

## DIGITAL LEADERSHIP: HOW STUDENTS ARE LEADING CHANGE THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

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**Abstract** In the rapidly growing digital age, student leadership is taking on new forms based on technological innovations and digital platforms. This article explores how students use social media, coding, and digital tools to manage initiatives, address Real-world issues, and bring social change to their communities. It presents case studies, research results and expert insights, highlighting how digital leadership gives young people the opportunity to make proactive changes. With more and more access to technology, students around the world prove that leadership is no longer limited to traditional settings, but develops on the internet, breaking down barriers and building bridges for a more inclusive and dynamic future.

**Key words:** *digital leadership, student leaders, social media, coding, digital platforms, student empowerment, online activism*

**Introduction** The leadership concept has undergone profound changes with the advent of digital technology. Traditionally associated with positions on student councils or school clubs, leadership now delves into the digital field, where students are taking the initiative to create increasingly meaningful change. Digital leadership includes a wide range of skills and activities, from conducting awareness campaigns on social media to developing programs that address social or educational issues. Today's students are digital locals who use technology not only for communication or entertainment, but also for innovation, activism and problem solving. According to the World Economic Forum (2023), digital literacy and leadership are some of the best skills needed for the future workforce. In addition, a survey by Common Sense Media (2022) found that 72% of adolescents believe they may differ in the world using digital

tools. These findings suggest that students are not passive consumers of technology, but actively contribute to digital ecosystems. This article examines how students use digital platforms to lead, the challenges they face, and the impact of leadership on society and education.

### **Social Media as a Tool for Student Activism and Leadership**

Social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter (X), TikTok, and YouTube have become powerful tools for student-led activism. These platforms provide a space where students can express their opinions, spread awareness, and mobilize support for a variety of reasons. Notable examples include the Friday for the Future Movement, started by Greta Thunberg and supported by millions of students around the world. Through hashtags, viral videos and online petitions, students have managed to bring climate change to the forefront of global debate (Vahlstrom and Sundberg, 2021). In addition to environmental activism, students have also used social media to promote mental health, racial justice, and gender equality. For example, the #BlackLivesMatter movement saw active participation by student leaders who used Instagram Stories and TikTok videos to share resources, educate their peers, and organize protests (Tufekci, 2020). A study by Auxier and Anderson (2021) at the Pew Research Center found that 46% of adolescents used social media to protect the cause they were interested in. These platforms offer students autonomy and a global audience, allowing them to bypass traditional gatekeepers such as school administration or local media. Social networks also develop collaborative leadership in which ideas are created together and shared in different communities. At the same time, digital leadership in social networks is accompanied by problems such as cyberbullying, misinformation and digital fatigue, which students need to learn to navigate.

### **Coding and Tech Innovation for Social Good**

Another powerful aspect of digital leadership is student involvement in coding and technological innovation. Students who learn programming skills often use them to create apps, websites, or platforms that address societal or educational challenges.

Organizations such as code and girls Code.org gave thousands of students the right to use coding as a tool for leadership and creativity (Saunders, 2020). One of the inspirational cases is Gitanjali Rao, a teenage scientist and child of the year 2020 of time, who used his coding skills to develop programs to solve problems such as cyberattacks and water pollution (time, 2020). Her work shows how technical skills can become an impressive leadership when combined with a desire to help others. Similarly, students participating in hackathons and STEM competitions often collaborate to address issues such as climate monitoring, mental health support, and accessibility for people with disabilities (NCVIT, 2021). Coding also encourages analytical thinking, teamwork, and innovative aspects of leadership. As more schools incorporate computer science into their curriculum, students are gaining tools that bring not only social but also technological change. However, access to coding education remains uneven, often limited to socio-economic and geographical factors (Margolis et al., 2017).

### **Digital Platforms for Organizing and Leading Projects**

Digital platforms such as Trello, Google workspace, Canva, and Slack have enabled students to effectively plan, organize, and manage projects. Student clubs and organizations now rely on these tools to coordinate meetings, set tasks, and promote events. For example, student councils often use Google Forms for voting and feedback, Zoom for virtual meetings, and Canva to create professional graphics (Kimmons & Veletsianos, 2021). In addition, platforms such as Change.org and GoFundMe allowed students to run fundraising and petition campaigns. In one example, a group of High School students in Florida, via GoFundMe for \$50,000, provided laptops for peers who could not afford distance learning during the covid-19 pandemic (Edweick, 2020). These digital tools not only simplify operations, but also teach students important leadership skills such as delegation, time management, and digital communication. The Edmodo and Microsoft Teams were also prominent in education, allowing students to co-conduct class discussions, share resources, and facilitate peer learning. As education



becomes more and more hybrid, digital leadership through these platforms is essential to ensure inclusiveness and participation.

### **Case Studies: Student Digital Leadership in Action**

Several student-led initiatives reflect the power of digital leadership: Secret rival: founded by former college athlete Victoria Garrick, this student-led organization uses social media to eradicate mental health in sports. It provides resources, conducts webinars, and shares stories that reach thousands of students (Garrick, 2021). STEMettes: an effort to encourage UK-based girls to pursue careers in STEM by offering workshops, mentoring and online resources. Founded by Anne-Marie Imafidon, it gives student ambassadors the right to lead in their local community (STEMettes, 2022). Hack Club: a global network of high school coding clubs that support student-run hackathons and coding projects. It offers a digital platform for students to collaborate, share code and receive mentorship (Hack Club, 2023). These case studies show how students use digital tools not only to express ideas, but also to generate long-term impact through structured leadership initiatives.

### **Challenges in Practicing Digital Leadership**

While digital leadership offers many opportunities, it also presents unique challenges. The pressure to maintain an online presence can lead to stress and burnout. Additionally, students often face issues like online harassment, privacy concerns, and the spread of misinformation (Livingstone & Byrne, 2018). Access to technology is another major obstacle. According to UNESCO (2021), more than 60% of students in developing countries have no access to trusted internet or digital devices, creating a digital divide that limits participation in online leadership. Schools must address these differences by investing in infrastructure and teaching. In addition, ethical considerations such as digital citizenship, data privacy, and online etiquette must be integrated into educational systems to prepare students for Responsible Leadership (Ribble, 2011). Without proper guidance, even well-intentioned digital initiatives can have unintended negative consequences.

## Future Implications of Student Digital Leadership

As technology continues to evolve, digital leadership becomes increasingly important in shaping the future. Artificial intelligence, Virtual reality and blockchain offer new boundaries for student leaders to explore. For example, virtual student governments or AI-based tutoring platforms can revolutionize how leadership is used in schools (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2017). Schools and universities must develop digital leadership by offering digital literacy courses, encouraging student-led technology projects, and collaborating with technology organizations. Teachers should also be trained to effectively support and mentor digital leaders (ISTE, 2020). Digital leadership is not a replacement for traditional leadership, but a strong extension of it. Students who have learned to lead in the digital space are better prepared for a modern workplace where distance cooperation, technological fluency and Social Impact are highly valued (LinkedIn Learning, 2022).

## Conclusion

Digital leadership gives students the opportunity to transform ideas into action using technology. Through social media, coding, and project management tools, students are leading important issues ranging from climate change to education reform. These young leaders do not wait for the future—they are creating it. As teachers and policymakers, we must support and equip them with the tools, knowledge and opportunities necessary for their development. The future belongs to those who control it, and today's students prove that they are ready to take the reins.

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