

Digital Humanism: A Paradigm for Inquiries in Humanities and Social Sciences

PHD Lanto Charlys RASOANILANA, Department of Communication, Mediation, Media, and Organization

Abstract

This article scrutinizes the emergence of digital humanity in contemporary society, focusing on the transformations, ethical considerations, and inequalities prompted by the rapid advancement of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Employing a socio-cognitive approach, the authors delve into the writings of Milad Doueihi on digital humanity, considering this concept as an adaptation of scholarly discourse to the digital culture. The research also draws upon the works of Paul Mounier and Olivier LeDeuff to contextualize the changes in humanities and social sciences in response to the ascent of the digital era.

Special emphasis is placed on digital humanism, a fourth paradigm defined by Doueihi, which explores how the digital realm influences human behaviors and shapes new identity constructions. The researchers examine digital practices, highlighting the complexity of digital identity as a self-projection in a digital space, distinct from traditional identity. The methodology incorporates statistical data and narrativized interviews, providing a holistic perspective on social phenomena related to the digital domain.

The results illuminate the deconstruction of collective imagination by the digital realm, with a focus on changes in communication and the co-construction of social reality. A concrete example is examined in the field of education, revealing the challenges of adopting new pedagogical methods related to digital humanity.

Finally, the article addresses the issue of technological determinism, underscoring how digital advancements redefine norms and social behaviors. The researchers advocate for a profound ethical reflection to guide these transformations, emphasizing the risks of digital inequalities associated with access to technologies.

Keywords: *Digital Humanity, Digital Humanism, Digital Identity, Deconstruction, Education, Technological Determinism, Digital Inequalities*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Notion of Humanity: Current State of Affairs:

The concept of humanity is not commonplace in the field of research in the social sciences. Notable works involve the positivism of Auguste Comte, a foundational sociological perspective suggesting that social facts can be scientifically explained through observations and experiments. Consequently, the sociologist associates the notion of sociology, a science denoting social phenomena, with that of humanity, proposing a thought system where man cannot be studied in isolation as he belongs to an external entity, namely humanity. Comte asserts that "man himself is, in essence, a pure abstraction; only humanity is real, especially in the intellectual and moral order" or "Man himself does not exist; only humanity can exist since our entire development is owed to society" (Comte, 1854). This positivism laid the groundwork for numerous studies on society and social phenomena, abstracting the individual and encompassing him in a collective whole. In this sense, humanity can refer to the notion of society or civilization. However, it is essential to distinguish it from the homeland or belonging to a specific social group. Humanity does not refer to a simple collectivity but, like the concept of Man with a capital M, it encompasses all humans. Hence, it can be related to the notion of human rights, stating that every human being, by virtue of their human nature, possesses inalienable rights. Thus, by our very essence, we belong to humanity.

This concept, however, is quickly set aside in the social sciences due to its overly philosophical branches. Comte and other authors turn their focus to humanity in opposition to the concept of God and, more particularly, explore humanity's connection with religion. Other researches addressing the notions of the science of humanity tend to

contrast the human with the animal (Bourdeau, *Science de l'homme ou science de l'Humanité*, 2002), delving into issues concerning biology and philosophy.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS:

II.1. Authors Dealing with the Concept of Digital Humanity:

For the historian Milad Doueihi, Digital Humanity "is the common term qualifying the multiple and diverse efforts of adapting the scholarly world to the digital culture" (Doueihi, 2011). The invasion of digital technology into almost all human activities has thus rapidly given rise to the terms "digital humanities," "digital humanities," or even "digital social sciences," characterizing practices related to the digital realm. In his works, Paul Mounier questions the future of humanity and humanism in the upheaval of human connections concerning technology or politics in our digital era (Mounier, 2018). On the other hand, research led by Olivier LeDeuff highlights the turning point that digital takes as a research field, questioning its subdisciplinarity or transdisciplinarity in the humanities and social sciences. The digital realm is an immense labyrinth of collective knowledge, organizing exchanges and weaving networks as diverse as they are significant, challenging the practices of the social sciences themselves because, indeed, "the rise of the digital impacts all phases of scientific work and production" (Olivier Le Deuff and Frederick Clavert, 2014). These studies demonstrate the transformation of professions in social sciences caused by regular technical innovations: from research itself, dealing with increasingly massive data, to the writing and publication of research. The digital realm, therefore, is perceived here as a set of tools useful to the researcher to carry out their research. The questions posed relate to how to transmit these digital skills in the humanities. The term digital humanity thus pertains to the scientific and epistemological sense, with the paradigm being methodological.

II.2. Digital Humanism:

The subsequent interest pursued in this research requires delving into humanism in the classical sense of the term, referencing the works of the historian Milad Doueihi. Drawing on Levi Strauss's three humanisms as a starting point, he establishes the foundations of a fourth humanism: "the aristocratic humanism of the Renaissance, anchored in the discovery of classical Antiquity texts; the bourgeois humanism of exoticism, associated with the discovery of cultures in the East and the Far East; finally, the democratic humanism of the 20th century, that of the anthropologist, which encompasses all activities of human societies." (Doueihi, 2011).

This fourth humanism is digital and explores the evolution of societies in the face of digital technology and its ability to influence human actions and behaviors. The notion of religion resurfaces here, as he aligns the digital with religion, highlighting that both are "techniques of mediation and communication that, each in its own way, alter the relationships between individuals and society and establish a new ethical dimension capable of influencing and shaping actions and behaviors." (Doueihi, 2008). Just as we convert to religion, disrupting our habits and behaviors, we convert to the digital, producing specific behaviors. To grasp how digital practices transform the human relationship with the world, he proposes the method of digital humanism to comprehend the complexity of this digital civilization.

The human, in the classical sense of the term, is often relegated to the background in a society strongly influenced by technology. Digital technology transforms the practice of sciences themselves, but in this process, man himself is transformed, and by extension, humanity. Digital practices undoubtedly cause a mutation in the humanities and their understandings, but they also lead to mutations in human representations of the world. The paradigm of digital humanism can be defined as a particular approach to explaining, apprehending, and understanding social phenomena related to the fields of social sciences such as communication, anthropology, or sociology. This method directs inquiries related to digital transformation beyond being just a scientific construction method for establishing technical advancements in scientific data collection and publication. It is also a paradigm and a school of thought with the capacity to provide insights into the mutations of human relationships and identity constructions.

This theory of digital humanism will primarily methodologically frame the reflective analyses discussed in the research results.

II.3. Statistical Data and Narrativized Interviews:

The collection of data in the realm of humanities and social sciences constitutes a crucial step in the research process aimed at deepening the understanding of social phenomena. Among the most commonly employed methods are questionnaires and narrativized interviews, each bringing unique perspectives to the analysis. Questionnaires, in the

form of structured surveys, provide a robust quantitative foundation by enabling the statistical measurement of specific variables. This approach is particularly useful for obtaining data that is generalizable on a large scale. We opted for multiple surveys targeting teachers in humanities and social sciences (SHS), totaling 19, as well as researchers in SHS and students.

Simultaneously, narrativized interviews adopt a qualitative approach, offering researchers the opportunity to gather rich and contextualized narratives. These interviews encourage participants to share their experiences in detail, thus facilitating the understanding of complex social dynamics and subjective factors. Combining these two methods allows for a holistic approach, enriching the scope of sociological research by capturing both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the studied social phenomena. This integrative approach enhances the robustness of the analysis, contributing to a better understanding of realities.

III. RESULTS:

III.1. New Identity Constructions in Connection with the Digital: Toward New Habits

The advent of the digital has brought about a radical transformation in how individuals develop their daily habits and construct their identity. Habits, once rooted in traditional rituals, undergo a metamorphosis in the digital era. Constant interactions with digital devices shape new habits, marked by constant connectivity, instant access to information, and active participation in social networks. These habits redefine how we work, learn, and interact with our environment.

This digital invasion into humanity's daily life tends to reveal new identity challenges: the construction of a traditional identity and a digital identity. According to Erving Goffman, "each person possesses a personal identity, a biography, an accumulated memory of this journey that is their life. In this framework, the individual claims a multitude of capacities, functions" (GOFFMAN, 1974). In contemporary times, it is possible to differentiate between traditional identity, meaning in the classical framework of what is identity: name, date of birth, origin, religion, etc. However, there is an increasing emphasis on digital identity, which is much more complex. This complexity lies in the fact that digital identity is not merely a digital extension of traditional identity. Franck Beau and Oriane Deseilligny, in their research on the virtual world of video games, highlighted the narrative dimension of digital identity. Therefore, digital identity is not simply a transposition of classical identity into a digital universe; it is a projection of the self that can be constructed using digital tools such as photos and videos. For Emmanuel Kessous and Bénédicte Rey, constructing an image of oneself on the internet contributes to a flow of exchange characteristic of the attention economy (Kessous, 2012). According to Fanny GEORGE, she goes even further and reveals that this identity can testify to a nearly strategic desire to manage and act on others by displaying and concealing certain traits of one's identity (Georges, 2010). Thus, mechanisms emerge to manage this digital identity, challenging human identities at relational, communicative, legal, and even psychological levels.

By personalizing their digital manipulations, internet users leave traces, collaborate to create norms and habits. Individuals now navigate seamlessly between the physical and virtual worlds, integrating their digital experiences into their daily reality. This fusion redefines the notions of proximity and distance, creating transformative connections beyond traditional limits. The exchanges, communications, interactions, and social ties that fuel our civilization in the digital domain give rise to practices, symbols, and interactions, explainable through the paradigm of digital humanity. Here, we validate the thesis put forth by Milad Douehihi, asserting that this paradigm alters relationships between individuals and modifies their social behaviors.

III.2. Deconstruction of a Culturally Anchored Collective Imaginary by the Digital:

The theory of deconstruction, popularized by Jacques Derrida, provides a rich conceptual framework for understanding the dismantling process of symbolic structures in our collective imagination. Applied to the digital realm, this concept takes on a new dimension, emphasizing the ephemeral and fluid nature of narrative constructions in an environment characterized by virality, interconnectivity, and multiplicity of perspectives. Sociologist Guy Rocher mobilized the notion of the imaginary in the early 1980s, referring to "society projects, future visions, social dreams, political hopes, collective aspirations" that groups "develop and maintain," leading to the formation of "ideologies, utopias, social myths" (Guy Rocher, 1982: 68). The collective imaginary, traditionally rooted in cultural and historical narratives, is now subject to constant deconstruction by the digital.

Social media, content-sharing platforms, and virtual realities provide spaces where narratives are created, deconstructed, and sometimes reinvented in real-time. This dynamic redefines how individuals perceive the world and interact within their virtual communities. Digital communication emerges as the key player in this deconstruction process. Individuals become both architects and spectators of this transformation, actively participating in the creation and dissolution of shared narratives. The digital provides a platform where the boundaries between author, interpreter, and receiver blur, thus redefining traditional communication paradigms. While the deconstruction of the collective imaginary by the digital opens new creative perspectives, it also poses major challenges in terms of the loss of common cultural reference points.

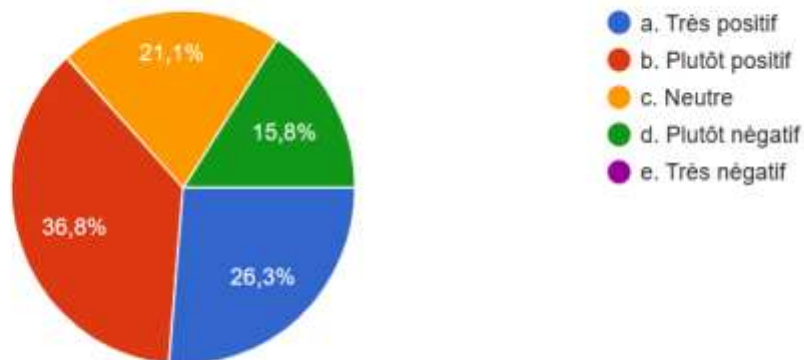
III.3. An Example of Digital-Related Deconstruction: the Case of Education:

The impact of the digital in academic research is disrupting education. Due to the multitude of data accessible to both students and educators through digital means, the latter is no longer the sole holder of knowledge. This shift disrupts traditional dynamics. For instance, due to the digital variable, the expectations of learners do not align with the practices of educators. These two actors have divergent views on education, leading to contradictory stances on the expectations of both parties. There is, therefore, a rupture in the postures of different actors as representations related to learning do not align. Modern pedagogies converge towards interactive, playful, stimulating, visual, auditory, and digital learning, requiring active engagement from students for them to become active participants in their education. Aware of these current challenges, this corresponds to the learner's expectations of a successful course, in harmony with digital, technological, and pedagogical advances. These practices encourage questioning and guide the learner in their learning.

The teacher, therefore, has a more subdued role, making way for the student to construct their knowledge. The teacher acts as a mediator of knowledge so that students can grasp it. The reality in terms of teacher practices is quite different. There is a predominant implementation of lectures, where postures oppose the case mentioned earlier. The teacher dominates the course, monopolizing the conversation while the learner is kept in a passive posture of listening and brief dialogues. This mirrors the "traditional" course in higher education.

6. Comment évaluez-vous l'impact des technologies numériques sur l'engagement des étudiants dans vos cours ?

19 réponses



Title: Graphical Representation of the Impact of Digital Usage as Perceived by Social Sciences Teachers

How to resolve this contradiction? It necessitates a shift in posture from both parties involved. In the perspective where the teacher is the primary actor in control of the course and can make modifications to its organization, it leads us to reconsider the teacher's posture. This modification will, in turn, bring about a change in the student's

posture. These reflections have motivated our research and directed us towards proposing and developing a flipped pedagogy, in connection with an adaptation to a digital humanity.

However, we encounter another obstacle: this teacher's posture, inherited from decades of practice and training, is challenging to question. This hesitancy is coupled with a generational discomfort with digital tools and new technology. For instance, a 23-year-old student in 2023, born in 2000, will have been fully immersed in technological advancements and will generally master digital tools at their disposal with ease, considering an assimilation period. The teacher, witnessing the peak of the internet and digital pedagogical tools well after their training years, will find it more challenging to appropriate these tools and use them in a teacher's role as the master of knowledge, guiding the student in their learning with these instruments. The teacher is more comfortable with their training references such as physical books and will encourage their learner towards this sphere of knowledge where they trust their own skills.

The teacher's reluctance towards modern pedagogies does not fully explain these divergent postures between the teacher and the learner. A generational discomfort does exist in our case regarding flipped pedagogy and digital practice because these skills are unique to the recent generation, allowing them to acquire competencies more fluidly. The teacher's generation, despite having the role of a trainer, is partially unfamiliar with these practices, and the practices unique to them lack effectiveness in transmitting their very real competencies. This can be explained by the institutional delay in addressing the issue of pedagogical reforms, explaining this challenging rupture to reconcile.

However, focusing solely on the posture and commitment of the teacher is incomplete in explaining another paradox: the resistance of students to the use of digital tools.

9. Quels sont les principaux défis que vous rencontrez dans l'utilisation des technologies numériques en SHS ?

19 réponses



Title: Diagram Representing Challenges in the Use of Digital Technology in Education

The collected data demonstrate that while this discomfort with digital technology indeed exists, it is crucial not to exaggerate its impact regarding the challenges related to digital technology. From the conducted interviews, although the profile of teachers resistant to digital practices does exist, many are open to training that can affirm their personal technological competencies. However, this does not exclude the widely shared sentiment of students' resistance to digital technology. This variable shows that the deconstruction is not complete: there is a lack of commitment from students, refuting the profile of digitally proficient students solely based on their belonging to a so-called digital generation. Being part of a generation with recognized digital fluency, without necessarily possessing these skills, raises questions of social stratification and inequality of access to digital resources. This

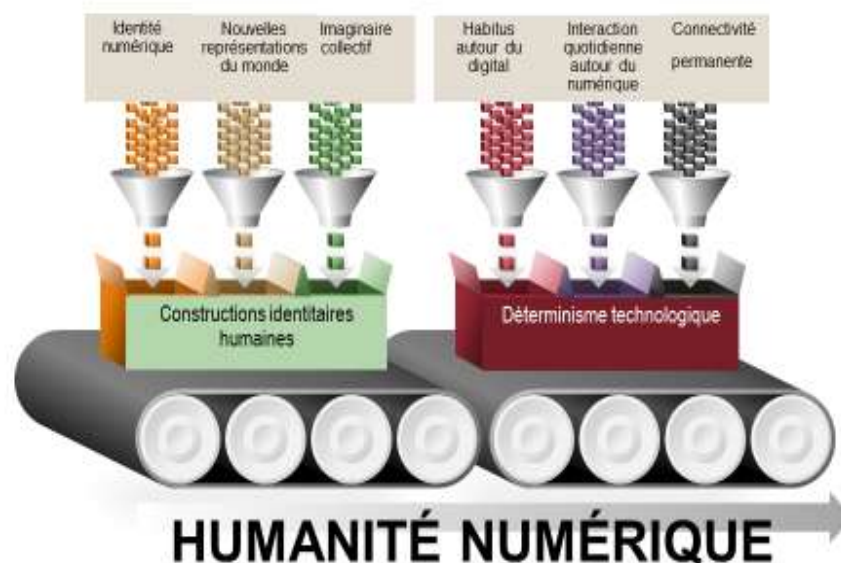
factor, also felt by teachers, converges towards the need to train both teachers and students to achieve greater alignment with the goal of digital humanity, a machine already in motion, impossible to stop but only to adopt.

III.4. A Challenge of Digital Humanity: Technological Determinism:

The overwhelming impact of digital technology in almost all areas of the social sciences does not allow it to be excluded from questioning or providing answers. Sociotechnical devices are an integral part of all human spheres: work, social interactions, education, research, and as seen previously, identity constructions. They affect “all economic and social activities, redefining notions of space and time, and tending to transform the ways of producing, exchanging, communicating, and learning” (Dahmani, 2004: 17). The democratization of access to media and digital tools, in general, disrupts the representation of the world, the way of apprehending it, and the relationships individuals have with each other.

At the heart of contemporary societal evolution, technological determinism emerges as a complex and omnipresent concept. The theoretical foundations of this determinism find their roots in the works of thinkers such as Marshall McLuhan and Jacques Ellul, who laid the groundwork for understanding technology as a determining force in shaping culture and communication. According to this perspective, technological advancements inevitably determine how individuals interact, share information, and construct social realities. In the context of communication, technological determinism is expressed through a series of transformations. The advent of digital media, social networks, and instant communication devices has redefined the very nature of informational exchanges. The ubiquity of technologies has generated new communication norms, altering traditional patterns of information transmission.

L'HUMANITÉ NUMÉRIQUE SELON LA METAPHORE DU TAPIS ROULANT



Title: Diagram Created by the Author

Technological determinism is not confined solely to the communicative sphere; it also extends to the entire society. Changes in work patterns, interpersonal relationships, and the construction of individual identity are intimately linked to technological advances. Thus, technology becomes a crucial actor in the co-construction of social reality, contributing to the definition of norms, values, and behaviors.

IV. DISCUSSION

IV.1. The Importance of Differentiating Between Traditional Humanity and Digital Humanity:

The fourth humanism is defined by the advent of the digital civilization, the full extent of which is still challenging to fully grasp. It is crucial to explore what characterizes the transition from our traditional society to an emerging reality, that of digital humanity. Revisiting the foundations of traditional humanity, rooted in classical social patterns, becomes essential. Orality, gestures, and physical proximity have been the pillars of our communication, shaping our perception of the world and mutual understanding. The advent of information and communication technologies has brought about a radical transformation, propelling humanity into a digital era. Virtual interactions, dematerialization of information, and digital globalization redefine our relationship with time, space, and relationships. Digital humanity manifests itself through social networks, collaborative platforms, and new forms of media expression. Digital humanity emphasizes instant connectivity and the rapidity of information. However, there can be identity losses in this high-speed information circulation. The coexistence of traditional humanity, represented by the real world and the presence of generations less familiar with the digital, highlights the need for a satisfying balance and the necessity to preserve humanistic values within the digital reality.

In the face of this rapid, complex transformation still under construction, humanistic values offer a moral compass, reminding us that every innovation must serve the common good and respect human dignity. Ethical questions about the progress of artificial intelligence or medicine, which are beginning to make significant waves, demonstrate the importance of framing progress and practices related to technological innovations. It is imperative to ensure that they serve humanity and do not violate our fundamental rights. For example, the phone can be an indispensable tool for communication in a professional setting, but what about the deviations in terms of working hours that tend to blur the personal sphere of the employee with the professional one? Issues related to online practices, such as cyberbullying or surveillance, highlight the relevance of a humanistic approach to digital transformations.

IV.2. Inequalities in Digital Opportunities:

The first cornerstone of inequality of opportunities in the digital age lies in access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). Socio-economic and geographical disparities determine who can fully benefit from the opportunities offered by digital tools. Individuals in disadvantaged areas or less privileged social backgrounds often encounter obstacles in acquiring digital skills. According to Charlotte TRILHA, in a world where technological determinism is taking up more and more space, the digital is falsely democratic. The paradigm of digital humanities explains disparities related to the non-acquisition of digital skills. This disparity is observed not only in access to infrastructure but also in the understanding and use of technologies. Individuals from more privileged backgrounds have more resources to master advanced digital skills, creating a gap that influences individuals' ability to fully engage in the digital economy and access associated professional or educational opportunities. The same goes for generational gaps, with youth having more mastery of digital technology. The ability to express oneself effectively through digital channels directly influences participation in online debates, access to information, and even the creation of professional opportunities. Inequality in digital communication skills can, therefore, be considered a determining factor in social disparities in this digital age. These inequalities can stem from socio-economic factors, such as the level of education, family income, and geographical location. Individuals from socio-economically advantaged backgrounds often have easier access to digital devices and high-speed Internet, reinforcing their advantage in mastering digital skills. Moreover, disparities in digital education can exacerbate inequalities, as those who have been trained in technology from a young age tend to be better prepared to engage in contemporary digital society. These digital disparities can lead to social and economic exclusion, compromising equality of opportunities in an increasingly digitized world.

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