Rofam Academy Secondary School

CITIZENSHIP   CLASS

Group Assignment.   9A

The Influence of Culture and Digital Technology

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How Culture and Digital Technology Shape Attitudes, Beliefs, Behaviour and Moral Understanding

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Introduction

In contemporary societies, culture (the shared beliefs, values, practices and institutions of groups) and digital technologies (the computing, network-infrastructure, platforms and devices that mediate daily life) interact in complex ways. This interaction influences not only what people believe and value, but also how they behave, how they interpret actions as "good" or "bad", and how they make moral judgments. The interplay of culture + digital technology can reshape cognition, social norms, interpersonal relations and moral frameworks.

Theoretical and Empirical Foundations

Culture & learning

Social learning theory (e.g., Albert Bandura) argues that individuals acquire behaviours by observing and imitating models in their environment, not only by direct reinforcement. Culture provides models, norms and shared meanings that shape what is imitated and valued.

Cultural-transmission theory emphasizes how practices, beliefs and norms persist across generations, even when the original reasons for them are no longer present (e.g., rituals).

Moral-psychology frameworks such as Jonathan Haidt's Moral Foundations Theory propose that people use intuitive moral modules (care/harm, fairness/cheating, loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, sanctity/degradation, liberty/oppression) and culture influences the relative weight of each.

Culture is not static: It is dynamic, shaped by technology, communication patterns and institutions.

Empirical cross-cultural psychology shows that national/cultural dimensions (e.g., individualism vs collectivism, power distance, long-term orientation) shape behaviour and attitudes in technology adoption, trust and risk perception. For example, a study found that "culture significantly influenced website usability and perceived risk in European consumers … culture significantly influenced trust of Asian consumers … online purchase behaviour."

Digital technology & society

The field of science & technology studies (STS) proposes the "mutual shaping" model: Technology shapes society and society shapes technology.

Platform/media theory emphasises how the medium affects communication, attention, cognition and social relations (e.g., social media platforms providing new affordances).

Empirical reviews show digital technologies reshaping cognition (attention, memory), behaviour (digital interventions for change), organisational culture (digital culture), and workplace well-being (remote work, digital fatigue). For example, a systematic review of digital behaviour-change interventions shows how digital devices and apps can influence real-world behaviour, but the effectiveness depends on design, context and engagement.

Organisational research shows that digital transformation influences employee innovative behaviour, mediated by organisational culture support and leadership style.

Integration: Culture + Digital Technology

Cultural values shape how technology is used, interpreted and integrated technologies do not produce identical effects everywhere.

Conversely, digital technologies reshape cultural practices: e.g., how people communicate, what counts as knowledge, what counts as credible, what behaviours are visible and thus normative.

Therefore, to understand how attitudes/behaviours/moral understanding shift, one must analyse both cultural context and technological affordances/incentives.

Key Mechanisms of Influence

Here are major mechanisms through which culture + digital technology influence attitudes, beliefs, behaviour and moral understanding:

1. Attention & cognitive structures

Digital devices and platforms restructure attention (e.g., notification culture, multiscreen use) and memory (externalising memory to devices). This shifts how people process information, make decisions, and form beliefs about what is important.

Example: young people using smartphones may develop more rapid-switching attention, less sustained reflection.

2. Information exposure & selection (algorithms, filter bubbles)

Algorithmic recommender systems select and prioritise content, shaping what information people see, what viewpoints they are exposed to, and thus what beliefs they form. Echo-chambers and filter bubbles reinforce existing attitudes, reduce exposure to alternative views, and thus influence moral beliefs (what is "right" or "wrong").

Empirical support: digital interventions for behaviour change find that design/context matter greatly.

3. Visibility of behaviour and reputational incentives

On digital platforms, actions are visible (likes, shares, comment threads). Social feedback gives individuals rewards for conforming to emergent norms, thereby shaping behaviour. Thus, behaviour that is publicly rewarded becomes normative; moral signalling becomes a form of currency. This changes what behaviour is labelled "good" (approved) or "bad" (shamed) in digital communities.

4. Affordances & new possibilities for action

Digital tools create new modes of interaction (social media, mobile communication, remote work) that change possibilities for behaviour, leisure, learning, moral action (e.g., activism, sharing).

This also changes cultural practices: e.g., how families interact, how children learn, how communities form.

5. Institutional shift and normative framing

Digital platforms become new institutions (news, social organisation, commerce). These platforms' affordances and governance shape cultural norms, information flows and moral framings.

Traditional gatekeepers (publishers, universities, churches) lose exclusive power; new norms, values and belief systems emerge via digital networks.

6. Cultural variation in adoption & meaning

Use and interpretation of digital technologies vary by culture. Cultural dimensions (e.g., trust, collectivism vs individualism) modify how people adopt and integrate technology into moral frameworks. For example: cross-cultural study of online behaviour showed significant differences in perceived risk/trust depending on culture.

Case Studies

Case 1: The "Five Monkeys" Parable (Group Norms & Conformity)

In a quiet laboratory decades ago, a group of scientists conducted a peculiar experiment. Inside a cage, they placed **five monkeys**, a **ladder**, and at the top, a bunch of **fresh bananas**. Naturally, one monkey climbed the ladder to grab a banana. But before it could reach, the researchers sprayed **ice-cold water** on all the monkeys. The group screamed and shivered in shock. After several attempts, the monkeys learned a collective rule, *climbing the ladder brings punishment for everyone*. Eventually, none dared to touch it again.

Then, the scientists **replaced one monkey** with a newcomer. The new monkey, unaware of the rule, tried to climb the ladder. Instantly, the others attacked him, not because they understood why, but because *that's what you do*.
One by one, each monkey was replaced. Eventually, all the original monkeys were gone,

yet the learned behaviour continued. None of them had ever been sprayed, but all had learned:

"We don't climb the ladder here."

This story mirrors how **cultural norms form and persist**. People follow traditions, customs, and moral codes not necessarily because they understand their origins, but because they are passed down and socially reinforced.
Our **attitudes toward "right" and "wrong"** often emerge from such inherited behaviours , the cultural equivalent of "don't climb the ladder."

Case 2: The Dark Ages - Cultural Stagnation and the Power of Ideology

Following the fall of the Roman Empire, much of Europe entered what historians call the Dark Ages (approximately 5th–10th centuries CE). During this period, scientific inquiry and intellectual exploration declined, while religious dogma and centralized authority defined moral and intellectual life. The Church became the central institution controlling education, knowledge, and moral interpretation.

As a result, technological innovation slowed, and alternative viewpoints were suppressed. Morality became rigidly tied to theology, and questioning established truths was often seen as sinful or heretical. In essence, culture itself acted as a form of "cognitive technology" ,a filter that structured thought and limited what could be considered 'true' or 'good.'

Yet, this same period also preserved ancient manuscripts and moral systems that would later fuel the Renaissance, showing that culture, even when restrictive, can serve as both a constraint and a foundation for future progress.

> Sociologically, this reflects Max Weber's idea of "cultural rationalization," where systems of belief organize not just morality but also intellectual possibility.

Case 3: The Digital Era - Algorithms, Attention, and Moral Fragmentation

In the 21st century, digital technology and social media have redefined how humans construct their identities, moral beliefs, and social relations. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and X (Twitter) operate on algorithmic reinforcement loops that prioritize engagement over truth. This design has led to what scholars call "digital tribalism" : the clustering of individuals into echo chambers that amplify their existing beliefs.

In this environment, moral and political values are often shaped by what receives social validation (likes, shares, or trends) rather than rational deliberation. Empirical studies (e.g., Haidt, 2022; Turkle, 2011) show that digital technology not only affects what people believe, but also how they define good and evil , often through emotionally charged, simplified narratives.

At the same time, digital connectivity has democratized information, empowering marginalized voices and global movements like #MeToo or Black Lives Matter. Thus, technology simultaneously erodes traditional moral consensus while enabling moral expansion and activism.

> Philosophically, this represents a shift from a "shared moral space" to a "networked morality," where ethical understanding becomes pluralized, fragmented, and shaped by data-driven architectures.

How Attitudes, Beliefs, Behaviour and Morality Are Affected

Attitudes & Beliefs

Exposure to digital content shapes beliefs (what is true, credible, authoritative). Algorithmic selection may reinforce confirmation bias, reducing openness to alternative

views. Cultural context mediates how technology is understood and used; for instance, trust in online systems differs across cultures, affecting adoption and beliefs about technology's role.

Beliefs about morality (what is good/bad) can shift if the contexts of communication and information change: e.g., more visible global activism changes beliefs about justice, fairness, authority.

Behaviour

Social norms: Digital platforms accelerate the formation of behavioural norms (e.g., viral challenges, sharing norms, hashtag activism). Behaviour that is socially visible becomes more widely adopted.

Habit and attention structure: Smartphones and apps produce habits (checking feeds, responding to notifications). Behaviour becomes shaped by technological affordances (ease of sharing vs deep reflection).

Moral behaviour: Digital reputation systems encourage behaviours oriented to social reward rather than intrinsic moral reflection. This may lead to performative altruism, virtue signalling, group-based moral judgement.

Moral Understanding (Good vs Bad)

Visibility and publicness matter: In digital spaces, behaviours are more visible, subject to peer judgement, shaming and reputation effects. What is "good" may be defined by platform norms rather than traditional moral authorities.

Cultural variation: Because digital platforms are global, moral frameworks from different cultures interact. Conflicts may arise when global digital culture clashes with local cultural values (e.g., privacy, modesty, authority).

Speed and emotionality: Online interactions often favour emotional, immediate responses over deliberation. Moral intuition systems (Haidt) are triggered; slower, reflective moral reasoning may be diminished.

Institutional shift: Traditional moral authorities (religious institutions, local community elders) may lose influence, while digital influencers, algorithmic reward systems and platform policies become new moral arbiters.

Persistence of norms without reason: As in the Five Monkeys example, norm enforcement may become decoupled from original rationale; digital cultures can have entrenched rules whose original moral logic is obscure to new participants.

Implications & Challenges

Design and governance: If digital platforms shape moral behaviour, their design (algorithms, visibility tools, reward mechanisms) carries ethical weight. Designers become normative actors.

Digital literacy & critical thinking: Users must develop skills to navigate information, recognise biases, reflect on moral choices rather than simply follow visible norms.

Cultural sensitivity and adaptation: Technologies must be adapted to cultural contexts; one size fits all risks ignoring cultural values and may create alienation or unintended consequences. Cross-cultural studies (e.g., online purchase behaviour) show culture strongly influences digital adoption and risk/trust perceptions.

Moral pluralism: Global digital culture supports diverse moral views; societies must address how to mediate conflicts between digital-native norms and local cultural/moral frameworks.

Well-being and moral overload: Constant connectivity, exposure to moral issues via platforms (social media activism, outrage cycles) can create moral fatigue. Studies of remote work show digital demands can impair well-being.

Institutional legitimacy: As digital platforms become powerful actors in shaping culture and norms, questions arise about legitimacy, accountability and governance of digital moral spaces.

Conclusion

Culture and digital technology are not independent; they co-produce each other. Technology offers new affordances, changes attention, exposure, social visibility and institutional structures; culture gives meaning, norms, values and interpretative frameworks. Together, they shape what people believe, how they act, how they understand right and wrong and how societies evolve. The three case-examples (the Five Monkeys parable, the Dark Ages institutional shift, and the Smartphone revolution) illustrate different facets of this interaction: normative persistence, institutional transformation, and technology-driven rapid change. For your work (e.g., designing systems, thinking about diagnostics, or creating educational interventions), it's critical to account for both the technological affordances and the cultural context in which the system operates, because both shape the moral and behavioural outcomes.