

Elizabeth Kristi Poerwandari

Mentally Healthy in the Digital Era

Staying Human
in the Advanced
Technology Realm



MENTALLY HEALTHY

in the ~Digital Era~

Staying Human in the Advanced Technology Realm

Author:

Elizabeth Kristi Poerwandari



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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

GratITUDE and thanks to the God Almighty that this book has finally been completed after nearly a year of writing amidst other activities. This book is simply an expression of the desire to share concerns, worries, curiosity, and enthusiasm, all blended together in observing our current lives, which are mediated by the internet and highly advanced technology.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, almost everyone experienced discomfort in having to carry out activities and connect with others through platforms like Zoom or Google Meet. I remember one of my academic advisees pleading to take a leave of absence because they felt extremely stressed about having to attend online classes. They admitted being unable to concentrate, feeling dizzy, even experiencing itchy skin and hair loss. Others felt pressured because it was difficult to follow lectures from a noisy home near the railway tracks. Their parents' income was very limited and continued to decline due to the pandemic. They often couldn't afford to buy data packages and had to use a computer with a leaking battery that always needed to be plugged into an electrical outlet. They also had to compete for signal with other family members, all of whom had to engage in online activities.

The challenge of self-adjustment is quite significant in a life that is becoming increasingly competitive and mediated by the internet. In fact, even before the Covid-19 pandemic, for more than ten years, I had observed one or two students in different classes reaching out to me, saying, "Sorry, I will be late," or "Sorry, I can't attend the lecture." It turned out they had appointments with psychiatrists or clinical psychologists that coincided

with class hours. I also encountered students experiencing anxiety, panic attacks, insomnia, overthinking, and even attempts at self-harm.

On the other hand, over time, quite a few students eventually found themselves ‘too comfortable’ and preferred to continue with online activities only. This was because they didn’t need to move around, didn’t have to leave the house, and perhaps didn’t even need to shower first. We fail to realize that this is closely related to various other dimensions of life.

Castells describes modern society as a “network society,” marked by fundamental changes from almost every perspective we choose to observe. This book attempts to discuss just a small aspect of the characteristics of a network society, namely the psychological side of living a life mediated by the internet and advanced technology. Indeed, there are people who are highly resilient, easily adaptable, and able to continue functioning optimally. At the same time, many others feel empty, confused, lonely, and start questioning themselves because they feel incapable of keeping up.

Nevertheless, the presence of advanced technology cannot be seen as having the same implications for everyone. Hopefully, this book can provide insights into the implications that are relatively similar for many people, as well as the different impacts and implications for various groups.

I envision a specific task for psychology to update the theories it employs. Many of the theories used thus far have been developed based on the assumption that humans interact directly with other humans, whereas today, much of our lives are mediated by the internet and advanced technology.

In short, I hope this book can help us all make the best use of advanced technology, while also adapting and taking steps to prevent or overcome its harmful effects. From a psychological perspective, I hope that we can all maintain mental health, continue to care for others and life in general, and enhance our adaptability and resilience.

This book could only be completed after reading numerous research reports, having informal conversations with many people, and engaging in discussions with fellow lecturers at the Faculty of Psychology, University of Indonesia, as well as with students. Special thanks to the teaching team of the course Human Beings and Life in the Digital Era: Agnes Sianipar,

Pratiwi Widyasari, Wuri Prasetyawati, Elok Dianike Malay, Erita Narhetali, Nathanael Sumampouw, and Dian Oriza. My heartfelt appreciation also goes to my dear friend Lucia R.M. Royanto, who introduced me to the publisher (of the Bahasa Indonesia version).

I would also like to thank my friends at the *Toward Healthy Mind, Body, and Sexuality* Laboratory: Sali Rahadi Asih, Iman Menaldi, Bona Sardo, Gloryka Ednadita (I'm excited that we will soon begin research on the use of artificial intelligence to meet human emotional needs), Sugiarti, Cantyo Dannisworo, Lifina Dewi, and Ina Saraswati.

I am especially grateful to friends who have been discussion partners and kindly provided their testimonials. Thank you to Ricardi S. Adnan, Melani Budianta, Inez Kristanti, Tara de Thouars, Kamala Chandrakirana, and Juneman Abraham. Even more special thanks go to my dear friend Livia Iskandar, who offered invaluable feedback for improvement after reading the draft of this book.

This book is the English translation of the Indonesian version. Just to tell the readers a little bit, actually I never thought about translating this book into English. However, in our laboratory there were two students who were interning for 1 semester, so suddenly an idea came to my mind, why not ask them to translate this book into English with the help of AI? For publication, why not try open access self-publishing so that the book can be read by international readers without any cost? So I asked them to translate and was very surprised at how fast they worked. Also very amazed at how the free version of ChatGPT can really help the process of disseminating knowledge. Many thanks to Georgius Andrew Wijaya and Zahrin Dzakiyya Anwar who have utilized ChatGPT and checked the translation results from Chat GPT. Thank you as well for helping me find access and self-publishing facilities for this book. Your work is amazing. Hopefully the assignment of translating and publishing this book will also be useful for you. Many thanks also to ChatGPT and all parties who have made ChatGPT possible, which can be used to the maximum to share knowledge. My gratitude and thank you to Penerbit KBM Indonesia as well for our cooperation.

I sincerely apologize to readers if there are important matters that have not been addressed in this book or if any explanations seem inadequate. I warmly welcome any feedback.

April 2025

Elizabeth Kristi Poerwandari (Kristi)

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THEIR WORDS ABOUT “MENTALLY HEALTHY IN THE DIGITAL ERA”

This book is highly relevant to the current state of affairs, which is full of dilemmas and contradictions. On one hand, humanity is experiencing extraordinary advancements in life due to technological progress. On the other hand, people are regressing in social activities and roles that once defined their identity. The ever-expanding knowledge and the ability to complete tasks quickly with the aid of technology contradict the rising psychological issues, such as a tendency to "give up easily" and feeling alone even in the midst of a crowd.

As a result, humanity today finds itself in a fragile condition—full of confusion and struggling to predict what will happen tomorrow due to an insufficient understanding of the metaverse, a phenomenon described as BANI (brittle, anxious, nonlinear, incomprehensible). With great patience, Kristi Poerwandari attempts to deepen our understanding of what is happening and what we must do to strengthen ourselves.

- **Ricardi S. Adnan, Professor of Sociology, Universitas Indonesia**

This book is highly relevant for understanding oneself amidst the rapid technological advancements. With a wise yet accessible tone, the author successfully introduces new perspectives on these issues. Rather than being didactic, the book invites readers to develop greater awareness and mindfulness in navigating life in the digital era. It is an easy-to-digest yet essential read for anyone who wants to maintain mental well-being in an ever-changing world.

- **Inez Kristanti, @inezkristanti, Adult Clinical Psychologist, Social Media Content Creator**

Everything we need to know about this technology and social media era is all in this book. What makes this book so fascinating is that it helps us—especially digital natives (Millennials, Gen Z, and Alpha)—truly relate to the topics discussed. At the same time, it provides guidance on how to maintain mental well-being in a technological era that often leads to anxiety and depression. As I read, I found myself thinking, "This is exactly me!" But this book doesn't just explain the why—it also provides the how. It prepares us to understand the present situation while also helping us anticipate how to fully reap the benefits of technology.

- **Tara de Thouars, @tara_dethouars, Clinical Psychologist, Lighthouse & RSK Dharmawangsa**

This book is essential reading because it helps us grasp the vast and profound changes we are undergoing as individuals, as a society, and as a civilization due to the internet and advanced technology. Our economic system, modes of production, and social interactions have been reshaped in ways that have turned technology from a mere tool into something that actively transforms humanity.

As a psychologist and professor, the author clearly explores the connections between major socio-economic shifts and our sense of self. While technology facilitates many aspects of life, it also erodes our sense of security, encourages problematic behaviors, and creates new power structures. Through this book, the author provides a psychological framework to help us build a healthier, more balanced life, free from unnecessary suffering.

Practically, readers can use the questions at the beginning and end of each chapter to situate themselves within these massive changes and find their own path forward. Ultimately, this book reminds us to trust in our humanity and to consciously exercise our agency in leading meaningful lives.

- **Kamala Chandrakirana, Indonesia untuk Kemanusiaan (Indonesia for Humanity)**

This popular psychology book is a must-read for anyone who wants to maintain mental well-being in the rapidly evolving digital age, which has reshaped society and how we perceive ourselves. While the digital era offers tremendous benefits, it also poses significant risks if not accompanied by adequate digital literacy.

From Generation X to digital natives, we must continue learning to keep up with technological developments in order to avoid anxiety, financial losses, and gender-based violence facilitated by technology (TFGBV). These risks range from FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) and phishing/scamming to the dangers of technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV).

As a nonprofit organization that has provided psychological support to victims of violence, disasters, and conflicts since 2002, Yayasan Pulih consistently emphasizes the importance of self-care and life skills in achieving balance. Happy reading—stay healthy, strong, and prosperous!

- **Livia Istania DF Iskandar, Yayasan Pulih, Pulih@thePeak**

From aspirations to love (even for “monkey robots”),

Mba Ipoet examines our modern dilemmas.

For those who feel “trapped” or “liberated” by the internet, this book guides us back to our humanity.

- **Juneman Abraham, Professor of Psychology, BINUS University**

We've all seen it—a family sitting together for a meal, yet parents and children are engrossed in their own devices. This phenomenon, known as phubbing, has become an everyday reality. The rapid and massive changes in information technology have altered lifestyles in ways that affect each generation differently.

For instance, Baby Boomers tend to enjoy sharing content, yet they are often susceptible to spreading hoaxes and AI-generated misinformation. Meanwhile, Millennials and Gen Z struggle with FOMO and the pitfalls of cancel culture.

No need to feel overwhelmed by these terms—Kristi Poerwandari’s book

Mental Health in the Digital Era: Staying Human in the Advanced Technology Realm explains them all in a clear and engaging manner. Across nine well-structured chapters, the book delves into various psychological and cultural aspects of today's tech-driven world. Each chapter begins with thought-provoking discussion questions and concludes with reflective questions, making this book an excellent resource for discussions, educational modules, or workshops on digital media awareness.

Most importantly, this book helps us achieve a balanced life. Rather than being controlled by technology, we learn to harness it creatively for the collective good.

- **Melani Budianta, Cultural Commission, Indonesian Academy of Sciences**

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Kristi is one of the founders of Yayasan Pulih, a psychological organization focused on trauma management and psychosocial empowerment, as well as one of the founders of LBH APIK Jawa Barat. She is the editor of *Indonesian Women in a Changing Society* (Ewha Women's University Press, Korea, 2005) and a council member of the Asian Association of Women's Studies (AAWS).

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