

## NETWORK SOCIETY: DIGITAL EMPOWERMENT OR DISEMPOWERMENT

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### **Abstract**

*New skills and avenues for participation and self-expression in a connected society are made possible by ICT. Digital empowerment refers to the multi-step process of gaining access to better networking, communication, and collaboration opportunities and boosting the competency of individuals and communities so that they can play an influential role in society as a result of these developments. in the modern age of information. The goal of this essay is to investigate the relationship between inequality of participation and the degree to which individuals are empowered or disempowered in network society governance systems. A qualitative critical secondary data analysis was performed, in which published data and communication theory were used. This analysis contends that questions of the relationship between democracy and democratization and the role of computer-mediated communication in political communication are at the heart of the Digital Divide. The current Digital Gap is anticipated to add to structural disparities in political involvement as the role of ICT systems in political communication expands. As much as this inequality works against democracy and the political empowerment of some, it also creates chances for greater political participation by others. That raises questions about the social strata best positioned to profit from the coming networked society's electronic administration.*

*Keywords: Network Society, Digital Empowerment, Digital Divide, Information and Communication Technology (ICT).*

### **Abstrak**

*Keterampilan dan jalan baru untuk partisipasi dan ekspresi diri dalam masyarakat yang terhubung dimungkinkan oleh TIK. Pemberdayaan digital mengacu pada proses multi-langkah untuk mendapatkan akses ke jaringan, komunikasi, dan peluang kolaborasi yang lebih baik dan meningkatkan kompetensi individu dan komunitas sehingga mereka dapat memainkan peran yang berpengaruh dalam masyarakat sebagai hasil dari perkembangan ini. di era informasi modern. Tujuan dari esai ini adalah untuk menyelidiki hubungan antara ketimpangan partisipasi dan sejauh mana individu diberdayakan atau tidak berdaya dalam sistem tata kelola masyarakat jaringan. Analisis data sekunder kritis kualitatif dilakukan, di mana data yang diterbitkan dan teori komunikasi digunakan. Analisis ini berpendapat bahwa pertanyaan*

*tentang hubungan antara demokrasi dan demokratisasi serta peran komunikasi yang dimediasi komputer dalam komunikasi politik merupakan inti dari Kesenjangan Digital. Kesenjangan Digital saat ini diperkirakan akan menambah kesenjangan struktural dalam keterlibatan politik karena peran sistem TIK dalam komunikasi politik meluas. Sebanyak ketidaksetaraan ini bekerja melawan demokrasi dan pemberdayaan politik beberapa orang, itu juga menciptakan peluang untuk partisipasi politik yang lebih besar oleh orang lain. Itu menimbulkan pertanyaan tentang strata sosial yang berada pada posisi terbaik untuk mendapatkan keuntungan dari administrasi elektronik masyarakat jaringan yang akan datang.*

*Kata Kunci: Masyarakat Jaringan, Pemberdayaan Digital, Kesenjangan Digital, Teknologi Informasi dan Komunikasi (TIK).*

## INTRODUCTION

The digital divide is affected by both the introduction of new technologies and the discovery of their effects. Every facet of society, from the most seemingly insignificant to the most fundamentally transformative, is being impacted by the ever-increasing pervasiveness of digital technologies.<sup>1</sup> The gap between the digitally connected and those who aren't is one that has yet to close. The assumptions, policies, and infrastructure capacities of different places cause this phenomenon to appear in varied ways.<sup>2</sup>

We can no longer assume that individuals use the same methods of interpersonal communication that existed before the advent of digital communication technologies. Several storylines drive our comprehension of the digital divide's real-world consequences.<sup>3</sup> Policy decisions, economic participation, interpersonal relationships, and even philosophical worldviews could all be affected by this narrative.<sup>4</sup> No of the story, there is one thing we can be sure of: the media plays a role. In this article, I argue that narrative analysis should be used to fully comprehend the effects of the digital divide.

Understanding the Digital Divide theoretically is greatly aided by the use of narrative analysis. The stories people tell about the Digital Divide can be used as a comparative tool at various stages of development if we treat them as the primary unit of analysis. Everyone from policymakers and academics to technologists and regular folks uses discourse. That is to say, we may perform a functional analysis of the everyday narratives that individuals employ to make sense of their lives, in addition to analyzing "macro" narratives that can be traced across different discourse formats.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Fonna, Nurdianita. *Pengembangan Revolusi Industri 4.0 dalam Berbagai Bidang*. Guepedia, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Djauhari, Marhum. "Pemberdayaan Infrastruktur TIK dalam Mendorong Perekonomian Masyarakat Miskin di Perdesaan." *Buletin Pos dan Telekomunikasi* 9.1 (2011): 1-22.

<sup>3</sup> Putra, Rizki Saga, and Irwansyah Irwansyah. "Media komunikasi Digital, Efektif Namun Tidak Efisien, Studi Media Richness Theory dalam Pembelajaran Jarak Jauh Berbasis Teknologi di Masa Pandemi." *Global Komunika: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik* 3.2 (2020): 1-13.

<sup>4</sup> Chrisnatalia, Sandra Grace, and Dedi Rianto Rahadi. "Komunikasi Digital pada Pembelajaran secara Daring Dimasa Pandemi Covid-19." *Jurnal Bonanza: Manajemen dan Bisnis* 1.2 (2020): 56-65.

<sup>5</sup> Cullen, Rowena. "Addressing the Digital Divide." *Online Information Review* (2001).

Users of infrastructure and content are viewed as having user skills but not necessarily participatory, planning, or critical abilities when they are in the adaptive role. Although he has the ability to respond, the user is still serving in an advisory capacity and not a creative one. "the norms and profiles of the information society employ users, and the way in which this is geared at developing desirable individuals in society," the author writes, "even when we speak of user-centred design as an ideal model for understanding people's needs".<sup>6</sup> Citizens are called users or consumers in the language of information society programs, and they are urged to become technologically literate and economically competitive by mastering these new tools.<sup>7</sup>

The existing Digital divide seems to contribute to structural disparities in political participation through its impact on political communication. This is true regardless of whether the difference is occurring within a country or between countries. In spite of their positive effect on increasing people's access to political involvement, these discrepancies are a drag on democracy and a source of social injustice. To avoid making a hasty conclusion, researchers should examine the more nuanced relationship between growing community networks and democratic reform.<sup>8</sup>

The Internet and other forms of technical infrastructure are made available to the public by the government in an effort to help its residents adjust to life in the modern information society. To close the digital divide, this is the sole strategy most governments employ.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, aid is geared toward helping people acquire, use, and benefit from many forms of contemporary technology. If citizens stop playing their designated duties, they are often labeled as hackers or troublemakers, who pose a security danger. Internet users are typically ranked quantitatively based on factors like the number of times they access the Internet, the number of e-mail accounts they have, or the volume of services they use, rather than qualitatively based on factors like their excitement about the Internet's potential or their grasp of the significance of the technology it employs. Quantitative assessments of digital equality and inequality conceal the full picture.<sup>10</sup>

More generally, our study investigates the impact of information and communication technologies on the emergence of new social networks and the reorganization of established ones. We begin by outlining these frameworks, then move on to a discussion of current global networked societies, where we highlight the ethical concerns that arise when those who would most benefit from connectivity are denied access to it. Finally, we point out the crucial issue that

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<sup>6</sup> Wynn, James. *Citizen Science in the Digital Age: Rhetoric, Science, and Public Engagement*. University of Alabama Press, 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Burgelman, Jean-Claude. "Regulating Access in the Information Society: The Need for Rethinking Public and Universal Service." *New Media & Society* 2.1 (2000): 51-66.

<sup>8</sup> Hoffmann, Christian Pieter, and Christoph Lutz. "Digital Divides in Political Participation: The Mediating Role of Social Media Self-Efficacy and Privacy Concerns." *Policy & Internet* 13.1 (2021): 6-29.

<sup>9</sup> Nissen, Christian S. "Public Service Media in the Information Society." (2006).

<sup>10</sup> Wimmer, Maria A. "A European Perspective towards Online One-Stop Government: The eGOV Project." *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications* 1.1 (2002): 92-103.

even if everyone has access to the internet, that might not be enough to fix the structural inequalities that digital empowerment has spawned. Rather, we must go beyond mere access and guarantee that technology is used to effectively mitigate structural disparities faced by underrepresented communities. The investigation was a critical secondary data analysis, based on theory and previously published data. Whether or not networked societies strengthen or debilitate communities, we provide recommendations for further research in this critical analysis.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed qualitative methods of inquiry. The purpose of the research is to provide an overview of a certain community or group of people, a symptom, or the link between two or more symptoms. This style of research describes the real occurrence by offering an in-depth description of the subject under investigation using interview data and expressing facts through narrative or other materials. Using interview data, the research describes the actual phenomena by providing exhaustive descriptions of the issues examined.<sup>11</sup> This research aims to acquire exact and precise information regarding the context and circumstances of the research issue; hence, descriptive research and qualitative approach are employed. The pertinent literature on the topic under research was compiled for data collection.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### A. Network Society

The most important kind of social structure is a communication network, or a "network society." For decades, people have been talking about how they live in a "mass society," where they get their news and entertainment from the media and feel a degree of isolation from others outside of their immediate social circles. A growing number of social structures in nations that display hallmarks of a networked society include people who actively engage in the practice of using the internet to gather data, make connections, and advance their careers. Relationships matter more than personal qualities in this culture.<sup>12</sup> When thinking about space, it's helpful to consider both the geographical and technological dimensions. In this area, proximity and distance are determined more by one's social networks than by one's actual location, hence the term "social geography." Even while political systems are typically pictured as hierarchical organizational

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<sup>11</sup> Moleong, Lexy J. "Metode Penelitian Kualitatif Edisi Revisi." *Bandung: PT Remaja Rosdakarya* (2014).

<sup>12</sup> Meneses, Julio, and Josep M. Mominó. "Online Community Building in Classrooms and Schools: Using the Internet to Extend Teachers' Face-To-Face Community Practices." *Educar* 51.2 (2015): 417-440.

charts, they may turn out to be polycentric power structures in which political influence is based more on network positions than regular jobs.<sup>13</sup>

The consequences of people joining the new communication networks of networked societies are becoming more important as membership in these networks becomes increasingly related with tangible benefits. The economic and political structures of a society are just two parts of the larger network of social groups and communication technologies that make up that society. Historically, economic restructuring has been considered crucial to the emergence of interconnected communities.<sup>14</sup> Since international banking is at the very center of the global economy, the two sectors go hand in hand in the information economy brought about by globalization.<sup>15</sup> Organizations are becoming more change- and discontinuity-tolerant in order to weather the storm of ever-shifting markets and governments. Organizational change is possible, but it does not arise from advances in communication technology.<sup>16</sup>

Position and network relationships, rather than monetary or informational gain, are more important sources of power in the social, economic, and political climate of networked societies.<sup>17</sup> The use of power in earlier paradigms, such as Fordism and Weberian organizational assumptions, entailed forcing others to do one's will. On the other hand, network power is concentrated in the sharing of resources and the coordination of action.<sup>18</sup> Access to networks and the capacity to choose what flows through them are key markers of domestic and international systemic advantages and losses.<sup>19</sup>

The construction of public spaces for citizen discourse and the exercise of state authority have always relied heavily on information and communication technology.<sup>20</sup> Despite the fact that there is scant evidence that ICTs have had a profoundly emancipatory effect on the powerless thus far, there is a sense of democratic potential that is supported by empirical evidence. Since the introduction of ICT, societal change has accelerated greatly. not just economically, but also in terms of politics, society, and culture. Several observers have made suggestions for making sense

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<sup>13</sup> Wang, Lian, and Chun Liu. "Lost in mobile? Exploring the Mobile Internet Digital Divide among Chinese College Students." *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education* 18.1 (2021): 1-17.

<sup>14</sup> Castells, Manuel, and Gustavo Cardoso. *The Network Society*. Vol. 469. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.

<sup>15</sup> Stalder, Felix. *Manuel Castells: The Theory of the Network Society*. Polity, 2006.

<sup>16</sup> Castells, Manuel. *The Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, Business, and Society*. Oxford University Press on Demand, 2002.

<sup>17</sup> Sari, Astari Clara, et al. "Komunikasi dan Media Sosial." *Jurnal The Messenger* 3.2 (2018): 69.

<sup>18</sup> Stalder, Felix. *Manuel Castells: The Theory of the Network Society*. Polity, 2006.

<sup>19</sup> Barney, Darin. *The Network Society*. Vol. 2. Polity, 2004.

<sup>20</sup> Barney, Darin. *The Network Society*. Vol. 2. Polity, 2004.

of this shift, but Manuel Castel's thesis of the network society has particularly gained the attention of scholars.<sup>21</sup>

There are three major features of the modern economic era that set it apart from others. The modern economy is "informative," "global," and "networked." Useful because economic actors' (individuals, firms, nations, and regions) ability to acquire, process, and use knowledge based on information determines their relative competitiveness.<sup>22</sup> In addition, the present economy is global since its fundamental activities—production, consumption, distribution—and its ancillary components (including but not limited to capital, labor, materials, management, information, technology, and markets) are all coordinated on a worldwide scale. In addition, the networked aspect of today's economy is defining. Competition between corporate networks in a global network determines economic output. In order to demonstrate the significance of "network companies" to the international economy. As a result, many multinational corporations are now decentralizing, subcontracting with SMEs, or forming strategic relationships with other multinational corporations. In essence, a network of economic entities exists. The focus in such a system shifts from the task at hand to the overall project. After the first phase of the project is finished, the roster will shift to include a mix of larger and smaller businesses. The production unit is now a project instead of a firm.<sup>23</sup>

There is no "middle ground," yet some details may be more salient than others. What makes one point more crucial than another is not its position in some abstract hierarchy, but rather the advantages it offers in terms of efficiently receiving and processing information. A new network node will be deployed in place of a failing node. As a result, a node's significance is not tied to any one particular property, but rather to the degree to which the network can rely on it to reliably disseminate data. The lack of a centralized authority raises the question of who is responsible for establishing network objectives and ensuring that everyone participates in achieving them. Whose regulations should be followed? Networks, function automatically. At first, social actors battled with one another and fought to have their particular aims adopted as network goals. As an added bonus, the victor of that conflict will become the network's primary focus. When a network's purpose has been defined, other participants are more likely to join in. If a participant is dissatisfied or wants to pursue different objectives, he is free to establish his own independent network.

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<sup>21</sup> Castells, Manuel. "Toward a Sociology of the Network Society." *Contemporary Sociology* 29.5 (2000): 693-699.

<sup>22</sup> Castells, Manuel. *End of Millennium*. Vol. 3. John Wiley & Sons, 2010.

<sup>23</sup> Coe, Neil M., Peter Dicken, and Martin Hess. "Global Production Networks: Realizing the Potential." *Journal of Economic Geography* 8.3 (2008): 271-295.

## B. Network Society: Digital Empowerment or Disempowerment

In today's "information society," both information and operational networks are vital. Information is very valuable in economic terms, and its free flow and the ability to share it are crucial to the development of various forms of prosperity and collaboration. In an information society, global information capital is progressively becoming the backbone of the economy. Another significant change and outcome of modern ICT is the expansion of communication networks. In this sense, today's post-industrial society might be described not just as an information society, but also as a network society or a communication society.<sup>24</sup>

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can set up a dimensional framework for interaction and communication, even while the technology itself is not interactive. As many social networks are hierarchical in structure, technology can be utilized to facilitate both strong and weak information flows within these networks. Strongest information flows are generated between the most powerful parties (nodes), making them the de facto hub of the network while other nodes and hubs fall to the fringes. Unfortunately, new forms of communication and the opportunities they present often remain out of reach for these underserved communities and individuals. Without deliberate activation, the internet serves primarily the interests of those who already wield power, such as entrenched institutions.<sup>25</sup>

However, the Internet may be used to great effect for emancipation and enhancing participation by increasing the diversity of information flows, facilitating horizontal communication, and establishing new digital bridges to underserved or isolated populations. Those who lack access to information, social, and economic capital from social networks can use digital technology as a means to gain this access more quickly and efficiently than ever before.<sup>26</sup> Investment in 1) two-way information exchange, rather than broadcasting only in one direction, and 2) the freedom to express dissenting opinions through publication can help achieve this goal in the field of communications. Manage opportunities to have an impact on policymaking, and develop parallel discussion forums.

Technology like the Internet is great for spreading knowledge. Information is gathered in an open network environment, where it can be reshaped and reapplied without losing any of its original value. Through the dissemination of data in multiple dimensions, individuals and groups can take on the role of information providers. So, we can keep the one-way flow of knowledge from becoming too dominant. The ability to post one's writing online has given people a newfound freedom of speech. Many communities, activist groups, and social movements can

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<sup>24</sup> Tosepu, Yusrin Ahmad. *Media Baru dalam Komunikasi Politik (Komunikasi Politik I Dunia Virtual)*. Jakad Media Publishing, 2018.

<sup>25</sup> Marsal-Llacuna, Maria-Lluïsa. "Future Living Framework: Is Blockchain the Next Enabling Network?." *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 128 (2018): 226-234.

<sup>26</sup> Kaunang, Fergie Joanda, et al. *Konsep Teknologi Informasi*. Yayasan Kita Menulis, 2021.

share their perspectives on important issues. Without widespread consideration, however, the publicity value of these information flows is minimal at best.

People and decision-makers need to be willing to accept the online environment as a serious place for participation in policy making if digital technologies are to be used to affect social issues. Efforts made in only one direction failed, but the new idea and strategy must be embraced by all parties involved. One model for the idea of expanding effective empowerment could be an online system for citizens to take initiatives and follow them up during the decision-making process (see, for instance, the application to an initiative by the Mansetori project in the city of Tampere).<sup>27</sup>

People can't just be passive observers in a participatory democracy; they need to participate as subjects (with power over) as well (power over). Engaged citizens not only help shape the future, but also have a voice in the policymaking process through two-way dialogue with those in power. Connected publishing and online interaction are only two examples of the many new avenues for civic engagement made possible by the information society, but citizens also face novel problems in this brave new world. E-citizens need to be comfortable with technology, open to interacting with others online, and familiar with the protocols for citizen engagement. While there are now more entry points than ever before, the bar to really taking part is higher than before. Most individuals can only play the limited function of receiving, or as Sinikka Sassi puts it, the position of voter and complainer, in society because the number of engaged citizens is small and frequently elitist. Even while voting and complaining can have an effect, they are seen as reactive rather than proactive.<sup>28</sup>

From the standpoint of civil society and citizen involvement, one of the most valuable aspects of the Internet is its ability to link many parties and produce a public forum for debate and discussion.<sup>29</sup> People-to-people connections improve activism by allowing activists to pool resources, but they also necessitate new forms of engagement between individuals and governments. While these kinds of links can be found within formal administrative frameworks (for example, in the form of online services provided to people), they can be difficult to establish outside of such structures, as with citizen initiatives. The interaction between citizen organizations and these administrative entities needs to be significantly improved if we want to foster public participation.

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<sup>27</sup> Hokka, Jenni, et al. "Catalysing Citizen Activism in Manse Forum." *Toward Active Citizenship on the Net: Possibilities of Citizen Oriented Communication: Case Studies from Finland*. 2004. 205-242.

<sup>28</sup> Small, Mario Luis. *Unanticipated Gains: Origins of Network Inequality in Everyday Life*. Oxford University Press, 2009.

<sup>29</sup> Small, Mario Luis. *Unanticipated Gains: Origins of Network Inequality in Everyday Life*. Oxford University Press, 2009.



Technology is used by many different kinds of citizen organizations and connected communities to facilitate their activities and to create online platforms. Additionally, many locals have established online communities through their extensive web networks. They are emblematic of a novel sort of citizen participation common in today's knowledge-based society. People are able to communicate with one another and share their culture, interests, politics, ethics, professions, and geographic locations over the Internet. They publish via email lists, online journals, or another kind of web-based media. The definition of community in the information society must be revised to account for the significant differences between online and offline communities. Online communities have more in common with tribal societies than with traditional communities; members can come and go at will, and there's no requirement that they live in close proximity to one another. In most cases, individuals initiate their own forms of internet activism. Citizens are engaged in nonstandard forms of activity, not always those prescribed by the administration. In most cases, citizens who are well-connected to one another end up being more powerful collectively than they individually would be.

Internet forums are both similar to and different from traditional media in that they are open to the public. It not only provides a centralized source of data, but also encourages bottom-up participation. Representatives of alternative media and, later, Internet aficionados draw inspiration from philosopher Jürgen Habermas' concept of the public sphere, in which citizens participate in public discussion and debate in order to effect societal change. Unfortunately, the implementation of this exciting concept of public space has been less than stellar. As an example, the opposite tendency can be seen in the media production industry, where large media conglomerates are becoming even more dominant and the public is increasingly viewed as a passive audience. While there are virtual communities that can function as analogues to Habermas' public spheres, these online forums have a number of drawbacks that prevent a wide range of stakeholders and decision-makers from actively participating in their deliberations. Consequently, they have not seen significant results.<sup>30</sup>

An ideal environment for engaged people would be a publicly accessible online forum where residents may voice their opinions and participate in making decisions. The value of online public spaces lies in their potential to foster innovation, raise pressing political concerns, launch novel conversations, and challenge established symbolic order. However, its chances of success are hampered by the fact that society's most prominent players, including the economy and administration, do not view public space as a genuine idea of social involvement.<sup>31</sup> We can think of activist organizations' online presences as (potentially rival) micropublic places. Online

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<sup>30</sup> Fuchs, Christian. *Internet and Society: Social Theory in the Information Age*. Routledge, 2007.

<sup>31</sup> Fuchs, Christian. *Internet and Society: Social Theory in the Information Age*. Routledge, 2007.

communities have the potential to be cooperative and egalitarian, but many academics agree that they have grown fragmented and hierarchical.

In order for the Internet to fulfill its potential as a platform for citizen participation, there needs to be greater collaboration between various stakeholders and the development of novel, inventive solutions that can provide citizens with more than just the incremental improvements that come with new tools. Systems to follow up on initial decision-making procedures, citizen initiative systems, or some new mobile applications for participation are all examples of the kinds of innovations that would be required. The primary challenge is enlisting the participation of diverse stakeholders such as administrators, technical experts, developers, designers, corporate representatives, and citizens in the creative process.

The Internet does not directly affect people's participation in society. A connection between internet use and heightened awareness in social issues, however, appears to be the case. Using the Internet, we can better identify knowledgeable residents, work toward more open government, and have more respectful exchanges with the general public. Online communities can't alter entrenched power dynamics, but they can help citizens become more self-aware and engaged in the information society by highlighting new avenues for action.

The use of ICT can facilitate or kick-start empowerment processes within a community, benefiting both individuals and groups. People's ability to participate effectively in the information society can be enhanced through the use of ICT. Improvements in these areas of knowledge and skill can serve as a bridge for underprivileged and underserved populations, allowing them to join a wider social support system and access to information and resources. I like to think of it as a link in the chain of digital emancipation.

The process of digital empowerment helps people become prepared for the information society and able to take on more responsibility in their own lives. Using the spiral tool can either propel this evolution or serve as a method for investigating the shifts that characterize ICT-based development initiatives.

An all-inclusive model, the empowerment process raises the prospect of developing one's skills and contributing to society. In this context, "inclusion" is feeling that one has a voice in communal decisions and having confidence in exercising that voice. The term "included" is meant to describe a range of mental and emotional states rather than concrete behaviors. An individual who is comfortable in his or her social environment is aware of what it takes to actively take part when the opportunity arises. Citizens who are included are not necessarily eager to have their voices heard and opinions considered. Being left out is the polar opposite of being included. Dropouts and the socially excluded are called "marginalized" citizens.

Inclusion broadens the scope of empowerment, increasing the likelihood of people's being able to take part and have an impact. When we talk about "participation," we're referring to any kind of interaction with other individuals. Taking part in civic life typically involves engaging in political or social endeavors with the larger goal of making a difference in the world. In the empowerment spiral, engagement in and influence over social issues increases as a form of interaction, but participation itself is not a direct result of empowerment. It can also be dubbed an inclusion process because of the way that increased participation characterizes the outcomes. It is crucial to incorporate this inclusive element into community development programs and ICT initiatives when aiming to increase citizens' participation in the information society.

## CONCLUSION

The practical application of digital enablement can be seen in the improvement of underprivileged or rural communities, the establishment of networks for community-based innovation, and the analysis of the impact of information and communication technologies in these areas. Awareness, motivation, technical access, competence, and constructive involvement are the five pillars of digital empowerment, and it is important to assess whether or not they are present in the context of development and inclusion activities. The initial 'loop' of the process can then be stimulated in order to seek out improvements in skill, the development of new networks and connections, the acquisition of new knowledge, and the acquisition of new behaviors. Instead of focusing solely on getting and consuming, we might aim to develop our ability to contribute, to have an impact, and to direct our own life. This is not only an effect of using cutting-edge technology; rather, it's an ongoing cycle that helps other societal initiatives progress through the use of ICT in a community-driven, collaborative manner. Success in an ICT project can be gauged by looking at how the project has evolved over time, iterating on past successes to learn from them, and identifying any missing pieces or bottlenecks in the launch process.

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