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The Digital Citizen

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The Digital Citizen

As the second part of a two-year exploration of the “Digital Society,” The Digital Citizen locates the individual within the larger societal context through an examination of the political, societal, financial, and ethical consequences of our increasing global adoption of digital technology. Our inquiry will coalesce around several vital topics and corresponding questions:

Freedom of Speech, Ethics, and the New Digital Landscape. How has the internet changed the way we think about free speech? What are the boundaries between free speech and hate speech? How should we respond to ideas that we disagree with or that we find offensive or objectionable, both online and in person (and is there a difference)? Are there traditions in ethics that provide us with some guidance? Is government surveillance a necessary tool to provide safety to its citizens, or does it undermine privacy rights and freedom of speech?

Citizenship and Diversity. How have traditional definitions of citizenship been challenged by the rise of globalization and information technologies like email, the internet, and social media? How and why do individuals and groups, whose lives and identities fail to conform to traditional conceptions of an “American,” struggle against cultural and legal barriers that may reduce their full protection as citizens? How have these struggles over political policies and religious beliefs been waged locally and internationally by netizens?

The Internet, Democracy, and Inequality. Has the internet been good for democracy? Does the decentralized networking power of social media do more to promote positive social change or to fuel “echo chambers” and extreme political polarization? Has the digital revolution served as a great equalizer, or has it instead increased inequality?

Science and Digital Citizenship. What is the evolving role of scientists in educating the general public and policy makers and providing for a means of public discourse in the digital age? Has the internet increased our access to scientific knowledge or has it undermined our access to reliable information? Is the “anti-science” movement eroding our collective ability to address major scientific problems such as emerging epidemics (e.g., Zika), agricultural practices (e.g., GMOs), and the greater health of our planet (e.g., climate change)?