

Has the internet reshaped communication in many ways that are troubling or not?

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Abstract

This paper examined whether the internet has reshaped communication in ways that are deeply troubling or whether it has created more positive transformations in modern society. A quantitative research approach was adopted to evaluate people's perceptions of how internet-based communication affects social interaction, information sharing, and everyday communication practices. The population of the study consists of 10,000 active social media users who regularly engage in online communication through platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, and X (Twitter). A simple random sampling technique was used to select 384 respondents from the target population of active social media users in Nigeria. Data were collected through a structured online questionnaire using Google Forms, which was distributed through various social media channels. The responses were analyzed using descriptive statistical tools such as frequencies and percentages to identify patterns in participants' opinions and experiences. The findings revealed that the internet has significantly transformed communication by enabling faster information exchange, enhancing global connectivity, and providing platforms for interactive engagement. Many respondents agreed that digital communication technologies have improved access to information, strengthened social networks, and facilitated educational and professional collaboration. However, the study also identified troubling consequences associated with internet communication, including the spread of misinformation, cyberbullying, excessive social media dependence, and reduced face-to-face interaction. These issues highlight concerns about the social and psychological effects of digital communication technologies. The study concludes that while the internet has brought major advantages to communication systems, it also presents challenges that require responsible use and effective regulation.

Keywords: Internet communication, digital media, social interaction, misinformation, online communication technologies.

INTRODUCTION

The expansion of the internet has fundamentally transformed the landscape of human communication across the world. Over the past two decades, digital technologies have reshaped

how individuals interact, exchange information, and participate in social, economic, and political life. Recent global statistics indicate that more than 5.3 billion people are connected to the internet, representing about two-thirds of the world's population (International Telecommunication Union, 2023; Kemp, 2024). Social media platforms, online forums, instant messaging services, and video conferencing technologies have created unprecedented opportunities for communication across geographical boundaries. As a result, individuals can now interact instantly regardless of distance, enabling faster dissemination of information and fostering new forms of global connectivity (Castells, 2022; Rainie & Wellman, 2019). These technological advancements have significantly expanded the speed, reach, and diversity of modern communication systems.

In addition to increasing connectivity, the internet has revolutionized the accessibility and democratization of information. Scholars argue that digital communication platforms allow individuals to participate in public discourse, share knowledge, and access educational resources in ways that were previously limited to traditional media institutions (Shirky, 2020; Van Dijk, 2020). For example, online platforms have enabled citizen journalism, digital activism, and collaborative knowledge production, thereby empowering individuals and communities to express opinions and influence societal debates. The emergence of blogs, podcasts, and social networking sites has also transformed individuals from passive consumers of information into active creators and distributors of content (Castells, 2022; Fuchs, 2021). These developments illustrate how the internet has enhanced participatory communication and expanded opportunities for social engagement.

However, alongside these transformative benefits, many scholars have raised concerns that the internet may have reshaped communication in ways that are deeply troubling for society. The rapid spread of misinformation, online harassment, digital surveillance, and algorithm-driven echo chambers has generated widespread debate among researchers, policymakers, and technology experts (Sunstein, 2018; Pariser, 2011). Studies show that false information spreads more rapidly on social media platforms than verified news, often influencing public opinion and undermining trust in credible institutions (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018). Furthermore, the anonymity provided by digital platforms has contributed to the growth of cyberbullying, hate speech, and toxic online interactions, particularly among younger internet users (Twenge, 2019; Anderson & Jiang, 2018). These developments suggest that while the internet has improved communication efficiency, it has also introduced significant social and ethical challenges.

Moreover, scholars have expressed concerns about the broader social consequences of internet-mediated communication. Increasing dependence on digital interactions has been linked to declining face-to-face communication, weakened interpersonal relationships, and growing social isolation among some populations (Turkle, 2017; Odgers & Jensen, 2020). At the same time, algorithmic recommendation systems used by many digital platforms tend to expose users primarily to information that aligns with their existing beliefs, thereby reinforcing ideological divisions and political polarization (Bail et al., 2018; Sunstein, 2018). Consequently, the influence of the internet on communication cannot be understood solely in terms of technological advancement; rather, it must also be examined within the broader context of its social, psychological, and political implications.

The rapid growth of internet technologies and digital communication platforms has transformed how people interact, share information, and participate in society. Although the internet has improved global connectivity and access to information, it has also created serious concerns such as the spread of misinformation, political polarization, cyberbullying, online harassment, reduced face-to-face interaction, and threats to users' privacy and well-being (Vosoughi et al., 2018; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017; Turkle, 2017). Furthermore, the increasing influence of social media algorithms and weak regulatory frameworks have intensified these challenges, raising questions about the overall impact of internet-based communication on individuals and society. However, despite existing studies on digital communication, there is still limited understanding of whether the overall transformation caused by the internet is more beneficial or deeply troubling to contemporary communication systems and social relationships. This gap in knowledge creates the need for further investigation into the broader implications of internet-based communication. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the extent to which the internet has transformed communication and whether these changes have negative implications for contemporary society.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To assess the Transformation of Communication practices through internet use in contemporary society
2. To analyze the benefits associated with internet-based communication systems.
3. To evaluate the troubling consequences of digital communication, including misinformation, polarization, and social isolation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Technological Determinism Theory

The Technological Determinism Theory was propounded by Marshall McLuhan in 1964. The theory posits that technological innovations are the primary drivers of social change and significantly shape human behaviour, communication patterns, and societal structures. According to McLuhan (1964), communication technologies influence not only the content of messages but also the manner in which individuals interact and perceive the world. In the context of the internet, the theory suggests that the emergence of digital communication platforms has transformed interpersonal communication, information dissemination, and social interactions. Recent studies have shown that internet technologies have altered communication practices by enabling instant messaging, social networking, virtual communities, and real-time information sharing across geographical boundaries (Castells, 2020; Couldry & Hepp, 2021). While these developments may enhance connectivity and access to information, some scholars argue that excessive dependence on internet-mediated communication could contribute to reduced face-to-face interactions, misinformation, digital addiction, and declining interpersonal relationships (Twenge, 2023). This theory is relevant to the study because it explains how internet technologies may have reshaped communication in ways that are either beneficial or troubling to individuals and society.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

The Uses and Gratifications Theory was developed by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch in 1973. The theory argues that individuals actively select media and communication channels to satisfy specific needs such as information, entertainment, social interaction, education, and personal identity. Unlike traditional media theories that view audiences as passive recipients, the Uses and Gratifications Theory considers users as active participants who consciously choose media content based on their interests and motivations (Katz et al., 1973). In relation to internet communication, the theory suggests that people utilize online platforms, social media, websites, and digital applications to fulfil various communication needs and objectives. Contemporary scholars have observed that internet users increasingly depend on digital platforms for news consumption, social networking, academic activities, business transactions, and entertainment (Sundar & Limperos, 2021; Whiting & Williams, 2020). However, the unrestricted nature of internet use may also expose users to cyberbullying, misinformation, privacy concerns, and excessive screen time, which could have troubling implications for communication and social relationships (Pangrazio & Selwyn, 2021). The theory is therefore relevant to this study because it helps explain why individuals adopt internet-based communication and how such usage patterns may contribute to both positive and negative communication outcomes.

EMPIRICAL REVEIW

Tandoc, Lim and Ling (2020) examined the relationship between social media use and the spread of misinformation in digital communication environments. The purpose of the study was to determine whether the structure of internet-based communication platforms contributes to

the rapid circulation of false or misleading information. The researchers adopted a survey research design involving 450 social media users who regularly consumed news content online. Data were collected through structured questionnaires measuring exposure to online news, trust in digital sources, and sharing behavior. The findings indicated that users who relied heavily on social media platforms for news were more likely to encounter and share misinformation compared with those who depended on traditional media sources. The study concluded that although the internet enhances access to information and communication speed, it also creates environments where misinformation can easily spread and influence public perception. The authors recommended strengthening digital literacy education and improving content moderation policies to reduce the negative consequences of internet-driven communication.

Cinelli et al. (2021) investigated the emergence of online echo chambers and their influence on communication patterns within digital social networks. The aim of the study was to examine how individuals interact with information and whether internet algorithms encourage users to engage primarily with content that supports their existing beliefs. The researchers employed a computational analysis method, examining millions of interactions across multiple social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The findings revealed that users tend to cluster around communities that share similar viewpoints, creating echo chambers where dissenting opinions are rarely encountered. The study concluded that internet communication platforms may unintentionally deepen social and ideological divisions by reinforcing existing beliefs rather than encouraging open dialogue. The researchers recommended that platform designers introduce algorithmic transparency and encourage exposure to diverse perspectives to improve the quality of digital communication.

Vraga and Bode (2020) explored strategies for correcting misinformation in online communication environments. The study aimed to determine whether fact-checking messages and corrective information shared through social media could reduce the influence of misinformation among internet users. A controlled experimental design was adopted involving 600 participants who were exposed to misleading online posts followed by corrective information. The results showed that fact-checking messages significantly reduced belief in misinformation when delivered quickly and from credible sources. However, the study also found that repeated exposure to misinformation continued to influence some participants' perceptions even after corrections were presented. The authors concluded that while the internet creates new challenges for accurate communication, digital tools such as fact-checking and media literacy campaigns can mitigate some of these problems.

Meshi, Cotten and Bender (2020) investigated the relationship between social media communication and psychological well-being among young adults. The purpose of the study was to examine whether frequent engagement in online communication influences emotional health and interpersonal relationships. The researchers utilized a cross-sectional survey design involving 500 university students who reported their patterns of social media use and psychological wellbeing indicators. The findings revealed that moderate use of internet communication platforms facilitated social connection and emotional support, but excessive engagement was associated with increased stress, loneliness, and reduced face-to-face communication. The study concluded that the internet has both positive and troubling effects on communication, enhancing connectivity while simultaneously creating risks related to mental health and social isolation.

Keles, McCrae and Grealish (2020) conducted a systematic review investigating the impact of social media communication on adolescents' mental health. The purpose of the study was to synthesize evidence from existing empirical studies to determine whether online communication platforms contribute to psychological challenges among young users. The researchers reviewed 13 peer-reviewed studies focusing on adolescents' social media use, communication patterns, and mental health outcomes. The findings suggested that excessive engagement with online communication platforms was linked to increased anxiety, depression, and cyberbullying experiences among adolescents. However, the review also highlighted positive aspects of digital communication, including access to peer support networks and opportunities for self-expression. The study concluded that the internet has reshaped communication in complex ways that include both empowering and troubling consequences for young users.

Anderson and Jiang (2018) examined the effects of social media communication on interpersonal relationships among young adults. The purpose of the study was to investigate whether increased internet-based communication strengthens or weakens face-to-face social interactions. The researchers adopted a descriptive survey design involving 520 university students who actively used social networking platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, and Twitter. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings revealed that although social media improved connectivity and instant communication, excessive dependence on online interaction reduced physical social engagement and contributed to feelings of loneliness among some participants. The study concluded that the internet has significantly reshaped communication by making interactions

more convenient, but it may also weaken traditional interpersonal relationships when overused. The researchers recommended promoting balanced communication habits and encouraging meaningful offline interactions.

Newman et al. (2022) investigated the impact of digital communication platforms on public trust in news and information sharing. The study aimed to determine whether internet-based communication has improved access to reliable information or increased exposure to misleading content. A mixed-method research design was employed involving online surveys and interviews with 700 internet users across different age groups. The findings showed that while digital media increased the speed and accessibility of information dissemination, many users struggled to distinguish credible news sources from false information shared online. The study concluded that the internet has transformed communication positively through information accessibility but has also created troubling challenges related to misinformation and declining trust in online content. The authors recommended stronger media literacy programs and stricter platform accountability measures.

Odgers and Jensen (2020) explored the relationship between internet communication and adolescent psychological well-being. The purpose of the study was to examine whether frequent online communication contributes to emotional and social problems among teenagers. The researchers adopted a longitudinal research design involving 400 adolescents who were monitored over a two-year period. Data were collected through interviews, behavioral assessments, and social media usage records. The findings indicated that moderate internet use supported social connection and communication, while excessive exposure to online conflicts

and cyberbullying increased anxiety, stress, and emotional distress among participants. The study concluded that the internet can both support and negatively influence communication experiences depending on the manner and intensity of use. The researchers recommended parental guidance, digital education, and improved online safety policies to reduce harmful communication experiences among adolescents.

Guess, Nagler and Tucker (2020) examined the spread of political misinformation through online communication platforms during election periods. The aim of the study was to determine how internet communication influences political attitudes and democratic participation. The researchers used a quantitative research approach involving the analysis of social media activity and survey responses from 1,200 participants during a national election campaign. The findings revealed that politically motivated misinformation circulated rapidly through online networks and significantly influenced users with low levels of digital literacy. The study concluded that while the internet promotes political participation and rapid communication, it also creates troubling opportunities for manipulation and polarization within democratic societies. The authors recommended improving fact-checking systems and educating citizens on responsible online communication practices.

Fuchs (2021) investigated the role of social media corporations in shaping modern communication patterns. The study sought to examine whether internet communication platforms prioritize public interest or commercial profit through their algorithmic systems. A qualitative content analysis method was adopted using policy documents, platform guidelines, and communication theories. The findings showed that many digital platforms use algorithms

designed to maximize user engagement, often promoting sensational and emotionally charged content. The study concluded that internet communication has become increasingly commercialized, creating environments where harmful or divisive content can spread rapidly for economic benefit. The researcher recommended stronger international regulations and ethical standards for digital communication companies.

Wells and Mitchell (2023) examined the influence of internet communication on workplace and educational interactions after the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of the study was to determine whether virtual communication technologies improved communication efficiency or created social and professional challenges. The researchers adopted a cross-sectional survey design involving 650 employees and students who regularly used online communication tools such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Meet. Data were collected through online questionnaires and focus group discussions. The findings indicated that internet communication platforms improved flexibility, remote collaboration, and access to information; however, participants also reported communication fatigue, reduced personal connection, and misunderstandings during virtual interactions. The study concluded that the internet has reshaped communication in both beneficial and troubling ways, depending on how digital technologies are managed and integrated into daily life. The researchers recommended combining digital communication with opportunities for direct human interaction to maintain effective and healthy communication practices.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopted a quantitative research approach to examine whether the internet has reshaped communication in ways that are deeply troubling or beneficial. The quantitative approach was selected because it enables the systematic collection and analysis of measurable data regarding individuals' perceptions and experiences with internet-based communication. Through this method, the researcher can identify patterns in how people interact online, evaluate their views about the effects of internet communication, and determine whether these changes are perceived as positive or problematic. Quantitative research also allows for statistical interpretation of responses, making it possible to generalize findings to a broader population of internet users.

The population of the study consists of 10,000 active social media users who regularly engage in online communication through platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, and X (Twitter). The study focuses on social media users in Nigeria, because the state has a high level of internet usage and digital communication activities. Because the internet allows communication to occur across geographical boundaries, the population was considered large and diverse.

A simple random sampling technique was used to select 384 respondents from the target population of active social media users in Nigeria. The researcher shared the online questionnaire link among selected social media users across platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, and X (Twitter) to ensure that all participants had an equal opportunity to participate in the study. The survey was created using Google Forms, which allowed respondents

to easily access and complete the questionnaire through their mobile phones or computers. The link to the survey was shared across WhatsApp groups, Facebook pages, Instagram stories, and Twitter posts to reach a wide range of internet users. This approach ensured that participants were individuals who actively engage in internet communication, making their responses relevant to the study objectives.

The primary instrument for data collection was a structured online questionnaire designed using Google Forms. The questionnaire contained close-ended questions with Yes or No response options, enabling respondents to clearly indicate whether they agree or disagree with statements related to the impact of internet communication. The questions focused on issues such as the spread of misinformation online, online interactions, exposure to cyberbullying, digital connectivity, and the influence of internet communication on relationships and public discourse. The questionnaire was pre-tested among a small group of social media users to ensure clarity and reliability. Feedback from the pilot test helped refine the questions to ensure that respondents could easily understand and respond accurately.

The data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistical techniques such as frequencies and percentages to summarize respondents' responses. The results were presented using tables and simple charts generated from Google Forms to clearly illustrate patterns in participants' perceptions of internet communication. This method made it easier to interpret whether respondents believe that the internet has reshaped communication in ways that are deeply troubling or beneficial.

RESULTS

Assessment of the Transformation of Communication Practices Through Internet Use in Contemporary Society

The findings presented in Figure 3 indicate that the majority of respondents believe that internet technologies have significantly changed the way people communicate. The results show that 120 respondents (31.3%) indicated that the internet has transformed communication by enabling faster information sharing. This suggests that digital platforms such as email, instant messaging, and social networking sites allow individuals to exchange information instantly regardless of geographical distance. The speed of communication has therefore become one of the most notable transformations introduced by the internet.

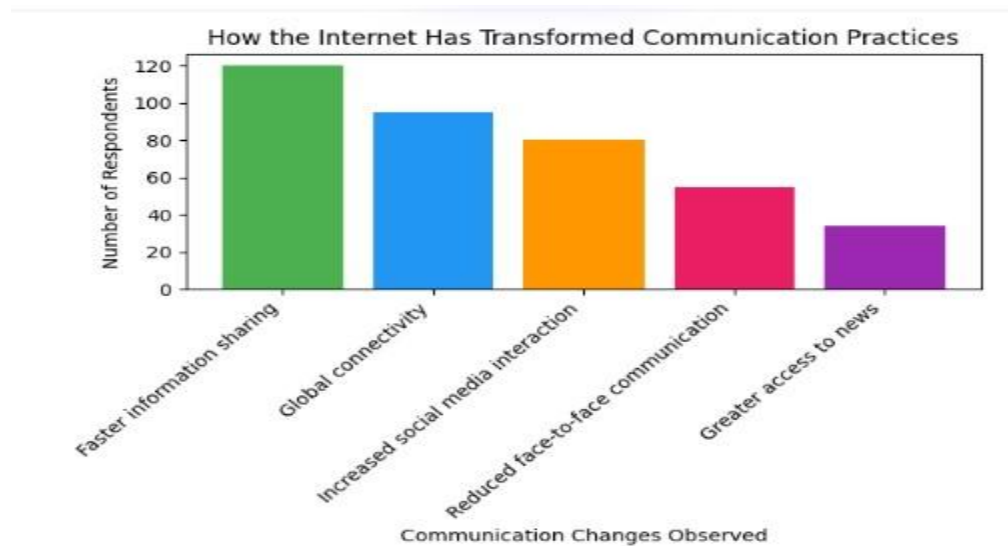


Figure 3: How the Internet Has Transformed Communication Practices in Contemporary Society

Source: Online Survey Data, (2026)

Similarly, 95 respondents (24.7%) indicated that the internet has enhanced global connectivity, enabling individuals to interact with people across different regions and cultures. This demonstrates how internet technologies have reduced geographical barriers and facilitated international communication and collaboration. Furthermore, 80 respondents (20.8%) reported that the internet has increased social media interaction, allowing individuals to maintain relationships, participate in online discussions, and engage with wider communities through digital platforms. However, 55 respondents (14.3%) noted that internet communication has contributed to reduced face-to-face interaction, indicating that reliance on digital communication tools may decrease direct interpersonal contact. Additionally, 34 respondents (8.9%) highlighted greater access to news and information as another transformation resulting from internet communication.

Benefits associated with Internet-Based Communication Systems.

The findings illustrated in Figure 4 reveal that respondents identified several benefits associated with digital communication technologies. The largest proportion of respondents, 110 respondents (28.6%), indicated that internet communication has improved social connectivity. This suggests that digital communication platforms enable individuals to maintain relationships with friends, family members, and colleagues despite geographical distance. Social media platforms and messaging applications allow individuals to interact frequently and maintain strong social ties.

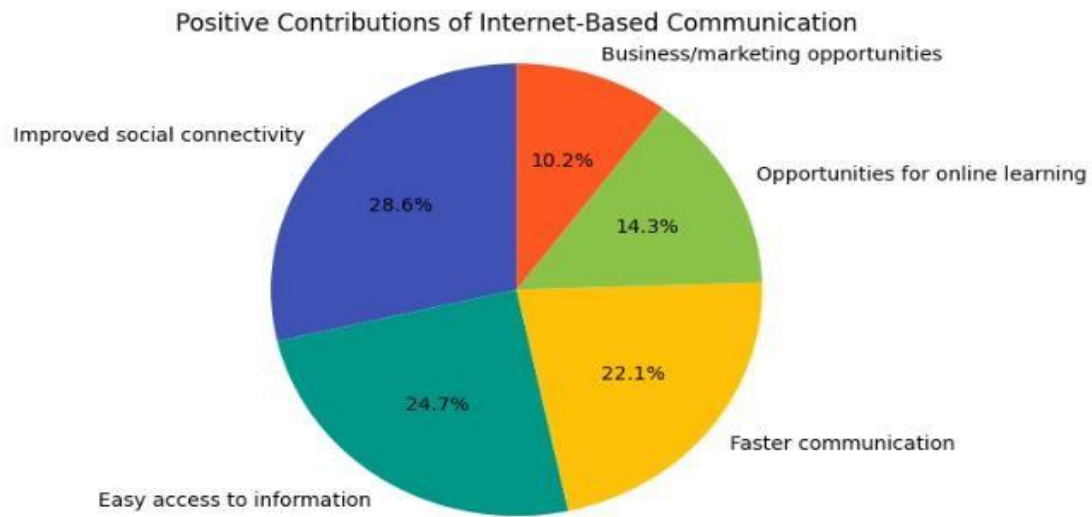


Figure 4: Contributions of Internet-Based Communication to Social Interaction and Information Sharing

Source: Online Survey Data, (2026)

Another significant benefit identified in the findings is easy access to information, which was indicated by 95 respondents (24.7%). The internet provides users with access to a vast range of knowledge resources including academic materials, news updates, and educational content. This has enhanced the accessibility and dissemination of information across societies. Furthermore, 85 respondents (22.1%) indicated that internet communication enables faster communication, making it easier for individuals and organizations to exchange messages quickly. Additionally, 55 respondents (14.3%) stated that the internet has created opportunities for online learning, allowing students and professionals to participate in virtual educational programs and training activities. Finally, 39 respondents (10.2%) reported that internet communication has created business and marketing opportunities, enabling entrepreneurs and organizations to promote products and services online.

Troubling Consequences of Digital Communication

The findings presented in Figure 5 reveal several concerns expressed by respondents regarding the negative effects of internet communication. The most frequently reported issue is the spread of misinformation, which was identified by 100 respondents (26.0%). This finding suggests that the rapid dissemination of information through digital platforms can facilitate the circulation of inaccurate or misleading content. The absence of strict information verification mechanisms on some online platforms makes it easier for false information to spread widely.

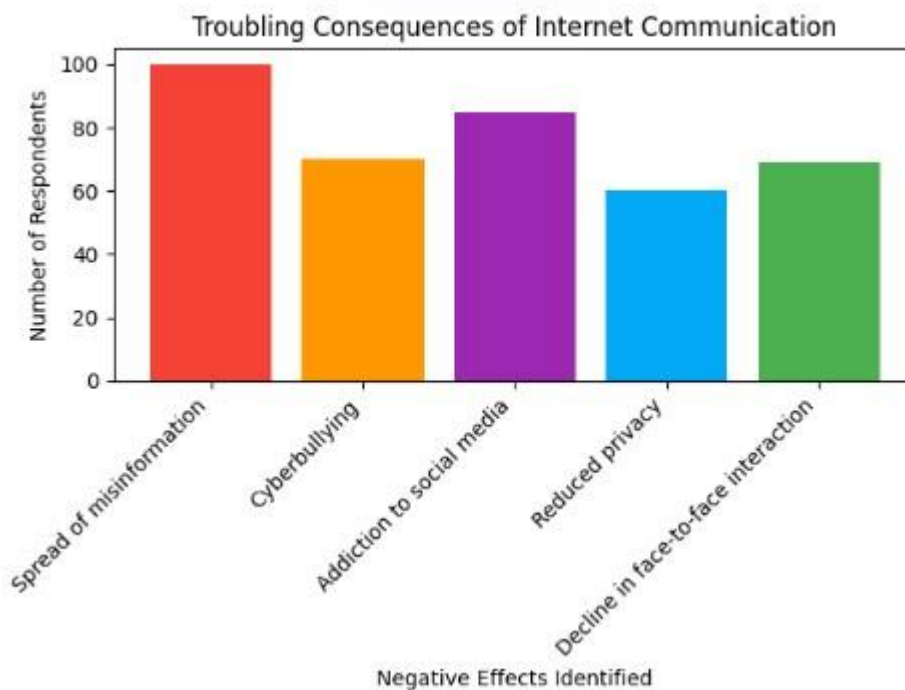


Figure 5: Consequences Emerging from the Increasing Reliance on Digital Communication Technologies

Source: Online Survey Data, (2026)

Another major concern identified in the findings is social media addiction, reported by 85 respondents (22.1%). Excessive engagement with social media platforms can affect productivity, academic performance, and mental well-being. Similarly, 70 respondents (18.2%) identified cyberbullying as a troubling consequence of internet communication. Online harassment and abusive communication can negatively affect individuals' emotional and psychological well-being. The findings also reveal that 69 respondents (18.0%) believe that increased reliance on digital communication contributes to the decline of face-to-face interaction, while 60 respondents (15.6%) expressed concerns about reduced privacy, highlighting risks associated with data security and personal information exposure online.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of the study in relation to the first objective, which is to assess the transformation of communication practices through internet use in contemporary society, show that internet use has significantly reshaped communication by making it faster, more frequent, and globally connected. Communication has largely shifted from traditional face-to-face interactions to digital and network-based platforms where individuals interact instantly across distances. This supports Castells (2020), who argued that digital networks have redefined communication by enabling real-time global interaction, and Rainie and Wellman (2019), who observed that communication has moved from close physical interactions to broader online networks. These studies confirm that the internet has fundamentally transformed how people communicate in contemporary society.

In relation to the second objective, which is to analyze the benefits associated with internet-based communication systems, the findings revealed that internet communication enhances social connectivity, improves access to information, and supports educational and economic opportunities. It allows individuals to maintain relationships over long distances and access information more quickly and efficiently than traditional communication systems. This is supported by Hampton, Rainie and Lu (2021), who found that digital communication strengthens social relationships through continuous interaction, and van Dijk (2020), who noted that internet-based communication improves information sharing and promotes education, innovation, and economic development. These studies reinforce the view that the internet provides significant benefits by improving communication efficiency and expanding opportunities in society.

Regarding the third objective, which is to evaluate the troubling consequences of digital communication, including misinformation, polarization, and social isolation, the findings indicate that despite its benefits, internet-based communication also presents serious challenges. These include the rapid spread of misinformation, increased political polarization, cyberbullying, and reduced face-to-face interaction, which may contribute to social isolation and psychological distress. This aligns with Pennycook and Rand (2021), who found that misinformation spreads rapidly on social media due to its viral structure, and Keles, McCrae and Grealish (2020), who reported that excessive social media use is associated with anxiety, cyberbullying, and reduced psychological well-being. These studies support the finding that while the internet improves communication, it also introduces troubling social and psychological consequences.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings of this study demonstrate that the internet has significantly reshaped communication practices in contemporary society, producing both beneficial and concerning outcomes. The results indicate that internet-based communication has improved the speed of information exchange, expanded global connectivity, and strengthened social interaction through digital platforms. Many respondents acknowledged that the internet has made communication more efficient and accessible by enabling individuals to connect across geographical boundaries, share knowledge quickly, and participate in online communities. These developments highlight the transformative role of the internet in facilitating information dissemination, education, business communication, and social engagement in the digital age.

However, the study also reveals that the transformation of communication through the internet is accompanied by several troubling consequences. Issues such as the rapid spread of misinformation, cyberbullying, reduced face-to-face interaction, social media addiction, and concerns about privacy and data security were identified as major challenges associated with digital communication. These concerns suggest that while internet technologies offer significant advantages for communication, their misuse and overreliance can negatively affect social relationships, public discourse, and individual well-being. Therefore, the study concludes that the internet has reshaped communication in complex ways that combine both positive contributions and troubling implications. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts from governments, educational institutions, digital platforms, and society at large to promote responsible and ethical use of internet communication technologies.

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