

THE QUEEN OF SCIENCES IN THE BINARY AGE: APPLYING COMTEAN SOCIOLOGY TO DIGITAL LANDSCAPE

Nancy Devinder Kaur

Assistant Professor, Punjabi University

ABSTRACT

This research paper is a bridge between 19th century Social Physics and 21st century Data Science. The researcher has highlighted the applicability of Positivist Approach for the researches in the field of Digital technologies. No doubt August Comte Positivism theory predates the digital computing but it can help in explaining all social and physical phenomena of New Media and AI Algorithm. The paper also highlights the application and importance of empirical researches in the digital era. Auguste Comte has contributed to the development of scientific framework which can explain the effect of digital technologies on the society with functionalistic perspective.

INTRODUCTION:

Auguste Comte is a renowned French philosopher and he credited for inventing sociology as a formal structured discipline. He propagated the use of scientific principles to explain the phenomena of the society rather than religious and metaphysical doctrines. He is widely considered as the 'Father of Sociology'. He is known for redefining the study of Human Society by applying scientific fact based research methods.

Research problem: Modern digital media landscape often lacks a unified philosophical foundation to bridge the gap between technical data science and social theory. Digital media has diffused into all the corners of human lives. These new smart technologies have an inherent quality of convergence. Today, all the communication, information and entertainment technologies are compatible and interactive with each other. The content has many sources and many sources have the same content. With the amalgam of so many digital technologies, there is a need to move beyond speculative analysis of digital behaviour and return to an empirical, fact-based approach that treats digital interactions as measurable phenomena governed by invariant laws. Keeping these facts in view, the researcher has re-examined the concepts given by Auguste Comte in this dynamic digital era.

Significance of Research: This research is significant for scholars in both Sociology and Media Studies. It provides a historical and philosophical justification for data-driven research, proving that classical theories are not obsolete but are essential blueprints for understanding the complexities of global digital interaction.

Objectives of Study:

- To validate the **Law of Three Stages** within the current Information Age.
- To demonstrate how **Digital Altruism** serves as a modern manifestation of Comte's "Religion of Humanity".
- To establish **Social Physics** as a viable framework for predicting social behaviour through data mining and algorithms.

Research Design: The research design for this study follows a **Descriptive and Analytical** approach rooted in the **Positivist Philosophy given by Auguste Comte**. It treats social phenomena as measurable data points similar to the physical sciences.

Isidore Marie Auguste François Xavier Comte Auguste (1798–1857) was a French philosopher who essentially "invented" sociology. He was the first to argue that the study of society should be treated as a rigorous science, just like physics or biology.

Auguste Comte's life was a bit of a rollercoaster—marked by brilliant intellectual breakthroughs, periods of severe mental health struggles. Comte was born in **Montpellier, France**, in 1798. His parents were staunch Catholics and royalists, but Comte was a rebel from the start. He was a mathematical prodigy and attended the prestigious **École Polytechnique** in Paris. However, he didn't graduate; he was expelled in 1816 for leading a student protest against the school's administration.

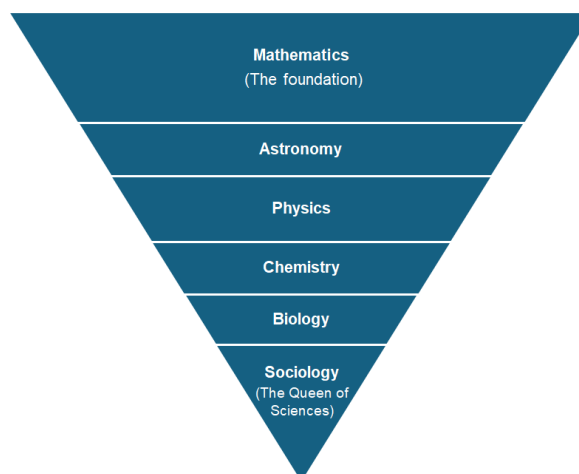
In 1817, he became the secretary to **Henri de Saint-Simon**, a social reformer who heavily influenced Comte's early ideas about "social physics." In 1826, he began a series of public lectures on his "Positive Philosophy."

Comte's most profound contribution is the philosophy of Positivism, Social Physics and Altruism. He strongly believed in studying the social world by using scientific methods as done in physical world.

He propagated following concepts :

- 1) Empiricism: Research must be based on the facts that can be observed, measured and verified.
- 2) Objectivity: Comte focussed on to -driven research works. He believed in the knowledge that is derived from scientific approach rather than philosophy and religious speculations.
- 3) Universal laws: He argued and also believed in social laws that govern the human behaviour as gravity governs the phenomena of physical world.

Auguste Comte's theories were ahead of times. He was a visionary who never lived to see the invention of cinema, television or new media technologies but this approaches are widely applicable to all the fields of Mass Communication. Comte contributed a lot to the discipline of sociology. He is considered the father of sociology because according to him sociology is the queen of sciences. In in the 19th century, Comte arranged various scientific disciplines based on their complexity and degrees to which they depend on each other.



Comte argued that Sociology was the most difficult and significant because it dealt with the most complex variable: human behaviour and society . Digital media and artificial intelligence can be easily considered as a sub discipline of sociology. Both these disciples are deeply rooted in human behaviour and also effect the set up and functioning of society.

The Philosophy of Positivism is being applied here. The are measuring the impact of new technologies empirically. By observing the digital interactions or activities of the users the researchers are predicting the latest culture of the society.

Most of the researches on the cyber laws can be categorized under the discipline of social physics. This concept was given by Comte. He believed that all the social phenomena can be quantified and predicted using invariant laws, much like gravity. This philosophy of his getting validity in this century. With all the latest technologies like computers and internet data mining is getting effortless. The nature of Knowledge is digital and in binary code.

In today's Digital era Comte's Law of Three Stages' is proved to be a blessing. According to these laws the humanity develops when it moves from superstition (Metaphysical) stage to evidence-based Observations (Positivist). In is an Information Age, data is the most important currency. It has data has replaced the intuition. This is leading to Comte's Positivist society. Digital literacy is again one concept that extends the Comte's Philosophy of Positivism. Now, the knowledge is data based and the nature of the society is predicted by understanding the frequency of their digital interactions.

The advent of social media has also contributed towards the formation of positivist society as now researches are data based and the observational research methods are used to study the behavioural patterns. Now-a-days the researchers employ mixed methods approach for doing research. In this approach, both qualitative and quantitative research methods are selected. With computers and internet, the statistical testing of data is possible. Large amount of data can be managed. Unlike The **Payne Fund Studies** (1929–1932) which were a landmark series of 13 investigations into the influence of movies on children and which was criticized for over simplification of the tool and not being able large amount of data.

With all the progressions the users are moving away from "Theological/Superstitious" misinformation toward "Positive/Scientific" verified facts. Building on the concept of positivism Comte gave another concept- Social Physics. This concept extended the his view arguing that the sociology is a scientific study. He said that the society is by invariable laws and these laws can be studies using the same methods as used in natural sciences. The researches on the cyber laws can be categorized under the discipline of social physics. This concept was given by Comte. He believed that all the social phenomena can be quantified and predicted using invariant laws, much like gravity. This philosophy of his getting proved in this century. With all the latest technologies data mining is getting easily manageable.

Apart from this another major theoretical contribution of Comte was that he divided the discipline of sociology into two broad areas: Social Statics and Social Dynamics

- a) Social Statics: This concept deals with holding major institutions of society together. It focuses on creating consensus and harmony in the society. It promotes that societies should glue together for balanced and harmonious existence. This concepts primarily deals with maintaining order in the society.
- b) Social Dynamics: Comte gave a very popular slogan 'ORDER AND PROGRESS'. According to this theory progress must be the development of order. It studies the laws that govern the social change and development.

Both these disciplines aptly apply to the changes occurring in the society with the diffusion of digital technology and artificial intelligence. With the advent of AI the social order and social dynamics both are changing at a very fast pace. For instance when the researchers use "Big Data" to track trending topics, viral loops, or election interference on X (formerly Twitter), they are fulfilling Comte's dream of treating social interactions as measurable

physical data points. With latest digital up gradations like “filter bubbles” create a digital consensus (or lack thereof) that holds a digital society together. It explores the “glue” of the digital organism. social media acts like a glue which is binding people across the globe. People with same thought processes and lifestyle now have an opportunity to bind through digital communities. Computer mediated communication is now new way of intrapersonal, interpersonal and also mass communication. Auguste Comte’s work is arguably more relevant today than at any point since the 19th century. His “Social Physics” has moved from a philosophical dream to a digital reality. Comte’s most prophetic contribution was the idea of **Social Physics**—the belief that human behavior follows mathematical laws that can be discovered through observation. Digitalization of technologies are re-creating Comte’s concepts regarding researches on society.

Every time an algorithm predicts your next purchase or a social media platform maps how a “viral” trend spreads, it is practicing Comtean social physics. We now have the “observational tools” (smartphones, cookies, and sensors) that Comte lacked to actually find the “invariant laws” of human interaction.

Later in life, Comte proposed a “Religion of Humanity” based on Altruism. He is also credited for coining this term in mid 19th century. Comte believed that the main objective of social physics is to work for welfare of the humanity. He said that main goal of life is altruism winning over egoism for the evolution of human race and for the society to be in the state of harmony and consensus. He further opined that as society progresses from theological stage to positive stage, humans become more social and they learn to work for the welfare of the society. As Auguste Comte grew older his views on altruism shifted from purely scientific to deeply spiritual. This is a core pillar of research into **Prosocial Digital Behavior** and **Online Activism**. In present times, researchers study “Digital Altruism”—how social media enables global empathy, crowdfunding for strangers, and collective action. This aligns with Comte’s vision of a society unified by secular, human-centric moral values rather than traditional religious dogma.

Digital media researchers treat the internet as a “global nervous system.” Research on how “nodes” (users) and “links” (interactions) affect the overall “health” of the digital ecosystem is a modern, high-tech version of Comtean Organicism.

Comte’s theories apply to the 21st-century landscape:

Theory	Comte’s Version	Application to digital landscape
Law of Three Stages	Intellectual Evolution	Humanity moves from superstition to science.
Hierarchy of Sciences	Classification of Knowledge	Sociology is the final and most complex science.
Social Statics	Social Order	Study of institutions that maintain stability.
Social Dynamics	Social Progress	Study of how societies evolve over time.
Positivism	Scientific Method	Only observable facts/data lead to true knowledge.

CONCLUSION

Comte provided a robust framework that today allows the researchers to treat digital interactions—such as algorithms, big data, and social media trends—as measurable physical data points.

The transition of society through the **Law of Three Stages** is evidenced by the modern shift from superstitious misinformation toward scientific, verified facts fueled by data-driven insights. Furthermore, Comte's concepts of **Social Statics** and **Social Dynamics** aptly explain how digital media acts as the "glue" for global communities while simultaneously driving rapid social change through artificial intelligence.

Ultimately, the application of **Positivism** in the 21st century proves that human behaviour follows mathematical laws that can now be discovered using modern observational tools like smartphones and sensors. Beyond pure data, Comte's emphasis on **Altruism** finds a new home in "Digital Altruism," where global empathy and collective action align with his vision of a society unified by human-centric moral values. Thus, Comte remains a foundational visionary whose theories provide an essential intellectual blueprint for understanding the complexities of the digital era.

REFERENCES:

1. Amzat, J., & Razum, O. (2014). Sociology and Health. *Medical Sociology in Africa*, 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-03986-2_1
2. Bourdeau, M. (2014). Auguste Comte. *Oxford Bibliographies Online Datasets*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/obo/9780195396577-0246>
3. Guillin, V. (2016). Aspects of scientific explanation in Auguste Comte. *Revue européenne des sciences sociales*, (54-2), 17–41. <https://doi.org/10.4000/ress.3589>
4. Mill, J. S. (1961). *Auguste Comte and Positivism*. University of Michigan Press. <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.12946773>
5. Sacks, K. (2017). Auguste Comte and Consensus Formation in American Religious Thought—Part 1: The Creation of Consensus. *Religions*, 8(8), 147. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel8080147>
6. Stehr, N. (2007). Theories of the Information Age. *The Handbook of Service Industries*. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781847205261.00010>