

Algorithmic Subjectivity and the Digital Generation: A Sociological Analysis of Youth Identity Formation in Algeria

الذاتية الخوارزمية والجيل الرقمي: تحليل سوسيولوجي لتشكيل هوية الشباب في الجزائر

Dr. Djebli Fateh^{*1} ; Dr. Abdelhalim Rekab²

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ملخص:

يهدف هذا البحث إلى تحليل كيفية إعادة تشكيل تقنيات الاتصال الرقمي، وخاصة الهواتف الذكية ومنصات التواصل الاجتماعي، للوعي الإنساني بطرق تقوض الحكم الديمقراطي والاستقلالية الشخصية لدى الجيل الجزائري الرقمي. اعتمدت الدراسة على منهجية نقدية متعددة التخصصات تجمع بين علم اجتماع الاتصال ودراسات الإعلام وعلم النفس الاجتماعي لفحص كيفية عمل الخوارزميات كأظمة تربوية خفية. أظهرت النتائج أن المؤسسات التقليدية (الأسرة، التعليم، الدين) تفقد سلطتها التكوينية لصالح البيئات الرقمية المحكومة خوارزمية، مما ينتج هوية "خوارزمية" تتشكل عبر استنتاجات آلية وليس عبر التفاعل الاجتماعي التقليدي. كما توصلت الدراسة إلى أن المشاركة السياسية تصبح متقطعة وعاطفية بدلاً من مستدامة ومدروسة، بينما تنتقل سلطة المعرفة من الخبرة إلى الانتشار الفيروسي. يدعو البحث إلى تطوير "علم اجتماع رقمي نقدي" و"عدالة خوارزمية" لاستعادة الوكالة الإنسانية في العصر الرقمي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاتصال الرقمي؛ التفاعل الواسطي؛ السيطرة الخوارزمية؛ تراجع التعاطف؛ الحكم الديمقراطي

Abstract:

This research investigates how digital communication technologies, particularly smartphones and social media platforms, are fundamentally reshaping human consciousness in ways that undermine democratic governance and personal autonomy among Algeria's digital generation. The study employs a critical interdisciplinary methodology combining communication sociology, media studies, and social psychology to examine how algorithms function as invisible pedagogies. The findings reveal that traditional institutions (family, education, religion) are losing their formative authority to algorithmically-governed digital environments, producing an "algorithmic identity" shaped through automated inference rather than traditional social interaction. The study demonstrates that political engagement becomes episodic and affective rather than sustained and deliberative, while knowledge authority shifts from expertise to viral visibility. The research calls for developing "critical digital sociology" and "algorithmic justice" to reclaim human agency in the digital age.

Keywords: Digital Communication; Mediated Interaction; Algorithmic Control; Empathy Decline; Democratic Governance

Résumé :

Cette recherche examine comment les technologies de communication numérique, notamment les smartphones et les plateformes de médias sociaux, remodelent fondamentalement la conscience humaine de manière à saper la gouvernance démocratique et l'autonomie personnelle chez la génération numérique algérienne. L'étude emploie une méthodologie critique interdisciplinaire

^{1*} Corresponding author.

Djebli Fateh, Larbi Tebessi University – Tebessa , fateh.djebli@univ-tebessa.dz.

² Abdelhalim Rekab, Larbi Tebessi University – Tebessa , abdelhalim.rekab@univ-tebessa.dz, Laboratory of studies and digitization and electronic information industry in libraries, archives and documentation.

combinant la sociologie de la communication, les études médiatiques et la psychologie sociale pour examiner comment les algorithmes fonctionnent comme des pédagogies invisibles. Les résultats révèlent que les institutions traditionnelles (famille, éducation, religion) perdent leur autorité formative au profit d'environnements numériques gouvernés algorithmiquement, produisant une "identité algorithmique" façonnée par inférence automatisée plutôt que par interaction sociale traditionnelle. L'étude démontre que l'engagement politique devient épisodique et affectif plutôt que soutenu et délibératif, tandis que l'autorité du savoir passe de l'expertise à la visibilité virale. La recherche appelle au développement d'une "sociologie numérique critique" et d'une "justice algorithmique" pour reconquérir l'agence humaine à l'ère numérique.

Mots-clés : Communication Numérique ; Interaction Médiatisée ; Contrôle Algorithmique ; Déclin de l'Empathie ; Gouvernance Démocratique.

1. Introduction

A fundamental transformation is underway in the architecture of socialization. For an entire generation of young Algerians, the formative processes through which identity, belief, and worldview are cultivated have shifted from institutional domains family, education, religion to the algorithmically governed environments of digital platforms. This transition marks not a mere technological advancement, but a profound reconfiguration of the mechanisms of influence, authority, and subject formation. The digital space, far from being a neutral conduit for information, functions as an active agent in the production of social reality, shaping perception, emotion, and behavior through opaque, data-driven systems that operate beyond the threshold of conscious awareness. The centrality of algorithmic curation in everyday life has given rise to a new mode of subjectivity one that is continuously modulated by predictive analytics, behavioral feedback loops, and personalized content delivery. In this environment, the traditional vectors of ideological transmission are increasingly displaced by systems designed not to educate, but to engage; not to inform, but to retain attention. The result is a form of socialization that is individualized, affectively charged, and structurally aligned with the imperatives of platform capitalism. Within this framework, the cultivation of critical consciousness is supplanted by the logic of automated reinforcement, where beliefs are not deliberated but delivered, and identities are not constructed but inferred.

This shift demands a critical re-examination of the conditions under which contemporary Algerian youth come to understand themselves and their society. The digital milieu in which they are immersed does not merely reflect cultural trends; it actively shapes them, privileging immediacy over reflection, performance over authenticity, and emotional resonance over discursive depth. As algorithmic systems assume a central role in structuring experience, they also redefine the boundaries of agency, autonomy, and civic participation. The political, ethical, and epistemological implications of this transformation are profound: when the flow of information is governed by proprietary code rather than public discourse, the very foundations of democratic culture are called into question.

This article interrogates the mechanisms by which digital platforms have become the dominant institutions of socialization for Algeria's youth. It examines how algorithmic systems function as invisible pedagogies, producing a generation whose ideals are not forged through dialogue or

tradition, but extracted, predicted, and reinforced by the technical logic of the digital ecosystem. In doing so, it confronts a central paradox of the contemporary moment: a generation that is more connected than any before it may also be the most subject to unseen forms of control.

2. The Algorithmic Architecture of Influence:

The digital environment in which contemporary Algerian youth are immersed functions not as a neutral space of information exchange, but as a highly structured apparatus of social governance. This apparatus operates through algorithmic systems embedded within dominant social media platforms, which continuously monitor, interpret, and respond to user behavior. These systems do not merely facilitate communication; they actively shape the conditions of perception, engagement, and identity formation. In this context, the subject is not an autonomous agent navigating a digital landscape, but a node within a network of data extraction and behavioral modulation, where attention, affect, and action are systematically curated to align with the operational logic of platform capitalism.

The consequences of this transformation are profound. The mechanisms of algorithmic curation have redefined the parameters of visibility, participation, and belonging, displacing traditional forms of socialization with a new regime of influence that is both pervasive and opaque. This section examines the operation of this regime through two interrelated processes: the construction of algorithmic identity and the strategic exploitation of emotional engagement. Together, these processes constitute a form of invisible pedagogy, one that shapes the subjectivity of a generation not through explicit instruction, but through the silent, continuous feedback loops of digital infrastructure.

2.1 Algorithmic Identity and the Modulation of Control

The concept of identity in the digital age has undergone a fundamental transformation. No longer conceived primarily as a product of social interaction, cultural affiliation, or self-reflection, identity is increasingly produced through automated processes that infer meaning from behavioral data. This phenomenon, termed *algorithmic identity*, refers to the dynamic, data-driven profile generated by digital platforms through the aggregation and interpretation of user activity clicks, dwell time, likes, shares, and network connections (Cheney-Lippold, 2011, p165). This identity is not self-declared, nor is it transparent to the user; it is assigned, continuously revised, and used to determine the content, opportunities, and social environments to which an individual is exposed.

For young Algerians, whose primary sites of social and political engagement are increasingly confined to digital platforms, algorithmic identity becomes a central determinant of experience. A user who briefly engages with content related to religious expression, political dissent, or consumer aspiration may find their digital world gradually reconfigured around that inferred interest, regardless of its representativeness or intentionality. This process operates as a form of *soft biopolitics*—a governance technique that does not rely on overt coercion, but on the subtle, continuous modulation of behavior through personalized feedback (Cheney-Lippold, 2011, p166) Control is exercised not by

prohibition, but by anticipation: the system learns, predicts, and responds, shaping desires before they are consciously articulated.

This mode of governance undermines the autonomy of the individual by embedding influence within the very structure of digital interaction. The user is not asked to consent to this process; it is presupposed by the design of the platform. In the absence of transparency or public oversight, algorithmic identity becomes a site of invisible power, where the boundaries between self and system, agency and determination, are systematically blurred. As traditional institutions family, school, religious community lose their centrality in the formation of identity, they are not replaced by open exploration, but by closed circuits of automated reinforcement, in which the subject is both producer and product of their own digital enclosure.

This process is further intensified by the metric assemblages that govern visibility and value in digital environments (Burrows, 2012, p356). For youth aspiring to recognition whether as influencers, activists, or professionals—their worth is increasingly measured by quantifiable indicators: follower counts, like ratios, and engagement metrics. These metrics do not merely reflect popularity; they structure behavior, incentivizing conformity to algorithmic expectations. As Burrows (2012) observes in the academic context, living with the h-index produces new forms of self-discipline and anxiety; similarly, young Algerians live with the "like-index," where self-worth is algorithmically mediated.

Moreover, the design of digital platforms reflects what Winner (1980) calls the *politics of artifacts*: technologies are not neutral, but embody specific power relations. The architecture of social media—its emphasis on virality, brevity, and emotional resonance—favors certain forms of expression over others, systematically marginalizing reflective, nuanced, or critical discourse. In this way, the platform itself becomes an agent of social control, shaping not only what is seen, but what can be thought (Winner, 1980, p121).

2.2 Emotional Contagion and the Economy of Attention

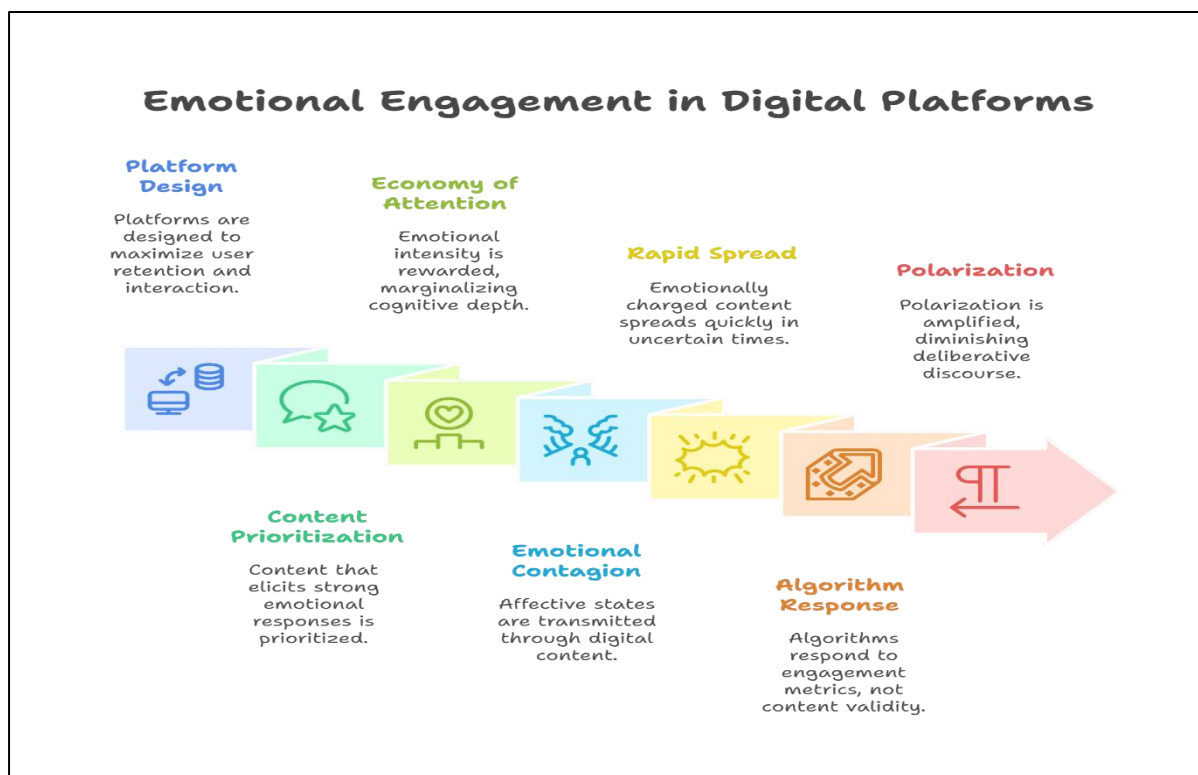
The integration of *presumption* the dual role of user as both producer and consumer of content further intensifies this dynamic (Ritzer, G., Dean, P., & Jurgenson, N, 2012, p380). Young Algerians are not passive recipients of algorithmic influence; they actively participate in the production of digital culture, often performing their identities for an audience whose visibility is controlled by the platform. This performance is not neutral; it is shaped by the implicit demands of the algorithm, which favors content that conforms to trending formats, aesthetic norms, and affective templates. Authenticity is not measured by sincerity, but by reach.

This performative logic is central to what (Abidin, 2017) describes as *calibrated amateurism*, where users present themselves as authentic, relatable, and spontaneous, while carefully optimizing their content for algorithmic visibility. For Algerian youth, this means adopting global digital aesthetics—selfie culture, vlogging, meme formats while navigating local moral and political constraints. The

result is a hybrid identity, shaped at the intersection of algorithmic demands and sociocultural expectations.

Furthermore, the digital public sphere is not a level playing field. As (Bail, 2021, p18) demonstrates, exposure to opposing views on social media can increase, rather than reduce, polarization. In Algeria, social media can become a space of *affective polarization*, where emotional alignment with a community supersedes factual debate. This is exacerbated by the *filter bubble* effect (Pariser, 2011), wherein algorithmic systems reinforce users' existing beliefs, limiting exposure to alternative perspectives and entrenching ideological silos.

The consequence is a form of subjectivity in which self-expression is subordinated to the logic of platform visibility. To be seen is to conform; to be heard is to perform. The digital generation is not merely influenced by algorithms it is trained by them, conditioned to produce the kinds of content, emotions, and behaviors that sustain the system that governs them.



Abdelhalim Rekab, 2025, Emotional Engagement in Digital Platforms.

3. The Erosion of Traditional Institutions in a Platform Society

The formation of subjectivity has historically been mediated by core social institutions family, education, religion, and the state each functioning as a site of normative transmission, cultural continuity, and civic socialization. In the Algerian context, these institutions have played a central

role in shaping postcolonial identity, moral frameworks, and collective belonging. However, for a generation that is perpetually connected, their authority is being systematically reconfigured by the logic of digital platforms. These platforms do not merely offer competing narratives; they restructure the very conditions of visibility, legitimacy, and knowledge production. As a result, the pedagogical and normative functions of traditional institutions are no longer primary, but secondary subordinated to the algorithmic governance of engagement, affect, and virality.

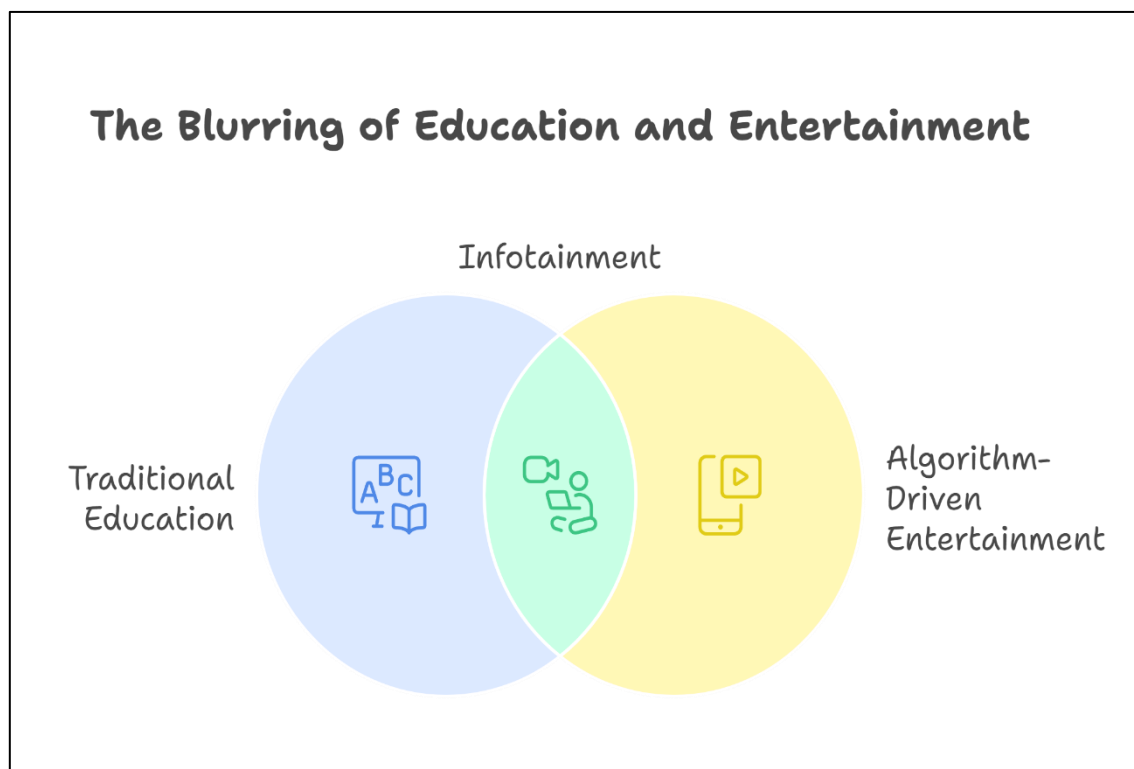
This transformation signals the emergence of what (van Dijck, 2018) term a platform society, in which private digital infrastructures assume public functions, from information dissemination to identity formation. In this new order, the institutional mechanisms of socialization are not abolished, but re-mediated: their messages must now compete within algorithmic ecosystems governed by commercial imperatives and behavioral metrics. The consequence is a hierarchical inversion where the institutional voice, once a source of authority, is now a participant in a network where influence is determined not by expertise, but by algorithmic amplification.

This section examines the displacement of traditional institutions through three interrelated processes: the Platformization of education, the algorithmic reconfiguration of family and intergenerational authority, and the commodification of religious and moral discourse. Together, these processes illustrate how the digital generation is not simply using technology, but being socialized by it on terms that are foreign to the institutions that once defined their world.

3.1 The Platformization of Education and the Crisis of Knowledge Authority

The educational system, once a privileged site of epistemic authority and civic formation, now contends with a generation for whom knowledge is algorithmically curated. Students no longer rely solely on textbooks or teacher-led instruction; they turn to YouTube for historical narratives, TikTok for scientific explanations, and Instagram for moral exemplars. While this shift may appear to democratize access to information, it simultaneously subjects learning to the attention economy, where comprehensibility is sacrificed for virality, and complexity is penalized by low engagement (Lupton, 2013, p5).

The platform does not prioritize epistemic validity; it rewards emotional intensity, performative clarity, and aesthetic coherence. As a result, a five-minute video simplifying a political conflict will reach far more youth than a nuanced academic lecture not because it is more accurate, but because it is more *shareable*. This creates a crisis of knowledge authority, where the distinction between expertise and entertainment is increasingly blurred.



Abdelhalim Rekab, 2025, The Blurring of Education and Entertainment.

Moreover, the digital capital required to navigate these new terrains fluency in platform-specific norms, technical access, and network literacy is unevenly distributed (Robinson, 2009, p489). Urban, middle-class youth may leverage digital tools to augment their education, while rural or economically marginalized peers face structural barriers to meaningful participation. Yet even for those who are connected, the nature of their engagement is shaped by the same algorithmic forces that govern leisure and social interaction. As (van Deursen, A. J. A. M., & van Dijk, J. A. G. M, 2013, p510) argue, the digital divide has shifted from access to differences in usage, and now, increasingly, to differences in cognitive and critical outcomes. A student who learns history through a gamified, algorithmically recommended video series is not engaging in the same epistemic practice as one who reads a scholarly text even if both are technically "online."

This Platformization of knowledge production undermines the institutional role of education as a space of critical inquiry. When learning is mediated by algorithms designed to maximize retention and engagement, the outcome is not intellectual autonomy, but algorithmic dependence a mode of cognition shaped by predictive suggestion and affective reinforcement.

3.2 The Algorithmic Reconfiguration of Family and Intergenerational Authority

The family, long a primary site of moral socialization and intergenerational transmission, is also subject to algorithmic re-mediation. Parental authority and traditional modes of guidance are increasingly challenged by the immediacy and intimacy of digital influencers, whose curated lives

and affective appeals often carry greater weight than familial advice. These figures function as digital elders, offering lifestyle models, career advice, and moral frameworks that are more emotionally resonant and socially visible than those of parents or elders.

This phenomenon is rooted in what (Abidin, 2017) describes as *calibrated amateurism* a performative strategy in which influencers present themselves as authentic, relatable peers while carefully optimizing their content for algorithmic visibility. For Algerian youth navigating questions of identity, sexuality, or career, these figures become trusted sources of guidance, not because of their institutional legitimacy, but because of their affective proximity and algorithmic prominence.

The result is a fracturing of intergenerational authority. When a young person turns to TikTok for relationship advice or Instagram for fashion and self-worth, they are not rejecting their family; they are responding to a system that rewards visibility, performance, and emotional alignment over tradition and experience. As (Hargittai, 2018, p292) notes, digital inequalities are not just about access, but about the reproduction of social hierarchies in digital spaces. In this context, the family's role as a moral compass is not erased, but diluted its voice competing with a global, algorithmically amplified chorus of digital peers.

Moreover, the rise of presumption the dual role of user as producer and consumer means that youth are not passive recipients of influence, but active participants in the construction of digital culture (Ritzer, G., Dean, P., & Jurgenson, N, 2012, p380). Their interactions with family are increasingly mediated through shared content, memes, and social media performances, further blurring the boundaries between private life and public spectacle.

3.3 The Commodification of Religious and Moral Discourse

Religious institutions, too, face a crisis of authority in the algorithmic age. While mosques and scholars continue to play a role in moral education, their voices are now filtered through platforms that favor emotional sermons, viral quotes, and aestheticized piety over sustained theological discourse. A short, dramatic clip of a preacher condemning a social issue may be shared thousands of times, while a nuanced lecture on Islamic ethics remains unseen. In this context, religiosity is not only performed but platformed, shaped by the same metrics of reach and engagement that govern celebrity culture.

This commodification of religious discourse transforms faith from a reflective, communal practice into a form of digital content curated, optimized, and distributed according to algorithmic logic. As (Bauman, Z., & Lyon, D, 2013, p13) argue, surveillance and control in the digital age are no longer centralized; they are liquid, dispersed through everyday digital practices. In this environment, religious authority is no longer derived from scholarship or spiritual depth, but from visibility, virality, and affective alignment. Even the state, long a central actor in shaping national and religious identity, finds its influence diluted. Official narratives are no longer the default; they are one node among many in a networked public sphere dominated by private platforms. When the state attempts to engage

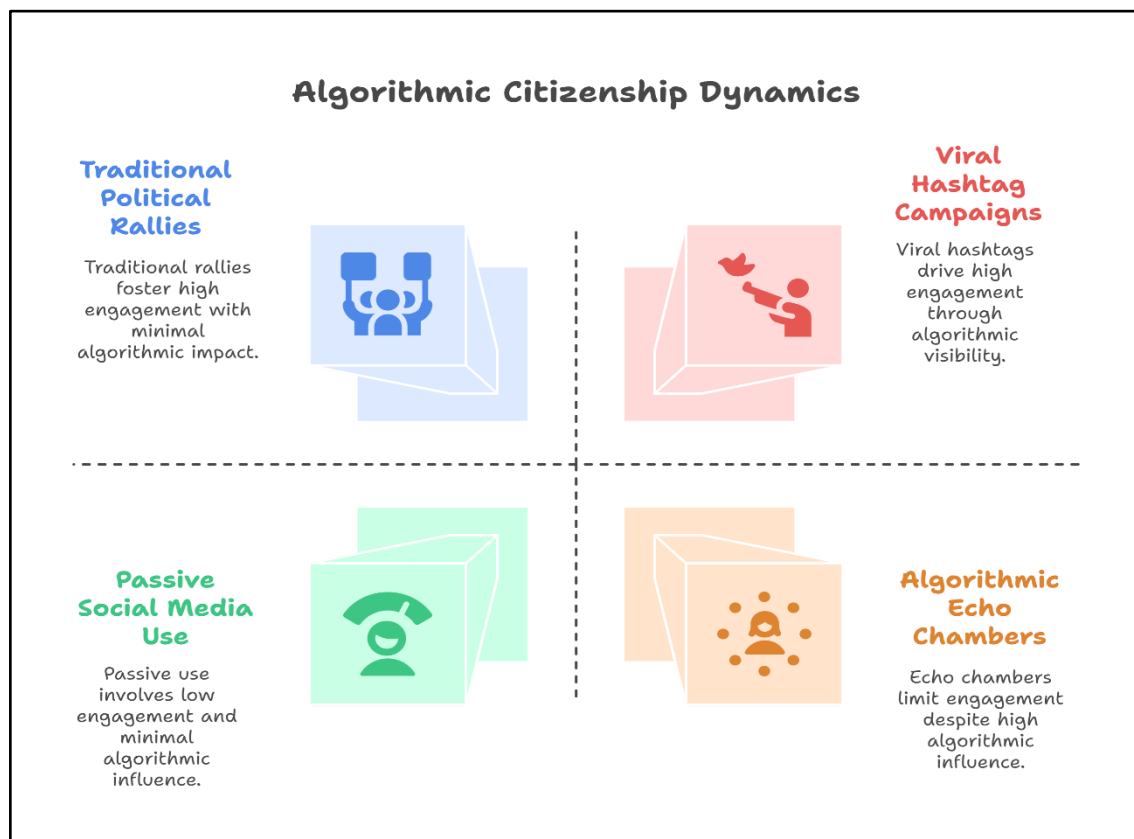
youth online through official social media accounts or digital campaigns it does so on the platform's terms, subject to its algorithms, norms, and temporal rhythms (Lupton, 2013).

The consequence is a fragmented moral public, where orthodoxy is contested not through scholarly debate, but through algorithmic amplification. In this new order, the ideals once cultivated through dialogue, discipline, and reflection are increasingly supplanted by those delivered through automated curation. The Algerian digital generation is not rejecting tradition; it is being raised in a world where tradition must compete with an algorithm.

4. Algorithmic Citizenship and the Future of Political Engagement

4.1 The Platformization of Protest and the Crisis of Sustained Mobilization

The 2019–2021 Hirak movement demonstrated the transformative potential of digital media as a tool for decentralized, youth-led mobilization. Social media platforms enabled rapid coordination, circumvented state censorship, and amplified demands for democratic reform. However, as the movement evolved, its reliance on digital platforms also exposed structural vulnerabilities. The same systems that facilitated initial mobilization Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp contributed to its fragmentation, as algorithmic curation prioritized emotional content over strategic coherence and rewarded virality over long-term organization.



Abdelhalim Rekab, 2025, Algorithmic Citizenship Dynamics.

This phenomenon reflects what (Theocharis, Y., & Lowe, W, 2016, p1467) describe as the episodic nature of digital activism, where engagement is driven by bursts of affective intensity rather than sustained civic commitment. A protest video that garners thousands of shares may inspire outrage, but it does not necessarily foster the organizational capacity needed for political transformation. Moreover, the platform's emphasis on immediacy and visibility often discourages the slow, deliberative work of coalition-building, policy development, and institutional reform.

The crisis of sustained mobilization is further exacerbated by algorithmic fragmentation. As users are funneled into personalized content streams, the shared public sphere necessary for collective action erodes. A youth in Algiers may be exposed to progressive, secular narratives, while another in Constantine encounters religious-nationalist discourse both shaped not by geographic or ideological proximity, but by the logic of engagement-driven algorithms. This filter bubble effect (Pariser, 2011) undermines the possibility of a unified political front, replacing solidarity with segmentation.

In this context, protest is not only organized on platforms it is platformed: its meaning, reach, and longevity are determined by the same systems that govern entertainment and consumption. The result is a form of activism that is highly visible, yet structurally fragile.

4.2 The Algorithmic Construction of Political Identity

Political identity in the digital age is no longer formed solely through affiliation with parties, ideologies, or movements. Instead, it is increasingly constructed through algorithmic inference a process by which platforms assign users to political categories based on behavioral data: likes, shares, dwell time, and network connections. As (Cheney-Lippold, 2011, p173) argues, this produces a new algorithmic identity, one that is continuously modulated by soft biopolitical control, where governance occurs not through overt coercion, but through the subtle shaping of perception and behavior.

For young Algerians, this means their political worldview is not only influenced by the content they consume, but by the invisible feedback loops of the platform. A user who engages with a single post on corruption may find their feed gradually saturated with anti-government narratives; another who watches a religious sermon may be steered toward conservative political content. These algorithmic pathways are not neutral they reflect embedded biases, commercial logics, and geopolitical agendas that shape the boundaries of political imagination.

Moreover, the prosumer model of Web 2.0 (Ritzer, G., Dean, P., & Jurgenson, N, 2012, p381) transforms political expression into a performative act. Youth do not merely express dissent; they perform it for an audience shaped by algorithmic visibility. The decision to post, share, or comment is influenced by anticipated engagement metrics likes, retweets, shares metrics that reflect platform logic, not civic value. This micro-celebrity dynamic (Abidin, 2017) turns political engagement into a form of self-branding, where authenticity is measured by reach, and ideology is optimized for shareability.

The consequence is a depoliticized politics one in which the act of resistance is stripped of its collective and structural dimensions, reduced to a personal performance within a commercialized digital economy.

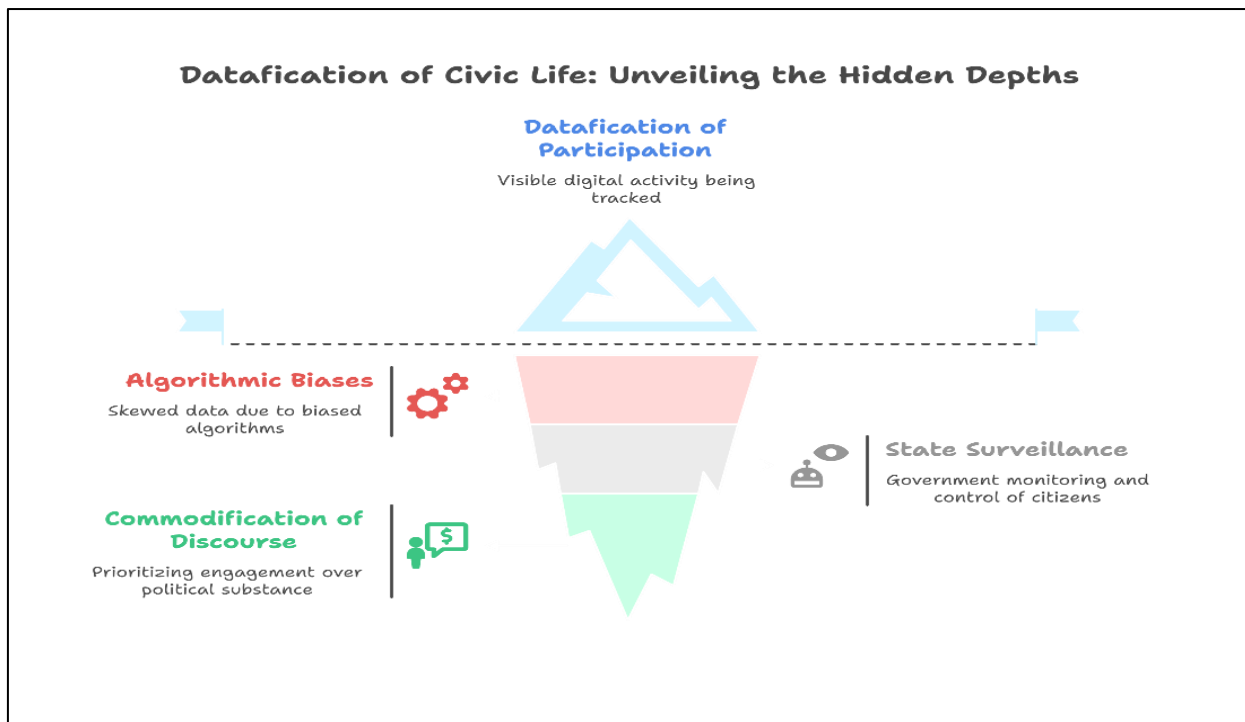
4.3 The Datafication of Civic Life and the Erosion of Democratic Agency

Beyond shaping identity and mobilization, digital platforms are redefining the very fabric of civic life through the datafication of participation. Every click, share, and comment are captured, aggregated, and analyzed, producing vast datasets that are used to predict, influence, and manage behavior. This process transforms citizens from autonomous agents into data subjects, whose political preferences are not self-declared, but inferred from digital traces.

As (Boyd, D., & Crawford, K, 2012, p665) caution, big data is not an objective reflection of reality, but a constructed artifact shaped by the limitations of collection methods, algorithmic biases, and corporate interests. In Algeria, where state surveillance and disinformation campaigns are increasingly sophisticated (Jewkes, Y., & Wykes, M, 2012, p936), the datafication of civic life poses a dual threat: on one hand, it enables new forms of digital repression, where dissent is monitored, predicted, and preempted; on the other, it fosters a commodified public sphere, where attention is monetized and political discourse is subordinated to engagement metrics.

The erosion of democratic agency is further evident in the metric assemblages that govern visibility and influence (Burrows, 2012, p360). Whether a protest gains traction or a hashtag trend is no longer a matter of social significance, but of algorithmic performance. In this environment, political legitimacy is not derived from deliberation or consensus, but from quantifiable visibility a condition that privileges spectacle over substance.

The future of political engagement in Algeria depends not only on connectivity, but on reclaiming agency from the invisible architectures that govern it. This requires a critical digital sociology that interrogates not just *what* youth are doing online, but *how* the digital environment is doing something *to them*.



Abdelhalim Rekab, 2025, Datafication of Civic life: Unveiling the Hidden Depths.

5. Toward a Critical Digital Sociology: Reclaiming Agency in the Algorithmic Age

The preceding analysis has demonstrated how algorithmic systems are reconfiguring the foundations of socialization, identity, and political engagement for Algeria's digital generation. Yet a sociology that only diagnoses power without imagining resistance risks becoming complicit in the very structures it seeks to expose. As (Burrows, 2012, p367) has argued, sociology must not remain confined to the academy; it must become *public*, engaging with the lived realities of those it studies. In the face of algorithmic governance, this imperative is more urgent than ever.

This section calls for the development of a critical digital sociology one that interrogates the hidden architectures of digital influence, fosters algorithmic literacy, and supports forms of digital resistance. It is a sociology that does not merely describe the world, but seeks to change it. Drawing on the tradition of public sociology and emerging frameworks in digital studies, this section outlines a path forward: one that empowers youth, challenges platform power, and reclaims the digital sphere as a space of democratic possibility.

5.1 The Algorithmic Gaze: From Surveillance to Sociological Intervention

Digital platforms do not simply *observe* users they *act upon* them. The continuous collection and analysis of behavioral data constitute what (Cheney-Lippold, 2011) terms the algorithmic gaze, a form of soft biopolitical control that modulates identity, desire, and behavior without overt coercion. This gaze is not neutral; it is embedded with commercial, political, and cultural logics that privilege engagement over ethics, and visibility over truth.

To counter this, a critical digital sociology must develop methods to make the invisible visible. This requires what (Savage, 2013, p7) calls the “social life of methods” a reflexive, innovative approach to research that can grapple with the fluid, real-time nature of digital life. Ethnographic studies of youth digital practices, critical data audits, and participatory research with marginalized users can expose how algorithms shape experience in Algeria-specific contexts.

Moreover, sociologists must move beyond analysis to intervention. This could take the form of public workshops on algorithmic literacy, collaborations with educators to integrate digital critique into curricula, or partnerships with civil society to monitor platform influence on political discourse. The goal is not to reject digital media, but to demystify its power and equip users with the tools to navigate it critically.

5.2 Digital Resistance: Informal Networks and Subaltern Practices

Despite the dominance of global platforms, young Algerians are not passive subjects. They engage in tactical digital resistance informal, everyday practices that circumvent algorithmic control and assert agency in constrained environments. These include the use of proxy servers to bypass censorship, the creation of encrypted WhatsApp groups for political discussion, and the formation of youth-run download rings that distribute educational content offline.

These practices echo what (Fuchs, C., & Dyer-Witheford, N, 2012, p1059) describe as digital labor from below forms of user activity that resist commodification and reclaim digital space for collective use. They also reflect the subaltern digital cultures identified by (Abidin, 2017), where youth negotiate global platform logics with local moral and political constraints.

A critical digital sociology must center these practices, not as anomalies, but as forms of everyday resistance. By documenting and analyzing them, sociologists can challenge the narrative of youth as mere consumers of digital culture and instead position them as agents of digital innovation and resilience. This requires shifting from top-down analyses of platform power to bottom-up explorations of user agency.

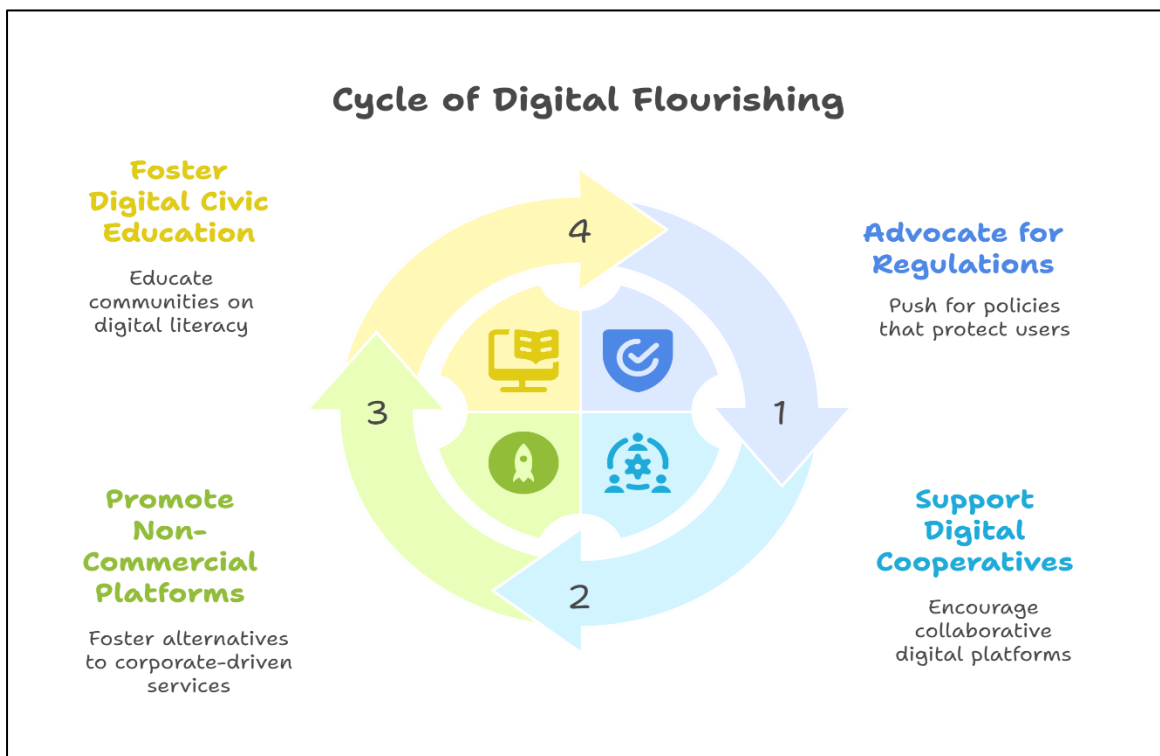
5.3 Reclaiming the Digital Public Sphere: A Call for Algorithmic Justice

The digital public sphere in Algeria is not a neutral arena of free expression. It is a platformed public, shaped by proprietary algorithms that prioritize profit over participation, and engagement over equity. In this environment, the voices of rural youth, women, and political dissidents are systematically marginalized not through censorship, but through algorithmic invisibility.

To reclaim this space, we need a framework of algorithmic justice a demand for transparency, accountability, and democratic oversight of the systems that govern digital life. This includes:

- The right to know how algorithms curate content.
- The right to opt out of datafied socialization.
- The right to participate in the design of digital environments.

As (Lupton, 2013) argues, digital technologies should serve human flourishing, not corporate extraction. A public sociology of the digital must therefore advocate for regulatory frameworks that protect users, support digital cooperatives, and promote non-commercial platforms. It must also foster digital civic education not just in schools, but in communities, mosques, and online spaces.



Abdelhalim Rekab, 2025, Cycle of Digital Flourishing.

Conclusion

The Algerian digital generation is not merely growing up with technology; it is being formed by it. The mechanisms of algorithmic curation, affective amplification, and datafied sociality have restructured the very architecture of influence, displaced traditional institutions and redefined the conditions of identity, knowledge, and political engagement. In this new sociotechnical order, the formation of ideals is no longer the outcome of dialogue, reflection, or institutional transmission, but the product of automated systems designed to capture attention, not cultivate autonomy. As this article has demonstrated, the digital environment functions not as a neutral space of opportunity, but as a structured field of power, where visibility, value, and voice are determined by opaque, proprietary algorithms.

The erosion of the family, education, and religious institutions as primary agents of socialization does not signify a liberation into open digital exploration, but a transfer of authority to private platforms governed by commercial logics. In the platform society, knowledge is not evaluated for its truth, but for its shareability; moral guidance is not derived from tradition, but from the visibility of digital influencers; political engagement is not sustained through organization, but triggered by algorithmic provocation. The result is a form of algorithmic citizenship a subjectivity shaped by continuous modulation, where agency is constrained by the very systems that claim to empower it.

This transformation demands a critical sociology capable of interrogating the invisible pedagogies of the digital age. As (Burrows, 2012) has argued, sociology must not only analyze the world, but engage with it especially in moments of profound structural change. The digital generation's experience of being "born online" is not a technological inevitability, but a sociopolitical condition that can and must be challenged. This requires a public sociology of digital life one that fosters algorithmic literacy, exposes the politics of platform design, and supports resistance to datafied control.

Moreover, as (Lupton, 2013) and (Savage, 2013) emphasize, the social life of methods must evolve to meet the challenges of a digital society. Traditional sociological tools are insufficient for analyzing the fluid, networked, and real-time nature of algorithmic influence. New methodologies critical data studies, digital ethnography, and sociological interventions in platform governance are urgently needed.

What unfolds in the digital lives of Algeria's youth is not merely a story of technological adoption, but of systemic subjection to a new mode of governance one that operates without legislation, without accountability, and often without awareness. The platform society does not demand obedience; it engineers consent through the quiet mechanics of personalization, reward, and emotional resonance. In this environment, resistance itself can be commodified, dissent repackaged as content, and identity reduced to a data point in a predictive model. As (Abidin, 2017) has shown, even the performance of authenticity so central to youth self-expression is calibrated for algorithmic favor, turning rebellion into a metric of engagement.

This is the paradox of the digital age: a generation that appears to have unprecedented agency posting, sharing, creating is, in fact, enmeshed in a system of invisible determination. Their choices are pre-structured by algorithms that know, or think they know, what will capture attention before the user does. Their political awakenings are shaped not by civic education, but by the affective logic of viral outrage. Their moral compasses are influenced not by elders, but by influencers whose authority is derived not from wisdom, but from visibility. In this context, the ideal of the autonomous individual central to both liberal democracy and critical sociology begin to unravel.

Moreover, this system is not neutral. As (Cheney-Lippold, 2011) argues, algorithmic identity is a form of soft biopolitics, where control is exercised not through force, but through modulation nudging, filtering, predicting. And like all systems of power, it reproduces inequality. Youth from urban, middle-class backgrounds may navigate this terrain with greater digital capital (Robinson, 2009),

while those from rural or marginalized communities face not only infrastructural exclusion, but epistemic marginalization their voices, concerns, and worldviews rendered invisible by algorithms trained on global, commercial, and often Western-centric data.

The most insidious aspect of this transformation is its banality. It does not announce itself with propaganda or censorship. It arrives as convenience, as connection, as freedom. But beneath the surface, it reconfigures the very foundations of social life: how we know, how we relate, how we become who we are. To accept this as inevitable is to surrender the sociological imagination to the logic of the machine.

The future of democratic life in Algeria depends not on how many youths are connected, but on who controls the systems that shape their minds. When ideals are no longer forged through collective deliberation, but delivered by an algorithm, the very foundation of citizenship is at stake. The task of sociology is not to accept this condition, but to reveal it, contest it, and imagine alternatives.

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