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The Concept of Identity in the Technological Era

Ines RAZEC¹

Abstract

Today's individual is faced with a complex dilemma. On the one hand, he creates and uses technology in order to facilitate his existence and evolve. On the other hand, the frequent use of technology makes him become dependent on the algorithms for his daily tasks. In time, this leads to a diminishment of one's capacity to take informed decisions regarding personal matters and instead rely on digital platforms to obtain answers to questions that he would otherwise address through the process of introspection. In an era where almost every information can be turned into data, we tend to become less spiritual and more pragmatic, which makes us more prone than before to inauthentic behaviors. Starting from the premise that our character is reflected by our choices, and that the memory of past events helps us determine how to react to certain stimuli and situations, in order to adapt to the world around, we need to pass the reality through our own filter of thoughts. However, by actively choosing to identify technology with our personal moral compass, we become unconsciously diverted from our true nature and no longer put the necessary effort in order to know ourselves. The aim of this study is to analyze the connection between personal identity and the constantly changing environment, with a particular emphasis on the impact of new technologies over the human behavior, through a literature review of the most important works written by both sociologists, philosophers and experts in the domain of Artificial Intelligence.

Keywords: *Digital identity, technological era, artificial intelligence, behavior.*

1. Introduction

Over the years, individuals have evolved in line with the political, social and cultural context, adopting mentalities and taking on behaviors designated as acceptable by the majority. Thus, man became increasingly complex and the moral values, once considered immutable by the philosophers, have acquired different interpretations in order to best illustrate one's passage through all the stages of physical and mental development. By conducting a superficial analysis of the outstanding moments of the past, we notice the prevalence of a social feature that has been a driving force for the most important discoveries in the study of generations, namely the individual's tendency to overcome his predecessors by means of innovations that have redefined the reality, thus creating new political and economic systems designed to satisfy the growing need for progress.

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At present, technology has become so well integrated in our existence, that we barely even notice it anymore. However, should something happen to shut it down or restrict our access to it, we would immediately notice its absence. Considering its large use, technology is progressively turning into something we identify with. For example, our avatars on social media platforms represent online manifestations of us. They are the way we choose to show ourselves to the digital world, and not always reflect our unique personality or character. Instead, most often than not, our digital profile is a representation of what we wish we could be or what could best resemble others' opinion of us. The fast transition from the offline to the online world has made it easier than ever before for the individual to migrate between types of personalities, change styles, vocabulary, interests, and hobbies. In a world where we could reach our ideal self by only a click, how could we get to know who we really are? Today's society is overly saturated with publicity that encourages individuals to ask themselves what they deserve, and make choices solely based on their own, egoistic interests. However, only by superficially analysing the impact of technology over the choices we make, we discover an impressive amount of people who massively rely on algorithms to find out what to choose. Considering the fast evolution of technology, this dynamic could produce major personality shifts in the future generations, encouraging two types of antagonistic behaviours. On one side, by analysing the behaviour of the digitalized generations from a critical point of view, we could notice a more acute insecurity regarding their choices, a lack of responsibility for their actions, and an overall superficiality, resulted from the emphasis placed on the image. On the other side, today's society is better informed and has a globalized perception of reality, due to the impressive amount of data that can be so easily found online, which also help people perform tasks faster, and more efficiently. This study aims to explore the reshaping of the individual's identity through a constant process of adaptation to a perpetually changing society and especially in the context of the evolution of artificial intelligence. There is an interrelationship between society and the individual within which the change occurs as a result of the mutual influence of each of these two factors, one over the other. Individuals' collective behaviour therefore leads to a redefinition of society over time, which in turn gives rise to certain reactions on their part as a result of the need to adapt to the environment. As a result, Artificial Intelligence has started to redefine all areas of existence, such as: the way we communicate, our behaviors, and the working environment. Engaged in this interdependent relationship with technology, we are deliberately choosing to modify our habits and behaviors in order to integrate in our environment a high number of devices that promise us instant experiences through an almost imperceptible transition from the physical to the virtual world: "The success of AI is largely due to the fact that we are building an AI-friendly environment, in which smart technologies find themselves at home and we are more like scuba divers. It is the world that is adapting to AI not vice versa" (Floridi & Franklin, 2017, p. 157). In today's society, people translate their dependence of technology by emphasizing its role as an instrument for development. However, according to Latour, the fact that

technology never seems to cease evolving inevitably deviates people from their original purpose, and in turn makes them change their objectives up to a point where they are no longer aware of the initial reason why a certain technology was implemented and start thinking of new means of innovation: “If we fail to recognize how much the use of a technique, however simple, has displaced, translated, modified or inflected the initial intention, it is simply because we have changed the end in changing the means, and because...we have begun to wish something quite else from what we at first desired” (Latour, 2002 p. 252). On one side, this process could be perceived as a progressive separation of one’s purpose. However, on the other side, this perpetual change of perspective and wishes helps people evolve, both spiritually and materially. As history teaches us, the greatest discoveries were preceded by bright minds who always thought in advance, which helped them surpass their condition.

Considering the multiple implications of the relationship between individuals and technology, whose ramifications extend to all the categories of human existence, and using as basis the studies developed over time on the influence of Artificial Intelligence over humans, this subject was analyzed from a behavioristic perspective. In this respect, a particular emphasis was placed in observing the influence that the development of new technologies has on the individual in terms of shaping personal identity, as revealed by the behavior adopted within the society, with a particular emphasis on the way in which they interact with each other and the perception of the Self. The Ancient Greek aphorism “Know Thyself”, commonly attributed to Socrates, but taken over and reinterpreted by many other philosophers over time, can be seen both as an encouragement to introspection and as a reference to the constant changes produced in the human nature over time. During this process, one must always remain profoundly attuned to oneself. One of the fundamental features of the “social animal”, as Aristotle defines the man, is the adaptability, manifested and proved especially during times of radical change throughout the history. Today, we are both witnesses and participants to one of these moments, and the speed of the change is so troubling that we risk getting disconnected from our true selves without even noticing it. This reality is the direct product of the technological breakthroughs. What is both fascinating and frightening about this transformation is its dual nature, on the one hand imperceptible for those who decide to ignore it or unconsciously adapt to it only when needed, and on the other hand violent, for those who organically experience the effort required to form an identity that could help them integrate in the digitized society. By extrapolating Socrates’ aphorism in order to adapt it to the discussed subject, and combining it with Thomas Hobbes’ remark that “knowledge is power”, we can conclude that, along with the immersion of the New Technologies in everyday life, in order not to lose oneself, the individual has to make a constant effort to know his own identity and assume the appropriate behaviors.

In this context, the question that needs to be answered is the following: “What changes take place in the human identity in the context of the emergence of new technologies?” This is the question on which this paper is based, constituting the product of an analysis focused on the effects of the New Technologies and

namely of the artificial intelligence on the individual behaviour. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the implications of the two above mentioned areas of interest, in the following pages I will make literature review, composed of both past and recent studies, in order to define, explain and correlate the two themes of interest, namely the identity and the artificial intelligence.

2. The construction of individual identity

The concept of individual identity has been explored from different perspectives throughout the literature, given its multi-dimensional nature. The fast emergence of Artificial Intelligence in our lives creates the premises for major societal changes, whose manifestations become increasingly obvious especially through the growing preference for the online environment as opposed to the physical world. In this context, for almost two years, the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic were added to the factors that rushed the transition to the virtual world, thus putting people under supplementary pressure to adapt their existence in order to coexist with the machines. Nowadays, these changes have become so obvious that they can no longer be ignored. Moreover, the high number of controversies and contradictory opinions proliferated by literature and media regarding the new technologies impose a more in-depth analysis that could offer some concrete guidelines of what to expect in terms of individual and collective identity in the technological era. The results of such a study could be beneficial for several reasons: knowing how a technology might influence the human behavior could help decide whether or not to implement it; the effects of the existent technologies over humans could contribute to predicting the future in terms of relationships, the communication process, and the jobs of the future; understanding how technology influences people could prove to be essential in developing systems that could raise awareness regarding the environmental dangers and encourage the necessary actions to remedy the most pressing environmental, economic and politic problems of the society.

This chapter is based on the analysis of the most important theories developed on the subject of identity, which highlight the role of society in forming and shaping the individual's behavior. For a thorough and comprehensive understanding, the present analysis is based on Jan E. Stets and Peter J. Burke's study, "The Development of Identity Theory" (2009), along with the interactionist symbolic approach developed by the Chicago School, through George H. Mead, Herbert Blumer, Stryker, Stets and Carter, Burke.

According to Mead (1934), the social act consists of a number of phases, such as: "the interaction of different forms, which involves, therefore, the adjustment of the conduct of these different forms to each other, in carrying out the social process. Within that process, one can find what we term the gestures, those phrases of the act which bring about the adjustment of the response of the other form." (p. 45). If the meaning given to the gesture corresponds to the intention behind it, the social act is validated as a "symbol", which is subsequently

reflected in the language. Thus, the identity of the individual is built in response to stimuli exerted by external factors and through constant comparison with the environment. In this respect, individuals' behavior is polished by the society. Therefore, the integration into a particular social structure is conditioned by being compliant with its rules. According to an analysis conducted by Jan E. Stets and Peter J. Burke (2009), Mead's central idea regarding the interrelationship between the society and the individual, then taken over by Stryker, divides the social structure into two levels: "The first level included the networks in which people and their identities were embedded...Second was the larger bounding social structure of organizations and institutions, which influenced the probabilities that people with their identities entered into various networks" (p. 58). Thus, identity is perceived as a behaviour that the individual assumes in order to belong to a particular structure, with pre-defined rules and a set of well-defined expectations. Perceived through this theory, man is a collection of different characters and roles, that are amplified or diminished, depending on the context.

Herbert Blumer (1986) exemplifies and explains the symbolic-interactionist theory supporting the idea that, during the interaction between two individuals, the behaviour of each one is the product of introspection and interpretation of the other's actions, not the result of a momentary impulse. From this point of view, our reaction to certain actions is the result of a complex process that involves interpreting their significance, and it therefore carries a personal load. In essence, one person's character is not only reflected by actions, but also by that person's reactions to certain external stimuli. Thus, one adjusts his attitude depending on the conclusions one draws from the interaction with the environment: "The conscious life of the human being, from the time that he awakens until he falls asleep, is a continual flow of self-indications-notations of the things with which he deals and takes into account. We are given, the, a picture of the human being as an organism which confronts its world with a mechanism for making indications to itself. This is the mechanism that is involved in interpreting the actions of others" (p. 80). However, in order for this self-regulation to take place, the individual needs to be both aware of his surroundings, and capable of introspection.

Starting from the assumption that one's identity is built from the sum of his reactions to external stimuli, the roles which one assumes according to the context may also change in response to a change in the environment. Hume (2003) proves this idea very well in his work, by comparing the society with a body that undergoes changes to which the mind must adapt: "A change in any considerable part of the body destroys its identity; but 'tis remarkable, that where the change is produc'd gradually and insensibly we are less apt to ascribe to it the same effect" (Section 10). According to the philosopher, a sudden change produces an immediate and obvious reaction. However, if the change happens gradually, this allows the individuals to adapt to it gradually, because its effects fade over time. However, the overall result is the same. This is why, one's identity is constructed over time, but it becomes more visible depending on how fast it develops.

In essence, identity manifests itself on two fronts: personal and social,

within a community. According to Stets and Burke (2009) “Personal identity standards include the meanings that set the person apart from others as a unique individual” (p. 70). Thus, these personal features represent the sum of individual experiences, lived separately from the society. These are the characteristics which the individual forms throughout his life and to which he continuously relates in situations which directly concern him. Within this theory, an interesting aspect that Stets and Carter (2011) have noticed is the need for a more in-depth study of the level of one’s morality that is reflected in the behaviour, which is often inclined towards the achievement of personal purposes: “Goal accomplishment involves individuals controlling their perceptions of themselves in situations so that their perceptions are kept near their internal identity standards” (p. 193). Thus, every action is founded on a personal will, that is fuelled by strong, positive or negative feelings, which influence the degree of the impact that it will have on the individual and, as a result, will shape the perception of others of him.

Results of the study undertaken by Stets and Carter (2011) on a sample of 545 students of a South Western university during the academic year 2007-2008 (p. 201), on the moral identity of individuals, have shown the following: “The higher the moral identity, the less likely it is for the person to report immoral behaviour in the survey scenarios” (p. 207). On the other hand, the opposite is also true. The researchers have also seen a direct link between morality and the individual's ability to meet certain requirements successfully. Thus, the greater the ability of an individual to solve problems, the less likely he is to resort to unethical behaviour in order to achieve a favourable outcome (p. 208). Moreover, they also noted a direct correlation between the participants' emotions and the degree of morality of their actions. In this respect, the preponderance of negative emotions led to a deviant behaviour, which determined individuals to deceive and act immorally, while the positive ones triggered a behaviour based on fairness (p. 209). One conclusion of these findings is that feelings are part of the factors that contribute to one’s personal identity, influencing one’s behaviour and, by extension, his integration within the society.

In accordance with the theories summarized above, Peter J. Burke (1980) also explored the concept of identity by using previous studies as hypotheses that highlight its complexity, embodied in the form of conscious roles assumed by the individual, according to the context, i.e.: “Identities are Relational” (p. 19); “Identities are Reflexive”; “Identities Operate Indirectly” (p. 20); “Identity as Motive” (p. 21). Based on these hypothesis, Burke (7) attributes the following six characteristics to the identities: “(1) the self is composed of an organized set of identities, (2) identities are self-in-role meanings, (3) identities are defined relationally in terms of counter-identities, (4) identities are reflexive, (5) identities influence role performance indirectly through the construction of self-in-role images, and (6) identities motivate behavior” (p. 28).

Thus, based on the behaviourist-interactionist theories, the human being is portrayed as a collection of identities accumulated throughout life in the form of conscious or unconscious roles, by reference to the environment, that make him act

in accordance with his own ambitions and emotions. Since man is part of a society that he constantly uses as an example in order to rectify his behaviour, the features he accumulates throughout his life as part of the individual identity are redefined through his group. Thus, the group becomes a stand-alone entity, which has the ability to amplify or diminish certain attitudes that most of its members proliferate, depending on the main attributes of the common identity with which its members wish to associate. From this perspective, all changes occurring within the society are reflected in the personal identity which in turn contributes to the identity of the group, thus generating a perpetual cycle of transformation. Observed over a longer period of time, this cycle highlights the shift from one generation to the next.

These theories reveal the existence of several identities within the same individual, who needs to adapt his behavior to a changing context, in order to integrate in a society that functions both as engine and in response to this change. Identity is defined in terms of a number of factors whose influence may or may not have an effect depending on how it is consciously perceived by each individual. In this respect, the more society evolves in a short amount of time, the bigger the impact over the members of the group. At present, the changes that take place in the identity, both at an individual and at a collective level become clearer as technology continues to evolve. This is why, today more than ever, the theories briefly stated above function as a basis for assessing the prevalence of certain behaviors proliferated within the digitized society, such as: the dependence on the devices for the daily tasks; the overly specialized occupations, the creation of a virtual body that is essentially adapted to the virtual world.

3. Artificial intelligence in relation to the world

In the study “The Atlas of AI”, Kate Crawford (2021) addresses artificial intelligence from the perspective of the way in which it is used to serve certain economic and political interests: “AI systems are not autonomous, rational, or able to discern anything without extensive, computationally intensive training with large databases or predefined rules and rewards. In fact, artificial intelligence as we know it depends entirely on a much wider set of political and social structures” (p. 8). This definition of today's artificial intelligence portrays the image of a society that essentially uses it as a means of evolution, thus meeting its ever-increasing ambition, with a speed that surpasses that of a century ago, and without much consideration for generations who have to adapt to the ever-faster pace of successive changes. Following the structure proposed by Crawford, in the following pages, I will focus on highlighting the presence of artificial intelligence in our lives, by exploring it from the point of view of the information, the interpersonal relationships and the communication process, the working environment, and ending up with some of the characteristics of the new identity developed by man.

3.1. Information

Today, any type of information is stored in huge databases, which often act

as a substitute for human memory. Its usefulness is tested according to each individual's personal needs and the rapidity with which they can access the necessary data. Considering the huge amount of knowledge and the speed with which it can be acquired, the man is frequently dependant on search engines to interpret the world around. The mirage represented by them leads him to unconsciously develop a certain dependence on information that satisfies a temporary purpose and which is considered to be the absolute truth. We therefore live with the false impression that there is no need to carry out with further research, because Google diagnoses us, recommends possible treatments, gives us advice on interpersonal relationships, redirects us to relevant sites, etc. Thus, we receive an information that had already been interpreted and impregnated with the subjective opinions of everyone else who had previously accessed it. Each click can grant us access to an amalgam of data ordered by an algorithm which, most often than not, offers priority to the information considered to be useful by a majority composed by individuals with different opinions and areas of interest. As a consequence, the algorithm's ability to distinguish between the objective and the subjective reality could also be profoundly damaged. In "Future Politics", Jamie Susskind (2019) explores the changes that news will suffer in the age of new technologies. According to him, "The news will be the first means of perception that will fall under the control of the digital technology. We already rely more and more on social networking sites for selecting and presenting news. The main difference compared to the present will be that reporters, editors, publishers and moderators who traditionally performed the activity of filtering the information will gradually be replaced by automatic systems programed to do so" (p. 168). Starting from the premise that the algorithm behind the search engines orders the information according to the frequency with which it is accessed by the audience, the news found on the first page stand the best chances to be read, without necessarily being the best.

In this context, it is necessary to explore the problem of "fake news", which is justified by the fact that everyone can play the role of the journalist, because of the speed and accessibility of information in the online environment. The same information can be communicated in such different ways that it runs the risk of reaching the public in a distorted and often political form. According to Mihai Coman (2016), "If we look at a media product, we see that, content wise, these products have a mixed character: they incorporate messages created by journalists as a result of journalistic work and other messages from individuals or institutions wishing to communicate certain information about themselves by using the press" (p. 59). A concrete example of the use of new technologies for spreading false information and the power of the media over people is provided by Tanya Lombrozo (2018) in the article "Psychology of Fake News", using American parliamentary elections in 2016. In this article, the author notices: "in the month before the 2016 election, the average American was exposed to somewhere between one and three articles from a known publisher of fake news. Another alarming result is that when it comes to political topics, tweets containing false information

propagate more rapidly and broadly on Twitter than those containing reliable information”. The election scandal also revealed the existence of intelligent bots used by the media to propagate this type of misinformation (Swire & Ecker, 2021) and manipulate numbers, thus creating a false perception of reality. Looking at the situation as a whole, there are several conclusions that can be drawn. First, the use of bots during the elections was discovered only after the results were published, which means that the messages were written so well that they could easily have been confused with real ones, conceived by real people. Secondly, bots could be used for propaganda purposes to increase the popularity of various political actors, manipulating numbers and gathering partisans in all the important sectors of activity. This fact could lead to the idea that democracy, as manifested and exercised by the political powers, is beginning to turn into another form of power, which merely creates the illusion that decisions are the result of a collective, when, de facto, they are just the proof of a reality that has been consciously modified to obtain a certain type of reaction from the public. Thirdly, when the individual is assaulted with such a large amount of information from various sources, he is in a position either to believe everything that is delivered to him or to develop what Mikael Klintman (2021) calls “knowledge resistance”. According to him, this phenomenon describes one’s difficulty of believing even the information that is supported by concrete proof.

As a whole, information is not reduced to the media alone, but it represents the multitude of all the messages we receive, regardless of the source or the means used to reach them. In “The Age of Spiritual Machines”, Ray Kurzweil (2012) makes some previsions about the future, based on the current state of discovery in the field of Artificial Intelligence, predicting an easier way of accessing the information “A typical website will be an online environment perceived virtual environment without any external hardware. You “Enter” by mentally selecting the site and then entering that world” (p. 212). The researcher also discusses the possibility of making the physical reality extremely difficult to distinguish from the virtual one, due to “the nanotechnology waves” (p. 213), by mentioning the robot called “foglet” (p. 212), a nano-robot capable of forming networks with other robots of the same kind, thus making it possible to create a virtual world that resembles the real one. In such a context, an individual who has no knowledge of the new technologies risks altering his or her own perception of the world and develop a cognitive dissonance, which no longer allows him or her to distinguish between what is real and what is the result of a virtual projection. By developing a false perception of what he experiences through this virtual environment, the individual runs the risk of believing as true the information he accesses during this experience, thus accumulating divergent pieces of information which could destabilize him.

The implications of nanotechnology are also discussed by Olsen et al. (2021) in the work “A Companion to the Philosophy of Technology”, from the point of view of the ethical implications of its potential consequences for humans. In this respect, the researchers raised the issue of personal privacy: “Given the fact that

nanotechnologies will enable more sophisticated monitoring and surveillance technology, particularly in the form of more sensitive and much smaller sensing devices, together with increased computing power, both processing speed and memory size, the capacity to collect information on individuals, and generate information through data-mining, will increase and with it implications for civil liberties” (p. 80). While nanotechnology announces incredible advances in medicine, through devices capable of detecting a particular condition and then treating it accordingly, in order to acquire the data needed to develop a thorough knowledge of man, a more comprehensive research must be conducted on the individual. Therefore, in order to benefit from this technology, man must allow machines to study him. This is one of the major dilemmas of today's society, on the one hand, because the choice is extremely difficult, on the other, because its outcome should reflect on the majority. At present, each of us experiences differently this constantly changing reality.

From the outside, new technologies are presented to us as inexhaustible sources of news that arise our curiosity. This is why, we are trying to benefit from them as much as we can, for the following reasons: curiosity, the fear of being excluded from various groups, the attempt to control others' perception of us, the obligation towards certain institutions that are accessible only through certain platforms, etc. The huge variety of means by which we can obtain information is shaping the image of a society that is constantly having to choose, and this process is not always conscious and continues to expand. This phenomenon is very well described by Kurzweil (2012): “It may seem that we will have far too many options. Today, we only need to choose clothing, make-up and our destination when we leave the house. At the end of the 21st century, we will have to choose our body, our personality, the environment – a lot of decisions that are hard to make! But don't worry – we'll have intelligent machines to guide us” (p. 213). With the immersion of artificial intelligence in our lives, this “choice paradox” theorized by psychologist Barry Schwartz (2004) will no longer be felt so strongly because, as Kurzweil says, the machines will help us. Facebook is an example of the practical involvement of machines in the choices we make. The algorithm behind the platform analyses the pages that we appreciate most frequently, thus building a collection of information that interests us, and delivers it to us, thus relieving us of the effort we have to make to look for it ourselves. As a result of this process, we are automatically integrated into a bubble of information, friends and groups that have the same interests as us and are led by the same values, keeping us far from everything that does not correspond to our own identity. Although, *prima facie*, this is useful to us, by not having access to the views of the opposition, we risk living in a virtual utopian world that shows us only what we approve of, inducing us a sense of belonging that makes it very attractive, but which puts us at risk of not being able to defend our opinions in an interaction taking place in the real world, where we are the ones responsible for filtering the search results. As a result, the difference between the virtual and the real world is becoming more and more obvious. It is therefore necessary to discuss the possibility of splitting up the individual, through a

clear distinction between the physical and the virtual body, which I will explore from the perspective of interpersonal relationships.

3.2. Interpersonal relationships and the communication process

Interpersonal relationships are an essential part of the individual, who is essentially a social being, designed to integrate into certain structures and groups in order to survive, thus embracing the moral values necessary to adapt to a particular political, economic and cultural system. To facilitate this process, the brain is capable of producing empathy, affection and sympathy. According to Patricia S. Churchland (2011), “Moral values ground a life that is a social life. At the root of human moral practices are the social desires; most fundamentally, these involve attachment family members, care for friends, the need to belong. Motivated by these values, individually and collectively we try to solve problems that can cause misery and instability and threaten survival” (p. 36). By reference to and in relation to others, the individual is able to shape his behaviour to match his personal identity and the identity of the group he is part of.

Given the complexity of human existence, with all its adjacent sectors, in order to manage it more easily, individuals need to form their own systems of priorities, depending on which to manage their affection and the degree of involvement in relationships, based on a reward system built since childhood, which Berger and Luckman (1967) address in “The social construction of reality”. According to the researchers, the individual develops roles that help him manage social situations, and build connections to others: “This makes it possible to detach a part of the self and its concomitant reality as relevant only to the role-specific situation in question. The individual then establishes distance between his total self and its reality on the one hand, and the role-specific partial self and its reality on the other” (p. 207). Based on Berger and Luckmann's idea, the process of differentiation and distribution of the affection varies according to the importance which man attributes to the individuals in his life, that he associates with concrete situations and experiences. Through the evolutionary process, and over time, man has managed to adapt his empathy in relation to the environment through a complex process of introspection, which has allowed him to develop his self-awareness, thus developing his ability to pass through his own system of values others' feelings and life experiences.

Returning to the current problem of the ever-increasing body deduplication, in order to adapt both to the virtual and the physical environment, along with the high amount of choices to make on a daily basis, one finds it more difficult than ever to manage his affection. The distinction between the two bodies has also brought with it a considerable change in one's perception of interpersonal relationships, introducing a new variable in the equation, namely the management of relationships developing in the online environment. In the “Digital dementia, how the new technologies disturb our minds”, Manfred Spitzer (2020) highlights the connection between the size of the brain and the membership of a particular group: “...the size of the cerebral cortex or the neocortex, not the whole brain, is

related to the social life of the organism...the most significant correlation between the size of the brain and the size of the social group concerns the prefrontal cortex...if we take into account the region of the brain that, as far as we know, is responsible for the complex mental operations that we need in our social existence, then its size is linked to the development of our social dimension” (p. 103). More precisely, the more we socialize, the more our brain develops. This discovery from the neuroscience domain confirms once more our identity as social animals, and highlights the importance of the communication process in our daily lives. This is why, it is almost natural to permanently seek new experiences that would allow us to evolve. This phenomenon is called by Max Borders (2018) “the experience economy” (p. 46), and is analyzed from the point of view of 7 dimensions, namely: “uniqueness and aesthetics” (p. 47), “attention and time”, “adventure and exploration” (p. 48), “environment and energy” (p. 49), “community and relationships”, “love and care” (p. 50), “purpose and meaning” (p. 51). In this part, I will mainly focus on the fifth and sixth dimensions, which explore the relationships and affection.

We are currently witnessing a redefinition of the social context that we are part of, in terms of personal needs, through the new technologies. According to Borders (2018), the attachment of individuals to certain groups also prevails in the digital society, but this will suffer changes in the future: “Our needs are likely to change by degree and kind in a condition of abundance, but the great dirigisme of the central welfare state is likely to disappear as we approach the social singularity. That means mutual aid is likely to return – only we’ll have technological support. Paradoxically, we’ll be both more localized and more globalized. New communities will emerge both on the ground and in the cloud” (p. 50). This observation is part of the emergence of a new identity developed in the virtual space as more and more communities are formed in the online environment. Within these groups, the conventional limits imposed by space and time will be progressively eliminated, setting the conditions for a relationship developed at a global level, whose consolidation will not require a great effort from the individuals. On the one hand, this discovery may be an advantage, because it relieves us of both a physical and an economical effort to which are added the limitations imposed by the difficulty of adapting our personal program to someone else's. On the other hand, the ease with which we can form new connections and the ability to communicate with each other anytime and anywhere can lead us to develop a superficial perception of interpersonal relationships, because it diminishes the feeling that we need to make an effort to strengthen and maintain them. By analyzing the behavior of individuals in the online environment, in the paper “Cyberpsychology. Online life: How the Internet is changing us?”, Catarina Katzer (2018) notices: “We are rather approaching artificially created beings than genuine people. This is because robots and computer programs are apparently uncomplicated and their great advantage is that we don't have to worry about them anymore, as our real friends expect us to do about them. A pragmatic interdependence is therefore created. This is another reason why social networks are such a great temptation: the superficial relief and the

apparent controllability. In theory, we better control the relationships, their status and expectations, control that we cannot exercise in the case of personal meetings” (p. 276). The increasing number of choices one needs to make is also added to this social context. Faced with such a large number of opportunities represented by potential partners found online, on a global scale, the individual tends to attach less importance to the relationships he establishes, because he starts perceiving the others as products that he can choose from according to his own inner disposition and based on his momentary preferences.

Another problem is the fact that the perception of love also changes. This has become increasingly visible with the apparition of new platforms that guarantee experiences similar to the real life, which grant us a greater influence over the others. To illustrate this reality, Borders (2018) uses Japan's example, where, having a relationship with the machines has already become a trend: “This multi-million-dollar virtual romance industry is as much an outgrowth of Japan’s hyper-conservative cultural mores on sex and marriage as it is of the power of software developers” (p. 50). Starting from the premise that the machines are programed to adapt to the particular needs of each individual, a robot can be an excellent companion to someone who cannot develop relationships in real life, either due to a lack of time, or because of an intrinsic need for constant approval or because the machines can be controlled more easily and a relationship with them would not end. Leaving aside the relationship between the individual and the machines, it is also necessary to explore how one perceives and shows his love in the online environment. Catarina Katzer (2018) also answers to this question: “When we compare past dating behavior with the present one it becomes clear: in real life it was definitely harder to take the first step. Learn how to flirt. Some are shyer. In addition to that, it's just the will of chance to meet your ideal partner in a coffee shop or in the pub around the corner. Online, we can overcome our shyness, mimics, gestures and language” (p. 282). From this point of view, on the one hand, the ease with which people can find a partner in the virtual environment also depends to a large extent on the identity they decide to assume and the behavioral barriers they are willing to overcome in order to be successful. An essential change is therefore gradually occurring, leading to the development of a new identity dimension, which in turn influences the individual's perception of himself and the surrounding world. According to Jamie Susskind (2019), there is a branch of Artificial Intelligence called “emotional artificial intelligence”: “In addition to detecting our feelings, machines can increasingly adapt and react to them. This is what emotional artificial intelligence does. Its uses are numerous - from ATMs that can tell if you're relaxed, and therefore receptive to advertising, to digital “interlocutors” with “faces” and “eyes” that apparently react emotionally” (p. 69)

On the other hand, this new type of relationship brings with it a new set of risks, out of which, the most frequent is the one represented by cyber-attacks and online harassment, conventionally referred to as “cyber bullying”. According to McLuhan (2013), “The new media and technologies by which we amplify and extend ourselves constitute huge collective surgery carried out on the social body

with complete disregard for antiseptics. If the operations are needed, the inevitability of infecting the whole system during the operation has to be considered” (p. 91). This metaphor highlights the lack of security in the online environment due to the lack of a moral system of values to govern it.

3.3. The New identity

Based on the fundamental ideas formulated about identity from the perspective of the behaviorist theories briefly presented in the second chapter, and in view of the changes produced nowadays by the Artificial Intelligence, the new identity of the modern individual is built both based on the self-duplication, and on an inherent need to adapt to a context dominated by the need for belonging to an ever-changing society. This phenomenon is very accurately described by Clippinger (2007) in his study “A crowd of one: The future of individual identity”: “If social identity is derived from the same principles that shape biological identity, then social and individual identity, like biological identity, is formed in opposition to external competing identities, those that blur the boundaries between one’s own social niche and that of others. This might explain the intensity of a group’s needs to reinforce in-group and out-group distinctions in order to clearly demarcate the boundaries of one’s own social niches” (p. 68). We therefore return to the origins of the individual as a “political animal”, whose identity is emerging within social groups and in accordance with the rules spread within them. On the other hand, Clippinger also mentions the multiplication of the environments in which the individual operates, a process which is directly proportional to the development of his personality.

In the paper “Language and identity in the Digital age”, Ron Darvin (2016) identifies two different perspectives on identity in terms of the process of communication and interaction between individuals, namely: the dystopic one, based on the idea that technology has a negative impact on us, affecting our ability to communicate assertively, and the utopian one, based on the hope of a better future, in which individuals will evolve and their lives will radically change. However, according to the author, these concepts are essentially erroneous, because they relate to the individual as a stand-alone entity, without taking into account that his development is influenced by the society: “Not only has the digital facilitated the growth of the knowledge economy, by providing new opportunities for representation, it has also enabled the construction and performance of multiple identities... With regard to agency, consumers are viewed as active creators who produce their own media and differentiate themselves further through ways of speaking, seeing, thinking or acting” (p. 525). The huge freedom that the individuals are nowadays enjoying gives them the opportunity to create a world that meets their needs, which progressively diversifies the types of identities they take assume.

Currently, there are systems based on machine learning, that can correctly recognize and interpret one’s real feelings, and which are conventionally called “emotion prophets” (p. 153) by Kate Crawford (2021). According to the researcher, “These systems may not be doing what they purport to do, but they can nonetheless be powerful agents in influencing behavior and training people to perform in

recognizable ways. These systems are already playing a role in shaping how people behave and how social institutions operate, despite a lack of substantial scientific evidence that they work” (pp. 153-154). The main aim of these smart machines is to contribute to the recruitment process within large companies, by analysing the interviews of candidates for different positions and comparing them with the profile considered to be the most suitable for the job. Titans of artificial intelligence such as: Microsoft, IBM and Amazon developed such programs to detect emotions that transcend the barriers imposed by individuals' social and cultural identity (p. 155). Artificial intelligence is thus used as a trusted tool since it relieves man of an activity that would require a longer period to make a decision and which could result in a subjective one. Considering the fact that people are likely to develop certain affinities for other people or contexts that resonate with their own value system, they are often unable to make objective decisions, especially when they could have long term effects. On the opposite side there are the machines, which, by not possessing what we conventionally call inner life, are capable of unbiased analysis and objective decisions. On the other hand, companies that use this kind of technology can switch the responsibility to them in case they face charges.

This example raises a new type of identity that Sullivan (2018) calls “transactional identity” (p. 725), which illustrates the process by which individuals make their personal data available for registration by machines designed to facilitate their existence: “Transaction identity is the most important part of digital identity, primarily because of its transactional functions. Transaction identity i.e. the part of digital identity required for transactions is a small, defined, relatively static set of identity information, Typically, it is the individual’s full name, date of birth, often place of birth, and identifying information such as a signature and/or a unique number such as a PIN but not all this information is necessarily needed for every transaction. The information needed varies depending on the requirements of the transacting entity and the nature and value of the transaction” (p. 725). This information is protected by applicable laws for the protection of personal data. However, the need to provide personal data for most of the services we benefit from may create a sense of uncertainty among individuals, given the lack of concrete information regarding the purposes for which they are used. The implications of this new identity are extraordinary according to Sullivan: “Digital identity has revolutionized service delivery for commerce and the way in which government transacts and interacts with its citizens. It has brought many benefits by increasing the efficiency and cost effectiveness of service delivery, but there are significant ramifications, especially for individuals because of the architecture of digital identity schemes and the functions of digital identity” (p. 726).

4. Conclusion

Artificial Intelligence makes its presence noticed everywhere, from devices that show us the best route to take, such as the GPS, to programs designed to help doctors put the correct diagnosis. In time, we have adapted our existence to the

machines in such a fast way, that relying on them has become the norm. However, the more we depend on algorithms, the less we use our own judgement to make decisions. As human beings, we have an inherent moral compass that helps us make the difference between right and wrong, characteristic that is not specific to the machines. Therefore, by excessively relying on them to provide us with the answers we seek, we run the risk of becoming more like them, and less like ourselves. This is why, it is important to understand that, fascinating as it may be, technology should be perceived objectively, as a tool for progress, and not as the main force that guides our existence.

In this profoundly digitalized society, we are starting to develop a separate identity that is essentially designed to fit in the virtual world, and which makes the transition between the physical and the virtual space become easier and almost imperceptible. Using the concept of the “strange loop”, developed by Hofstadter, we should always be able to return to our individual self once we disconnect and return to the material world. However, it is still Hofstadter (2007) who raises awareness regarding the possibility that the path to oneself could become harder to follow, as one emerges more in the technological space: “What one starts to realize, as one explores these disorienting by technologically feasible ideas of virtual presence “elsewhere”, is that as the telepresence technology improves, the “primary” location becomes less and less primary” (p. 263). The progressive separation from our physical body makes us less aware of the boundaries imposed by nature, encouraging us to experiment life at a global level, which could lead us to consider ourselves invincible when protected by the apparent anonymity guaranteed by different platforms. However, the paradox lies in the fact that the more we rely on technology to perform our daily tasks, the more personal information we feed to it: “Society will have to accept certain trade-offs to enjoy this future. The first is constant, near-perfect surveillance. Today, the data collected by your smartphone already know more about you than your partner or your mother. With GPS tracking, motion sensors and call logs, it is possible to draw a rich picture of your day-to-day activities” (Mirani cit. in Franklin, 2017, p. 149).

Technology is a very powerful tool, with a lot of potential to help us rectify the environmental problems, create balanced economies, well-organized political systems and developed medical services. However, the most important actor in the relationship dynamic between technology and society is still the individual, because he is the only one capable of deciding how to use it to his advantage, without crossing the ethical boundaries. The purpose of this paper was to emphasize the importance of humans in the changes that the world suffers as it progressively turns into data. In essence, the behavioural shifts produced in the individual and collective identity are mere reflexions of the choices we make during our lives. This is why, we can only analyse the information we already have about the human behaviour under the influence of technology through concrete examples that we gather every day by taking a closer look at the people around us. Considering the fact that we are complex beings, an accurate and objective image of how the identity of the future would look like would be impossible.

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