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Digital Educational Tribes: Platform Algorithms and Students' Academic Identity

Abstract: This article analyzes the mechanisms shaping students' academic identity in the digital age, with a focus on educational platforms as emerging spaces of socialization. It explores the phenomenon of *digital educational tribes* — informal student communities formed around algorithmically curated content on learning platforms. The study examines how services such as Coursera, YouTube, and Google Scholar influence the development of academic identity through individualized learning trajectories, self-socialization styles, and content selection. The methodology combines qualitative interviews and digital ethnography. Central to the analysis is the algorithm as a hidden socializing agent that structurally substitutes the educator in the learning process. The theoretical framework draws on Michel Maffesoli's concept of tribal sociality, Danah Boyd and D. Marwick's theories of digital identity, and the platform-based epistemologies of Manuel Castells and Shoshana Zuboff. The findings reveal that students engage not only with educational content but also with norms of communication, cognitive styles, and algorithmically structured logics of interaction. The concept of *digital educational tribes* is introduced as an analytical model of informal online communities where educational participation is structured not around disciplines, but through algorithmic content selection, knowledge aesthetics, and rituals of inclusion. The key notion of *algorithms as educators* allows for a reconceptualization of technological systems as agents of educational influence, replacing traditional academic institutions in the process of structural interaction. Based on qualitative interviews and digital ethnography, the study shows that students' educational behavior is increasingly shaped as a performative identity oriented toward public recognition, aesthetic engagement, and communicative visibility. The article articulates a critical stance on the risks of fragmentation and the loss of worldview coherence in platform-based education. It proposes theoretical approaches for integrating digital educational culture into the academic context without sacrificing cognitive depth, analytical resilience, or systemic pedagogy.

Keywords: digital educational tribes, algorithms as educators, academic identity, platform-based education, epistemic aesthetics, performative participation, educational fragmentation, cognitive resilience, digital ethnography, self-presentation in educational environments, academic subjectivity, epistemological instability.

Abbreviations:

$TEDx$ is an independently organized conference held in the format of TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design).

Introduction

In the contemporary educational landscape, digital platforms are gaining increasing significance, transforming not only access to knowledge but also the very nature of educational participation, subjectivity, and socialization. Platforms such as Coursera, YouTube, and Telegram communities are evolving from mere technical tools into cultural spaces where students construct their academic selves not through institutional curricula, but through content stylistics, algorithmic recommendations, and social rituals of interaction. This phenomenon gives rise to a new analytical category—digital educational tribes: informal online communities that coalesce around shared modes of thinking, learning choices, and platform-specific aesthetics of knowledge. Within these communities, academic engagement emerges as a style, a public stance, and a fragment of emotional exchange—rather than as a structured mastery of disciplinary systems.

Algorithms play a pivotal role in this environment as pedagogical agents—technological mechanisms that curate content, suggest educational trajectories, model learning pace, and establish norms of academic interaction. These algorithms effectively perform pedagogical functions without pedagogical accountability: they shape knowledge not according to methodological logic, but based on criteria of popularity, visual appeal, and emotional feedback. Despite evident advantages—flexibility, accessibility, personalization—platforms generate risks of fragmentation, diminished cognitive endurance, and the substitution of learning with stylized participation. Students engage in education through aesthetic impulses, interface convenience, and communicative rituals, distancing the learning process from its foundational nature—methodological, rigorous, critical, and intellectually demanding.

The novelty of this study lies in the introduction and conceptualisation of the phenomenon of digital educational tribes as a new analytical category for understanding the transformation of students' academic identity in platform-based education. While previous research has primarily focused on the digitalisation of learning processes and algorithmic personalisation, this study identifies algorithms as hidden educators—agents that shape students' epistemological behaviour, aesthetic preferences, and cognitive patterns. It proposes a theoretical framework that reinterprets algorithmic curation not merely as a technological feature but as a form of social pedagogy that replaces traditional educational mediation. The research also introduces an interdisciplinary synthesis between Maffesoli's neo-tribalism, digital ethnography, and algorithmic governance, revealing how students' educational participation is increasingly aestheticised and performative, forming identity through visibility and ritualised communication rather than academic mastery.

The subject of the study is the influence of platform algorithms and the socio-aesthetic mechanisms of digital educational tribes on the formation of students' academic identity, motivation, and patterns of educational participation.

The object of the study is the process of academic socialisation of students in the digital educational environment, determined by the structural logic of online platforms.

The study aims to identify the mechanisms through which students' academic identities are formed within digital educational tribes, to analyze the role of algorithmic influence and the social aesthetics of platforms, and to critically reflect on the challenges posed by fragmentation,

loss of systemic coherence and intellectual resilience, and the replacement of epistemological depth with symbolic representations of participation and the aestheticization of knowledge.

The research objectives include:

- identifying the typical features of educational participation within digital educational tribes;
- uncovering the functions of algorithms as structures of pedagogical selection and transmitters of social norms;
- analyzing motivational, aesthetic, and ritual factors influencing students' educational choices;
- revealing conflicts between platform flexibility and the demands of academic coherence, disciplinary depth, and professional endurance;
- formulating a pedagogical approach for integrating platform-based education without compromising academic criticality.

Methodologically, the article is grounded in digital ethnography and qualitative interviews, which enable the reconstruction of students' experiences not only as users but also as participants in social ecosystems. The theoretical framework draws upon M. Maffesoli's concept of tribal sociality, Danah Boyd and D. Marwick's theories of digital identity, and approaches to the structural power of algorithms as articulated in the works of M. Castells and S. Zuboff.

The findings may be of value to researchers in digital education, educators, platform designers, and theorists of the social environment of online learning.

Methods

The research employed a combination of general scientific and specialised empirical methods consistent with the interdisciplinary nature of the topic.

At the general scientific level, the study was grounded in a systematic approach that enabled the author to analyse the phenomenon of digital educational tribes as a complex socio-cultural system integrating technological, communicative, and pedagogical components. The dialectical method allowed the identification of contradictions between flexibility and fragmentation, accessibility and loss of academic coherence, as well as between algorithmic automation and human cognitive autonomy. Structural-functional analysis was used to reveal the dual role of algorithms as both technical mediators and socialising agents. Comparative analysis enabled the juxtaposition of traditional academic education with platform-based learning models to identify epistemological shifts in the understanding of knowledge, learning, and academic identity. Hermeneutic interpretation provided the conceptual basis for understanding symbolic meanings, rituals, and aesthetics inherent in platform communication, which function as markers of belonging within digital tribes.

At the specialised level, the research relied on the methods of digital ethnography and semi-structured qualitative interviews with 270 students from Ukrainian and international universities actively engaged in online educational platforms such as Coursera, YouTube, Google Scholar, and Telegram channels. Digital ethnography facilitated the observation of behavioural patterns within platform communities—commenting, liking, sharing certificates, and collective course participation—allowing the identification of tribal markers of social belonging and symbolic interaction. The interview method provided insights into students' motivational structures and

perceptions of academic authority in algorithmic environments. Thematic analysis was subsequently applied to classify recurring patterns of meaning, drawing upon engagement theory and social constructivism (*Jensen et al., 2022*; *Toquero, 2021*).

The integration of qualitative methods ensured both the validity and interpretive depth of the findings. This methodological framework enabled the author to reconstruct academic identity formation as a performative and aesthetic process shaped by algorithmic curation, peer interaction, and the aesthetics of digital self-representation. Thus, the study combined philosophical analysis, sociological observation, and empirical verification to capture the multi-layered logic of education in the age of algorithmic mediation

Literature Review

The rapid platformisation of higher education has drawn the attention of numerous scholars who analyse how digital technologies transform pedagogical communication, cognitive behaviour, and the epistemology of learning. Aagaard (*2021*) conceptualises the student as a *customer* within a commodified educational ecosystem, arguing that platform logic redefines the learner's role as a consumer of algorithmically filtered knowledge. Bonilla (*2022*) extends this argument by describing education as a *service economy*, where learning becomes embedded in mechanisms of attention and engagement rather than cognitive depth.

Maffesoli's (*1996*) theory of *neo-tribalism* provides the sociological foundation for understanding the phenomenon of *digital educational tribes*. He argues that late-modern society is structured around emotionally cohesive micro-communities united by shared aesthetics and rituals. Hardy, Bennett, and Robards (*2018*) adapt this concept to the digital sphere, emphasising the fluidity and performativity of online communities. Vorobjovas-Pinta (*2021*) further deepens this perspective, showing that tribal belonging in digital contexts is maintained through symbolic boundaries and collective rituals—principles directly relevant to educational platforms.

The epistemological aspect of algorithms as agents of socialisation has been explored by Introna (*2016*), who describes the *governmentality of algorithms* as a new mode of academic regulation. Kitchin (*2017*) complements this view by revealing how recommendation systems construct cognitive enclaves and "echo chambers," while Williamson and Eynon (*2024*) identify the *hidden curriculum* of algorithmic personalisation that shapes learning pathways subconsciously. Gallagher, Breines, and Blaney (*2020*) highlight that algorithmic pedagogies redefine the balance between automation and student agency in post-pandemic education.

From the psychological and motivational perspective, Bourdieu's (*1984*; *1986*) theory of *symbolic capital* and Ryan and Deci's (*2000*) *self-determination theory* explain why visibility, recognition, and performative participation become key motivators in digital learning environments. Students accrue symbolic capital through certificates, likes, and public self-presentation (*Lawler, 2011*; *Lebaron, 2013*), turning educational achievement into a social performance.

Selwyn (*2019*) and König and Wenzel (*2023*) warn that such aestheticisation of education may erode methodological consistency, substituting analytical rigour with engagement metrics. Their findings align with Bonilla's (*2022*) notion of *educational commodification*, where platforms prioritise interactivity over depth.

In methodological terms, digital ethnography (*Jensen et al., 2022*; *Toquero, 2021*) emerges as an effective approach to studying these transformations, as it captures authentic practices of engagement, symbolic exchange, and algorithmic mediation within online communities. Rush Dreker and Downey (*2023*) also stress the significance of cultivating a *digital academic identity* as part of career development, reinforcing the necessity to understand identity as both performative and relational.

Thus, the reviewed literature demonstrates that modern education is being restructured by algorithmic, aesthetic, and social logics. Existing studies address individual elements—algorithmic bias, motivation, or social belonging—but lack a unified model integrating these components. The present research bridges this gap by conceptualising digital educational tribes as a complex synthesis of algorithmic pedagogy, symbolic sociality, and aesthetic communication. It thereby extends current theoretical discourse by redefining educational identity as an algorithmically mediated and performatively enacted construct, situated within the broader transformation of digital culture (*Papacharissi, 2010*; *Marwick, 2013*).

Results

Algorithms as hidden agents of socialization

In the digital educational environment, recommendation algorithms—e.g., on platforms such as Coursera, YouTube, and Google Scholar—perform not only the technical function of content selection but also a socializing role that often remains unnoticed. They shape educational trajectories, influence academic interests, and even affect students' perceptions of themselves as subjects of knowledge.

This effect can be compared to the concept of hidden pedagogy or hidden curriculum—that is, the implicit transmission of norms, values, and expectations through the structure of the educational environment rather than through formal content. In the case of algorithms, this is manifested in the fact that they:

- amplify popular topics, reducing the visibility of niche or critical directions;
- create echo chambers of academic content, where the student sees only what already corresponds to their previous actions;
- shape the idea of "quality knowledge" through view metrics rather than academic depth.

As noted in the study *The Hidden Curriculum of Algorithms: How Personalization Shapes Learning Pathways* (*Williamson & Eynon, 2024*), algorithms can narrow cognitive horizons, reinforce biases, and reduce diversity of thought in the learning process. This creates a hidden pedagogy in which the student learns not only content but also norms of behavior, styles of thinking, and algorithmic logic.

In this context, the algorithm emerges as a "hidden educator"—an agent without a face, yet possessing structural power over what the student sees and learns. As Gallagher, Breines, and Blaney (*2020*) point out, automation in education changes the very nature of pedagogy, creating new forms of interaction between the student and the digital environment.

Thus, educational platform algorithms should be considered not only as technical tools but also as hidden agents of socialization that shape academic behavior, identity, and perceptions of

knowledge. Their influence is implicit but systemic—and requires critical reflection within pedagogical theory and practice.

Digital Educational Tribes: Concept and Features

The concept of the "digital educational tribe" is an adaptation of the notion of neo-tribalism proposed by French sociologist Michel Maffesoli. In his work *Le temps des tribus* (1988), translated into English as *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society* (*Maffesoli, 1996*), he describes modern society as fragmented into small, emotionally cohesive groups—"tribes" that unite around lifestyles, symbols, rituals, and shared experience. These communities do not have rigid structures but possess a "state of mind" that defines their internal logic, aesthetics, and behavioral norms.

In the digital educational context, such tribes form around platforms—Coursera, YouTube, Telegram, Google Scholar, and others—where students not only consume content but also interact, identify, and integrate into communities with their own rules, language, and authorities. These tribes exhibit the following features:

- *normativity:* internal rules that regulate communication style, content evaluation, and topic acceptability;
- *language and symbols*: use of terms, memes, and visual codes that mark affiliation;
- *participation rituals*: regular commenting, liking, and participation in joint courses or challenges;
- *inclusion and exclusion*: mechanisms for accepting new members or marginalizing "outsiders";
- *flexible identity*: a student may belong to several tribes simultaneously, adapting their participation style depending on context.

As noted by Hardy, Bennett, and Robards (*2018*), digital tribes are not stable structures but rather temporary zones of sociality that arise around shared interest or emotional experience. In the case of educational platforms, this may involve a course, topic, instructor, or even the style of material delivery.

A critical analysis of neo-tribalism is also provided by Vorobjovas-Pinta (*2021*), who, through an ethnographic lens, shows how space, ritual, and symbolic boundaries shape temporary communities. This allows educational platforms to be viewed as environments of social inclusion, where academic identity is formed not only through content but also through participation in tribal culture.

Thus, the concept of the digital educational tribe enables the description of informal student communities that emerge within platform-based education. They possess their own social logic, which does not always align with academic structure but significantly influences students' identity, motivation, and educational behavior.

Mechanisms of Student Academic Identity Formation

Academic identity is a set of knowledge or skills and the awareness of oneself as a subject within the academic environment, capable of critical thinking, research, and participation in scholarly discourse. In the digital age, this process is increasingly mediated by algorithms that

determine what a student sees, what interests them, and how they position themselves (*Rush Dreker & Downey, 2023*).

On educational platforms, recommendation algorithms (e.g., Coursera, YouTube, Google Scholar) create personalized learning trajectories that do not always align with the academic logic of sequence. Through interaction with content, the student gradually forms an understanding of what is considered "academic", which topics are important, which authors are authoritative, and even which thinking style is acceptable.

This process involves several defining mechanisms:

- *algorithmic selection*: the student sees only those courses, videos, or articles that correspond to their previous actions—creating an "academic echo chamber" effect (*Kitchin, 2017*);
- *fragmentation of knowledge*: instead of a systematic course, the student receives a mosaic of topics, which may complicate the formation of a coherent academic position (*Selwyn, 2019*);
- *platform aesthetics of knowledge*: the style of material presentation (visual, emotional, brief) influences how the student perceives academicity—e.g., a TEDx video may seem more "scientific" than a textual article;
- *interactive socialization*: comments, likes, subscriptions—these are not just behaviors but forms of academic participation that shape a sense of belonging to a community.

As D. Marwick (*2013*) notes, academic identity in the digital environment is performative—the student is not merely learning but acts as a platform participant, demonstrating their engagement, thinking style, and position. This creates a new form of academic subjectivity, formed not in the classroom but in an algorithmically structured environment.

Thus, student academic identity in the digital age is shaped through interaction with algorithms, platform aesthetics, and social mechanisms of participation. It is a complex process in which the student becomes not only a consumer of knowledge but also a participant in a digital academic culture with its own norms, rituals, and logic.

Research Data: Interviews and Digital Ethnography

To identify how students form academic identity within digital educational tribes, qualitative research methods were applied—specifically semi-structured interviews and digital ethnography. These methods allowed for the description of behavioral practices and the interpretation of students' reflective motivations related to educational participation.

Methodology:

- Interviews were conducted with 270 students from Ukrainian and international universities who actively use Coursera, YouTube, Google Scholar, and Telegram channels for self-directed learning;
- The sample included students aged 19–25 from various disciplines (social sciences, humanities, IT, ecology); the most active contributors in educational platform chats were invited to participate;
- Digital ethnography was performed through participant observation in the mentioned educational chats, open course comments, and Discord communities;
- Thematic analysis was applied, based on engagement theory and social constructivism (*Jensen et al., 2022*; *Toquero, 2021*).

Key Observations

Identity through the Platform. The formation of students' academic identity in the digital age increasingly occurs not through institutional context (university, faculty, studied disciplines), but through platform affiliation. This trend reflects a shift in the structure of educational subjectivity, where identity is built on the basis of interaction with the platform, its symbols (certificates, logos, course ratings), and social mechanisms (visibility in the community, comments, likes).

Academic identity in this context performs a performative function: the subject is not merely learning but demonstrates belonging to the educational environment through public rituals (*Marwick, 2013*). Coursera, YouTube, Telegram communities, etc., appear not only as content delivery channels but as spaces of social self-expression, where learning is simultaneously an act, a style, and a symbol.

The concept of "digital self-branding" (*Papacharissi, 2010*) helps to understand how the platform becomes a medium for projecting oneself as an academic subject. Identity is no longer tied to disciplinary logic but to the logic of the environment in which the action takes place. This leads to fragmentation but also enhances agency—the student independently chooses their academic trajectory, supported by visual and social representation.

Among the responses to the question about the components of academic identity, the vast majority indicate a significant shift toward platform-based education.

Below are typical responses to this question:

"It doesn't matter where I study—what matters is that I have a Coursera certificate. It looks solid. I even include it in my resume, though it was a short course" (female student, 24, Lviv).

"I don't consider myself a university student, although I am one. I've been studying through YouTube and Google Scholar for three years. It's my choice" (male student, 22, Kyiv).

"I don't know who taught this course—what matters is that it had good ratings and was trending on YouTube" (female student, 20, Bratislava).

Thus, students form their educational identity not through formal institutions but through platform affiliation.

Algorithmic Trust. The shift in the source of educational authority is a key feature of modern platform-based education. Whereas knowledge was previously acquired through figures such as teachers, scholars, and institutions, today more and more students rely on the algorithm as a structural intermediary that indicates what is worth studying, how it should be presented, and what is considered high-quality.

This phenomenon is described within the framework of the concept of "algorithmic authority" (*Introna, 2016*; *Kitchin, 2017*), which asserts that algorithms—despite lacking subjectivity—generate institutionalized trust, mediated by interface design, popularity, likes, and cultural legitimization. Students perceive recommended content as inherently relevant—which complicates the development of critical thinking and source analysis skills.

A risk of cultural automatism emerges, where educational choices are based on platform logic rather than reflection. This creates a new behavioral norm: if something is shown—it must be worth studying. Academic trust is delegated to technological systems that lack transparency regarding selection mechanisms. This is directly reflected in interview results:

"If a video is in the recommendations—I assume it's worth attention. I don't Google further—it's already verified." (Student, 20, Krakow)

"I'm subscribed to a Telegram channel that shares top courses. The algorithm clearly knows I'm interested in psychology—I get new materials daily." (Student, 21, Ivano-Frankivsk)

Thus, students develop trust in the algorithm as an authority that replaces academic selection and critical inquiry.

Educational Aesthetics and Rituals. In the digital education environment, the aesthetic component of materials (visual style, design, emotional delivery) becomes not just a supplement but a central criterion of educational value for many students. This shift reflects a trend toward the platform-based aestheticization of knowledge—where educational products are evaluated not so much by content as by their mode of representation.

This can be explained through the theory of platform-based knowledge consumption (*Bonilla, 2022*), which describes learning as a cultural practice involving the choice of style, participation rituals, and social symbols. Joint course participation, certificate exchange, and video discussions are formats of interaction that structurally resemble tribal behavior, as described in the concept of "neo-tribes" (*Maffesoli, 1996*).

In interviews, students using these educational resources emphasize the appeal of the aesthetic component, as it aligns with the contemporary information-cultural environment, unlike traditional academic teaching.

"I only take courses that have a beautiful visual cover. If the design is boring—I don't open it. That's important." (Student, 23, Odesa)

"In our group, we agree on which courses to take together. We ask those who've completed them about their impressions and choose the most stylish and vivid ones. Then we exchange certificates. It's already a tradition." (Student, 25, Prague)

"When you earn certificates on Coursera, you feel like you belong to a separate world where everyone strives to move forward." (Student, 22, Edmonton)

We can conclude that aesthetics act as a marker of belonging, and rituals serve as social cement for the educational community. This approach creates a new cultural logic—academicity emerges not through methodological depth but through style, form, and collective participation. Student knowledge consumption relies on aesthetics, shared rituals, and symbols of success, resembling tribal sociality.

Motivation: Visibility and Recognition. Motivation for learning in the digital educational environment is increasingly shaped not by interest in content, but by visibility within the community and public recognition. Educational achievements become part of performative capital they are displayed, published, and evaluated.

This phenomenon is closely linked to Pierre Bourdieu's theory of "symbolic capital" (*Bourdieu, 1984*; *Bourdieu, 1986*), which asserts that social practices of status exchange (in our case—certificates, comments, participation) structure the internal hierarchy of the community. In the digital educational tribe, prestige is earned not only through knowledge but also through activity, publicity, and aesthetic representation of oneself as a participant. Symbolic capital is increasingly in demand in the social environment (*Lebaron, 2013*; *Lawler, 2011*). Below are several testimonies gathered during digital ethnographic expeditions:

"I publish all my certificates on LinkedIn. Even those that lack substance. It's about image, not knowledge." (Student, 22, Ternopil)

"This will be my 15th certificate. It's a real treasure, currency. It's like the time spent learning has been materialized and now has a tangible form." (Student, 23, Berkeley)

This supports the concept of reflexive motivation (*Ryan & Deci, 2000*), where the need for recognition becomes the driving force of action. Learning transforms into a formation of public exposure of the academic self, where content often yields to style and participation rituals.

Concern with image-related aspects, representational assets for the job market, rather than deep professional preparation, is evident in comments left by course participants on digital educational platforms. They also openly express enthusiasm about their belonging to local educational communities.

"I like being part of the community. When I leave a comment—I feel like I'm in the loop. That's more important than just completing the course." (Student, 19, Frankfurt am Main)

These statements point to a sense of tribal belonging, emotional engagement, and collective motivation. Clearly, student motivation is often shaped not by knowledge itself, but by recognition and visibility within educational sociality (*Sheldon & Gunz, 2009*).

This is also confirmed by results of digital ethnography, obtained through methods such as virtual participation and real-time observation on educational platforms, where course participants eagerly share their online learning experiences.

Among the behavioral patterns identified:

- *Participation rituals*: weekly course completion, certificate publication in profiles, lecture discussions in Telegram groups, etc.;
- *Formation of local norms: commenting style* ("speak with arguments," "don't post if you haven't taken the course"), mutual support, material recommendations;
- *Linguistic self-identification*: "I'm a viewer of technical content," "I follow a philosophy channel"—this indicates educational identity as a choice of disciplinary space.

All of this confirms the thesis that students' academic identity today is increasingly constructed not through institutional canon, but through dynamic participation in digital educational tribes.

Thus, reflexive typical examples from interviews and digital ethnography demonstrate that students are not merely learning—they are integrating into an environment where knowledge, thinking style, and social interaction share a common logic defined by algorithms and platform culture.

Platform Logic vs Academic Sequence

Digital educational platforms, especially those relying on personalization algorithms, often operate according to the logic of quick accessibility, entertainment, and fragmented content consumption. This contradicts the traditional principles of academic education, which presuppose methodological consistency, depth of topic exploration, and reflective thinking.

Recommendation algorithms tend to amplify what already "works" in the digital environment: popular courses, short videos, emotional headlines, and interactive formats (*König & Wenzel, 2023*). As a result, students receive an educational experience that resembles cultural consumption more than academic learning.

This paradigm shift has several consequences:

- *Fragmentation of knowledge*: material is not presented linearly but broken into short fragments—complicating the formation of holistic understanding (*Aagaard, 2021*).
- *Loss of epistemological logic*: students often do not realize how topics are interconnected or what underpins the knowledge being taught.
- *Commercialization of learning*: educational content is often designed for engagement rather than pedagogical value, altering the motivational nature of learning (*Bonilla, 2022*).
- *Informational isolation*: students receive content that confirms their interests rather than challenges them intellectually—leading to echo chambers and reduced academic diversity (*Selwyn, 2019*).

One interview respondent noted:

"I like courses where the videos are five minutes long, and you can just skip the unnecessary stuff. I don't need to dive deep—the main thing is that the algorithm gives me something quick." (Student, 21, Kharkiv)

This indicates that platform logic has reshaped perceptions of educational quality, where speed and comfort outweigh depth, structure, and cognitive tension.

Thus, while digital platforms foster tribal sociality, they simultaneously contribute to the de-academization of educational content, creating risks of knowledge fragmentation, superficial thinking, and lowered standards of pedagogical consistency. This challenge requires new forms of theoretical reflection and adaptation of educational strategies to digital logic.

Discussion

The educational environment emerging in the digital age is no longer a neutral backdrop for learning. It becomes an aesthetic and social space where students construct academic identity not only through knowledge but through symbols, rituals, and styles of interaction. Digital educational tribes' communities of like-minded individuals on platforms—provide a sense of belonging, horizontal exchange, and flexible navigation of educational content.

However, this flexibility has a dual nature. On one hand, it opens possibilities for independent thinking, adaptation, and autonomous trajectory formation. On the other—it generates risks of fragmentation, lack of pedagogical and worldview coherence, and the substitution of systematic thinking with stylized participation, where knowledge is not a deep experience but a public gesture. Instead of academic tension—convenience; instead of discussion—comment; instead of structure—intuitive aesthetics.

Educational performativity, based on certificates, reputation, and visibility, may hinder the development of cognitive endurance—the ability to work on complex tasks that lack quick results, visual appeal, or instant recognition. And it is precisely this endurance—working with texts, concepts, data, and unconventional challenges—that underpins professional maturity.

This is also a problem of professional unfitness: real conditions for applying knowledge—production cycles, corporate demands, interdisciplinary conflicts—are not tailored to mood or balanced by aesthetic preferences. There is no room for romanticized learning in a pleasant interface with a programmed loyalty system—instead, there is routine complexity, obligation,

and intellectual challenge. What matters there is not a chat comment but a debate with an opponent; not a like but an argument; not inspiration but structure.

Thus, we face the need to reconsider the role of digital educational tribes: are they a useful supplement to systemic education—or a flawed substitute that undermines academic logic itself? The pursuit of comfort, platform coziness, and tension-free learning is not the strategy that prepares one for the challenges of the real world. It may be a stage of entry into knowledge, but not a paradigm for acquiring it.

This problem is not only pedagogical but also cultural-ontological. Education as thinking, not as style; as labor, not as participation; as immersion, not as a like. This is where the fine line lies—between flexibility and chaos, between self-expression and academic discipline.

Conclusion

The study demonstrated that digital educational platforms do not merely change the way knowledge is accessed—they shape a new logic of educational socialization, where the student is seen not as a bearer of disciplinary systematics but as a participant in a ritual of cognition occurring within aesthetic, algorithmic, and social resonance.

The formation of academic identity in the digital age takes place within platform culture, which offers quick accessibility, comfortable navigation, and visible participation—instead of structured methodology, cognitive tension, and worldview coherence. Education becomes aestheticized and communicative, and simultaneously vulnerable to fragmentation, as the student shifts from a stable academic position to a stylized educational presence.

This situation highlights a critical threshold that cannot be ignored. Digital convenience is not a substitute for intellectual endurance. Educational tribes are horizontal communities, but they do not provide the verticality of development—sequential thinking, argumentation, methodological depth. The pursuit of optimized conditions for knowledge may limit the student's ability to overcome complexity, which is the foundation of professional maturity.

Knowledge acquired within academia is applied not in spaces where the user chooses the genre or interface, but in situations where intellectual discipline is subordinated to production or professional dynamics. There, visual appeal does not prevail—clarity of decision does; not inspiration, but sustained argumentation. This is where the epistemological inadequacy of the platform as a sole educational strategy becomes evident.

The digital educational ecosystem produces not only new tools and formats but also a new typology of academic participation, emerging in the form of digital educational tribes—informal communities united not around discipline but around platform, aesthetics, and interaction style. In these communities, the student plays the role not merely of a knowledge recipient but of a performer of the educational "self," acting publicly, fragmentarily, and within algorithmic resonance.

Digital educational tribes—as community, logic, and technology—may complement academic education, but they do not replace it. Their value lies in mobility, accessibility, and inclusivity—but not in depth, methodology, or cognitive tension. Education as thinking, as labor, as position formation—cannot be built solely on the basis of the platform.

This is where the second key concept arises—algorithms as pedagogues. They are not neutral aggregators—they perform pedagogical selection, shape educational trajectories, set the

rhythm of participation, and define quality through popularity. This is a technical structure that effectively replaces the teacher's function, but without a guaranteed methodological framework, without epistemological responsibility.

This platform–tribe–algorithm triad, while valuable in forming an accessible, intuitive, aesthetic educational model, cannot be the sole paradigm. It does not ensure cognitive endurance, does not cultivate academic reflection skills, and does not teach how to live and think in a world where knowledge is not tailored to convenience.

Fragmentation resulting from platform logic is not merely a technological feature—it becomes an epistemological trap in which the student loses the connection between knowledge and its application. And the algorithm, though convenient, does not teach how to overcome complexity—it merely offers what is most popular. Therefore, platform-based education does not reproduce academic knowledge—it reconstructs it according to the logic of sociality, aesthetics, and algorithmic selection.

Hence, it is necessary to develop a deep scientific-pedagogical theory of integration that will define approaches such as:

- the role digital educational tribes can play in the educational continuum;
- how to ensure the connection between aesthetic participation and methodological systematics;
- how to form an educational culture where flexibility is not an excuse for fragmentation.

Creating a new critical theory of knowledge and a new pedagogy for the digital age will allow us to find adequate correlations between academic teaching and platform-based education.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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