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# **US Media Framing of Conflict in the Middle East: Human and Environmental Consequences**

## **Authors**

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## **Abstract**

This research employs the perspective of media framing to identify the definition, causation, evaluation, and preferred actions presented by commercial media coverage of US war and interventions against Syria during the Trump administration in 2018 and under the Biden administration in 2021. A content analysis of the *New York Times* and the *Associated Press* coverage of the military attacks provide the empirical evidence for the findings. Both media sources relied on the following techniques: selected government and expert sources; descriptive evaluations of participants; and a lack of historical context. These techniques enabled both media's ideological interpretations of the US bombings of Syria in 2018 and 2021.

The evidence confirms the political economy of media perspective that structures and social relations of production impact the construction of commercial media news reports. An important component of media framing is decontextualization of events, such that readers and viewers are given little geo-political background for news events. The human costs on local populations and the lasting environmental consequences in the region are largely excluded from commercial media framing, allowing more favorable acceptance by public audiences while obscuring and ultimately accepting not only the immediate catastrophe of war, but the long term consequences for humans, habitats, and ecological systems.

## **Key Words**

Key words: Media framing, historical context, sources, environment

# Can the global city enable democratic autonomy? Re-reading David Harvey and Saskia Sassen

## Authors

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## Abstract

The global city is imagined to be a space that accommodates flows of people, ideas, cultures and—most importantly—capital. It is also imagined to enjoy a high degree of decision-making autonomy from the nation. However, the rise of nationalism and covid lockdowns have called into question what a global city means when nation-states can stop global flows in and out from a city. Hong Kong is a good case study because the international community has been questioning this former British colony's global status due to overt political control from the Central Chinese government and stringent border control during the pandemic. However, these worries tend to focus on economic issues without paying attention to how democratic autonomy shapes city space and configures time.

This paper asserts that to seek democracy in a global city, citizens, activists, and academics ought to reject the typologies of local/national/global, and politics/economy/culture. Instead, they need to interrogate the multi-directional and often contradictory flows of capital, information, culture, and people. Three organizing concepts that are useful for examining such flows are network, space, and time. The focus on these three concepts will help re-imagine new spatialities and temporalities that realize citizens' agency.

To begin this task, this paper builds on the writings of David Harvey and Saskia Sassen and discuss how they may enrich the three organizing concepts: network, space, and time. I will assess how applicable their arguments are to the case of Hong Kong.

Harvey's concept of the right to the city is useful at pointing out: the state-planned, corporate-friendly urbanization in Hong Kong since the 1970s; the government re-branding the city as a global financial hub after the handover in 1997; protestors' street occupation creating a common for residents' affects. Sassen's concept of the Global City is useful at suggesting: the process of a Global City increasing its capacities of global operation, coordination, and control through attracting corporations to establish Headquarters; and the role played by a booming financial sector and advanced internet technologies in a Global City.

The case of Hong Kong, however, shows some undertheorized areas of the two concepts. Harvey tends to neglect the cultural aspects of urban life and ignore the conflicting interests among the working class. Sassen's suggestion of the Global City being relatively autonomous of state control does not seem to explain the central planning of the Chinese government. In addition, Sassen also harbours the slightly simplistic belief that information technologies will have positive “spill over” benefits for global-local social movements. This paper will use the three organizing concepts—network, space, and time—to strengthen the two concepts, right to the city and the Global City.

## Key Words

global city, Hong Kong, financial center, David Harvey, Saskia Sassen

# Participation to avoid elite capture in communication policies. Lessons from Latin America

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## Abstract

Communication policies in Latin America have historically been captured by economic and political elites. Thus, the policy-making process was unequal and its results increased the unequal possibilities of access, diversity, pluralism and participation in public communication.

In the first decades of the XXIst Century there were a relevant statal and social activism on communication. Consequently, most of the new regulations enacted in Mexico, Ecuador, Argentina and Uruguay created participatory state institutions for proposing and monitoring policies.

This paper **analyzes** the ways that the institutionalization of citizen participation in communication policies took place in these four Latin American countries.

The main **question** is: To what extent did the participatory institutions created by the laws of audiovisual communication, telecommunications and access to information sanctioned with social participation between 2000 and 2020 in Mexico, Ecuador, Argentina and Uruguay, allow (or not) that social organizations have an impact on the policy-making processes to avoid or limit their capture by political and economic elites?

The **theoretical** approach follows the tradition of communication policies studies that addresses citizen participation as a key dimension in the democratization of communications (UNESCO, 1977; Mastrini & Mestman, 1995; Freedman, 2006; Loreti & Lozano, 2014; Segura & Waisbord, 2016; Linares, 2017; Segura, 2018; Rich, Maika & Montero, 2019; among others).

**Methodologically**, a comparative study was carried out based on the operationalization of the concept of citizen participation. Two procedures were complementary: bibliographical and documentary analysis; and 18 interviews with state officials and social activists.

We **argue** that the participatory institutions created by communication laws sanctioned with social participation in Mexico, Ecuador, Argentina and Uruguay between 2000 and 2020 failed to ensure citizen impact on communication policies. Instead, they remained subsumed within partisan negotiation and/or political alliances. However, they did manage to circumstantially limited or suspended the capture of communication policies by the elites.

In addition, the analysis of Latin American experiences of participatory institutions allows the formulation of a theoretical model of citizen participation that overcomes the limitations of the multi-stakeholder paradigm.

## Key Words

participatory institutions, communication policies, right to communicate civil society state

# Digital labor in cyberloafing: A paradox between alienation and subjectivity

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## Abstract

Most of the emphasis on digital labor has focused on the discussion of the one-way management and exploitation of workers by platform companies, capital, and algorithmic technologies. Digital labor serves as an alienating digital work that can manifest itself in different forms of alienation and exploitation (Fuchs, Sandoval, 2014). However, the subjectivity of labor has been overlooked. In the context of digital media, perhaps a “positive audience view” should be the theoretical basis for digital labor studies, rather than viewing digital labor groups as passive objects (Ding, 2021). In this regard, this study examines offline work scenarios in the Chinese context where employees use digital office tools in a “materialized interactive way” to achieve temporary resistance to offline alienated labor in the form of non-absenteeism. To better understand this phenomenon, this research employs semi-structured interviews with 22 employees who have experiences of cyberloafing with different genders, work ages and types of work as the interview subjects. Then the researcher carried on a more detailed analysis of the interview materials using the two-level coding path to study how employees in the offline workplace collaborate with digital office tools and platform providers to resist the alienation of labor offline and the consequences of this short-term, temporary resistance.

The results show that: (1) The employees use three resistance strategies: “middle position”, “nomadic action” and “delimitation”. Through the use of keyboard shortcuts, the positioning of the screen and the control of body posture, the employee maintains a balance between not leaving the workplace and not being in a work situation at the same time. And within a given workload, workers constantly test the boundaries of the autonomous space and switch flexibly between these boundaries and beyond to maximize their subjectivity. (2) Although the employee temporarily overcomes “dead labor” through relatively autonomous digital labor in the offline workplace, this resistance is at the expense of “re-alienation”. On the one hand, the employees who engage in cyberloafing still have to return to the alienated labor offline and spend less time on the workload and tasks that have already been set; on the other hand, as the platform operators commodify their audience, the practice of resistance using digital labor becomes a product externalized to the worker, and additional online labor exploitation is added to the offline labor exploitation, indicating an increase in the total amount of work per unit of time.

Yao (2021) and Xia (2020) see the “subjectivity of digital labor” as a “new academic growth point”. In this vein, this study helps to reflect on the subjectivity of digital labor, especially in the context of the combination of offline and online labor, which enriches the meaning of digital labor.

## Key Words

Digital labor, Alienation, Subjectivity, Digital media



# **Are migrant workers essential? Policy and media discourse of essential services and migrant workers in Canada**

## **Authors**

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## **Abstract**

During the Covid-19 pandemic, media and policy discourses in North American and the European Union countries have highlighted the importance of essential work in the areas of health care, transportation, and agriculture, among others. But there exists a noticeable discrepancy between the discursive acknowledgment of essential work and the precarious conditions of essential workers, many of whom are migrant workers. The project approaches Canada as a case, given that it stands as an exemplary country among developed countries for immigration and multiculturalism while its low-income economic sectors heavily rely on

temporary migrant workers.

Responding to the outbreak of the Covid-19, the Canadian government listed ten essential sectors of service to preserve “life, health, and basic societal functioning” (Public Safety Canada, 2021). Growing media and scholarly attention in Canada and other Western countries have been paid to the situation of essential workers. For instance, mainstream news media, including CBC News, National Post, Globe and Mail, and Toronto Star, have number of reports on the well-being of low-wage essential workers in Canada. Public research institutions, such as the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) in the U.S. and European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) in the EU, released analytical documentation of demographics of essential workers along with gender, race, age, and education. While migrant workers have long served as an indispensable labor force for economic development in industrial and newly industrialized countries along with neoliberal globalization, they are subject to social exclusion and discrimination, vulnerability, and labor exploitation. Sociologists and anthropologists reveal that the state immigration policy, nationalist discourse, and racial stereotypes of disadvantaged and marginalized migrants consolidate their unequal treatment in the labor market in Western countries including Canada (Bauder, 2006; Nyers, 2015; Sharma, 2006, 2020). Media and communication scholars have extensively examined how media representations shape the public image and perception of immigrants and refugees in Western countries (e.g. Campani, 2001; Bauder, 2008; Lawlor & Tolley, 2017; Mummery & Rodan, 2007). These studies expose that mainstream media often shape and reinforce public perceptions of migrant groups as alienated and undesirable others in destination countries.

The large population of migrant workers, become what Nandita Sharma (2003) terms as “a new international proletariat” in capitalist globalization. Yet, migrant workers’ labor power is severely constrained due to their temporary immigration status and lack of protection from unions. This project deploys qualitative methods of thematic analysis and critical discourse analysis to analyze the policy and media discourse of essential services and migrant workers during Covid-19 in

Canada. The study addresses two main research questions: What are the media and policy discourses around essential workers and migrant workers during the Covid-19 pandemic in Canada? To what extent have public perceptions of migrant workers been influenced by the increasing visibility and recognition/appreciation of essential workers?

**Key Words**

Covid-19, migrant workers, essential workers, media, policy, Canada

# **"We are new farmers ": how do live e-commerce sellers in rural China understand and construct the authenticity?**

## **Authors**

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## **Abstract**

The central question of digital labor is how the information economy gives rise to new forms of value production and exploitation. Platform labor deploys sophisticated technology to apply labor control, producing ideologies to manufacture consent from workers. These workers usually live with precarious and insecure labor conditions. Among the scholarship on how workers are mobilized into platform labor, authenticity is an important motivation and an element that workers need to embody. Together, authenticity and entrepreneurship are the tenets of the self-branding culture that promotes participatory culture and encourage users to become micro-celebrities. However, existing studies on authenticity mostly focused on the creative labor of content producers in Western, uncovering the tension between the discourse of authenticity from the platform and the actual labor experience of workers.

In China, thanks to the online payment and logistical infrastructure, the social media entertainment industry has given birth to the form of live e-commerce, where consumers can watch the production of goods and order them directly. A large number of Chinese peasant residents creatively set up live-streaming studios to show the authenticity in various situation to promote their products, creating a different meaning of authenticity and a regime that integrates creative and physical labor. This paper attempts to show the tension about authenticity of live e-commerce between the discourse from platforms, and the perception from sellers. This study attempts to contribute to the discussion of the platformization of cultural production on different levels. First, I focus on the live sellers in rural China integrating content production and physical labor; secondly, this paper considers the live room as an assemblage to understand the role of different actors, such as gendered bodies, and mobile phone interface; thirdly, this research expands the catalog of inequality in platform labor shift from Western focus more on race, gender and class to urban-rural inequalities in China.

Methodologically, the author conducted a six-month fieldwork in a poverty county in northern China. The author worked as a digital influencer in two live teams and conducted 15 in-depth interviews. The authors protected their privacy by informing his researcher identity in advance, obtained consent from the interviewees, as well as using pseudonyms in the text.

The study found that platforms such as Kuaishou and Douyin define authenticity as the visualization of real life by video technology, the opportunity for the marginalized to be seen, and a way to monetization for individuals without social capital. This emphasis on authenticity is incorporated into the discourse of empowerment and entrepreneurship, encouraging individuals

to seize opportunities and take positive action, which is not exactly equivalent to the self-branding culture in the Western context.

For rural sellers, authenticity means different things. First, the video technology requires the sellers to solve infrastructural problems. They should contact with product suppliers for help to get ready for live streaming, like setting up a space similar to the real production scene, and ensuring basic infrastructure conditions, such as electricity, internet, and lighting. Secondly, rural China has been marginalized for a long time and the live e-commerce sellers just select specific products and workers in rural area to be seen. For example, to highlight the production process as very clean, manual and non-industrial on live streaming, the sellers hire local good-looking old ladies to perform as workers while hidden the real workers in poor conditions away from the camera. Thirdly, various social capital and collective labor is required for live e-commerce to perform authenticity. The sellers usually should be familiar with media technology, like camera and video editing, have enough funding to invest warehouse and hire workers, and be able to train local rural residents to work on platform. All the hardship for constructing authenticity is missed from the discourse from platforms.

However, the sellers also choose to not tell out their real labor experience on live streaming or other social media. Because they want to perform the authenticity by calling themselves as normal peasants, which is important to promote natural agriculture products. Finally, this study attempts to show that authenticity in the context of live e-commerce in rural China is deeply penetrated by commercial goals, with the platform and sellers jointly focusing on constructing the authenticity of rural area. The sellers, benefiting a lot from live e-commerce and platform economy, also serve to discourse of authenticity, which attracts and mobilizes ordinary rural residents while reproducing the divide between rural and city on live streaming, and covering the inequality inherent in platform labor.

### **Key Words**

Platform economy; Platformization; Authenticity; Rural China; Live e-commerce

# Platformization of Korean Internet Portals toward Mega-platforms: a historical approach

## Authors

Dr. Dal Yong Jin - Simon Fraser University

## Abstract

Korean digital platforms have evolved primarily since the mid-1990s. When the dot.com boom started in the U.S. in the 1990s, Korea developed national information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure. Korea did not have the necessary infrastructure as in many non-Western countries; therefore, the country vehemently drove to advance national infrastructure and several digital technologies, including high-speed Internet, which played a primary role in leading the country toward digital Korea. Korea's contemporary platforms, then as small web portals, were also launched in the mid-and late 1990s. Korea is a latecomer to the Internet age; however, it swiftly enhanced other digital technologies, greatly influencing people's daily activities. From online games like the *Kingdom of the Wind* (1996) to social networking services, including Cyworld (1999), to Internet portals like Daum (1995), a handful of digital technologies drove the digital economy and youth culture (Oh and Larson, 2011; K.S. Lee, 2011; Yoon, J.W., 2016). With the development of cutting-edge digital technologies, once a tiny and digitally peripheral country has experienced a fundamental shift.

In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, Korea has especially advanced digital platforms and relevant cultures. However, previous works mainly focused on a particular area, including the platformization of webtoons (Kim and Yu, 2019) in the realm of digital platforms, or the development of the Korean Internet (Yang, S.Y., 2017) and the early history of networks in Korea (Chon et al., 2013), which did not directly analyze the process of Korean platformization.

This article documents the evolution of Korea's digital platforms to fill the gap. By using a historical approach in tandem with platformization, which is helpful to determine the causes behind the changing processes of new technologies, it examines the advancement of digital platforms. It divides the digital platform era into three significant periods based on major technical advancements and platform firms' corporate transformations, including the early construction of ICT infrastructure between the mid-1990s and early 2000s, the early platformization period of Internet portals amidst the smartphone revolution between the mid-2000s and mid-2010s, and the duopoly market of Naver and Kakao from the mid-2010s—after the merger of Daum and Kakao—to present. It investigates multiple causes that led to the advent of digital platforms, both in terms of technologies and systems, and analyzes power relations between several major players, such as the government, corporations, and global forces. It also maps out the relationship between sociocultural transitions and accompanying structural changes in digital platforms and relevant policies.

This article paper utilizes a multiplicity of source materials. Documents and informational publications from government bodies (e.g., the Ministry of Science and ICT and Ministry of Information and Communication) and research institutes provide important information. Corporate data, including annual reports (e.g., Naver, Daum, and Kakao) and trade journals, are fundamental sources for analyzing the platformization of domestic digital platforms. These data and documents have great value because they provide detailed information on the platform industry and corporate activities that cannot be accessed elsewhere.

**Key Words**

digital platforms, platformization, Internet portals, history, political economy, Korean Internet

# **Complex, global and financialised ownership structures. A network analysis of the ownership structure of Spain's four most relevant media conglomerates in 2020: Vocento, PRISA, Planeta and Mediaset.**

## **Authors**

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## **Abstract**

### ***Abstract (473 words)***

Media owners can often decide about their companies' strategy and media outlets (Archer & Clinton, 2018; Winseck, 2008). Rational-choice institutionalism defines institutions as political, economic and normative constraints within organisations (North, 1986). Following that and McQuail's (2010) Structure-Conduct-Performance model, (1) the direct and indirect media owners and their links and revenues shape the conditions for media conduct and performance, (2) the media ownership structure informs of changing patterns of media production and distribution control (Mosco, 1996, p. 25) and (3) media ownership transparency enhances their democratic accountability (Craufurd Smith et al., 2021, p. 548f).

Since Spain's transition to democracy, complex ownership structures (Almiron, 2011), precarious journalistic working conditions (Ramon et al., 2021) and professionalism and political parallelism (Brüggemann et al., 2014; Hallin & Mancini, 2004) have characterised the media system. Since the 2008 economic crisis, the digitisation of Spain's media market has unfolded (García Santamaría, 2016).

The research question is: *How complex, transparent, politicised and financialised is the ownership structure of Spain's four most relevant media groups in 2020?*

Based on the results of the Euromedia Ownership Monitor (EurOMo), a cross-country comparative project co-funded by the European Commission, this study analyses Spain's four most relevant media groups in 2020: PRISA, Vocento, Planeta and Mediaset España. Together, these conglomerates operate three of Spain's most-read national newspapers, fourteen regional newspapers, two of the five most-heard radio outlets, the most-viewed Spanish TV outlets and two streaming services.

The research objectives are: **(O1)** How far are each conglomerate's outlets present in the TV, radio, print newspaper, online and streaming market between 2020 and 2022? **(O2)** Who are each conglomerate's direct, indirect and ultimate owners? How far is each conglomerate's ownership structure **(O3)** complex and transparent and **(O4)** financialised and politicised?

To achieve **(01)**, we assess each conglomerate's media outlets' share in the above-defined markets and categorise, based on literature, each journalistic outlet's editorial line. To achieve **(02, 03, 04)**, we conduct a network analysis of the conglomerates' direct, indirect and ultimate owners (n = 118) accounting for at least 5% of the shares of each media conglomerate in 2020 based on publicly available information. We further analyse the legal owners' revenues, subsidies and staff in 2020, identify the financial legal owners and assess the natural owners' political links.

The main findings are (1) high ownership concentration in the print and TV markets, (2) changes in the editorial line and paywall model of PRISA's newspaper *El País*, (3) severe political parallelism of Planeta's TV outlet *La Sexta* and (4) the presence of bankers and investors (Ana Botín, Joseph Oughourlian) and moguls (Silvio Berlusconi, Carlos Slim) among the owners. Last, (5) PRISA's and Mediaset's ownership structures are highly financialised, as well as internationalised and complex—hindering transparency—. The paper provides insight into the relative opacity and the politicisation and financialisation of the ownership structure of the media owned by Spain's four critical conglomerates against the background of digitisation.

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**Key Words**

media ownership transparency, Spain, Vocento, PRISA, Planeta, Mediaset, financialisation, politicisation

# Large Language Models as Monopolies of Knowledge: Contributions to a Political Economic Critique of ChatGPT

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## Abstract

A large language model (LLM) is a statistical representation of a language, created by machine learning, which contains the probability that a given sequence of letters occurs within it. LLMs can generate text output in the form of statistical projections from an input prompt. Given the prompt “It is rainy and...” an LLM might output “cold” or “windy”. Sophisticated LLMs such as OpenAI’s ChatGPT (released in 2022) can generate cogent essays and working software code. The problems LLMs pose for communication (plagiarism, impersonation, bias, nonsense) have been identified (Bender et al. 2021), but their political economic dimensions have barely been explored, despite the political economy of AI being a thriving field (Dyer-Witthford et al. 2019; Joque 2021). Luitse and Denkena (2021) opened the political economy discussion on LLMs, showing how they are being commodified via centralized cloud platforms. They focus on the position which LLMs occupy in the circuit of capital, but they do not consider the specific technical function that LLMs perform, and what is significant about it. This is the topic of our paper.

Drawing from Marxist and media-theoretical frameworks, we argue that as proprietary representations of language built from publicly available data, LLMs function as an enclosure of the digital commons; the transformation of social knowledge into fixed capital. We grasp this via Harold Innis’ (1995) conception of monopolies of knowledge. This concept describes the “tendency for [social] power structures to consolidate around the fixed capital (i.e., infrastructure) that controls how information is stored, processed, and transmitted” (Manzerolle, forthcoming). We contend that the commercial development of LLMs constitutes a monopolization of knowledge more literal and concrete than Innis could have imagined: privatized, automated models of language which present new possibilities of commodification and axes of competition for their producers.

Following a technical introduction to LLMs, we outline the emerging LLM market, its dynamics and sketch the power structures forming around LLMs. While the monopolization of specifically linguistic knowledge is a novelty of LLMs, we argue it should not be the endpoint of analysis. The LLM approach is being applied to data other than text, producing multimodal “foundation models” (Bommasani 2022) which can monopolize optical, audible and even motor function data. Thus, the dynamics we track here are likely to have an increasing relevance.

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**Key Words**

machine learning, artificial intelligence, foundation model, automation, language

# Digital Capital Never Sleeps: An Empirical Study of Digital Labor and Manufacturing Consent in China

## Authors

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## Abstract

This research examined Bilibili.com from the political economy of communication perspective. Specifically, this research adopted qualitative and quantitative evidence to analyze Bilibili video uploaders as digital laborers, who participate in the operation of the company owning the website, transferring leisure time, social relations, emotion, creativity, and knowledge into digital capital. This process yields profits for the platform while "exploiting" digital laborers in an obscure form. Bilibili uploaders widely identified themselves as "powered by love", burning savings to compensate for the video-making costs. The paper then analyzed the "manufacturing consent" process. Driven by emotional and social needs, Bilibili users get involved in the platform's "game of making out". The community feature attracts users to serve as both producers and consumers ("prosumers"), leaving them no room to escape "exploitation" and alienation. Once participating, they agree with game rules to overwork, commit self-exploitation, and compete to fulfill their original social desire. Perplexed by the hallucination of community and game-like systems, uploaders serve as laborers without concerning the platform is seizing surplus value from their work.

However, uploaders have the resistant agency born simultaneously with digital labor identity. Bilibili uploader as a shared title equips them with the possibility of forming shared consciousness. Identified as a unity, uploaders tackle cyberbullying and oppose intellectual property with joint efforts, revealing their potential for collective revolting actions. In a digitalized society, media turns each participant into a digital laborer, contributing to the circulation of digital capital, erasing the labor-leisure boundary, and creating a scenario where digital capital never sleeps.

## Key Words

Political Economy of Communication, Digital Capitalism, Digital Labor, China

# Thinking beyond traditional political economic paradigms: Making a case for media environment capture

## Authors

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Dr. Hendrik Theine - Vienna University of Economics and Business

Dr. Sebastian Sevignani - Friedrich-Schiller-University Jena

## Abstract

Digital platforms are increasingly scrutinized in scholarly research. Research focuses, among others, on the platforms' role within the global political economy, their ability to transcend sectoral and territorial boundaries, on practices of algorithmic configuration as well as on gatekeeping issues in the new (media) public.

Discussing, evaluating and synthesizing previous research on the role of platforms for journalism and news media, this paper asks: In how far are traditional political economic paradigms, for instance on media ownership, useful tools in understanding current communication and media structures? And how can we move beyond such established concepts to better grasp current information regimes?

Introducing the concept of media environment capture we highlight that platforms cannot be simply conceptualized as "another" element of media capture with its aim to influence political discourse. Instead, we argue that the comprehensive and much encompassing nature of platform activities in relation to journalism and news media requires a broader conceptual understanding - hence, the need for media environment capture as an updated concept. Thus, our goal is to expand established ideas to describe the manifold captures of journalism on the part of the tech-companies' business activities.

Using the example of the journalistic press in Germany, this paper first looks at the comprehensive influence of tech-companies (e.g. Alphabet) on all stages of information production and distribution in the media sector. Second, it analyzes the influence of these companies on entire information landscapes surrounding this sector (such as sources, research, law etc.). Both developments signpost the changing infrastructure of today's media and information regimes: it is not only influential actors in one sector of the public sphere who are subject to private interests; rather, the space of communication between and around all actors participating in the public debate is being commercialized.

## Key Words

media capture, environment, journalism, tech companies

# Living within the platforms: TikTok in the age of neofeudalism

## Authors

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## Abstract

It is said that we are currently entering into the era of neofeudalism, i.e., a disastrous age that is characterized by the emergence of a new form of exploitation based on the complete subordination of the proletariat as “peasants” to their “new lords.” An exemplar of these “new lords,” as already been correctly discerned by several scholars, is the digital platforms, which extract surplus value not through the appropriation of employed workers’ surplus labor but via “monopoly, coercion, and rent.” To employ Hardt and Negri’s term, the digital platform (which can be deemed as the most crucial infrastructure of the Empire (under the reign of neofeudalism, we should take this term more literally)) is indeed “parasitic.” And, such parasitism can only be rendered possible through a new, post-disciplinary deployment of power in the societies of control, which, according to Deleuze, operates, like cybernetic machines, via communication and continuous modulation and extends itself into every corner of the society (there are no more rigid enclosures): as what we have already witnessed, digital platforms not only aims at incessantly tracing and regulating our life trajectories, but also seeks to incorporate all aspects of our lives into them. Therefore, following the step of Tiqqun (an anarchist writing group insisting that works should be primarily conceived as a way of domestication), I tend to further argue that working for the digital platform itself implies a kind of total subjection, through which the lives of the workers become the objects of powers. Only in this sense, can we fully understand our initial definition of neofeudalism as a mode of exploitation contingent on complete subordination.

To substantiate these arguments, the short-video platform TikTok can serve as an instance. By examining its User Incentive Mechanism, this article attempts to unveil how TikTok has successfully transformed its users into its workers, or to be more precise, its tenants, and why such a process of transformation is simultaneously a process of overall domination, which aims at subsuming the entire lives of the users-tenants under the platform. What at stake here is the blurred boundary between production and consumption: users-tenants within short-video platforms like TikTok, does not, merely passively inhabit in a world of spectacles, serenely gazing at it (which, according to Debord, can be deemed as “an object of mere contemplation”), but themselves are engaged into the very production of these spectacles -- however, this only made them more alienated. Nevertheless, it is precisely here that resistance is made possible: since the “land” of the new lords where the users-tenants are doomed to live within is itself built up by the latter, there must be ways to re-build and thus to re-appropriate it. Therefore, this article will finally explore possible way to subvert the domination of digital platforms by focusing several artworks, which are crucial for conceiving a participatory project in the era of neofeudalism.

## Key Words

neofeudalism, Tiktok, digital platform, immaterial labor

# **South Africa's online media and the Ukrainian war: A decolonial Marxism perspective**

## **Authors**

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## **Abstract**

The coverage of the war in Ukraine has unravelled inherent biases within the South African online commercial media. These biases are largely driven by its location within the global capitalist power structures, thus confirming continuities of media imperialism. By relying on Western sources, this media invariably exports Western norms, standards, hegemonic narrative and worldview. This paper employs content analysis to examine the coverage of the war by five South African online publications (*News24, IOL, TimesLive, Citizen.co.za and BusinessTech*) between January and February 2022. The coverage was largely negative because of concerns about the impact on global markets. The West's dominant views are discernible due to the chosen sources, with over 80 per cent coming from its newswires. Similarly, the opinions of Western political and business leaders and their business and economic analysts are prevalent. While it is expected for stories to be framed from a conflict perspective, it is the economic consequences frame that also drives the coverage, with Russia blamed, as reflected in the predominant theme "Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine". While there have been fundamental developments since the concept of media imperialism emerged, this coverage points to some continuities. It is precisely for this reason that the South African media should develop partnership beyond the West, more so, in the context of the growing importance of BRICS.

## **Key Words**

media imperialism, online media analysis, critical political of economy

# Never the Twain: The policy contradictions of the Aotearoa New Zealand Public Media Bill

## Authors

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## Abstract

### *Never the Twain: The policy contradictions of the Aotearoa New Zealand Public Media Bill*

In February 2020, the Labour government announced its Strong Public Media programme to explore options for the creation of a new multi-platform public media entity encompassing Radio New Zealand (RNZ) and Television New Zealand (TVNZ) capable of meeting audience needs in the evolving digital media environment.

The proposed new entity raised both normative and operational questions, given that RNZ is a public service media operator with a charter, and TVNZ, although publicly-owned, is a commercial operation. Indeed, previous efforts to restructure TVNZ as a dual remit public service/commercial operator (under the 1999-2008 Labour administrations) had not succeeded, partly because of inadequate public funding to off-set commercial opportunity costs, and partly because TVNZ's commercial culture resulted in active resistance to the imposition of the reforms.

After a lengthy process to establish a 'business case' for the new entity, in February 2022, the government announced that the establishment of the new entity, Aotearoa New Zealand Public Media (ANZPM) would proceed. The budget committed an additional NZ\$327m in public funding (2023-26) and this was followed by a further announcement that \$42.2m of the contestable NZ On Air fund would also be re-allocated to the new public media entity. This was vehemently opposed by the private media and production sector.

Following the first reading of the ANZPM Bill in June 2022, the Parliamentary Select Committee received over a thousand written submissions, identifying a litany of shortcomings. Many reflected predictable vested interests, but many submissions supportive of the bill's goals were nevertheless critical of the proposed legislation. Most prominent themes among these criticisms were;

1. The institutional structure and concerns about political interference.
2. The new entity's balance of public service versus commercial priorities.
3. The operational allocation of public funding (including whether commercial genres could receive public subsidy).
4. The governance of the new entity and ensuring delivery of public service charter outcomes.
5. The adequacy of future funding beyond the 3-year budget allocation.
6. The potential for new entity to exert undue market power.

The new entity was intended to be operational by mid-2023. However, the Bill is still undergoing revisions after feedback from Select Committee. With an election looming later in 2023 and the



recent resignation of Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, there is increasing speculation that the ANZPM Bill will be abandoned.

Adopting a critical institutionalist perspective, this paper aims to analyse the normative and operational contradictions of the proposed new public media entity. Using documentary analysis of policy papers and public submissions, coupled with the author's engagement with key policy actors, the analysis will map out the different stakeholder interests which have progressed- or undermined- the ANZPM Bill.

The diagnostic at time of writing suggests that, despite the Labour government's political intentions, there has been an "under-determination" of the conditions necessary for securing a) the legitimation of the Bill and b) a viable institutional model for delivering public media services in the digital environment.

**Key Words**

critical institutionalism, public service, policy process, public funding, stakeholders, underdetermination

# Revisiting State Power in China's Video Game Industry

## Authors

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## Abstract

State power is a popular research topic in Chinese video game studies. Scholars have discussed state management strategies (Cao & Downing, 2008), state policies (Ernkvist, 2008; Fung, 2018), propaganda (Chung & Fung, 2013), and state-led nationalism (Jiang & Fung, 2017). However, these studies are sometimes plagued by the following two issues. First, they tend to criticize state control in general terms without sufficient interpretation of the contexts of control and the complexity of reality. Second, they tend to overstate the influence of the state while underestimating the roles of private companies and society.

This study calls for a shift of focus from general criticism to an in-depth analysis that contextualizes state power in the interactions between the state, private sectors, and society, and historicizes the ever-changing state power in China's video game industry. Drawing on the work of political economists regarding Chinese state power in the communication industry, particularly Zhao's (2008), it argues that the Chinese state's management of video games is mainly based on its pursuit of economic growth and ideological stability. However, the state cannot guarantee its success in this capacity, as state power is sometimes diluted by such factors as discord within the political system and various pressures from the private sector and society.

This study has three sections. First, it examines the transformation of favorable state policies in the context of China's reform and reintegration into global capitalism. Second, it details how ideological control mechanisms, including propaganda and censorship, are shaped, utilized, and circumvented by different political, commercial, and social actors. Third, it locates state actions against game-related Internet addiction in the broad field of social relations and state-corporate relations, unveiling divided and contested interests and discourses involved in constructing Internet addiction.

This study brings new insights into Chinese video game studies by showing the multifaceted nature and limitations of state power. It also joins political economists' discussion on the role of the state in the communication industry, extending the discussion into the field of Chinese video games.

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**Key Words**

video games, China, state, political economy

# **Platform non-standardization and workers' resistance: the case of haulage platforms in China**

## **Authors**

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Dr. Yang Zhou - Lingnan University

## **Abstract**

Drawing on the case of Huolala, a leading haulage platform in China, this paper explores collective resistance among platform truck drivers in China. Compared to resistance activities of other groups of platform workers like food couriers and ride-hailing drivers, those among truck drivers, though not necessarily more frequent, are often larger in scale, more militant in actions and more diverse in appeals. In this article, we seek to understand this distinctive pattern. We want to further explore why, now that all of platform workers' daily activities are now mediated through gig platforms, platform truck drivers are particularly militant? In asking these questions, we are seeking for a conceptual tool that can help us theorise specifically the intersection between the structural characteristics of labour platforms and platform workers' subjective experience and can account for their patterns of resistance. This will be useful not only for us to understand platform workers' grievances, but also opportunities and spaces for cross-platform solidarity.

To answer the questions, we draw on the labour process perspective, and we find "standardisation" a promising concept. The labour process perspective is currently the dominant perspective in the platform labour literature, especially those related to resistance. Most of these studies focus on a single platform that are highly standardised. Compared to them, Huolala is less standardised, which, from our fieldwork experience we believe explains the high-level militancy among the truck drivers.

In this article, we will draw on literature from industrial history and service work to build the concept of standardisation in three aspects, namely, task allocation, labour supervision and performance assessment. We will further establish its relationship with labour process theory and with workers' subjective experience, by conceptualizing standardization as clarity and normativity in standard setting, communicability and synergy in the perception of standards between different actors, and operability and generalizability in the practice of standards. We will then use empirical data to elaborate the explanatory power of the concept and the framework.

The empirical data we draw on comes mainly from our 6-month fieldwork in Chongqing. Thirty-six interviews were conducted with platform truck drivers, each lasting for 0.5–3h. The interviewees were shortlisted according to a set of diversification criteria, including duration of platform work, vehicle types, and gender, and asked to narrate their work experience and to recall any salient events or experiences, whether positive or negative, which they had encountered in this work. In addition, we spent time with drivers as they went through daily routines and observed their WeChat groups.

The expected findings will be a theoretical framework and we will use this framework to argue that it is the non-standardization of the 'algorithmic control' of Huolala that perpetuates the specific patterns of resistance by workers and frustrates platformization. We will elaborate the

main ways in which Huolala is non-standardised and how this relates to workers' resistance pattern. Specifically, in terms of task allocation, due to the non-standard nature of cargo, drivers inevitably have to 'calibrate' the algorithmic decision-making and burden transport risks. In terms of labour supervision, due to task complexity and traffic regulations, time control, which acts as the standard to monitor workers in other platforms like food delivery and ride-hailing, has to be weakened, thus the service quality is totally measured by the nebulous, customer-oriented rating, which actually serves to exacerbate precarity and labour control. In terms of performance assessment, compared with transport services that are easy to standardize pricing, the time-consuming and energy-sapping tasks like handling cargo commonly avoid listing prices and allow tailored negotiation. Through interpersonal interaction, truck drivers can perform relational work to reshape relationships with clients and resist labor commodification, challenging the algorithmic control and governance of impersonal and anonymized labor relations.

**Key Words**

standardization, haulage platform, gig economy, platform control and resistance

# **Mexico Communication Concentration performance after Telecomm constitutional reform in 2013.**

## **Authors**

Prof. Rodrigo Gómez García - Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana- Cuajimalpa

## **Abstract**

This paper presents the different performances of the broadcasting and telecommunications services in Mexico since the constitutional reform in 2013. This reform created the Federal Telecommunications Institute (IFT) and issued a new Telecommunications and Broadcasting Act in 2014, which includes many provisions to give it autonomy and broader power to regulate the telecom and broadcasting sectors. The IFT functions as the telecom and broadcasting sector's exclusive antitrust agency: (a) it has the authority to sanction or split up companies engaged in monopolistic practices and, (b) to establish restrictions to minimize undue market advantages for dominant players in the industry— defined as companies that capture 50 percent market share through their number of users, capacity or network infrastructure by sector. We have to recall that Mexico has one of the higher concentration levels in the world (Noam, 2016). . Under this landmark, this research presents how the new Act and IFT's intervention have been modeling to different degrees the concentration levels in the different markets of the telecom and broadcasting services and to which extent concentration has decreased. In the center of these concentration figures, Televisa and America Movil are the main industry players and the paper will present a brief analysis of their cross sectors' economic performances.

## **Key Words**

Concentration, Media, Media Policy, Pluralism, Media Systems, Mexico

# **Afro-optimism and Progressive Modernity: the Fintech story in the African press**

## **Authors**

Ms. Cathleen LeGrand - University of Leeds

Prof. Chris Paterson - University of Leeds

Dr. Jorg Wiegratz - University of Leeds

## **Abstract**

This paper provides a first analysis of representation in the African press of the fast-emerging amalgamation of online financial services popularized under the label “Fintech.” We assess how the concept is presented by one of the primary institutional framers of social life in Africa: the mainstream press.

Two competing discourses about Fintech have emerged: one is critique grounded in political economy that regards Fintech as neo-colonial, racialized platform, inherently anti-development and likely to cause a crisis of consumer debt and data piracy. The other, promoted by business and government, presents Fintech in glowing terms, a potential answer to many of Africa’s problems and an accelerator of progressive development, bringing benefit to even the most marginalized. As Fintech becomes a potent force across Africa, we examine the story African news readers are told.

To understand the past half decade of portrayal of Fintech by the African press, we selected six media organization exemplars of that coverage for content analysis. We examined content from six news organizations (two in Kenya, two in Uganda, and two in South Africa), and one African news aggregator, deploying the concept of framing to examine how the Fintech story is communicated to news readers in Africa. We identified nine frequently apparent tropes in a sample of news coverage of Fintech, used to reveal dominant recurrent themes in and the ideological orientation of news coverage.

Findings suggests that the Fintech story in African newspapers is a predominantly celebratory narrative offering little cautionary and critical reporting to the public and to policy makers. The press examples we examined demonstrate collaboration with the local and transnational finance sector to present a vision of progressive modernity via a strongly promotional narrative about Fintech and reinforce afro-optimism and a techno-utopian discourse. This narrative sanitizes a highly problematic financial service sector and almost entirely omits concerns about Fintech as an exploitative and neo-colonial project likely to lead to national and regional crises of debt and personal data exploitation.

## **Key Words**

Fintech, Africa, neoliberalism, racial capitalism, platform capitalism

# Challenges and Risks of Digital Governance in Chinese Government from Health Code, Travel Card Offline

## Authors

Ms. Siyu Chen - student

## Abstract

At the end of 2022, China announced that the "communication trip card" would be taken offline, and then the health code faded from public view. These two digital applications, born out of epidemic prevention and control, have played a significant role in China's pre-epidemic prevention and control efforts. However, as a prerequisite, China's 1.6 billion cell phone users had to relinquish some of their privacy and allow the relevant regulatory authorities to read their personal information. This compulsory entry of the public's personal information into the epidemic prevention and control application means that market forces are using their technological, data and capital advantages to create a de facto "capture of regulation"(G.J.Stigler, 1971) of individuals. The embedding of digital technology in social governance is a typical example of the deeper integration of technological power and state power in China, as well as the latest changes in the pattern of intelligent communication and the new game of power role transformation in the digital era. Technology is just one of the elements of health codes and trip cards as a digital governance system for the government. Health codes as governance tools involve a trade-off between government power and individual rights. With technology empowerment, the government's ability to control the risk of epidemics is greatly enhanced, but this is in exchange for limiting the rights and freedoms of individuals. Health codes that monitor individuals in all aspects, handle large amounts of sensitive personal information involving privacy, implement big data analysis and corresponding risk determinations, and then take control measures such as quarantine and lockdown, undoubtedly limit and derogate from individual rights and interests. Based on the application of travel cards and health codes for digital governance in China during the epidemic, this study explores the hidden issues of resources, roles, power, and privacy behind government governance, thus exploring the concessions and maneuvers between the power of the Chinese government and the power of individuals in the digital era.

## Key Words

capture theory of regulation, digital governances, government rights, personal power



# **Maze and Hope: Metaphors of Platform and Platformized Entrepreneurial Labour in China**

## **Authors**

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## **Abstract**

Platform, originally known as a raised level surface or a supporting environment for certain activities, has been applied to describe the digital infrastructure that supports the design and use of particular applications (Gillespie, 2010) and invites people to act and to work freely (Kloet et al., 2019). Under this functionalist metaphor, digital platforms become appealing workplaces featured with inclusiveness, autonomy and prospect, attracting entrepreneurial activities and creating platformized entrepreneurial labour who takes advantages of the platformization opportunities to change lives under platform-driven organization, control and surveillance (Yu et al., 2022; Gandini, 2020). Platform economy and platform labour can act as impetus of economic growth and social benefits, which brings out the hope of platform developmentalism (Reilly, 2020). However, the implications of digital platforms are far more complex than technological utopia for entrepreneurial labour. Platform-based labour dilemma, such as exploitation, precarity, asymmetrical power relationship, bring conflicting metaphors of platform, reflecting the complexity of platform society and its negotiation mechanism of labour consent.

From the holistic political economy perspective, this research combines Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff, 1993) with platform labour analysis, aiming to explore how the flowing metaphors of platform interact with platformized entrepreneurial labour practice. The following questions are discussed:

RQ1: What kind of metaphors do platformized entrepreneurial workers use to describe the platform they work for?

RQ2: How are the labour-related metaphors of platform held by platformized entrepreneurial workers formed and constructed?

RQ3: How do platformized entrepreneurial workers coordinate their labour practice with the metaphors of platform?

To investigate the construction of platform metaphors and the entrepreneurial labour practice and power relations behind, this study draws on in-depth interview with 20 platformized entrepreneurial workers on Chinese social video platform Douyin, where people seek business by video content creation. Critical discourse analysis of document related to entrepreneurial labour on Douyin is also applied.

The findings suggest that, firstly, the platformized entrepreneurial workers use mine, shelter and maze metaphors to understand the platform. They dream for the potential success or suffer from unsatisfying employment situation and join in the platform for gold digging or life improving. However, they may easily get lost in the platform logic and algorithmic rule. Secondly, the metaphors of platform are socially constructed by technological and discursive design of the platform, official media discourse and the entrepreneurial workers' observation and experience. Thirdly, the mixture of the metaphors along with the entrepreneurial spirit from the workers forms the unpaid hope labour (Mackenzie & McKinlay, 2020) for the platform.

Ultimately, this research contributes to the comprehensive understanding of platformized labour by developing an analysis framework bridging the platform ideology and labour practice. Also, it helps to spark the rethink of social justice of the platformization process.

**Key Words**

metaphor, digital platform, entrepreneurial labour, platformization

# The Business and Social Enterprise Models of Performing Rights Organizations

## Authors

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Prof. Patrik Wikstrom - Queensland University of Technology

## Abstract

Performing Rights Organizations (PROs), also referred to as Performing Rights Societies (PRSs) or Royalty Collection Organisations (RCOs), enforce copyright regulations by providing users with a licence to use music in a variety of contexts. Essentially, they act as intermediaries between music users, which include online platforms, broadcasters, cinemas, live music event promoters, and any other public venues using background music, and their members, which are composers, songwriters or authors, but also non-creative actors, including music publishers and other rights owners.

Traditionally, and before the advent of digital distribution, PROs, although private organisations, were virtually extensions of public administrations: they were created and regulated by governments of the national territory in which they operated to collect money for rights owners. Directly, PROs only paid out royalties to their members, music creators operating in the same national territories. Yet, indirectly, they paid out royalties to any artist whose music was played by users in their territory with the support of PROs in other countries, which were members of common international networks.

From a global perspective, the digitalisation of the music industry, coupled with changing regulations aimed at adapting these organisations to a new environment, has considerably transformed PROs and the way they operate. For example, PROs now operate on an international level and have representations and members in a variety of territories. They are still collaborating with other PROs in networks, but they are also competing with the same peers to attract superstar acts/songwriters to their membership, or for niche markets. As a result, with the digitalisation of music, a variety of types of PROs have emerged, from small organisations incorporated as non-profits still focussed on national territory, to larger ones acting essentially as international conglomerates, which are specialised in the collection of rights from digital platforms. However, there is very little academic research aimed at understanding these different organisation types and their specific roles in the music business world.

This paper will represent the second 'milestone' of this research. In a previous analysis, we reviewed the characteristics of PROs that are private interest organisations and compared them to those that are social purpose organisations. This paper continues in the same tradition, by adopting the framework of the social enterprise model canvas (SEMC) to understand and compare

the ways in which these organisations are structured and operate to create value for themselves, for their members, and for other stakeholders involved. For our analysis, we draw upon a review of existing literature, desk research and expert interviews. This new phase of our study differs from previously conducted research, as it focuses on the analysis of organisations that operate in particularly competitive environments. These organisations include the US-based American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP), the Society of European Stage Authors and Composers (SESAC), the Broadcast Music, Inc. (BMI), and the recently-established, international PROs Merlin, Amra Music and ICE Music.

### **Key Words**

Performing Rights Organizations, Rights Societies, Royalty Collection Organisations, Business models.

# Curation platforms as cultural intermediaries? The case of food content curation on South Korean platforms

## Authors

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Prof. Sang-Gil Lee - Yonsei University

## Abstract

The term 'cultural intermediaries' was introduced by Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist, known for his significant contributions to sociological studies of the neoliberal cultural economy (Bourdieu, 1984). It has been widely discussed and refers to individuals or vocational groups that facilitate the circulation of cultural capital between different classes, who translate and transmit cultural meanings, values and preferences across social strata, bridging the gap between high culture and popular culture and promoting cultural tastes from one group to another (which is why they are commonly referred to as 'tastemakers') (Maguire & Matthews, 2014, p. 1). It has become increasingly common for digital platforms to serve not only as economic institutions but also as cultural intermediaries (Lee, 2010).

Recently, specialised platforms for content curation and e-commerce (employed here to mean the automated intermediary activities) have emerged and not only provide users with information and knowledge but also gather large amounts of data on users' behaviours and preferences. While these platforms exchange this data with third-party partners and/or various autonomous content and commerce complementors, the content of these platforms is provided by personalised curation services through gatekeeping activities that merge human intermediators and AI technology connected to real-time product search, ordering, purchase and delivery in e-commerce. But, due to this process of platformising cultural intermediary activities, users who use these customised, real-time automated curation services are at risk of exclusion from the development of platform capitalism, particularly due to data commodification (Srnicek, 2017). Furthermore, issues with blending tastes are brought on by the diversification of online cultural intermediaries, from professionals to amateurs (creating user-generated content), as well as the platformisation of cultural production, which combines user creation with expert commerce curation in an environment where market forces are still in play (Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Kim & Yu, 2019).

This study will examine the relationship between the curatorial power of the platform and the personalization of consumption. By analysing two cases of Korean food content curation platforms, 'Market Kurly' [KR: 마켓컬리] and 'Our Table' [KR: 우리의 식탁], the role of curation platforms as online cultural intermediaries will be critically evaluated. It will consider the input of both platform-employed experts and AI technology, as well as user-generated curation of everyday consumable products and services. The findings of this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of the impact of digital platforms on cultural intermediary activities and the implications for the development of platform capitalism.

## Key Words

Platform economy, curation platform, cultural intermediaries, South Korea, Bourdieu

# **“Public Laboratory” and “Management Cockpit”: the sociotechnical imaginaries of Hong Kong and Shenzhen’s smart city plans**

## **Authors**

Ms. Fangyu Qing - The Chinese University of Hongkong

## **Abstract**

This article analyzes the smart city plans of Hong Kong and Shenzhen from the angle of "sociotechnical imaginaries". It assumes that the imaginary provides aesthetic and affective experience to form a selective reality with ideological vision. In the analysis, “public laboratory” and “management cockpit” are used to show the feature and inconsistency of the imaginaries. Eventually, this article interpreted how “digital sovereignty” and “digital colonization” could entangle within a nation-state.

Hong Kong and Shenzhen, both special administrative regions in China, with similar economic sizes and close locations, and different political systems and technology strengths, were compared and contrasted in this article. Van Dijk’s political discourse analysis on official documents and coverages was used. Special attention was paid to visual materials to illustrate the experiential element in sociotechnical imaginaries.

In the main body, this article analyzed how different social actors, like governments, companies, and citizens, interact imaginarily. It found that the latent logic is the same. Smart city plans are imagined to be a social force and an economic incentive for local governments to rearrange social actors and overcome current crises. However, the actual arrangement and the impression of the plans are quite different. While the Hong Kong government put forward a friendly but vague blueprint to persuade citizens to start enterprises and save the declining local economy, the Shenzhen government distributed ambitious majesty top-down guidance to mobilize, regulate and internalize big companies’ technology ability and “modernize” their administrative ability. The article concluded that both governments want to create and normalize a new government-company-citizen relationship through imaginaries. For example, a protectionist mindset contrasts Hong Kong's liberal economic policy.

Trends like technological optimism were mentioned to explain the similar role of technology, while two spectrums were put forward to understand the differences. The first is a center-periphery political spectrum, and the second is a strong-weak technology spectrum. The geopolitical history of the Great Bay Area under the “one country, two systems” was mentioned as a context.

This article ultimately tries to make sense of a situation when the different positions on the political and technological spectrums create an entanglement of “digital colonization” and “digital sovereignty”. The “digital colonization” was used to describe how the ideological inconsistency and the failure in creating a common “Chinese” identity resulted in a regional fear of so-called “digital colonization” of the Mainland. “Digital sovereignty” was used to conclude the connotation of the

Shenzhen practice of smart city and how these activities enhance China's sovereignty by improving their administrative ability in an online-offline mixed space.

**Key Words**

smart city, sociotechnical imaginary, digital colonization, digital sovereignty, comparative study

# Exploring the Climate Crisis- Economic Inequality Nexus in the U.S American Media Landscape

## Authors

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Dr. Hendrik Theine - Vienna University of Economics and Business (Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien)

## Abstract

Both social sciences and public debate increasingly acknowledge that the unfolding climate crisis is also a socio-political crisis in multiple dimensions. First, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, the underlying driver of climate change, are historically and still attributed largely to the rich, consistently within and across countries. Second, the dramatic physical results of this crisis will overwhelmingly hit socially and economically vulnerable parts of the population, again within and across countries. Political economy analysis adds a third dimension, namely that political and economic elites in the Global North have contributed their fair share to delay, block, subvert and circumvent effective climate crisis measures. The question becomes, how are policy decisions being made – who is included and represented, and how is information framed, created, and disseminated?

Based on this, the research endeavor asks how often and in what way is this climate crisis-economic inequality nexus taken up by the U.S media? The aim of this contribution is to a) uncover how often the connection between the climate crisis and economic inequality is made; b) how the climate crisis-economic inequality nexus is framed; and finally, c) whether there is a systematic difference in frequency and in framing between different types of news media. To do so, a unique data set of articles and transcripts from eleven different US-American newspapers and broadcasters between 2014 and 2020 is assembled. The data set consists of different types of media, ownership structures, political affiliation and types of journalism ranging from broadcasters like MSNBC to privately owned online magazines like American Thinker. This corpus of US-American articles and transcripts (7,217 in total) is analyzed drawing on structural topic modelling – a quantitative text analysis method designed for social science inquiries (Roberts et al. 2019). Initial findings show that the framing of the climate crisis-economic inequality nexus changes in tone and frequency from 2014 to 2020, and there are differences in key topics between the news media themselves. Certain outlets place significantly more emphasis on the responsibilities and failures of different socio-political actors; others focus heavily on financial and market-based solutions; some begin to mention the different intersectional dimensions of inequality.

In a second step, these findings from the US-American corpus are compared to a second data set consisting of two alternative news sources, namely the Guardian and Project Syndicate, identified to have an explicitly 'progressive' and more climate-crisis focused journalistic style. Both data sets are compared in terms of frequency, of news coverage as well as framing of the climate crisis-economic inequality nexus. In a final step, a selected set of topics from both data sets is analyzed using qualitative a critical discourse analysis, following Aranda et al. (2021) contention that the



combination of methodologies allows for a better uncovering of how language is used to create latent (or overt) hegemonies. In total, this study not only offers novel, empirical findings on the media framing of the climate crisis-economic inequality nexus, but also gives a strong foundation for future research to explore what changes in media are needed to complement the necessary socio-ecological transformations of today's world.

**Key Words**

climate crisis, economic inequality, structural topic modelling, us media

# **Muslim women, citizenship and racism: From the symbol of nation to anti-national threat**

## **Authors**

Dr. Milly Williamson - Goldsmiths University of London

## **Abstract**

The criteria for Muslims being labelled as anti-national is increasingly simplified. As Britain is rapidly shrinking itself into a province while glorifying its imperial past and historical power, the racialisation of citizenship has set up a further national hierarchy. Citizenship is no longer a right but a “privilege”. The nation is often discursively gendered female and that women are used as symbolic markers of cultural purity and national honour, so that policing women has been historically justified as “protecting the nation”. This paper critically examines the prominence of representations of Muslim women in racist discourse, including the relationship between gendered anti-Muslim racism and the creation of a hostile policy environment which undermines the rights of Muslim citizens in the name of security. Media and political representations of Muslim women are both durable and flexible; so, while early twenty-first media and political narratives presented Muslim women as ‘victims’ (of Islam and Muslim men) to justify war leading up to the invasion of Afghanistan, more recent reworkings present veiled Muslim women as a ‘terror threat’. This current representation has its roots in the undermining of anti-colonial struggles (such as the Algerian struggle for independence from the French empire in the early to mid-twentieth century) but is now put into service for a range of political purposes, particularly sanctioning violent border policies and justifying a growing body of discriminatory assimilationist laws. This paper assesses in detail the case of Shamima Begum, who had her UK citizenship revoked in 2019 following a lengthy legal battle. Through qualitative analysis of UK Home Office statements, blogs and press releases and their circulation in news media, as well as legal judgements on the case and their circulation in the news media. This paper exams how Begum’s revoked citizenship by the British state and her treatment in the press, exemplifies much of the purposes and gendered structure of contemporary anti-Muslim racism. It argues that both state and media actors constructed the then 15 year old as a ‘terror threat’ as part of a move to put into law and justify the notion of ‘contingent citizenship’ in a context in which many British Muslims and members of the British Windrush generation are being denied citizenship and the rights that go with it.

## **Key Words**

Racism, Muslim women, citizenship

# **Terrorcraft as Ideology: The Cultural Production of the Racialized Terrorist**

## **Authors**

Prof. Deepa Kumar - Rutgers University

## **Abstract**

Scholars in various fields including Islamophobia Studies and Arab American Studies have argued that stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims lead to bad policies. While negative constructs do play a role in discriminatory treatment, it is larger socio-economic factors, such as empire, that lay the basis for projects of racialization. Pushing back against simplistic understandings of how culture operates within the broader totality, I use a dialectical cultural studies method to trace the evolution of the “terrorist” in the news media and in Hollywood films from the 1970s to the 1990s. Through a detailed study of the *New York Times*, I show how the white leftist terrorist was replaced only gradually and over a long period of time first by Arabs and then Islamists. There was nothing inevitable or automatic about this process. In the second part of the paper, I analyze films. Yet again, we find a diversity of terrorists. During the Reagan administration’s first war on terror, it was white men who were still featured as terrorists in popular films like *Die Hard*. However, there was a significant move to cast Palestinians as terrorists in the 1970s and 80s. While Arab terrorists constitute a part of the overall terrorist menace, it was not until after 9/11 that the association of Muslims and Arabs with violence becomes more entrenched. The key argument in this paper is that there is no seamless continuity between earlier stereotypes of brown people, particularly Arabs, Iranians and South Asians, and those in the WoT era. This paper comes out of a larger book project on “terrorcraft,” which I define as a racial regime of social control that works to police dissent and potential threats to the seamless reproduction of US superintended global capitalism. A variation on the term “racecraft,” coined by Barbara and Karen Fields, terrorcraft is about terrorist racial formation. Terrorcraft is the product of three mutually constitutive and reinforcing elements—security practices, security culture, and security rituals. In this paper, I focus on security culture and the contradictory production of the terrorist menace in films and

## **Key Words**

Racism, Ideology, Muslims, Terrorcraft

# Islamophobia, cultural spectacle and the culturalisation of free speech

## Authors

Prof. Gavan Titley - Maynooth University

## Abstract

This paper tracks the interlocking ways in which freedom of speech has become a pronounced dimension of the transnational obsession with Muslim people as the problem population against which national identities are reproduced and national unity agendas animated in Europe and the 'West'. Departing from the importance of liberal values to the articulation of national identity in the post 9/11 landscape, it situates the politics of free speech within the securitised integration politics ascendant in this period, which focused on the need for Muslims to constantly provide proof of capacity or willingness to respect the equality and freedoms deemed integral to the nation/Europe. It traces three lines of political influence. The first is the centrality of ideas of radicalisation to the securitarian logics of this period, which, in situating Muslims as a threat to settled democratic values, ironically remove their political contestation from the realm of politics, configuring political speech as evidence of potential future disruption. The second is the *culturalisation* of freedom of speech in Europe as a general condition of integration politics, and as an intensified reaction to the 'Danish cartoons controversy' (2005-6) and the terrorist attacks on the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* and assorted sites in Paris in 2015. Thus, even as securitarian responses across Europe restricted speech and political activity, freedom of speech was essentialised as a settled national and civilizational value that Muslims were required to demonstrate their compatibility with. Finally, the paper surveys the political productivity of free speech rhetoric to the contemporary networked and highly mediated far-right, and argues that this appropriation would be impossible without the securitisation and culturalisation of the preceding two decades.

## Key Words

Islamophobia, free speech, culturalisation, securitisation

# **Counter-speech or counter-narratives? The potentials and limitations of counter-narratives about Muslims on Twitter.**

## **Authors**

Prof. Elizabeth Poole - Keele University

Prof. Ed de Quincey - Keele University

Dr. Eva Giraud - University of Sheffield

Dr. John Richardson - Keele University

## **Abstract**

Online platforms have the affordances to contest Islamophobic hate speech as demonstrated by the dynamics of #stopIslam following the Brussels terror attack, 2016. In this instance, the hashtag gained its prominence through the contestations of users who sought to question, critique and undermine its original message (Poole et al, 2020). However, research has also shown the limitations of social media for online activism and mediated solidarity, in particular for creating meaningful debates or change (Nikunen, 2018; Schradie, 2019). This paper examines data from a large-scale study (3million plus tweets) that used methods of computational (big data), quantitative, and qualitative analysis to examine the dynamics of discourse about Islam and Muslims in the case of Brexit (the exit date, 2020), the Christchurch terror attack (2019) and the Covid pandemic (2020). Adopting a longitudinal, comparative approach, we examine whether the high incidence of solidarity discourses in these datasets are limited to acts of counter-speech (and other performative acts) or if they contribute to sustainable counter-narratives that have implications for wider discursive knowledge about Muslims. We argue that as the shock of the event diminishes, the more support evaporates and critical voices emerge, raising questions over the longevity of solidarities online in relation to trigger events. In turn, this allows us to say something about whether the political economy of Twitter limits its ability as a communication tool for positive, progressive and structural change. The paper explores the technological, social and translocal structures that enable networked collectivities to form and circulate counter-narratives, but also the complexities that arise from being intimately entangled with the narratives they seek to contest. Equally, we question how far a platform underpinned by commercial logic can be an agent of change when Islamophobia is exploited for economic gain? Despite this, we look to emerging data from interviews with anti-racist activists to demonstrate the benefits of Twitter as a platform for meaningful and active mobilisation.

## **Key Words**

Twitter, solidarity, counternarratives, Islamophobia, activism

# **Towards a Political Economy of News Sources**

## **Authors**

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Dr. Igor Vobič - Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana

## **Abstract**

In the past few decades, production of news has been one of the central topics in sociology of the media (Tumber 2014, 65–69). Authors have pondered what are the major sources for journalists, what journalistic routines lead to their use, and who is deemed a legitimate source by the journalistic community (Gans 1979/2004; Schlesinger 1990; Bourdieu 1998, 69–70; Franklin 2003; Franklin and Carlson 2011). Gans's (1979/2004, 116) classic study described these relationships as a dance, where "sources seek access to journalists, and journalists seek access to sources", with sources usually leading the tango. With digitisation, connections between news, journalism and its sources have diversified and intensified through increasingly ubiquitous modes of news production and distribution, such as aggregation and algorithmisation. These re-configured traditional values and practices of journalism and contributed to eroding authority of professional journalism (Anderson 2013; Coddington 2019).

These sociological studies have provided relevant insights into how news is produced, but most of them remain focused on the micro or at best meso-level of the analysis, putting scant attention to the social totality and its influence on the journalistic production process. With only a few exceptions (Tumber 2014, 67) have authors asked how unequal distribution of power in society influences production of news, why certain voices, social groups, and even whole geographic areas seem to be systematically overlooked in the process of producing news, or what these inequalities mean for the public sphere and its normative purpose.

The main aim of the paper will be to re-examine the prevailing approaches to news sources by employing political economy of communication (PEC) as a macro-level approach. We will provide brief sketches to demonstrate the significant value of PEC for these discussions: a) inequalities in the international news flows, which have a long history in PEC and have been widely discussed in the NWICO movement, but remain as pertinent as ever with continuing concentration of the news agencies and shrinking foreign reporting (Artz 2017); b) the role of PR and corporate propaganda in narrowing the scope of available news sources; c) the role of corporate ownership and global concentration of the media (Hardy 2014, Ch. 4), which has an influence on the existing crisis of the news media, stretching from precarisation of the workforce and impoverishment of the newsrooms to a deepening crisis in local news (Pickard 2020, Ch. 3); d) digitisation and increasing commodification of communication, which is deepening the problem of news overload and re-shaping journalistic information sourcing in the asymmetrical interdependence between media and digital platforms. Through these illustrations, we will demonstrate how PEC as a critical and holistic approach can be employed for a much deeper understanding of news sources.

## **Key Words**

News Sources; News Flows; Corporate PR; Commodification; Media Sociology; Production

# “Moving Bricks” Online as Multiple Careers: The Digital Housewife in Chinese Video Game Industries

## Authors

Ms. Jiayi Hou - The University of Tokyo

## Abstract

“Moving bricks,” or *banzhuān*, is a popular Internet slang widely used by Chinese young people to mock at themselves for conducting tiring, repetitive, and uncreative labor to make a living. Like many young people from socioeconomically disadvantaged families, Deng tried to “move bricks” in various places such as factory lines, offices, and service industries ever since. However, none of these precarious jobs turned out to be long-lasting. He then decided to sustain himself by “moving bricks” independently in video games, a field in which he had better interests, experiences, and confidence. To acquire a livelihood, Deng had to switch between the following freelance roles according to the customized requests of his clients: (1) a gold farmer who harvested in-game items or currencies and later traded them for real money to the other players looking for a shortcut; (2) a hired booster who spent significant amount of time power-leveling certain game characters on behalf of the other players; (3) a paid companion who provided both technical and emotional support to improve the other players’ gaming experiences; (4) a live streamer who entertained his audiences, also potential consumers, by webcasting his individual play. Moreover, Deng also occasionally looked through various digital platforms for temporary jobs such as security guards, parcel sorters, or construction workers that could immediately pay out at the end of the day just to earn enough cash to meet the most basic necessities.

Different from existing studies that primarily focused on the processes and social consequences of how creative class and or the educated precariat engage with multiple careers as flexible labor (de Peuter 2011; Standing, 2016), this study first features in extending the scope to those who already live at the margins of contemporary China and are thus commonly assumed as generic labor of low-quality (Castells 2013; Kipnis, 2006). By examining how these underprivileged youths, or the unlikely creative class (Lin & de Kloet, 2019), aim at making ends meet by becoming digital slash workers in various informal sectors related to video games, due to the rapid platformization of Chinese society (de Kloet et al., 2019), I intend to unpack not just the alternative imaginations of labor, value, and meanings among these self-claimed “brick movers”, but also how digital technologies, particularly video-game-related platforms and services, deeply intertwine with existing social inequalities in post-socialist China today.

During an on-going ethnography from January 2022 to January 2023, this study traced the everyday experiences of seven self-employed slash workers like Deng and interviewed three owners of “gaming workshops” who managed dozens of slash workers. By particularly examining how they negotiate in between multiple freelance roles, trading various services that they can provide for monetary returns from their richer teammates, I argue that they have embodied a

complicated “digital housewife-ness” by not just producing, sometimes even exaggerating, commodifiable data according to the variegated datafication mechanisms on different game-related platforms as Kylie Jarrett (2015) originally suggested. More importantly, “moving bricks” in video games is never as uncreative as the term indicated but involves the profound use of imagination and multi-dimensional affective labor—particularly an intentional performance of deprecating and sacrificing oneself—to enhance solidarity among game players and sustain the video game ecosystems with significant reproductive value, in parallel to what housewives do to a family and the society with limited wage.

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## Key Words

underclass; Chinese platform; labor; creative class; slash youth



# **“Pink Terror”: Fan wars, censorship sensibilities, and interpretive labour in China**

## **Authors**

Ms. Erika Ningxin Wang - King's College London

## **Abstract**

This article will focus on the fan wars on social media to examine the interaction between fans' interpretive labour, media platform governance and the censorship of the party-state in China. It aims to understand fans' ambivalent feelings towards censorship from within the fan community, observe their tentativeness towards the blurred boundaries of the censorship system, and document their guidelines on reporting to censors based on their own tried and tested experiences, which have led to large-scale fan collective actions such as fan wars.

Combining the digital ethnography on social media platforms and in-depth interviews with key fan informants, this paper tracks their practices engaging in fan wars and collective reporting practices in both the digital and physical worlds. The focus is on how members of fan communities summarise and develop the “reporting guidebooks” that are considered to be effective. This article takes Foucault's panopticon (1977, 1988) as a starting point, and makes David Graeber's concept of “interpretive labour” (2012) as the central theoretical framework to explain that the labour of fans in practising reporting, learning from experience, developing reporting guidelines, and participating collectively in the act of reporting is a way as the exploited of internalising and embodying the ideology and behavioural logic of the exploiter.

From the fans' point of view, in the media platform environment where the reporting mechanism is ubiquitous, fans have to carry out a lot of daily practices, spend a lot of time and energy on trying out the reporting rules time and again to draw up guidelines for reporting experiences that are believed to be effective, and even internalise the logic of reporting-censorship as a daily task and one of the criteria for fans to be domesticated (Stanfill, 2019). Thus, from the very beginning of fanhood, there is a deep-rooted recognition of the censorship of state power (Wang and Ge, 2022), and even attempts to use this mechanism to take revenge on the enemies of the fan war. Therefore, in fact, in such a platform-state-fan interaction, platforms and fans are always in a more passive and vulnerable position (of course, fans are also in a more vulnerable position than platforms), and they are forced or motivated to devote some additional labour to internalising and embodying the logic of state manipulation (Luo and Li, 2022). Thus, even though fans use censorship as a weapon in their conflicts and appear to gain temporary power as the enforcer to harden conflict victories, however, this exploitation in fact remains based on the inequality of power relations. The censorship sensibilities are internalised by fans through the summation of more efficient reasons for reporting and the experience of reporting as a fundamental principle that fans deeply identify with. These efforts to practice and summarise reporting guidelines are in

fact interpretive labour. The internalisation and embodiment of the exploiter's logic of behaviour and values results in a situation of increasing marginalisation and vulnerability for fan culture.

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#### **Key Words**

fan studies; censorship; Chinese platform

# Taobao/Livestream Village Model?: “Platform Capitalism” Revisited through a Non-linear Lens

## Authors

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## Abstract

Recently, China-based popular short video and livestreaming platforms, such as Kuaishou, Douyin, and Taobao Livestream, have incorporated online retail as a key monetization strategy through e-commerce livestreaming. Specifically, e-commerce livestreaming, with its capability of generating customer-specific orders for producers during and/or right after a livestreaming session, potentially enables a type of hyper, just-in-time, mass customization model that connects the cultural production on the platforms with the production and distribution of various commodities offline. This is especially the case for the light manufactured goods of short production cycles that are mostly produced in family workshops and small to medium factories located in (semi)rural China, which increasingly rely on the infrastructure built by dominant internet companies and whose production and organization are further shaped by government intervention (Lüthje, 2019; Zhang, 2020).

For instance, through partnership with local governments all over the country, Alibaba between 2009 and 2021 has launched over 7000 Taobao villages: the rural e-commerce hubs that feature Alibaba's various services like logistics, fintech, data analytics, and ecommerce training to encourage local farmers to engage in online sales, and the company further aims to build a “new industrial system” surrounding its Taobao villages (Alibaba, 2019; Zuo, 2021). Meanwhile, in the face of a trend of “pan-livestreamization” of Chinese platforms—meaning platforms in different sectors adopting livestreaming function to engage with users and to explore new revenue streams—a large number of Taobao villages are transitioning into “livestreaming villages”. This transition is further aided by the participation of more internet companies, such as Tencent, Douyin, and Kuaishou, which utilize the various resources previously established for e-commerce business to further introduce livestreaming as a new driving engine for local economy, job creation, and their own business growth.

To provide a more nuanced and up-to-date understanding of Chinese livestreaming industries situated in the broader political and socio-economic context, this on-going research aims to direct our attention from the activities and interactions in front of the camera during livestreaming to the multi-staged value chains of Chinese e-commerce livestreaming behind the screen. Such value chains have integrated content production on prominent platforms with manufacturing and agriculture offline, during which process the conventional boundaries of the cultural industries are blurred and renegotiated. In particular, this paper highlights the role of livestreaming platforms in integrating various (pre)capitalist production paradigms, ranging from peasant economy, petty capitalism, and (neo)Fordism which continue to thrive and gain currency as integral parts in the so-

called “platform economies”. Building on the findings from four ethnographical trips in 18 Taobao/Livestream Villages and 26 livestreaming bases in China between 2020-2022 and online ethnography on major livestreaming platforms since 2018, this research pays special attention to the various types of labor, especially rural temp workers, the way they are mobilized and organized respectively in different production paradigms, and how the laborers are being (in)formalized as an essential part of the thriving e-commerce livestreaming business models. While the scholarship concerning the production models of platform often share a tendency of giving the primacy to data extraction and conceptualize “platform capitalism” as the newest stage of capitalism (Zuboff, 2019; Couldry & Mejias, 2019; Srnicek, 2016), there is emerging literature revealing the deep connection between platform, manufacturing, and industrial labor (Lüthje, 2019; Steinberg, 2022; Andrijasevic et al., 2021). Continuing in the same line of inquiry of the latter, this research therefore highlights the “capitalisms managed by platforms” by provincializing data extraction as one of the significant production paradigms integrated simultaneously along the e-commerce livestreaming value chains and thus contributes to a diversified and non-linear understanding about “platform capitalism”.

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#### Key Words

e-commerce livestream; China; platform capitalism; neo-Fordism; flexible labor

# **Exploitation and Empowerment Faced by the Low-level Digital Labor in the Chinese Internet Industry - A Comparative Case Study**

## **Authors**

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Ms. Shini CHEN - The Chinese University of Hong Kong

## **Abstract**

### **Background**

The dramatic expansion of the digital labor in the related industries has been hogging the limelight recently with the rapid development of the internet in China. The sensational 996 work schedule, unbearable work pressures and low hourly payments have become the characteristics of this group, especially the low-level digital labor. This situation has raised concerns regarding their psychological state and the curiosity about what motivates them to persevere in such harsh working conditions.

### **Significance and research question**

In digital labor studies, there seems to exist a dichotomy of theoretical frameworks. Scholars in the west tend to analyze digital labor under the exploitation mechanism from the perspective of Marxian political economy. Whereas, certain Chinese scholars claim to disregard the exploitation framework and pay attention to the construction process of labor subjectivity and agency. This provides an idea of whether we could figure out both exploitation and the self of digital labor in certain groups. Considering this, we introduce the concept of 'empowerment', hoping to enrich the existing studies on digital labor.

In the selection of the comparative cases, the focus was on two types of digital workers, the Chinese low-level IT programmers and data annotators. Lacking sufficient discussions on these groups, our research could provide some additions to this knowledge base.

Realizing the significance of the above issue, the pertinent research question is proposed as to, 'What kind of roles do exploitation and empowerment play in the Chinese low-level data annotators and programmers respectively?'

### **Method**

A method of in-depth interviews with 5 low-level IT programmers and 5 low-level data annotators was adopted to collect the data. The questions covered two main levels, the labor process, such as the work schedules and wages, and the ideology of labor including labor identity and other stimuli to proactive work. The factual information collected helps to compare the objective working environment, and direct expressions related to abstract subjective feelings of the interviewees, such as self-esteem, the feeling of being valued, perception of the improvement in the ability, self-

efficacy, and the sense of achievement, provide evidence for establishing our ideology of digital labor.

### **Findings and conclusions**

Through comparison, results illustrate that exploitation and empowerment could both be found and are closely bonded. For low-level programmers, benefits like more free working schemes and higher salaries have been provided albeit remaining under strict pressure of a sense of crisis. In case of the data annotators, the further development cannot be guaranteed, nevertheless, currently they could get fully spiritual rewards from their jobs. Other factors inspiring the interviewees to work proactively could be identified, including gender equality, access to knowledge, and strong support for vulnerable groups.

Moreover, it is worth noting that the aspirations for the AI industry indicated by certain less educated data annotators could reflect a fetish or fantasy regarding high technology that enables further exploitation, impelling us to consider the relations between exploitation and empowerment in a more dialectical manner. Perhaps at times, exploitation gets cloaked in empowerment, while the essence of exploitation remains.

### **Key Words**

Digital labor, exploitation, empowerment, political economy, China

# **The Voice of America in the Horn of Africa: Examining Public Diplomacy, Journalistic Autonomy, and Power Interlocks at the Amharic Desk**

## **Authors**

Dr. Tewodros Workneh - Kent State University

## **Abstract**

Established in 1982, the Voice of America (VOA) Amharic Service (hereon “the Service”) became one of the most popular news outlets for Ethiopians in Ethiopia and Ethiopian diaspora communities across the world. Despite its popularity, the Voice of America’s historical ties to the U.S. government raised questions about the organization’s journalistic independence. For example, when the Voice of America (VOA) was placed under the United States Information Agency (USIA) in 1953, the State Department intervened in the daily routines of the broadcaster ranging from editorial decision-making to personnel management. From pressures to reignite anti-Soviet rhetoric during the Reagan administration to coverage controversies on the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, newsroom staff regarded themselves as “second class” journalists in response to sporadic administration interference.

Although VOA continues to experience external pressure to align itself with the public diplomacy interests of the U.S. government, it is thus far reasonably successful in conducting itself along sound journalism practices. The current study examines the case of the VOA Amharic Desk to chart power relations, interlocks, networks, and actors that inform the broadcaster’s historical oscillation traversing profiles of public diplomacy and journalistic autonomy. In the past 20 years, the Service was at the forefront of several attempts of termination by the coordinated efforts of the ruling party in Ethiopia and the U.S. State Department. Primarily angered by the Service’s continued critical coverage of human rights abuses, bad governance, and other issues of public interest, Ethiopia’s ruling party made the discontinuation of the Service one of the top priorities of its diplomatic relation with the United States. It is against this background that this study investigates determinants of newsroom autonomy in the VOA-Amharic newsroom. Specially, the following research questions are considered: (a) What are the major pressure points of the Service’s newsroom autonomy permeating from Ethio-American shared public diplomacy interests? (b) How do VOA-Amharic journalists describe their news making culture in the context of external state interests? (c) What are some of the challenges and opportunities of doing journalism in an organization detached from the homeland?

Based on a two-stage data collection process involving a close examination of documents obtained through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request submitted to USAGM and semi-structured and open-ended in-depth interviews conducted with reporters, editors, and managers in the VOA Amharic newsroom, the study finds VOA Amharic journalists experience primary pressure sources (host political factors and homeland political factors) and secondary pressure sources (personal/relational factors, diasporic political factors, and audience factors) challenging their

journalistic autonomy. Despite these pressures, journalists highlight the significance of the organization's legislative "firewall" and evidence-based external review process in upholding the newsroom's autonomy. The study concludes by proposing a multi-layered model of approaching contemporary global public diplomacy dynamics involving public international media.

### **Key Words**

Ethiopia

Public diplomacy

EPRDF

USAGM

Soft power

Journalistic autonomy

VOA



# Media ownership transparency in Portugal: challenges and limitations

## Authors

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Dr. Alexandra Figueira - Universidade Lusófona de Humanidades e Tecnologias

## Abstract

Increasingly considered a requirement for free and democratic functioning, transparency is a consensual policy response, namely to address concerns over media ownership. But this principle encompasses a reality that is broader than just ownership. It is also a way of counteracting the public's loss of trust in the news media (Karlsson, 2020). While media ownership transparency is not the only guarantee of their contribution to democratic systems, it is nevertheless considered an essential prerequisite for the media not to be diverted from their essential role. Bearing in mind that the media can become dependent of political and economic interests, the main argument poses that information about who owns the media and how journalism is financed is essential and should publicly available.

There is a growing importance attributed to transparency at the European level. The European Commission has presented a Media Freedom Act that stresses the importance of transparency and has commissioned a consortium of researchers to set up a European database on media ownership and legal provisions on media transparency.

Although a significant number of countries at the European level do not have specific legislation regarding media transparency (Craufurd-Smith et al., 2021), the issue is relatively stabilized in Portugal. A specific legislation was passed in 2015, which determines the transparency of ownership, of management and of means of funding. Under this legal determination, the Regulatory Entity for the Media manages the Transparency Portal, where any citizen can find the list of beneficiaries of companies operating in the sector.

A general public debate on the consequences of this law has not, however, taken place in Portugal (Baptista, 2022) and the Journalist Unions has presented public concerns on the limitations of the law (Silva et al., 2022). The ethical importance of transparency remains high in the public agenda, but, as stated by Bock & Lazard (2021), “the complexity in operationalization and grounded practice” should be acknowledged and reflected upon.

This communication will critically discuss the Portuguese case, addressing the limitations of the transparency principle in the Portuguese media system configuration. It will present the results of a systematic analysis of the cases in which media companies failed to fulfil the obligations, as well as of the requests presented to the media regulatory agency to be excused from fulfilling some of the obligations. This will allow to better understand the complexity of the transparency principle, as well as the challenges presented to its operationalization.

## Key Words

Ownership, Transparency, Funding, Regulation

# Digital commons for the ecological transition: Critiques, practices and policies

## Authors

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## Abstract

The 'double' – digital and ecological – transition keeps being talked about, yet the environmental footprint of digital technologies has not diminished (Shift Project 2018). Can the climate disaster and the erosion of biodiversity be reversed within digital capitalism? Mobilizations uniting the Internet, the social economy and environmental activism denounce the profit maximization and financialization which prevent large firms from developing sustainable digital technologies (Flipo 2020, Gossart 2015, Veltz 2017). The Green Web Foundation audits the sustainability of websites, and digital commons have been advanced as prefiguring an ecological and post-capitalist future, based on self-management and common ownership of the means of production (Bauwens et al. 2019). Digital commoners advocate the use of free and open source software to enhance the sustainability of computing devices (Fairphone). They develop open and collaborative databases which can help govern and evaluate the ecological transition (Open Street Map). Finally circular economy and degrowth principles can inform the deployment of cooperative platforms (Mobicoop) and of distributed manufacturing in 'makerspaces' (Kostakis et al. 2018). However these localised solutions face three major challenges: (a) their ecological production partly relies on unsustainable Big Tech products; (b) digital capitalism has integrated their critique of intellectual property rights, whilst maintaining its hyper-productivist accumulation regime; (c) their political support is negligible. Our proposed contribution is to overcome these contradictions. We combine three research methods: first, we analyse a 'grey literature' corpus that gathers digital commons movement critiques of the capitalist mode of production; second, we conduct an ethnographic study using observations and interviews of three collectives using digital commons for the ecological transition; third, in line with our participation in the Digital Commons Policy Council and the Société des Communs, we develop an action-research program aiming to assess the extent to which the digital commons are likely to 'scale up', in the context of the colossal socio-economic changes imposed by the global ecological catastrophe. Specifically, we conduct an exploratory co-construction of public policies aiming to expand sustainable digital commons. We briefly outline four policy worlds where this expansion can occur: (a) the world of economic and industrial policy, to scale up ecological commons-based production: city support for cooperative platforms; regional support for distributed manufacturing clusters; state and EU support for free software to increase

product durability; (b) the world of social and labour policy, to recognise labour (including reproductive labour) for the digital commons and create a contributory society: initiatives from free and open source software communities; incentives for public and private employee contributions to digital commons; contributory or universal basic incomes; (c) the world of technology policy, to limit the power of digital capitalism: measures to increase citizen privacy and control of data; dissemination of software products acting as 'champions' for copyleft licences, whose ubiquity means recreating them from scratch under non-copyleft licenses is not economically viable; (d) the world of education policy, to change cultural values: use of Wikipedia in schools as a fact-checking resource; development of teacher training in the use of Wikipedia and the importance of common values.

### **Key Words**

digital commons; digital capitalism; ecological transition; policy development; free software

## **Television - a new shape: the same formula**

### **Authors**

Prof. Adilson Vaz Cabral Filho - Fluminense Federal University

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### **Abstract**

With the digital age, information travels at great speed and makes possible direct communication between people. The new Communication and Information Technologies (nTICs) form a broad system of technologies such as big data mining, machine learning, Artificial Intelligence (AI), robotics, Internet of Things (IoT), cloud computing, quantum computing and 5/6G. These changes are being implemented in different kinds of production and business models around the world, in a process conceived as the 4th Industrial Revolution or industry 4.0. The possibilities of making this organizational model work need to be analyzed in relation to Communication, understanding not only technological aspects, but also social, cultural and political ones, in the context of their appropriation by society. Although Communication is a basic and productive element of everyday life, its genesis from the ways of content transmission is characterized by markets structured from monopolies and oligopolies, historically disregarding its aspects as a human right. Although it is still “a process in formation, although it clearly represents a step forward in society, it is a price that oligopolies do not want to pay” (CABRAL FILHO; TRINDADE, 2020, p.87), even if they seek to work with new conglomerates active in nTICs, which enhance opportunities for traditional groups. Based on comparative case studies, bibliographical and documentary research, we demonstrate that, in Brazil, a small and privileged group of families, churches and politicians concentrates information and monopolizes radio and TV vehicles. On open TV, the groups Globo Network, Record TV, Brazilian system of Television (SBT), Bandeirantes Network (Band) and RedeTV! are the five largest open channels in the country, diversifying activities, investing not only in media but other sectors of the economy, using “regional and international strategies in search of new partners and the maintenance and expansion of their businesses” (CABRAL, 2020, p. 24). With the advent of the Internet, due to the expansion of the presence of corporations and digital platforms, business models on television shifted from static programming grid to personalized and individual one. Based on documentation related to the sector and bibliographical research, it is worth investigating how, in the face of this reconfiguration, television media groups seek to remain competitive in the new business model provided by the nTICs controllers. These new and powerful actors assimilate the convergence of contents through different media, enabling a new culture of production and consumption of television audiovisual content, as well as the emergence of new entrants in the market under the logic of control of the large platforms. The streaming service presents itself as the new television, a new communication space already led by traditional media groups, in partnership, when necessary, with strong conglomerates in the sector, although seeking

to maintain regional and local influence. Given this scenario, it is proposed here to analyze how, despite the much-vaunted digital transformation, control over the production and distribution infrastructure takes place in similar ways to the advent of mass communication. Next, the strategies of television media groups in Brazil are discussed in terms of the power they seek to maintain, based on political influences and articulations with other economic sectors. Finally, we seek to take into account the movement of these economic forces to understand a regulatory perspective of the sector that assumes Communication as a human right.

**Key Words**

Television; media groups; streaming; VoD; Brazil; regulation of streaming

# Netflix's strategy to influence the policy debate on the audiovisual sector in Latin America

## Authors

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Ms. Marina Rossato Fernandes - PhD Student

## Abstract

Netflix has consolidated itself as the main SVOD streamer in Latin America (García Leiva et al. 2021), where it landed in September 2011, particularly among the upper-middle and middle classes (Straubhaar et al. 2021). As the streamer has expanded its operations globally through the distribution and production of works (Lobato 2019), it has engaged in branding diversity (Asmar et al. 2022) to promote itself as a distinctive player that ensures content diversity and provides local content without the need for regulation. As a result of Netflix's presence in the audiovisual market, many scholars have studied its business model (Lordache et al. 2021; Lobato 2019; Lotz 2021), the impact of regional/national regulation on its performance (Baladron and Rivero 2019; García Leiva and Albornoz 2020) and the presence of local content in its catalogues (Albornoz and García Leiva 2022; Lordache 2021; Grece and Jimenez Pumares 2021; Lotz et al. 2022). However, its role in shaping the policy debate remains under-researched. Therefore, this presentation addresses this gap by examining how Netflix uses its power to influence the media policy debate in Latin America. The research that supports this presentation combines different methodologies to explore Netflix's strategy to consolidate itself as an actor capable of influencing the policy debate on the audiovisual sector in Latin America: -First, the Netflix discourse was identified through a qualitative analysis of different official documents. Two major international reports were analysed: the first, *Behind the Camera: Creativity and Investment for Latin America and the Caribbean* (Olavarría et al. 2021), was produced in collaboration between the Inter-American Development Bank and Netflix. And the second, *Cultural Affinity and Screen Tourism* (UNWTO 2021), was produced by the World Tourism Organization in partnership with Netflix. Netflix's quarterly shareholder letters, its *Environmental, Social & Governance Report 2021* (Netflix 2021a), its *Inclusion Report* (Netflix 2021b) and the study *Inclusion in Netflix Original U.S. Scripted Series & Films* (Smith et al. 2021) were also examined. -Second, to explore Netflix's relationship with Latin American institutions, a map of the company's partnerships with local actors was created based on official information from the company's website and specialised press. -Third, an ethnographic study using participant observation of Netflix's participation in the first edition of *Iberseries & Platino Industria* (Madrid, 27 September–1 October 2021) and the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development – MONDIACULT 2022 (Mexico City, 28–30 September 2022). In addition, three semi-structured expert interviews were conducted with Ibero-American institutional representatives to assess their openness to the Netflix discourse. The findings revealed Netflix's efforts to legitimise itself as a distinctive player that could ensure the inclusion of new local creators and the diversity of audiovisual content without regulation. Its engagement with different

institutions and policy actors reveals a strategy to gain legitimacy, position itself as an 'expert' and frame the policy debate according to its interests. The enlargement of Netflix's agency through knowledge production and association with policy entrepreneurs raises concerns about the concentration of power and the constraints of cultural policy.

**Key Words**

Netflix; streaming; audiovisual sector; cultural diversity; Latin America

# Regulating SVoD Services in the EU and the Americas

## Authors

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Prof. Guillermo Mastrini - Universidad Nacional de Quilmes

Prof. Ana Bizberge - Universidad Nacional de Quilmes

## Abstract

Even though Subscription Video-on-Demand (SVoD) services are still a small part of the audiovisual market in the EU and the Americas, growth has been significant for the last five years (Grece, 2022; Statista, 2022). SVoD has become a driver of the audiovisual sector, with numerous launches, business reorganizations and rapid consumer adoption. This situation has provoked a myriad of reactions at the political and business levels, some of which prompted regulatory change across the world (Lobato, 2018; Evens & Donders, 2018; Albornoz & García Leiva, 2019). For instance, among the most critical debates regarding the impacts of SVoD services the following can be detected: the amount of local works included within catalogues, the existence of a level playing field regarding investment obligations, and the corporate profile of companies involved. The EU has taken advantage of existing rules to address these issues, mainly via the reformulation of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive, whereas in the Americas the debate has evolved heterogeneously (Bizberge, 2022). In Latin American countries taxing foreign digital service providers has been the dominant approach and most of the ruling proposals haven't prospered (Bizberge, 2021). In Canada, the governmental project Online Streaming Act did pass the house of commons and the senate and it's to become a Royal Charter too. It is raising many concerns though (Winseck, 2022; McKelvey, 2022). It is of great importance therefore to offer an overview of how SVoD services are regulated in the EU and the Americas regarding much contested topics such as: a) content quotas, b) financial obligations, and c) cross-media ownership restrictions. More specifically, the paper will compare regulation in the main EU and American audiovisual markets -namely the UK, Germany, France, Italy and Spain, within the EU, and the USA, Canada, Mexico, Brazil and Argentina, among American States- to critically examine how different issues are interpreted and operationalized. The final aim is to prompt a reflection on different regulatory regimes and linked policy implications. It is argued that the cases chosen are valuable not only because they constitute major markets within each region but also because they represent a range of diverse regulatory approaches to audiovisual policy and regulation in the EU as well as in the Americas (Gibbons & Humphreys, 2012; Vlassis, 2022; Mastrini & Becerra, 2017; Baladron & Rivero, 2019; Muñoz Larroa, 2020). The United Kingdom is also to be included because they had to implement the Directive during the Brexit transition period. Empirically, a qualitative regulatory analysis that relies primarily on a critical bibliographic and document review, examining a wide range of texts, will be performed. Such texts include, apart from legal documents, studies, white papers, official and specialized media reports, and academic publications. Informed by a panoramic lens, it will be concluded that while different regulations regarding SVoD services



represent a step forward in the road towards harmonized provisions for all market players, due to the vagueness of some provisions and/or the lack of enforcement mechanisms, their true potential is under discussion.

**Key Words**

Subscription VoD; Latin America; European Union; streaming regulation; media ownership

# Television production and distribution in the age of VoD and the role of PSM: The debate in Europe

## Authors

Prof. Maria Michalis - University of Westminster

## Abstract

In Europe, there has been a long debate around weak circulation of European audiovisual works. In the context of the European Union, there have been initiatives (notably quotas) aimed at supporting such circulation for both economic and cultural reasons (Chalaby 2009, Michalis 1997). The advent of VoD providers such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and Disney+ has changed the landscape for production and distribution, not least because these providers operate transnationally, their business models challenge existing content funding methods, whilst their huge content budgets put inflationary pressure on content production cost. The popularity of such VoD providers has prompted a debate on the sustainability of (sub)national content. In Europe, this debate is closely linked to the future of public service broadcasting, given that public service broadcasters are typically the principal investors in original local content. At a time when PSB faces increasing political and market threats, the stakes couldn't be higher. The paper reviews these challenges and debates, and highlights the 'frenemy' relationship between national (public service) broadcasters and global streamers. It then focuses on cultural policy responses at EU and a selection of national levels. Policy responses involve quotas, investment requirements for VoD providers (e.g., Kostovska et al. 2022), and prominence obligations. Finally, the paper reviews available evidence concerning circulation of European content and whether global VoD providers have facilitated that, changing emphasis in formats from either PSBs or VoD providers, and levels of (co-)productions. Methodologically, the paper is based on extensive documentary analysis of policy documents, industry and company reports. Given its subject matter, the paper contributes to debates on cultural policy, and the challenges of regulating global platforms.

## Key Words

VoD; Public Service Media; European audiovisual; streaming; Media regulation

# **New television flows, content hierarchies, and new players in the Ibero American SVOD services landscape**

## **Authors**

Prof. Juan Piñón - New York University

## **Abstract**

The SVOD streaming services are transforming the long-standing traditional landscape of flows in the Ibero American region. Not only there has been the rise of new circuits of production, distribution, and consumption in the region, but also a new hierarchies of content connected with what is now considered the most valuable genres or formats that brings branding value to the SVOD services. These changes have impacted in a differentiated modality streaming services connected to traditional media sector, particularly US Hispanic and Latin American television networks, vs new emergent streaming services coming from the Telecommunication sector and Silicon Valley. The data offered by the Ibero American Television Fiction Observatory ([www.Obitel.net](http://www.Obitel.net)) in relation to the flows of broadcasting television programming across the region and the long-standing dynamics of production, distribution, and circulation across the region, seemed to be disrupted by the data on the new logics of distribution by the new dominant players in the SVOD services landscape (Vasallo, Piñón, and Burnary, 2022). In contrast to the hegemonic position of telenovela production as high ratings producers in primetime television in broadcasting networks for the mass market, the new SVOD landscape has been impacted by the new sought high-quality dramas with few number of episodes for the targeted mostly upscale audiences in the new digital landscape. In this context a division of labor in terms of content production has emerged as byproduct of the differentiated media or platform business models and corporate resources in the site of production. This new division of labor production is reordering the hierarchies and visibility of centers of production across the region, the modalities of who produces what, and under which conditions, which enables particular collaborations among competing players. One of the sites of production in which division is most visible, is produced in the context of the tension on short premium drama series vs long fictional serials as telenovelas. On the one hand, premium dramas series, mostly around 8 to 12 episodes, are driving the attention and branding efforts of SVOD services across the board (called de-telenovelization). But, on the other hand, telenovelas have demonstrated to be a key element audiences viewership in SVOD catalogs. In this tension Silicon Valley, Telecommunication and US Media corporations behind their SVOD streaming services, have gain a foot in the region through their alliances with indie producers across the region, mostly through the production of the short premium series. In contrast to long standing hegemonic broadcasting television networks as still the main producers of telenovelas-long serial content (Piñón, 2014a). US streaming services seems to have no thirst to produce long serials in the context of the U.S. Spanish language context. The exception of the rules happens when the SVOD streaming services team up with a particular US Hispanic or Latin American network to produce a Spanish language content that will have window in linear

television for massive audiences, to be later releases in their digital catalog (e.g. Netflix and Amazon). Another disruption has been the rise on visibility of fictional content from Spain and its premium drama output for SVOD services, when Spain did not use to have a significant flows of content in broadcasting television across the region; as well as what can be consider as the new digital extractive corporate dynamic with the run-away production by US SVOD dominant players, taking advantage of the labor, cultural output, and creative work of production houses (indies) across the region (Miller et al, 2005), particularly in the all too common regional centers of production such as Mexico, Brazil, Colombia and Argentina.

**Key Words**

Subscription VoD; Ibero-america; streaming; media regulation; broadcasting

# **Digital Lords and Media Lords deals in Australia : privatising media policy**

## **Authors**

Prof. Benedetta Brevini - University of Sydney/ London School of Economics

## **Abstract**

Over the past two decades, the "Digital Lords," of the west (Brevini, 2021) Google and Facebook, have been subject to growing criticism worldwide for their immense economic, political, and ideological power and accountability to the public. Despite calls for regulatory measures to curb their market dominance, such as antitrust interventions and fragmentation of their absolute data ownership, the most tangible actions so far have centered on making these Digital Lords contribute to journalism. With neoliberal governments becoming increasingly reluctant to support public interest journalism through public funding, policy makers in various countries are exploring ways to make the wealthy and tax-avoidant Digital Lords pay for the news they share. While these debates are gaining traction from the US , to the European Union, to India and the UK, the most discussed policy tool to make Digital Lords pay for journalism is the widely known Australian 'News Media Bargaining Code.'

This paper illuminates the policy discussion that occurred in Australia when the new law was implemented, and assesses its effectiveness and drawbacks in addressing media diversity and the absence of news in certain areas of the country, referred to as "news deserts." What does this case study teach us about the progressive privatisation of media policy?

## **Key Words**

Digital Lords, Tech Giants, Media Bargaining Code,Public Journalism, Media Policy

# **Making Tech Giants Pay for the news : the case of France and Spain**

## **Authors**

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## **Abstract**

On April 17, 2019, the Directive (EU) 2019/790 on copyright and related rights in the digital single market, the so called "New Copyright Directive" was adopted by the European Union. The New Copyright Directive introduces a new right for press publishers in relation to the online use of their publications, pursuant to Article 15 of the Directive. The article recognises press publishers established in the EU the right to claim revenues from online uses of their publications by information society service providers; it also recognises that authors of press publications shall receive an appropriate share of the revenues realized through the licensing of online uses of their publications.

Implementing the directive, in September 2020, France ruled that that Google needs to pay publishers to display snippets of news content, being the first to implement a EU directive of March 2019 (Brevini,2021). Meanwhile, in Spain, Google News is back since June 2022, eight years after the Tech Giant discontinued the product due to the impact of a Spanish law that mandated payment for linking to news websites. The Country had reversed the 2014 law and adopted the European Union's copyright directive, allowing publishers to negotiate directly with platforms for agreements.

## **Key Words**

Digital Lords, Tech Giants, Google, Facebook, Support Public Interest Journalism

# **The UK Case : creating or thwarting a Sustainable local journalism ecology?**

## **Authors**

Prof. Natalie Fenton - Goldsmiths University of London

Prof. Des Freedman - Goldsmiths University of London

## **Abstract**

Two decades of consolidations and cost-cutting measures by the largest commercial local news providers in the UK have led to the loss of many titles and hundreds of journalist jobs, severely undermining local journalism. While many new independent local news outlets have sprung up, these are often run on tiny budgets and struggle to sustain themselves. The cost-cutting by regional news conglomerates has been a response to two main factors: a) changing technologies and the migration of classified advertising online and b) choices by these companies to protect profits and executive salaries rather than invest in local journalism. Creating a sustainable local journalism ecology requires us to address both. Firstly, since there appears to be no long-term business model that can address the crisis in local news at the scale that is needed, a new funding stream is required. The logical way to fund this is through a levy on the tech giants who dominate the advertising market. Secondly, the allocation of these funds need to be reoriented towards supporting local public interest journalism, rather than propping up the very institutions who have contributed to the crisis. Any new forms of funding or subsidy must therefore be distributed via an independent body using transparent and democratic criteria and procedures, prioritising those local news organisations which act in the public interest, are independent of powerful interests and accountable to the communities they serve.

This paper addresses how the above debate has played out in the context of UK media policymaking and the diverse interests from dominant mainstream news publishers and those of small independent publishers and civil society groups that resulted in the 'News for All' campaign - the recommendations of which have just been adopted by latest Parliamentary Inquiry into the Sustainability of Local News. The paper considers what this might mean for the forthcoming Digital Competition Bill and the newly established Digital Markets Unit in the context of other national initiatives for similar ends.

## **Key Words**

Sustainability of journalism, local journalism, Tech Giants, Funding journalism, Digital Markets Unit

# The US Internet Giants and the Resurgent US War Machine

## Authors

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## Abstract

This paper calls for the urgent critical political economic scrutiny of the US internet giants' involvement in the current war between Ukraine and Russia and with the American upsurge in militarism. With intensifying geopolitical rivalries among the global power states, US defense spending is ascending. In 2021, the U.S. military budget of \$801 billion consisted of nearly 40 percent of all global military expenditures, not including almost \$24.9 billion in military assistance for Ukraine by the Biden Administration. The US Internet giants – the so-called big five of Google, Microsoft, Amazon, Apple, and Meta — are eying the military industry as a new profit domain. While the big five are more known for their consumer products which have rightly been criticized by scholars and policymakers for their monopolistic behavior, surveillance, and data and labor exploitation (Wu, 2011; Fuchs, 2013; Srnicek, 2017), their participation in the current war and the US's turned up global militarism driven by its geopolitical and economic interests, is still less exposed behind their consumer business that is hardwired in our social and political lives.

While traditional war profiteers Lockheed Martin, Boeing, and Raytheon are often the face of the US war machine (Cockburn, 2021), this paper shows that the tech big five are also reshaping the nature of the business of war. The US internet giants are not only increasingly entrenched in the US Military-Industrial-Communications Complex (MICC) but also directly operating on the digital front lines — from fact-checking to disabling traffic maps to intelligence — for the Ukrainian government in their fight against Russia.

The paper posits that the US Internet giants' pivot to the war sphere is spurred not only by their imperative for expansion to the most lucrative markets but also driven by the exploitation of current geopolitical rivalries. With its unilateral global power diminishing, the US is desperately trying to remobilize its allies and retain them under US political and economic influence and enlisting the tech giants to curtail its rivals – in particular, Russia and China. The paper explicates how and under what conditions the US Internet giants are maneuvering and blurring lines between their consumer and military markets by leveraging the current geopolitical rift which propels US militarism today.

## Key Words

Google, Amazon, Microsoft, Meta, Internet, geopolitics, militarism, Ukraine, Russia



# The data-driven neoliberal ideology of smart cities: A comparative study of IBM and Alibaba

## Authors

Ms. Yihan Li - The Chinese University of Hongkong

## Abstract

Although smart city has been a global practice expected as a solution to metropolitan problems, it is still in dispute when being criticized to cause problems like destroying democracy and marginalizing groups. The focus of these discussions is the social consequences of global technology firms involved in public management through ICTs who are driven by profit, especially around the neoliberal ideology. The neoliberal ideology refers to the marketization of urban governance and privatization of decision making, which expands the market model into government and society (Park et al., 2012). This ideology is commonly acknowledged that weakens power of the government and citizens. More city functions are achieved with the participation of corporations. It also accompanies with a “compliant and accommodating citizenry” (Hollands, 2015, p.62).

However, all these critiques are based on a presupposition of a globally unified discourse of smart cities of different companies, which has not been tested rigorously yet. Scholars often choose statements from several companies from Europe and America as the global representative (Söderström et al., 2014). But the differences between the global south and global north are prominent when cases from China and South Korea are emphasized as the government-dominated urban regime (Hu, 2019). And there is little known about how different companies actually represent actors of companies, governments, citizens.

Considering the dominant western-centric studies and the lack of comparative research of smart cities (Kitchin, 2014), this research aims to fill the gaps and compare the smart city discourse and practices of two companies from the global north and south, that is, IBM and Alibaba, which represents the renowned giants and late-comers. And the core question is that whether there is a global genre of neoliberal ideology and how it is constructed by different companies through representations of governments and citizens. Two urban projects- Alibaba’s Hangzhou City Brain and IBM’s Intelligent Operations Center of Rio de Janeiro are compared.

I followed the most different system design (Landman, 2000) to find the most similar characteristics. To get a picture from the perspective of companies, news releases, promotional materials, and reports regarding the two cases on company websites by 2020 March was collected. The texts were analysed adopting Fairclough’s (1992) critical discourse analysis to examine the texts, the “text-in-interaction”, and constitutive effects of discourse.

The paper finds one data-driven neoliberal ideology of smart city discourse based on relations among three actors: Companies promote technical solutions and is most influential with higher knowledge status; Urban governments are wise and forward-thinking decision makers to adopt

public-private partnerships in smart city projects; Citizens are vulnerable and passive. Here, a data-based neoliberal citizenship emerges that on the one hand undermines citizens' rights and obligations and governing practices. On the other hand, citizens are impacted and even controlled by data, which deepens the dominance of governments and companies.

**Key Words**

smart city, neoliberal ideology, discourse analysis

# The Political Economy of Repair and Anti-Repair

## Authors

Prof. Steven Jackson - Cornell University

## Abstract

This talk explores the political economy and poetics of repair and anti-repair, charting the forms of breakdown, maintenance and repair that are increasingly central to the production and reproduction of media infrastructures around the world. Drawing on instances of amateur repair movements in Europe and North America, and livelihood repair operations in countries from Namibia and Uganda to Bangladesh, the talk explores the distinct forms of skill, value and imagination ('poetics') to be found in often-overlooked practices of maintenance and repair. It argues that such acts and moments are essential to global media practices and problems, including the vastly understudied and/or mischaracterized problems of sustainability, innovation, and expertise (who has it, where it lives, and whose gets valued). It then turns to the political economy of repair – the structural choices and conditions written into design, law, business strategy and economics by which repair (and life?) are hemmed in, constrained, enabled, and all too often reduced. Covering issues from proprietary networks to the (mis)application of intellectual property laws, lock-out design strategies to the construction of effective repair monopolies, the talk examines the chief structural barriers against more lively and sustainable repair worlds. It also addresses recent and ongoing actions against this position, from fair repair bills and circular economy initiatives to shifts in design and corporate strategy. It concludes with an argument for the urgency of thinking and doing poetics and political economy *together* – and how repair as site, practice, and way of seeing might help us towards new and more thoroughly materialized modes of political economy that can meet and respond to the expansive demands of life and liveliness – in our scholarship and in our worlds.

## Key Words

political economy, repair, anti-repair, maintenance, breakdown, global media, design, proprietary

# **Ecomedia and Ecoinformation for a Living World: Overcoming Long-term vs. Short-term Views**

## **Authors**

Prof. Divina Frau-Meigs - Université Sorbonne Nouvelle - Paris 3

## **Abstract**

The turn of the twenty-first century has fostered a new augmentation, as information has moved from analogical to digital, and as paper gives way to screens in relation to the accessibility and consumability of information in all its diversity. This augmentation corresponds to the cyberist era, a paradigm shift where information is a complex composite of news, data and documents. To navigate this shift, its opportunities and risks, new literacies are necessary that do not reproduce the models of the modernist paradigm and consider the challenges of the twenty-first century, especially the ecological transition and the digital transition.

This communication first examines the relation between cyberism and ecomedia literacy and its political and economic ramifications, particularly in view of modernist oppositions (right vs. left; rich vs. poor; institutionalist vs. populist, etc.) as they are challenged by cyberist ones (short term vs. long term; cruelty vs. care). It then meshes it with the need to build informational resilience, which implies revisiting Media and Information Literacy in the light of care theory and pedagogy of cruelty frameworks. It concludes by examining the new tensions formed by long-termism/short-termism and considering how these binaries need to be surpassed to ensure that MIL (including ecomedia literacy) contributes to democracy and ultimately sustainability.

## **Key Words**

political economy, cyberism, care, ecomedia literacy, ecoinformation literacy, long-termism, resilience

# **“Consumerist retrograders” -- Anti-consumption phenomenon in Chinese Online interest-related community**

## **Authors**

Ms. Zhao XinYu - Central China Normal University

Dr. Gege Fang - Tsinghua University

## **Abstract**

Among the group of youth being digital, consumerism gradually deepens from a behavioral practice to an idea cognition. Companies create a great consumer landscape covering ordinary people, internet celebrities and social media stars. Meanwhile, many young people are expressing “anti-consumption” views and practising “anti-consumption” behaviours in online communities. Cyber language such as “anti-haul” reflects this rebellious spirit. This paper draws on Baudrillard's symbolic consumption theory framework, to supplement and innovate its development in the new media era based on the anti-consumption phenomenon among Chinese youth in the Online interest-related community.

The networked field survey method is adopted in this paper, Douban being chosen as a research platform. Douban is one of the most important meeting points for the online interest-related community in China. By 2020, Douban had 5,156 groups and more than 200 million users according to NetEase Media. Chinese earliest anti-consumption online community emerged on Douban in 2011. There are 267 anti-consumption groups on the platform of Douban, covering more than 2.4 million members. It can be said that Douban is a typical window to observe the consumer culture of Chinese youth as the largest social media group gathering place with “anti-consumption” as the core idea in the Chinese Internet World. The two largest and influential groups were selected for this study, and 20 out of their 710,000 community members were selected for in-depth interviews. The interview lasted for 811 minutes and 148,000 words of textual data were obtained. After reading the interview data, the author combined existing theories for open coding and identified three types of consumption patterns as the theme cue: namely functional consumption, symbolic consumption, and cultural consumption.

It is found that the formation of new consumption patterns of Chinese youth has experienced three steps from “stimulation” to “dilemma” and to “turning”. Stimulated by a great number of commodities and the landscape of consumptions, the old models of consumption patterns oriented by functional value and symbolic value are emerging. With the increase and excess of consumption, young consumers find themselves in the dilemma of consumption. The concrete manifestations include: economic dilemma in reality, anxiety and exhaustion in spirit and reflection on consumption capital in cognition. Consequently, some young Chinese have formed a new pattern of consumption pattern in the online interest-related community. This pattern is oriented by cultural value, which is reflected in that young consumers pay more attention to the spiritual value and emotional feelings, they carefully consider the negative impact of consumption on

society. In practice, they reduce the amount of consumption quantity by the principle of “no consumption” and inhibitory consumption.

Study proves that the anti-consumption phenomenon in the Chinese online interest-related community is essentially the awakening of the subjectivity of youth. Young consumers have developed a new pattern of consumption, in which consumption is not an accessory of capitalist production but a domain of self initiative. This perspective is different from Baudrillard’s “producer sovereignty theory”, reflecting the current power game between the consumer and producer. Where the pleasure of consumption comes from and why it goes is a question worth pondering.

**Key Words**

anti-consumerism, online interest-related community, symbolic consumption, Baudrillard, subculture

# Cultural third places and commons in a world of transformations- evidence from France

## Authors

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## Abstract

Climate change, economic crisis, digital transformation, the revolution in our working practices, the needs of the learning society and a malaise within liberal democracies are challenging global economies, as well as communication research agendas. In this context, the commons, as a mode of collective action, solidarity and governance of shared resources have emerged as an alternative paradigm in a variety of sectors (Alix et al, 2018; Zimmerman, 2020) including the creative economy (Bertacchini et al, 2012; Comunian et al, 2022; Pélissier, 2021).

Third places (*tiers lieux* in French) is term used in the French context to describe places that put an emphasis on doing together (*faire ensemble*) for better living together (*vivre ensemble*) (Levy-Waitz, 2018) and provide opportunities to meet, to exchange, to co-create and to experiment. In response to the challenges posed by contemporary transitions, some of those *tiers lieux* with a strong cultural component- that we call cultural third places- inscribe their projects in a new form of pragmatic 'utopia' by embodying new forms of commons (Idelon, 2022; Desgouttes, 2021; Pélissier et al, 2023) aspiring to the construction of a new society in opposition to the one based on the increasing commodification of all forms of cultural expression.

In this presentation, we will focus on the preliminary results of a research project on cultural third places and commons partially funded by the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme Paris. Our methodology lies on a combination of fieldwork and documentary analysis of websites, communication material and other sources shared by the interviewees (statutes, work plans, project descriptions, etc). Our fieldwork includes site visits, observation of activities and interviews with representatives of cultural third places mainly located in the Sud Region in France (including Marseille, Avignon and Nice), but also others in Paris, Grenoble and Lyon. The fieldwork is currently underway and will be finalised with a focus group and public event gathering the representatives of the spaces we interviewed and inviting them to provide feedback on the preliminary research findings in a participatory manner. A public event to present the final results is foreseen in autumn 2023 in Paris.

Our aim is to explore in a more systematic way how these cultural third places mobilize the commons logic as an alternative organisation and narrative paradigm to respond to the challenges of the contemporary transitions. We do so by exploring how a narrative identity for cultural third places takes shape around the conceptual grid of the commons (Ostrom, 1990; Coriat, 2015) and how it translates into actions, activities and new forms of governance.

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## Key Words

commons, cultural third places, transitions, creative economy, narrative identity



# Re-manufacturing Consent and Returning Subjectivity: A Grounded Theory Analysis of Vloggers' Labor Process on Digital Platforms

## Authors

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Ms. Ziyi Zhu - School of Journalism and Communication, Tsinghua University

## Abstract

The wave of "platformization" has swept through modern society, and vlogger, one of the emerging employment groups in the platform economy, has received widespread attention. Burawoy(1982) once described the "game of making out" in the factory: the capitalists had manufactured consent by giving workers little decision-making power to ensure the exploitation. Nowadays, the developing digital technology reshaped the capitalization mode and seemed to give laborers sufficient freedom. But such "freedom" essentially was a more covert labor control, which obscured the real labor process and intensified the antagonism between labor and capital. However, unlike traditional digital laborers such as data labeling workers, vloggers were of high prestige and a high degree of freedom. So this creative profession was sought after by many young people voluntarily as an "aspirational" job(Neff, et al, 2005, Duffy, 2016). Looking back at the previous studies, most political economists focused on macro narratives but ignored the subjectivity of individual laborer and micro-politics in the production of daily meaning(Craig, et al, 2021).

Therefore, this study proposed the following questions from the individual level: How did vloggers understand their production? How did they interact with MCN(Multi-Channel Network), audiences, platforms, and other stakeholders? How did they exert their subjectivity and "productive power"?

We conducted a participant observation and a semi-structured in-depth interview with 12 vloggers. Based on first-hand experience, we adopted the grounded theory method to analyze the text material. After coding, 5 core categories, including "labor consent", "data intermediary", "content production", "relationship shaping" and "subjectivity presentation", as well as 12 main categories and 49 concepts emerged. According to the 5 core categories with their profound meaning, we refined the labor process of vloggers as well as drew a diagram of the interaction of multiple subjects during the process.

The first conclusion was that vloggers, as laborers, had received support and incentives from many stakeholders, but corresponding regulations also arose. In general, however, labor control in the traditional sense was weakened into negotiation and cooperation, which reflected the subjectivity of creative laborers. Secondly, while the vloggers were producing data, their daily production was also mediated by data, which highlighted the characteristics of the platform era. Finally, the labor process of vloggers was not a rigid assembly line, but flexible and autonomous cooperation. Vloggers and other stakeholders were not just in an economic or controlling relationship but had a

spontaneous emotional connection that provided vloggers with a constant stream of positive feedback, which in turn enabled them to form individual identities and group identification.

In conclusion, when vloggers had enough decision-making power, the "consent" produced by the "game of making out" would give way to the "consent" produced by the negotiation among multiple subjects. To a certain extent, labor control has been broken through in the context of such digital platforms. Based on the subject's consent, the vloggers' labor practice has been a manifestation of their productive power as well as an effective way to enrich their daily life experience and declare their subjectivity.

**Key Words**

vloggers, labor process, platform, subjectivity, Consent

# **Media ownership issues and concerns in India: the dynamics of a hostile takeover of a media group**

## **Authors**

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## **Abstract**

The corporatisation of the Indian media system is a long-standing concern spanning its growth and development. The overarching faith and correlation to democracy and its sustenance relegated the ownership dimension, and the concerns of shrinking the public sphere were flagged but not pursued (EPW, 1965). The nodal ministry of information and broadcasting within a sectoral mindset was content by the proliferation and expansion of the media, particularly broadcasting. The reduction in circulation/readership figures of the print media (Joseph, 2020), compounded by its sluggish survival strategies during the pandemic and the rise of other platforms, has queered the dynamics of the digital media ecosystem in India.

Quite often described as a more democratic country among the many decolonised nations, India is explicitly witnessing a challenge and interrogation of the avowed principles upon which media systems function. The PE context is reflected in the television news spaces where nearly 300 plus channels offer news on a 24x7 basis. Dominant political or business families in India own most of these channels.

While focusing on why and how the slide in the freedom index has occurred, many reports and analyses have explicitly looked at ownership and the polity's nexus with it (Bhawan, n.d.; Mendel et al., 2017; TRAI, 2014). The obligation of the state to prevent media concentration and thereby promote media plurality is one of the facets of the "said positive obligation only". (TRAI, 2022)

A more recent case that caused disruption is what critics have described as a hostile takeover of a media channel, the New Delhi Television Ltd (NDTV), that, although not among the top in the rating race, was regarded as a value-based news channel. This takeover by one of the wealthiest corporates, Adani enterprises (now under a cloud), with interests across diverse economic sectors, has been the subject of intense debates in India (Livemint, 2022). It has raised more significant issues that bring to the fore the intersection of commercial and infrastructure interests in mining and telecom (Reporters without borders, 2022). The regulatory framework within which the dialectics of freedom of expression and the patterns of Indian media ownership operate will be analysed. It may be mentioned that at least two of the super-rich corporates own significant chunks of the media spaces across all platforms. The rise of meta as the top media company in India adds another dimension to the erstwhile debates and concerns about international PE. Media ownership patterns in India and their impact on macro journalistic practices, including the more recent case of a hostile takeover of a reputed media channel, will form the basis of the paper to discuss its implications or the limitations of media discourses on more fundamental issues and

concerns in what is regarded as the largest democracy in the world. The naive discourses on media and its ability to strengthen democracy will be weighed against many other macro realities of the innate reluctance of the media to do so due to the prevalent patterns of ownership structures.

**Key Words**

Media ownership, India, Hostile takeover, corporatisation, regulation

# **“Who are you working for?”: Thinking on audience value production under Platform capitalism**

## **Authors**

Ms. Han Yu - Tsinghua University

Ms. Runxuan Tuo - Tsinghua University

## **Abstract**

A nebulous series of entities called ‘platforms’ are increasingly shaping our world (Srnicsek, 2017). Social platforms have become the new field for information acquisition and social communication; Streaming platforms meet the needs of audiences for fragmented leisure; local life software extend the virtual economy to the real world through ride-hailing drivers and takeaway riders; social media influencers, live broadcasts, and e-commerce all perform daily life in the virtual space. Under the influence of expansionary market logic, the Internet is driving a shift in political economy towards digital capitalism (Dan Schiller, 2001). Furthermore, platforms and technology enterprises relying on digital communication technology and massive data are bringing together advertisers, enterprises and the public as never before, profoundly changing existing social relations and labor behavior, and giving birth to a new model of value grabbing - platform capitalism (Srnicsek, 2018). Under the joint action of technology and capital, the intentional or unintentional communication and interaction behavior of platform users motivated by knowledge acquisition and leisure and entertainment is involved in the value production of platform capitalism as a kind of "hidden" labor.

The role of communication in social reproduction, and the study of labor in the field of communication, can be traced back to Dallas W. Smythe. In 1977, he published the paper "Communications: Blindspot of Western Marxism", which first systematically explained the "Audience commodity theory" and thus began the "Blindspot Debate". From traditional media to social media, and now to platform media in a broad sense, changes in the communication environment have promoted cross-era discussions on "audience view". The traditional audience commodity theory is based on the mass communication model of the 70s, but in today's digital economy model where platforms serve as infrastructure, what role do audiences and their communication play? How does the platform's employment mechanism and audience work as "digital labor"?

Drawing on semi-structured interviews with 27 platform users, this study revisits Dallas Smyth's "Audience Commodity" and "Blind Spot Controversy", and reveals the labor forms of platform non-employment audiences and the exploitation mechanism of platform capitalism from the perspective of the political economy of communication

The study draws conclusions as follows. First, the dissemination and consumption of information by platform audiences is the labor process of producing value. In the consciousness industry oriented by gamification and commercialization, audiences satisfy the traditional motivations of

leisure, entertainment, learning, communication, and life, but in the entrapment of platform capital, they have to fall into active content production, unconscious data output, and passive advertising viewing. Furthermore, the audience is not only the commodity of the platform, but also plays the role of platform advertising consumer, information producer, product marketer, and platform operator. Finally, the essence of platform capitalism is monopoly capitalism, and the privatization and commercialization of audience data and social relations, the construction of a closed platform ecosystem, the expansion of family space, and the promotion of social acceleration are the internal operating mechanisms of platform exploitation.

**Key Words**

Platform capitalism; Audience commodity theory; Digital labor

## **Material Matters**

### **Authors**

Prof. Graham Murdock - Loughborough University

### **Abstract**

Contemporary media systems consume formidable amount of energy in their production and use and their operations depend on complex networks of communication infrastructures (both wired and wireless) and proliferating arrays of machines and devices. These essential material supports depend in turn on extended complexes of resource extraction, manufacture, transportation, marketing, maintenance, and disposal. The current organisation of these material bases of communication has major consequences for the climate and environmental crises but discussion of their impacts is largely missing from *The Climate Book* 's otherwise comprehensive and authoritative overview. Debates around 'greening' the media are now well established within communication studies, with members of IAMCR playing a central role, but recent developments invest them with a new urgency. In this presentation I want to pursue two issues. Firstly, that technologies promoted as 'green' are not necessarily problem free and entail choices and trade offs that need to be worked through. Secondly, since the material bases of communications as currently organised depend on the double exploitation-of resources and labour – proposals for change must address the role of media in advancing both climate justice and social justice.

### **Key Words**

Greta Thunberg, Climate Book, greening media

# Platform-based Cultural Production: Personality, Script, and Myths in China's Grassroots E-commerce Live-streaming

## Authors

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## Abstract

With the rapid development of information technology, the information production practice in cyberspace has repeatedly painted the picture of society and itself, among which commercial and economic forces have been playing the most active and the least active leading role. E-commerce live-streaming has entered the public vision through online, updated the life and consumption patterns of platform economic participants, promoted the development of the real economy offline, and spawned the main group living in rural areas. As a new form of economic platform and village, e-commerce live-streaming gradually guides the development of the whole market, through which merchants display the items and demonstrate the usage to attract consumers. Though, as a new form of practitioners and producers created by anchors, little is known about the narrative and techniques adopted by grassroots live streamers.

The research questions are divided into the following three parts. First, how do the host understand the audience, determine the target audience, attract eyeballs in the livestreaming (performance), acquire the audience, and convert the audience into consumer goods and what is the labor process during live streaming? Second, what is the labor relationship between the live streamers with the platform behind the streaming (behavior)? Third, as anchors, why do they participate in such activities? Based on what self-perception? What kind of tasks and requirements do they have to fulfill, and what kind of life do they have in general, driven by this motivation?

Through text analysis of live-streaming performance, participant observation, and in-depth interviews with 12 grassroots live streamers, this paper investigates how Chinese live-streamers expand their audience and affect the audience's purchase decisions. They represent themselves as knowledgeable "recommenders" and create coherent narratives to build rapport with the audience. From the perspective of the political economy, this paper further analyzes the affordance of China's e-commerce live-streaming, an emerging technology, and the intrinsic motivation of hosts living on the technology affordance and platform. With the interwoven identity of e-commerce sellers and landlords, grassroots live streamers are busy and anxious, living outside the performance and in the work. Inspired by "Internet mythology", they are not only producers of the platform economy, but also consumers who are also subject to "network myths". In their vividly individual practice, they feed back the information society on which they live, and write a "grassroots entrepreneurship" story in the real world they survive.

## Key Words

Live-streaming, Aspirational Labor, Political Economy, Digital Cultural Production, China



# A Climate of Democratisation: Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Climate Communication

## Authors

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## Abstract

Communication has an enormous role to play in dealing with climate change, but as Corbett (2021) recently suggests, communication has struggled to deal with “polarization and climate silence,” thus resulting in “individual, social, political, and biospheric consequences” (p. 16). In *The Climate Book*, Greta Thunberg (2023) conceives the book as “democratic”, bringing together a variety of people concerned about climate change – scientists, activists, authors and others – to contribute to a book on a complex and interconnected issue, that requires multifaceted perspectives and approaches. Much like the climate scientists whose work is featured in *The Climate Book*, Indigenous and other climate activists also make an important appearance. In many parts of the so-called Global South, rising temperatures, erratic weather, changes in agricultural patterns, and other concerns increasingly form the lived reality for many Indigenous and other communities; here climate communication is instead bound by other restrictions, such as a shrinking interest and increased challenges in environmental reporting (Mishra, 2020).

Indigenous communities across many parts of the world have a deep connection with their natural environments – and Indigenous Ecological Knowledge (Traditional Ecological Knowledge) has long been recognised as critical to dealing with climate change (Raygorodetsky, 2011). Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) is a rich storehouse of non-conventional generational knowledge, and in the last twenty years since its growing acceptance, TEK is still not fully seen as harmonious with Scientific Ecological Knowledge (SEK), with the latter still dominating ecological discourses. Indigenous communities have a rich ecological knowledge, and can identify a wide range of animal and plant species including those that serve as critical medicines, Indigenous knowledge also helped in predicting weather patterns, and in recent years Indigenous communities have reported changing weather patterns and rampant biodiversity loss due to climate and environmental change (Mishra, 2018; Mishra, 2023). For many Indigenous communities in India, this Traditional Ecological Knowledge has been critical in climate change adaptation and mitigation. Traditional Knowledge Systems are varied, rich, and often anchored to place, and attempts to write down this knowledge leads to a change in its properties (Ellen and Harris, 2000), yet a lack of formal ways of dealing with traditional knowledge has led to evolving relationships with the land and resource bases (Gadgil and Berkes, 1991).

This paper reflects on the complex nature of Traditional and Indigenous Ecological Knowledge (TEK/IEK), based on ethnographic insights from Indigenous and other communities in India. While TEK needs more presence in conventional climate discourses, and may very well further the

process of democratising climate knowledge, communicating TEK related to climate change also presents numerous challenges, particularly where some TEK holders are faced with changing relationships to their natural environments, as well as other social, cultural and political challenges.

**Key Words**

Greta Thunberg, climate crisis, traditional ecological knowledge

# **Data Society, Digital Labor and the Data Analytics Industry in Hong Kong**

## **Authors**

Prof. Peichi Chung - The Chinese University of Hong Kong

## **Abstract**

This paper examines the changing conditions of labor in the emerging new media field of data analytic. The paper looks into the human-machine relationship that formulates new set of data-driven working environments in global video game industry. This paper focuses on the idea of “player-led innovation” that was previously discussed in the publications about Korean esports. It extends from the emphasis of player-led innovation in Korean esports to the new working condition for gamers in the data analytic industry of Hong Kong. The purpose is to investigate changes that characterize today’s digital labor conditions in the field of automated media. The paper will look into Hong Kong’s data analytic business to make a case of “system power” in contributing to value generation in global video game market. It will analyse the role of computer system in defining labor productivity in time of artificial intelligence and machine learning. The paper will also examine digital skills and production knowledge that independent studios in Hong Kong develop in the area of data analytics. This paper examines how independent game studios reshape their relationship with major global game corporations in the digital economy of big data.

The paper follows two lines of literature to conceptualize computer-assisted labor conditions in video game. The first line of literature includes works on digital labor proposed by Scholz (2013), Fuchs (2013) and Brynjolfsson & McAfee (2014). The second line concerns about topics of automated media and data society elaborated by Andrejevic (2019), Chun (2021) and Loukissas (2022). The paper begins with an introduction on the increasing use of big data and data analytics services to generate information about the global esports ecosystem. It proceeds next to discuss the computational transformation of play and work as labor conditions change from physical space to virtual space. The primary method of the paper focuses on face-to-face interviews and textual analysis of video games and game services offered by Hong Kong independent game studios. Case study analysis includes (1) an overview of independent game studios distribution, (2) selected local video games, and (3) major data analytics companies in Hong Kong. The paper concludes with the mapping of new industry network that connect local video game studios and the global video game corporations in the global video game economy.

## **Key Words**

Data, Esports, Hong Kong

# The media industry's mobilization in the Swedish North – a case of transformative “green” power or unjust reproduction of an exploited periphery?

## Authors

Prof. Annika Egan Sjölander - Umeå University

Ms. Mikaela Wikstrom - Umeå University

Dr. Moa Eriksson Krutrok - Umeå University

## Abstract

“Sometimes I wonder if I am crazy” is the intriguing headline of a newly published portrait of a prizewinning climate journalist, Alexandra Urisman Otto, who has followed Greta Thunberg around the world (*Journalisten*, Feb 1, 2023). Urisman Otto has also contributed to Thunberg's latest publication *The Climate Book* (2022). This volume articulates not only critique of, but also the responsibility of journalists and media houses to respond better to the climate crisis. The headline is a quote from the reporter when she describes a profound despair when reviewing contemporary journalism. And this happens not only when reading the own newspaper, the national broadsheet *Dagens Nyheter*, but also when looking at other media. The problem is that one cannot really detect in this cover that we are in the middle of a severe climate crisis and that the handling of it will impact *all* future life on the planet. The dominant logic of ‘business-as-usual’ in media and other sectors of society is not adequate and has to be replaced. The strong need of “greening” the media (Maxwell & Miller, 2012), is equally relevant when it comes to research and the study of media and communication I would argue.

The crisis forms a rationale for studying how (inter)national and regional/local media mobilize resources and invest in the north of Sweden at the moment, alongside bigger than ever “green” investments in traditional tech industries like mining, energy and steel production. All motivated and seen as great solutions to the problem of climate change. The ambition is e.g. to build battery factories for cars, produce fossil-free steel and extract rare earth metals, which in turn requires vast amounts of electricity planned to be produced from renewable resources such as wind and water. But much more people (houses, schools etcetera) are also needed in this Arctic region in order for this so-called green revolution to happen. And the population growth is estimated to have to be as high as 25 percent in about 10 to 15 years, which requires migration within and outside of Sweden. The speed and the scale of this societal transformation is unprecedented, even if the idea of Norrland being “The Land of the Future” is over 100 years old (Sörlin, 1988). The impact on indigenous Sámi communities and reindeer herding is also a major hurdle.

The purpose of this paper is; 1, to map out how the media industry in itself, at (inter)national and local/regional level and in commercial as well as public service media, mobilize resources and invest in this Arctic region and examine how this relates to the climate crisis and 2, analyse the news

media discourse that is (re)produced in the journalistic coverage and op-eds that deals with these societal transformations. The overall ambition is further to reason about what democratic role news media at different levels can play and to analyse to what extent the media industry in itself can be seen as a transformative power in the needed transition to a more sustainable world.

**Key Words**

Greta Thunberg, climate change, media industries, journalism

# The Weaving Power of Media: Elites and Primary Definers in Post-Uprising Chile

## Authors

Mr. Marcos Ortiz - Goldsmiths University of London

## Abstract

In 2019, Chile experienced a social uprising that challenged the prevalent neoliberal system. Despite the series of movements that had pushed for changes in education and pensions in previous years, the Chilean Spring took the government and the media by surprise. This paper argues that in order to analyse the response of the traditional print media after the uprising in all its complexity, it is not enough to focus solely on the practices, customs and decision-making mechanisms within the media alone. On the contrary, it is necessary to delve into the examination of the circles of political, economic and social power in which these media operate. In other words, it is essential to address the issue of the elites, “the main sources, main targets and some of the most influenced recipients of news” (Davis, 2003). Understanding the ways in which the elites behave and interact with other sectors of society is key to delineate the traditional media’s entanglements with hegemonic actors such as political parties, corporations, think tanks and universities.

Drawing on Bourdieu’s field theory of journalism (1993) as well as Hall’s notion of ‘primary definers’ (1978), this paper is a theoretical exploration that argues that elite theory can lead the way to understanding the media as boundary organisations with porous borders that eagerly mediate the relationships among more established fields (Medvetz, 2012). It is in this murky liminal space where the true weaving power of the media resides. Similar to a patchwork in which each piece of fabric represents a different powerful actor, the media as a catalyst of power helps give cohesion, strength and order to these otherwise loose pieces of unconnected material.

How does the opacity in the transmission of and interrelations between certain types of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) contribute to the selection of primary definers? What role does the media play in sustaining the hegemonic ideology of neoliberalism and, therefore, the dominance of the elites across the power spectrum? The highly concentrated nature of the Chilean media sands out as a relevant case study to answer these queries. The role played by *El Mercurio* and *La Tercera* – Chile’s most influential legacy newspapers – providing generous platforms where elite sources are able to command the country’s political narrative is therefore one of this paper’s main points of attention.

The scrutiny of power and elite mapping are key steps in order to examine the reasons behind a series of media decisions and behaviours. While it is portrayed as a consequence of merit and hard work, the selection of authoritative news sources is another way of inheriting cultural capital and, therefore, maintaining control of hegemonic discourses. This phenomenon, which takes place in a more nuanced manner – rather than through elaborated conspiracies – is of paramount

importance in moments of social change or crisis and may also explain the reasons why the elite media struggle to foresee social uprisings as massive as the one that took place in Chile.

**Key Words**

Media power, elites, Chile, political economy, critical theory

# The political economy of disinformation in Taiwan

## Authors

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Prof. Chang-de Liu - College of Communication, National Chengchi University

## Abstract

Disinformation has become a universal phenomenon and big threat to social cohesion and democracy. Taiwan is no exception from the global trend. According to a 2019 international report by V-Dem, a research institute of Sweden's University of Gothenburg, Taiwan is subjected to more foreign disinformation than any other place in the world. To protect its democracy and social order, Taiwan has developed a multi-dimensional approach to counter disinformation.

This article aims to examine Taiwan's experience in countering disinformation, putting it in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. This study proposes the following questions: What power structure and factors contributed to the prevalence of disinformation in Taiwan? What efforts have been taken to decrease the harm disinformation caused to the society? To answer these questions, this study applies documentary method to gather data of disinformation and government policy. Furthermore, some cases of disinformation and fact-checking outcomes are well examined. Finally, this study interviews key stakeholders in the information ecology to get insights on disinformation distribution and social responses.

This article examines disinformation and its remedy in Taiwan from a political economic perspective. By applying the key entrances proposing by the political economic approach, this article places disinformation distribution in the interactive framework of the state, media industry and civil society and dig into the discourses and actions taken by different agents who have influences on the operation and moderation of disinformation.

The study finds that, in Taiwan's context, the disinformation ecosystem involves various actors and their behaviors. They include political and commercial forces entities who that seek to abuse their power to influence public opinions, professional cyber armies and industries that manipulate information to gain interests, online and social media platforms that provide a means to spread disinformation, commercial media that produce unverified news, and undiscerning audiences and users that accept information as offered.

The mechanism to counter disinformation requires cross-sector partnership among the government, the media and technology industries and the civil society. The multi-dimensional approach includes the followings: 1. law enforcement and information transparency by the government; 2. self-regulation and social accountability of the media and technology industries; 3. Fact-checking mechanism and media literacy education by the civil society organizations.

Taiwan's effort has earned global attention. For example, an EU report in 2021 introduces Taiwan's case and reviews its law enforcement a careful step in balancing social cohesion, information



decency and speech freedom. To counter disinformation, the abovementioned stakeholders take their roles and collaborate with each other. In addition, this study suggests that rebuilding people's trust, enhance information literacy and construct a healthy information ecology are required for society to fight against disinformation and consolidate itself.

In a word, this study examines Taiwan's case in its efforts in countering disinformation, building trust and protect democracy and social stability. Therefore, it is relevant to the main theme including "humanity, democracy and communication" of IAMCR 2023. It also fits the theme of the political economy section by examining the power structure and resistance of citizen efforts in building common good.

**Key Words**

Covid-19 pandemic, cross-sector cooperation, democracy, disinformation, political economy, Taiwan

# **Zhibo gonghui: China's live-streaming Economy's Proactive Agent**

## **Authors**

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Mr. Wenhao Zhou - Shaanxi Normal University

## **Abstract**

Currently, there are thousands of Chinese 'live-streaming guilds' (zhibo gonghui) - an organization that cultivates and trains live-streamers, playing a major role in the live-streaming industry. This illustrates the characteristics of the economic model of China's live-streaming platforms. Based on in-depth interviews with seven managers of four live-streaming guilds and analysis of field observations of live-streaming platforms over the past two years, the study concludes that China's live-streaming platforms have an existing economic model that is characterized by "intermediation" with its own specialties. The live-streaming guilds are the "agency" of the live-streaming platforms, but with invisible power to impact live-streaming platforms and evade rules ordered by live-streaming platforms for their benefit. In a limited organization, managing live streamers effectively in a reasonable manner and converting profits is difficult because the virtual marketplace built by the live-streaming platform is boundless. A live-streaming guild becomes an important 'agent' since it not only trains a lot of high-level live-streamers but also assumes the economic risk for the live-streaming guilds. The more interesting aspect is that the guilds, in order to gain greater exposure for the live streams they manage, use various irregularities to gain access to the live streaming platform and to circumvent the technical-algorithmic management of the live streaming platform to capture more revenue. One of the live-streaming guild's managers interviewed even told us that in order to get more profit from the live-streaming platform they cooperate, they would maintain a good relationship with other live platforms, allowing the live platform to form internal competition and thus a more reasonable distribution of benefits for them. In the traditional platform economy, the platform is often the rule maker and market manager, however, the emergence of the live-streaming guild as the agent has made the economic model of the live-streaming industry more unpredictable and complicated.

## **Key Words**

Live-streaming, Platform economy, Live-streaming platform

# **Our home is ruined : A Study of the Migration of Online Community Members**

## **Authors**

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Ms. Xiangjun Yu - Renmin University of China

Ms. Qianxue Yi - Renmin University of China

Ms. Wujing Geng - Renmin University of China

## **Abstract**

Douban is a Chinese social media platform dedicated to discussing books, movies, and pop culture. The platform has hundreds of thousands of different interest groups, similar to online communities known as "subreddits" on Reddit. In 2022, to block the negative influence generated by fans, the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) worked with social media platforms to shut down a large number of fan communities. As a result, Douban deactivated the functions of some interest groups such as retweeting and replying and disbanded 62 interest groups.

Previous research has discussed how users adopted multiple strategies to resist censorship on social media, such as expressing subversive ideas, using circumvention tools, and self-censoring publishing content. This study takes a community-level view and examines how online community members bypass government censorship through migration. We conducted 17 interviews with members of the banned community on the Douban. Participants included moderators, content creators, and lurkers. This study attempts to answer the following three questions: What does the closure of these online communities mean for their members? Why some members were willing to migrate and some refused to join? What role did technology play in the relocation of online communities? The interview explored three aspects based on the research framework: (1) The interest groups the respondents joined and their daily use, (2) their attitudes toward the ban of online community and online censorship (3) how digital technologies mediated their experiences of online migration. All interviews were transcribed, and we used thematic analysis to analyze the text.

I reviewed the literature on online communities, social media censorship, and collective action. Based on established research, our analysis generated three findings. First, while a large body of established research discusses whether online communities are communities in the traditional sense, this study argues that online communities are more like what Ray Oldenburg (1989) calls the third place. This finding is similar to the view of Charles Soukup (2006), who refers to Computer-mediated communication as a virtual third place. The ban on those interest groups makes the younger generation directly experience the invasion of political power into private life, depriving individuals of a buffer zone outside of real life, and exposing them to the destruction of daily life order, creating a sense of emptiness and loss of control. Second, Digital technology both

facilitates and hinders the online migration of users. On the one hand, supported by digital technology, censorship makes the address, content, and members of a community invisible, and the weak ties between group members are cut off. On the other hand, with the help of technology, digital spaces can be replicated or reconstructed instantly, and community members can connect and verify each other during the migration process. Third, through collective action, group members move out of their own corner of the Internet. Group members shifted from a focus on common interests to a focus on people and people-community connections<sup>6</sup>

**Key Words**

censorship, online communities, the third place, migrate

# **Cines latinoamericanos on demand: distribución fílmica y diversidad en catálogos VOD en España**

## **Authors**

Prof. Marylin Luis Grillo - Universidad Carlos III de Madrid

## **Abstract**

La cinematografía producida en América Latina tiene en los servicios de video bajo demanda (VOD) una ventana de comercialización y exhibición cada vez más frecuente y necesaria para recuperar inversiones, obtener ganancias y seguir produciendo en contextos nacionales marcados por la poca cuota de pantalla en las salas de cine de sus mercados domésticos. La distribución internacional deviene, entonces, en un eslabón todavía más importante dentro de la cadena de valor; y España constituye uno de los principales mercados externos para estos países.

Considerando que no se trata de un cine latinoamericano, sino de la producción cinematográfica de los 20 países que componen Latinoamérica, la investigación se centra en la oferta fílmica producida por al menos una de estas naciones y disponible en España por los operadores transnacionales de servicios bajo demanda por suscripción Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, HBO Max, Disney + y Apple TV +. Específicamente, trabajamos con aquellas películas que sean presentadas con el sello de Original o Exclusive, una categoría polémica que constituye una estrategia de promoción dentro de los propios catálogos, e implica diversos grados de inversión por parte del operador en el proceso de producción.

El objetivo principal es determinar la diversidad de contenido latinoamericano en dichos catálogos, para así arribar a primeras conclusiones sobre el impacto de los servicios de VOD en la distribución internacional de las cinematografías producidas en América Latina. Asimismo, como detallamos en la categoría de Originales y Exclusivos, podremos ahondar en el impacto de estos operadores transnacionales, todos ellos con sede en Estados Unidos, en la producción de cine en la región latinoamericana.

La metodología empleada resulta novedosa y desafiante, en tanto toda aquella investigación que aborde los catálogos de VOD tiene el reto de la poca transparencia de los algoritmos de estas empresas. En tal sentido, creamos una herramienta ad hoc para poder determinar los filmes y analizarlos, al tiempo que nos apoyamos en bases de datos, la observación directa de los catálogos y la revisión bibliográfica documental.

El análisis de la oferta nos permite comprobar que solo Netflix posee un número significativo de Originales en el total de obras producidas por al menos un país de América Latina que están disponibles en su catálogo de España. En todos los operadores, son en su mayoría producciones mexicanas, brasileñas y argentinas. Suele evidenciarse una intención de producir y promocionar comedias como género predominante, a la vez que destacan en menor medida pero con mayor prominencia filmes de renombrados directores y/o protagonistas, galardonados en muchas

ocasiones en festivales de cine y premios internacionales. No obstante, resalta la poca diversidad lingüística y la pobre representación de diversas identidades de la región.

**Key Words**

Audiovisual diversity, Latinamerican cinema, international film distribution, transnational VOD, platform

# **Metabolic Marxism**

## **Authors**

Prof. Thomas Nail - University of Denver

## **Abstract**

In this presentation I show that Karl Marx was one of the first and most innovative historical adopters of the concept of metabolism. In the 19th century, most chemists and biologists thought of metabolism in a strictly organic sense referring to individual living creatures. However, I show here that the first thinker to explicitly expand the concept of metabolism to non-living, ecological, and social processes was the German philosopher, Karl Marx. This chapter shows how he did this, why he did it, and the importance of this conceptual decision today.

Although historically under-appreciated by most Marxists, the significance of the idea of metabolism in Marx's work is now well-established in eco-Marxism. In my presentation I will highlight what I think is most important about the idea of metabolism for thinking about living and non-living communicative systems today.

## **Key Words**

political economy, communication, metabolism, social, ecological, media, systems, motion, natural

# A Political Economy of Imagination

## Authors

Prof. Janet Wasko - University of Oregon

Prof. Jeremy Swartz - University of Oregon

## Abstract

This presentation explores how political economies of communication, media and environment are increasingly playing out in relationship to imagination and ecology. It builds on previous scholarship on the *sociological imagination* and the ways in which social realities are constructed for individuals and publics within historical, moral, social, and praxis-based environments/media.

This work builds on an integrative approach to the study of communication and nature, with special focus on the ways that large corporations are increasingly fusing the rhetorics of sustaining and thriving into their planning, research, development, and implementations. Perhaps, this is best exemplified with the Walt Disney Company's appropriation and trademarking of the scholarly concept of "environmentality" (ironically, the term that was originally an offshoot of Michel Foucault's analysis of governmentality).

Although there are many examples, we will focus on the ways that the Parks, Experiences and Products division's EPCOT (Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow) complex, highlights the emergence of an *ecological imagination*. This is where environmental issues and aesthetics are commodified and distributed within the logics of social responsibility and planning for the future.

We will conclude with thoughts regarding what constitutes accountability for an ecological imagination in a world of greening theme parks and other venues of mass consumption. Finally, we will briefly discuss paradoxes of being 'friendlier to the planet' that come with environmental transformations already at play in large-scale land development projects.

## Key Words

ecological, imagination, political economy, research and development, accountability, nature, paradoxes



# “Hard Work is Our Unifier”: CrossFit, DEI, and the Ethos of Personal Responsibility

## Authors

Ms. Hadil Abuhmaid - University of Oregon

Dr. Christopher Chavez - University of Oregon

## Abstract

In June 2020, CrossFit founder and CEO, Greg Glassman made a series of public statements in response to the death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police officers. In social media posts and calls with affiliates, Glassman appeared to argue that Floyd’s death was not racially motivated and that the Black Lives Matter movement was a public nuisance.

The public response to Glassman’s statements was swift. Glassman stated an apology and resigned later that month. By then, however, significant damage had already been done to the CrossFit brand. Several athletes affiliated with CrossFit ended their relationship with the brand. The most significant of these was Reebok, who ended their ten-year exclusive deal as title sponsor of the CrossFit Games.

In their effort to control the damage, CrossFit management began to institute a set of efforts around diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Led by their new CEO, Eric Roza, the company re-wrote its foundational principles, hosted a series of town hall meetings, formed a DEI council, and invested in scholarships to support underserved communities. In his press statements, Roza wanted to counter the notion that CrossFit culture was antithetical to inclusivity. Instead, he asserted that, at its core, the values of the brand are inherently inclusive. “We are a resilient global community committed to changing lives through CrossFit,” Roza stated. “Hard work is our unifier.”

CrossFit represents a unique point of analysis. First, CrossFit is a lucrative global brand worth four billion dollars. Second, CrossFit has historically taken on a color-blind approach, in which the community itself supersedes national, ethnic, and linguistic differences. Third, the ethos that inspires CrossFit is one found in law enforcement and the military. The workouts themselves are modeled on military boot camps and are frequently named after first responders and military personnel who have died in service. As a result, the CrossFit brand has generated a loyal customer base amongst members of the military and the police. The strategic goal, therefore, was to signal a change in a way that would not isolate its core audience.

Using the CrossFit brand as a case study, we examine the ways in which discourses around inclusivity are informed by capitalist and racial ideologies. We ground our analysis in a critical political economy approach, which calls for attention to the interplay between symbolic and economic dimensions of the production of meaning. This means looking at CrossFit as both a symbolic and economic product. Research in this area must attend to the ways various organizations are funded, organized, and regulated. Moreover, there is a need to understand how

racial ideologies are embedded within media organizations. We conduct a critical discourse analysis of CrossFit's public-facing documents around DEI. Here, we are interested in how CrossFit's efforts are shaped by marketplace logic, and the degree to which the brand's DEI efforts are transformative, making the brand more inclusive, or conservative by maintaining the status quo.

**Key Words**

CrossFit, DEI, political economy, critical discourse analysis

# Back to the Field: Slow Reality Television and the Reimaging of Chinese Rurality

## Authors

Dr. Shuo Liu - Middlesex University

## Abstract

Drawing on a detailed case study of *Back to the Field*, one of the most successful Chinese popular television programs of recent years, this paper aims to illuminate the forces shaping program production under the double impact of the industry's changing economic organisation and the Communist Party's shifting political priorities mediated through the regulatory system.

China's transition to an increasingly commercialised and competitive television environment has fuelled a search for program forms capable of maximising audiences and advertising income. Reality television, borrowed or adapted from formats that originated in Europe and North America and later Korea offered ready-made options and established the genre as a central component in program planning.

Centred on a guest house and smallholding in the countryside, *Back to the Field* broke with reality programming's established emphasis on fast action and competition to pioneer an alternative 'slow' format depicting friends working, eating and talking together. The pressures and spaces that shaped this innovative intervention are explored through in-depth interviews with the production team and observations in the villages chosen for location shooting and analysed using a conceptual framework based on Pierre Bourdieu's model of fields of cultural production and the differential stocks of economic, social-cultural capitals participants command and deploy in devising strategies of action. The dynamics shaping the field of program production are placed in turn within the wider set of pressures and opportunities generated firstly, by general structural changes within the television industry, secondly by the political revaluation of the countryside encapsulated in the Rural Revitalisation policies whose launch coincided with the program's development, and thirdly by the cultural resources provided by changing popular representations of the countryside and the city.

The program privileges a romanticised vision of the rurality based around family farming and newly opened opportunities for individual enterprise while rendering invisible the increasing concentration of power in the hands of large agricultural holdings and corporations and the persistence of rural poverty. The representation of ethnic minority areas reinforces the official representation of China as 'united in difference' while suppressing ethnic tensions. Its presentation of 'timeless' landscapes and ways of life reasserts the continuity and distinctiveness of Chinese civilisation. The operation of ideology is examined through focus groups and interviews drawing on Raymond Williams' notion of 'structures of feeling' to explore the relations between public rhetorics and representations and the memories, and aspirations anchored in personal biographies shaped by contrasting generational experiences and experience of the city and the countryside.

## Key Words

Television Production and Ideology, *Back to the Field*

# The Political Economy of Internationally Funded Media in Afghanistan

## Authors

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## Abstract

In the past two decades, the speedy development of media in Afghanistan was an example of media progress in the underdeveloped world, which has gotten excellent attention worldwide. With the collapse of the government in August 2021, Afghanistan lost economic funding from the international community; in its annual report, the Journalist Union of Afghanistan has announced that a considerable amount of the country's media outlets are closed, and the rest face significant risks and challenges. Many media organizations stopped working, bringing Afghan media to a new debate.

To critically understand these significant changes in Afghanistan media, this study uses a political economy of media/communication as a theory and method, with institutional analysis, and focuses on how the complexity of internal institutions in Afghanistan affects media practice. Moreover, how international funding as one of the leading institutions in Afghanistan's political arena (Shahrani, 2012) and media freedom/freedom of speech as media institutions guide the media content, practice, and the incredible development of media within the Afghan context. In the long history of Afghanistan from 19 century, the dominant political dynamics in Afghanistan have been shaped by key institutions, which are: Kingship (Monarchic), Kinship (familism/tribalism), and Pashtuns Pashtunwali (the Pashtun code of male honor), Islam/religion and lastly the political economy of government dependency on foreign funding" (Shahrani, 2012).

This paper used a qualitative research method based on the critical political economy of communication, with a document analysis of international funding to the media sector by a case study of four leading media organizations as a sample. Besides, the researcher interviewed editors and journalists of specific media groups, which include state-owned media (RTA) and privately owned influential media organizations (TOLO TV, Pajhwok news agency, and Kabul News TV).

Concluded a combination of Political economy and institutional analysis, the researcher asked if the actual narration of Afghan media development and practice was for developing a better future for Afghan society. Assuming the Afghan media is fast rising, one would expect Afghan media practitioners to have substantial progress in ensuring the media industry's future and building responsible media institutions. However, the results of this study point toward the U.S. dominance and lack of media institutions, finally leading to the old tradition of inequalities in access to free media and media imperialism.

This study is a work in progress.

## Key Words

**Keywords:** Afghanistan media, Political economy, institutional analysis, and imperialism

# Market Competition and the Commodification of Privacy

## Authors

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## Abstract

As digital media technologies developed over the past couple of decades, so have concerns about privacy. While there have been numerous legislative interventions to protect privacy from incursions by companies constantly seeking user data, there have been a few attempts to leverage market competition in pursuit of privacy. Such attempts have centered around mobile devices designed with privacy in mind. This paper offers a typology of product-based privacy interventions and argues that the capitalist logic underlying the surveillance ecosystem has come full circle to offer pathways for privacy protection through the commodification of privacy. Early perspectives on the commodification of privacy focus on the exchange of user privacy for participation (Campbell & Carlson, 2002). In this article, we treat the commodification of privacy as a transformation from a social or legal norm to a product of economic value, obtainable with purchasing power. In advancing this perspective, we focus on recent privacy-product interventions in the mobile phone space in two categories: limited connectivity devices—such as Lightphone, Mudita Pure and Punkt MP02—that generally exclude apps capable of surveillance and connected devices—such as iPhone, Librem 5 and Blackphone (discontinued)—that offer connectivity alongside privacy protection. We argue that across both categories, access to privacy and capitalism are inextricably linked. We further argue that the emergence of Apple—whose business model is built around hardware sales, leaving it with little incentive to share user data with advertisers unlike other tech companies, such as Facebook, where advertising is the primary source of revenue—as self-appointed defender of user privacy centers privacy as a competition issue in a way that smaller market players with privacy ideals have been unable to sustain. This coupling of Apple’s significant market share and its policing of user surveillance practices of other tech companies raises crucial questions about the paradox of pursuing social values through market dominance.

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## Key Words

commodification, competition, privacy

# **Media and the Drums of War – From the (classic) era of Capitalist Imperialism to the Escalating Threats of Today**

## **Authors**

Prof. Paschal PRESTON - Dublin City University

## **Abstract**

Whilst mediated communication has long had a close relation to the violence of warmaking and military conflicts, this paper seeks to compare the key roles, practices and influences of ‘modern’ media, from the 1890-1920 era (of ‘classic’ capitalist imperialism) to the escalating threats of major war in recent years. The paper is concerned with one core and two subsidiary questions : What are the specific forms, roles, and influences of mediated communication in the creation and conduct of warfare today --and how do these compare to the classic era of modern imperialism -the first era of truly ‘mass’ media one century ago?. What are the implications for an ethically just, political and moral economy of media research and practice related to warmaking? What does this imply for the role and practices of international research bodies such as IAMCR.

The paper is motivated by the amplifying signals of growing militarism, rearmament and threats of violent conflict on the part of certain major states or constellations of states in recent years. This includes the growth of manifest tensions between the USA-led NATO power bloc and both Russia (concerning spheres of influence in C&E Europe, which have escalated over the past decade) and, more recently, China. This big turn towards warfare is now most manifest in Russia’s illegal invasion and war in Ukraine. But as we write, recent months have seen a growing array and amplification of public provocations, militaristic threats and ultra-nationalist rhetorics by USA-based leaders and media (and some follower states within the NATO constellation) directed against China. These shifts have set back if not reversed small steps forward in addressing global ecological crises and any remnants of liberal hopes for a ‘peace dividend’.

This paper’s comparative inquiry on media and war-making in two modern periods (1900-1914 and the contemporary, c2008-2023 period) draws on conceptual resources and relevant empirical materials from two fields of academic inquiry :

- .1) The century-old body of studies specifically focused on understanding the evolving role/influence and operations of mediated communication, along with dominant professional practices and rhetorical forms, from the rise of truly ‘mass’ media to the digital media era; this strand draws on Lasswell and other ‘classic’ contributions, to identify evolving technical affordances, operational reach and institutional features of media, dating from the era of WW1;
- .2) The corpus of research on the evolving political-economy, techno-ecological and organisational features of capitalist imperialism, with an emphasis on comparisons of the 1900-1914 era and the contemporary (c2008-2023); this strand includes attention to the dominant constellations and evolving forms of imperialist ‘competition’, techno-eco-industrial (including ‘communication’) infrastructures, crisis tendencies in each era, plus related shifts in the optimal modes of politics,

participation and power (persuasion, consent, repression, violence) and how these link to crucial popular interests, the organisation of social movements, peace/anti-war movements, and other forms of resistance in each era.

This paper will creatively mobilise conceptual and empirical materials from these two research strands to better address the challenging questions posed above (first paragraph of this abstract).

**Key Words**

War and Media;

the mediatization of military conflict;

military-industrial complex;

# **‘Gatekeepers of the status quo’ but ‘desperately needed’ – multiscalar and contradictory political economies of media and communications, the climate crisis and insights from Greta Thunberg’s *The Climate Book***

## **Authors**

Dr. Trish Morgan - Dublin City University

## **Abstract**

There is ‘no other entity than the media who, in such a short timeframe that we have now, can reach out to as many people we need to reach out to’, observes Greta Thunberg, speaking on the publication of her work *The Climate Book*. The book serves as a layperson’s reference point for climate information and education, with topics from the state of the art climate and environmental science, critiques of inaction, analyses of the uneven geographical impacts of environmental crisis, and pathways for action on environmental justice, put forward in a multidisciplinary work that comprehensively tackles the multiscalar challenges of epochal environmental crisis.

This paper contends that the implications of *The Climate Book* for media and communications as a field of study are themselves multiscalar, requiring a structural approach to scholarship in the field that takes account of political economies and political ecologies of media and communication. To this end, the paper also takes a thematic and multiscalar approach, pointing to some urgent research directions for the field as impacts from climate crisis multiply at uneven geographical scales and temporalities.

Drawing on Thunberg’s pleas to ‘listen to the science’, this paper is directly informed by section 18.4.1 of the full technical report of the latest IPCC working group two. Titled ‘Political Economy of Climate Resilient Development’ (IPCC 2022: 18-65), it observes that ‘the prevailing political economy is itself now at risk as its legitimacy, viability and sustainability are called into question’ (ibid.: 18-65). However, despite this legitimacy crisis, the report notes how ‘the [climate] adaptation agenda is depoliticized and market-based solutions advocated’ (ibid.).

This paper highlights the important role of political economy perspectives which critically investigate such agendas of depoliticisation, and the limitations of market-based solutions. It considers the differential interests, agendas and power dynamics that can occur between political and economic spheres of influence and their stakeholders. Furthermore, it underlines how political economy approaches interrogate the concept of ‘stakeholder’ itself, identifying how certain industrial or civic groups and communities, or even policy options, may be marginalised or excluded from ‘holding’ a ‘stake’ in decision-making processes (Swyngedouw 2018).

Thunberg underlines how the media are ‘desperately needed’ for transformation from the prevailing political economy, yet they frequently are ‘acting as gatekeepers of the status quo’. Thus, precisely because of the media system’s importance, this particular paper will emphasise how the field needs to contend with these contradictions. To such ends, this paper addresses how the



media as part of the 'waste economy' require engagement with the challenges of degrowth and post-growth political economies. It acknowledges how critical perspectives on the inescapable materiality of media production are required. It reflects on how ethnocentric norms in the field need recalibration through inclusion of traditional and indigenous ecological knowledge.

These themes are not exhaustive. However, in articulating them, perhaps the most urgent topics in the history of the field of media and communication can be integrated and normalised.

**Key Words**

climate change, Greta Thunberg, research directions,

# Appearance and essence of labor relations on digital platforms

## Authors

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## Abstract

The debate about labor relations on digital platforms has at least three explanatory axes. The first, dictated by the owner conglomerates of digital platforms, states that there is no labor relationship between them and the workers who, mediated by the platforms, provide any services; the worker would only be a user of these platforms. The second, present in the approaches of Sociology of Labor, aims to recognize immediate work relationships involving workers who provide services through digital platforms and the owners conglomerates as employers. The third, dedicated to the field of Communication, referring to the classic conception of the “work of the audience”, understands that the activity of the worker, as a user of the platform, is immediately work itself. In this article, I propose an alternative approach, which seeks to reinterpret these axes in a more abstract analysis plan. Based on the dialectical critique of the Political Economy of Communication, I use the marxian categories of “appearance” and “essence” in order to observe digital platforms as a concrete historical mutation of fundamental elements of labor relations. At the most apparent level of the simple circulation of commodities, labor relations are presented as an exchange of equivalents, in which two owners of commodities, one selling his labor power and the other buying it, meet as subjects of law, formally free and equal. When one descends to the hidden abode of production, we find an essential logical moment in which those who, before, appeared as formally free and equal, show themselves as capitalist and worker, in a specific relationship of labor exploitation. The appearance of formally free and equal owners of commodities is necessary for the realization of the essential exploration proper to the hidden abode of production as surplus-value production. However, the apparent dynamics historically placed limits on the dynamics of capital which, for that very reason, aimed to modify them. The production and realization of surplus value bumps against three general limits: the natural limit of the duration of the day; the physical limit of the worker's body capacity; and the juridical limit imposed by the political conquests of the working classes. In this way, I understand that labor relations mediated by digital platforms must be analyzed as an attempt by capital to escape the limits to production and realization of surplus value imposed by the conquests of the working classes, modifying the original status of the apparent plan of subjects of law, proper to the juridical form of capital, to the plane, which can be logically derived (as the dialectical critique of the Political Economy of Communication teaches), of communication as a social form. Thus, with regard to digital platforms, I indicate in this article that, on an essential level, relations of (exploitation of) labor continue to exist which, in turn, aim to present themselves, on the apparent level, as an alleged relationship between subjects of communication, which aims to replace previous legal relationships.

## Key Words

Appearance; Essence; Labor Relations; Digital Platforms; Communication as Social Form

# **AAMAM's Energy Politics: Between Carbon and Green Capitalism**

## **Authors**

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## **Abstract**

Energy matters. It powers societies and communications industries. For most of modern history, carbon energy—oil, gas and coal—has powered the communications industries. But over the past two decades, the global climate crisis has catalyzed efforts to shift the world from carbon to renewable energy. In our age of the Anthropocene or Capitalocene, carbon and renewable energy blocs are competing for power and influence over economies, governments and whole ways of life, and the communication industries have become significant to shaping the future of the world's energy system. To contribute to IAMCR 2023's "Inhabiting the planet: Challenges for media, communication and beyond" theme, this paper considers the political economy of energy that powers that world's most powerful communications industries. It contextualizes and analyzes how the social power of Alphabet-Google, Apple, Meta-Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft (or "AAMAM") intertwines with the global climate consequences of these corporations' power supply. AAMAM rank among the world's largest corporations and are core to much of the world's digital infrastructure, platforms, goods and services. They are materially and symbolically consequential for the planet, not only because they use lots of energy to power their operations, but also, because they are powerful setters of energy communication agendas and frames. This paper probes the position AAMAM take in the global battle between carbon and renewable energy blocs in ten environmentally interrelated contexts: (1) finance; (2) energy policy and conduct; (3) materials and mining; (4) assembly and manufacture; (5) transportation and logistics; (6) energy uses; (7) energy and environmental communication; (8) data centers; (9) A.I. and algorithms; (10) disposal. While AAMAM are now global champions of green capitalism, they are still interlinked in significant ways with the reproduction and expansion of carbon capitalism. For AAMAM to become truly green, all of its operations will need to be *decarbonized*.

## **Key Words**

green capitalism, environment, Big Tech, renewable energy

# **Digital Platforms and Infrastructure in the Realm of Culture**

## **Authors**

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## **Abstract**

The concepts of (digital) platform and (digital) infrastructure have been widely used and discussed in recent media research, and in neighbouring fields such as science and technology studies (STS). Yet there appears to be considerable confusion about how to understand these concepts and the relationships between them. This article seeks to bring these concepts together more coherently by pointing to ways in which “platformisation” might be understood as having impacts on information infrastructure, including on the principles of open-ness and generativity underlying early internet architecture, with potential effects on media and culture. To develop this perspective we draw on research from legal studies which articulates these principles much more fully than in recent media studies and STS, and which understands infrastructures as resources subject to political contestation, and, in the work of Julie Cohen, digital platforms as strategies for bounding networks and disciplining infrastructures. We discuss how this perspective might complement approaches to digital platforms and infrastructures to be found in political economy of media and internet governance research. We then apply the perspective to a case study: the transition of online music from a set of chaotic experiments with alternative models of distribution to a thoroughly platformised environment.

## **Key Words**

digital platforms, infrastructure, legal studies, governance, music