



The “new space” of homo digitalis: Questioning humans in the digital age

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><i>Keywords:</i> homo digitalis new space technology human digital culture</p>	<p>This study aims to address two main theses. First, this study focuses on the question of how technology and digitalization create people who cannot be separated from technology, called homo digitalis. Second, this study seeks to open a discourse of “new space” that is different from the real space created by homo digitalis. By using the method of literature review, this study is expected to lay the foundation for scientific studies on digitalization and the formation of new spaces in the era of digital technology. The results of the study refer to two basic arguments. First, homo digitalis is not just a user of technology. He exists through and in digital machines. That is, he exists in the confinement and governmentality of digital technology. Second, the new space created by homo digitalis is very different from real space. This does not mean that the new space is not real, but the new space is considered real even though it is telepresent. This study is the basis for redefining space and human existence in the digital world.</p>

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Introduction

Modern humans exist via gadgets. It is not an exaggeration if humans as wise creatures with their minds (*homo sapiens*) have to shift to creatures that exist through gadgets (*homo digitalis*). *Homo digitalis* does not only explain how close humans are to gadgets. Its existence is attached to the act of running the device machine itself such as browsing and chatting. I am browsing and chatting, so I exist. Gadgets become an inseparable part of life as a modern human (Hardiman, 2021). In the end, the mode of being of humans cannot be determined absolutely by the thinking system as Descartes stated but is determined by how many clicks on smart machines we do every day. In the end, it must be recognized that human existence exists through continuous engagement with the digital world (Montag, 2018).

We now live in a digital society. While this has occurred progressively, major changes have been wrought by the introduction of devices and platforms over the past decade in particular (Lupton, 2015). Society is increasingly digitalized and connected, with computers and algorithms mediating much of people's daily activity in one way or another. Digital technologies have become ubiquitous and part of everyday life. Things that would have been regarded as science fiction just a few decades ago are taken for granted, such as modern smart phones, global information networks or virtual reality (Dufva & Dufva, 2019).

Since waking up in the morning, humans have been connected to their respective gadgets. It seems excessive to explain that *homo sapiens* will soon switch to *homo digitalis*. However, this argument has a basis when gadgets or smartphones have become the existence of human thinking

capacity. *Homo digitalis* is no longer an I think as described by Descartes, but an I browse. Humans think through the internet (Hardiman, 2018).

This study aims to re-question and explain the discourse of the new space built by *homo digitalis*. The new space of *homo digitalis* is a space that is very different from the actual reality. The new space in question is not a free space where the subject can determine its own reality. The new space in question exists within the confines and traps of digital algorithms that allow the creation of a "new" reality, namely the reality of digital society.

Optimists argue, as Christian Fuchs (2019) writes, that "digital technologies have radically transformed the world, promising new forms of community, alternative ways of knowing and feeling, creative innovation, participatory culture, networked activism, and the seedbed of democracy." The pessimists argue, Fuchs continues, that "digital technologies do not bring positive change at all, but rather exacerbate the depth and expansion of domination through new forms of control, such as networks of authoritarianism, digital dehumanization, alienation 2.0, networks of exploitation, and the rise of a surveillance society" (Nugroho et al., 2019).

Method

This study is a literature study. Literature study is a method of collecting library data by reading and recording, and managing research data objectively, systematically, analytically, and critically (Snyder, 2019). The primary reports used in the literature may be verbal, but in the vast majority of cases reports are written documents. The types of scholarship may be empirical, theoretical, critical analytic, or methodological in nature. Second a literature review seeks to describe,

summarize, evaluate, clarify and/ or integrate the content of primary reports (Cooper, 1988).

Literature study can be achieved by collecting references consisting of several previous studies, then compiled to draw conclusions (Mardalis, 1999). This study was carried out in several stages, namely (Kulthau, 2002) Select a theme, Exploration of information Determination of research direction, Collecting data sources, Presentation of data, Compiling reports (Kulthau, 2002). The data analysis technique uses the content analysis method which can be used to obtain valid inferences and can re-examine according to context (Krippendoff, 1993). Data analysis is carried out by selecting, comparing, combining, and sorting so that relevant data is found (Snyder, 2019).

Results and Discussion

Homo digitalis

Rafael Capurro in his book *Homo Digitalis* (2017), explains how the development of digital techniques today has required contemporary philosophy to rethink ontology, anthropology, and ethics in the digital age. Here we will focus more on anthropology. This major change in communication has certainly changed not only human lifestyles, but also human understanding of reality, of the self, and also of good and bad (Hardiman, 2018).

In pre-digital society, Aristotle called humans *zoon logon echon*, creatures that use language. That is, at that time the speaker was physically and realistically present to the listener. In the digital era, both are telepresent. Humans are just a component of the communication media system. He seems to use the media, but in fact he himself is the medium of communication, because in an anonymous network of digital

communication humans are only channelers of messages from the internet of things. This media-controlled, media-functioning, and digital-technology-adapted creature may be called *homo digitalis* (Hardiman, 2018; 2021).

Being in the www

To borrow F. Budi Hardiman (2021), humans are in - *www* - *sein*, i.e. being in the *www*. The word *Welt* (world) has been replaced with *www* (*Welt-weit-Web*). The *Welt* in Heidegger's ontology is also a medium for *Dasein* (self-consciousness) to project itself. Humans in the digital era are "in" (*In Sein*), that is, at home with digital entities such as YouTube, Instagram, Twitter and Facebook (Hardiman, 2020).

In the class, when I ask students a question, the first thing they do is open their devices to Google to find the answer. Not long after, they answered what was asked. As a result, the answers they give depend on the availability of options on the device screen. This means that the answer depends on the finger that clicks on each selected article title. There are no more answers that come from conceptual elaboration, which is usually born from the treasury of knowledge from reading credible sources. This means that the answers put forward are the choice of gadget machines that are only expressed through human seamlessness. In the end, the discourse in the classroom is no longer filled with conceptual discourse that comes from the elaboration of concepts that come from the depth of someone reading books in the library. The discourse that is built usually comes from the elaboration of various writings obtained via browsing, from "trash" writing to quality writing.

Perhaps it is not so fair if this example is only aimed at students. To not be considered one-sided, it must be recognized that some educators (lecturers) also still use the "power"

of devices that provide various choices of writing on the screen in making teaching materials or other academic materials. This means that the choice of materials and conceptual frameworks may depend on the availability of materials provided on our screens. This certainly cannot be generalized, but this reality is not impossible. In simpler terms, it can be said that the choice of diction and concepts between educators in areas with internet access and more sophisticated device quality is certainly different from educators in villages with limited internet access.

We are thrown into a digital world where our choice of diction, arguments, concepts, ideals, and emotions are “driven” by the software. We create a space where our concepts and arguments are not born in libraries and scientific discussion rooms. Our arguments no longer come from the discourse built with discussion partners. As a result, we seem to actively convey concepts or arguments that have been provided by search engines such as Google (Paul, 2023; Subiyanto, 2021).

The conception of *homo digitalis* is in the power of the digital machine algorithm, and we are in its confinement. Pasquale (2015) explains: “Just as we are treated algorithmically (i.e., a set of patterned numbers based on machine recognition), we are conditioned to treat others in the same way.” Thus, in the context of third-party technology and the internet, these algorithmic subjects are ‘surrounded by systems of prediction and control’. One of the consequences is that algorithmic subjects are trained or disciplined in self-promotion strategies.

The subjects in education are no longer free and autonomous in themselves. He is connected to a complex system of machines, which he himself does not realize. The provision of various applications makes

people seem to have no other choice but to communicate. Luhmann (1997) even explains that it is not people who communicate, but “communication communicates with communication”. This means that the concepts and arguments that come out of each person are not entirely from the messenger. If seen carefully, for example, the provision of instant messages and various emojis in the WhatsApp application illustrates how the machine has produced messages that we ultimately choose as our choice.

Not only the diction and concepts of knowledge, emotions and other things are affected by the availability of apps on smart machine screens. Anyone can create a video and image review explaining a tragedy without any emotions and tears falling. This means that human emotions are uprooted from the actual reality. A disaster or a tragedy is packaged in a video and shared just to get followers or clicks from others. This means that there are no tears to be shed but rather a “modification” of the emotion of the tragedy in order to serve another purpose. It is like people feeling really loved just because there is an “I love you” message on the WhatsApp application, even though in fact it is the opposite.

In cyberspace people are not just dealing with technological devices but immersing all their senses and bodies into the interactive environment built by digital technology. In other words, wealth creates new experiences with an essentially limitless degree of realism. With the amplification of information, enrichment also offers new qualities to physical phenomena experienced daily, such as telepresence (Supeli, 2010).

A “new” space

Existing via gadgets ultimately creates a “new space” that is completely different from the previous space and communication

patterns. Jean Baudrillard, in the late 20th century, built the concept of simulacra to explain how humans live in a reality where reality is replaced by symbols (Baudrillard, 1995). The new space in question is a space where texts, images and videos are considered a reality. Texts, images and videos seem to really happen, and we seem to recognize that what is presented on the screen of our devices is reality.

People no longer talk about how texts, images and videos actually happened. It no longer matters whether texts, images and videos are created from real events. Humans began to simplify everything because it was considered efficient and costless. As a result, human existence began to shift from homo rationale (thinking creature) to homo digitalis (digital creature). Homo digitalis explains how the human way of being is characterized by subjects who only rely on their fingers to “click” without giving more space to the ratio to criticize a text, image and video (Hardiman, 2021).

Since waking up in the morning, students have been in touch with gadgets. When asked about what the first thing to look for when opening their eyes in the morning, students simultaneously answered that what they were looking for was gadgets. People seem to feel close, monitor each other, and feel loved even though in cyberspace, with rules that have been determined by the smart machine itself. Technology prepares communication tools with various options, and we are “forced” to follow the predetermined rules. This means that what is called reality is a relationship of signs whether texts, videos and images. This is the “new space” created by humans in the modern era.

Discussion tasks given by lecturers are simplified with discussions via technology applications such as Zoom and Google Meet. This means that everyone can be inactive and only show their face as a way

to be considered present in the discussion in question. Discussion and cross-opinion to get an insightful idea will be replaced with the answer “OK” for the sake of effectiveness and saving time. Libraries and discussion rooms that have been prepared by the campus are like ghost houses without residents because reading and discussion activities have changed to virtual space. We are simplifying academic interactions and at the same time we are losing the academic value that is usually built from a live debate or discussion. This means that digital capitalism has usurped the world of education and placed some of the most sensitive social learning processes at the mercy of a proprietary market logic, (Schiller, 2000).

The presence of gadgets makes everything available with just one click. Humans consider that the smart machine seems to be a “messiah” in answering various life challenges in the world of education. The reproduction of glorious narratives about the Industrial Revolution 4.0 or Artificial Intelligence (AI) seems to be fantasized like *Deus ex Machina*. The emergence of “God out of the machine (artificial intelligence),” is a form of neo-fetishism ala algorithmic subjects in society for fantasies of freedom, justice, and human welfare in the era of digital capitalism (Nugroho, 2021).

Conclusion

This study is in the line of trying to reconsider the fact that humans have lived and carried out their “existence” in digital technology. There are several basic theses that can be taken as conclusions from this study. First, the very rapid presence of digital technology makes humans not only accept but live as homo digitalis. Humans are and live their lives as creatures that cannot be separated from digital technology. Second, the presence of homo digitalis creates a new

space. The new space in question is a virtual space that is different from the original reality. However, in philosophical reflection, the new space is even considered more real than the real space experienced by humans before technology and the internet were created. Third, homo digitalis is not only present as a user of technology but lives its existence as a human being through digital technology. This means that humans are not only users but exist and are inseparable as digital beings (homo digitalis).

The reflective question is whether we are still willing to “drown” in the rhythm of the massive digital world? We don’t have to open two hands while clapping and accepting “smart machines” as the regulator of the entire human life system. We have to admit that digitalization has not only positive but also negative impacts. We certainly don’t want to fall into algorithmic enclaves where subjects drown in the vortex of their own world as a result of market algorithms that continue to attack digital humans with content based on consumptive action patterns (Lim, 2017).

Declaration of Ownership

This article is our original work.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest to declare in this article.

Ethical Clearance

This study was approved by the institution.

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