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PUBLICATIONS

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ONLINE ISSN: 2992-5509
PRINT ISSN: 2992-6092

NEWPORT INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN EDUCATION (NIJRE)

Volume 5 Issue 2 Page 21-26, 2025

https://doi.org/10.59298/NIJRE/2025/522126

Digital Humanities: Merging Technology with Cultural Studies

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ABSTRACT

The digital humanities (DH) represent a transformative and interdisciplinary domain that integrates computational tools and methodologies with traditional humanistic inquiry. This paper examines the evolving landscape of DH, tracing its historical emergence, conceptual foundations, technological tools, and the challenges it poses to conventional academic paradigms. It interrogates the theoretical and practical implications of digitizing cultural knowledge, examining intersections with archival studies, data visualization, and ethical considerations in digital scholarship. Through a review of case studies, this study highlights how DH enables novel forms of inquiry into literature, history, media, and culture, while also revealing tensions surrounding collaboration, representation, and disciplinary fragmentation. Ultimately, the paper argues that digital humanities is not merely a methodological innovation but a conceptual rethinking of how knowledge is produced, curated, and disseminated in the digital age.

Keywords: Digital Humanities, Cultural Studies, Computational Humanities, Digital Archives, Data Visualization, Interdisciplinary Research, Digital Ethics, Technocultural Literacy.

INTRODUCTION

Digital humanities, often better known as DH, is a burgeoning interdisciplinary field that exists at the intersection of academia, technology, and cultural studies. It addresses the dual challenges posed by the rapid rise of new technologies for the creation, dissemination, and storage of cultural artefacts and by the changing role of humanistic scholarship in a society that tends to neglect its social, political, cultural, and economic relevance. Digital humanists are at the fore of this discussion and engage with these challenges by devising new methods for examining the nature and the effects of new technologies on culture and society; by actively collecting, analyzing, representing and curating cultural artefacts in forms mediated by digital formats and technologies; and by developing theoretical frameworks to understand these phenomena from the perspective of cultural studies and the humanities. A similar and parallel set of challenges applies to the social sciences, which can and have adopted similar solutions. The term digital humanities signals the importance of the role of digital technology and formats in the processes of producing, disseminating, storing, and using culture. To speak of the humanities, however, also means to emphasise the relevance of understanding these phenomena about social and cultural structures and processes rather than in terms of mathematical possibilities and limits alone. Thus, the two components of the term digital humanities are rarely easily combined and may well hold different meanings for different people. Digital humanities, therefore, very much remains a presently relevant research topic [1, 2].

Historical Context

This overview examines the historical context of the digital humanities' emergence, showcasing a variety of projects that illustrate the field's diverse research forms. Key issues confronting digital humanities are explored, alongside potential future directions considering the rapid technological evolution affecting traditional humanities knowledge systems. The term "digital humanities" is highly debated in academia,

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PRINT ISSN: 2992-6092

often synonymous with terms like "computational humanities" or "digital culture." Despite the growth of digital media exploring human culture, a consensus on its definition remains elusive. Frequently, digital humanities are illustrated through projects that engage scholars, citizens, or students with common themes. These projects are structured around specific tasks or problems and utilize output formats that may not adapt easily for broader use or publishing. Although digital humanities comprise collaborative efforts, much work is done independently by early-career scholars and graduate students. This solitary work, while contributing to academic discourse, often lacks broader impact. Successful interdisciplinary collaboration in teams relies on a shared language and understanding of various disciplines' codes, methods, and practices. Without this shared foundation, establishing effective collaborative networks becomes challenging [3, 4].

Key Concepts in Digital Humanities

Digital Humanities is a multi-stakeholder field that transcends disciplinary boundaries and national borders, giving rise to new disciplines like Computational Humanities, DH for the Humanities, Literary Studies, Cultural Studies, Archival Studies, and others. Many of them do not share the same values and traditions as a nascent field. Especially disciplines such as Digital Forensics, Digital Archaeology, and Digital Librarianship complement and often collaborate with all others. This vertical fragmentation allowed them to form smaller communities contributing to the growing field of Digital Humanities. On the other hand, there is also consolidation in the form of associations and international collaborations on grants and projects. There is still an umbrella term, Digital Humanities, embraced by higher echelons. However, while it is widely recognised as a potentially ground-breaking paradigm within and across the Humanities, it is necessary to take a step back to inquire how significant this paradigm shift could be and whether it will contribute to a breakthrough. There are different conceptualisations of the term, ranging from "hard core" existential/ontological technology perspectives to "soft core" transdisciplinary perspectives. The former sees technology as fundamental, creating new forms of inquiry. Applications and methods within the soft core were developed in fields outside the Human Sciences and have been adopted by other disciplines. While the applicability of existing methods and applications can further research in a multitude of disciplines, direct contribution towards a Human-centric Digital Technology seems marginal. Further, the Digital Humanists' initial concern with the supposed algorithmic dangers of Big Data has shifted towards a broader conception taking in a range of phenomena of loss, confinement, simplification, and bias across quite different social domains and practices. New discussions on Digital Humanities have been launched in terms of accountability, political economy, accessibility, representativeness, and censorship, but it is questionable whether they are sufficiently unique to define it as a new field. Digital Humanities scholars are multi-stakeholders from different communities with divergent premises and varying epistemologies. Each community tries to fit in with and contribute to the new paradigm, but this has resulted in fractal fragmentation with dozens of different research agendas [5, 6].

Interdisciplinary Approaches

Digital humanities represent an active, participatory, sensitive engagement with the diverse artifactualities of the digital turn, revealing the computational media preservation of artifactuality as including a complex intersection of intermedial aspects. Recent exploratory activations of latent possibilities for studying digital texts and networks are beginning to be significantly appropriated by arts and humanities scholars, appearing within scholarly publications and presentations, course offerings, public research engagement, and public communities drawing on expertise within the art, art history, and related scholarly communities. Such innovative engagements with the networked digital media, while not as numerous, may be emerging in parallel, reflective of a much broader international array of social and cultural responses to the distinctively networked digital turn, and emerging from much longer histories of listening to and deliberation about the way media and communication shape the texture of everyday lives and hopes. Much of the digital humanities UX creativity over the past decade has focused on the development of applications, frameworks, pipelines, and platforms for relatively standardised scholarly practices of textual encoding, curation, and preservation, too, for searching, browsing, and data-mining sets of otherwise less recalcitrant legacy materials. Broader collections of DXH initiatives explicitly addressing this digital societies agenda mix a study of the intermedialities of text and network, this mediation's generative presences in culture and society with that of the socio-cultural constitution of the pervasive meanings and practices of textuality, textuality-in-theclud, and so on, with an emerging scholarly discourse and corpus increasingly institutionalised within a range of scholarly organisations and conventions [7, 8].

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Digital Archives and Repositories

Since philosophers have used the media of writing in an attitude of theorising in order to explain what written works represent, the reception of films has generally received little attention compared to the production of films. In particular, there is still little research on the discourses about historical cinema produced in Central and Eastern Europe during the period of the Cold War. Through the example of a film cycle by Slovak Television, 'The Little Theatre of Hungarian Folk Stories' made in 1983–1989, sources are analysed relating to its production and reception. In addition to the publications of film historians, critics, reviewers, and various actors in a fictional role about what is going to be or what could be widely accessible to the everyday public, their productions and media reception are articulated. Curators tend to underestimate the viewers of educational films and make obsolete their planning and editing methods. This paper analyses a short animation film, 'The Voyage into the Clouds', that belonged to a series of science films entitled 'Magic Lantern in the Year 2000'. The history and associated publicity of the film are discussed as a consequence of altered filmic and social practices. In this regard, the selection and interpretation of the film as evidence and the attempt to "deal" with it raise questions on the wider concepts of film canon, archiving, and preservation of such films as well. Their previous invisibility triggers a rethinking exercise on the process of canonisation. On the other hand, their indisputably independent recent becoming evokes the paradox of their inaccessibility with regard to the future and their current obsolescence with regard to the not-too-distant past. From the perspective of a Catholic, feminist and queer theoretical intersection, the reception and possible interpretations is reflected on in the context of the current world film scene [9, 10].

Data Visualization Techniques

Data visualization (DV) has emerged as a global phenomenon and an indispensable activity in studies, education, and journalism. It is increasingly utilized in the humanities to visualize texts, maps, networks, and other information of art, music, and theatre. DV is currently becoming one of the hottest topics of research in scholarly publications on the digital humanities. DV is not simply about making science's data "look pretty" as some critics have claimed. Humanities data are notably unique and different with respect to their structures and scopes. They are largely heterogeneous, nonlinear, and multifaceted. To reflect the complexity and dynamicity of humanities data while engaging the audience, visualization for humanities data should be valuable and inspiring in addition to being functional and accurate. However, too often this concept and optimism have been neglected. It is prone to ignore and underestimate the value- and interpretation-laden nature of humanities data. This misunderstanding leads to erroneous and rigid design of humanity-based visualizations. This situation calls for a broader understanding and stricter interpretation of DV as a talent and art of revealing, unboxing, and representing the value and meaning of data from a humanistic perspective. In this sense, humanity-based visualization is not strictly a graphic diagram. It covers a broad category of textual, graphic, and audio-visual representations of data or information, which can be called for visualization for representation. There is a need to demonstrate that this broad conception of DV can be addressed to a non-expert audience as well as humanities researchers. It can also be a process that can be co-constructed with an interpretation of data and data-driven inquiry. Humanities data are, for the most part, not just any collection of datagram files or flat files. They contain rich interpretation, sophisticated and hidden structures, and vast information which should be elaborately revealed, described, and demonstrated as well [11, 12].

Technological Tools and Methods

Technologies in digital humanities involve GIS, databases, and extensive corpora. Many humanities fields are linked to geography, enabling departments to create maps reflecting their students' origins and publication venues. These maps, however, are not neutral and require careful choices concerning inclusion, boundaries, and themes. Geography plays a crucial role in cultural and postcolonial studies, with American Studies scholars utilizing specific tools. Databases can vary from simple bibliographies to intricate interrelated datasets. Scholars typically gather data from archives outside the bay. The diverse evidence in the humanities is often repurposed for various projects. Large data collections foster novel collaborative analyses, and many Americanists have handled corpora with unique behaviors. Selection of materials hinges on project goals, but accessing non-canonical, born-digital artifacts proves challenging. Data sets, whether from long-term projects or journal contents, can be compiled and analyzed using basic R programming. A combination of computer and traditional analyses leverages the strengths of both methods. One example is the textual analysis of advertisement sections from Daniels's 1915 novel The Bondwoman's Redemption, exploring topical modeling and Umberto Eco's hypertext theories. Readings will include relevant postings [13, 14].

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Case Studies in Digital Humanities

Digital Humanists across the globe are extending cultural studies inquiry into the examination of the sociotechnical systems, infrastructures, and logics underpinning the archive digitization, participating in machine learning training, and drawing on algorithmic processes for analysis. That work—that of scholars, artists, and historians—is probing what is obscured by the AI "black boxes," much like those efforts done for algorithms deployed in social, economic, and political decision-making. Many have taken a techno-critical approach to speak back to projects or practices across the digital humanities and allied fields. This work often critiques those efforts for audience closure, reductive representations, inaccessibility, and an ignorance of the impact of the technologies within the institutions and the environments that host those methods. Yet there is another tactic at hand: a critical, select immersion in those technologies, discourses, and systems of interpretation, application, development, or political economy. This approach raises the questions of how understandings gleaned from the foresight with the technology could aid scholars in their analysis of the social and cultural aspects within the data sets or projects? It is about taking a humanist epistemology and creatively, pragmatically, or defiantly adopting its methods for scholarship and expression. It is about studying not only the outputs of the algorithms and AI but also the architecture, parameters, and training that lead to those outputs. In some ways, the work described here is largely about developing technocultural literacy with new and powerful vocabulary, grammar, and syntax for representation, with a focus on the analysis of the new and emergent in the mass media [15, 16].

Challenges and Ethical Considerations

Digital Humanities has quickly advanced, reshaping the study of cultural artifacts through computational methods. Texts are now extensively analyzed with large-scale datasets in literary and cultural studies. This has led to a new sub-discipline that critically examines the foundations of computational humanities, focusing on the conceptual and methodological shifts accompanying data thinking. It explores the influence of algorithmic modeling, database thinking, and gamification on the definition of disciplines, texts, and the circulation of data. This research assesses the potential and limitations of machine learning in large-scale digital analysis, drawing on insights from 20th-century post-structuralist, psychoanalytic, and deconstructivist traditions. It interrogates whether the humanities should explore interpretations beyond the capacities of Big Data. Humanities scholars now encounter new challenges, previously non-existent, as they manage large datasets at a professional level. Issues arise around the professionalization of data practices and the evaluation of research output tied to datasets, compounded by the way data shapes interpretative frameworks. Establishing new institutions is crucial; these should not just circulate methodologies but should unite traditional scholarship with innovative knowledge production through digital data, engaging stakeholders from diverse fields. For the discipline to adapt, scholars must reflect on how culture is increasingly influenced by data. However, this shift necessitates a change in the mindset of many within the field. Ethical challenges in Digital Humanities are prominent in both public and academic spheres. Historically, the rise of new technologies has led to the politicization of digital work, with ethical concerns seen as specific to cultural digitization and a data-driven society. Nonetheless, the perception that such issues were absent in the past obscures deeper assumptions about the roles and limits of interpretations within the humanities, hindering scholars' ability to engage critically with the ethics of historical scholarship in recent decades [17, 18].

Future Directions in Digital Humanities

Digital humanities is today a widely recognized term signaling a possibly ground-breaking paradigm within and around the humanities. It has also become an umbrella term for a variety of different epistemologies and associated methodologies. There are many different interpretations of how digital humanities might contribute to a "digital turn", a renewal of the humanities, or a new epoch of "e-science" or "i-science". One is articulated by the US National Endowment for the Humanities Office of Digital Humanities, which emerged from the humanities computing tradition with a classical interpretation of digital media as computing machinery. The technology is seen as a deterministic driver, impacting the humanities in many ways, but also as an instrument to ask new questions, focusing on buzzwords such as "big data" or "big humanities". A second approach refers to the soft-core perspective, with a focus on creative professional and civic usages. A third position represented by a junior scholar, who did not find a place within digital humanities for her PhD thesis, pursuing "an interest in the digital as an object of inquiry". There are some overwhelming examples among the well-established groups and projects with a behavioural study of media in the humanities and social sciences. For instance, the so-called "Baltic Sea project" with its many digital products is interesting. It is also a well-organised example of many groups joining forces across many local differences. Even though the methodologies are not yet fully developed,

we have a new kind of digital process that is different from the ideas of rule-governed computation and closed work. Similarly, there are social changes extremely useful for the humanities to open their discourse and be involved in the emergent digital developments. However, the big uncertainty is about the sciences' response to the inclusion of more users and the respective positions and needs [19-22].

CONCLUSION

Digital humanities mark a significant shift in the epistemological and methodological frameworks of the humanities. By merging technological tools with critical cultural inquiry, DH redefines how we engage with texts, artifacts, and histories. However, the field's diversity in approaches and its inherent interdisciplinary challenge the creation of a unified identity. While DH opens unprecedented opportunities for innovation, access, and collaboration, it also surfaces crucial ethical and epistemic questions about representation, data ownership, and the nature of interpretation. As we move forward, the success of digital humanities will depend on its ability to balance computational rigor with humanistic sensitivity, ensuring that technological advancements remain grounded in the critical, reflective ethos that defines the humanities. Through inclusive, accountable, and critically engaged practices, digital humanities can evolve as a vital space for knowledge production in a digitally saturated world.

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CITE AS: Ahairwe Frank (2025). Digital Humanities: Merging Technology with Cultural Studies. NEWPORT INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN EDUCATION 5(2):21-26 https://doi.org/10.59298/NIJRE/2025/522126