

SOCIAL CAPITAL IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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ABSTRACT

The social changes that have occurred in recent decades on the technological level have radically changed the way we communicate and relate to those around us. In recent years, more and more articles and research have come out about the influence of technology on our relationship capabilities. From this point of view, this article is an exposition of the main theories regarding the digital influence on the social capital evolution, as well as a combination of arguments that support the fact that the social power we have suffers as a result of the development and spread of technology: social networks and applications that occupy our time today. Also, in this discussion, it will be reminded of the negative link between time spent in the virtual environment and social intelligence.

Keywords: social capital, social intelligence, social relations, technology.

WHAT IS SOCIAL CAPITAL?

Social capital is one of the most studied concepts in sociology, especially because it refers to the very thread that connects a society, namely the relationship between individuals. First defined by Hanifan in 1916, the concept of social capital refers to the totality of an individual's relationships, as well as their quality. Although there have been many perspectives that have approached this concept, only a few have captured the essence of the term, especially with reference to how it is found in society, what are the differences from other types of capital and the changes of manifestation it has had over time.

One of the most important authors who approached the concept of social capital was Bourdieu (1986) who addressed it as a resource that the individual benefits from when he is part of a group:

“Social capital is the aggregation of resources possessed or potential, which are linked to the possession of a lasting network of several ties, more or less institutionalized, of acquaintances and persons we recognize – or in other words, participation in a group – which provides each member with the social capital of the collective itself, a ‘credential’ which entitles them to benefit from capital, in several senses of the word”¹⁹³.

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¹⁹³ Pierre Bourdieu, “The forms of capital”, in John Richardson (coord.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, Westport, Greenwood Press, 1986, p. 246.

In Bourdieu's conception, the concept of social capital is not something individual, but a resource that the person collectively benefits from when he is part of a group. Pierre Bourdieu also, starting from the theory of economic capital, describes the concept of cultural capital as being in the image of that of social capital, describing it as that resource that refers once to the accumulation of cultural material goods (which we can call physical dimension) and knowledge or skills that help him climb the social ladder (which we can name as mental dimension). Cultural capital is strongly linked to social capital in that although an individual may have cultural capital, you cannot evolve up the hierarchy of society without social capital. This idea was expressed by Coleman (1988) in his study: *Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital*¹⁹⁴, where he shows that you can be an erudite person from a family with a fairly high culture (used in the sense of accumulated knowledge, a concept described by Roger Scruton), but not have any role or function in society, because you do not benefit from a sufficiently extensive social capital. In addition to social capital, another term should be mentioned that actually represents how social capital manifests itself, namely social network:

“A social network is represented by members linked by a node who have different relationships – close or distant”¹⁹⁵.

The social capital conceptualized by Bourdieu (1986) is born in a social structure that allows the individual to use the resources of the group (*i.e.*, social capital itself) to achieve his goals. These resources, in turn, are based on reciprocal relations. Reciprocity means recognition and recognition perpetuates the group:

“Social capital in a group implies an effort of sociability and reciprocity through which various acts of recognition are confirmed and reconfirmed”¹⁹⁶.

Robert Putnam wrote about reciprocity as a primary dimension of social capital at the turn of the century in his book *Bowling Alone: Thinking about social change in America*¹⁹⁷. He described how the feeling of reciprocity decreased among the population, especially after the 60's (*i.e.*, among the baby boom generation) by analysing several dimensions of society: first and foremost, he observed the level of participation in political life, community life (meetings with neighbors and friends, going to church, membership in an organization, volunteer work). From his analysis of these dimensions, he concluded that Americans relate less and are less involved in community life.

¹⁹⁴ See James Coleman, “Social capital in the creation of human capital”, in *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 94, 1988, pp. 95–120.

¹⁹⁵ Wasserman Stanley and Katherine Faust, *Social network analysis: Methods and applications*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994 quoted by Alexandra Marin and Wellman Barry, “Social network analysis: An introduction”, in John Scott, *The SAGE handbook of social network analysis*, London, Sage Publications, 2011, pp. 11–25.

¹⁹⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *op. cit.*, p. 247.

¹⁹⁷ Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Rebirth of the American Community*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 2000.

Robert Putnam also divides the share capital into two main dimensions: bonding and bridging. Bonding capital refers to the capital of close relationships, with people from the groups we belong to, basically the group of close individuals with whom we communicate often and with whom we are invested more than just for a certain external purpose. Granovetter (1973) called this type of social capital *strong ties* to express closeness between people:

“The strength of a bond is likely a linear combination of the amount of time, emotional intensity, intimacy, and mutual service that characterizes the bond”¹⁹⁸.

In contrast, bridging capital is important for obtaining information and other benefits that we would not need on a daily basis. Today, we would translate this type of capital as “superficial relationships” or ties to help us fulfil a purpose (Example given by Robert Putnam in his book for bridge-type social capital is a group of people who are part of the American civil rights movement). Also, Granovetter, in 1973 called this type of social capital weak ties and argued that they are much more beneficial in the long run for the individual, since it is these relationships that provide other social frameworks of which the individual is not a part:

“The more indirect ties a person has, the more encapsulated he will be in terms of acquaintances that go beyond his circle of friends”¹⁹⁹.

This type of social capital is especially observed in the economic relationships that individuals have through a positive correlation: the larger your social network, the more chances you have to get a more advantageous job or a possibility of developing other types of capital, such as human capital.

“Social capital is goodwill available to individuals or groups. It lies in the structure and content of the actor’s social relationships. Its effects derive from the information, influence, and solidarity it provides to the actor”²⁰⁰.

DIGITAL AGE AND DECLINING SOCIAL CAPITAL RESOURCES

One of the most interesting features of modern society is the relation to the rapid technological development taking place today. The most present digital forms present in our lives are social networks and applications that can be accessed with the mobile phone. In his book, *The Superficial* (2020), as well as other articles, Nicholas Carr described how technological development brought a change in the way we perceive the world today, especially in relation to the amount of information we are served today:

“The smartphone has become a repository for itself, recording and distributing the words, images and sounds that define what we think, what we experience and who

¹⁹⁸ Mark Granovetter, “The strength of weak ties”, in *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 78, No. 6/1973, p. 1361.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 1371.

²⁰⁰ Paul Adler and Seok-Woo Kwon, “Social capital: prospects for a new concept”, in *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 27, No. 1/2002, p. 19.

we are. In a 2015 Gallup poll, more than half of iPhone owners said they couldn't imagine their lives without the device"²⁰¹.

As in literature it has been pointed out, social networks are websites or applications that facilitate the creation of content and although it is predominantly an abstract term, the social network differentiates itself according to the possibility of offering a profile in a linked system, the possibility of describing the people with whom individuals are connected and seeing the list of people with whom others are friends, to transmit information in video, audio or written form²⁰². According to a report called Digital 2023 Global Overview Report²⁰³ created by Meltwater and We Are Social, the most used social networks among young people today are: Facebook (with almost 3 billion users globally), YouTube (with 2.5 billion accounts globally), WhatsApp and Instagram (each with 2 billion users) and TikTok (with over 1 billion profiles). Also, according to the same report, young people spend significantly more time on average on social networks than other older categories: young people between 16 and 24 spend about 3 hours of a day on social networks, those between 25 and 34 spend 2 hours and 45 minutes on average, and the older they get, the time spent on social networks decreases: People between 55 and 64 spend on average only 1 and 35 minutes on such applications.

The reason why social networks are used today is equally important to analyze: Currently, with the help of social networks, there is an opportunity to obtain social capital. According to the report analyzed above, 48% of people who use social media said they do it to keep in touch with friends and family. Other important reasons cited include filling free time (36%), reading news (35%), finding articles, references, etc. (29%), finding out what's new (28%), sharing knowledge or other opinions with others (27%).

Why would it be important to look at social media in the discussion about social capital online? When social networks appeared, the first being present since the end of the last²⁰⁴ century, studies appeared that talked about the negative effects of their use, especially for the social health of users. Norman Nie (2001) talked about how time spent on social media can harm social relationships, especially because the

²⁰¹ Nicholas Carr, "How the Phones Hijack Our Minds", October 27, 2017, in *Wall Street Journal*, Available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-smartphones-hijack-our-minds-1507307811>, Accessed on October 7, 2023.

²⁰² See: Emily O'Day and Richard Heimberg, "Social media use, social anxiety, and loneliness: A systematic review", in *Computers in Human Behavior Reports*, Vol. 3, 2021, Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S245195882100018X>, Accessed on October 7, 2023.

²⁰³ Simon Kemp, "Digital 2023 – Global Overview Report", January 26, 2023, in *Data Reportal*, Available at: <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-global-overview-report>, Accessed on April 26, 2023.

²⁰⁴ A very good description of how social networks have developed can be found in David Kirkpatrick, *The Facebook Effect: The Inside Story of the Company That Is Connecting the World*, New York, Simon & Schuster Publishing, 2011.

internet and time spent online rob individuals of the time individuals should use to socialize in the offline world²⁰⁵.

The study that is still referenced, especially for researchers analysing the link between digital media use and social capital, was led by Robert Kraut (1998). He conducted very important research for the field of “social media” and social networks. Although his article “The Internet Paradox” does not refer to social capital as a basic concept, Kraut demonstrated that the advent of the Internet decreased the yield of social skills (to relate and communicate with close ones) and that a multitude of areas of personal life suffered. He conducted a longitudinal experiment (over a period of three years) that consisted of giving Pittsburgh families access to the internet and monitoring online activity. After a long period of time, it was observed that families who were offered internet went out less, kept in touch less often with their loved ones and community, and even reported symptoms of social isolation (measured by the UCLA Solitude Scale). Thus, it is considered a basic study of criticism about the influence of the online environment on social capital.

SOCIAL CAPITAL IN ONLINE ENVIRONMENT TODAY

Unlike Putnam’s writings on television, which basically described the reduction of social capital due to the loss of time in front of TV, the reference to the Internet is much more complicated – this is because in the online environment the interaction is two-way, and individuals can respond to the messages that appear on their screens:

“Even though it has worldwide coverage through satellite transmission stations, the television network is an unequivocal communication: the receiver cannot modify or respond to the transmitter’s message”²⁰⁶.

The mobile phone, invented in 1973 by Martin Cooper, brought about the first revolution in remote verbal communication. A second, more complex occurred with the phone’s ability to access the internet and the virtual reality it brings with it. Thus, compared to television, the Internet allows the individual to be part of reality, to respond to the message sent to him, forming interactions – there is a possibility of accumulating social capital. The Internet represents a form of connection, first for the data, then for the users, which come to relate over the barrier of space and time. In this sense, *cyberspace* must be defined – a reality made up of data matrices, in which the individual can participate and create forms of cultural content – although not totally similar to those within reality, including human social relationships:

²⁰⁵ The same conclusion was reached by Robert Putnam, but he pointed out in particular the negative effects that television had on social relations.

²⁰⁶ „Chiar dacă are acoperire mondială prin stațiile de transmisie prin satelit, rețeaua de televiziune este o comunicare univocă: receptorul nu poate modifica sau răspunde la mesajul emițătorului.”, in Radu Baltasiu, *Antropologia globalizării [The Anthropology of Globalization]*, Bucharest, Little Wallachia Publishing, 2009, p. 109.

“Cyberspace represents a possible world, but real– virtual reality. A world without necessarily corresponding in physical reality, but which produces effects on us, and whose support is binary reasoning (built only from combinations of 0 and 1), totally different from the natural one, processed by the computer. This reality built through a new (binary) logic rest on computing power and the transmission of information through computer networks”²⁰⁷.

In order to see exactly how social capital manifests itself in the online environment, Dmitri Williams (2006) created a capital measurement scale using his knowledge of the main online activities and the inspirations that came from the analysis of social capital in the offline environment. Thus, he measured bridge-type social capital by looking outward (looking outward), contact with several categories of people, looking at oneself as part of a larger group, diffuse reciprocity with a wider community²⁰⁸. For the social capital type similarity, he looked at:

“emotional support, access to limited resources, ability to mobilize solidarity, out-group antagonism”²⁰⁹.

Another important thing Dmitri Williams mentions about the benefits of social capital online is that it generates less risk:

“One speculation is that social capital generation by online communities is moderated by the relatively low cost of entry and exit (from a pool) compared to offline”²¹⁰.

Other ways to quantify social activity online can be the number of likes, comments, and hours spent on a conversation. Xane Faucher (2018) defines the concept of online social capital as sums of relationships that can be quantified by the number of likes, comments, etc. to serve to increase the profits of large media companies:

“Online social capital becomes a substance that can be measured by the number of friends, followers, approvals from others, such as likes or tweets”²¹¹.

It is also recalled that besides the individual as a direct beneficiary of online social capital, there is another amount of important actors that exploit online interaction between individuals:

“The more we are encouraged to ‘like’ online content, the more our data is collected and used to sell similar content, and the more appropriate our data can be for advertising”²¹².

²⁰⁷ „Ciberspațiul reprezintă o lume posibilă, dar reală – realitatea virtuală. O lume fără corespondent neapărat în realitatea fizică, dar care produce efecte asupra noastră, și al cărei suport este raționamentul binar (construit doar din combinații de 0 și 1), total diferit de cel natural, procesat de către computer. Această realitate construită printr-o nouă logică (binară) se sprijină pe puterea de calcul și de transmitere a informației prin rețele de calculatoare.”, in *Ibidem*, p. 107.

²⁰⁸ Dmitri Williams, “On and Off the Net: Scales for Social Capital in an Online Era”, in *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*, Vol. 11, No. 2/2006, p. 600.

²⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 601.

²¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 611.

²¹¹ Kane Faucher, *Social Capital Online*, London, University of Westminster Press, 2018, p. 15.

²¹² *Ibidem*, p. 22.

Facilitating social capital online has been a research topic in numerous studies, especially for those who wanted to understand how social networks influence users' lives. The main points touched upon by most studies have been related to how social networks bring an improvement in social relationships overall, by switching the barriers encountered until then in interaction, although there have also been quite relevant studies that have denied the benefits of online interactions for the social capital of the individual. Ellison *et al.* (2010) divided the literature regarding the influence of online on social capital into three directions: Primary perspective: Social capital is facilitated by the Internet, negative perspective: Internet causes social capital to decrease, positive outlook: Internet can supplement offline interactions and increase social capital²¹³.

The benefits for the similarity type of capital are described by Nicole Ellison *et al.* (2007) through the example of students who move to another city for studies but manage to keep in touch with former colleagues or acquaintances back home, which is observable if we analyse the information made available by students to be found on Facebook²¹⁴. In addition to the similarity and bridge capital types, the study authors also looked at how Facebook's platform is beneficial for activating latent relationships (*i.e.*, that could take place between two people, but initiative is expected), sometimes pointing out the purpose behind using these platforms. There are benefits for those who do not have social relationships but want to make their own – the hypothesis called “the poor get rich”, but also for those who already have social relationships and can capitalize on them – “the rich get richer”²¹⁵.

SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE AND ONLINE SOCIAL CAPITAL

Although the desire to make our lives easier is what urges us to continue investing in the technological sphere, lately several studies have emerged addressing the negative effects of cyberspace on social relationships. One of the major authors who wrote about the biggest problems with the effects of technology on individuals, especially children and young people, was neuropsychiatrist Manfred Spitzer. What we need to focus on is the social side of the effects of technology – Manfred has shown how addiction to online media causes depression, insomnia, and serious health consequences:

“Even the phenomenon of addiction (...) It has to do with depressive disorder: Numerous studies have shown that depression occurs more frequently with

²¹³ Charles Steinfield *et al.*, “Online social network sites and the concept of social capital”, in Francis Lee (coord.) *et al.*, *Frontiers in New Media Research*, New York, Routledge, 2012, pp. 115–131.

²¹⁴ Nicole Ellison *et al.*, “The benefits of Facebook ‘friends’. Social capital and college students’ use of online social network sites”, in *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Vol. 12, No. 4/2007, p. 1162.

²¹⁵ See Robert Kraut *et al.*, “Internet Paradox Revisited”, in *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 58, No. 1/2002, pp. 49–74.

computer and internet addiction compared to people who behave normally with digital media use”²¹⁶.

The mechanism by which the Internet and the virtual world affect social life is as simple as possible: individuals become so engrossed in the world behind the screen that the real world no longer matters, and virtuality replaces family or friends:

“It’s hard to deny that students who network a lot are reducing their activities in the real world and so are increasingly socially isolated. The known vicious circle in the treatment of anxiety disorders, which consists of isolation, anxiety about social ties and again isolation, is reinforced by the possibilities offered by the Internet”²¹⁷.

Manfred Spitzer (2012) also discussed the decrease in communication capacity and social skills of young people who spend a significant number of hours online:

“Digital media have a detrimental effect on empathic capacity and social competences. Talking about the effects of Facebook, we have seen that it is precisely young users (between 8 and 12 years old) who suffer the most in terms of social relationships and affectivity because of digital media”²¹⁸.

Hence the connection with another important sociological concept, namely: social intelligence.

Social intelligence is a concept that has been studied psychologically over time alongside other concepts such as: emotional intelligence or adaptive intelligence. The concept of social intelligence has been defined as intelligence that deals with the ability to communicate and relate to others, to read or understand the emotions and moods of others, as well as by adapting to various social situations²¹⁹. Herbert Marlowe, in 1986, described social intelligence using the following dimensions: interest and care for others, empathic abilities, emotional expressiveness, and sensitivity to the emotions of others²²⁰.

The concept of social intelligence is closely related to the accumulation of social capital in that in order to integrate into a group you need certain skills to adopt or improve so that you are accepted by those around you. In order to retain

²¹⁶ „Până și fenomenul dependenței (...) are legătură cu tulburarea depresivă: numeroase studii au arătat că depresia apare mai frecvent concomitent cu dependența de calculator și de internet, comparativ cu oamenii care au un comportament normal în privința folosirii mediilor digitale.”, in Spitzer Manfred, *Demența Digitală [Digital Dementia]*, translated by Dana Verescu, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing, 2012, p. 230.

²¹⁷ „Este greu de negat că studenții care stau foarte mult în rețea își reduc activitățile în lumea reală și astfel sunt din ce în ce mai izolați social. Cercul vicios cunoscut din tratamentul tulburărilor anxioase, care constă în izolare, anxietate față de legăturile sociale și din nou izolare, este întărită de posibilitățile oferite de internet.”, in *Ibidem*, p. 232.

²¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 171.

²¹⁹ Silman Fatos and Dogan Tayfun, “Social intelligence as a predictor of loneliness in the workplace”, in *The Spanish journal of psychology*, Vol. 16, 2013, p. 2.

²²⁰ See Herbert Marlowe, “Social intelligence: Evidence for multidimensionality and construct independence”, in *Journal of educational psychology*, Vol. 78, No. 1/1986, pp. 52–58.

and accumulate as much social capital as possible, individuals need communication and integration skills so that they can create a reciprocal relationship with those in their environment. Social intelligence consists, as mentioned before, of social skills that are mainly limited to understanding the people and social situations around them. These skills are positively correlated with self-esteem and negatively correlated with anxiety or social isolation. An individual with a social media profile who does not have an “acceptable” level of social intelligence may experience similar problems as in real life. In this sense, a connection can be made between those who have many relationships in the online environment (active users) and those who do not (passive users)²²¹.

The way we accumulate social capital online is different from the offline environment. More specifically, in the offline environment we need certain social qualities to be able to integrate into a group (social intelligence), while in the online environment almost all the knowledge we need adapts for an interaction that is mediated by a screen (although we need a degree of social intelligence also online, most of the time, the effort from this point of view is much lower). The lack of physical interaction, if replaced only by online, can lead to forgetting the most basic social skills. In *The Century of Solitude* (2020), Noreena Hertz, talks about a case that seemed unusual to her. Having a discussion with a professor from a leading university in the United States, she described how she started a “reading the human face” course, after noticing that more and more students coming to college were unable to read expressions during a conversation²²². Nicholas Carr (2012) explains the process by which repetition helps consolidate long-term memory and how, in general, through this process we can acquire more qualities and knowledge. Social intelligence can only develop through exercise: through communication, discussion, involvement in all kinds of social activities, especially face-to-face. Another study demonstrating how interaction between individuals has changed due to online media describes how people who tend to use digital media more have become unaccustomed to smiling or having a functional relationship with strangers (potential actors in their own social network).

The mechanism by which this idea of alienation from the social around us works leads us to the idea that we are so caught up in the online world that we are afraid to interact with our peers, especially because it gives us a familiar and comfortable place from which we hardly want to get out²²³.

²²¹ Ronald Riggio *et al.*, “Social skills and self-esteem”, in *Personality and Individual Differences*, Vol. 11, No. 8/1990, pp. 799–804.

²²² Noreena Hertz, *The century of loneliness. A call to reconnect*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 2021, p. 122.

²²³ John Hunter *et al.*, “The use of smart-phones as a digital security blanket: The influence of phone use and availability on psychological and physiological responses to social exclusion”, in *Psychosom Med*, Vol. 80, No. 4/2018, p. 346.

Sociologist Sherry Turkle gives a very clear example in her book by creating a contradictory phrase: “together alone”. She uses the phrase to describe how online connections are quite weak:

“The links we form through the internet are not, in the end, the links that really connect”²²⁴.

In addition to individuals becoming accustomed to staying in their virtual bubble where relationships are not close and withdrawing from reality, the online environment robs them of the time they could use for actual interactions, of a closer nature and longer duration.

THE DIGITAL WORLD AND CONVERSATION

Sociologist Sherry Turkle has laid out in her career of over 20 years the reasons why everyday conversations are important for relationships between individuals. Today, in the normal rhythm of discussions with those around individuals, certain disruptions have occurred due to the mobile phone. Sherry Turkle, in her book, *Rediscovering Conversation*, gives countless examples of cases where relationships in family, friends and loved ones have moved online, reality, or face-to-face discussions being just a remnant of dialogue between individuals. It describes how the mobile phone and technology in general has reduced man’s self-reflection:

“Our image on Facebook is completely different from how we use avatars in games. I have long studied how digital objects inform how we perceive ourselves and have dedicated many years to researching the psychological influence of role-playing games in the digital environment. The avatars we create in online games (to which we often choose body constitution, physiognomy or even behavioural peculiarities) were not designed to stimulate self-reflection. Or they perform exactly this function. When we build an avatar, you often give it traits that allow us to externalize parts of ourselves that we would like to probe better”²²⁵.

The author also points out that every time we have a free moment of reflection and self-analysis, we flee to the online environment where we look for all kinds of stimulation to hide the fact that we do not know how to communicate with ourselves. The second thing that has been radically changed by the entry of technological spheres into the lives of individuals is the relationship with the family:

²²⁴ See Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together*, New York, Basic Books, 2011.

²²⁵ „Imaginea noastră de pe Facebook este complet diferită de felul în care recurgem la avatarurile din jocuri. Studiez de multă vreme modul în care obiectele digitale ne informează în ce fel ne percepem pe noi înșine și am dedicat numeroși ani cercetării privind influența psihologică a jocurilor de rol din mediul digital. Avatarurile pe care le creăm în cadrul jocurilor online (cărora de cele mai multe ori le alegem constituția corpului, fizionomia sau chiar particularitățile comportamentale) nu au fost gândite cu scopul de a stimula autorefecția. Ori ele îndeplinesc exact această funcție. Atunci când ne construim un avatar, îi conferim adesea trăsături care să ne permită să exteriorizăm anumite părți din noi pe care ne-am dori să le sondăm mai bine.”, in Sherry Turkle, *Redescoperirea Conversației [Rediscovering Conversation]*, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing, 2023, p. 102.

“At a closer look, we seem to live a superlative family life: we can share so many things with the other family members (videos, photos, games, everything in the world). We can be ‘together’ with the family on new levels: in some ways, we are never separated (...) Looking at it differently, however, the role of technology in family life is much more complex than that. As with many aspects of life, we are tempted to stay together, but also apart. At dinner or in the park, parents and children turn their attention to phones and tablets. Conversations that used to be face-to-face are now moving online”²²⁶.

The way we relate to others has become dependent on our online activity. Each virtual touch is wasted time that could have been used to build lasting relationships that benefit one’s own social capital and increase social intelligence.

CONCLUSIONS

This article tried to analyse the phenomenon of social capital accumulation in the online environment. Social capital, an important resource for any individual in society, had to adapt to the new inventions of technology that moved the individual from the physical environment to the virtual one. We emphasize the definition and importance of the concept of social capital, its uses in sociology and its evolvement since the digital revolution. We summarized the major writing on the subject of social capital online, including important theories such as: Internet paradox of Kraut, the directions of Nicole Ellison’s articles and Faucher’s opinion about the influence of major corporations on our social capital. We explored more of the pessimistic side of the effect of the digital world on social capital by highlighting authors like Manfred Spitzer, Noreena Hertz and the big ideas on how much damage the technology has brought into our social lives through authors such as Nicholas Carr and Sherry Turkle.

In this presentation, several points of view were analysed regarding the negative aspects of time spent in the online environment, both by trying to describe the side effects (the “together alone” theory being just one of the most relevant examples), but also the way in which one’s own social capacities are questioned. Starting from the great theories regarding social capital and its importance for the individual, to the analysis of how this concept has evolved with the emergence of new digital media, what I tried to highlight in this article is that in postmodernity we are dealing with major changes in the way we communicate and accumulate social

²²⁶ „La o privire mai amănunțită, părem să trăim o viață de familie la superlativ: putem împărtăși atât de multe, alte lucruri cu membrii familiei (filmulețe, fotografii, jocuri, tot ce este pe lume). Putem fi ‚alături’ de familie pe noi planuri: din anumite puncte de vedere, nu suntem niciodată despărțiți (...) Privind totuși cu alți ochi, rolul tehnologiei în viața de familie este mult mai complex de atât. La fel ca-n alte multe aspecte ale vieții, suntem tentați să stăm împreună, dar și separați. La cină ori în parc, părinții și copiii își îndreaptă atenția spre telefoane și tablete. Conversațiile care înainte se purtau față-n față se mută acum online”, in *Ibidem*, p. 127.

capital. From the analysis of the articles and theories collected, for future endeavours, questions can be exposed such as: Do we still know how to relate today as before? Does social intelligence suffer from excessive use of online media? Is the relationship of social relationships (family, friends or even society) changing with digital development?

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