

# Dehumanization In Digital Era Through Social Media: Cultural Transformation In Human Existence

Elka Anakotta

*Institut Agama Kristen Negeri Ambon*

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## **Abstract**

*Human existence through relationships with others before the flow of digitalization occurs through direct and meaningful relationships. Relationships that are built through face to face physical contact, direct storytelling, shaking hands, or even hugging to strengthen each other. Our absence from others, especially in special moments of life, sometimes creates guilt because our physical presence feels irreplaceable. In an era of technology that is so advanced and brings progress with the presence of social media, it has provided a new space that allows our absence from other people to be replaced by status displays on account walls on social media. This paper shows a shift in the meaning of our existence towards other people because in society there has been a transformation of the way humans exist through smileys and emoticons which can be done at any time regardless of space and time as long as the data packet is available. The way humans are in other humans is a transformation in the digital era through social media showing the transformation that is taking place in society. Thus, it is hoped that the human's way of being to other humans will remain an irreplaceable way of being / being at any time because the essential value of humanity actually has a meaning at that point.*

**Keywords:** *human existence, relationship, dehumanization, cultural transformation, social media*

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## **I. Introduction**

This paper will examine how the use of new media technology has substantial consequences in society, especially regarding three questions: (a) How social media is used to represent human presence; (b) How the use of social media transforms people's lives and (3) How does the use of social media change the way we live as humans and threaten our humanity?

Social media is a category of online discourse where humans can create content, and share that content on the internet. Ease of use, speed of access have rapidly changed public discourse in society and set trends and agendas from environmental and political to technology and the entertainment industry (Miles & Huberman, 2018). According to them, in the last ten years, the online world has changed dramatically, and for this we can thank the invention of social media, so that humans can exchange ideas, feelings, personal information, pictures and videos. Social networks have an impact on social interaction by changing the model of face-to-face interaction, how we receive information, and the dynamism of social groups and friendships.

Facebook for example, which already has as many as 500 million members (especially students) and continues to grow until now (Flamingo, 2019). Facebook users expect to grow along with the development of its users. These social networks have provided tools through which humans can communicate, share information, and create new social relationships. With its popularity, our social interactions are affected in many ways as we adapt to the rapidly evolving technological advances (Susanto et al., 2020). This is actually what Castells once mentioned (2001) in (Anwar, 2018) previously by emphasizing that the current internet network culture not only reduces the values of technological developments and discoveries, but also includes forming social patterns.

Information and communication technology, making the fusion of space and time factors which are now determining aspects of speed and success in the field of education. Information technology, also controls the global economy that makes transactions carried out online, namely by looking at numbers on monitors where the numbers are constantly changing. Technological advances, also obscure existing mediums because they are diverse which then makes user interaction and control. These media interactions, categorized into two, namely existing interactions, allow users to take control of cultural texts, and interactions related to media capacity that can be interpreted as opportunities to integrate and become a direct part of the media texts they consume. In addition, this interaction makes it possible to replicate the real environment in media life (Harahap, 2016).

The emergence of new media technologies that open communication between humans with computer mediation, there will be several possibilities, including creating opportunities for education and learning, creating

new opportunities for participation in democracy, establishing countercultures, legal issues concerning personal rights, copyright and ethics, and restructuring relationships or human and machine interactions. This is what Licoppe later did (Licoppe, 2004) those who see technological advances through new media have presented a "connected presence" so that presence in the virtual world is temporarily absent.

Hubert Dreyfus (2009) in (Olivier, 2017) mention of life in cyberspace results in alienation, where humans then ignore bodily, emotionally, intuitively and rely more on virtual communication. By borrowing a phenomenological approach and referring to Heidegger, seeing modern technology has the possibility of returning to the subject and having an independent goal that is more flexible and efficient in organizing sources. Thus modern man can be led by modern technology. Furthermore, following the phenomenology of Merleau Ponty's body, Dreyfus mentions if there is a 'sense' of presence in relationships in cyberspace then it can constantly provide us with the possibility to grasp on whatever is to come. But bodily interactions cannot be imprisoned in cyberspace no matter how sophisticated we are with 3D dimensions, voices, remote-controlled robots, etc.

Cultural transformation through digital technology, by Mc Luhan through two processes, namely digitally and dispersal (Guins, 2014). Digital technology, called New Media, puts us in a paradoxical condition of the combination of social automation and individual autonomy that has an impact on the formation of "automodernity".

## **II. Dehumanization**

Dehumanization is another term for "inhumane" (Bastian et al., 2012), which is a result of the digital age according to Lenta and Cormos (LENTA & CORMOS, 2017), influenced by the media culture faced by modern digital society which gives rise to destructive acts such as human trafficking, prostitution, pedophilia, drug trafficking, to racism. In fact, existing technology is always double-faced which can be an opponent, so dehumanization is a real result of digital technology by having a tendency to see others as "less human" which involves equating human groups with animals which is often manifested as a form of extreme prejudice (Ngafifi, 2014) (Bastian, 2012). Bastian added that dehumanization is nothing but the result of a process of self-perception that infers a lack of humanity through behavioral observations and attributions taken from overt behavior. Also, through information that continues to increase on the internet which then occurs an overload of information, so that individuals find it difficult to find valuable information.

The dominance of technology based on positivism, communism, and capitalism is also able to give birth to new alternative thinking, which ultimately creates critical thinking that leads to dehumanization, where humans are trapped in the systems and structures they create. This technological revolution is influencing people's mindsets (Mardina, 2017) and the rise of the digital age has not only influenced philosophical and theoretical perspectives, but also down to the way every human being assumes their daily lives. From that factor, dehumanization, which can occur due to behavioral processes, is created due to the media through one of them cyber bullying. Through this behavior, some individuals are considered inferior human beings, who are treated inhumanely without guilt, according to (Pujasari Supratman, 2018), a group of people are considered no longer human, without feelings, hopes, and care so that they can be treated however without the need to feel remorse.

## **III. METHOD**

This research is qualitative to be able to describe what is a phenomenon in society, especially regarding the use of social media. The data needed in addition to primary data is also secondary data. Primary data included data on participatory interviews with informants who actively used social media as well as observations of social media activities carried out by informants. Secondary data is obtained through a literature review of the topic studied.

Data both in the form of interview results and observations are grouped thematically according to the research question. The results of the grouping are in the form of categories consisting of three categories as can be seen in the following section. The entire data is analyzed using descriptive-interpretive analysis to find the meaning behind the existing data.

## **IV. RESULTS**

### *Social Media Accounts*

Facebook is the most accessible social media so that all informants have Facebook and WA accounts. Only a few of the informants had Path, Wordpress or IG accounts. The length of account ownership ranges from seven to fourteen years.

In interviews with several informants, the choice of accounts on Facebook because it is felt to be the easiest to access, also various conveniences that are now available in social media. Here are some excerpts from interviews with informants:

*For me (FM, 52), having an account with Facebook can answer the need to be able to socialize in cyberspace. Facebook can be used for various purposes in addition to connecting with children who are temporarily outside the area (outside Ambon), but also with family and friends.*

*Another informant (DFN, 37), said that from the beginning only had a facebook account (about eight years ago), and then about two to 3 years ago had an instagram account, and now it has become more active on instagram.*

*There is also an informant (DS, 54) who said that he was created an account by his s on, namely Facebook, so he admitted that he did not have the ability to create an account other than his Facebook account.*

*Informant CP,41 suggested that Facebook is currently the easiest to use, so he has a facebook account.*

*The informant, AS,48, said that he had several accounts other than Facebook, but the one that was active until now was Facebook.*

*Almost the same as the informant's answer above, AAS, 43, said that he had several accounts, but the one that was very actively used was Facebook.*

*The informant, YNM, 35, admitted that some besides IG, Facebook is also used because it is much more accessible and most friends and family use Facebook accounts more so that it can be easier to connect.*

*How each account looks was very diverse, but most photos of yourself and family become account markers, in addition to pictures of natural beauty or quotes about specific things. Here are the answers of some informants:*

*I didn't necessarily change my profile picture, but what I displayed there was a photo of myself with my family (AP, 49). The same answer was obtained from JT (42).*

*Every few times a month, I change the profile photo of my Facebook account, and usually the most recent photo of myself. Sometimes a group photo with my children also becomes my profile picture on facebook (FM, 52)*

*My profile picture on social accounts is a photo of myself, but sometimes a photo of my late husband, as a sign of longing for him (FS, 40).*

*DFN, 38, said that her profile was the picture of the birth of her new niece, then was a photo of herself with her husband. If then change at this time mostly with new nieces and nephews who are having fun together.*

*Almost the same as the informant's answer above but YT, 55, said that currently his profile picture is more related to his grandson's activities, so if the profile photo is changed then it the grandson activity.*

*The answers of informants CP, 41 and NS, 45 are slightly different from the answers of other informants, because their activities also use social media as a means of promotion, so sometimes profile photos are related to what they want to sell to relatives or friends in cyberspace (promotion of cakes that can be ordered online).*

#### Activity on Social Media

In interviews with several informants, mixed answers were found about the activities they carried out on social media. Here's an overview of their answers in the interview:

*NS, 48, said that almost every day he would look at Facebook, but not necessarily update on the activities carried out that day. Opening Facebook is just a way to see other friends' statuses online, and sometimes laugh or just comment on their status.*

*DFN, 38, admits to doing the same thing with this, where lately the most often done is to look at the status of other friends in cyberspace. Both also have the same answer that status updates are closely related to mood.*

*AS, 48, said it is not every time to update status, but it is very used to update the latest news and information because of the needs and interests of work as well as a means of promotion of the work done.*

*Similar to this answer, SLS, 49, said that not every time he updates his status, but uses his social media accounts to update the latest news as well as existing information. The need for status updates is always related to service activities carried out both on campus and in various other places (activities as a teacher and Sunday school at church).*

*MTA, 40, admits that status updates are done in relation to activities with family or also closest friends, but most often done is to update the latest news and information because currently almost all information will be updated through social media.*

*FM, 55, admits that the status update was done in conjunction with important things he wanted to tell his children. AAS, 44, and AS, 36, said it was doing more to update the latest news.*

#### Social Media Personalization

Personalization of accounts on social media informants is done with different time and costs. There were informants who answered erratically, and even up to five hours of social media use or activity every day, almost 50% answered one to two hours, and the rest answered two to three hours every day. Based on this answer, each of them spends a minimum of one hundred thousand rupiah to three hundred thousand rupiah.

Personalization in its form takes various forms, including by downloading photos of yourself or family, photos of activities, tagging in to friends or family for news and information to be shared, and captioning words of wisdom and quotes from God's word. Here are the results of interviews with some informants:

*According to ES, 49, photos of myself and family became the top choice in personalization and then some work-related activities. Tagged in news and information is sometimes done but again always in relation to work. For captions, words of wisdom or quotes from God's words have occasionally been done according to the circumstances or problems faced at that time.*

*Still in line with the answer above, AP, 50 also makes photos of themselves and family a part of personalization on Facebook. In addition, it also captions words related to situations and conditions. A summary of Sunday sermons in church is sometimes included.*

*Another informant, CP, 42, when personalizing accounts more often makes photos of themselves and family. Photos of activities that are directly related to work as well as photos of children's activities are also part of the download.*

*For other informants, such as FS, 40, who rarely personalizes his account. If personalized, then, photos of her late husband were posted or several times had downloaded photos of her children.*

*Currently, according to the informant, VM, 34, personalization of accounts is done by posting photos of himself, family photos, and lately all activities that are part of his duties in church ministry or office duties will be downloaded.*

*DS, 54, personalised his account by subduing words of wisdom and excerpts from God's Word.*

#### Personalization of social media accounts for general relationships

Social media accounts owned by informants are used mostly to upload the latest news or information. Here's an overview:

*According to JT, 42, the use of social media today is very useful to access the latest news that is happening. These news not only happened in Ambon but also reached other parts of the world. The latest information, especially regarding birthday notifications or grief through encouragement or personalization of other people/friends on Facebook or Instagram.*

*According to WT, 44, social media is currently very useful for accessing the latest news. These stories are sometimes shared, especially with communities directly related to the news.*

*JT, 55, in a common relationship, social media is used to see what is going on around him, which is very rarely done because the mobile phone used is not always online.*

*NS, 45, uses social media on his mobile phone to access the latest news, particularly in relation to politics. Sometimes comment on the news that is happening.*

*YNM, 35, with her profession constantly connected online, social media is not really used for the purpose of accessing news, but the latest information especially related to her work will be shared with the appropriate community.*

*In line with this answer, AS, 36, the importance of social media is very useful for the dissemination of information in relation to the work involved.*

#### Personalize social media accounts for friends and family relationships

Social media accounts are also used as a medium to establish relationships with friends and family:

*YNM, 35, currently I use social media to download photos of children, especially moments that his father cannot see who is indeed for work reasons in a different place. In addition, the use of social media is very easy as a birthday reminder of friends and relatives, so the account wall will also be used to convey happy birthday to them.*

*For the FM informant, 52, social media can be used as a means of conveying words of wisdom as well as commentaries about life to his children but also nephews. Since my children are adults, as well as some of my nieces and nephews, I usually do tagged-in reviews for how to build a better life forward or how to choose the right life partner. I also use my account to wish a birthday relative or friend a happy birthday. In addition, sometimes I also express my condolences to relatives or friends who are experiencing grief.*

*As a mother, especially in relationships with my son, according to, AS, 48, social media is used to express affection for her child on every birthday, while in relationships with girls who are studying abroad, social media is also used to convey birthday wishes and download photos of herself and family so that they can also be enjoyed by her children (closest family).*

*Informant ES, 49, explained about the current use of social media accounts because of the existence of his daughter who has worked and lives outside Ambon, so at any time it is necessary, especially according to him if there are problems that they have to face in life, then the account wall becomes a place to write words of wisdom as reinforcement and quotation verses of God's word.*

Currently, according to informant DFN, 37, his social media accounts (on Instagram especially) only contain "funny" photos of him and his nephew. If there is a birthday I will also say happy birthday or sadness because of grief, for example just a student, I also use social media accounts (facebook) to express the sadness I feel.

#### Personalize personal social media accounts

How the use of social media accounts is used as a medium for self-individualization is answered with several types of answers from informants :

According to the US informant, 36, in personalizing social media accounts the most he wanted to do was to give suggestions or comments on events that were booming at the time. In line with this answer, the informant, AS, 48 also gave a similar answer in which he was eager to comment on the important events being discussed.

Meanwhile, according to AP, 49, self-individualization that appears in social media accounts is more directly related to the happiness he feels (it can be in the form of success obtained at work for example) as well as writing prayers of gratitude on his account wall.

A similar answer was given by VM, 34, where he said: I am more often on account writing about the happiness I experience as well as my little family. For that purpose, I often mark it with photos that show that happiness, that is, in the work I do as well as the success that my husband and children experience. In addition to photos, I also wrote captions of words as a prayer of gratitude on my account wall.

For informant JT, 42, personalizing individualization is done by writing about happiness, places to eat that are being enjoyed alone, with family and friends. In addition, according to him, self-portraits are often posted but also photos with his child. So far, JT wants to do through his account, which is to comment on an important event that happened.

GL, 41, says that personalizing his individualization is by writing words of wisdom or God's words that usually serve as metaphors for the desire to have a good influence on others.

#### The reason behind personalization

Based on the results of interviews with several informants, the reasons behind the importance of account personalization are as follows:

According to AS, 49, I do up-date status, post activities that I do in connection with my work and activities, or wish happy birthday, is not to show off to others, but solely because of the interest of saving photos of activities because my mobile phone memory is not able to store them, and at any time I need it either because I forget or because of other needs so I just see it on facebook, Or even Facebook that will remind me of the memory.

According to CP, 42, if you use social media to post something, such as wishing someone a happy birthday or wishing someone else, because of limited time to meet that person in person. Sometimes it is a close relative or friend and can be met in person but due to time constraints it becomes much easier. At the same time this will elevate others to someone's historic date. To post photos of yourself and family is done with the awareness that it will be enjoyed by others. However, I still do it because I have secured my account by directly connecting to my mobile number.

According to SLS, 49, the interest in posting photos of yourself and family is to share with them, while for posts related to campus activities and activities as a catholic teacher or Sunday school activity is to be able to share with friends who are also struggling in catastrophery and Sunday school. So that those who don't have time to reach can see through facebook what we do and maybe be able to copy it in their place. I also often share important information to be known by relatives or friends who are not reachable.

According to FM, the busyness and distance between me and my other children and family eventually turned into social media to connect us. I often wish you happy birthday and express my condolences through posts on my facebook page. Moreover, children nowadays do not like to always be advised, so I use Facebook to give advice to them through links that are in accordance with the advice I want to give.

According to DFN, 38, the desire to post on social media nowadays is more because social media can be used for other than of course seeing friends' statuses on social media about their status and then knowing the condition even laughing at them if anyone posts a status funny and weird. In addition, he has spilled his frustration several times on Facebook because he is angry or upset, although the method is not directly but through certain metaphors or certain words of wisdom and has never been done directly (for example mentioning names, individuals, or names of certain agencies).

## V. DISCUSSION

### Creating Personal Space on a Global Network

Social media has made it easier for humans to build relationships without borders that are very different from traditional media. Internet technology allows humans to establish relationships across spatial and social

boundaries through the practice of sharing content between netizens. (Ibidunmoye, n.d.) (compare with (Afolabi & Durodola, 2018)). Humans who initially may be passive in establishing relationships with others, then become active and even continue to hunt for various information that can be obtained on various social media, including just by looking at posts from fellow media users. Charlene Li dan Josh Bernoff (2008) in *(Engagement of Online Shoppers on Social Media : Do We Get Enticed to Shop Online ?*, 2020) distinguish five types of active participant behavior, consisting of creator groups by focusing on publishing, up-loading, giving criticism, collecting (by storing and sharing what they have), joiners (who are actively involved), and groups that are only spectators.

Social media has become an intimate private space that is globalized, where everyone who has an account on the media will move from information that is private to announced (to public property) or those who glance at or open what other netizens publish. Hogan (Hogan, 2010) describes what happens on social media when someone walks in and becomes a part of it. When someone has to submit personal data, the system on social media functions as a curator which, although not visible, is able to manage and select what is conveyed to him. Posts made on social media, including personal photos or photos with family (husband / wife and children), can easily be recalled because they have become part of the system as a form of questioning made even without a specific purpose.

In the development of technology that is growing, especially in social media, the notification system (Candra et al., 2020) makes it easy for someone to remember what he has done in previous years (if the person concerned saves it on his social media account). The existence of notifications such as the same birthday date between fellow social media users, is a hegemony that causes pressure on account owners to have to respond. The trend of social media use among netizens shows a fundamental result in three ways: First, there has been a change in behavior, where social media account users must always make their time to personalize by posting both photos of themselves (profile), posting various activities (so that when the activity is taking place netizens will also take time to take photos of themselves or ask for help for others to do it). Second, the closeness that should be established must be cut off because the first thing to do is take a photo to immediately put in the account and post. Third, social media has become a means to spill longing for lovers but also advice to children, and a warehouse for storing all the life histories of netizens.

#### Cultural transformation

The development of technology brings changes in people's lives. Changes that have an impact on the way humans establish relationships as described above. What causes this to happen is because technology accessed by humans demands accountability from humans as users of the technology. Technology becomes a tool that lives in the hands of humans as users because various functions of technology are empowered by humans. In this position, cultural transformation can take place and change the entire social world of technology users as Arnold Pacey says in (Diaz, 2004). Family, community, and even national values are changing globally because of the intersection between presence and absence in an infinite network, so that local contexts and values almost lose connectivity with their owners.

As part of a global village McLuhan (1964) in (COULARDEAU, 2013) people are very easily connected to the outside world, introduce themselves to anyone who is connected to the internet, and can disseminate anything, so that it becomes a common consumption. In this kind of transformation, it will easily bring changes in perception and behavior of what happens in the social world. Truth becomes costly, because what is known together is what determines truth. Budrillard in (Saumantri & Zikrillah, 2020) shows that technology is able to unite fragments that are fragmentary in the real world, and this makes humans who consume information through internet technology to live in illusion (hyperreality).

Cultural transformation that occurs in all human life, where everyone can access with a computer or smart mobile phone then the person concerned can participate directly in cyberspace, regardless of time and age. Age span is a problem in itself in the cultural transformation that occurs, where not everyone today was born at the same time. Most of the current generation known as digital natives are indeed born where their lives are already connected to the digital world, but there are still those who are Prensky called as a digital immigrant (Prensky, 2001). They are different from digital natives, because they were born before the digital era so they require adjustment to this era. So, cultural transformation can happen but part of it is still in the past and some have to grapple and adjust to this digitalization era.

#### Dehumanization through the use of social media

Technology has taken a wider role where the delivery of messages can be done in various forms. Technology makes it easy for humans to establish communication but keeps humans away from real relationships in real life. Technology provides the needs of delivering messages with all different forms of icons, and humans feel satisfied by using the various symbols available. The human subject becomes passive because it stays with what is available and becomes part of the system. Humans interact with other humans in a valueless space, because whoever governs, technology works. With a model like this, conflicts between humans in real life are actually

wide open. Life on social media looks different than in real life so what is posted does not necessarily indicate something like that or what is called Goffman in (STODDART, 1986) we present ourselves in the world of theater.

What is displayed in posts has certain intentions from the owner and also from those who comment on the status. The process of posting statuses and receiving comments on statuses can open up a space for conflict between them that if not realized then it is very likely that the conflict actually occurs in real life. Social media is only a medium used by humans to pour whatever they want, but at the same time open up space for latent conflicts in it, because of misinterpretations that can possibly occur from connoisseurs or commenters on the status posted.

By doing limited relationships on social media, making emotional bonds between humans thinner. Social media is considered to have been able to convey what our feelings are to others, or even to our husbands or wives and children. The presence of other human beings, including those closest to us, is limited to photographs, sayings, words of wisdom, news reviews, to show our closeness, even though it is even easier to resolve conflicts, even though conflicts still exist and if not resolved it will have a bad impact on relationships in real life.

## VI. CONCLUSION

As it turns out, social media has been used as a multi-interpretation space for users who interact in it. Relations between humans become increasingly shallow due to being reduced to the limits of available symbols and icons, thus losing value and meaning. The essence of human presence in other humans is seen more in virtual space, while alienation is experienced in the real world because of the loss of emotional touch in it. Social media is able to bring the far in the distance while hoping that what is conveyed will arrive as originally intended, but limitations in accessing by the recipient can be an obstacle, maybe even the person concerned does not have the media or tools to access the message sent. Lest, the presence of social media sets a trap for humans to regret and feel guilty in the future for what has been posted and become public consumption, including regret because prayers and hopes are trapped in a worthless medium.

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