



Social Knowledge in the Digital Age: Transformations in Trust, Interaction, Participation, and Digital Inclusion

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Abstract

Digital changes have completely changed how social knowledge is created, disseminated, valued and challenged. These changes are discussed in this review in four interrelated aspects: trust, interaction, participation and digital inclusion. Social knowledge is increasingly developing in digitally mediated environments that are shaped by the interplay of platforms, networks, algorithms and user practices, all of which impact visibility, credibility and access. The review highlights how online interaction and identity formation contribute to knowledge exchange, while digital platforms simultaneously create new opportunities for participation and new forms of inequality. The problems of trust and information integrity continue to be relevant issues as users face misinformation, mediated credibility, selective exposure, and a lack of even digital literacy. Meaningful participation is also influenced by structural variations in terms of access, skills, representation and platform design, as connectivity alone does not imply meaningful participation. AI enhances knowledge processing and communication by bringing another level of complexity with algorithmic bias, transparency, accountability, and lack of social context. The synthesis suggests that future digital knowledge systems should be computational and also interpretable by humans, participatory and democratic, and governance-focused. To ensure that the development of technology will facilitate credible, inclusive and socially embedded knowledge formation, there is a need to put greater emphasis on digital literacy, accessible design, transparent algorithms and human oversight.

Keywords: social knowledge, digital trust, digital participation, digital inclusion, artificial intelligence

1. Introduction

Social knowledge is the set of understandings that serve as the basis for making sense of people, relationships, communities and social spaces as people live in them. It is developed through learning about others and grows in a gradual way through shared social experiences, observation, communication and interpersonal experiences (Brooks-Gunn & Lewis, 2017). The digitalisation has significantly transformed these processes, involving spaces where knowledge is generated, shared, assessed and remediated in technologically mediated networks. Social media has proven to be a powerful medium as it allows for sharing of information on a large scale, and produces vast amounts of information that can be useful in building knowledge and managing it in communities and organizations (Alghamdi et al., 2023). The developments have placed digital environments not only as communication spaces but also as significant social spaces in which meanings, relationships, identities and collective understandings are continually negotiated.

The relation between culture, society and knowledge is also changing due to the increasing integration of digital technologies into daily life. Digital communication can bridge the gap between people who are not only dispersed geographically but also culturally, and facilitate the transformation of existing culture and access to social information (Levin & Mamlok, 2021). This is part of the general trend of the knowledge society in which the access to information, the exchange of knowledge, and the ability to engage in digitally mediated processes pervade social and institutional change (Meier & Terán, 2019). In this context, social knowledge is thus produced in relation to human relationships as well as to technologies which constitute their informational infrastructure – that is, those that make information visible, available and socially meaningful.

This is complicated further by the fact of the use of social media, which involves interaction between people as well as the sharing of knowledge. The relationship between digital interaction and knowledge management (Nisar et al., 2019) is becoming even closer, and information flowing through social platforms can have organizational and social benefits when it is effectively converted into usable knowledge. This shift does not just affect each separate platform, but is a key development for the internet in general. Digital technologies have been part of a longer process of social and technological change and impact communication, institutions, behavioural practices and organization of social relations on several levels (Hilbert, 2020). The practical implications for society's ability to address complex collective problems also have an impact on digital knowledge production. Communication processes and knowledge-production processes can be transformative, supporting the incorporation of multiple viewpoints and forms of expertise needed to tackle multidimensional problems like climate change (Tàbara et al., 2017).

While rich literature exists on digital communication, knowledge management, technological change, and online social behavior, these fields have often been studied in a rather isolated fashion. Focusing on how digital transformation also reshapes social knowledge, with social trust, social interaction, social participation and social inclusion being interconnected, has been neglected. This division hampers our comprehension of forms of credible knowledge, other people's engagement, involvement in knowledge production, and the inequalities of digital engagement. With the growing importance of algorithms and artificial intelligence (AI), the need for an integrated account of these relationships is growing.

This review will therefore review and critically synthesize the transformation of social knowledge in the digital age, focusing specifically on the transformation of social structures of trust, digitally mediated social interaction, participation and social digital inclusion. It also aims to link these aspects in a coherent conceptual framework and pinpoint future research challenges and opportunities arising from the growing nature of knowledge environments that are driven by algorithms and AI.

2. Social Knowledge and Knowledge Formation in Digital Environments

Social knowledge is not individual cognition, but is created in social contexts. Communities are essential to the cultural meanings, shared representations and interpretative resources that enable people to make sense of events and to share what they consider to be valid knowledge. In this sense, knowledge is a reflection of social relationships that link the individual to collective systems of meaning; so, communities and cultures are at the heart of understanding and representing social realities (Jovchelovitch, 2019). Collective memory carries this over time, holding socially relevant understandings of the past. Through interaction with social representations, it is possible for social groups to establish/rebuild collective memory and social frameworks in which the events of reality gain meaning (Haas et al., 2025).

There is also a wide range of cross-cultural and cross-geographical variations in the formation of knowledge. Indigenous communities have practices and ways of maintaining their knowledge by creating connections between people, practices, environments and generations. Under global changes, collective knowledge is vulnerable to social and environmental disruptions, and keeping relationships between knowledge holders is crucial to maintain this knowledge (Cámara-Leret et al., 2019). Issues of "whose knowledge" are also very important. Decolonizing knowledge systems and participatory research can help to move the focus away from the marginalization of local and historically excluded systems of knowledge, and towards seeing communities as active producers of knowledge, not just passive research participants (Hall & Tandon, 2017).

Digitalization has added a new level to these processes, as knowledge exchange has become part of

(interconnected) technological ecosystems. Digital ecosystems are networks of organisations, platforms, people, data and supplementary resources that enable knowledge to flow quickly and easily between traditional institutions. Their value is also partly due to the ability of the participants to adapt their organizational ability to the changing technological relationships and opportunities (Volz et al., 2025). Digital learning environments also provide evidence that knowledge is, in fact, social even in the face of technologically mediated interaction. The community of inquiry model emphasizes that knowledge is constructed in a meaningful way through interaction among social, cognitive and teaching processes, instead of mere exposure to digital information (Swan, 2019).

An increasing number of algorithmic systems now shape the information that enters into these social learning processes. Online platforms rank, recommend, amplify and filter content, which affects opportunities for users to view others and learn from socially transmitted content. Platform architectures can thus impact individuals' judgment and collective behavior, as they affect both exposure to social signals and the contexts in which social signals are understood (Brady et al., 2023). Digital platforms should thus not be treated as information delivery platforms but as active players in today's process of knowledge creation.

The use of these knowledge spaces is still uneven. Digital inclusion is not just about being connected to the Internet; it is also about having the skills to use digital resources, understand them and critique them, and to participate. Digital literacy can then be a means of social inclusion that allows people to engage better in the digitally mediated social and institutional environment (Méndez-Domínguez et al., 2023). These capabilities are especially evident in times of social upheaval, when an increasing reliance upon digital access to education, communication, public information, and civic activities may become more pressing. This means digital citizenship is an amalgamation of technological skills and abilities for responsible and informed engagement in the digital society (Milenkova & Lendzhova, 2021).

Social knowledge in digital environments is created by how these elements—the cultures, collective memory, community networks, technological infrastructures, algorithms and individual digital capacities—interact. The study of the formation of knowledge must thus not only take into account information that circulates on the Internet, but also the knowledge of those who are represented, the mode in which it is visible, the ability to speak, act or react, and the resources that people have or do not have to engage in it. Table 1 shows a summary of key dimensions that are involved in the formation of social knowledge in digital environments as well as their functions and associated issues.

Table 1. Key Elements of Social Knowledge Formation in Digital Environments

Knowledge Dimension	Digital Context	Main Role	Key Issue	References
Social representations	Community and culture	Shared meaning	Context dependence	Jovchelovitch (2019); Haas et al. (2025)
Indigenous knowledge	Community networks	Knowledge preservation	Knowledge loss	Cámara-Leret et al. (2019)
Participatory knowledge	Research and education	Inclusive knowledge production	Epistemic exclusion	Hall and Tandon (2017)
Digital ecosystems	Connected platforms	Knowledge circulation	Platform dependence	Volz et al. (2025)
Collaborative learning	Online communities	Joint knowledge construction	Participation quality	Swan (2019)
Algorithmic learning	Social platforms	Information selection	Selective exposure	Brady et al. (2023)
Digital literacy	Digital society	Meaningful participation	Skill inequality	Méndez-Domínguez et al. (2023); Milenkova and Lendzhova (2021)

3. Trust, Credibility, and Information Integrity

In digitally connected settings, trust is increasingly one of the key pillars of social knowledge as people rely more and more on technologies, platforms and actors located outside of their direct sphere of perception when assessing information. Digital trust is multi-dimensional, encompassing assessments of reliability, security, reputation, context and what to expect from other members of a connected system. With the growing

prevalence of digital environments, effective models for establishing trust need to be able to handle the more intricate interactions between people, devices, services and information infrastructures (Ting et al., 2021).

Digital knowledge repositories have also revolutionized the way of establishing credibility. Users are largely unaware of how information is selected, organized, or validated in the use of databases, platforms, search systems, and other repositories. Reliance on digital knowledge, however, extends beyond reliance on the knowledge itself; it is also a reliance on the infrastructures that preserve and present digital knowledge (Swierstra & Efstathiou, 2020). This is mediated trust, as technological intermediaries have an impact on the information sources and their users. These intermediaries now have a strong influence on visibility, accessibility, and perceived relevance, and have become an important part of the current digital knowledge systems, especially in relation to their trustworthiness (Bodó, 2021).

When information is quickly shared on the Web and in the social media landscape, assessment of credibility is even more challenging. People might see online claims before they have enough evidence to support them, and lack cues for the reliability of sources. Computational approaches to credibility assessment show the importance of analysing supporting evidence and contextual information in assessing the credibility of emerging information online (Popat et al., 2017). The quality of available evidence and how evidence is communicated to users through mechanisms of credibility is therefore important for information integrity.

The problem of disinformation is exacerbated by the fact that misinformation or information designed to be misleading is likely to compound people's lack of faith in institutions. Research on the “disinformation order” suggests a relationship between the spread of disinformation and communication environments that are experiencing disturbances in communication as a result of weak institutional legitimacy that can lead to alternative information sources being more appealing (Bennett & Livingston, 2018). However, concerns regarding fragmented information environments should be interpreted cautiously. Yet evidence on echo chambers shows that these are sometimes over-exaggerated and over-predicted in terms of prevalence and impact, suggesting the importance of making a distinction between empirical findings on the existence of echo chambers and generalized assumptions on discrete online audiences (Guess et al., 2018).

Digital literacy thus becomes an important resource for information integrity for everyone. It includes more than just the skills to find, comprehend, interpret, share and appropriately apply information in digital settings. The skills become more significant as people use a variety of sources that vary in authority and credibility (Reddy et al., 2020). Corrective mechanisms can be provided in a complementary way by fact-checking, but not consistently. Numerous studies have found that fact-checking can increase the accuracy of people's political beliefs, though the impact depends on factors related to the communication, such as the message and audience characteristics, and audience prior beliefs, knowledge, and ideology (Walter et al., 2020).

Therefore, trust and information integrity in digital society are created as a result of a dynamic relationship between credible information, trustworthy technological intermediaries, the users' evaluative capacities and effective corrective mechanisms. To safeguard social knowledge, these elements should be bolstered collectively, and not seen as isolated problems of misinformation or loss of trust. The major threats to trust and information integrity are summarized in Table 2, along with the mechanisms that can be used to enhance credibility in digital environments.

Table 2. Major Dimensions of Trust and Information Integrity

Dimension	Main Challenge	Key Influence	Protective Mechanism	References
Digital trust	Reliability uncertainty	Connected systems	Trust modeling	Ting et al. (2021)
Knowledge repositories	Hidden validation	Digital infrastructure	Source scrutiny	Swierstra and Efstathiou (2020)
Mediated trust	Intermediary dependence	Technology platforms	Transparency	Bodó (2021)
Online credibility	Unverified claims	Limited evidence	Credibility assessment	Popat et al. (2017)
Disinformation	Misleading content	Institutional distrust	Verification	Bennett and Livingston (2018)
Echo chambers	Selective exposure	Network patterns	Diverse information	Guess et al. (2018)
Digital literacy	Weak evaluation skills	User capability	Critical literacy	Reddy et al. (2020)
Fact-checking	Persistent inaccuracies	Prior beliefs	Corrective information	Walter et al. (2020)

4. Digital Interaction, Identity, and Knowledge Exchange

Digital technologies have changed the way that social interaction can be done, making communication more than just being physically together and the exchange of people. Digital media can facilitate people communicating beyond temporal and spatial constraints and create new visibility between them. These shifts have resulted in unique patterns of mediated interaction that see social relations increasingly mediated by digital technologies, networked communication, and communication with others who are distant (Thompson, 2020). Digital interaction is thus more than the transfer of information; it is an important social context in which knowledge about people, communities and events is continually co-created.

Online social networks are examples of social interaction creating and disseminating socially valuable knowledge. Network structures affect the flow of information in terms of speed, direction, and reach and especially in communities when there are events that demand quick collective action. The study of online network connectivity after disasters indicates that the connectivity patterns can be used to assess the patterns and dynamics of information and communication relationships during a high information demand period (Kim & Hastak, 2018). This can facilitate users to act as information receivers, interpreters, and disseminators at the same time, thereby building interpersonal links as one of the important aspects of digital information dissemination.

These interaction processes are very closely linked to identity formation. Social networking sites offer venues where people choose the information and images, associations and behaviors they will share with others. While the concept of self-presentation is still applicable for the understanding of impression management in online spaces, it is necessary to introduce new conditions of the persistence, visibility and reach of audiences in digital space (Merunková & Šlerka, 2019). It is an added layer in data-intensive environments, the identity of which is increasingly created both through conscious representation and through verification mechanisms, metrics, profiles, and data produced about the person. Platforms can then shape and recompose digital selfhood through ways of classification, authentication, and valuation, becoming entangled in these mechanisms of the platform (Hearn, 2020).

The connection between digital communications and sociality is complicated. While social media can help build interactions, maintain relationships, involve and connect with community, and provide social support, engagement online does not necessarily lead to more robust relationships. Results from social media research suggest that outcomes are more a function of usage of social media platforms, personality traits, and type of experiences in online contexts than just the amount of technology use (Ryan et al., 2017). Digital interaction should consequently be considered as an interaction of quality and social interaction and not just connectivity.

Artificial intelligence is further transforming the conditions under which knowledge is shared and exchanged. Within an organization, AI-driven knowledge digitization can enable more easily shared knowledge, making knowledge more accessible and transferable, and can also enable cross-language collaboration to expand information exchange beyond language barriers (Cheng et al., 2025). AI also alters who is being communicated to and by whom in communication. Intelligent systems are increasingly acting as communicative actors instead of being invisible communicators through which humans communicate, so it is important to investigate how humans interpret, respond to and interact with machine communicators (Guzman & Lewis, 2020).

Today, communication, identity formation, socialization and knowledge sharing are linked in the same networked spaces. With increased involvement of Artificial Intelligence in these processes, digital communication moves from human-to-human communication to hybrid knowledge environments, where people, platforms, data and intelligent systems collaborate in the production and structuring of social knowledge. The steps of digital interaction in online social networks, identity building and social connectedness lead to AI-supported knowledge exchange and human-AI communication, which are all responsible for social knowledge (Figure 1).

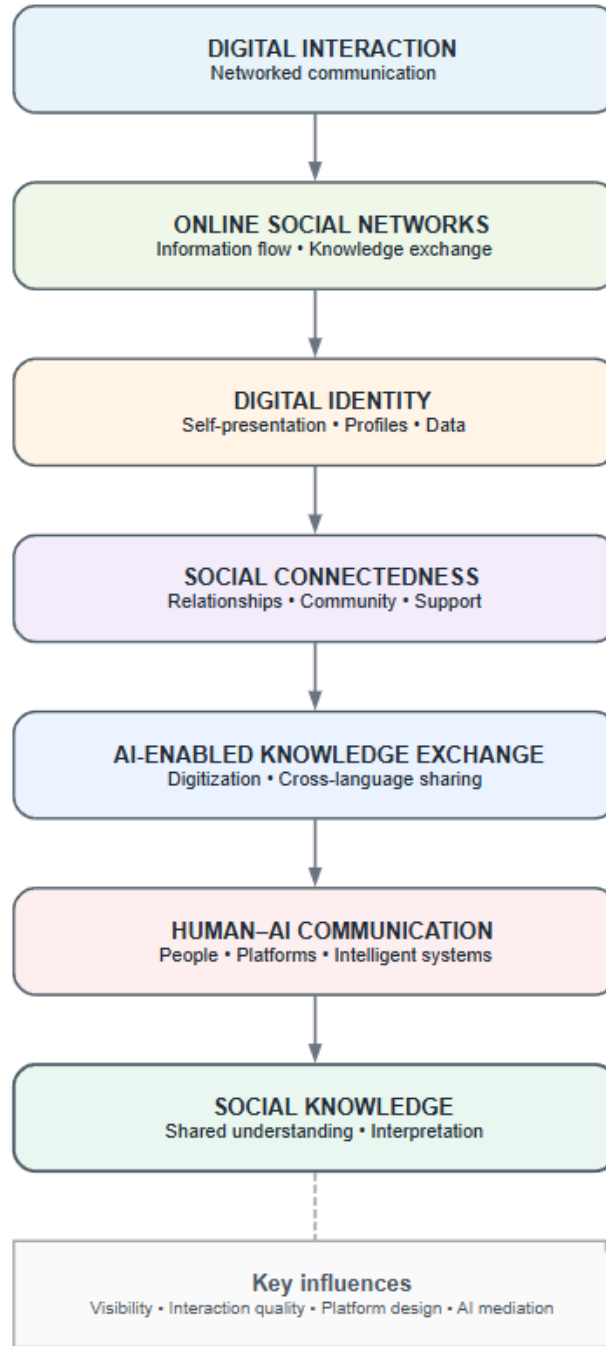


Figure 1. Digital Interaction, Identity, and AI-Mediated Knowledge Exchange

5. Participation, Inclusion, and the Distribution of Social Voice

Digital participation has opened new possibilities for individuals and communities to engage in public communication, although greater connectivity does not necessarily translate into equal social voice. Current power, resource and recognition distributions influence participation, especially when communication processes are linked to the visibility of experiences in the public sphere. The perspectives from the Global South raise questions about participation where the act of accessing communication technologies might not necessarily lead to democratization of the production of knowledge (Pavarala, 2026). The participatory turn, in general, marks the transition from an institution-based perspective to one that takes into account citizens and communities as producers of culture and decision-makers as well (Bonet & Négrier, 2018).

Digital platforms are significant places for civic engagement because they enable people to share local data, discuss local issues and stay connected with geographically relevant networks. In the context of localized social media, motivations to engage in civic life and feelings of trust are linked to social aspects of social media use, and not only to technology (Kwon et al., 2021). They can be a space where people can share their own expertise on their community and engage in joint conversations that have traditionally been led by formal

community organisations.

Another significant shift in the distribution of communicative power is the growth of user-generated content. Digital audiences have the ability to make, alter, distribute and interpret information rather than just receive it professionally. This interactive capability is also conducive to increased visibility and knowledge sharing, but can also lead to tensions when platforms are able to commercially exploit audience interactions, behavior data and creative contributions. These infrastructures, which seem to give users opportunities to participate, can at the same time turn participation into data and economic value via algorithmic systems, crowdsourcing and platform-based production models (Stehling et al., 2018).

The unequal opportunities to participate in digital platforms continue to be a key constraint. Today's digital divide goes beyond just internet users versus non-users. Socioeconomic inequalities can shape the quality of the devices, their connection to other devices, the skills people have, their level of autonomy in using them, and the advantages they can reap from digital engagement. As access to technology expands, digital systems can thus perpetuate existing inequalities (Robinson et al., 2020). To achieve meaningful inclusion, it is important to consider the capabilities and institutional supports that people have to be able to turn access to the digital world into social participation and empowerment. Community-centred approaches are useful to reinforce inclusion when it is not a one-way street, but when marginalised people are more empowered to have a voice and be included in systems designed without them (Qureshi et al., 2025).

Exclusion may also be due to the architecture of digital technologies. Technology systems and interfaces include expectations regarding users, user capabilities, user actions and use conditions. Design decisions can thus create conditions for marginalization for those who do not fit into these assumptions, leading to digital marginalizations that can't be solved with devices or Internet access alone. Technology structures, and how they may create or reinforce barriers to certain groups, need to be taken into consideration in inclusive design (Sin et al., 2021).

Distribution of social voice in digital environments is not just the possibility of speaking, but visibility, recognition, accessibility, meaningful participation and the ability to shape knowledge and collective action. Therefore, design practices, platform power and structural inequality need to be tackled along with technological access for digital inclusion to expand beyond the status quo of marginalization. Table 3 shows the key dimensions of social voice and digital participation and inclusion – and how opportunities for social voice are correlated with barriers to meaningful participation in the structural and technological domain.

Table 3. Dimensions of Digital Participation and Inclusion

Dimension	Opportunity	Main Barrier	Needed Response	References
Social voice	Wider representation	Power imbalance	Inclusive participation	Pavarala (2026)
Participatory culture	Citizen involvement	Institutional control	Shared decision-making	Bonet and Négrier (2018)
Civic participation	Community engagement	Trust limitations	Local engagement	Kwon et al. (2021)
User-generated content	Knowledge contribution	Data exploitation	Platform accountability	Stehling et al. (2018)
Digital access	Broader participation	Structural inequality	Equitable access	Robinson et al. (2020)
Social inclusion	Community empowerment	Marginalization	Capability building	Qureshi et al. (2025)
Inclusive design	Wider usability	Design exclusion	Accessible interfaces	Sin et al. (2021)

6. Artificial Intelligence, Algorithmic Power, and the Future of Social Knowledge

Artificial intelligence is transforming how social knowledge is produced, organized, interpreted, and circulated. It has been used to expand knowledge discovery, and its ability to process huge amounts of information has resulted in more extensive knowledge. However, computational knowledge is not the same as the social knowledge of humans. As AI takes over the functions of expertise and judgment, a sociological approach to knowledge has gained increasing importance since knowledge is embedded in experience, culture, interaction and tacit understanding (Collins, 2025). Algorithmic power becomes more important when automated systems impact the visibility of information, classification of people or their access to opportunities and resources. While data-driven decision-making can help to enhance consistency and analytical capability, algorithms can amplify biases that are found in data, design, or institutional processes. Responsible algorithmic decision-making, especially if an automated decision has a higher impact on society, is therefore dependent on fairness, transparency and accountability (Lepri et al., 2018).

These challenges are also applicable to AI applications in socially sensitive environments. Bias can manifest from the data collection process to the development of the system, to the deployment of the system, or even during human-AI interactions, and if there's less transparency, this can make automated decisions hard to

examine. Ethical governance, therefore, calls for issues of privacy, explainability, representation, accountability, and the impact of technology benefits and risks on various social groups (Singhal et al., 2024). As predictive systems gain in power, it is also appropriate to ask what is meaningful knowledge. The outputs of data-driven models require assumptions about the accuracy of the data reflecting complex social realities, and they show patterns and make estimates of future possibilities. Over-reliance on the power of computation makes uncertainty, context, and aspects of human experience beyond quantification lose importance (Hong, 2020).

Computational power and human interpretation and social responsibility will be crucial for the future of social knowledge. Research needs to account for the impact of AI on epistemic authority, trust, representation, and participation and to ensure that people have meaningful opportunities to comprehend and contest algorithmic decisions.

AI is increasingly becoming an integral component of contemporary social knowledge systems rather than functioning solely as a tool for data processing. Whether its social value is built over time by technological capability being developed alongside fairness, contextual understanding, transparency and meaningful human oversight is key. The roles of knowledge production, algorithmic power, governance, social risks, and human oversight in the production of responsible social knowledge mediated by AI are presented in Figure 2.

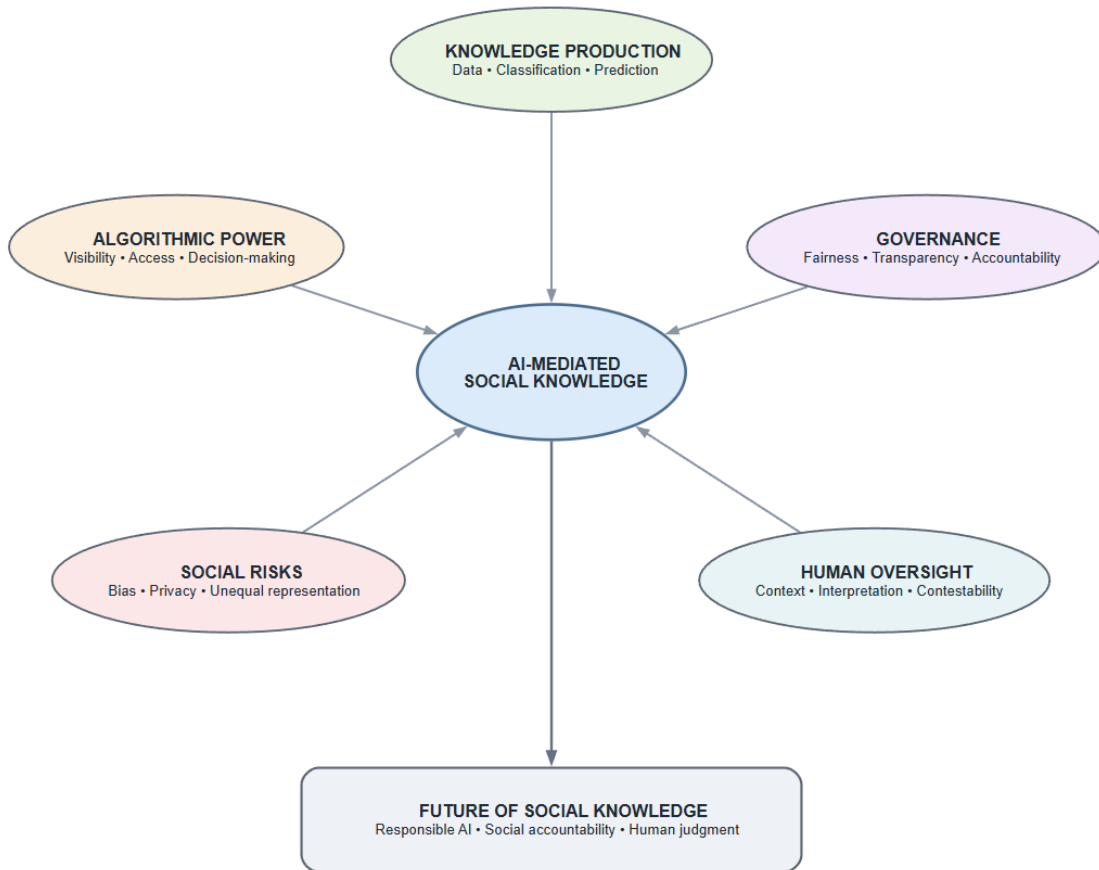


Figure 2. AI-Mediated Social Knowledge including Algorithmic Power, Governance, and Human Oversight

7. Conclusion

The interaction of human relationships, digital platforms, algorithmic systems, and patterns of participation increasingly influences social knowledge in the digital age. This review demonstrates that knowledge formation cannot be detached from the infrastructures for the organization of visibility, credibility, interaction and access. Digital environments have opened new avenues for communication and collective sharing of knowledge, but have also helped to strengthen concerns about misinformation, mediated trust, selective exposure, platform dependence and unequal inclusion. The quality of digitally mediated knowledge is dependent on trust and integrity of information, and meaningful participation requires more than connectivity alone. The ability to create opportunities for marginalized groups to be involved in knowledge creation and public communication is inextricably linked to digital literacy, accessible design, institutional support and meaningful inclusion. As AI becomes more and more prevalent, social knowledge is also moving towards semi-automated systems where human decision-making and AI algorithms are starting to work together. Therefore, future studies should focus on transparency and fairness in AI systems, context interpretation and maintaining the role of human agency in AI-driven systems. Trust, inclusion, accountability, and socially informed understanding will be key to the future of social knowledge, with the success of digital

transformation also relying on these factors.

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