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**Auszug aus:**

*"Digiligion"? Living in a digital world*

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# „Digiligion“? – Living in a digital world

by Stefan Erhardt



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„Digiligion“? – *Living in a digital world* behandelt die fortschreitende Digitalisierung und deren Auswirkungen auf alle Lebensbereiche. Dementsprechend zeichnet sie sich durch einen starken Lebensweltbezug der Schülerinnen und Schüler aus. Die Lernenden führen Umfragen zur Mediennutzung durch, werten diese aus und entwickeln einen *media literacy test*. Sie diskutieren, kritisieren und bewerten die Rolle digitaler Medien in ihrem Leben und deren Einfluss auf unsere Kommunikation anhand von authentischen Zeitungsartikeln, Statistiken, einem Hör-Seh-Verstehen, einem Cartoon und Mediationstexten. Entwickelt sich die Digitalisierung immer mehr zu einer neuen Religion?

# “Digiligion”? – Living in a digital world

## Oberstufe (Niveau)

by Stefan Erhardt

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## Competences and skills

The students enhance several **communicative competences**. By working with texts, statistics, cartoons and videos, students improve their **writing** and **reading skills** as well as **listening/viewing comprehension**. They work on their **speaking competences** concerning discussions and comments and practise **mediation**. Furthermore, students enhance their **media competences** in that they actively use digital media, for example blogs, internet tools and presentations. In contrast, they practise constructive critique on digitalisation and digital media by discussing and commenting on the effect on individual and social life.

## Overview:

### List of abbreviations:

A: Analysis

C: Comment

CT Creative Task

D: Discussion/Debate

IN: Interview/Survey

MD: Mediation

PR: Presentation

RC: Reading comprehension

T: Working with the text

VLC: Viewing/ listening comprehension

W: Writing

Topic	Material	Method
1: Digital media literacy	M1–M5	A, C, CT, IN, RC, T, W
2: „Digiligion“?	M6–M9	A, D, MD, T, VLC
3: Digital detox	M10–M12	A, C, D, PR, RC, W

# “Digiligion”? – Living in a digital world

## Facts

The digitalisation of societies has taken on a presence that has made it not only an important economic factor for business and marketing, but has also become an enormous influence on people’s lives. Some, who have followed this development critically even call it a revolution and the next stage in the technological development of humankind.

The speed and the volume of digital inventions and their spreading amongst almost all inhabitants of this planet over a relatively short period of fifty years have established a digital standard not only amongst Western cultures. Nowadays, kids grow up surrounded by digital devices (at least by one, namely a mobile phone with internet access) which they learn to use quickly and, thus, see them as the regular background to their life experiences. As one recent article in the well-known magazine *Nature* called it: “An explosion in information technology is remaking the world, leaving few aspects of society untouched.” This includes education and socialising. Some teachers see this trend of including digital devices in schools positively, advocating the seemingly obvious advantages of computerised knowledge and promoting their enthusiasm for new teaching methods and situations with sometimes missionary zeal. This view is backed by an undeniable satisfaction regarding the progress mankind has made in terms of access to information. Others see the impact of digitalisation rather critically, pointing out the drawbacks digital media have had on young people’s perception of reality and relationships or the negative impact of electronic media on basic skills like reading or writing.

Here are some of the concerns uttered by scientists of various provenances:

- Everyday work with computers is hindered by hardware problems, data loss, virus infection or advertising.
- The way users work today may lead to social isolation.

- The speed at which the computer forces users to work may be detrimental to their health.
- The distraction of attention caused by multitasking and an abundance of web links can lead to disorientation in the data flood.
- Users lose the capacity to concentrate over a long period of time and develop an aversion to reading longer texts or books. This may lead to a cultural change from a linear book culture to a kaleidoscopic, disconnected and random awareness of facts and events.
- Users' memory capacities are reduced. They tend towards superficiality in thinking deeply, relatedly and creatively.
- Users' feelings and social behaviour get reduced to a state of isolation.
- People are now forced to not only observe their environment globally, but also to live in a real and in a virtual world at the same time, with a "secondary reality" steadily displacing the primary one.
- People's behaviour is changed. Their cognitive-emotional frame of mind and their complete way of life is altered by orienting themselves along digital guidelines.

In general, digitalisation has made steady progress: the obvious positive assets like the unabashed access to information 24/7 or communication at a speed that enables processes, decisions, and projects to be pursued far more efficiently than ever before. Despite all this, the list of warners and sceptics has not grown shorter (as can be seen looking at the short reading list at the end of this introduction). The aspects viewed rather sceptically in these days especially concern the influence of digital developments like artificial intelligence on our everyday lives, the dependency digitalisation may exert on all kinds of areas, and the fear of massive surveillance and data control.

Some of these aspects are touched upon in this unit, namely the influence of social media on young people, the change digitalisation brings concerning human interaction, the establishing of a group of enterprises with almost god-like status and a huge crowd of avid followers as well as the possibility of exiting this "explosion".

## Reading list

### Recent publications:

- ▶ **O'Neill, Cathy:** *Weapons of Math Destruction. How Big Data Increases Inequality And Threatens Democracy.* Penguin, London 2016.
- ▶ **Greenfield, Adam:** *Radical Technologies. The Design of Everyday Life. A field guide to the technologies that are transforming our lives.* Verso, London 2017.
- ▶ **Schulz, Thomas:** *Was Google wirklich will: Wie der einflussreichste Konzern der Welt unsere Zukunft verändert.* Penguin, München 2017.
- ▶ **Galloway, Scott:** *The Four: The Hidden DNA of Amazon, Apple, Facebook, and Google.* Portfolio/Penguin, New York 2018.
- ▶ **Alter, Adam:** *Irresistible: The Rise of Addictive Technology and the Business of Keeping Us Hooked.* Penguin, London 2018.
- ▶ **Ormerod, Katherine:** *Why Social Media is Ruining Your Life.* Cassell, London 2018.
- ▶ **Zuboff, Shoshana:** *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for the Future at the New Frontier of Power.* Profile Books, London 2019.
- ▶ **McNamee, Roger:** *Zucked: Waking Up to the Facebook Catastrophe.* HarperCollins, New York 2019.
- ▶ **Spiekermann, Sarah:** *Digitale Ethik: Ein Wertesystem für das 21. Jahrhundert.* Droemer, München 2019.
- ▶ **Türcke, Christoph:** *Digitale Gefolgschaft. Auf dem Weg in eine neue Stammesgesellschaft.* C.H.Beck, München 2019.

## Notes on the material

**Topic 1** starts with a task for all students to conceive and conduct a survey about media usage in class or, if possible, of fellow students in their respective year. Afterwards, students discuss the results and compare them to recent statistics about media usage of young people, especially social media, in Germany and the USA. This is followed by a rather challenging essay – regarding both language and content – by two U.S. American professors of ethics (*Embedded Beings: How we blended our minds with our devices* by Saskia K. Nagel / Peter B. Reiner). This text shows how a user of digital technology connects body and mind to this technology through certain devices. At the end, the essay explicitly refers to a video clip which is part of topic 2. Students complete reading comprehension tasks. If desired, it can also be connected with a listening

comprehension exercise since the essay is available as podcast on the website. To end topic 1, students are encouraged to start their own blog and post their thoughts, ideas, questions, opinions concerning media throughout the whole sequence, including what is being worked on in the lessons. It might be necessary to first provide instructions on how to start a blog and how to post according to standard “netiquette”. Students then decide whether their blog will go public or whether it is only open to registered members (of their class). Comments from others should be welcome, so that there can be an exchange about students’ blogging experiences at the end of the sequence. This adds a practical side to media education.

**Topic 2** aims at investigating to what extent the digitalisation of individuals and societies has created a certain religion-like community or even a new religion – as stated by communication scientist Christian Hoffmeister in his book *Google Unser* (Hamburg: DCI Institute, 2019). In order to find this out, students transfer excerpts from the book into English. This could be done cooperatively (using the jigsaw technique) so that an intense exchange about the book’s concept can be arranged. The four excerpts are between 595 and 689 words long – this is in consideration of students who work their way through a text quite slowly or quite fast. Talking about these text excerpts, one may include pictures of the logos mentioned and the corresponding religious symbols (excerpt 1), a sample of Facebook’s Little Red Book (<http://v1.benbarry.com/project/facebooks-little-red-book>) (excerpt 2), photos showing Steve Jobs, Mark Zuckerberg and Sergey Brin as well as perhaps a recap video of the Pokémon-Go craze (e.g. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L2app5o\\_7sc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L2app5o_7sc)) (excerpt 3) and the icons referred to (images of *Our Lady of Tenderness* and *Christ Pantocrator*) can easily be found through any search routine, along with pictures of “duckface” and “fishgape” poses, possibly accompanied by some video clips from influencers themselves (excerpt 4). Before carrying out a class discussion about the proposition of a new religion, a so called *digiligion*, as the author phrases it, students watch a video clip about Steve Jobs introducing the first iPhone to the public in 2007. With the help of viewing tasks, students find out to what degree this particular event carries traits of a religious ceremony. Then students discuss whether or not technology corporations are seriously and intentionally aiming at installing some kind of digital religion.



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