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MYTHS AS AN ATTRIBUTE OF DIGITAL CIVILIZATION

Mariya Kornyshova (a)*
*Corresponding author

(a) Yaroslav-the-Wise Novgorod State University, Veliky Novgorod, Russian Federation,
Mariya.Kornishova@novsu.ru

Abstract

The article examines the problems associated with the nature of information and human capabilities, that digital civilization inevitably creates, and the reasons for their occurrence. It is hypothesized that digital civilization needs to necessarily generate myths in order to sustain itself. The author criticizes the view that digital civilization is rather something useful, and its problems are temporary. The number of information sources increased until it turned their totality into noise. To cope with this problem, new digital technologies began to be created. One can quickly transfer large amounts of data, but the processing of certain information is carried out by a human since it requires an understanding of information sense (which is not identical to its meaning), and the speed of information processing is limited by them. Digital singularity is a myth. The formation of myths as a way to manipulate society's consciousness is an attribute of the current digital civilization since the object of the application of digital technologies is information that is sometimes false. Consumers' confidence is being lost, and without confidence in information, neither modern banking, nor investments in digital innovations, nor mass media will be able to function. This is why the digital civilization is turning to non-scientific means such as a myth to convince society of the value of information that supports its functioning.

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1. Introduction

The rapid progress of digital technologies has significantly transformed all spheres of human activity (Bellaby, 2018), creating a digital civilization. Compare it with the civilizations that preceded it, for example, with the agrarian one. There, a crisis in the form of drought led to the emergence of irrigation technologies, thereby increased labor productivity. It became possible to produce food for more people than was required for agricultural production. Relatively few workers were freed up, resulting in a flourishing of crafts in cities. Producing various household items, people tried to give them aesthetic properties. For example, pottery was painted. Therefore, the emergence of new technologies entailed the development of art for the agrarian civilization. Consider the emergence of the digital civilization. The development of industrial technologies also frees up a considerable number of workers. In order to make a living, these people are forced to deal with two challenges: firstly, the advancement of digital technologies and, secondly, the search for the areas for their application.

2. Problem Statement

We explore various problems associated with the nature of information and human capabilities, that the digital civilization inevitably generates, as well as their causes. Problems as a consequence of technology advancement (the first challenge). The advancement of digital technology refers to an increase in the volumes of stored data and in its transfer speed, the transition to the use of cloud technologies. Improvements in digital technologies gradually led to a continuously increasing flow of data about everything in the world, which served as an aid for the further growth of digital capacity. Then, we examine what problems people have when meeting the second challenge, that is, finding areas for the application of digital technologies.

3. Research Questions

It is necessary to figure out what the consequences of the unprecedented growth of digital capacity are, how digital technologies affect the human, how compatible digital technologies are with human abilities. It is needed to consider: a) the main contradiction – the antagonism of human capabilities with these technologies, and b) digital enhancement of a human – the proposed solution to this contradiction (transhumanism, artificial intelligence, robotization). As a result, the article aims to find evidence-based answers to the following questions. Does the digital civilization create problems for itself in order to solve them? Does the digital civilization need myths for its continued existence? Is digital singularity a reality or a myth?

4. Purpose of the Study

Problems of digital technologies are interconnected with people's problems. A human is not able to consume such amounts of data that are transmitted through the World Wide Web. An increasing number of information sources has turned into a quality that denies informativeness. Eventually, technologies have been introduced to solve this problem (search engines). Using them, a person loses the ability to search for

the necessary information on their own, their creative abilities suffer. The need for a human to adapt to the acceleration of information exchange requires the development of illogical figurative emotional thinking, the speed of which exceeds the speed of conceptual logical thinking. At the same time, the creative processing of information is carried out by a human, and the speed of information processing is limited by them. Perhaps proponents of the creation of artificial intelligence would try to use it for creative operations, but artificial intelligence of this level has not been designed (Gunkel, 2017). The hopes of transhumanists to improve “human functionality” with nanotechnology, biotechnology, information and communication technologies, and cognitive sciences are utopian (Arshinov & Budanov, 2016). It is impossible to create artificial intelligence that is able to understand like a human, that is, not just to compare a sign and a meaning, but to understand an actual sense. The reason for this impossibility is that people do not know how they carry out the procedure of understanding. The explanation for this lack of knowledge lies in a person's intuitive interpretation of what is meant, and this interpretation allows them to establish appropriate meanings of signs, but it “does not belong to the sphere of meanings” itself (Gasparyan, 2017).

Furthermore, consider the second challenge – the search for the areas for digital technologies application. The application object of digital technologies – information – can be false and therefore useless for the person who obtains it. The amount of false information, including fake, (Mukerji, 2018) is growing uncontrollably together with the total amount of information on the World Wide Web, this is why consumers’ confidence in it is being lost. Without confidence from society, neither the modern banking sector nor investments in digital innovations nor cultural industries, for example, mass media, can function. Therefore, the digital civilization turns to non-scientific means such as a myth, for example, the myth of digital singularity, to convince society of the importance of the information supporting the functioning of the society. Thinking by means of a myth has an “unconscious-figurative” nature (Strelnik, 2018). A myth is a sensory understanding of the world prior to its logical understanding. Consciousness creates myths in religion, media, and other areas where “emotions and values” prevail (Naidysh, 2017). Mass development through the use of digital technologies of emotional-figurative thinking to the detriment of conceptual, logical thinking creates the basis for believing in myths.

5. Research Methods

In analyzing the problems, the author uses the dialectical method. Because of the novelty and speed of ongoing civilizational changes, the problem of the quantitative growth of data flows and its consequences are considered in philosophical studies in fragments. To reflect on the connection between the digital civilization and the formation of myths, a synthesis of various aspects of the problem is carried out in the article.

6. Findings

The source of data is information about humankind’s activities. This means that humanity, by creating and absorbing flows of data about itself, is engaged in self-contemplation. As a result of the improvement of digital technologies, there is a problem which we will define as the first one: the more data sources, the fewer consumers for each source. A human is physically incapable of consuming such amounts

of data, even if it is necessary and interesting for them. The value of data is linked with its understanding (La Fors et al., 2019). Every person is faced with the problem of how to choose from a huge mass of data sources a reliable one. A definite solution to the problem of an individual's confidence in a data source was the introduction of social networking services, where one communicates only with familiar people or on a topic of common interest.

It would seem that with the advent of social networking services, the issue of generating information that is interesting to people has been resolved, but in fact, it is not true. The ever-increasing flow of data that is stored and transmitted through the World Wide Web creates a second acute problem. The number of information sources increased until it turned their totality into noise. The huge flows of data consumed by humanity are no longer informative. This means, there is a transition of the amount of information into a quality that denies informativeness, and therefore denies the mass importance of individual sources. As a result, in this new digital world, there is no longer a need for further growth of original digital technologies that make it possible to increase the volume and speed of transmitted data. Now digital technologies have begun to be introduced in order to somehow cope with the noise problem (for example, search engines) – a problem generated by the previous growth of these technologies. In turn, these technologies create new problems. The third problem: using them, people lose the ability to search for the necessary information on their own, their mental, creative abilities suffer, they become dependent on the machine. There are a number of professions, for example, teachers, scientists, where creative abilities are needed. This problem is acute in the field of education since education requires “reading culture” skills on the part of students (Kozlova & Kinderknecht, 2018) who, with search engines, successfully resist obtaining them. Attempts to combat this problem require new digital technologies that in some way would help to encourage students to read necessary texts in their entirety. The fourth problem: a type of thinking that is massively forming under the influence of digital technologies and is conventionally called “clip thinking”. This is an illogical thinking in rapidly changing “images, pictures, emotions” (Kozlova & Kinderknecht, 2018). The speed of emotional-figurative thinking exceeds the speed of conceptual-logical thinking. The reason for “clip” thinking formation is human adaptation to information exchange acceleration and to information volume increasing (Kozlova & Kinderknecht, 2018).

The third problem leads to the fifth one, which is that, in the eyes of new generations, the process of acquiring information is valued less, so then there is a paradox: the labor-intensive creation of new information in the digital civilization is lower-paying than its effortless reproduction which is a purely technical process. The sixth problem: technologies allow one to quickly transfer large amounts of data, but the processing of certain information is carried out by a human (since it requires creativity), and the speed of information processing is limited by them. At anything that requires creativity, the human cannot be replaced by robots which always act in accordance with the programs installed on them (Kuznetsova & Orudzhev, 2016). Here is an example from the field of education: when grading a student's solution to a problem, important is not only the correct answer, which is available for grading by a machine and which the student could copy from some source that digital technologies now allow as well, but also the way the student came to such a solution, which allows assessing the degree of student's independence in reaching the solution, and this can only be checked by a teacher.

There are other, ethical issues arise, for example, the use of digital technologies for controlling people (for example, by employers when hiring) raises the problem of the need to protect the confidentiality of personal data (Becker, 2019; Bellaby, 2018; Jacobson & Gruzd, 2020), including by means of digital technologies. Threats of new technologies to “human well-being” can also arise when they are used to help people, for example, when artificial intelligence drives vehicles and an accident occurs (Mecacci & Santoni de Sio, 2019) or when, in nursing homes, medicines are delivered by a robot, leading to a deficit in human sympathy the elderly face, and as a consequence to their sense of loneliness (La Fors et al., 2019; Pirhonen et al., 2019). The limitations on the length of this article did not allow us to consider all emerging problems here.

The second challenge that the workers of the digital civilization are engaged in is finding areas for the application of digital technologies. These technologies are used to store and transmit data, to help the human in the processing of data and in its control (Bellaby, 2018), that is, they have a limited scope of application. But the digital civilization seeks to spread myths that these technologies can be used with benefit in almost all areas of human life in order to, firstly, ensure the widespread adoption of digital technologies and, secondly, fill the void of meaninglessness in the digital civilization.

Digital technologies are of limited utility. Mass development through their use of emotional-figurative thinking to the detriment of conceptual, logical thinking creates the basis for believing in myths. The creation of myths as a way to manipulate public consciousness (Strel'nik, 2018) is an attribute of the digital civilization, in contrast to the agrarian and industrial ones. Of course, myth played a significant role then as well, but production activities did not necessarily require the production of myths, since a certain useful material product was produced. The quantitative growth of the digital civilization during the transition of a certain measure occurs to the detriment of its material foundations. With the transition of this measure, the quantitative growth absorbs useful industrial and agricultural products. A lot of “simulacra goods that address the needs” are produced artificially, which resulted from “the unrestrained growth of the service sector” and “virtualization of anything and everything” (Bodrunov, 2018).

The intensive development of digital technologies leaves a mythological imprint on the language and shapes our worldview. Thus, the terms “code” and “programming”, which came into use due to their dissemination, are now used in relation to culture and living organisms (cultural, genetic “code”).

Working with information instead of a material product also changes people's worldview, leads to a separation from the material foundations of civilization in the minds of those who work with it. Such a change in the worldview and the triumph of an idealistic approach in the minds of those who work with information make it difficult to see serious problems in the sphere of material production.

If the development of the agrarian civilization led to the development of crafts (due to which industrial civilization appeared over time) and arts, then digital civilization, apparently, presupposes the rejection of both. The place of art development is taken by the growth of digital technologies here. This does not mean that some people do not admire the masterpieces of world art, it means that they do not create them. The quality of the content of the transmitted information, in general, has ceased to matter. For example, with the advent of certain technologies, a work of fine arts, which requires mastery, has been replaced for almost every person by an amateur copy of a fragment of reality – by a home photo; everyone has become a writer – they can express their opinion about anything and collect millions of subscribers. At

the same time, the number of readers of professional writers' works has decreased due to the increase in the number of information sources, and people, freed from industrial labor, instead of creating in the field of art try to work with data flows.

7. Conclusion

Let us briefly outline the findings. The antagonism between the human and digital technologies, the antagonism between their limited abilities and the modern civilization striving for the unrestrained expansion of technologies, is revealed and is currently unresolvable with the help of these technologies. This contradiction is largely the cause of the problems of communication, learning, and knowledge production in such areas as education and science. We see a self-growing process: the more intensive the digital civilization development is, the more problems it generates, and their solutions require more and more digital resources. The formation of myths for society's consciousness manipulation is an attribute of the formed digital civilization since it works with information that is often untrue and the volume of which has increased so much that it has exceeded human perception capabilities. Digital singularity is a myth. Digital technologies are of limited utility. But it is vitally important for the digital civilization to convince people that it is unconditionally useful and significant for society, which is its main myth. Otherwise, it will not be able to develop quantitatively.

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