

Sociovirtualization and Human Rights: Exploring Digital Spaces as Platforms for Social Justice

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Abstract

The growing intertwining of social behavior with virtual environment or sociovirtualization has transformed the way people interact, organize, and claim their rights. The online environment provides unprecedented opportunities for social mobilization, human rights advocacy, and participation, yet at the same time it reinforces and exacerbates already existing discrimination, stigma, and human rights violations. This article will explore the ambivalent role of the online environment in social justice issues. A synthesis of interdisciplinary studies of politics, sociology, digital ethics, and human rights will be provided through the methodology of systematic literature review. Major findings include the potential of sociovirtualization in fostering international solidarity and empowerment of disadvantaged groups.

However, hate speech, digital divides, algorithmic biases, and surveillance capitalism are threats to equality and human dignity. In order to govern sociovirtual spaces, the essay recommends a human rights-based approach based on principles such as accountability, transparency, digital literacy, and inclusive design. The essay concludes by suggesting that if digital spaces are to be truly used as tools for social justice and not as spaces of further marginalization, then policy measures, responsible technology design, and international collaboration are key.

Keywords: Sociovirtualization, human rights, social justice, digital spaces, algorithmic bias, digital divide, hate speech, online advocacy



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1. Introduction

The process of human interactions, communications, and human rights assertion underwent a significant change since the beginning of the twenty-first century. One of the hallmarks of modernity is sociovirtualization, which refers to the growing mediation of social relations, identities, and actions through virtual technologies (Kurt, 2024). The virtual space became an essential venue for asserting human rights as well as for violating them from social media protests against police brutality to the virtual courts making decisions on the fate of refugees.

This transformation comes amidst the growing pressure on human rights worldwide. Institutional safeguards protecting vulnerable populations have been undermined due to populism, stigmatization, and decline of democracy (Kurt, 2023; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017).

Simultaneously, the global pandemic accelerated the digital transformation of work, education, healthcare, and civic activism making virtual access crucial for basic rights. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, technology is no longer the backdrop to human rights; “it is the front line. And all human rights have a digital dimension” (UN Human Rights Council, 2025). However, as has already been stated by the previous research, sociovirtualization is ethically ambiguous since it might strengthen social bonds and, on the other hand, threaten people’s privacy; it can empower the most vulnerable and spread hate speech (Kurt, 2025; Farkas & Schou, 2023).

The central theme of concern for this research paper shall focus on how sociovirtualization would affect human rights and social justice and what measures could be put in place to ensure digital worlds do not continue or aggravate existing injustices.

In order to carry out the investigation of the subject matter, this research work will make use of systematic literature review where peer reviewed literature in human rights, digital sociology, communication ethics and political science shall be used.

This research paper will build up from previous literature on ethics of sociovirtualization (Kurt, 2025), populism and stigmatisation (Kurt, 2023), human rights (Kurt, 2024) and *"Digital Populism and the Legitimization of Hate: Communication Strategies, Social Cohesion"* (Kurt, 2025). This research work aims to provide constructive theories on social justice.

The outline of the research work is as follows. Section 2 will present the conceptual framework on sociovirtualization and human rights. Section 3 will present the methodology of literature review. Section 4 will present the findings of the review in five major themes. They are: access and digital divides, freedom of expression and hate speech, surveillance and privacy, algorithmic justice and online activism. Section 5 will present controversies and dilemmas. Section 6 will be the conclusion.

2. Conceptual Framework: Sociovirtualization and Human Rights

2.1 Sociovirtualization Revisited

Sociovirtualization is defined as a process of turning virtual spaces (social media, immersive technology, collaboration software) into crucial grounds for social encounters, self-identification, and group activity (Kurt, 2025). The concept of sociovirtualization is



distinguished from its predecessor “virtual community” by the fact that the concept does not include consideration of the interaction of the real world and the virtual world and that actions in one have effects on the other. This has a lot of consequences for human rights that have to be rethought considering the digital context. It is also important to note that the term “sociovirtualization,” originally developed by Kurt (2012), has been empirically examined in a master's dissertation by Şengül (2021), which investigated the relationship between sociovirtualization and digital addiction during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.2 Human Rights in the Digital Age

The UDHR and other human rights conventions do not make any explicit inclusion of virtual spaces within international human rights laws. However, according to the UN Human Rights Council, “the same rights that people have offline must also be protected online” (UN, 2013). Offline/Online Continuity is the foundation of the normative analysis of sociovirtualization, and rights include:

- Right to freedom of expression and information (UDHR Article 19): Digital communication platforms offer global freedom of speech but at the same time pose challenges to censorship and fake news.
- Right to privacy (UDHR Article 12): Data mining, monitoring, and algorithmic analysis put self-determination of information at risk. As the Council of Europe (2024) has emphasized, “core principles such as equality and non-discrimination, transparency, privacy and safety of all users should be embedded in the design and development” of virtual environments (Resolution 2578, para. 6).
- Right to non-discrimination (UDHR Article 7): Algorithm-based discrimination and hate speech against marginalized groups.
- Right to participate in civic activities (UDHR Article 21): Marginalization because of lack of access and digital literacy. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has warned that “the unequal availability of technologies is widening the digital divide,” with approximately 2.6 billion people – one third of humanity – having no access to the internet (UN Human Rights Council, 2025).
- Right to an effective remedy (UDHR Article 8): Online harassment (like doxxing and cyberstalking) calls for a remedy.

2.3 Social Justice as an Analytical Lens

Justice goes beyond rights to consider the imbalances that exist within the structural nature of society. Where sociovirtual spaces are concerned, justice would need to take into account who might participate, whose perspectives are valued, who is being surveilled, and who is going to pay for the digital infrastructure (Sasidharan, 2025). Association (2024) have stressed the importance of “a human-centric approach to immersive realities development” to ensure that human rights, the rule of law, and democracy are protected in virtual environments (p. 4).

3. Literature Review Methodology

This systematic review is designed in accordance with the PRISMA guidelines to provide transparency and reproducibility of the study. The term PRISMA is an acronym for "Preferred



Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses". This is a systematic review and meta-analysis reporting guideline that enables researchers to systematically and effectively report the methodology and results of their systematic review.

Overall, PRISMA is based on four main phases including (1) Search Records & Duplicates; (2) Abstract-level Screening; (3) Full-text Screening and, finally, (4) Final

The following sources were used in the search process: Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR and Google Scholar. The keywords are the following: ("sociovirtualization" OR "digital spaces" OR "online platforms") AND ("human rights" OR "social justice" OR "digital rights"). The period of the search was from 2015 to 2025.

Articles included in the analysis: (a) peer-reviewed articles or books from academic publishers; (b) on the topics of human rights, social justice and ethical problems associated with digital technologies' development; (c) written in English.

However, within the said time frame, there were many studies which came out from the above-discussed process. Following the elimination of duplicate papers or repetition of ideas, there were screening processes of the title and abstract of the article aimed at evaluating the full text regarding the issues of digital space, human rights, social justice, and digital rights. Papers which were included in the study became the primary focus of this research.

The following five themes came out through inductive coding: (1) digital access and inequalities; (2) freedom of speech and hate speech; (3) surveillance and data protection; (4) algorithms and bias; (5) online activism.

4. Findings: Digital Spaces as Arenas for Human Rights

4.1 Digital Access and the Right to Participation

The ability to participate in public engagement has become more and more dependent on access to the internet. The digital divide based on issues such as wealth, geographic location, age, and disability has caused billions to be left out of socio-virtual spaces (UNESCO, 2022). Research has shown that the digital divide “not only restricts access to critical services such as education, healthcare, and employment, but also undermines fundamental human rights, including the right to equality, dignity, and participation in societal decision-making” (Pajuste, 2025, p. 4). During the era of the pandemic, access to the internet was necessary to attend virtual schools, access employment through teleworking, and receive medical attention through telemedicine, hence making it a violation of the right to education, employment, and healthcare.

Designing inclusion and public broadband networks have now turned into human rights issues. According to Kurt (2024), connectivity should be viewed as a “social determinant of rights.”

4.2 Free Expression Versus Hate Speech

Through socio-virtualization, marginalized people have been given the means to transcend the barriers that stand in their way when they want to talk to the authorities. The #MeToo, Black Lives Matter, and climate justice social movements employ socio-virtualization to resist the dominant discourse (Freelon et al., 2020). As the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights



observed, “digital technologies can connect them in new ways, powering global human rights initiatives -- including the MeToo movement” (UN Human Rights Council, 2025, para. 18-19).

At the same time, however, socio-virtualization provides populists with the means to promote hateful language. As has been discussed before (Kurt, 2023), digital populism allows hate speech to be justified as “truth-telling” against political correctness. The UN Secretary-General has declared that “hate speech is the first step down the path of dehumanisation,” and that “in our digital age, hate speech spreads faster than ever, amplified by unregulated platforms and intensified by artificial intelligence” (UN News, 2026). Anger is fostered through algorithms, and echo chambers are created for dehumanization to thrive (Kurt, 2026). The problem is how to control the toxic information without suppressing criticism.

4.3 Surveillance, Privacy, and Autonomy

The sociovirtual spaces use surveillant business methods. Zuboff (2023) defines surveillance capitalism as “the unplanned repurposing of digital technologies to provide behavioral data for prediction and profit” (p. 8). Location data, behavioral patterns, social ties, and other information are collected, processed, and sold without adequate consent. The development of surveillance capitalism deprives individuals of their privacy and allows for manipulative practices, such as micro-politics and discrimination in advertisements.

Transparency and data minimization are crucial from the viewpoint of human rights. The GDPR and DSA are excellent examples of what should be done; yet, these standards are not consistently applied worldwide. In addition, governmental surveillance in the name of security especially threatens activists, journalists, and minorities (United Nations, 2019). Automated moderation systems, while capable of processing content at scale, “also reproduce existing biases, struggle to understand context, and often make mistakes that disproportionately affect journalists, activists, artists, and other vulnerable and marginalized communities” (Electronic Frontier Foundation, 2026).

4.4 Algorithmic Justice and Non-Discrimination

The use of algorithms ensures access to housing, employment, credit, healthcare, and justice. However, the problem of the presence of biases in the dataset and the lack of transparency in the development phase leads to discrimination, for example, racial discrimination in face recognition software, gender discrimination in recruiting algorithms, or geography discrimination in content moderation (Noble, 2018). Research has demonstrated that “automated systems often display discriminatory patterns that disproportionately impact marginalized communities, particularly in terms of equality, due process, and privacy rights” (Koniakou, 2021). Generative AI models “not only overlook their languages and experiences—they can algorithmically distort them, reinforcing misrepresentation, exclusion, and bias in the very content they generate” (OpenGlobalRights, 2025).

This is why socio-virtualization raises the risk of automation and replication of existing injustices. The newest studies concerning “algorithmic justice” highlight the need for assessment of the effectiveness of algorithms, their review by external organizations, and involvement of communities in the process of development (Rahman, 2025). UNESCO



(2022) has emphasized that platforms should adhere to international human rights standards, including in platform design, content moderation, and content curation.

4.5 Online Advocacy and Transnational Solidarity

One of the most exciting discoveries about sociovirtualization in the study is the potential for digital technologies to create cross-border mobilization. Social networks can be used to document the testimonies (in cases of Syria and Ukraine), provide emergency notifications, and raise money for the Human Rights groups. The movies in virtual reality make people feel and see the pain in far-away lands and compel them to do something.

The second aspect of sociovirtualization is the enhanced ability for peer support of those marginalized groups of people, including disabled individuals and minorities without safe places to communicate physically (Maloney et al., 2021). The process of sociovirtualization promotes social justice because it reduces isolation and creates group effectiveness.

5. Discussion: Tensions and Trade-offs in Sociovirtual Social Justice

Sociovirtualization from the research cannot be regarded either positively or negatively with respect to human rights; instead, it all depends on its nature and structure. The Council of Europe (2024) has noted that “without corrective measures, unequal access to the metaverse – because of its costs – may generate new forms of discrimination and increase social inequality” (Resolution 2578, para. 33). There are particular issues that must be considered in this respect:

- Security/Privacy: The usage of encryption technologies helps both dissidents and criminal. Mass surveillance scares off the threats and stifles the real voices.
- Content Moderation/Freedom of Speech: As much as the issue of hate speech can involve too much control, the rules of platforms in this regard are unclear and unfair. As the Electronic Frontier Foundation (2026) has documented, “overzealous moderation remains a problem” with automated systems deleting nonviolent content at alarming rates while failing to detect actual hate speech (para. 17-19).
- Universal Human Rights/Particular Cultural Issues: Though human rights have a universal character, different cultural attitudes to hate speech, blasphemy and political demonstrations exist. One strategy cannot be applied in every situation. Besides, the problem of the digital divide is another structural barrier.

Though the access to the digital technologies is a necessary condition, the digital literacy, which means being able to distinguish the fake information and configure one’s privacy settings, etc., is not always evenly spread out.

6. Conclusion and Future Directions

It is in this way that the increasing use of socio-relationships, socio-identities, and collective actions in virtual spaces can be referred to as sociovirtualization, according to this essay, and this essay has contended that sociovirtualization is essentially a double-edged phenomenon when it comes to social justice and human rights. It has been pointed out in previous sections



that digital space represents dangers in terms of social justice and human rights due to the fact that digital spaces represent new ways of exclusion, discrimination, and human rights violations, but at the same time, there are vast opportunities that come with sociovirtualization. The main thing about sociovirtualization is that it is neither good nor bad – its effects on human rights depend on various factors.

6.1 Summary of Key Arguments

As a result of our comprehensive literature review, we have come up with several important conclusions that should be reiterated for their practical relevance.

First, the exercise of basic rights today presupposes availability of digital resources. The Internet and basic literacy in using it become more and more important when speaking about the right to engage in political processes, to study, work, receive medical help and even meet. In other words, the digital divide becomes a systematic infringement of human rights, affecting primarily poor, rural citizens, disabled people and senior citizens, not just an economic and technological issue. To overcome the divide, broadband Internet should be recognized as a public good, and the devices used for accessing it should be subsidized. UNESCO (2022) has emphasized that addressing hate speech and promoting digital inclusion requires a human rights-based approach that integrates digital literacy as a fundamental right.

In contrast, socio-virtualization increases both the power of repressive and emancipatory discourses. First of all, due to the development of technologies, oppressed communities, such as racial minorities, the representatives of indigenous peoples, and those who have suffered from sexual violence, were able to circumvent gatekeeping mechanisms and address the global audience with their narratives. In fact, it would be impossible without socio-virtualization, and there would not be any movements for climate justice, the #MeToo movement, or the Black Lives Matter campaign. On the other hand, the same technological framework can be used for the spread of stigmatizing discourse by hate groups, populists, and states. Hate speech normalizes the discourse and undermines the moral basis of democratic discussion, and the use of algorithms to amplify the emotions of anger and fear results in the creation of echo chambers of dehumanization.

The third structural barrier is connected with the presence of algorithmic governance and surveillance capitalism. The concept of information self-determination is at odds with the business model of the majority of the platforms because the latter is founded on personal data exploitation of users and targeted advertisements. Taking into account the opacity of data operations and the power imbalance between companies and individuals, the consent of the latter is not always well-informed. However, there is an increasing dependence on algorithms in finance, job market, housing, health care, and justice. The fact that algorithmic decisions are not accountable, the bias in the datasets for machine learning, and the absence of independent audits make it hard to identify such discrimination as well as traditional discrimination. Another element of socio-virtualization is the automation of inequality.

Fourth, there must be an approach that is based on human rights and multiple stakeholders involved in governance. All these problems cannot be solved by one single actor; it is not about the government, not about the technology company, not about civil society. Governments are not politically or technically competent enough but have great legal responsibilities. Companies are operationally competent but place their interests ahead of any



other interest. Civil Society organizations are not legally competent enough and have limited financial resources but have great moral power and practical knowledge. International organizations can set the standards and foster collaboration but do not have an enforcement capacity. The approach proposed in Section 6 attempts to unify different actors on the same values, such as proportionality and legality, transparency and accountability, design without discrimination, human dignity as a principle, participation and inclusion. This requires all these measures: digital rights regulation, algorithmic impact assessment, independent monitoring, community-based online platform, legally binding agreement and increase in digital literacy. The Council of Europe (2024) has stressed that “responsible governance may encourage creativity, innovation and entrepreneurialism, while upholding democracy, human rights and the rule of law within and through metaverse environments” (Resolution 2578, para. 52-53).

Finally, education will form the foundation of digital justice. Algorithmic trickery, disregard for the law, and violation of codes of conduct will persist. However, a well-informed populace that is aware of their digital rights, able to think critically about information, and exhibits ethical behavior in the virtual world will never fall victim to trickery and will demand accountability. Education and lifelong learning must include digital media literacy, digital rights education, and professional development. Despite all of this, education must not place the blame on the victim; the platform and state must abstain from causing any harm, not the individual, and especially not the marginalized individual.

6.2 Implications for Policy and Practice

The recommendations of this paper have immediate implications for different groups of stakeholders.

To policy makers: Technology companies’ regulation should cease. It is necessary to enact legislation that would ensure the digital rights of people, non-discrimination, algorithmic transparency, data portability, and privacy. Mandatory impact assessment procedures should be conducted regarding the high-risk systems in the public administration. In order to reduce the digital divide, investment should be done in infrastructure in the public space. They should encourage the formation of international binding agreements concerning artificial intelligence and human rights. They should also ratify and implement international guidelines such as the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UN Human Rights Council, 2011).

For IT companies: The respect for human rights must be integrated into their operations and not treated as an add-on charity. The equity by design and privacy by design must be implemented as standard practice and not something that makes them unique among others. It must be achieved through the creation of bodies overseeing the algorithms and the content. The transparency reports must be independently audited and machine readable. The grievance procedures must be fair, prompt and accessible. As the Electronic Frontier Foundation (2026) has argued, “companies must regularly audit their automated systems for bias, with particular attention to low-resource languages, vulnerable and marginalized communities, and conflict zones” (para. 8-10).

Regarding civil society organizations:



Campaigning, litigation and organizing the community will be necessary for digital rights advocacy. CSOs should concentrate on community-level campaigns related to digital literacy, litigation as a strategy to establish precedence, counter speech in order to offer an alternative to hate speech and community-based platform-building based on cooperative approach. It is possible to enhance such an approach by establishing partnerships between human rights organizations, trade unions, environmental groups and IT activists.

Regarding international organizations:

It is necessary to move from non-binding declarations issued by the UN, regional organizations (such as EU, AU, ASEAN, OAS) and specialized agencies to binding conventions. It is essential to agree on minimal standards of accountability, transparency and prohibition of particularly dangerous applications (social scoring, mass surveillance without judicial supervision, for example) as the results of a convention on artificial intelligence and human rights. What is absolutely essential is cross-border cooperation in combating hate speech, mutual assistance in digital rights cases and protection of digital rights activists.

To educators and academics: It is extremely important to incorporate digital citizenship into the curriculum throughout various educational stages from elementary school up to university. Longitudinal approaches to study evolving impacts, comparative studies to understand which regulatory systems provide the best protection for human rights, and research approaches focused on disadvantaged groups should become priorities. It is extremely important to collaborate among various disciplines, including computer science, law, sociology, psychology, and human rights.

6.3 Future Research Directions

Even though this review provides quite an extensive amount of knowledge, there are still plenty of gaps to be filled. The areas for future research should include:

Longitudinal study of digital rights violations. For the most part, the research work currently being done is cross-sectional and focuses on a specific period of time. However, the effects of online harassment, algorithmic discrimination, and surveillance tend to accumulate over the years and result in the indirect consequences on political engagement, economic opportunities, and mental health of people. The longitudinal studies that track one cohort of people over time will allow us to establish causation chains and understand when and how exactly interventions are the most effective and when therapy practices have the most significant effect.

Final Reflections: Sociovirtualization as a Human Rights Struggle

The sociovirtualization process is taking place right now; it is not something distant in the future. The digital technology plays its part in the context of what we claim and exercise our rights – in terms of the algorithmic suggestion of information, platform mediation, and profiling through data brokers. By denying that this is the case, by assuming the digital technology to be just a political-free instrument, we are giving power to those who design, own, and control it.

The biggest challenge for the human rights in the twenty-first century is the issue of ensuring that sociovirtualization is used as a way of achieving social justice and not exclusion architecture.



"How would we like our digital society to be" is the question posed here.

Who is going to have the final say? How can power, which in the digital age works through code, be made accountable?

Neither innovation nor competition can provide us with an answer. Legislation, litigation, organization, education, and development of alternatives are all going to be necessary in this fight. Human rights approach and its principles of equality, accountability, participation, and dignity are crucial as one of the important guideposts. But it is not a map – it needs to be created by everyone collectively.

This paper attempted to contribute to the common effort in that direction through summarizing the existing knowledge, pointing out its limitations, and formulating a corresponding governance model.

There are still many things left to do. However, the path ahead is very clear – socio-virtualization must lead to justice rather than exclusion, freedom rather than domination, connectivity rather than segregation. The choice is up to us.



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