
DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN MEDIA & SOCIETY

EDITORS

Ayşen AKKOR GÜL, Yıldız Dilek ERTÜRK, Paul ELMER

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INTRODUCTION: DIGITALIZATION, NETWORK SOCIETY AND TRANSFORMATION IN SOCIAL LIFE

Ayşen AKKOR GÜL, Yıldız Dilek ERTÜRK, Paul ELMER

Digitalization (or digitization) is the name given to the process of organizing information of all kinds—images, sounds, written documents and signals—into electronically transmittable and storable binary bits. Beginning with the development of transistor technology in the late 1940s, the process of digitalization demanded much time, effort, and ingenuity. When the digital representation of information in binary bits had at last been achieved, the new era of the digital age was ushered in. Gradually information technology replaced the long-established gains of the industrial revolution with more easily-shared and accessed digital innovation. However this was not just an innovation in data processing, storage and transmission: as time passed it was realized that digitalization was also transforming every aspect of life: habits, economies, politics, societies, education, media, health, habits and mindsets. However the most notable change was in society. The “Wired Society” of the 1970s identified by scholars like James Martin as being intimately associated with mass media and telecommunication networks has since become a globally interconnected society through the progress of digitalization.

The term network society gained currency from the early 1990s, and was used to describe this highly technological environment, with its twin emphasis on digitized practices and connectivity. Manuel Castells signalled the coming primacy of networks, both social and technological, in his emblematic book *The Rise of Network Society: The Information Age: Economy Society and Culture*. The ambitious nature of his vision was that “networks have become the basic units of modern society” (2000, p. 469). For Castells, technology alone was insufficient to define this networked society, because the condition of a person in society is informed by multiple factors; culture and upbringing, religion, political beliefs and affiliations, social status and position, among others, and the ways that we are shaped as individuals and groups is subject to multiple forces and practices. His vision of a changed society was technologically inflected, technologically inspired, but strived, nevertheless, to embrace emerging social experiences and practices. As Jan Van Dijk later observed, in his influential

account of *The Network Society*, it is the “combination of social and media networks... (that) shapes the nervous system” of such a society (2006, p. 28).

As new formulations emerged, they did so hand in hand with new understandings, forged at the meeting point of technologies and persons. Under this broad sweep of enquiry the body, as a locus of technology, is a recurrent theme and the network, as a locus for social life, engagement and even identity, also achieved prominence; writers in this volume touch on these key debates. Such debates progressed along parallel paths, rather than convergent ones. As authors, we could not have anticipated how world events would conspire to bring together such issues so suddenly and unexpectedly when, in December 2019, the world witnessed a Coronavirus outbreak that spread from Wuhan, China, to become a global pandemic.

From the first day, it became possible to observe our network society in a condition of some maturity, its technologies, its practices and its influence, as it rapidly demonstrated the stage of its evolution. It was possible to monitor, in real time, the progress of Covid-19 in countries around the world. Whole populations, otherwise apparently disconnected from each other, were able to compare successes and failures, restrictions on behaviour, medical and social precautions, but also worries, hopes and personal narratives. Clinicians were of course able to share data, and public health experts were able to access a wide base of information to aid their decisions. More broadly, whole nations were thrust, by a combination of enforced restrictions on work and social life, to encounter, succumb to, and create, a network society that claimed a central place in their social, economic, political and familial experiences and practices.

Looking out at the end of the second decade of the 21st century, it seems obvious that the ongoing digital transformation is shaping societies not just in ways that we can see but also in ways that we can't even guess at and that this process will continue as long as digital technology remains productive. One question that bothers minds is concerned with the quality of this transformation: “Is everything getting better with digitalization?” For the time being, we appear to have acquiesced to the sometimes irksome impositions of digital technology as being acceptable remedies for the current crisis. That acquiescence however will not last long however if the benefits of digitalization are substantially outweighed by the risks that it poses, for example, to health if such risks are realized as a significant uptick in deaths and worldwide mortality. The best we can say as of this moment is that predicting the future of digitalization is going to need a lot more time and research. One thing we can guess is that a century from now, our descendants will be referring to these years as the early stage of the Digital Era.

The Organization of the Book

This book presents examples of digital transformation as they have unfolded in different fields and in different countries. Thus it is designed to be a situation analysis in which some chapters share research results and others are essays written to contribute to the ongoing debate. The book consists of two parts, the first being “Transformation in Television, Radio, Film and Games” and the second being “Transformation in Social Life, Economy and Education”. Individual chapters’ authors address different issues related to the digitalization of games, post-production, radio transmission, education, marketing, payment systems, fandom, social media, artificial intelligence, democracy, and intellectual creativity. Three questions to be kept in mind as you read each chapter are “What is happening in the particular field as a result of digital transformation?”, “Is it a real transformation?”, and “What are the benefits and drawbacks of the transformation?”

Chapter One focuses on new trends in television-viewing practices and considers how digitalization empowers TV series’ fans. The chapter draws attention to the popularity of Turkish television series in Latin America and argues that digitalization has transformed the habits and attitudes of Latin American viewers: through the spread of Turkish television series, Turkish culture and values are also promoted. Chapter Two consists of a case study that sheds light on whether technological developments will transform the image of women in online games. In-depth interviews with female users of massively multiplayer online role-playing games and a game producer reveal that although technology gives women players a chance to be whatever they want, they prefer to create gendered characters. Thus women’s participation in digital technology has not transformed the representation of gender in online games just yet. Chapter Three focuses on “vertical editing” techniques as an outcome of the digital transformation of post-production methods. Exploring the limitations of these techniques through a documentary film called *Kamilet*, the chapter raises the ethical issues inherent in vertical editing owing to its ability to manipulate information through image formation. Chapter Four analyses the transformation of the body in fiction and shows how the development of science and technology affects our understanding of metamorphosis in movies ranging from fantastic classics to science-fiction. The chapter concludes that human beings embrace their individuality firmly and will not abandon their self-image for that of a robot, an android, a digital avatar, or even a clone of oneself. Chapter Five examines podcasts as an outcome of transformation of digital data processing. Presenting a sample of Turkish radio broadcasts, it argues that podcasting is just a complementary application rather than a new form of radio.

Chapter Six compares the recent digitalization of “public education” in two European countries—Hungary and Turkey. It reveals both the achievements and the shortcomings of ICT and compares and contrasts digital educational competencies in these countries. One of the striking findings of this chapter is that in both countries, digital content and the digital literacy levels of teachers are unsatisfactorily below expectations. Chapter Seven sheds light on the virtual “socialization practices” of digital culture in closed groups. It defines the characteristics of “field”, “doxa” and “social capital” in digital habitus as constructed on Facebook and tries to understand the digital transformation of habitus based on Bourdieu’s theory. Chapter Eight draws attention to digital transformation in marketing techniques such as “kid influencer marketing”. It introduces “toy unboxing videos” on YouTube as one of the new ways in which brands reach consumers. It asserts that although toy unboxing videos allow more interaction when compared to traditional methods, they are no less innocent. Chapter Nine takes a brief look at social media and how artificial intelligence, social media, and fake news represent a danger to democracy while revealing also how AI can be used to safeguard democracy. The chapter concludes with food for thought as to what a future might look like where AI potentially dominates politics. Chapter Ten presents an example of the digital transformation of payment systems and describes existing mobile money systems, with particular attention being given to their untapped potential in Turkey. It concludes with a socioeconomic image of what effective mobile money systems in Turkey would look like and offers key directions for future development and deployment of mobile money in Turkey in pursuit of the country’s national agenda of becoming cashless by 2023.