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The post-digital age has already begun

In their annual report, [Matthias Horx](#) and his [Zukunftsinstitut](#) (Future Institute) based in Frankfurt and Vienna offer an insight and outlook into current trends and innovations. A source of inspiration to look outside the box at the start of the year and perhaps take a few things into consideration in your own plans.

While we are still laying the groundwork to implement digital transformation, Matthias Horx is intensely occupied with asking what will come next. The first signs of digital exhaustion are already becoming apparent. The futurologist believes that we are heading for a tipping point where digital momentum is starting to waver.

For the promise that digitalization will revolutionize everything is being increasingly perceived less as a promise, but above all as an overwhelming requirement, leading to dehumanization. In the US, a radical debate about the consequential damage of social media has started, which will also have an impact in Europe. At the latest when it becomes known that the next upcoming elections were digitally influenced by whomever.

In order to understand the effects of digital communication, it is advisable to use both economic and psychological parameters. The economy can be represented as a formula of accumulated clicks - and this is precisely where Horx sees the danger that social media channels degenerate into absolute manipulation machines and make people addicted and immature.

But clicks also have a direct influence on our motivation because with every click our organism releases happiness hormones such as dopamine and endorphins. The number of clicks,



likes or followers also determines our emotional condition. Who would have thought that we would be willing, voluntarily and without realizing it, to cede so much power to the internet?



Alexa, can you help me date?

Although about four billion people can now get in touch with each other constantly via the internet around the clock, digital loneliness has increased significantly. Social ties are increasingly disintegrating, which contributes to intensifying the digital non-committal nature of present-day life. The language assistant Alexa provides the proof. The most frequently asked question is whether Alexa can help with dating.

But the internet has also given everyone their very own megaphone, and millions of opinions are posted in the digital nirvana around the clock. However, all decency has been lost through anonymity, and no one has to answer for the publication of fake news. Abuse is being spewed as if there was no tomorrow. Horx calls this an outrageocracy, in which verbal attacks spread in a way that cannot be tolerated.

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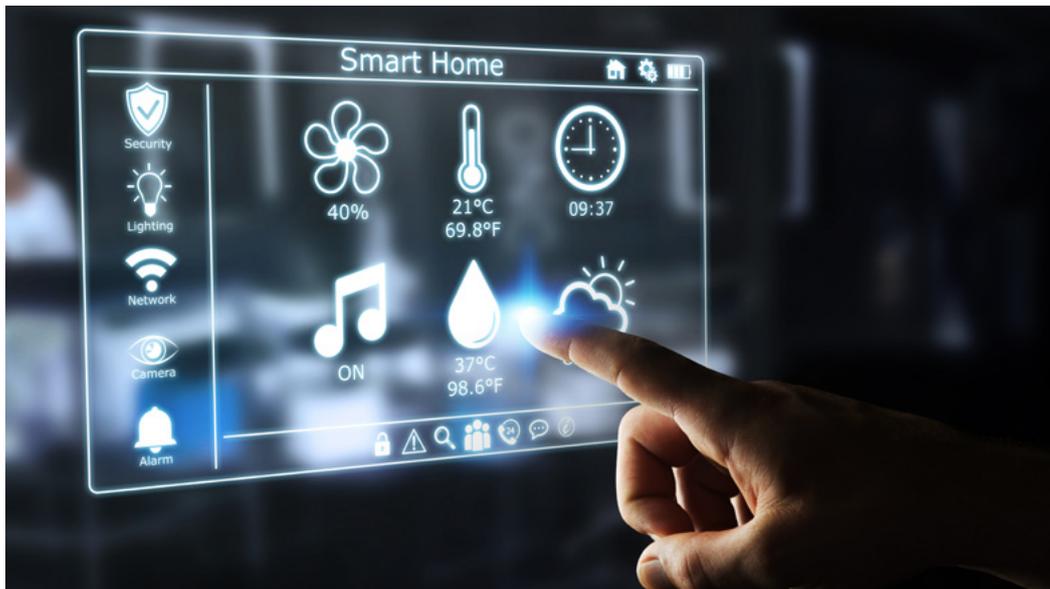
Matthias Horx: Founded the German Zukunftsinstitut.

Electronic caretakers

The digital evolution has long been in a crisis of marginal utility and is increasingly dedicated to mere banalities. The real innovation rate of digital devices that offer users value added has been slowing down for about five years. The private „smarthome“ is proving to be a laborious matter, turning residents into their own electronic caretakers. This raises the question of whether you really want to do the job.

Despite artificial intelligence, the blurriness of human life cannot be clearly determined in the future and, above all, cannot always be interpreted correctly. This is evident in people with multiple diseases who, in contrast to healthy people, do without constant monitoring. They derive their joy of life from the trust that everything will come up roses. Horx notes that constant monitoring and too much knowledge limit the quality of life.





The revenge of analog

There are signs that analog technologies are making a comeback. The best example of this is vinyl records, which are even on the verge of an innovation leap with HD vinyl. And classic notebooks have become an evergreen (see the article in Muller Martini's customer magazine „[Panorama](#)“ 1/17). Horx does not identify a nostalgic reflex here, but deems it to be the longing for significance. „When everything is infinitely copied and available, the unique, the specific, the tangible becomes a new luxury.“

And last but not least, Horx believes that the expectations placed on artificial intelligence are far too high. „Something in us seems to long for self-abandonment, in which we can transfer everything complex and human, to machines.“ This also gives rise to the widespread assumption that there is no remedy against the superiority of digitalization. Digital fatalism on the one hand and digital fanaticism on the other, should be countered with digital realism because human and technical systems are in perpetual co-evolution.



However, courage and self-confidence are needed to face this evolution. Digital systems in combination with artificial intelligence can optimize many things, but decisions based on



values and priorities cannot be outsourced to machines. Humans, society and politics will be required in the future, too. In the era of post-digitalization, the human net profit arising from wisely combining the informal with the cognitive, the communicative with the reflective and the systemic with the sensual is the focus. According to Horx, this will allow people to free themselves from the constant pressure to innovate, do without pseudo-innovations - and decide for themselves what genuine progress is.

Your
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