



The Philosophy of Freedom in the Digital Age: How Technology Changes Our Understanding of Choice

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ABSTRACT

The article offers a philosophical reflection on the phenomenon of freedom in digital reality, including an analysis of a number of fundamental aspects related to the nature of these phenomena and the potential risks associated with them. The study examines the impact of the transformation of the information and communication field on the structure and modification of the social living space, social and cultural aspects. The study highlights the ethical aspects of the integration of digital tools – algorithmic justice, data privacy, responsibility, etc. The methodology of interaction between a digital person and a digital society is substantiated and the conceptualization of the impact of technologies on the understanding of human choice is conceptualized. Attention is focused on the philosophy of the development of a creative society. Concern is expressed about the potential loss of identity by a person in the conditions of digital reality. It is substantiated that the adaptability of human consciousness expands the horizons of creative collaboration with the digital world, forming an unlimited potential for innovation. The study attempted to understand the essence of the relationship between the categories of “control” and “freedom” in the context of active integration of information and communication technologies. The definition of the phenomenon of freedom was determined, and its positive and negative forms were characterized. The author’s vision of the importance of preserving human freedom against the background of global digitalization was proposed. The important role of open interaction and dialogue between the public, the scientific community and government bodies was highlighted to guarantee the harmonious synergy of human rights and freedoms and the digital environment, compliance with digital rights to privacy, security, freedom of expression and access to a safe Internet. The results of the study are aimed at a philosophical understanding of digitalization, which requires a balanced approach aimed at creating a digital space that respects human rights and freedoms, rather than restricting them.

KEYWORDS

digitalization, freedom, digital technologies, control, rights, philosophy of freedom.



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Філософія свободи у цифрову епоху: як технології змінюють наше розуміння вибору

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СТАТТЯ

АНОТАЦІЯ

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У статті запропоновано філософську рефлексію щодо феномену свободи у цифровій реальності, у тому числі, аналіз низки фундаментальних аспектів, які належать до природи цих явищ та потенційних ризиків, пов'язаних з ними. У дослідженні розглянуто вплив трансформації інформаційно-комунікаційного поля на структуру та модифікацію суспільного життєвого простору, соціальні та культурні аспекти. В межах дослідження висвітлено етичні аспекти інтеграції цифрового інструментарію – алгоритмічна справедливість, приватність даних, відповідальність тощо. Обґрунтовано методологію взаємодії цифрової людини і цифрового суспільства а концептуалізацію впливу технологій на розуміння людського вибору. Акцентовано увагу на філософії розвитку креативного суспільства. Висловлено занепокоєність щодо потенційної втрати людиною самобутності в умовах цифрової реальності. Обґрунтовано, що адаптивність людської свідомості розширює горизонти креативної колаборації з цифровим світом, формуючи необмежений потенціал для інновацій. У дослідженні було реалізовано спробу осягнути сутність зв'язку між категоріями «контроль» і «свобода» в умовах активної інтеграції інформаційно-комунікаційних технологій. Детерміновано дефініцію феномену свободи, охарактеризовано її позитивну й негативну форми. Запропоновано авторське бачення значимості збереження свободи людини на тлі глобальної цифровізації. Актуалізовано важливу роль відкритої взаємодії та діалогу між громадськістю, науковою спільнотою та органами влади для гарантії гармонійної синергії прав та свобод людини і цифрового оточення, дотримання цифрових прав на приватність, безпеку, свободу вираження поглядів та доступ до безпечного інтернету. Результати дослідження спрямовані на філософське осмислення цифровізації, що вимагає зваженого підходу, спрямованого на створення цифрового простору, який поважає права та свободи людини, а не обмежує їх.

КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА

цифровізація, свобода, цифрові технології, контроль, права, філософія свободи.

1. Introduction

The rapid spread of artificial neural network technologies, digital applications, personalization, and big data analytics characterizes the dynamics of the modern world. The complex phenomenon of digitalization of public life has sparked philosophical discourse, given the numerous social and ethical aspects of integrating digital technologies, including digital inequality, freedom and privacy, discrimination, control over information, etc.

In view of this, the key problem of philosophy in the context of digitalization is concern about the dynamics of the context of human freedom under the influence of technology, because digital reality determines our perception of identity, space and time, communication and relationships, expands the boundaries of interaction in synchronous and asynchronous formats, leveling spatio-temporal limitations. That is, digitalization changes not only the environment, but also each individual, transforming their consciousness complementary with the updated realities.

The rapid development of the digital world not only optimizes human life, simplifying routine duties and professional activities, but also accumulates the risks of depriving an individual of freedom, which is regarded in the philosophical field as the primary basis of human beings. The identified human freedom gained over the past century is currently gaining more controversial definitions and is evaluated in a rather pessimistic way for the future. The development of digital technologies is actualizing issues of security, ethics and identity. Control and intimidation, which have long been the main levers of influence on the construction of social relations, are now increasingly mentioned in scientific and institutional discourse. This actualizes the need to comprehend the specifics of the dynamics of the phenomenon of human freedom against the background of the digital development of today.

The key task of the study is to search for a comprehensive vision of the synergy of the new digital reality and the human personality, where problematization is implemented at the level of pragmatics. The chosen approach, on the one hand, allows for flexibility, dynamics and discrepancies, and on the other hand, appeals to the concepts of truthfulness, obviousness and thoroughness.

2. Literature Review

The study is based on several related issues, taking into account the achievements of scientists in the interdisciplinary scientific field. Fundamental works of philosophers include the basic developments of R. Capurro (2014) [1], E. Pedersen and M. Brincker (2021) [2], J. Campbell (2019) [3]. Also, it is necessary to take into account the achievements of modern researchers N. Popova, A. Perchyk, M. Myazin and S. Bednarsky (2024) [4], O. Obiedkov (2024) [5], A. Erol et al. (2020) [6] who dedicate attention to the conceptualization of the relationship between freedom and control in the era of digitalization. The key concepts of this relationship are analyzed in detail in the publication of O. Kyvliuk, G. Voronkova and V. Nikitenko. (2023) [7].

In the work "Formation of a Foresight Model of Digital Man and Society to Achieve Sustainable Development Goals" V. Voronkova, V. Niiktenko, G. Vasylichuk, Y. Kaganov and N. Metelenko (2024) [8] determine the key principles of the foresight model of the digital person and the digital society, which includes such elements as trend analysis, identification of the main influencing factors, forecasting promising development scenarios, and the development of response strategies.

The interaction of man and digital society in the context of complexity methodology and Agile philosophy was investigated by T. Dragu and Y. Lupu (2021) [9], R. Baskerville, M. Myers, and Y. Yoo, (2020) [10]. These scientists defined the Agile philosophy as an agile approach to project management that prioritizes people, interaction, and adaptation to changes instead of rigid processes and control, convincing that this philosophy should be the basis for guaranteeing freedom of choice in a digital environment.

Exploring the phenomenon of the digital person, O. Dzoban (2021) [11] argues that this is, first of all, a person immersed in virtual reality, with a set of new moral values, who perceives the world as a gamification environment, while being fully aware of its programmability, conventionality and the possibility of exit.

Of particular importance in the field of philosophical understanding of the category of human freedom and its transformation under different vectors of social influence are the publications of O. Ovcharuk (2020) [12], M. Kyrychenko (2019) [13], O. Radutnyi (2018) [14], K. Honcharenko (2019)

[15]. The authors investigate the development of the information technology sphere and its impact on the formation of the digital worldview and digital ideology of modern man.

The conceptual boundaries of the problem are expanded in the work of N. Kim (2025) [16], M. Godwin (2003) [17], M. Risse (2021) [18], R. Hanna and E. Kazim (2021) [19]. At the same time, the analysis of the dynamics of human freedom under the influence of digital social transformation in philosophical discourse remains relevant, given the importance of tracking changes in social practices against the backdrop of active cross-cultural assimilation in the modern context.

3. Problem Statement

Digitalization offers great opportunities; at the same time, its impact can limit personal autonomy, creating the illusion of choice and imposing algorithmic recommendations. The growing dependence on algorithms and digital platforms raises the question of how much a person's decisions really belong to them. Such urgent challenges require philosophical reflection. How is the essence of freedom of choice transformed in the digital age? What are the potential opportunities and risks posed by modern technologies? Understanding these questions becomes an important step towards assessing a person's place in a technologically determined reality.

The article aims to reveal the essence of the transformation of the phenomenon of human freedom in digital reality, which tests the modern individual and threatens their potential in the future.

4. Methods and Materials

The methodological and theoretical basis of the work was formed taking into account the priority principles of the implementation of system research, based on an integrated approach. In order to fully disclose the problem, several theoretical research methods were used, in particular, historical-philosophical and philosophical-cultural methods, holistic and systematic analysis, synthesis, methods of comparison, generalization and others.

Holistic and systemic analysis, as well as synthesis, were used to isolate the most significant aspects and basic concepts of the phenomenon under study. The dialectical method, comparison and generalization were used in order to detail the system of definitions, to distinguish basic categories and theoretical generalizations, and to form the concept of an integral process of philosophical and cultural progress of society.

The historical-philosophical method provided for an effective combination of theoretical-logical and empirical-historical scientific methods, while the main principle was the unity of subject-content and methodological aspects of philosophical knowledge.

The philosophical-culturological method provided for the use of "freedom" and "control", the concepts of "element" and "connection" in the context of the initial categories of philosophy. At the same time, the basis was an approach to the phenomenon under study, based on the concepts of integrity and generality, as well as the interdependence of individual elements.

5. Results and Discussion

The definition of "freedom" is understood as the property or state of being free, which implies the absence of restrictions, necessity, or coercion, liberation from something burdensome, ease and unlimited use, the ability to be open and frank. In general, there are two main types of freedom: positive freedom, that is, the ability to control one's own life and realize goals, and negative freedom, which implies no restriction on actions.

As evidenced by a retrospective analysis of the definition of "freedom", ancient philosophers such as Democritus and Aristotle believed that choice is determined by the objective laws of nature, which effectively excludes free will, since human actions are conditioned. In the Middle Ages, Luis de Molina emphasized that free will is possible thanks to reason, which helps a person to choose in the face of divine foresight [16]. At the same time, prominent German philosophers I. Kant, F. Schelling and G. Hegel interpreted freedom of choice as the ability to act according to internal principles. At the same time, Kant associated it with the moral law, and Schelling and Hegel with creativity and self-expression [17].

Modern scientists note that freedom of choice consists not only in the absence of restrictions, but also in the awareness of one's responsibility for decisions. In the context of ethics, with which the

phenomenon of freedom is inextricably linked, it is positioned as the unchanging basis of human beings. At the same time, it is necessary to understand the boundaries of the space for its implementation and the accompanying control tools [16].

Information and communication technologies are often perceived as a means of expanding freedom, in particular, in professional activities or communication. Ideas about the development of human freedom in the era of digital transformation are fueled by the fact that most digital technologies and ways of applying them are based on the consent of individuals. At the same time, it should be noted that such consent is given thanks to the same information and communication technologies, which actually weaken human freedom. At the same time, the decrease in the level of freedom is associated with the category of "control".

In the era of digitalization, "control" is controlled by the information itself, which is understood as a regulated system of word orders distributed through information and communication technologies [7]. An individual is a user who is confident that they act based on a conscious choice. However, these actions were pre-programmed and are subject to total control, which complicates the idea of a person's sense of his own freedom, although it corresponds to his desires [18].

In view of the above, there is an opinion that freedom is not characteristic of modern man at all, because he is immersed in the global Internet, where digital technologies form his own desires, encourage the consumption of certain information, and control his actions without consent. The threats to the revival of the totalitarian regime through large-scale digitalization are contradictory, because due to human nature with a constant choice put forward in it, the responsibility falls on the person himself, and technology turns into a dominant component of our personal life [9]. At the same time, the individual must decide for himself whether he is a slave to digital opportunities or, on the contrary, they serve a person. Such a choice is positioned as the sole responsibility of the modern individual.

The dynamics of understanding freedom of choice against the backdrop of rapid technological progress and globalization processes lead to the emergence of new challenges for maintaining freedom in an environment where decisions are increasingly made not by people, but by algorithms, big data and digital platforms. In such conditions, it becomes obvious that modern individual freedom is not reduced exclusively to the right to self-determination and autonomy and is only the result of personal will and self-determination. Today, freedom of choice depends, to a large extent, on the digital infrastructure within which a person makes decisions.

Among the positive aspects of digitalization, which bring tangible benefits for the development of individual freedom, it is necessary to note the greater implementation of the right to information. Providing virtually unhindered access to a variety of sources, digital technologies allow you to get a more complete picture of various aspects of public life, as well as express your own opinion, which significantly expands the possibilities of freedom of speech.

Also, an important area of digitalization is the support of socio-economic rights: access to distance courses and retraining programs through online learning helps to expand the boundaries of freedom of choice. In the field of employment, digitalization has integrated flexible schedules and remote work, which is especially relevant in crisis social conditions [10].

Among the undoubted advantages of the development of digital platforms, it is worth noting the implementation of cultural rights, in particular, access to cultural values and the right to scientific creativity, which contributes to the expansion of opportunities and increase the freedom of choice of each person. New technologies also stimulate the increase in public awareness and the growth of legal culture, creating prerequisites for resolving conflicts, developing creative strategies in the field of legal education. Thus, we can summarize the overall positive impact of digitalization on human freedom in the ensuring, protection and promotion of human rights, opening new horizons for their realization.

At the same time, total digitalization carries a number of risks and challenges that can have a potential negative impact on human rights and freedom of choice, limiting the capabilities of the individual. In particular, personalized manipulation technologies are a particular threat – new ways of influencing people's behavior, which are becoming more sophisticated and invisible to most users. These manipulations come from both individuals and large corporations, government agencies and political organizations.

By analyzing data about a particular person (behavior, preferences, browsing history and interaction with content), network technologies actively shape his perception of information, as well as decisions made based on it with the help of personalized recommendations. A kind of filtering effect is created, where users come into contact only with those materials that best correspond to their previous

interests, which limits their horizons, forms an “information bubble” and excludes alternative information for making conscious, multilateral and free decisions [15].

Also, the problem of loss of anonymity and privacy in the era of digitalization is closely related to the restriction of freedom of choice. GPS tracking technologies, data collection through applications and browsers, and registration of devices in communication networks actually make it impossible to completely preserve anonymity.

The basis of freedom of action is privacy, which guarantees a person the right to control various aspects of their own life without external interference. At the same time, total digitalization levels the boundaries between personal and public space. As a result, freedom of choice becomes a kind of illusion, because the actions of the individual are increasingly determined by hidden influences and algorithms.

It should be emphasized that the lack of anonymity not only significantly infringes on personal human rights, but also creates threatening risks for the development of a democratic society, which can be expressed in practice in total control by corporate or state structures, restriction of freedom of speech and freedom of expression [17]. Digital transformation on a global scale requires not only the development and implementation of effective technical solutions for the protection of personal data, but also the settlement of legal and ethical issues.

It is worth noting that freedom of choice is threatened not only by the complete digitalization of public life but also by limited access to digital technologies. Restriction of access to technology leads to the loss of freedom of choice in critical aspects, from professional self-realization to participation in democratic processes. In an environment where flexible schedules and remote work have become the norm, the lack of access to modern information and communication technologies limits educational and professional opportunities, which complicates career growth and adaptation to modern labor market requirements.

Also, there is a challenge regarding unequal access to information. Deprived of access to digital technologies, people find themselves in an information vacuum, which limits their ability to make informed decisions. Digital inequality can cause social exclusion, in particular, among young people, because communication in social networks and participation in public discussions determine the level of social activity today.

Preserving human freedom, his right to choose in the light of modern challenges requires a systematic approach that combines educational, legal, technological and socio-political measures. Solving this problem requires coordinated efforts on the part of the state, business and civil society [5].

Digital technologies, in particular, machine learning algorithms, can be actively involved in countering manipulative influences. Artificial intelligence automatically detects and blocks false information, fake news, and manipulative headlines, refuting false claims in real time [12]. Tools such as Google News make it easier for users to verify the reliability of information by forming ratings of the reliability of sources [17].

At the same time, it is worth noting that personalized algorithms for generating video content can enhance the “bubble” effect, supporting users’ current beliefs. To effectively overcome this effect, it is necessary to create ethical, transparent algorithms that minimize the risks of manipulation [7]. In addition, raising human awareness at different levels of development through the introduction of courses on critical thinking, online safety, the basics of data analysis and recognition of fakes will form the basis for the development of an informed and protected society. Courses on digital literacy and protection against manipulation in the media space, created by reputable educational platforms such as Coursera, Udemy, and Khan Academy [16], are already available.

An important element of preserving a person’s freedom of choice is the protection of personal data. In this context, it is necessary to develop and implement legislation to regulate the activities of digital platforms, which will prevent the spread of fake news, manipulation and harmful content, and introduce responsibility for the dissemination of false information. A successful example is the European GDPR law, which aims to protect personal data and prevent its unauthorized use [3].

Support for independent fact-checking platforms and the creation of transparent mechanisms for blocking fakes should become the basis of sectoral international cooperation, which should be given vector integration of global standards to combat manipulation and establish strict rules for the transparent use of personalized data.

Thus, by distancing himself from the “disciplinary society”, the individual of the twenty-first century found himself within the framework of the “society of control”, which is led by information. A person identifies himself with certain data, confirming his own consent to their consumption. The

greatest risks of this state of affairs are hidden in the fact that digital technologies themselves form this consent and the prerequisites for its provision, which is disguised as a conscious choice.

In view of the above, the responsibility for personal life and responding to the challenges of digitalization rests with the person themselves. The dualistic variability of the development of the embodiment of such responsibility is manifested either in the complete service of the individual to technology and dependence on them, or, conversely, in the subordination of digital systems to a person and control by them.

A person can potentially be free in the digital age and effectively resist control measures only if he makes a conscious choice not to subordinate his own life to the digital dimension of information and communication technologies. The victory of humanity in resisting the excessive impact of digitalization and the preservation of the right to freedom are determined exclusively by a disciplined and balanced attitude towards oneself.

6. Conclusions

The specifics of the development of modern society are determined by the cultivation of the significance and role of innovative information and communication technologies. The potential of the digital society is developing against the backdrop of the widespread implementation of artificial intelligence tools, algorithmizing, deep learning, big data analytics, which, at the same time, can potentially lead to several negative consequences – transformation of the human personality, its full immersion in the digital world, alienation from one's own essence, restriction of freedom of choice.

The purpose of the article was to reveal the essence of the transformation of the phenomenon of human freedom in digital reality, which tests the modern individual and jeopardizes their potential preservation in the future. The results of the study showed that the phenomenon of human freedom in the context of digitalization is a multifaceted concept that combines both positive and negative aspects.

In particular, digitalization provides access to a variety of information, ensuring greater realization of the right to information and freedom of speech, expanding horizons for self-realization, and supporting the provision of socio-economic and cultural rights. At the same time, there are serious tangential challenges, such as manipulation of the individual's consciousness, loss of anonymity, discrimination and digital inequality, the preliminary formation of ready-made human decisions by algorithms.

The main task of modern social development should be to provide prerequisites that will not only preserve but also strengthen human freedom, their right to choose, in the context of total digitalization and rapid technological development. Obviously, this requires the integration of educational projects to improve digital literacy, the development and implementation of transparent and ethically sound algorithms, and the provision of legal and social support aimed at protecting the rights of users of the global network. The synergy of efforts in the aspects of education, technology and the legal field will be able to guarantee the use of the potential of digitalization to expand human freedom of choice, minimizing the associated risks and restrictions.

The prospect of further research is seen in the disclosure of the essence of the "society of control", which is endowed with potential opportunities for the development of a totalitarian regime of digital format and can lead to ambiguous transformations of communication and behavior formats, value guidelines of the individual.

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