

UNIVERSITY OF WALES - TRINITY SAINT DAVID

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1.0 THE CONTEMPORARY HUMAN

The Cambridge Dictionary defines the word ‘**contemporary**’ as ‘*existing or happening now, and therefore seeming modern*’, with synonyms including ‘*modern*’, ‘*up to date*’, ‘*latest*’, and ‘*high-tech*’. A word that fits the description of the current era of globalisation, that lets us talk about the political and economic state of the world. According to Reader (2020), Gilbert Simondon describes the idea of metastability as a flexible state where the people in a society are open to change. However, the idea is often taken over by rapid consumerism and marketing which makes it harder for us to be able to think critically about these factors, as we are constantly pushed toward new trends and influences revolving around the present times. These changes may lead us to a bigger question—what does it mean to be a human in this contemporary era?

If you ask society what most people in this era do when they wake up in the morning, they would arguably say to grab their phones as soon as they open their eyes. Some would say to check their emails and reply to messages, others would scroll through the current news articles, some others would just choose to indulge in entertainment sources. Cruz (2020) noted that smartphone addiction becomes more prevalent as society’s dependency towards phone usage grows higher and higher in order to partake in daily activities. It is undeniable that a smartphone is the most important item for today’s society to survive and navigate their way through life, this is largely due to the rapid technological advancements that are actively being developed and applied in real time. Everything is on your phone, and your phone becomes your everything. From communication to entertainment, from current happenings to business, from national occurrences to international outbursts, the information that is published and provided nowadays are likely all available online at your fingertips just within a click and a tap away.

Other than connecting with and learning from others, smartphones also allow us to compare ourselves to and compete with one another (Veissière and Stendel, 2018). However, this modern day and age requires us to not only compare and compete with other humans, but we must also interact and compete with mechanical beings. Robots are slowly taking over the world we are currently living in, with machines being the reason for high employee turnovers due to replacement of the workforce. Not only in the production and manufacturing industries where machines are king of the assembly lines, but also in the entertainment and business industries where chatbots are replacing customer service workers and the rise of AI influencers on social media. Depictions of the dystopian worlds we used to read about in science fiction novels and comic books are slowly but surely becoming our reality, and it will only prove to get worse if we do nothing to stop the rapid automation and mechanisation that is engulfing our world. While we might not be able to live long enough to experience the complete reign of robots, should there even be one, our future generations might have to rise with rebellion and really give it their all in order to reject modernity and embrace tradition.

2.0 PROBLEM SOLVING

According to an article by Abah and Ogbodo (2020), they argue that globalisation redefines the definition of humanity in the 21st century, implying that global networks and forces that go beyond local or national contexts have an increasing influence on identity and values for the modern human. Enhancing media literacy is one way that these influences can benefit modern society. Lewis (2021) states that the goal of media literacy education is to assist people, particularly the youth, in acquiring and developing the ability and skills to utilise media technology. They can then use these abilities to create and produce beneficial content, as well as to critically analyse and assess the messages that are disseminated through the media. Nowadays, it is getting more difficult to differentiate factual news with hoaxes, especially with the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) that is evolving ever so rapidly. It is so easy for people to fabricate stories and spread misinformation around, allowing anyone to become a target of malicious intent, or even worse, the initiator. Therefore, media literacy is one of the most important skills that society can apply on an everyday basis in order to survive in this digital era.

Although humans are shaped by following the flow of globalisation and the development of technology, they still have the power to reflect on their actions and redefine humanity as something that can never be replaced by automated mechanicals that lack empathy and emotional intelligence. It is important that we as humans learn how to adapt to the changes that are present in the world we currently live in, but also be able to question the things that we are unsure of and to not just blindly follow unethical practices just because they are provided by machines that supposedly possess higher levels of intelligence than humans. In their article, Abah and Ogbodo (2020) states that society must move away from patterns of exploitation and selfishness and instead strive for equality and peace for all in order to create a more sustainable development that secures well-being for both the present and future generations. This suggests that we as humans should be more aware of the grave consequences that our actions may cause toward the longevity and ecological balance of the environment, as we only have one Earth for our current and future generations. So, we should do all we can to preserve our home planet.

Bukowski (1992) wrote, *“People are strange: they are constantly angered by trivial things, but on a major matter like totally wasting their lives, they hardly seem to notice.”* Although this thought was written over 3 decades ago, it still resonates with today’s current society. We tend to only see the flaws and imperfections of what we have, making it easy for us to forget about gratitude and humility, reminiscent of the glass half full/glass half empty situation. Just the sheer irony of promoting and following the latest new trends or clothes that promote fast fashion industries just because everyone else is doing it, but at the same time not feeling any passion or happiness by doing so because it doesn’t actually resonate with their identity or personality. Something that we can do to avoid these negative behaviours is to try our best to always be grateful for everything that we have in our lives, because something that we don’t necessarily feel is important can mean the absolute world to someone else.

3.0 WHO AM I?

If you were asked to describe humans as inanimate objects, what kind of description would you come up with? Are we like blades of grass in a soft green meadow, are we like the different books on the shelves of a used bookstore, or are we like the colourful pebbles on the rocky sea shore. I'd like to think of each of us as a giant jigsaw puzzle, with the puzzle pieces being pieces of us as a person. What we like, what we dislike, what gives us strength to move forward, what breaks us down to pieces, and what completes us as a human. Every piece with different sizes and shapes, with different tabs that fit into different blanks, with different edges that align with different curves. To experience and observe the beauty of individuality and not being exact carbon copies of one another, even if you share the same DNA, is something that we take for granted in today's day and age. Is it really getting harder to find unique individuals that don't deem it important to blindly copy other people's quirks and personalities in exchange for their own?

It's amazing to think that works of classic literature can be tied to our modern lives, having surprisingly parallel situations and predicaments. Based on *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, "*the only thing worth loving is youth*," (Wilde, 1891). Through Lord Henry, Wilde is saying that the only valuable things in life are youth and beauty, merely the superficial aesthetics being presented to people. Dorian eventually trades his soul for the immortality of his beauty, not realising that some things just cannot be covered up by a pretty face. I feel as if we live in a world full of Dorian Grays without realising it, always so obsessed with how we look and how others perceive us, desperate for external validation but shy away from the attention it brings. Why are we that way? Do we only value others' perception of us without truly knowing what it means for us? Could it be that society's validation matters a lot more than our own satisfaction?

The final line of *The Great Gatsby* reads, "*So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past*," (Fitzgerald, 2003). If the "current" represents reality and the inescapable forces of life, the "boats" represents us as humans who try our best to move on from our past and to chase our dreams of growing into someone better. But just like the tides that push and pull, we can always get pulled back into the shallow waters of what we once wanted to leave behind. **Kintsugi**, which is the ancient Japanese technique used to repair priceless items, is

known for the ability to beautify the cracks (Deng and Connie, 2023). It can actually serve as a beautiful metaphor for embracing the past that might have broken you down to pieces, but similar to a puzzle, you can always put it back together again. Instead of hiding the imperfections, the Kintsugi method embraces the flaws by drawing more attention to it. A concept that is worth applying into our daily lives, and will eventually benefit us in the long run.

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