

SUMMARY

In an era of unprecedented global crises—including climate change, migration, and military conflicts—the role of digital and social media has become more critical than ever. These platforms offer real-time access to information and facilitate direct communication, but they also accelerate the spread of misinformation, conspiracy theories, and radical narratives. As individuals navigate these digital landscapes, they form alternative identities, or micro-identities, that challenge traditional political structures and mainstream discourse. This special issue explores the emergence of these digital identities and their implications for social cohesion, political participation, and ideological polarization. This collection aims to fill significant research gaps by analyzing how socio-political upheavals shape identity formation in online spaces. It seeks to explain the mechanisms behind the proliferation of extreme narratives, offering interdisciplinary perspectives on the psychological, social, and political factors driving the spread of radical ideologies. Furthermore, the issue investigates the consequences of these digital identities—whether they foster political activism among marginalized communities or contribute to ideological isolation and societal fragmentation. Key topics include the role of digital platforms in sorting individuals into insular communities, the interplay between online political participation and identity formation, and the impact of structural inequalities in democratic societies on the rise of alternative narratives. By addressing these critical topics, the special issue will engage with scholars and practitioners from diverse disciplines and global regions, ensuring a broad and inclusive dialogue. Contributions will include empirical studies, theoretical papers, systematic reviews, and policy briefs offering evidence-based recommendations for mitigating the spread of extremist narratives. Ultimately, this special issue seeks to advance our understanding of digital identity formation, providing insights into how social media can be harnessed to promote inclusivity and constructive discourse in a time of global uncertainty.