

## Digital Media and Information Society: A Theoretical Study of the Ideas of Herbert Schiller, Manuel Castells, and Paul Virilio

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### Abstract

*The rapid evolution of digital media has significantly transformed social, economic, and political landscapes, providing new forms of communication, empowerment, and control. This theoretical framework integrates the perspectives of Herbert Schiller, Manuel Castells, and Paul Virilio, focusing on three core concepts: power dynamics, technological acceleration, and inequalities in access and participation. Through an extensive literature review, this research critically examines key texts and scholarly debates surrounding the contributions of each theorist, aiming to develop a comprehensive understanding of digital media's impact on society. The methodology combines rigorous textual analysis with collaborative academic discussions, ensuring a balanced evaluation of each theorist's ideas while highlighting intersections and divergences. Schiller emphasizes the role of media in reinforcing capitalist interests, Castells highlights the empowering potential of digital networks, and Virilio explores the implications of speed in shaping public perception. By addressing both strengths and critiques, this framework offers a deeper insight into the dual role of digital media as a catalyst for social change and a mechanism of inequality. The findings contribute to ongoing discourse on the role of digital platforms in contemporary society, emphasizing their potential for democratization while also presenting risks of reinforcing existing power imbalances. This theoretical framework lays the foundation for empirical research and interdisciplinary exploration in media studies. Furthermore, it highlights the need for critical engagement with the evolving digital landscape, urging scholars to examine how digital media can both empower and marginalize, offering a nuanced understanding of its complex role in modern life.*

**Keywords:** cultural imperialism; digital media; dromology; information society; network society

## INTRODUCTION

The swift rise of information and communication technology (ICT) has reshaped societal structures and revolutionized political participation and activism. Digital platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have evolved from mere communication tools to becoming central arenas for contemporary social movements (Hidayati & Imasari, 2024). Consider how campaigns such as Black Lives Matter in the United States, women's protests in Iran, and environmental protests in Turkey during 2024 leveraged digital media. These platforms enabled these movements to foster global solidarity, spread alternative narratives quickly, and directly confront entrenched power structures (Jovanovic, 2023; Milan & Beraldo, 2024).

Digital activism's global reach is particularly striking. For example, local protests against mining projects in the Ida Mountains and construction plans at Lake Salda in Turkey gained international attention thanks to digital amplification (Human Rights Watch, 2024). Meanwhile, movements like Extinction Rebellion in the UK and Fridays for Future worldwide have harnessed digital networks to promote

awareness and mobilize broad support for climate issues (Poell et al., 2016). This digital momentum extends to Africa, where campaigns such as #ThisFlag in Zimbabwe and #EndSARS in Nigeria have demonstrated the power of social media to drive political change and hold governments accountable (Sebeelo, 2021).

Schiller's perspective on cultural imperialism adds a vital layer to understanding these dynamics. He argues that media serves as both an economic and ideological tool, supporting the interests of dominant actors within global capitalism (Schiller, 1992). In the digital age, this theory remains relevant, mainly as tech giants control information flows and shape global discourse, often in ways that reinforce consumerist ideologies and political agendas (Arsène, 2021). On the other hand, Castells emphasizes the transformative potential of digital networks in reshaping social relations. His concept of the "network society" explains how digital platforms enable decentralized communication, creating new pathways for political engagement and grassroots mobilization (Castells, 2011). Movements such as Black Lives Matter, or simply categorizing women on social media

based on their clothing, illustrate the potential of social media to define and connect a global audience in real time (Ayuningrum & Paramita, 2024).

Virilio introduces a different concern, focusing on how the speed of digital communication—what he terms *dromology*—affects public perception. He warns of an “information bomb,” where rapid information flow overwhelms and distorts reality, potentially manipulating public opinion (Virilio, 2005). This concept is evident in the rapid mobilization of campaigns like #MeToo, where the speed of digital interaction coincided with misinformation during the 2024 protests in Turkey (Callender & Klassen, 2020; Human Rights Watch, 2024). The dominance of large digital platforms centralizes information and often shapes cultural narratives to favour certain voices, sometimes marginalizing alternative perspectives (Schiller, 1992). Castells suggests that these platforms empower decentralized communities, enabling rapid coordination and dissemination of information. However, Virilio argues that the speed of information can lead to a “dromocratic” form of governance, where decisions are driven by urgency rather than careful deliberation (Bagherzadeh Samani et al.,

2018). This creates a paradox: speed facilitates action but can also hinder strategic planning.

In the evolving digital landscape, the interplay between Schiller’s cultural imperialism, Castells’ network society, and Virilio’s *dromology* becomes increasingly relevant. Platforms’ algorithms and business models often amplify certain narratives, reinforcing biases and creating echo chambers rather than fostering open, diverse dialogue (Rufaida, 2023). This dynamic challenges social movements to balance effective communication with inclusive representation, particularly in environments dominated by algorithmic preferences.

This research offers a novel contribution to media studies by integrating the theoretical frameworks of Herbert Schiller, Manuel Castells, and Paul Virilio in the context of digital media, providing a fresh perspective on how digital platforms shape societal structures. While each theorist has been widely discussed individually within their respective domains, this study distinguishes itself by synthesizing their ideas to address contemporary concerns about digital media's role in political, social, and economic transformation. The focus on power dynamics, technological

acceleration, and inequalities in access and participation, when examined through the lens of these three influential thinkers, offers a more important understanding of the complexities surrounding digital platforms. By bridging these theories with real-world applications, this research highlights how the intersection of their ideas helps elucidate the multifaceted impacts of digital media on global communication practices and social change.

Lastly, digital networks complicate the relationship between social movements and political entities. While digital platforms can facilitate collaboration, they also introduce new conflicts, often driven by the unpredictability of rapid digital shifts. This dynamic requires social movements to remain agile, adapting to rapid changes while maintaining their core values and effectiveness (Nielsen, 2009). This article aims to integrate and critically assess the concepts of cultural imperialism, network society, and dromology to offer a comprehensive lens for understanding digital media's role in shaping modern social dynamics. By exploring the intersections of Schiller's, Castells', and Virilio's perspectives, this analysis seeks to clarify how digital platforms function as drivers of social

transformation and mechanisms of control.

Although this research may appear expansive due to its examination of three prominent theorists, it maintains a distinct focus by applying their ideas specifically within the realm of digital platforms. The breadth of the discussion arises not from a general theoretical analysis, but from the targeted application of Schiller's cultural imperialism, Castells' network society, and Virilio's dromology to the contemporary digital landscape. This approach enables the research to explore how these theories interrelate when applied to platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, which serve as central arenas for political activism and social movements. Rather than offering a generic overview of each theorist's ideas, the study carefully contextualizes their perspectives within the mechanisms of digital communication, providing an in-depth analysis of how digital platforms both empower and control users. This specific focus allows the research to offer critical insights into the intersection of theory and practice in the digital age.

The implications of this discussion are significant, particularly for scholars, policymakers, and activists navigating the complexities of digital communication.

This framework not only enriches the theoretical discourse on media studies but also provides an understanding of how digital power operates in contemporary society, highlighting both opportunities for empowerment and risks of inequality, manipulation, and homogenization. This analysis underscores the need for a critical approach to digital media that fosters more equitable, informed, and strategic engagement in the digital age.

## METHOD

The development of this theoretical framework followed systematic steps, integrating literature review, critical analysis, and collaborative discussions with academic peers. Initially, this research was undertaken as part of the Politics of Media course in the Doctoral Program in Communication Studies at Kocaeli University, Turkey. It was inspired by Stevenson's *Understanding Media Culture*, which explores how digital media shapes social reality (Stevenson, 2002). This approach aligns with best practices in theoretical research, emphasizing deep engagement with primary and secondary sources to ensure depth and accuracy (Bryman, 2016; Silverman & Patterson, 2021). It involved a comprehensive review of the core works of Herbert Schiller, Manuel

Castells, and Paul Virilio, allowing for a balanced analysis of their perspectives while identifying similarities and differences (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

While Systematic Literature Reviews (SLRs) and Bibliometric Analyses (BAs) have become popular among scholars, this framework intentionally opts for a different approach that prioritizes conceptual synthesis and interpretative depth. SLR and BA are generally structured to map extensive literature or measure research trends, which may result in fragmented insights (Passas, 2024). By contrast, this framework aims to develop theoretical perspectives that allow for the flourishing of complex ideas and debates. The emphasis on interpretive engagement and collaborative dialogue facilitates a more flexible exploration of theoretical concepts, often constrained by the rigid methodologies of SLR and BA (Charmaz, 2006).

The framework is methodically organized, with each section dedicated to one of the three core concepts: cultural imperialism, network society, and dromology. It develops logically, beginning with the definition of each concept and progressing toward their relevance and interconnectedness within the context of digital media. This

approach adheres to academic standards for theoretical research, emphasizing clarity, logical progression, and integrating key concepts to ensure comprehensive coverage (Patton, 2014).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Key Concepts and Relevance of Schiller, Castells, and Virilio's Thought

#### a. *Power in Digital Media*

Herbert Schiller's theory of cultural imperialism provides a foundational perspective for understanding power in digital media. He argues that media, mainly when dominated by large corporations, functions as an economic and ideological power tool. In the digital age, this influence is even more pronounced, with tech giants like Google, Facebook, and Amazon not only controlling the flow of information but also shaping public perception and consumer behaviour (Schiller, 1976, 1992). Their global reach reinforces economic disparities as they promote consumerist ideologies that Paul Virilio's focus on *dromology*, or the logic of speed, introduces another dimension of power dynamics in digital media. Virilio contends that speed has become a critical form of power in the digital era, as rapid information dissemination can manipulate public

align with capitalist interests. As these platforms expand, the centralization of power becomes more evident, contributing to a homogenization of cultural narratives that prioritize profit over diversity.

Manuel Castells' *network society* concept adds a layer of complexity by highlighting how power is embedded within digital networks rather than solely concentrated in traditional institutions. Digital media enables decentralized networks of activists, allowing for the bypassing of conventional media gatekeepers and the amplification of alternative narratives (Castells, 2011). However, Castells also warns that powerful actors can utilize the same networks that foster empowerment to exert control over communication flows. This duality is evident in contemporary social movements, where platforms facilitate mobilization and surveillance, reflecting the blurred lines between liberation and control in digital spaces (Poell et al., 2016).

perception, create confusion, or even overwhelm audiences (Virilio, 2005; Virilio & Polizzotti, 2006). This observation is particularly relevant in news cycles dominated by rapid digital exchanges, where misinformation can spread as quickly as verified information.

The accelerated nature of digital media not only distorts reality but also often benefits those who can control the speed and direction of information flow, complementing Schiller's view of media as a tool of control (Callender & Klassen, 2020).

In today's digital landscape, the concentration of power among tech corporations strongly aligns with Schiller's concept of cultural imperialism. These corporations shape consumer culture and influence political discourse through algorithms that curate what users encounter. The resulting environment amplifies dominant narratives while marginalizing dissenting voices (Fuchs, 2018). Castells' network society concept complements this analysis, illustrating how digital connectivity enhances global communication and reinforces power asymmetries—those with more significant resources gain more influence over network dynamics (Castells, 2010).

The intersection of cultural imperialism and network society becomes evident when digital platforms act as both tools of control and resistance. For example, global tech companies often propagate Western values, echoing Schiller's critique of one-way cultural flows (Schiller, 1976). Yet, these

platforms have become crucial for organizing protests, as seen in movements like #MeToo and Black Lives Matter, where activists use network dynamics to amplify marginalized voices and challenge established power structures. This dynamic supports Castells' argument that digital networks can serve as both instruments of empowerment and mechanisms of domination.

However, power in digital media is not limited to economic or ideological control. Virilio's emphasis on speed is crucial, as the rapid spread of information can create what he calls an "information bomb," where overwhelming data flow disrupts thoughtful deliberation and informed decision-making (Virilio & Polizzotti, 2006). This aspect of power not only facilitates control by dominant actors but also increases the potential for misinformation to quickly shape public opinion in ways that align with their interests (Human Rights Watch, 2024). Such rapid dissemination can destabilize narratives, benefiting those who can manage the content and pace of information.

While digital media has democratized access to information, underlying power structures remain

skewed towards those who control infrastructure and algorithms. This scenario aligns with Schiller's critique of media serving capitalist interests and Castells' observation that network power often favours those with superior digital resources. Simultaneously, Virilio's focus on speed indicates that digital communication's pace perpetuates existing inequalities, as those who dominate fast communication channels typically shape prevailing narratives (Bagherzadeh Samani et al., 2018).

In essence, power within digital media is multifaceted, encompassing economic dominance, network dynamics, and speed influence. Schiller's cultural imperialism, Castells' network society, and Virilio's dromology collectively offer a comprehensive framework for analyzing how digital media perpetuates power asymmetries while simultaneously creating spaces for resistance. As digital platforms evolve and shape communication, understanding these intertwined dynamics becomes essential for addressing the complexities of power in the digital age.

#### ***b. Impact of Technological Acceleration***

The acceleration of technology is pivotal in shaping digital media's impact on society, a concept underscored by Paul Virilio's theory of dromology.

Virilio argues that speed is not merely a characteristic of digital communication but a fundamental principle that influences the very structure of modern society. As information flows become increasingly rapid, they compress social interactions, economic exchanges, and political processes, often leading to reactive behaviour rather than thoughtful decision-making (Virilio, 2005). This trend is evident in today's fast-paced news cycles, where the rapid dissemination of information often surpasses the public's ability to critically analyze it, resulting in misinformation and shallow discourse (Redden & Smith, 2000).

Manuel Castells' notion of the network society builds on Virilio's perspective by illustrating how digital networks facilitate real-time communication across geographical boundaries (Castells, 2011). While this rapid exchange of information can democratize access and empower social movements, it also perpetuates new forms of digital inequality. Individuals with excellent resources and technological skills can better exploit accelerated information flows, leading to unequal influence within digital networks (Castells, 2010). Thus, technological acceleration is both an



enabler of social transformation and a source of constraint, contingent upon who controls the speed and direction of information flow.

Herbert Schiller's concept of cultural imperialism provides further insight, suggesting that rapid media dissemination is leveraged to serve capitalist interests. Schiller posits that global media corporations use speed as a tool to expand their reach and propagate consumerist values at unprecedented rates (Schiller, 1992). This rapid spread often results in cultural homogenization, where diverse local traditions are overshadowed by dominant narratives aligned with capitalist ideologies (Schiller, 1991). Virilio's concept of the "integral accident" underscores a critical consequence of technological acceleration: hyper-connected systems become more susceptible to large-scale failures. As technology accelerates, the likelihood of systemic disruptions increases, as demonstrated by events like the global Facebook outage in 2021 (Virilio, 2007).

In the digital era, accelerated media flows intensify this process, making it harder for alternative cultural narratives to gain visibility and resonance (Pedro-Carañana & Armirola Garcés, 2023). Such incidents exemplify how rapid

technological processes can simultaneously foster global connectivity while exacerbating vulnerabilities. Even minor disruptions can escalate into major crises, affecting communication channels, political stability, and economic functioning (Bagherzadeh Samani et al., 2018).

Castells also emphasizes that technological acceleration contributes to the rise of networked individualism, wherein personal identities and social interactions are increasingly defined by digital networks rather than traditional social groups (Castells, 2007). Additionally, Virilio's concept of speed extends to the psychological impact of accelerated digital communication. He introduces the notion of "timeless time," where the traditional boundaries between work, leisure, and personal time blur due to constant connectivity (Virilio, 2007). This phenomenon has led to digital fatigue and burnout, particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, when remote work and online education became widespread (Subiakto & Damayanti, 2024). These conditions highlight the broader societal implications of technological acceleration, affecting mental well-being and social behaviours.

While broadening participation, the shift towards digital activism also

contributes to community fragmentation as individuals increasingly rely on digital interactions over face-to-face encounters (Berg, 2022). Schiller and Castells focus primarily on acceleration's economic and social dimensions, while Virilio emphasizes its ethical implications. The rapid pace of digital media often favours sensational content over meaningful discourse, cultivating a culture of reaction rather than thoughtful engagement (Featherstone et al., 2021).

This speed-driven environment not only shapes public opinion but also raises ethical concerns about accountability, as the rapid flow of information can obscure both its origins and intentions (Lee, 2015). The ethical dilemmas posed by accelerated information flow demand a closer examination of media control and its implications for democracy. The speed of digital media amplifies the influence of those who dominate communication channels, often marginalizing voices that cannot keep up. This dynamic underscores the need for digital literacy and critical media engagement to mitigate the risks of unchecked technological acceleration.

Technological acceleration in digital media exerts a multifaceted

impact, spanning economic, social, and ethical dimensions. Schiller's cultural imperialism, Castells' network society, and Virilio's dromology collectively offer a robust framework for analyzing how speed shapes digital communication. While acceleration facilitates broader engagement and cultural exchange, it also presents challenges such as inequality, misinformation, and psychological strain. Addressing these issues requires critical scrutiny of who controls the pace of information and how it shapes societal realities in the digital age.

### ***c. Inequality in Access and Participation***

Inequality in access to digital media critically shapes participation within the digital landscape, as emphasized by Schiller's concept of cultural imperialism. Schiller argues that media flows predominantly from dominant nations to less powerful ones, resulting in cultural homogenization that marginalizes local narratives and reinforces existing power hierarchies (Schiller, 1991). Building on this cultural perspective, Castells' theory of the network society explores how digital networks can either empower or exclude, depending on access distribution. While these networks have the potential to democratize communication, the reality is

that access remains unevenly distributed (Castells, 2011). Castells underscores that the digital divide—representing the gap between those with and without access to digital technologies—mirrors broader socioeconomic disparities. Those lacking sufficient digital resources or literacy often find themselves marginalized, leading to unequal participation in digital discourse and, consequently, in shaping social and political narratives.

In the digital age, this dynamic persists, as major tech companies, primarily based in Western nations, dominate global communication networks, thereby restricting the visibility of diverse cultural expressions and perpetuating disparities in access (Fuchs, 2020). However, it is not merely a matter of geographic dominance but also speed, as explained by Virilio's concept of dromology. While the rapid expansion of digital infrastructure has boosted connectivity, it has also exacerbated the digital divide. Virilio's theory sheds light on how the speed of technological development contributes to this issue. As digital communication accelerates, individuals lacking high-speed internet or advanced digital devices face increasing difficulty engaging meaningfully in digital spaces (Virilio, 2005; Virilio & Polizzotti,

2006). This acceleration reinforces socioeconomic inequalities and fosters a form of "digital exclusion," where access is determined by geography, income, and education.

Schiller views media as an economic tool and argues that capitalist interests drive digital inequalities. He posits that digital platforms often adopt profit-driven models that cater to wealthier users, sidelining low-income communities that cannot contribute significantly to the platform's profitability (Schiller, 1976, 1991). Extending this critique beyond economic aspects, Castells introduces the concept of networked individualism, highlighting how digital networks prioritize personal connections over traditional social ties. This shift complicates digital participation, as those who are digitally excluded experience isolation from information and social networks themselves (Castells, 2007).

This exclusion perpetuates a cycle in which marginalized groups remain on the periphery, both economically and culturally, as they lack the resources needed to engage with the rapidly evolving digital landscape. This phenomenon is particularly evident in rural areas, where inadequate infrastructure hinders digital engagement

and prevents communities from contributing to broader social and political conversations. Consequently, the fragmentation of digital participation becomes even more pronounced, favouring urban, digitally literate populations while others remain isolated.

Virilio adds a psychological dimension to digital inequality by emphasizing the demands of accelerated digital communication. He suggests that rapid digital interactions require both access and the ability to process information quickly (Armitage, 2001). The psychological challenges imposed by this acceleration reveal a deeper layer of exclusion. This rapid pace can be overwhelming, especially for individuals new to digital technologies or lacking advanced literacy skills. The psychological burden of keeping pace with fast-changing digital environments can discourage engagement, further widening the digital divide and limiting meaningful participation. While efforts to address digital inequality often focus on expanding infrastructure, Castells emphasizes the need to foster digital literacy alongside increased access (Castells, 2010). He argues that real empowerment in the network society requires physical and educational resources. For example, initiatives

distributing digital devices in underprivileged areas must also include training programs that enable users to engage effectively with digital

tools. While expanding digital access is crucial, Schiller and Virilio advocate for regulatory measures that ensure fair representation of diverse cultural narratives in digital spaces. Schiller proposes that regulatory interventions are needed to balance commercial interests with public interests, ensuring that profit-driven content does not overshadow marginalised voices (Schiller, 1992). Virilio, meanwhile, calls for managing the pace of information flows to create a more inclusive environment where slower, more reflective communication channels coexist with rapid digital exchanges. Below, I present a summary in table form that illustrates how the perspectives of Herbert Schiller, Manuel Castells, and Paul Virilio connect to the concepts discussed above. Each theorist offers distinct yet complementary insights into the impact of digital media on society. The table outlines how their views relate to power in media, technological acceleration, and inequality in access, along with the real-world implications of these concepts.

Table 1: Comparative Perspectives of Schiller, Castells, and Virilio on Digital Media  
Concepts

Concept	Schiller's Perspective	Castells' Perspective	Virilio's Perspective	Real-World Implications
Power in Digital Media	Media as an economic and ideological tool; promotes consumerist ideologies.	Power embedded in digital networks; facilitates both empowerment and surveillance.	Speed as a form of power; rapid information flow can overwhelm perception, reinforcing control.	Major tech companies can shape narratives; activism can be empowered but also surveilled through digital networks.
Impact of Technological Acceleration	Rapid media dissemination drives cultural homogenization; speed reinforces capitalist agendas.	Network society fosters real-time communication, enabling empowerment but also contributing to digital inequality.	Acceleration shapes social dynamics; rapid communication can lead to 'integral accidents.'	Rapid news cycles and misinformation destabilize public discourse; digital acceleration fosters both connectivity and systemic vulnerabilities.

Inequality in Access and Participation	Digital inequalities perpetuated by capitalist-driven media, limiting representation.	Digital divide reflects socio-economic disparities; access and digital literacy are crucial for participation.	Digital exclusion is intensified by speed; rapid information processing limits access for less skilled users.	Efforts to expand access must include digital literacy training; regulations are needed for fair representation and managing information speed.
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The table highlights that, despite their different approaches to digital media, Schiller, Castells, and Virilio converge on the significant influence of media on social structures. Schiller emphasizes the media's role as an economic and ideological tool, while Castells views digital networks as spaces for empowerment and surveillance. Meanwhile, Virilio focuses on the impact of speed in shaping public perception and reinforcing inequalities. This comprehensive understanding helps us see digital media as a complex phenomenon that connects and perpetuates social disparities and challenges.

## **A Critique of the Thought of Schiller, Castells, and Virilio**

### ***a. Technological Determinism***

One criticism we can level at Schiller, Castells, and Virilio is their tendency towards

*technological determinism.*

Technological determinism is the theory that technology itself is the main force shaping society, influencing social structures, cultural norms, and human behaviour. This perspective implies that once technological advances emerge, they operate autonomously, driving change in society with little room for other factors, such as economic or political structures, to influence their

impact.

Critics argue that all three theories emphasize the role of technology - especially digital media - in driving social change and often ignore other influential factors such as economics, politics, and human agency (Anttiroiko, 2015). This perspective suggests that technological progress, once developed, exerts an autonomous influence on social relations, minimizing the significance of economic structures and political frameworks in shaping technological outcomes (Miconi, 2023).

For Herbert Schiller, critics argue that his focus on global media corporations dominating cultural flows tends to present a one-sided narrative of cultural imposition. Schiller's framework often ignores how local audiences actively reinterpret, adapt, or reject global media content (Rogers, 2006). By emphasizing the hegemonic power of Western media companies, Schiller's analysis suggests that cultural dynamics are determined primarily by technological infrastructure, thereby reducing the complexity of cultural interactions to a simple model of domination (Boyd-Barrett, 2006). This critique emphasizes the need to account for local agency and cultural adaptation, which can challenge or modify global

media messages (Chen & Shen, 2021).

Similarly, Manuel Castells has been criticized for the deterministic tone in *his theory of network society*. Although Castells argues that digital networks reshape social relations, critics point out that his framework sometimes implies that networks themselves dictate social organization (Comunello & Mulargia, 2023). This perspective can be seen as underestimating the role of economic and political structures that influence how networks operate and who controls them. Castells' emphasis on network autonomy and digital connectivity may overlook how traditional power structures continue to shape network dynamics, especially in contexts where political and economic interests intersect with digital technologies (Bust et al., 2023).

Paul Virilio's dromology concept-which emphasizes speed's central role in shaping social interaction - also faces criticism for technological determinism. Virilio argues that the speed of information flow determines societal change and often underestimates the role of human agency and resistance (Armitage, 2001). Critics argue that Virilio's focus on acceleration as a driving force may oversimplify the complex interactions between

technology and society, reducing social change to a reaction to technological speed (Sebikova, 2018). Moreover, Virilio's concept of the *information bomb*, which equates to the overwhelming flow of information as a weapon of mass disruption, tends to overlook how societies can adapt or even harness speed for positive civic engagement (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012).

Critiques of *technological determinism* from Schiller, Castells, and Virilio highlight the need for a more nuanced understanding of how technology interacts with social factors. Although their theories offer valuable insights into the transformative power of digital media, they often underestimate the complexity of social dynamics, significantly how human agency, cultural resistance, and economic and political interests shape the outcomes of technological change (Miconi, 2023). These criticisms call for an approach that integrates technology with other social forces to provide a more comprehensive analysis of the impact of digital media on society.

#### ***b. Underestimating Local Agency and Cultural Adaptation***

Criticisms of Schiller, Castells and Virilio also relate to the underestimation



of the agency of local actors and the complexity of cultural adaptation. Schiller's theory of cultural imperialism often portrays global media flows as a one-way imposition primarily dominated by

Western powers. This approach ignores how local cultures actively reinterpret, resist, or hybridize global media content (Rogers, 2006). Critics argue that Schiller's focus on American dominance is insufficient to capture the recent shift towards a more multipolar media landscape, where diverse cultural exporters challenge the idea of Americanization (Stevenson, 2002). For example, phenomena such as *K-pop* and Nollywood have shown that local industries can significantly influence global media flows.

Similarly, Castells' network society framework is often criticized for not adequately acknowledging the navigational strategies of grassroots movements or marginalized groups in digital environments. Castells emphasizes the transformative power of networks, yet critics point out that he tends to see networks as inherently empowering, ignoring the socioeconomic disparities that affect access and influence (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Marginalized

communities often adopt creative tactics to navigate and reshape networked environments, which requires recognizing local agencies within digital networks (Miconi, 2022). Stevenson also notes that although Castells attempts to balance his analysis between technology, economy and culture, he still leans towards technological determinism, which implies that technology alone drives societal change (Stevenson, 2002).

Virilio's analysis of speed and information overload is criticized for its limited consideration of local adaptation. His depiction of accelerating information flows as disruptive often underestimates how individuals and communities adapt to and manage such rapid change (Armitage, 2000). Although Virilio warns of the disorienting effects of speed, critics argue that his pessimistic view ignores the potential of digital technologies to foster new forms of social interaction and community participation (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Stevenson, 2002). Communities often develop coping mechanisms, such as selective engagement or digital literacy initiatives, demonstrating resilience and agency even in an accelerating media landscape.

### *c. Simplification of Power Dynamics*

A third criticism from scholars is that Schiller's concept of cultural imperialism tends to oversimplify the dynamics of global media by portraying it as a one-way flow of Western domination. While Schiller has shown how global media promote neoliberal values and consumerism, his framework often ignores how local cultures adapt, resist, or reinterpret these influences (Boyd-Barrett, 2006). In contexts where local audiences are active participants, Schiller's approach misses the interactive nature of cultural exchange, where adaptation and hybridization often occur. Stevenson adds that this focus on cultural commodification fails to capture how digital networks enable more reciprocal cultural interactions, making Schiller's views less applicable in a networked world (Stevenson, 2002). Similarly, Castells' theory of network society has been criticized for presenting digital networks as inherently transformative and democratic yet not fully addressing how traditional power structures continue to shape these networks (Anttiroiko, 2015).

While Castells acknowledges that networks create new spaces for communication and mobilization, critics argue that he underestimates how

economic and political interests influence network dynamics and reinforce existing hierarchies (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Stevenson points out that Castells' approach, while nuanced, still struggles to address intersectional power dynamics in digital spaces, as networks can simultaneously empower and maintain existing inequalities (Stevenson, 2002). Virilio's analysis of speed acceleration has also been criticized for oversimplifying the role of speed as a central power mechanism.

While Virilio emphasizes how rapid information flows can act as "information bombs", disrupting social order and perceptions (Armitage, 2001), critics argue that this perspective

ignores how individuals and societies develop strategies to manage and adapt to these rapid changes, for example through digital literacy and selective engagement (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Although Virilio highlights the disruptive potential of acceleration, he fails to recognise how digital networks can foster new forms of political participation and cultural creativity, complicating the relationship between speed and control (Stevenson, 2002).

Critics emphasize that while Schiller, Castells and Virilio provide

valuable insights, they treat digital technologies and networks as largely independent drivers of change, thus oversimplifying the complex interactions between social, cultural and economic factors that influence digital environments (Downey, 2000). These approaches often overlook how power is negotiated at multiple levels, from global media companies to grassroots communities. As a result, their frameworks may fail to fully capture how human agency and local contexts actively shape the impact of digital media on society.

#### *d. Additional Critics*

While Schiller, Castells, and Virilio's primary critiques can be grouped into three main themes—technological determinism, underestimation of local agency, and simplification of power dynamics—there are additional criticisms that fall outside these categories. These critiques address specific elements in the theorists' frameworks that reveal further limitations in their approaches. Scholars have identified nuances in each theorist's work that require deeper exploration, as these issues highlight gaps in understanding the complex realities of global media dynamics in the digital era.

One of Schiller's additional critiques centers on his state-centric framework. While Schiller illustrates how media serves as an instrument of Western cultural dominance, his analysis is often overly focused on U.S. hegemony and neoliberal influences. Critics argue that this approach fails to capture the multi-directional flow of cultural exchanges that have emerged in recent years, such as the rise of South Korean media (Hallyu) and Chinese soft power initiatives (Li & Jung, 2018; Zhang, 2016). These non-Western media powers have increasingly shaped global culture, challenging Schiller's one-dimensional narrative of Western dominance, which limits his framework's applicability in today's more complex media landscape.

Castells also faces criticism regarding his depiction of network society as inherently egalitarian. While he emphasizes the potential of networks to democratize communication, critics argue that Castells overlooks how economic and political elites continue to shape network access and information flow (Anttiroiko, 2015). This critique suggests that Castells' model tends to underplay the influence of traditional power structures that can dominate digital

spaces, reinforcing existing social hierarchies rather than dismantling them. As a result, his portrayal of networked environments as transformative risks overestimating the democratizing potential of digital communication, especially in contexts marked by significant socio-economic disparities.

Virilio's concept of dromology and the logic of speed have also been critiqued for neglecting human agency and adaptation. Virilio's focus on the destabilizing effects of accelerated information often paints a bleak picture of technological impact, likening it to an "information bomb" that disrupts social order. However, critics argue that this perspective fails to account for how individuals and communities develop coping mechanisms, such as selective engagement, digital literacy, and other strategies to manage rapid information flows.

### **Moving Forward to Future Research**

Further research is essential to test and extend the theories of Schiller, Castells, and Virilio, especially in an empirical context. The core concepts of cultural imperialism, network society, and dromology present opportunities for deeper exploration and adaptation across different social and cultural landscapes.

Importantly, future research can address the criticisms leveled against these theorists, then provide empirical evidence that supports or refines their original ideas. Such approaches not only address key concerns about technological determinism, local

agency and power dynamics, but also have the potential to strengthen and expand their theoretical frameworks, making them more adaptable to the evolving realities of digital media.

Empirical studies can explore how these theories are applied in different socio-political and cultural settings. For example, examining cultural adaptation in response to global media flows can enrich Schiller's theory of *cultural imperialism*, which reveals how local audiences resist, reinterpret or hybridize global media influences. Similarly, research into the dynamics of digital activism could provide a more nuanced understanding of Castells' *network society*, addressing critiques of its capacity to empower and marginalize. Virilio's concept of *dromology* can be extended by studying how individuals and societies deal with accelerating information flows, illustrating both the disruptive and adaptive aspects of speed in digital contexts.

Multidisciplinary and comparative studies offer significant potential for refining these theories. Researchers can investigate whether digital networks truly democratize communication or, as critics argue, reinforce existing social inequalities. Case studies of digital activism in different countries can reveal how network dynamics are affected by local socio-economic conditions. Integrating perspectives from political science, sociology and anthropology can provide a comprehensive understanding of how traditional power structures interact with networked communication, which can shed light on the enabling and constraining effects of digital networks on social mobilization and political participation.

Further exploration of Virilio's *dromology* could focus on the adaptive strategies developed by individuals and communities in response to rapid information flows. While Virilio emphasizes the destabilizing effects of speed, future research could investigate how digital literacy programs, selective media engagement and other coping mechanisms help manage the pace of information in everyday life. Comparative studies across different cultural contexts could reveal how societies with different communication

speeds and media infrastructures respond to speed, thus adding depth to Virilio's analysis by demonstrating the disruptive and adaptive potential of digital media.

It is also important to adopt a multidisciplinary approach in future research. Combining media studies with political science, anthropology and psychology can offer a more comprehensive perspective on how digital media intersects with cultural, economic and social factors. By drawing on multiple fields, researchers can develop integrated analyses that can better capture the complexity of digital media impacts. These studies not only refine existing theoretical frameworks, but also make them more adaptable to rapidly changing digital environments and diverse cultural contexts.

### **Limitations**

Despite its strengths, this theoretical framework has certain limitations. It is primarily based on specific books and articles available to the author, which may lead to an emphasis on some sources while potentially overlooking others. This selective approach might not fully capture the diversity of perspectives within communication and media studies, particularly when analyzing global digital dynamics. Additionally,

the interpretative nature of this framework is subject to biases inherent in theoretical exploration, as it relies heavily on conceptual analysis rather than empirical testing. These limitations suggest that while the framework offers a structured analysis of digital media, it might not account for all empirical realities or the rapidly evolving nature of digital technologies. Nonetheless, the framework remains crucial for revisiting and critically engaging with the ideas of Schiller, Castells, and Virilio, providing a structured lens to re-evaluate their relevance in today's digital age.

## CONCLUSION

This theoretical framework was developed to provide a comprehensive lens for understanding the impact of digital media on contemporary society, focusing on power dynamics, technological acceleration, and inequalities in access and participation, as seen through the perspectives of Schiller, Castells, and Virilio. By integrating these theories, the framework contributes to analyzing how digital media functions as a tool for empowerment and a mechanism of control. It offers theoretical insights that help clarify complex issues such as misinformation, digital activism, and global media inequalities, highlighting

its relevance for current and future studies.

The framework enriches existing theories and lays a foundation for further development through empirical testing and interdisciplinary exploration. While it offers a structured approach to analyzing digital dynamics, it remains open to refinement, inviting future research to expand its applicability across diverse cultural and socio-political contexts. This adaptability underscores the framework's importance as a foundational tool for deeper engagement with digital media's evolving role, making it a critical asset in understanding the complexities of today's digital transformation.

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