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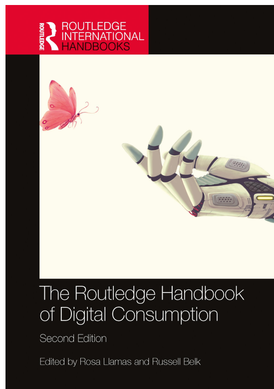

The Routledge Handbook of Digital Consumption

Rosa Llamas, Russell Belk

How digitalization blurs boundaries, makes things ungraspable, and affects psychological appropriation

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HOW DIGITALIZATION BLURS BOUNDARIES, MAKES THINGS UNGRASPABLE, AND AFFECTS PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROPRIATION

Bernadette Kamleitner and Michail D. Kokkoris

Contemporary societies are undergoing a digital transformation across a wide range of spheres of life (Cochoy et al., 2017; Grewal et al., 2020). We offer a new lens on what this actually means. We suggest that digitalization is subtly undermining the degree to which people are able to psychologically appropriate objects, concepts, and all else that they can experience as "mine" or "ours". The force giving rise to this is a blend of mechanisms that essentially blurs all sorts of boundaries. This "Big Blur" (Kamleitner & Kokkoris, 2021) leaves people unable to fully grasp what they are interacting with while making them crave experiences of mastery and ownership. This gives rise to a vicious circle that is fueled by the reinforcing powers of thwarted desires of ownership.

This chapter is structured as follows. First, we outline how digitalization blurs boundaries across several spheres of life. Next, we explain how blurred boundaries imply not grasping and why grasping is essential for ownership experiences. We then present evidence from the marketplace supporting the resulting desire for ownership experiences. We also show how promises of superficial graspability that abound in the marketplace may feed a vicious circle of trying to grasp the ungraspable. Finally, we discuss implications for future research and the future of consumption more broadly.

Digitalization and the blurring of boundaries

Digitalization refers to "the way many domains of social life are restructured around digital communication and media infrastructures" (Brennen & Kreiss, 2016, p. 1). It is a ubiquitous phenomenon that has affected numerous behaviors and practices ranging from what to check the first thing in the morning, how to communicate with others, how to pass waiting times, how to work, where and when to shop, or how to date. In the past few decades, scholars have tried to identify how digitalization changes our lives not only in the consumption sphere, but also socially, psychologically, politically, economically, etc. (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017; Bauman, 2013; Belk, 2016; Llamas & Belk, 2013; Rosa, 2013; Trittin-Ulbrich et al., 2020).

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Condensing these insights, digitalization appears to affect consumption via three key mechanisms: by fostering dematerialization, acceleration, and simultaneity.

Dematerialization concerns the possibility and promise of lifting the restrictions of physicality by rending objects immaterial (Atasoy & Morewedge, 2018), such as taking on one's vacation as many e-books one wants regardless of how many books would normally fit in a suitcase; or "liquidly" transitioning between different spheres and objects (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017; Bauman, 2013). Acceleration concerns the possibility and promise of reducing temporal restrictions by making things faster (Rosa, 2013), such as the immediate accessibility of digital goods or the speed of contactless payment. Simultaneity partially results from dematerialization and acceleration. It primarily reflects the fact that a plethora of tasks can be performed via the same mobile devices. It concerns the possibility and promise of managing multiple experiences at the same time (Wilbur, 2015), such as shopping or dating through one's smart phone while lying in bed or being in multiple online shops at the same time.

Each of these mechanisms is easy to understand, but it may be less clear what this entails on a broader scale. An obvious consequence, and the promise of digitalization, is that these mechanisms (promise to) liberate consumers from constraints – through digitalization everything seems possible. A less obvious consequence, and the focus of this chapter, is that digitalization puts the essence of many things and experiences into question because lifting restrictions also entails blurring boundaries. We suggest that one of the most fundamental consequences of digitalization is that it blurs numerous perceptual and conceptual boundaries that have been taken for granted prior to the onset of digitalization (Kamleitner & Kokkoris, 2021).

Let us illustrate this in the context of online shopping. Dematerialization prevents online shoppers from experiencing the haptic boundaries of the goods offered and of the store itself. Acceleration undermines the boundaries between different stages of consumer decision-making and shopping episodes. For example, you can quickly switch between searching more information on a product and being at the checkout, or even at another shop altogether. This last aspect also entails an aspect of simultaneity, which further entails the possibility to blur the boundaries between different roles and spheres of life. For example, online shoppers can simultaneously be at work, on a train or even at a family meal. As this one context of online shopping illustrates, digitalization touches on and blurs a vast array of different boundaries that used to guide people's lives. An additional and important implication of digitalization is that it undermines the bounding experiences provided by rituals. Rituals tend to need physical anchors and they unfold sequentially (Wang et al., 2021). This clearly is at odds with dematerialization, acceleration, and simultaneity. Offline, consumers physically experience transitions and the progression of things. This helps them digest, celebrate, and make sense of what they are engaged in at any one point in time. By saving on periods of transition and breaks, digitalization implies an increased blur of experiences. Digitalization not only blurs the boundaries of specific objects and experiences but, as illustrated, also blurs the boundaries between entire life spheres (e.g., commuting and shopping). Partly as a consequence, digitalization finally also puts into question conceptual boundaries, inviting consumers to re-think familiar definitions [e.g., is an e-book still a book?, is a Facebook friend a friend? (Llamas & Belk, 2013)].

Overall, we argue that this blurring of boundaries that follows in the wake of digitalization is pervasive. The accumulation of blurred boundaries across various contexts, objects, and constructs describes a new quality of experience in the human condition, which elsewhere we refer to as the "Big Blur" (Kamleitner & Kokkoris, 2021).

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Blurring means not grasping

Facing blurred boundaries means not being able to ascertain where something ends and begins. This might be potentially liberating and exciting. It invites exploring and provides room for people to establish their very own boundaries. To recognize and leverage these possibilities is, however, effortful and cognitively taxing. In the face of the "Big Blur", these positives can hardly be realized to their full extent. Rather, the less beneficial consequences are likely to dominate. The most obvious one being that of a lack of orientation. Navigating the "Big Blur" means that people can no longer know their own position, which usually would be a matter of course. Instead, they find themselves drifting amidst blurred spheres of life, entities, experiences, or concepts; an often disconcerting experience (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017; Kirchberg et al., 2015). For example, by undermining ritualistic consumption, digitalization simultaneously threatens a source of meaning (Wang et al., 2021) that arises because rituals provide a stable context in which a consumption experience unfolds. Indeed, meaning can often derive not only from highly purposeful and aspirational activities but also from rather trivial routines and habits that nevertheless provide a much-needed sense of structure, coherence, and self-control (Martela & Steger, 2016; Stavrova et al., 2020). The "Big Blur" likely entails multiple psychological and social consequences comprising notions such as uncertainty, a new level of intolerance of ambiguity, need for structure, difficulty to trust, search for identity and meaning. All of these aspects are deserving of attention as the boundary-blurring forces of digitalization continue to shape our experiences and us. They suggest that digitalization as it manifests now potentially shakes our very essence (for more detailed elaborations on these implications see Kamleitner & Kokkoris, 2021).

Here, we focus on one specific consequence, the fact that blurred boundaries also impede our interactions with objects. The key term we use to describe this is *graspability*. Like the word "boundaries", the meanings of "grasping" stretch from purely somatosensorial experiences to purely conceptual, intellectual experiences. One can grasp a kettle with one's hand, the nervousness of a person with one's ears, the essence of an object with one's nose, the beauty of the world with one's eyes, the meaning of a friend with one's heart, and the notion of a GDP with one's mind. The breadth of the word's connotations entails that humans can potentially grasp pretty much anything. That is except for the blurred. Grasping means to know where something begins and ends, i.e., where something is bounded, and it entails perceiving and understanding those boundaries.

This becomes most clear when thinking of the physical act of grasping. We are well able to grasp a bowl of water. We can put our hands around it because it has a clear boundary that we can literally use to grasp it. Moving on to a larger containment of water, a pond, physically grasping it in its entirety is no longer an option. But since we can see its outer boundaries and walk along them, it is still rather easy for us to grasp a pond with our senses. A large lake becomes harder to grasp. Still seeing its shore and being able to drive around it makes it nonetheless quite graspable. The shore also helps us to grasp the much larger sea. Yet, the other shore is (unimaginably) far away, and the sea in between holds unfathomable depths. This makes it much harder to really feel that we have a grasp of the sea, which often remains mysterious. That is except for when it becomes cartographed and visually bounded on a table or laptop anywhere in the world. In this case, it is the visual lines and conceptual distinctions that make graspable what we cannot grasp with our own somatosensory experiences. Broadly speaking, we thus also draw on definitions as bounding vehicles that delineate and limit the scope of the physical and conceptual entities and thus make them graspable.

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Grasping is necessary for ownership experiences

The blurring qualities that follow in the wake of digitalization are affecting the graspability of various physical and conceptual entities. A digital photograph, for example, is much harder to grasp than its analogue equivalent. Notably, the extent to which we can grasp an entity immediately affects the degree and quality in which we can interact with it. Any loss in the graspability of an object implies that consumers will perceive themselves having less control over it, being less knowledgeable and intimately acquainted with it, and being less able to invest themselves into it (Kamleitner, 2018; Kamleitner & Mitchell, 2018). Perceived control, intimate knowledge, and perceived investment are, however, key experiences in the formation of an object-person relationship. Specifically, they have been argued to constitute those experiences that it takes for objects to become psychologically appropriated (Pierce et al., 2001), i.e., objects that people think of as "mine".

Our argument thus is that digitalization impedes people's ability to develop a sense of ownership over various entities because it blurs their boundaries – and boundaries are needed to grasp and intimately interact with entities (for the interplay between boundaries and ownership in the context of the self, see Ataria et al., 2015). A growing stream of research alludes to the suggested reduction and implied shifts in psychological ownership (Atasoy & Morewedge, 2018; Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017; Danckwerts & Kenning, 2019; Kamleitner & Mitchell, 2018; Morewedge et al., 2020; Watkins et al., 2016). Notably, all of these insights apply to digital goods and the digital sphere.

The argument we make here is an even broader one. As we have demonstrated, the boundary-blurring forces of digitalization are not restricted to the online world. Rather, the possibilities of digitalization are potentially challenging, putting into question, and blurring all spheres of lives, concepts, and objects. In essence, we claim that the boundary-blurring forces of digitalization are undermining our ability to grasp and appropriate objects, concepts, and all other sorts of entities inside *and* outside of the digital sphere. It is not only harder to psychologically claim a digital photograph as opposed to a print-out copy. The very fact that the notion of photo-taking has changed and that digital copies may exist can also impede our ability to develop a strong sense of ownership for tangible photographs (Morewedge et al., 2020). In other words, digitalization increases uncertainty even about things we used to be sure about and challenges the very essence and definition of things, forcing us to revisit old concepts with new eyes.

If, as we propose, people currently struggle to deeply connect with and psychologically appropriate the things and concepts around them, this has implications that go beyond the specific person-object relationships affected. The reason lies in the well-documented fact that the psychological experience of ownership plays an important role in the human condition (Belk, 1991, 1992; Friedman & Ross, 2011; Furby, 1978; Pierce & Jussila, 2011; Pierce et al., 2003; Rudmin, 1991). Understanding what is mine and feeling to own something are experiences that help us navigate the world around us as well as shape our own identities (Furby, 1991; Nancekivell et al., 2019). To illustrate, we draw on one of the earliest and fundamental theoretical compilations on psychological ownership by Pierce et al. (2001). In this seminal paper, Jon Pierce and colleagues condense and reflect on a large body of prior literature to identify different motivational forces (they speak of roots) of psychological ownership. These comprise:

- Effectance, the fact that other entities empower us to do what we could not do ourselves.
- Home, the fact that other entities are involved in erecting a secure base.

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- Self-identity, the fact that other entities help us signal who we are and want to be.
- Stimulation, the fact that other entities stimulate our engagement and act as stimulating repositories (added more recently; Pierce & Jussila, 2011).

The experience of ownership is linked to all of these motivational bases and serves more than individual needs. We are not alone on this planet. An understanding of and respect for ownership act as much needed social facilitators (Kummer, 1991; Rudmin, 1991). People do not get into fights over things because they agree on who holds ownership rights, and they tend to attribute ownership to those that seem to hold the best grasp on an object (Furby, 1991). In multiple ways, the experience of ownership is thus as central for the functioning of individuals and societies as it is vulnerable to problems of graspability (Kamleitner & Mitchell, 2018).

Threatened ownership fuels the desire for ownership experiences

Given the fundamental role of ownership experiences in human behavior, humans are likely to resist embracing a life of diminished ownership experiences. Rather, they are prone to seek the psychological experience of ownership and all it comprises.

One way to do so is by demanding market offerings that reaffirm ownership for objects or experiences whose ownership is contested. This is particularly likely for those objects and experiences that carry a special meaning. Having a home is one of the core domains where the need for ownership is demonstrated (Pierce et al., 2001). One would therefore expect increased interest in attempts to protect and reaffirm psychological ownership of one's home. Indeed, a Statista report shows that home surveillance technology will be soaring from 26.6 billion US dollars in 2016 to 74.6 billion US dollars in 2025 (Alsop, 2020). The home improvement market has likewise seen a steady rise (van Gelder, 2020), suggesting that contemporary consumers are keen to strengthen their bond with one of their most meaningful possessions.

Another way of ascertaining a deep sense of ownership is by focusing on select possessions only. This is evidenced by the increasing popularity of voluntary simplicity and minimalism (Lloyd & Pennington, 2020; Peifer et al., 2020; Rebouças & Soares, 2021). Whereas giving away possessions might sound like relinquishing rather than reclaiming ownership, limiting one's possessions to a smaller subset might in fact facilitate knowledge, control, and investment (Pierce et al., 2001), and thereby enhance feelings of psychological ownership of the remaining possessions. We can more strongly feel like owners of possessions we are surrounded by in our everyday lives than of possessions stored and forgotten in the attic. Setting clearer boundaries around what is mine and not mine through reduction helps nurture a more profound sense of ownership. Interestingly and in line with our argument, reduction is especially popular among digital natives (Newport, 2019).

Going beyond material possessions, consumers also appear keen to reaffirm ownership of their experiences and eventually of their lives and themselves. A trend that speaks to this is the tremendous growth of mindfulness and meditation practices or digital detox retreats during the past decades (Clarke et al., 2018; Fact.MR, n.d.). These practices can be essentially viewed as deep engagement with oneself and one's own boundaries (Ataria et al., 2015), which eventually helps people feel more ownership of their lives (Carson & Langer, 2006). Similarly, the rising appeal of wellness treatments (Cederström & Spicer, 2015) not only serves to invest into oneself and become more intimately acquainted with one's body, it can also be seen as the ultimate way to experience the boundaries of one's physical experience – a

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person's skin and body. Supporting the growing demand in this area, figures show that in the last decade the size of the US market for massages nearly doubled (IBISWorld, 2019).

We also see an increase in market trends that at least partly stand out because they pay into the roots of ownership, in particular knowledge or control. Regionality serves as an illustrative example. It enables people to feel that they are knowledgeable about what they get and to bond with the deeper essence of the product. Notably, it simultaneously reaffirms a sense of collective psychological ownership (what is ours rather than just mine) with other people in the region (Gineikiene et al., 2017). The consequences of an enhanced desire for collective ownership experiences can be demonstrated not only in the consumption domain, but also in the social and political domain – and often in very worrying ways. Polarization, populism, and division have become growing concerns in societies around the world (Bouvier, 2020; Hogg, 2020). At the root of separatism rhetoric lies an accentuation of boundaries around everything that is "ours", such as our country, our tradition, or our values (Nijs et al., 2021).

It is not just the essence of all of these observations that indicates an enhanced desire for ownership. Often, these are wrapped into unmistakable promises of ownership. Possessive pronouns abound across product and service domains ranging from "my airline", over "my city", "my sharing service", "my credit card" to "my muesli", and "my toilet paper" (e.g., Garretson Folse et al., 2012); a phenomenon that based on our own advertising database (https://www.wu.ac.at/bibliothek/recherche/datenbanken/info/wma) has gained substantial traction since the onset of digitalization. For example, whereas 19% of ads for financial services in Austria contained possessive pronouns in the 1980s, this figure nearly doubled to 36% in the 2010s.

We also observe an increase in the supply of and demand for offers that promise psychological appropriation via its routes. This is evidenced in the apparent appeal of products that promise consumers total control (over their bills, their health records, their wardrobe, nutrition, children, etc.), swift yet intimate knowledge (e.g., "learn how to xxx in 15 minutes"; "know all about xxx in one easily comprehensible infograph"), and a platform to self-invest (e.g., "make xxx yours by selecting/adjusting/personalizing…"). The contemporary prevalence of such product promises not only reflects their success; it also alerts us to the underlying deep-seated need.

A vicious circle of trying to grasp the ungraspable

Looking at how things are marketed these days, the market appears to sense that increasingly digital consumers have a particular craving for a sense of psychological ownership. And all of the above examples suggest that they are in fact seeking (promises of) ownership. On closer inspection, however, many of these promises turn out as fake facades, and we argue that this triggers a vicious cycle that destroys consumer value and ultimately also consumer well-being (see Figure 3.1).

To bolster this potentially bold claim, let us revisit the inherent link between being able to grasp and to psychologically own something. Looking at the vast literature on psychological ownership (Peck & Shu, 2018; Rudmin, 1991), it becomes clear that a secure and strong (as opposed to a shallow) sense of psychological ownership rests on deep and often manifold experiences that connect a person with an ownership target. These experiences allow a person to fully grasp the ownership target and they serve as a solid foundation for her ownership claims. Grasping means traveling the routes to psychological ownership and having what it takes for others to respect ownership claims. The key to this is actual engagement with a specific target. Mere promises of control, knowledge, or outright ownership promises obviously

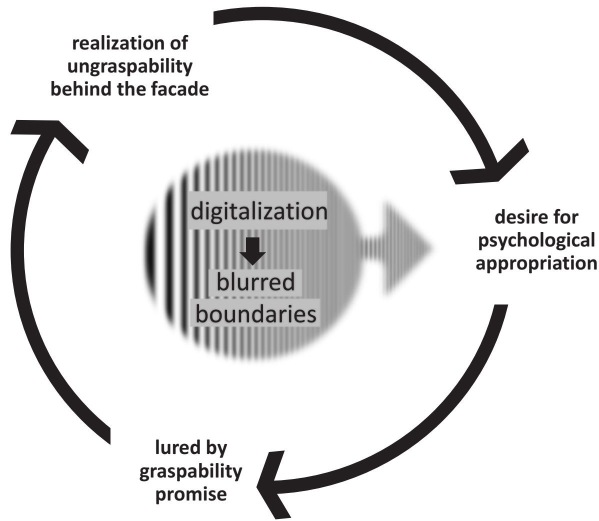

Figure 3.1 A vicious circle of trying to grasp the ungraspable
Source: Own elaboration.

cannot deliver on that. They can push a sense of ownership from zero to somewhat higher on a semantic scale (Kamleitner & Feuchtl, 2015; Kou & Powpaka, 2020; Peck et al., 2013), but they cannot deliver on the deeper benefits (and drawbacks) involved in a truly strong sense of ownership. Even if an object is simple to use, the consumer first has to use and grasp it to develop a deeper sense of ownership.

Promises of psychological ownership can kick-start deeper psychological appropriation, but this is no more than a start that has to be followed suit by firsthand experiences of control, knowledge, or investment. Digital products and services are by their very nature potentially accessible through the net and do not have one fixed location. Moreover, it usually takes a third-party infrastructure (e.g., cloud services, platforms, apps) for them to become accessible and manageable. This even holds for the now mostly virtual asset of money. A banking app, for example, can be simple to use and convey some sense of control, and these features will make for strong arguments in the minds of ownership-deprived consumers. However, not being able to understand how it actually works, having no control over out of service issues, not being able to feel the money flow, or not being able to determine its exact location mean that this app still has no clear boundaries. While it may quickly imbue people with some sense of ownership and control through the ease of use and the potential to visualize monetary flows, this amounts to a sense of control over an abstraction rather than the actual money. Most consumers will not be able to grasp virtual funds as deeply as they would holding the same amount in their hands. For example, rather than themselves assigning labels to different expenditure categories, they mostly accept suggestions and adjust their own categorization to the suggestions of the app. This is not to say that such apps are not benefitting consumers. The ease of use of such apps may actually entice people to engage with their funds more than they otherwise would. However, our argument is that a truly deep sense of ownership often remains out of reach. Most people will remain guided by the app rather than themselves attaining deep mastery over their funds. This becomes most pronounced whenever consumers' dependence on a technological service becomes salient. Every out of service experience, every occasion at which the site does not load properly,

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every time consumers realize the vulnerability of the account, which they can do little to protect, makes clear that the ease of use is a (partial) facade covering deeper forces that are entirely outside of the consumers' control (Watkins et al., 2016).

The keyword "smart", to name but another example, heralds many of these alluring facades. The product promise of ease and understanding promises a sense of ownership, and yet the underlying product essence remains ungraspable and thus unable to become psychologically appropriated. This mismatch of ownership promises and actual ownership affordances plays out subtly, well hidden behind some actual ownership affordances (Baxter & Aurisicchio, 2018) that often come in the shape of "user-friendly" facades. In some way, these facades serve as illusionary boundaries that people can work on until they realize that these are largely artificial and do not actual bound the object at all. Such as when companies call on all-in-contracts to demand new things from their employees that reach into their family time or when people get locked out from their social media account. Contemporary consumers are constantly facing experiences of that nature.

In a paradoxical manner, these experiences contribute to the desire for actual ownership. Any time a promise of ownership gets subtly disappointed, the desire to finally grasp and feel ownership gets stronger. As a result, those that have been most disappointed by ownership facades are those that are most likely to hunger for ownership and simultaneously are those that are most susceptible to get lured by other, and potentially even more blatant, promises of ownership experiences.

This is perhaps one of the most vicious circles powered by digitalization. The constant promise of a simple way of developing ownership not only means that this cannot be delivered on, it also robs people of the energy and commitment that it takes to truly engage. "Wouldn't it be silly to invest time and energy into trying to grasp something, when there are easy alternatives out there that you can grasp and master in a blink?" Such reasoning can be heard from many a voice and it is hard to counter argue (Morozov, 2013). We know from other domains how willingly people believe that they are knowledgeable or in control when objectively they are not (Dunning, 2007; Simons, 2013). Promises of simplicity thus undermine people's willingness and motivation to follow the deeper path of engagement necessary to actually grasp and truly own.

In addition, realizing that one is not in control is tightly linked to feeling like being controlled oneself. Not being in control equates to a loss of perceived autonomy. In turn, this can do more than thwart experiencing oneself as an owner, it paves the way for feeling like being owned by someone else oneself (Starmans & Friedman, 2016). In a paradoxical way, what starts out as a desire for a sense of ownership may become reverted into an increased preparedness to view oneself as being owned and dependent (Kamleitner, 2018).

What does this mean for future research?

Our main argument here is that digitalization blurs all sorts of boundaries. That this entails that people face an increased struggle to grasp all sorts of objects, concepts, or entities they interact with. That this impedes people's ability to psychologically appropriate any of these targets. That this shows in an increased desire for ownership experiences. And, that this desire is often thwarted due to the very same forces that give rise to it – the increasing ungraspability of blurred digital realities.

We have focused on this implication of the "Big Blur" because it potentially spurs a particularly vicious circle that robs consumers of their ability and willingness to actually appropriate their environment psychologically while making them prepared to become

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"mastered" themselves. There are, however, multiple nuances to the broader argument. We hope that this chapter spurs many such explorations.

First, if boundaries blur on a large scale, this affects much more than an individual's ability to grasp and psychologically appropriate particular objects. It can lead to a broader sense of loss of structure, meaning, and security. It will be important to better understand the conditions under which this potential manifests into an actual problem. Questions surrounding this entail the question of which boundaries might be particularly critical, which people might be particularly vulnerable and which interventions or more broadly speaking, experiences, might buffer best against this.

Second, we understand digitalization as a broad term that describes how we currently employ the expanding digital toolkit. If we look at it as the application of tools, it quickly becomes clear that we need to be careful not to confuse the tool with its application. The blurring of boundaries we describe is the result of a particular use of digital tools, a use that breaks and blurs boundaries. Can we also use digital tools to unblur or reinforce boundaries? Is there a way to digitally bound more than facades?

Third and relatedly, one may ask why digitalization has thus far been used to foster the "Big Blur". It is clear that some parties and institutions, in particular those that currently dominate the digital domain, benefit from the "Big Blur" (Zuboff, 2019). Consumers who are unable to fully grasp things and are lured into dependencies that they are unlikely to fully comprehend are a potentially pliable "resource" for those thriving on those dependencies. In many ways, the "Big Blur" lens we propose goes well with Zuboff's notion of the "Big Other" and "Surveillance Capitalism" which "effectively exile(s) persons from their own behavior while producing new markets of behavioral prediction and modification" (Zuboff, 2015, p. 75).

Third, digitalization has been with us and it might not be wrong to say it has grown on us for more than a decade. It is pervasive and affects even those that are largely abstaining from it. We are all in the midst of it. That makes it hard to truly ascertain how it has already changed us and society at large. The theoretical lenses we apply and the terminologies we use mostly date back to an age in which digitalization had not yet gained momentum. This calls for reflection and suggests that we may be ill-advised to use the past as a benchmark without simultaneously acknowledging that the very fabric of human life might have subtly changed. For example, money no longer has the same connotations it had when mostly being a tangible resource. Friendship, trust, and shopping no longer mean the same as they did 20 or even 10 or 5 years back (Llamas & Belk, 2013). Boundaries have also blurred in academia and in the subjects we study. Not being able to replicate studies from the 1990s or even 5 years back might not simply be a telltale sign of bad science but could equally be a reflection of us all having entered a new, (still) blurred way of living and thinking.

Fourth, much needs to be done to better understand how reductions in ownership can affect human experiences more generally. For example, one of the outcomes of ownership is a sense of responsibility, care, and stewardship (Peck et al., 2020). This may be burdensome. Avoiding the responsibility associated with owning is one of the top reasons why consumers opt for access-based consumption (Schaefers et al., 2015). Younger consumers seem to prefer a more flexible lifestyle centered more around access and less around ownership (Godelnik, 2017), and yet these same consumers exhibit a desire for ownership. They increasingly reclaim "their" future from older generations or "their" privacy, and they appear prepared to make climate change "their" problem. Are they just trading in multiple shallow ownership experiences to select deeper ones? Or are they truly shying away from responsibilities? How does this affect their general (dis)respect toward objects and even more broadly conscientiousness and responsibility as personality traits?

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In an article in *Forbes*, the World Economic Forum (2016, November 17) envisioned the world in 2030 as one where ownership no longer exists, and life is better than ever. This leads us to our final look ahead and broader philosophical question. What does it mean to live in a blurred world in the long run? Does it mean that we will succumb to the bigger blurring forces and readily submit ourselves as "their" subjects? Or does it mean that truly digital natives no longer have a need for structure and happily lead liquid lives (Atanasova et al., 2021)?

Further reading

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