

## ***ANIMUS DIGITUS: RETHINKING THE HUMAN IN DIGITAL ANTHROPOLOGY THROUGH ISLAMIC THEOLOGY***

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**Abstract:** *This article explores the conceptual transformation of human existence in the digital era through the debate between Homo Digitus and Animus Digitus within the framework of digital humanities and Islamic philosophical–theological anthropology. The main problem addressed in this study concerns the growing tendency toward reductionism in digital discourse, where human beings are increasingly understood as data entities, algorithmic functions, or objects of technological optimization. Such perspectives risk overlooking the dimensions of meaning, faith, and moral responsibility that constitute the core of human existence. This study employs a qualitative conceptual approach grounded in philosophical analysis, digital humanities perspectives, and Islamic theological reflection. The analysis compares the descriptive concept of Homo Digitus—which portrays humans as actors within digital socio-technological systems—with the normative–theological concept of Animus Digitus, which emphasizes humans as subjects endowed with soul, intention, and moral accountability in front of others, the environment, and God. The findings show that while Homo Digitus is analytically useful at the sociological level, it is insufficient to explain the ethical and spiritual dimensions of digital human life and the transcendental aspects that accompany it. The novelty of this research lies in the aspect of proposing the concept Animus Digitus as a normative–theological framework that integrates digital humanities with Islamic anthropology, thereby offering a more holistic interpretation of human existence in the digital age and provide an ethical basis for the development and use of digital technology that is oriented towards human dignity.*

**Keywords:** *Animus Digitus, Digital Ethics, Digital Humanities, Digital Philosophy, Homo Digitus.*

**Abstrak:** Artikel ini mengeksplorasi transformasi konseptual eksistensi manusia di era digital melalui perdebatan antara *Homo Digitus* dan *Animus Digitus* dalam kerangka humaniora digital serta antropologi filosofis-teologis Islam. Permasalahan utama yang dikaji adalah kecenderungan reduksionisme dalam diskursus digital kontemporer, di mana manusia semakin dipahami sebagai entitas data, fungsi algoritmik, atau objek optimasi teknologi. Perspektif tersebut berisiko

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mengabaikan dimensi makna, iman, dan tanggung jawab moral yang menjadi inti keberadaan manusia. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif-konseptual dengan metode analisis filosofis yang memadukan perspektif humaniora digital dan refleksi teologi Islam. Analisis dilakukan dengan membandingkan konsep deskriptif *Homo Digitus*—yang memandang manusia sebagai aktor dalam sistem sosio-teknologis digital—dengan konsep normatif-teologis *Animus Digitus* yang menegaskan manusia sebagai subjek berjiwa, berniat, dan bertanggung jawab secara moral di hadapan sesama, lingkungan, serta Tuhan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *Homo Digitus* memadai pada level analisis sosiologis-deskriptif, namun tidak cukup untuk menjelaskan dimensi etis dan spiritual kehidupan manusia digital serta aspek transenden yang menyertainya. Kebaruan penelitian ini terletak pada aspek pengajuan konsep *Animus Digitus* sebagai kerangka normatif-teologis yang mengintegrasikan humaniora digital dengan antropologi Islam, sehingga menawarkan pemahaman yang lebih holistik tentang eksistensi manusia dalam peradaban digital dan menyediakan landasan etis bagi pengembangan serta pemanfaatan teknologi digital yang berorientasi pada martabat manusia.

**Kata-kata Kunci:** *Animus Digitus, Etika Digital, Filsafat Teknologi, Homo Digitus, Humaniora Digital.*

## Introduction

The rapid development of digital technologies, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), big data, recommendation algorithms, and digital platforms, has fundamentally transformed how human beings understand reality, construct knowledge, and conduct their social and religious lives (Floridi 2024; Floridi 2023; Eke and Stahl 2024, 11–34; Kwet 2019, 3–26). Digital technology no longer functions merely as an external tool; rather, it has become an existential environment (of life) that frames how humans think, relate to one another, and make moral decisions (Floridi 2015; Mökander and Floridi 2022, 507–10; Coeckelbergh 2023, 1–13). In this condition, human life unfolds within an informational architecture that continuously records, predicts, and modulates behavior, thereby blurring the boundaries between subject, technology, and system (Floridi 2019; Floridi 2014, 39–62; Couldry and Mejias 2019, 336–49).

Nevertheless, much of the contemporary scholarship on the digital world, both in digital sociology and in digital humanities, remains predominantly descriptive and technocratic. Human beings are frequently understood through functional and instrumental categories as technology users, data producers, or actors within algorithmic systems. Such conceptualizations are often articulated through terms such as *homo digitalis* or *Homo Digitus*, which extend the Western modern tradition of anthropological typologies such as *homo faber* and *homo economicus*. While these approaches may be useful for empirical analysis, they risk reducing human beings to bio-technological entities stripped of meaning, intentionality, and moral responsibility (Zuboff 2020, 521–48; Bucher 2017, 30–44; Ruckenstein and Granroth 2020, 12–24).

This reductionist tendency is not merely theoretical but increasingly evident in concrete socio-technical practices such as algorithmic management and the growing crisis of digital mental health. Reports from institutions such as the World Health Organization and the World Economic Forum indicate rising levels

of anxiety, burnout, and alienation linked to AI-driven labor environments and platform economies. These developments suggest that human beings are not only conceptually but also practically treated as data points within optimization systems—what may be described as the living condition of *Homo Digitus*. This reductionism becomes more problematic when digital transformation extends into the domains of ethics, religion, and spirituality. Algorithms increasingly function as epistemic agents shaping truth, authority, and legitimacy, while digital platforms restructure religious authority and moral discourse (Couldry and Mejias 2020, 87–112; Mittelstadt 2019, 1–19).

However, within Islamic intellectual discourse, this transformation has not yet been matched by a sufficiently developed conceptual framework. Existing discussions remain fragmented between normative jurisprudence (*fiqh*), sociological observation, and partial ethical reflection (Moosa 2022, 559–64). More importantly, although calls for renewal—such as those articulated by Moosa—have identified the urgency of rethinking Islamic theological anthropology, they have not yet produced a clear operational or terminological framework capable of distinguishing between the descriptive and normative dimensions of the digital human.

Recent scholarship in digital studies further reinforces this gap. While theories such as surveillance capitalism by Zuboff and data colonialism by Couldry and Mejias successfully diagnose the political–economic structures of digital power, they tend to leave underdeveloped the question of the human being as a moral and existential subject (Zuboff 2020, 521–48; Zuboff 2022, 26317877221129290; Zuboff, 2019; Couldry and Mejias 2020, 113–41). Similarly, philosophical approaches that attempt to reintroduce ethical reflection—such as Vallor’s work on moral agency in AI or posthumanist debates summarized by Ferrando—open a normative horizon but remain largely situated within a Western secular framework, without fully articulating a theological–anthropological account of human existence (Vallor 2024, 45–78; Ferrando 2020, 119–43).

Within contemporary Islamic studies and theology, scholarship on digitalization has also expanded, particularly in relation to religious authority, digital ethics, and the transformation of religious practice. Moosa and Leaman emphasize the need to renew Islamic theological anthropology in response to the challenges of late modernity, including the digital condition (Moosa 2022, 559–64), while studies of digital religion highlight how digital platforms reshape structures of authority and lived religiosity (Evolvi 2022, 9–25; Campbell and Evolvi 2020, 5–17; Campbell and Cheong 2024; Hutchings et al. 2022, 8–28; AlMazaedh et al. 2026, 3–6).

Nevertheless, these discussions often remain fragmented across jurisprudential, sociological, and ethical domains, and systematic efforts to articulate an integrated Islamic digital anthropology remain limited. In particular, no widely developed conceptual framework yet bridges Islamic notions of *insān*, moral responsibility, and spiritual intentionality with contemporary debates in philosophy of technology and digital humanities. It is precisely this gap that the present article seeks to address through the development of *Animus Digitus* as a normative–theological

framework that complements the descriptive concept of *Homo Digitus*.

It is precisely this gap—between structural critique and the absence of a transcendental anthropology—that this article addresses. This study begins with the recognition that the contemporary digital condition has generated a profound crisis of meaning, in which human beings are increasingly interpreted through algorithmic, data-driven, and techno-functional categories. Within this context, the need emerges to redefine human identity beyond its reduction to a socio-technological entity. This article therefore proposes a conceptual distinction between *Homo Digitus* and *Animus Digitus*. *Homo Digitus* is retained as a descriptive–sociological category referring to the human as a functional entity embedded within digital systems, while *Animus Digitus* is developed as a normative–theological concept that reaffirms the human as a moral subject endowed with soul, intention, meaning, faith, and responsibility.

Drawing upon Islamic concepts such as *insān*, *‘abd*, and *khalīfah*, this framework emphasizes that human actions cannot be reduced to behavioral data alone, as their ethical significance ultimately depends on intention (*niyyah*) and accountability (*ḥisāb*), dimensions that remain inaccessible to algorithmic systems. In this formulation, the distinction between *Homo Digitus* and *Animus Digitus* functions not merely as a conceptual contrast but as an operational framework for distinguishing between descriptive and normative dimensions of the digital human (Leaman 2019, 101–28; Ali et al. 2025, 120–54).

This study is guided by three interrelated objectives: First, to critically examine the tendency toward biological and technological reductionism in conceptualizations of the digital human; second, to construct a framework for digital anthropology grounded in Islamic philosophy and theology while remaining dialogical with contemporary digital humanities scholarship; and third, to formulate *Animus Digitus* as an original theoretical contribution to the development of Islamic digital anthropology.

From the perspective of Islamic philosophy and contemporary theology, the concept of *Animus Digitus* introduces a substantive innovation by reconnecting digital anthropology with the Qur’anic concept of *insān*, rather than reducing the human being to a technologically enhanced *basbar*. This integration affirms that even within algorithmic systems and data-driven economies, human beings remain *‘abd* and *khalīfah*, situated within a horizon of moral accountability (*ḥisāb*).

At the same time, this framework responds to the limitations of contemporary digital theory by reintroducing dimensions of interiority, intentionality, and transcendental accountability that are absent in purely technocratic or secular models. Rather than adopting an anti-technological stance or embracing extreme posthumanist visions, this article advances a constructive approach that affirms human dignity, moral agency, and interiority as foundational for the ethical development of digital civilization.

As such, it positions Islamic philosophy and theology as critical resources for navigating the future trajectory of digital civilization while contributing to broader debates in digital humanities, philosophy of technology, AI ethics, and digital

theology (Vallor 2024, 3–27). From the perspective of Islamic philosophy and theology, *Animus Digitus* also introduces a substantive innovation by reconnecting digital anthropology with the Qur'anic concept of *insān*, rather than reducing the human being to a technologically enhanced *bashar*. This framework emphasizes that while digital systems record behavioral traces, they cannot access intention (*niyyah*), thereby underscoring the distinction between data-driven evaluation and moral accountability (*hisāb*).

Ultimately, this study adopts a constructive stance toward technology. Rather than rejecting digital transformation or embracing extreme posthumanist visions, it affirms human dignity, moral agency, and interiority as essential foundations for the ethical development of digital civilization. In doing so, it positions Islamic philosophy and theology as critical interlocutors in global debates on digital humanity while offering a theoretical basis for future research in Islamic digital anthropology, philosophy of technology, AI ethics, and digital theology (Vallor 2024, 3–27; Floridi 2021, 218–36).

## The Philosophical Problem Behind the Terms *Homo* and *Animus*

### Limits of *Homo* as a Digital Anthropological Category

The term *homo*, although historically rooted in biological classification systems such as those developed by Carl Linnaeus, is more significant for its enduring anthropological implication: the human being is defined primarily as a rational and functional entity. In the digital age, this classificatory logic does not disappear but is reconfigured. If modern science categorized humans through biological taxonomy, contemporary digital systems classify them through data infrastructures—algorithmic recruitment systems, platform metrics, and behavioral analytics that rank, predict, and evaluate individuals based on quantifiable outputs. In the context of this article, however, this historical background is not an end in itself but serves to demonstrate a persistent epistemological pattern: the reduction of the human to classificatory and functional categories that overlook the question of meaning and moral subjectivity (Floridi 2023, 92–101; Couldry and Mejias 2020, 45–59; Lynch 2022, 20–21; Hanna and Kazim 2021, 405–23; Umbrello and O'Hara 2025, 1–22).

Thus, *Homo Digitus* represents a continuity between modern classification and digital reduction (Bliss et al. 2021, 514–31), where the human being is translated into a datafied entity whose value is determined by visibility, engagement, and algorithmic performance (Zuboff, 2019, 377–401; Harari 2017, 37–58; Azizah et al. 2024, 251–68; Maulida and Ja'far 2022, 108–24). Within this framework, the concept of *homo* operates as a reductionist anthropological category. It privileges observable behavior and functional roles while marginalizing interior dimensions such as meaning, intention, and moral responsibility (Vallor 2016, 201–26; Han 2017, 23–47; Souza 2018, 47–52). What becomes problematic here is not merely the descriptive utility of such models, but their implicit normative claim—that human identity can be sufficiently explained through measurable behavior—

thereby marginalizing dimensions such as intention, ethical reflection, and spiritual orientation (Vallor 2024, 45–78; Floridi 2023, 110–18; Lutz 2019, 141–48).

This limitation becomes especially evident in algorithmic environments, where human actions are continuously tracked and quantified. While systems can capture behavioral traces—clicks, productivity, interaction—they remain structurally incapable of accessing the motivations that underlie those actions. Consequently, although *Homo Digitus* is analytically useful for describing human behavior within socio-technical systems, it is inadequate as a normative–theological category (Bliss et al. 2021, 514–31). It cannot account for intention (*niyyah*), moral responsibility, or transcendental accountability, which are central to Islamic anthropology (Ramadan 2017, 91–112; Floridi 2014; Floridi 2019, 89–112). For this reason, the continued reliance on *homo* risks reducing the human being to a technologized functional entity rather than a meaningful subject (Braidotti 2019, 55–78). From a normative–theological perspective, this reduction is deeply inadequate, because it fails to account for the human as a moral subject whose actions are guided not only by external stimuli but by inner intentionality and accountability (Moosa 2022, 560–63; Khan 2025, 361–82).

Furthermore, the dominance of this framework risks reshaping evaluative standards within digital societies. Human worth becomes increasingly aligned with metrics of efficiency, adaptability, and performance within algorithmic systems. Such a framework risks legitimizing forms of dehumanization, as it shifts evaluative authority from ethical principles to systemic performance, thereby obscuring the question of whether technological systems themselves ought to be morally assessed (Couldry and Mejias 2020, 120–31; Floridi 2023, 140–48). This dynamic reinforces a feedback loop in which individuals internalize algorithmic criteria as measures of self-worth, further entrenching reductionist models of the human (Salerno 2024, 34–48).

At this point, the philosophical limitation of *homo* becomes explicit. While it remains descriptively valuable for mapping human behavior within digital infrastructures, it lacks the conceptual resources to articulate the human as a bearer of meaning and responsibility. This reveals the central limitation of *homo* as a digital anthropological category: it may function descriptively, but it is normatively insufficient for articulating the human as a subject of responsibility, intention, and transcendence (Vallor 2024, 125–32; Braidotti 2019, 60–72).

The critical question, then, is not whether *homo* is analytically useful, but whether it can sustain an account of human dignity, interiority, and moral responsibility in an era where digital systems increasingly define human identity. It is precisely this inadequacy that necessitates the turn toward *animus* as a corrective framework, capable of restoring the dimensions of intentionality, consciousness, and ethical accountability that are systematically marginalized within the paradigm of *Homo Digitus* (Floridi 2023, 92–101; Vallor 2024, 130–38; Braidotti 2019, 75–84; Joyeux-Prunel 2024, 23–43).

***Animus: Human Beings as Creatures of Soul, Meaning, and Consciousness***

In contrast to the term *homo*, which is rooted in biological and functional classification, the term *animus* originates from classical philosophical and theological traditions that understand the human being from the perspective of interiority and meaning. In Latin, *animus* refers to the soul, the vital principle, and the center of consciousness that animates human action. From ancient Greek philosophy to classical Christian and Islamic theology, the human being has been understood not merely as a biological organism but as a being endowed with an inner dimension, will, and value orientation. This perspective situates humans as subjects who live within a horizon of meaning rather than as objects within natural or technological systems (Taylor 2016, 87–112). As a corrective category, *animus* directly addresses the limitations of *homo* by re-centering the human not as a functional entity but as a bearer of interiority, thereby restoring dimensions of intentionality and responsibility that are systematically excluded in reductionist digital anthropology (Thompson 2020, 150–60).

In contemporary philosophy, the concept of *animus* resonates with critiques of material and technological reductionism. Philosophy of consciousness and phenomenology emphasize that human experience cannot be reduced to computational processes or purely neurobiological activity. Consciousness, intention, and meaning constitute irreducible dimensions that shape human existence. Within the digital context, this critique becomes increasingly significant when humans are frequently conceptualized merely as “users” or “data producers.” The concept of *animus* offers an anthropological framework that restores the human being as the center of experience and meaning within an increasingly impersonal digital architecture (Thompson 2020, 145–68). More importantly, it introduces a normative horizon absent in *Homo Digitus*: while digital systems capture behavior, they cannot access the inner structure of meaning that grounds ethical evaluation, thereby exposing the epistemic limits of algorithmic representations of the human (Vallor 2024, 110–18).

Within the tradition of Islamic theology, the concept of *animus* bears a close conceptual affinity with the terms *nafs*, *rūḥ*, *qalb*, and *‘aql*. These four concepts collectively affirm that the human being possesses spiritual, ethical, and intellectual dimensions that are deeply integrated. *Nafs* refers to the self-endowed with desire and volition; *rūḥ* denotes the divine principle of life; *qalb* represents the center of moral consciousness; and *‘aql* refers to the intellectual faculty that enables the comprehension of truth. Through this integrated framework, the human being is understood as *insān*—a meaningful creature who bears responsibility for intentions and actions, both in the physical and digital realms (Kartanegara and Bagir 2005, 55–79). Crucially, these concepts must not be treated as supplementary theological vocabulary but as a fully developed anthropological system that provides an alternative epistemology to digital reductionism: while algorithmic systems operate through external data capture, the Islamic framework of *nafs*, *rūḥ*, *qalb*, and *‘aql* operates through an ontology of interiority, moral struggle, and

conscious intentionality (Moosa 2022, 560–63).

The *animus* perspective further emphasizes that human beings cannot be understood solely through what they do, but also through why and for what purpose they act. Will and intention therefore become central categories within philosophical–theological anthropology, because ethical responsibility originates from these dimensions. Within the digital ecosystem—where actions are frequently accelerated and mediated by algorithmic systems, this dimension of intention risks being eroded. The concept of *animus* reminds us that human beings remain moral subjects who act with consciousness and value orientation, even when operating within complex technological systems (Vallor 2016, 101–29). This distinction is decisive: algorithms may record behavioral traces (clicks, shares, engagement), but they cannot access *niyyah* (intention), which in Islamic theology constitutes the primary criterion of moral evaluation. Thus, *Animus Digitus* redefines the human not as a bundle of observable actions but as a subject whose ethical worth is grounded in invisible intentional states (Vallor 2024, 120–28; Khan 2025, 365–87).

From this perspective emerges the concept of *Animus Digitus* as a reconstruction of normative digital anthropology. *Animus Digitus* does not describe digital humans merely as technology users or nodes within data networks, but rather as living souls who believe, intend, and create meaning within the digital ecosystem. It emphasizes that the relationship between humans and technology must be interpreted within a spiritual–ethical framework: how technological systems influence human consciousness, intention, and orientation of life. In this sense, *Animus Digitus* functions both as a critique of technological determinism and as an affirmation of human dignity in the digital age (Floridi 2014; Floridi 2019, 211–34). In this sense, *Animus Digitus* also enables the articulation of the *digital insān* as a fully developed anthropological subject: not only embedded in digital infrastructures but also accountable within a transcendental moral order, thereby offering a systematic alternative to *Homo Digitus* rather than a mere terminological variation (Leaman 2019, 90–102).

In conclusion, the shift from *homo* to *animus* marks a fundamental transformation in the way the human being is understood in the digital era. If *homo* emphasizes function and adaptation, *animus* foregrounds meaning, consciousness, and responsibility. Within the framework of digital humanities and theology, *Animus Digitus* provides a conceptual foundation for understanding the human being as a spiritual–ethical subject who does not dissolve into the logic of technology but remains rooted in interiority, faith, and transcendental orientation (Williams 2018, 133–58). Thus, as a corrective anthropological category, *animus* not only critiques the reductionism of *homo* but also reconstructs a robust framework for understanding the human as *insān*—a morally accountable, spiritually grounded, and consciously intentional being in the digital age (Moosa 2022, 562–64).

### Critical Analysis: *Homo Digitus* vs. *Animus Digitus*

The term *Homo Digitus* emerges as a continuation of the modern conceptual tradition that interprets human beings through their relationship with tools, labor, and rational systems. In the digital context, *Homo Digitus* refers to humans who live within technological networks, interact with machines, produce and are simultaneously constructed by data, and become integrated into algorithmic logic. This concept has proven highly productive in digital sociology, technology studies, and the political economy of data, as it helps explain how human behavior is shaped by digital platforms, infrastructures, and complex computational systems (Couldry and Mejias 2020, 34–62).

The primary strength of *Homo Digitus* lies in its descriptive–analytical capacity. It enables scholars to map human–machine relations, the economic exploitation of attention, the automation of labor, and transformations in social structures driven by digitalization. Within this framework, humans are understood as actors within cybernetic systems governed by the logic of efficiency, optimization, and prediction. However, precisely because of this analytical strength, *Homo Digitus* tends to position humans as components of a system rather than as meaningful subjects. As a result, dimensions such as meaning, spirituality, intention, and moral responsibility are often reduced or even neglected (Zuboff 2019, 376–402; Zuboff 2020; Zuboff 2022, 26317877221129290).

The conceptual limitations of *Homo Digitus* become increasingly problematic when the concept is employed within normative or theological frameworks. Theological traditions—both Islamic and Christian—do not understand the human being merely as a functional entity but as a moral and spiritual subject accountable before God. In Islamic theology, for instance, intention (*niyyah*) constitutes the foundation of ethical evaluation, a dimension that cannot be adequately explained through the biologically and instrumentally oriented category of *homo*. Thus, while *Homo Digitus* is useful for factual descriptions of digital humanity, it remains insufficient for addressing normative questions concerning meaning, purpose, and human accountability in the age of algorithms (Ramadan 2017, 91–112; Hardiman 2018, 177–92; Arias 2019, 6–7).

In contrast, the concept of *Animus Digitus* offers a different anthropological horizon. Rooted in an understanding of the human being as a creature of soul, consciousness, and meaning, *Animus Digitus* positions the digital human as a spiritual–ethical subject living within a technological ecosystem. This concept aligns more closely with philosophical anthropology and digital theology because it emphasizes that the relationship between humans and technology is always mediated by intention, will, and value orientation. Within this framework, technology is not merely a tool but also a space in which human ethical and spiritual orientation is both shaped and tested (Vallor 2016, 145–71).

Admittedly, the main challenge of *Animus Digitus* lies in the fact that the concept has not yet been firmly established within mainstream Western scholarship. Yet this very condition highlights its theoretical contribution. Many contemporary

thinkers have criticized digital reductionism and called for the recovery of human interiority, virtue, and meaning, even though they do not explicitly employ the term *animus*. In this sense, *Animus Digitus* can be interpreted as a creative synthesis of critiques from philosophy of technology, virtue ethics, and Islamic theological anthropology—particularly the concept of *insān* as a faithful and dignified being (Floridi 2014; Floridi 2019, 209–38).

Therefore, the comparison between *Homo Digitus* and *Animus Digitus* should not be understood as an exclusive choice but rather as a distinction between levels of analysis. *Homo Digitus* remains relevant for empirical and structural analysis of digital society, while *Animus Digitus* is crucial for the normative and theological reconstruction of the digital human. If *Homo Digitus* answers the question of how humans' function within digital systems, *Animus Digitus* addresses the more fundamental question: who the digital human is and toward what ethical and spiritual orientation this existence is directed (Williams 2018, 159–82; Ja'far 2026, 19–37).

The distinction between *Homo Digitus* and *Animus Digitus* is best understood as a differentiation between levels of analysis. *Homo Digitus* explains how humans function within digital systems, while *Animus Digitus* addresses who the human being is as a moral and spiritual subject. From this perspective, influential theories such as surveillance capitalism by Zuboff and data colonialism by Couldry and Mejias provide powerful critiques of digital power structures yet remain limited in addressing the inner dimensions of human existence. They reveal mechanisms of control but do not sufficiently articulate a framework for moral and spiritual orientation. *Animus Digitus* fills this conceptual gap by introducing a normative horizon grounded in intention, responsibility, and transcendence. It enables digital anthropology to move beyond structural critique toward ethical evaluation and existential meaning.

### **Synthetic Position: *Homo Digitus* and *Animus Digitus* as Two Levels of Analysis**

The debate between *Homo Digitus* and *Animus Digitus* does not need to be resolved by choosing one concept over the other exclusively. Rather, it can be addressed through a clear distinction between levels of analysis. Within the philosophy of science, the distinction between factual description and normative reflection constitutes an essential foundation that prevents concepts from operating beyond their epistemic capacity. *Homo Digitus* operates at the descriptive–empirical level: it explains human beings as they appear within digital socio-technological systems, embedded in algorithmic logic, data economies, and human–machine relations. By contrast, *Animus Digitus* functions at the reflective–normative level, interpreting the digital human as a subject of meaning, faith, and ethical responsibility (Floridi 2014; Floridi 2019, 85–110).

At the first level, *Homo Digitus* provides a powerful analytical framework for understanding how human beings are shaped by digital infrastructures. Digital sociology, media studies, and the political economy of data employ this concept

to explain how human behavior is predicted, modulated, and exploited through computational systems. Within this framework, humans are understood as functional actors within complex technical networks. However, this approach deliberately suspends questions of meaning and value, since its primary focus lies on the operation of systems and their structural consequences (Couldry and Mejias 2019, 63–97).

At this point, *Animus Digitus* becomes an indispensable complement. By conceptualizing humans as beings endowed with soul, intention, and faith, the concept restores the dimension of interiority that is often erased in purely technological analyses. *Animus Digitus* affirms that even though humans live within technically deterministic digital systems, they remain moral subjects capable of reflecting upon and taking responsibility for their actions. In Islamic theology, this dimension resonates with the concept of *insān mukallaf*—the human being as a subject entrusted with ethical and spiritual responsibility—which cannot be reduced to data or algorithmic functions (Kamali 2015, 117–41).

This synthetic approach also aligns with recent developments in the philosophy of technology that reject the simplistic dichotomy between technological determinism and naïve humanism. Many contemporary thinkers emphasize that technology shapes the conditions of possibility for human action without eliminating moral agency. In this sense, *Homo Digitus* and *Animus Digitus* can be understood as complementary perspectives: the former explains how humans operate within systems, while the latter evaluates how humans ought to live meaningfully within them (Ihde 2019, 201–23).

This proposed synthesis allows for a more productive integration of digital sociology, philosophical anthropology, and digital theology. Rather than becoming trapped in terminological debates, distinguishing between levels of analysis opens space for interdisciplinary dialogue. *Homo Digitus* becomes a working concept for empirical research and structural critique, whereas *Animus Digitus* functions as a normative horizon that evaluates, corrects, and provides ethical direction for the development of digital technology (Vallor 2016, 203–29).

Accordingly, the following conceptual formulation may serve as a coherent theoretical foundation: if *Homo Digitus* describes the human being as a biological–technological entity operating within digital systems, then *Animus Digitus* affirms the human being as a soul endowed with meaning, intention, and ethical–theological responsibility within those systems. This synthesis is not a weak compromise but rather an analytical framework that enables a comprehensive critique of digital civilization—one that simultaneously addresses facts, meaning, and values (Williams 2018, 183–206; Taneo 2024, 55–69).

### **Relevance to the Islamic Tradition: The Concept of the Digital *Insān***

Within the framework of Islamic theology (*‘aqīdah*) and philosophy, the conceptual distinction between *Homo Digitus* and *Animus Digitus* finds a clear theological resonance in the concept of *insān*. The Qur’an consistently distinguishes between *basīr*—the human being as a biological creature—and *insān*—the

human being as a moral, spiritual, and responsible subject. This distinction indicates that, in the Islamic perspective, the human being cannot be reduced to bodily existence and functional capacity but must be understood as a meaningful being endowed with self-consciousness, volition, and transcendental orientation. In this regard, *Animus Digitus* corresponds more closely to the concept of *insān*, whereas *Homo Digitus* tends to remain at the level of a technologically mediated *bashar* (Izutsu 2002, 27–56). In relation to the notion of human nature (*fiṭrah*), this distinction becomes even more significant: *fiṭrah* denotes the primordial moral and spiritual disposition oriented toward truth, responsibility, and recognition of the Divine. Contemporary discussions on digital ethics indicate that datafication and algorithmic mediation risk obscuring this ontological orientation by reducing human identity to behavioral metrics and predictive models (Floridi 2023, 112–30; Vallor 2024, 18–25). Thus, while *Homo Digitus* reflects this reduction, *Animus Digitus* seeks to preserve and reactivate *fiṭrah* within the digital environment.

As *‘abd* (servant of God), the human being exists in a vertical relationship with the Divine, in which all actions—including those mediated by digital technologies—may be valued as acts of worship or as sin depending on the intention and ethical context of their use. The digitalization of life does not abolish human status as servants but instead expands the sphere of ethical responsibility. Online activities, data production, and algorithmically mediated interactions remain within the horizon of divine moral evaluation. For instance, the rise of digital *da‘wah* on platforms such as TikTok demonstrates how religious authority is increasingly mediated by algorithmic visibility, where popularity metrics shape perceptions of legitimacy and piety (Campbell and Bellar 2023, 44–59; Evolvi 2022, 9–25). Similarly, studies of platform religion show that digital engagement often privileges visibility over depth, raising concerns about the transformation of religious authority. In this context, *Animus Digitus* as the digital *insān* affirms that the digital human is not merely a user of technology but a subject who continues to exist in an ethical relationship with God, even while inhabiting virtual spaces and automated systems (Ramadan 2017, 113–38).

In addition to being *‘abd*, the human being is also positioned as *khalīfah*—a trustee entrusted with the responsibility to steward the earth and civilization. Within the digital context, this mandate of stewardship extends to technologies, data, and information systems that shape social life. This perspective rejects deterministic views that portray humans as fully controlled by technological systems. Instead, the digital *insān* is called to direct technology toward the realization of public good (*maṣlahah*), justice, and the preservation of human dignity. This is evident in emerging phenomena such as AI-generated fatwas and automated religious advisory systems, where the central issue is not only technical accuracy but also epistemic authority and ethical accountability (Bunt 2018, 201–219; Moosa 2022, 559–64). Likewise, the commodification of digital piety—through monetized religious content and influencer-based religiosity—demonstrates how platform economies can reshape spiritual practices into consumable forms (Campbell and Tsuria 2021, 88–105). In this sense, *Animus Digitus* provides a theological foundation

for critically evaluating the misuse of digital technologies that undermine human values (Kamali 2015, 167–92; Dasion and Prananta 2024, 71–78).

The dimension of *ḥisāb* (ultimate accountability before God) further underscores the inadequacy of the concept of *Homo Digitus* within an Islamic theological framework. In Islam, every human action—no matter how small—will ultimately be accounted for. This principle bears an interesting parallel to the phenomenon of digital traces, in which human activities are stored, recorded, and analyzed. Contemporary data infrastructures—such as algorithmic profiling, surveillance systems, and platform analytics—function as archives of behavioral traces, often described as digital footprints (Couldry and Mejias 2020, 119–25; Zuboff 2020, 530–36). Yet, unlike algorithmic archives that function purely at a technical level, divine accountability operates on a moral and transcendental plane, evaluating the intention and meaning behind actions (Ja'far 2011, 227–52; Khan 2025, 361–82). The concept of the digital *insān* as *Animus Digitus* integrates this dimension, whereas *Homo Digitus* tends to interpret digital traces merely as data rather than as records of moral conduct (Moosa 2015, 203–26).

The concept of the digital *insān* also enables a critical dialogue with contemporary discourses such as transhumanism and posthumanism. While certain technological discourses seek to transcend human limitations through human–machine integration, Islamic theology maintains that human dignity does not lie in technological enhancement but in the quality of faith (*īmān*), character (*akblāq*), and moral responsibility. *Animus Digitus*, understood as the digital *insān*, rejects the reduction of the human being to a purely technical project and affirms that digital transformation must be evaluated according to the extent to which it preserves or undermines the objectives of Islamic law (*maqāsid al-sharī'ah*) and the dignity of the human person (Leaman 2019, 84–109). This evaluative framework is particularly relevant in algorithmic environments where the visibility of religious scholars (*'ulamā'*) is shaped by platform logics rather than scholarly authority, thereby requiring a reassertion of epistemic and ethical criteria rooted in Islamic tradition (Campbell and Bellar 2023, 60–72).

Thus, from a theological perspective, the following conceptual formulation may be proposed: *Animus Digitus*—digital *insān*, whereas *Homo Digitus* merely describes the human being at the level of a technologically mediated *bashar*. This synthesis is not merely a terminological preference but a philosophical–theological position that shapes the direction of digital humanities within the Islamic intellectual tradition. It enables a more critical engagement with digital technologies while simultaneously opening an ethical and spiritual horizon for the future of humanity in the digital age (Floridi 2014; Floridi 2019, 241–68). At the same time, by reconnecting digital anthropology with the concept of *fiṭrah*, this framework underscores that the central task is not only to understand the digital human but to preserve the integrity of human nature amid the transformative pressures of algorithmic life (Vallor 2024, 22–27).

## Theoretical Implications of *Animus Digitus*

The implications of *Animus Digitus* can be condensed into three interrelated domains: First, in the philosophy of technology, it challenges reductionist models by affirming that human existence cannot be fully captured by computational logic (Floridi 2014; Floridi 2019, 143–68). Second, in Islamic theology, it reinforces the centrality of intention (*niyyah*) and accountability (*ḥisāb*), situating everyday digital practices within a broader moral framework (Ferrando 2020, 71–98). For example, digital activities—such as content production, online interaction, and algorithmic participation—are not only visible to platforms but also subject to ethical and spiritual evaluation. This theological framing can be further clarified through the distinction between human beings as *‘abd* (servants of God) and *khalīfah* (moral trustees), where everyday digital practices—posting, sharing, coding, or engaging with algorithmic systems—constitute forms of morally accountable action within a divine horizon. In this sense, while data infrastructures record human behavior for economic optimization, the concept of *ḥisāb* reinterprets these “digital traces” as moral archives that reflect intention and responsibility rather than mere behavioral data (Vallor 2024, 102–15; Floridi 2023, 128–34). Third, the concept of *Animus Digitus* reaffirms human dignity and agency amid the growing dominance of algorithms and automated systems. Although human decisions are increasingly mediated by artificial intelligence, *Animus Digitus* rejects the full delegation of agency to machines. It emphasizes that human beings retain reflective capacity and moral responsibility even within automated environments, thereby preserving an ethical foundation for debates on responsibility, error, and justice in AI systems (Vallor 2016, 259–84).

Fourth, *Animus Digitus* strengthens the theological framework of responsibility and intention within the Islamic tradition by placing *niyyah* as the core criterion for moral evaluation, even in digital contexts (Leaman 2019, 53–77). In practical terms, this implies that actions such as algorithmic amplification, digital consumption, or participation in platform economies cannot be assessed solely through observable metrics (clicks, views, engagement), but must also be evaluated in terms of intentionality and ethical orientation, which remain inaccessible to computational systems yet central within Islamic moral theology (Vallor 2024, 118–26). Fifth, it offers an original contribution to Islamic digital anthropology by introducing a conceptual paradigm that moves beyond Western secular frameworks and rearticulates the digital human as *digital insān*, thus opening new avenues for theorizing ethics, leadership, and spirituality in the technological age (Moosa 2015, 227–49). This reframing further reinforces the distinction between *bashar* as a biologically and technically mediated entity and *insān* as a morally accountable subject, particularly in contexts where algorithmic systems increasingly define visibility, authority, and social value (Floridi 2023, 140–52).

Therefore, *Animus Digitus* should not be regarded merely as an alternative term but as a theoretical position with both critical and constructive potential, capable of correcting reductionist biases, challenging extreme posthumanist claims, and

enriching the theology of responsibility while contributing to global debates on the future of humanity (Williams 2018, 207–29). By integrating the concepts of *'abd*, *khalīfab*, and *ḥisāb* into the analysis of digital life, this framework provides a concrete theological lens through which everyday technological practices can be reinterpreted as sites of moral accountability, thereby bridging the gap between digital systems as infrastructures of data extraction and human existence as a domain of ethical and spiritual responsibility (Vallor 2024, 130–38; Floridi 2023, 155–62).

### **Why *Animus Digitus* is More Appropriate than *Homo Digitus***

Based on the overall ontological, epistemological, and theological analysis, it can be argued that the term *Animus Digitus* more accurately represents the fullness of human existence in the digital age than *Homo Digitus*. This conclusion is not merely a matter of terminological preference but the result of philosophical reflection that recognizes the limitations of the biological–instrumental paradigm in understanding the digital human. As human life becomes increasingly mediated by algorithms, data, and automated systems, the need for a concept capable of capturing dimensions of meaning, consciousness, and responsibility becomes ever more urgent (Floridi 2014; Floridi 2019, 143–68).

The term *Homo Digitus*, as an extension of the intellectual lineage that includes *homo sapiens*, *homo faber*, and *homo economicus*, is deeply rooted in an understanding of the human being as a biological entity functioning within rational and technological systems. This concept is highly useful for descriptive analyses of how humans behave, work, and interact within digital ecosystems. Yet the very analytical strength of this framework also constitutes its limitation: *Homo Digitus* tends to reduce the human being to an instrumental agent measured through efficiency, productivity, and data patterns, thereby obscuring the inner and normative dimensions of human existence (Zuboff, 2019, 394–418).

By contrast, *Animus Digitus* affirms the digital human as a being of soul, meaning, and faith. Drawing upon philosophical and theological traditions that understand the human person as a subject of consciousness and will, this concept captures the dimension of interiority often absent from purely technological analyses. *Animus Digitus* views the human being not merely as a user or product of technology but as an ethical subject who lives, chooses, and assumes responsibility within digital spaces. This perspective becomes particularly relevant in an era when digital technology is no longer simply a tool but an existential environment in which human identity and values are continuously shaped (Vallor 2016, 285–307).

Within the framework of Islamic theology, the advantages of *Animus Digitus* become even more evident. The concept aligns with the Islamic understanding of the human being as *insān*—not merely *bashar*—who exists as both *'abd* (servant of God) and *khalīfab* (trustee on earth), and who will ultimately be held accountable (*ḥisāb*) for every action (Ja'far 2015, 80–106). The digitalization of life does not suspend these principles; rather, it expands the sphere in which they apply. Consequently, approaches that portray the digital human solely as *Homo*

*Digitus* risk neglecting the dimensions of intention, sin, and moral responsibility that lie at the core of Islamic theological anthropology (Leaman 2019, 110–32).

This conclusion also carries important methodological implications for the present academic project. By clearly distinguishing *Animus Digitus* as a normative–theological concept and *Homo Digitus* as a descriptive–sociological one, a more coherent and productive analytical framework emerges. Such a distinction allows the strengths of each concept to be utilized without conflating their respective levels of analysis, while simultaneously opening space for dialogue between digital sociology, philosophical anthropology, and Islamic theology (Couldry and Mejias 2019, 155–81; Ja’far 2013).

Thus, the preference for *Animus Digitus* should not be understood as a rejection of the empirical realities of the digital human. Rather, it represents an effort to interpret those realities in a more comprehensive and meaningful manner. *Animus Digitus* affirms that behind data, algorithms, and machines, the human being remains a subject endowed with soul, faith, and responsibility. This conceptual position is not only academically relevant but also crucial for shaping the ethical and spiritual trajectory of human civilization in the digital age (Williams 2018, 230–45; Ja’far 2017, 422–545).

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that digital transformation is not merely a technical shift in the ways humans communicate, work, and perform religious practices; rather, it represents a fundamental change in how human beings understand themselves, their knowledge, and their relationship with the transcendent. By positioning digital humanities as an epistemic, ontological, and methodological umbrella, this research identifies the central problem of the digital era as the tendency toward reduction, namely, the narrowing of the meaning of humanity into data entities, algorithmic functions, or objects of technological optimization. Within this context, the conceptual debate between *Homo Digitus* and *Animus Digitus* becomes a crucial lens for reinterpreting digital human existence in a more comprehensive manner.

The primary theoretical finding of this study is that the term *Homo Digitus* is adequate at the descriptive–sociological level for explaining humans as actors within digital socio-technological systems, but it remains insufficient for capturing the dimensions of meaning, faith, and moral responsibility that characterize human existence. By contrast, the concept of *Animus Digitus*—which resonates with the concept of *insān* in the Islamic intellectual tradition—offers a normative–theological framework that affirms the digital human as a subject endowed with soul, intention, and responsibility. Accordingly, this study argues that a comprehensive understanding of the digital human requires a clear distinction between levels of analysis: the descriptive level (*Homo Digitus*) and the normative–theological level (*Animus Digitus*).

The theoretical implications of these findings are broad and significant. First, at the philosophical level, this research contributes to the critique of biological,

technological, and data-driven reductionism within contemporary philosophy of technology. Second, at the theological level, it reinforces the paradigm of the theology of responsibility by affirming that digitalization does not suspend key concepts such as intention (*niyyah*), accountability (*ḥisāb*), and the human mandate of stewardship (*khilāfah*). Third, from an academic perspective, the concept of *Animus Digitus* provides an original contribution to the development of Islamic digital anthropology, a field that has thus far been largely dominated by Western secular frameworks with limited normative–theological reflection. In this regard, the study demonstrates that Islamic philosophy and theology do not stand at the periphery of global digital discourse but possess strong critical and constructive capacities.

Furthermore, this research carries methodological implications for the development of digital humanities. It highlights the importance of integrating empirical, data-driven analysis with philosophical and theological reflection, thereby preventing digital studies from becoming confined to technocratic approaches or purely procedural ethics. Such an approach opens the possibility for an integrative model of knowledge—consistent with the paradigm of *wahdat al-ilm* (the unity of knowledge)—which resists disciplinary silos and encourages the emergence of a polymathic model of digital scholarship within contemporary Islamic studies.

For future research, several strategic directions can be pursued. First, empirical studies on the practices of the digital *insān* within contemporary Muslim societies—such as social media ethics, online religious practices, and digital religious authority—would help test the normative relevance of *Animus Digitus* in lived contexts. Second, comparative research between Islamic digital anthropology and Christian digital theology or secular digital ethics could enrich cross-traditional dialogue. Third, further exploration is needed regarding the implications of *Animus Digitus* for emerging issues such as artificial intelligence, digital immortality, and algorithmic governance, particularly within the framework of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* and digital social justice.

In conclusion, this study affirms that the future of digital civilization will not be determined solely by technological sophistication, but by how human beings interpret and understand themselves within technological environments. By placing *Animus Digitus* at the center of reflection, this research proposes an ethical and theological horizon: that beyond the world of data and algorithms, the human being remains *insān*—a being endowed with soul, meaning, and responsibility—whose direction in life is not ultimately determined by machines but by values, faith, and moral consciousness.

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