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Consumptive Concentration: Theorizing Media Monopsony

Authors

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Abstract

Most of the emphasis on media concentration has focused on issues of ownership. However, the mechanisms of media control and concentration extend beyond who owns what and into who can purchase what. Particularly in the age of digital media, concentration of consumption has become increasingly apparent. Such concentration, termed monopsony, allows a small number of buyers to exert control over markets. While the primary examples of monopsony have been about labor, it seems likely that monopsony exists in media and via media in a range of other markets. This study marks the beginning of a research project examining the issue of monopsony as it relates to media and communication. This study contends that modern, global media exhibits monopsony in a variety of ways, largely owing the development of a variety of digital technologies, particularly the combination of data gathering via mobile devices and social media. Just as concentration of ownership resulted in a set of very particular problems — fewer voices, polarized channels of communication, and homogenized content among them — so, too, will concentration of consumption present power inequities that the political economy of communication needs to begin to address both in terms of its implication for the hyper-commodification of daily life but also for the ways in which it takes advantage of increasingly globalized markets that already had blunted labor mobility. Monopsony as a mechanisms allows for institutions to dominate a market in order to minimize and capitalize on areas of agency digital technologies are seen to afford. Always connected means always monitored. Always monitored can mean always commodified. Rather than focus on the formal modeling of monopsony sometimes undertaken in economics, this study focuses on the conceptual implications of concentration of consumption in media and communication. In order to better frame this theorizing of media monopsony, this study uses examples of media labor markets, demand for microchips, and user generated data as its starting point.

Submission ID

48

Digital Emotional Consumption: an Exploratory Study Based on Consumers' Interviews with "Virtual Lovers" in China

Authors

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Abstract

A special kind of emotional online service and economic phenomenon ---"Virtual Lovers"--- has emerged in China in recent years. By purchasing this service (text message/voice message/voice call/video call) through WeChat, Taobao or some other social media and e-commerce platforms, consumers can select favored "Lover(s)" by brief introductions and virtually experience romance with them. And if the service expires and the consumers do not want to renew, those "couples" will delete each other and no longer be connected. Unlike traditional online communication and offline emotional consumption, "Virtual Lover" service digitize and commercialize emotions so as to make the process of "being in a relationship" quicker and simpler. As this phenomenon first and so far only appears in China, there are few studies on this in the area of communication studies. To better understand this phenomenon, this research employs semi-structured interviews with 23 consumers of "Virtual Lover" service with different genders, ages, education backgrounds and degrees of affectionate and monetary involvement as the interview subjects. Then the researchers carried on a more detailed analysis of the interview materials using the two-level coding path to study the users' motivation and the political, economic and cultural contexts in deep layer perspective. The results show that: (1) The unmet needs in offline world gives rise to the virtual trading market of emotion. Consumers cannot fill their emotional and mood needs in offline life for various reasons (for example, Chinese laws and the Confucian Culture restrict people from participating in emotional and pornographic activities freely and openly; Psychological counseling is not widely available in China; The rapid development of Chinese post-industrial economy has made urban people extremely lonely), so they tend to get emotional satisfaction from the virtual world. The core motivation of consumers involve the desire to relieve pressure, to change their mood, and to get support while they're in emotional gap with feelings of loneliness and boredom. Some consumers even have fantasies to fulfill their sexual passion or develop a long-term, stable, one-to-one relationship with the "Lovers". (2) In order to meet the demand of the market, a certain number of digital emotional labors are hired and assigned according to consumers' requirement and spends. "Lover" is no longer the person hard to meet with, but becoming a commodity to be chosen. Unlike some other people spending more time and energy for free dating applications, which is elucidated as "free is always the most expensive", consumers willing to pay for "Virtual Lover" believe that emotional services can be offered immediately in this way. Meanwhile, the merchants of "Virtual Lover" service construct a hierarchical, symbolic and relatively closed paying system, which have been

internalized by consumers and service providers as a protective barrier against illegal demands and a virtual space to reconstruct their identities. Without this system, “Virtual Lover” service would be considered insecure and may invade their offline life. Therefore, this system has been supported by most users. However, some consumers still privately tip the “Lovers”. In this regard, the merchants turn a blind eye on those behaviors, which reflects the delicate relationship in merchants, service providers and consumers. (3) Consumers have multiple digital identities while presenting themselves in anonymous virtual space. They will not only use “Virtual Lover” as “tree holes” (shudong) to show their hidden sides, but also put on “masks” to express a self that they want to achieve offline. However, they always stick to the bottom to keep their personal key information, so as to reduce the possibility of others affecting their offline life. Finally, this study develops a theoretical concept of “digital emotional consumption”, which summarizes the consumption behavior of users to achieve emotional satisfaction through digital services. The kernel of this concept is that more open emotional needs can be satisfied, multifaceted self-identity can be constructed, and greater consumer spending can be encouraged in the digital emotional market. Behind this phenomenon is the social picture of consumers’ personal emotion entwined with the government regulation, capital commercialization and technology digitization. The future research on the “Virtual Lovers” can be the psychological and behavioral similarities and differences between male and female users when using this service from a gender perspective.

Submission ID

81

The Rise of East Asian Digital Platforms: from a Global South Perspectives

Authors

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Abstract

In the early 21st century, digital platforms have become some of the most significant infrastructures. Digital platforms, including social media, OTT services, and smartphones have shifted people’s daily activities as many people heavily rely on these platforms. Whenever and wherever, people use a variety of digital platforms, such as social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, and Weibo), chat apps as platforms (Kakao Talk, LINE, Messenger, WhatsApp, and WeChat), and smartphones (iOS and Android), e-commerce platforms (Amazon, Alibaba, Rakuten, and Flipkart), and streaming platforms (Netflix, Disney +, YouTube, Youku, and Spotify). Among these, U.S.-based digital platforms,

including Facebook, YouTube, Netflix, and Apple, have continued to dominate the global markets, while there are a few digital platforms developed by other Western countries like Spotify.

Digital platforms have fundamentally changed people's daily lives, and in the era of digital platforms, the notion of cultural flows has also greatly changed due to two major dimensions, which are closely related. On the one hand, several digital platforms have become the new outlets of popular culture. With the rapid growth of digital platforms, global fans also can enjoy popular culture coming from other countries on these digital platforms without purchasing CDs and DVDs, nor going to theaters, which is not unprecedented. Regional integration has become an increasingly significant goal that Asian countries attempt to engage through multilateral trades and negotiations (Bergsten, 2007; Chung, 2013). However, with the advent of digital platforms, materials trade, and therefore, possession has lost its momentum. On the other hand, the emergence of digital platforms has shifted digital culture as they develop a variety of forms of new-fangled cultural activities. As a response to the restrictions of traditional media, people around the globe advocating underrepresented narratives turn to new media sources, sources with on-demand access, interactive user feedback, and real-time generation of new, unregulated content.

By focusing on power relations between the Global North and the Global South in the realm of digital platforms, which have fundamentally influenced existing power relations in the realm of popular culture between the Global North and the Global South, this article attempts to advance a critical analysis of East Asian digital platforms. It first identifies the major characteristics that signal the growth of digital platforms as a corporate sphere in which their operation is defined by market forces (van Dijck, 2013). Then, it discusses the major characteristics of the growth of East Asian digital platforms with two major digital platforms—mobile instant messengers and OTT platforms—in order to understand whether locally-developed digital platforms have become dominant forces in their own countries and later expanded in the global markets. Then, it maps out whether platform-driven cultural flows have resolved existing global imbalances or expanded the divide. In so doing, it interrogates whether digital platforms themselves in both the Global South and the Global North have intensified disparities between Western and non-Western countries.

Submission ID

116

Demystifying work mediated by apps and digital platforms

Authors

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to present a definition of work mediated by apps and digital platforms. These forms of mediation are consequence of the Third Industrial Revolution, defined in terms of subsumption of intellectual work (Bolaño, 2002). General digitalization represents a new and deeper stage of the flexible accumulation system and, thus, the constitution of a new industrial paradigm which permits a renewed process of automation, limited, during the original Industrial Revolution to sectors like the textile industry or chemistry. The capitalist development in the 20th Century bypassed the limits of that condition by developing Taylorism and Fordist industrial organization, highly dependent on living labor. The Third Industrial Revolution tends to surpass these limits (Bolaño, 2021), promoting robotization and intellectual work subsumption. Digital platforms are a consequence of that change, permitting the development of powerful enterprises like Google, Amazon or Facebook, as well as startups like Uber and Airbnb, or promoting important strategic changes in other mainstream capital like General Electric, Siemens, John Deere and Monsanto (Srniczek, 2018).

We start with a brief critique of Dallas Smythe (1977) and his pioneer analysis of the audience commodity, which is problematic specially in defining the idea of work of the audience, as pointed by different authors, including Bolaño (2000), who extended after his critique to the work of a disciple of Smythe, Christian Fuchs, promoting an unconcluded debate (Bolaño and Vieira, 2015; Bolaño, 2015; Fuchs, 2015a; Fuchs, 2015b; Kangai, 2020). Fuchs (2015a) adopted the concept of work of audience in relation to the economy of internet, articulated to that of prosumer, proposed by the futurologist Alvin Toffler, in a presently very influent perspective in the political economy of communication and culture (PEC), despite the criticism that different authors proposed. The critique of Ursula Huws (2014), for instance, is correct on this respect, but her definitions of “digital work” is problematic in many aspects. In general terms, despite the important fact that nowadays the world of labor submitted the workers by means of digitalization, it does not change the fundamental condition of real and formal subsumption of human labor, reduced to abstract labor.

After retaking briefly the debate with Fuchs and developing a critique to Huws in these terms, including certain more specific aspects of her interpretation of Marx, we finish by explaining that the work mediated by platforms and digital apps represents a specific manifestation of the structural dynamic of capital whose postmodernist influenced interpretations must be rigorously criticized in order to lightening its real signification.

Submission ID

120

Should the Urban Space be Reconstructed? A Study based on Field-works in Chinese Bookstores**Authors**

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Abstract

A large number of studies have been conducted in China concerning the survival of bookstores. Most of the studies, however, focus on how the bookstores could use innovative methods to develop as business. The researchers of this article intend to use the article as a reflection on the increasing importance of bookstores as a site for business and consumption rather than a cultural space. The researchers have conducted field works and realized that bookstores are still able to survive without the fancy innovations and marketing. On the contrary, a lot of the popular bookstores with large investments and specialized management are closing their stores all over China. The article thus uses analysis of the condition of these bookstores as a way to reflect on the construction of urban space and development of cultural industry in China. The Chinese urban space has become diverse in its design and form but show an essence of increasing homogeneity. Field works in Chinese bookstores also reflect this issue. However, individual bookstores in China also indicates the changing daily activities of modern citizens fighting against chain bookstores with huge capital. The study examines the empirical data from the field work and studies how the urban cultural space in China is used as a site of conflict between the ordinary people and the great capital.

This article is based on an extensive field work in Shanghai, China. The researchers have visited and taken photos or videos of over 40 bookstores in Shanghai and conducted semi-structured interviews with over 15 local bookstore owners. In the following months, the researchers will pay visits to a further 30 bookstores and conduct interviews whenever possible. The article then uses grounded theory to analyse the data collected in the field work.

Submission ID

136

Situating Platform Gig Economy in the Formal Subsumption of Reproductive Labor: Transnational Migrant Domestic Workers and the Continuum of Exploitation and Precarity

Authors

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Abstract

In conversation with critical platform and labor studies, which tend to focus on drivers and food delivery workers, this article discusses platform work from the perspective of reproductive labor and migrant domestic workers. The exploitation of women's unpaid and low-paid reproductive work has persisted throughout various stages of capitalist development. Migrant domestic workers' underpaid reproductive labor becomes an essential site for primitive capital accumulation and the production of the labor force in the contemporary neoliberal global economy. Building upon analyses of the historical and contemporary circumstances of transnational migrant domestic workers in Canada, the article reveals that the platform economy is a technology-enabled, capital-driven force in the larger commodification and exploitation process of migrant workers' reproductive labor, and such process is underpinned by entangled structural and institutional forces of the uneven capitalist development, racism, patriarchy, and the state's discriminatory (im)migration and labor policies. The article argues that understanding platform work should be situated in the continuous formal subsumption of reproductive labor and the class immobility of migrant domestic workers. Policy adjustments and government regulation at the national and international levels are certainly crucial steps to protect workers' rights but addressing the labor issues requires wider and more radical social change. There thus awaits the mobilization and formation of broader labor movements at the local, national, and transnational levels with transformative and inclusive agendas, which seek not only to confront platforms' exploitation but also to undermine the entwined power dominations.

Submission ID

161

Reconfiguring social relations through time in a financialised economy and a rise of nationalism

Authors

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Abstract

A decade after the 2008-9 global financial crisis, the world witnessed two grave dangers: one is the COVID pandemic; the other is the rise of nationalism in a number of countries. The global financial crisis had revealed how connected the global economy is and how it had disproportionately affected the underclass. The pandemic has once again illustrated both phenomena. To react against globalized forces, some embrace a nationalist ideology that harbours xenophobia and racism. (Most notably are anti-Asian sentiments in white-dominated nations and East Asian countries' stringent border control during the pandemic.) How can feminist political economists understand these multiple forces that debilitate the autonomy of those who are the most affected by a global economy, a pandemic, and nationalism?

In this paper, I argue that feminist political economists (FPE) need to address these issues from the vantage point of time because meaningful social relations can only be created and sustained through reproductive labour. When the financial market disciplines time and when nationalism manipulates it, local-based human relations are made irrelevant to the market and rendered insignificant by state ideology.

The case study in this paper focuses on the turbulent years 2019-2020 in Hong Kong where the yearlong mass protests were subdued by the rise of COVID infections and the passing of the National Security Law. The backdrop of these years was high-profile IPOs of China-based corporations (such as Alibaba) in the Hong Kong Stock Exchange. A FPE critique of time will add to current studies that argue Hong Kong mass protests are results of political and economic discontents. Politically, Hong Kong citizens were disappointed that not only did the Chinese Communist Party break the promise of granting a high degree of autonomy to the Hong Kong people, but it has also quickened the pace to integrate the former British colony into One China. Economically, protestors grieved against the widened income gap and soaring housing prices that stagnate economic mobility and endanger human sustenance.

Both types of discontents need to be understood from the time perspective. Informationalised finance and financialised economy annihilate time and social relations. Digital information transmitted through private cables is said to provide real-time financial information for AI to make human-error-free decisions. On the other hand, the One China

nationalist ideology uses a *longue durée* meta narrative to justify the speedy integration of lost territories to redeem national dignity and achieve Chinese domination. In this ideology, there is no social relation, only Chinese subject to the nation. Both market and state ideologies subject Hong Kong people to a “running out of time” mentality, making some chose radical strategies during protests or emigrating elsewhere for a start over.

To counter this temporality, FPE recognises reproductive labour that relies on analogue technology. These activities show that social relations are shaped by tedious life-sustaining activities. Some renewed interests are volunteers sewing masks in workshops and protestors creating installation arts for resistance. These activities reveal the necessary time for labour to reproduce and the drudge nature of this type of labour.

Submission ID

164

The Making and Making Possible of the “China Data Valley”

Authors

Mr. Kevin Liu - University of Minnesota Twin Cities

Abstract

When the US-China tech war over semiconductors widens and China’s domestic efforts of chip manufacturing continues, a major official press published an investigation, revealing the failure of six billion-*yuan*-worth semiconductor projects in China; one of which is Hua Xin Tong Semiconductor (HXT), a joint venture between Qualcomm and the provincial government of Guizhou as a major endeavor to establish the Gui An Big Data New District—China’s first big data special district approved by the state council and located in Guizhou Province. However, the HXT project turned out to be a total failure as Qualcomm withdraw the tech support and the joint-venture filed for bankruptcy in 2019. Nevertheless, the big data district didn’t fail, and it enjoyed successful collaborations with other tech giants, hosting Apple’s iCloud China data center and Huawei’s world’s largest data center.

The development of this special district not only caught eyeballs for hosting data centers of these worldwide influential corporations but also for that Guizhou Province has been one of the poorest provinces in China but now it is among the fastest-growing digital markets in China and the local government boldly claims to be “China Data Valley.” What happens when giant media infrastructures like data centers aggregate in poor regions? How historically under-developed areas localize digital technologies and the big data industry? How such endeavors are *made possible* by both global and local forces of politics, economy, and culture? As the largest aggregation of data centers in in-land China and the

first national-level big data special district, this region has attracted almost zero scholarly attention so far. This paper fills this gap and investigates the *making* and *making possible* of the big data industry in Guizhou, it reveals how media technologies shape and are shaped by political-economic and socio-cultural complexes that involve the state, corporations, as well as ordinary people's life.

This project contributes to the scholarly discussions of the political economy of media infrastructures, in particular, the localization of materially significant media technologies such as data centers. It adopts a political economy of media approach to examine the structural constructions and conditions of possibilities of how the big data industry is established, and it also strives to capture the "structures of feeling" of how these state planning and corporate expansions are felt and lived by the local people. The paper first describes the political-economic complex of local and central governments, international and domestic high-tech corporations that establish the material foundation of the big data industry in Guizhou province; then it unpacks how such developments are talked about and narrated in local public media; lastly, it articulates these broader narratives to ordinary people's experience and discusses how local people make sense of these developments. This paper is part of a larger research project of the author; empirical data are collected from the author's field and archival works such as field notes, semi-structured interviews, institutional and public publications including news reports, commercial and political promotional materials, internal training materials, industrial report, governmental policies and so forth.

Submission ID

220

Paradoxes rising from the public funding of private media: An investigation into Trans-Tasman public interest journalism funds

Authors

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Abstract

This paper, which is a work in progress, investigates outcomes of recently established Trans-Tasman journalism funds which were launched to support journalistic institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic escalated the crisis of these institutions, those "organised workplaces and labour settings in which journalism is practised" and

produced, rather than a crisis in journalism itself (Picard, 2014; Thurman et al. 2019, 180). The two funds investigated are the *Public Interest Journalism Fund* (PIJF) in New Zealand and the *Public Interest News Gathering Fund* in Australia (PING). The purpose of PIJF is twofold: to aid media to continue producing public interest journalism, and to “provide transitional support to media organisations as the sector evolves in a way that ensures the longer-term sustainability” (Ministry for Culture and Heritage, n.d.). In Australia, PING was established to “support public interest journalism delivered by commercial television, newspaper, and radio businesses in regional Australia”, and to “help sustain Australian media businesses” (Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications, n.d.).

These funds offer a relevant case study to investigate the public funding of private media as they function as salutary example of a significant change in the relationship between governments and journalistic institutions. While in liberal democracies governments are supporting the media, mainly via indirect subsidies, this support has benefitted the strongest organisations (Allern & Pollack, 2019; Ots & Picard, 2018). By contrast, Trans-Tasman funds provide direct cash payments to news companies in an effort to sustain their businesses and journalistic production. This change in funding model is particularly consequential in light of contemporary scholarship which argues that public funding should “provide public alternatives to the failing commercial system” (Pickard 2021a, 81). Additionally, scholars suggest that the journalistic outputs funded from the public purse should be “available to all members of society without a fee or monetisation” (Pickard and Neff, 2021). Pickard suggests that any public funding would “ideally go only to independent, non-profit outlets” rather than shareholder owned commercial media corporations (Pickard 2021a, 2021b).

Our preliminary findings suggest that Trans-Tasman funds have largely allocated money to commercially operating media organisations, which paradoxically, are at the root of the journalism crisis (Pickard 2021a, 2021b). In New Zealand, approximately 74% of the first two rounds of PJIF funding was targeted at existing newsrooms: independently owned news providers received 55%, state-owned public broadcasters 18.5%, commercial/shareholder-owned media operators 14.3%, and media collectives/partnerships 12% of the total funding. In Australia, 73% of PING funding was targeted at private companies, and 84% of companies who received the government money operate commercially. Some of the newsroom funding has been allocated to the companies that cut newsrooms jobs just before receiving public funding. In New Zealand, NZME (owner of the *NZ Herald*) received money for newsrooms positions despite cutting 200 journalism jobs in 2020 (NZME, 2020). In Australia, Win Television removed regional television bulletins, despite receiving over AUD\$4 million from the fund, allegedly breaching grant guidelines in the process. We argue that the merging public funding mechanisms investigated here raise serious questions about the responsibilities of shareholders and the ethics of using public money to subsidise commercial, for-profit and shareholder funded media corporations.

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326

Beyond Financial Investments: The Globalization of China's Video Game Companies

Authors

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Abstract

Exploring foreign markets is not a new step for China's video game companies. However, in the new policy environment of "going-out" (Tang, 2020), the past decade witnessed a surge in the scale and scope of the companies' globalization. Firstly, in worldwide financial investments, game giants such as Tencent and ByteDance were as ambitious as their foreign competitors, Microsoft and Sony (Kharpal, 2021; Webb & Yang, 2021). Secondly, Chinese companies' overseas revenue of self-developed games maintained rapid growth (Game Publishing Committee & Game Industry Research Institute, 2021). Thirdly, collaborations between Chinese and foreign game companies have gone beyond distribution to research and development (R&D) (Huang, 2021; Liao, 2021).

However, the above phenomena have not been significantly studied apart from Chinese companies' worldwide financial investments (Hong, 2016; Tang, 2019). This paper addresses this gap by historicizing and contextualizing the international expansion of Chinese companies and their games in three dimensions: financial investments, self-developed game exports, and transnational collaboration. While the companies' expansion is a complicated process involving economic activities, cultural flow, and geopolitics, this paper focuses on economic activities and discusses cultural and geopolitical issues as contexts.

The paper draws on the political economy scholarship of digital capitalism, transnational corporations, financialization as theoretical frameworks, and document analysis and in-depth interviews as research methods. It argues that the globalization of Chinese video game companies and their products reached a new level in both depth and breadth in the past decade. As the companies are deeply integrated into the transnational financial, commodity, and R&D networks, their so-called "going-out" should not be understood only as a one-way flow of products and capital from China to the rest of the world, but as a multifaceted process that strengthened the above transnational networks, making it increasingly tight and complex, and a phenomenon that indicates China's rising position in the networks.

This paper contributes to the history of China's video game industry (Chew, 2016; Deng, 2020) by providing an updated study on the globalization of Chinese gaming companies. It also complements the literature on China's digital presence in the world (Keane, Yu, Zhao, & Leong, 2020; Shen, 2018) by shifting the focus from the role of the Chinese state to the role of Chinese companies and from the Internet to video games.

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Submission ID

484

Tragedy or Comedy of the Commons: A political economy analysis of the National Determined Contributions to Paris Agreement

Authors

Dr. Fei Huang - Tsinghua university

Abstract

Global warming is one of the most urgent issues humankind is facing with, once without effective collective action from all parties, tragedy of commons (defined by Garret Hardin in 1968 at first) could happen naturally. While 2015 Paris Agreement carved out a path and an ideal scenario based on collective efforts and agreement from the international community under the Umbrella of United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), indicating the adoption of bottom-up experimentalist governance, countries have taken various responses and different types of actions towards the common goal of 2 °C temperature rise limit. This paper, with the help of the methodologies of text analysis and political economy analysis, captures the texts of National Determined Contributions of the countries submitting to the UNFCCC, with the goal of summarizing the key concepts and arguments from the countries and identifying the political economy mechanism lying behind the climate issues, clustering of the opinions of national strategies will be studied, which showcased the typologies of anti-global warming stances from different interest groups shaped by the landscape of international political economy, trends of neo-globalization, tensional geopolitical structures and ideological gaps. Nation States, as the basic units of climate actions, are taking the strategies that can best serve their internal political economy goals, while responding to the global “goal”. It is to be figured out, based on the texts of the communications of the strategies from the national states to their peers and their "umbrella", that the tensions between labor and capital, nationalism and internationalism are two sets of key tensions hindering the reaching of agreement of global collaboration on climate change. The study will propose later, that communications are crucial in addressing the existing gaps and possibly turn tragedy of the commons into comedy of commons.

Submission ID

582

Big Royalty Collection Organizations for Big Names? Market concentration and social impact from the increasing competition between RCOs

Authors

Dr. Jim Rogers - Dublin City University

Dr. Sergio Sparviero - University of Salzburg

Abstract

This paper presents the preliminary work carried out on a study that is designed to assess and explain the extent and form of the competition that exists between performing rights royalty collection organisations (RCOs) in the music industry. RCOs are organisations with social goals that act as intermediaries between music users (the customers) and music rights holders (the beneficiaries). They provide licences allowing the use of music in public spaces and support for complying with copyright legislation. Their users are online platforms, broadcasters, cinemas, live music event promoters, and any other organisations using background music. The revenue from the licences is paid out to members, which are 'creators', i.e. composers, songwriters or authors, and non-creative actors, including music publishers and other royalties' owners. Since only recently, among the latter are also large, specialised investment companies (e.g. Hipgnosis). RCOs' operations are financed from a small percentage of the payments to its own beneficiaries, or the beneficiaries of other RCOs when they collect fees of creators that are registered members of other organizations around the world.

The digitalisation of music production and distribution, coupled with the globalization and concentration of music markets have affected the ways in which RCOs create economic and social value. RCOs' funding increasingly depends on the success of a few members rather than on the size of their membership. Reflecting the high concentration of power and distribution of earnings in the recording and music publishing industries, the repertoires of a relatively small number of 'superstar' artists and songwriters generate the vast bulk of performing royalties internationally. This polarization of wealth has become much more pronounced in the digital era.

Moreover, successful artists and songwriters tend to migrate towards the largest RCOs operating within the largest national markets. Larger RCOs can provide better and/or cheaper services, also for gathering international royalties for their members. U2 is exemplary of this trend, as they currently work with the UK Performing Rights Society (PRS for Music) after working with the Irish Music Rights Organisation (IMRO). Such trends have triggered competition between organizations and a concentration of resources in favour of the larger ones. Concentration is also favoured by the emergence of investment funds acquiring ownership and control of music rights and/or artists royalties.

For RCOs, these investment companies effectively function as ‘super-creators’ that can move the royalties of large catalogues of popular content.

This study proposes to better understand the extent of the competition between these non-profit organizations, and more importantly, its social impacts. It compares the business models of the smaller IMRO with the larger PRS, using the Social Enterprise Model Canvas. The latter is a frame used to analyse the business model of organizations that prioritize social goals financed from market revenues. From a detailed analysis of the business models, we can assess this claim and infer future scenarios, particularly in relation to the fulfilment of social objectives. The data used comes from literature review, reports and experts interviews.

Submission ID

586

From Hand-held Radio to Ride-hailing Platform: a Research on a Local Technical Interaction Network of Local Taxi Drivers in China

Authors

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Abstract

In platform society in China, the notion that taxi drivers use communication technologies to meet their needs of engaging with the market has become a generally optimistic picture. In the context of the era of the platform economy, this paper will figure out the logic that how the Chinese taxi drivers form a local network by using communication technologies such as radio and 5G. It is found that most studies are based on the perspective of synchronic use of communication technologies, examining the impact of taxi drivers’ media use on their social interaction, labour process, cultural life, and social class. It is believed that the technology intermediaries represented by Didi Chuxing provides taxi drivers with a way to reallocate market resources and create a new mode of labour relations and social interaction. Most conclusions suggest that with restriction of technological changes and

institutional environment, taxi drivers were at a disadvantage in the labour market, fighting against the rise of on-demand labour platforms.

However, in the rise and expansion of the platform model, the traditional model has not been completely occupied and disappeared. The intertwined influence of the two models on taxi drivers is reflected in the changes of media technology use by this group. In the traditional mode, based on the walkie-talkies, mobile phones and other equipment of the trunked mobile communication system, the drivers and the central wireless station can form a connection mode of “center-node”, and the drivers in a certain area can also use these devices to form aggregations with their peers. In the platform mode, the online car-hailing platform based on mobile devices reshapes the relationships within the drivers, between the platform and drivers, and between drivers and passengers through strict platform rules. In addition to that, it has also changed the role drivers play in the industry, the economy, and the local culture. And taxi drivers are far from passive recipients: they adapt to changes in communication technologies by altering their media usage patterns to deal with different situations of central control, urban space planning, taxi market supervision and other factors.

Therefore, overcoming the shortcomings of previous studies that regard taxi drivers as the same, this paper will take a county in Shandong Province as an example. It will shift the perspective from fast-developing large cities to neglected third- and fourth-tier cities or counties, observing and tracing where the heterogeneity within taxi drivers lies. With reviewing the previous progress of mobile communication technology, this paper focuses on how taxi drivers formed a local technical interaction network in the media development under the background of policy of “speeding up broadband and lowering rates”, and how “anti-control” is conducted in “control” adversity through media networks. From this, the characteristics of the information control and dissemination modes formed in the platform society are summarized. The economic, cultural and social motivations and the subject change behind the use of media technology by taxi drivers are also revealed.

Submission ID

598

A Playground or an Exploitative Factory? An Analysis of Playbour Based on Animal Crossing: New Horizons

Authors

Mr. YU ZOU - Communication University of China

Abstract

Powered by the Internet and advances in digital technology, the video games industry has grown rapidly and continues to develop. The virtual environment offers thousands of games that provide numerous players with a “playground” for mental relaxation. As an important driver of this playground, capital has initiated a new round of “enclosure movement” in the virtual space of the games. Players have been blinded by the appearance of games as merely entertainment, and have been drawn into the capital creation chain of game companies. They unconsciously create surplus value by providing “playbour” as part of the game industry chain.

From the perspective of the political economy of communications and using in-depth interviews and participatory observation, we examine the game behaviour and provision of content by players in *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*, analyse how these players provide playbour, and attempt to identify a path of resistance. Games provide players with an escape from reality and opportunities for virtual social interactions by offering an immersive experience that enables them to seek and develop companionship. Players obtain a sense of self-satisfaction by immersing themselves in a game, pursuing new gaming practices with the aim of enriching the game and enabling it to overlap with social networks for secondary dissemination, thereby contributing to the production and sales of the game. The simple and repetitive actions required by games can extend this activity indefinitely, resulting in players providing endless playbour while the game becomes an “exploitative factory.”

We also examine the rise in self-awareness among some players, disconnection through withdrawal, and the possibility of resisting capital enabled by the affective labour that is contained in self-valorization to further reflect on and discuss the theory of “digital playbour”.

Submission ID

622

Subjectivity Paradox of Poachers—Perspective of Political Economy of Transcultural Communication on Fansub Groups in China

Authors

Dr. Zhiyan Wang - Beijing foreign studies university

Mr. Siyuan Chen - Beijing foreign studies university

Abstract

As a long-term overseas film and television introduction and translation groups in Chinese Internet world, fansub groups have brought a large number of timely, free, subtitled and uncensored overseas film and television works to Chinese netizens, which play a huge role in shaping the Chinese cultural consumption market, promoting overseas culture, and building the cultural consumption style and taste of audience. Their spirit of sharing have also been praised by netizens, and they were dubbed as the Chinese Prometheus. However, with the official restriction of China's film and television introduction policy, and the rise of commercial film and television platforms, fansub groups' identity and survival crisis has started to emerge. As the latest event, the most famous fansub group Renren has been detained and jailed under the current law, which arouses heated discussion among Chinese people.

This paper attempts to gain insight into the origins, functions, dilemmas and future of fansub groups in mainland China through in-depth interviews, so as to uncover the trans-cultural nature of the work of fansub groups in China and the contradictory cultural identities embodied by their members. The paper adopts the analytical framework of the political economy of trans-cultural communication, probes into the political and economic background of the development of fansub groups and their trans-cultural work content, and through combing China's relevant film and television introduction policies and the development of China's film and television industry, to make clear the historical process of Chinese fansub groups from prosperity to decline. Based on this, the paper discusses in detail the paradoxical nature of the subjectivity reflected by the multiple identities of Chinese fansub groups as both producers and consumers of overseas film and television cultural products, as well as the participator in the neo-liberal globalization. The paper also explores the paradoxical nature of the Chinese fansub groups as resisters of cultural imperialism, illegitimate poachers of cultural copyrights, and promoters of cultural globalization and practitioners of cultural localization.

Finally, the paper argues that with China's economic rise, it has begun to play a more independent and autonomous role in the global cultural industry. The intertwined forces of the China's development of local cultural industries and the more and more profound involvement into the globalization lead to the wane of the fansub groups. With the increased domestic people's cultural self-awareness and their sense of local cultural

identity, the strengthened protection of native cultural industry and the more rigid laws of copyrights as the manifestation of China's integration into the global market, fansub groups will gradually dim the light as intermediaries and bridges for introducing foreign cultural products. However, as frequent transnational cultural communication and the public's demand for heterogeneous cultural products still prevail, fansub groups will not disappear for the time being, and they will continue to exist covertly on the Chinese Internet as the reliable and efficient channel for accessing overseas film and television.

Submission ID

637

Conception, piecework, and responsibility in South Korean drama writers' labour

Authors

Ms. Hoyoung Kim - Simon Fraser University

Abstract

This paper examines South Korean drama writers' labour process and precarity from a political economist viewpoint, through the notions of labour of conception and piecework. For this research, I draw on in-depth interviews with 18 Korean drama writers and two directors.

Drama is a broad category, referring to fictional narrative shows in the Korean television industry. These shows are called "K-dramas" or "Korean dramas" in non-South Korean areas. In South Korea, Korean dramas are often called "writers' art" because the writers both develop the shows and write the scripts. However, most of the participant writers' descriptions of their working lives were far from positive.

To specify the distinctive features of labour and precarity that drama writers experience in their work, I coin the phrase *the labour of conception*, which refers to the labour of imagining, conceiving, and developing, ideas and fabricating them through language. For this idea, I refer to and expand on the notion of 'conception' as presented by Braverman (1975) in the discussion around the division of conception and execution. Also, I use the concept piecework, which pays "workers a set fee per item produced" (McKercher, 2014)

In this paper, I show the Korean television industry structurally accumulates value from writers' unpaid labour of conception in creating a show, continual labour in writing scripts, and writers' sense of responsibility as conceivers. As writers have been in charge of creating shows, writers have the opportunity or autonomy to develop their own shows, not

just write scripts for shows that have been developed by others. However, autonomy is linked to writers' precarity because writers in the industry do unpaid labour of conception. Here, I posit that Korean drama writers' labour is precarious because the industry significantly offloads the inherent uncertainty and risks in the production processes and marketability of cultural commodities onto writers. As a result of this offload, writers suffer from anxiety, pressures, and financial insecurity and instability. In particular, I highlight that the piecework pay system plays a pivotal role in exploiting writers' labour.

Submission ID

694

Regulation of and by Users: Examining Community Regulatory Entities of Chinese Video Platforms

Authors

Dr. Yuanbo Qiu - South China University of Technology

Abstract

Following the discursive changes in the necessities and legitimacy of regulating user-generated content (UGC) on social media in the last decade (Schlesinger, 2020), there has been increasing pressure from the states and civil societies for greater regulation. Presently, platform regulation relies heavily on corporate self-regulation (Gillespie, 2018), which has been criticised for the lack of democratic accountability, low effectiveness, or inadequate sanctions (Flew & Gillett, 2021). In response to these inquiries, companies developed quasi-self-regulatory entities such as Facebook's Oversight Board for enhancing self-regulation (Medzini, 2021). However, the effectiveness of these entities has still been widely questioned – lack of democratic right, under-enforcement of rules, and fragmentation of regulation are the main issues of concern (Flew & Gillett, 2021; Haggart, 2020). In this context, it is imperative to develop new forms of regulatory entities for the public interest.

In China, where digital platforms are always treated as public utilities and should be responsible for the UGC, self-regulation or preemptive self-regulation (Flew, 2021) models of the platforms have evolved quickly under the pressure from the governments in recent years (Zhang, 2020). In particular, to deal with the increasing amount of audio-visual content, Chinese video platforms have developed distinctive community regulation entities. For example, short video platform Douyin established Self-regulatory Committee, live streaming platform Douyu built Room Regulator team, and video platform Bilibili set up Discipline Committee. These new community regulatory entities recruit ordinary users to enhance self-regulation. Moreover, these entities are also connected to the governmental

agencies – their reports and inquiries are uploaded to governmental agencies directly, and thus external regulation is also involved, which provides useful evidence to assist in guiding us to develop a new polycentric framework for regulating platforms.

In this context, this article asks the questions: what kind of community regulatory entities have been developed by major video platforms in China? How are they connected to companies and the government to fulfil the regulatory role? How can these regulatory entities contribute to the discussion on the regulation of and by users?

Drawing from the platform regulation perspectives of Gorwa and Flew, this paper combines in-depth interviews with peer regulators, content analysis on user comments, and document analysis on the policy decisions of the platforms, to explore the mechanisms and effectiveness of community regulatory entities in China. Three entities have been selected in this study, which are Douyin's Self-regulatory Committee, Douyu's Room Regulator, and Bilibili's Discipline Committee. With the first and secondary data, this paper tries to evaluate these entities in the context of the changing self-regulatory regimes, and then discusses how the relationship between rule-makers and rule-takers could be changed when the ordinary users become the delegates of the platforms. Finally, this paper reviews three platform regulation models concluded by Gorwa (2019), and analyses how the community regulation intermediaries can make contributions to existing regulatory models.

Submission ID

733

Media Conglomeration of Platform Companies in Cultural Production: The Conglomeration of Kakao and the Korean Cultural Industries

Authors

Dr. Taeyoung Kim - Simon Fraser University

Abstract

This paper examines the growing influence of platform companies in Korean cultural production. Understanding the roles of platform companies in cultural production is essential because their platform technologies and infrastructures have disrupted many of the existing mechanisms in producing, distributing, and consuming content (Poell, Nieborg and Duffy 2022). Combined with the high penetration of smart devices, increased accessibility, invisibility, reliability, and ubiquity which platform technologies bring to

stakeholders in cultural production has made stakeholders in cultural production customize their content for platforms (Plantin et al. 2016; Poell, Nieborg and van Dijck 2018). Meanwhile, this makes platform companies take the initiative in restructuring the industry for the sake of their interests (Jin 2015). In this regard, it is worth studying how platform companies interact with players in the cultural industries and increase their leverage in cultural production.

As a case study, it examines how Kakao, a major South Korean platform tycoon, expands its business to cultural production and restructures the nation's music industries. Thanks to the success in the webcomics business, the company began expanding its business to the cultural industries by acquiring a series of Korean pop music labels and entertainment management companies and establishing subsidiaries for producing different cultural genres from television to music. Combined with Kakaotalk, a mobile messaging application for smartphone users that dominates the domestic market, this tech company's growing presence in cultural production through media conglomeration triggered restructuring the cultural industries.

That said, by analyzing business reports of Kakao and its subsidiaries related to cultural production, it examines both the chronicle of Kakao's conglomeration and how it restructured the industry. The findings of this research will contribute to revisiting how distribution power—distributors control much of the entire cultural production process by controlling which products can be distributed to the audience (Garnham 1990; Wasko 2003)—becomes more powerful in the era of platformization driven by technological and financial strengths of platform companies, as well as their applications.

Submission ID

808

Online game practice under flexible employment: the balance between creative autonomy and labor control

Authors

Ms. lina zhang - Beijing University of Posts and Telecommiunications

Prof. Pei Huang - Beijing University of Posts and Telecommiunications

Abstract

The uniqueness of creative work gives practitioners a unique aura, and they are engaged in innovative and challenging work in the public vision, freely using their imagination to achieve artistic creation. These characteristics are very much in line with our current imagination of the relationship between emerging labor and individualization and

liberalism. However, there are also problems of interference in the autonomy of workers that cannot be ignored and need to be solved urgently. With the application of new employment methods represented by flexible employment, the drawbacks of lack of labor autonomy criticized by traditional labor process theory have changed in creative labor. The labor characteristics with technical talents as the core have given creative workers more voice, and the labor control of enterprises has also shown a more flexible trend.

In this context, based on the theory of labor process, through the combination of sampling survey and in-depth interviews, the article investigates the online game workers in the representative large, medium and small online game companies in Beijing, and adopts the dual research perspective of online game practitioners and human resource managers of online game enterprises to explore the balance between creative autonomy and labor control under the flexible employment system.

Study found that the flexible employment system achieves a relative balance between autonomy and labor control in creative labor by establishing a labor mode that combines technical flexibility, organizational flexibility and incentive system flexibility. The labor characteristics of creative labor and the institutional advantages of flexible employment provide a certain degree of autonomy for practitioners, and enhance the enthusiasm and discourse power of workers. But at the same time, there is also a more implicit question of psychological control in creative labor, which reminds us that the trend of labor control from behavior to psychology will also become another important research object in the era of digital economy.

Submission ID

820

Research on the subjectivity of digital labor ——Take Bilibili.com UP host as an example

Authors

Ms. Na Yuki - Communication University of China

Abstract

The free flow of capital advocated by neoliberalism makes globalization an irresistible trend. As American scholar Dan Shiller said, "As it comes under the sway of an expansionary market logic, the Internet is catalyzing an epochal political-economic transition toward what I call digital capitalism[1]". As a developing country with a booming momentum, China is inevitably involved in the wave of globalization, giving birth to a prosperous Internet industry. With the birth of the cyberspace, the new media broke the traditional linear communication mode and formed a decentralized dissemination model,

which has the characteristics of immediacy and spheres. People have become the subject of practice, which is different from the single recipient of information. The concept of consumer "digital labor" has gradually become a topic worthy of attention.

Due to globalization and the rapid development of the Internet, China has experienced "space-time compression[2]". A large number of labors are still stick to the traditional agricultural and industrial sectors while young people who are employed in cities are begin to flow to non-material labor. China's industrial structure has undergone major adjustments. The information society is coming with an irresistible momentum. Under the above background, it is of considerable practical significance to think about the digital labor in the Chinese context.

Bilibili.com as a highly youthful video platform and cultural community, is regarded as the largest subculture community in China up to now. Professional User Generated Content (PUGC) constitutes the mainstream of the platform content ecosystem and has considerable influence in a certain range[3]. Bilibili.com originally originated from ACG culture which has been continuously incorporated by subculture in the process of expansion. The UP host of Bilibili.com also presents the characteristics of tendency of low age, diversification and specialization. Whether the UP host can be regarded as "digital labor" still has a theoretical gap, the attention to its related issues cannot be ignored.

The "pan-employment labor relationship" and "non-paid emotional labor" between digital labor and Internet platform have obscured the actual labor process and blurred the gap between work and leisure, resulting in the generalization of class antagonisms[4]. The inequality between the surplus value created by the UP host and the meager income is precisely the covert exploitation of capital under the commercial ideology. Individuality of UP host is integrated into the circulation process of capital while alienation arise from it. At the same time, the characteristics of this group, such as the high degree of specialization of labor, the strong productivity of labor and the strengthening of non-material labor, together with the postmodern spiritual core of the subcultural community constitute the foothold of the UP hosts' initiative. They have realized the transcendence of self-worth in the process of labor practice, which is different from the loss of subjectivity in general cognition. They have the value acquisition in terms of meaning giving, emotional resonance in emotional labor and industrial formation as wells.

The research on the subjectivity of this group is just a localized footnote imported from the western dissemination of political economy of communication theories. The whole picture of the digital labor cannot be outlined by a single exploitation framework as its reveals the attempts of the UP host avoid falling into the cage of instrumental rationality in the process of digital labor which give more possibilities to the dual opposition of labor relations. This study adopts online ethnography and in-depth interviews, focusing on the dynamic balance between the "alienation" of the digital labor and its subjectivity in the Chinese context in order to explore the possibility of subjectivity construction in the process of labor practice, enriching the existing related research and add a dimension for reality understanding.

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Submission ID

893

The US and China's Digital Tech Industries Go Global: A Rivalry in the New Digital Media Imperialism?

Authors

Dr. Tanner Mirrlees - Ontario Tech University

Abstract

Following the end of the US-Soviet Cold War and up until the US-led Global War on Terror hit the wall of the global slump of 2007-2008, the US was the planet's sole economic, military and media-communications superpower. But throughout the presidencies of Barack Obama and Donald Trump, the US superpower was said to be declining due to the rise of China, a country that has grown rapidly over the past two decades and maintained its sovereignty in the face of the US State's use of a mix of persuasion and coercion to try to induce and pressure it to integrate with and follow a US-centered model of neoliberal capitalist development. For the past decade, global competition between US and Chinese corporations has been supported by each countries' security State, and as this intensified, so has geopolitical tension and conflict. Nowadays, each country's business elites and state planners are restructuring their respective national societies to outmatch the other, regrouping to reshape the institutions, rules and relations of global order, and trying to push and pull other countries into their orbit. As global competition and conflict between the US and China mount, the digital technology industries have become a flashpoint in the international geopolitical economy of communication. Indeed, digital technology—its research and development, ownership and control, design, production and distribution, and usage—has become one of the most contentious sites in the US-China battle to make the world's future. The US is home to Silicon Valley, the most powerful technology industry on the planet, but China's Big Tech industry is rising fast, and increasingly "going global."

As result, the globe is sometimes re-imagined by foreign policy strategists, news media, and scholars as a space for a new inter-imperial rivalry between the United States and China, two equally matched superpowers. This paper probes the contours of this relationship by way of a comparative analysis of the structural power of the United States vis-a-vis China. It argues that even though the United States' unipolar moment is over, and China is rising fast, the United States in 2021 still outmatched China's global economic, military, and digital technology might. The enduring global structural power of the United States vis-à-vis China (and other countries) suggests that a refined theory and empirical study "media imperialism" that foregrounds inter-imperial rivalry holds analytical value for international political economists of communication.

Submission ID

969

Panel overview - Revisiting Communication, Technology and Development: A 50th Anniversary Tribute to Dallas Smythe in China

Authors

Prof. Yuezhi Zhao - Simon Fraser Univsity, Tsinghua University

Prof. Yu Hong - Zhejiang University

Abstract

Proposal Submitter:

Yuezhi ZHAO (Simon Fraser University, Canada)_

Yu HONG (Zhejiang University, China)

Chair & Discussant

TBD

Panel Rationale:

When Dallas Smythe returned from his first trip to China exactly fifty years ago and then posited his "After Bicycles, What?" question at the onset of China's reform and open-up process, he probably could not have imagined Chinese transnational corporation Huawei's leadership in 5G technology or the complex and protracted geopolitical struggles surrounding it. To many, the so-called Digital Cold War or the information warfare that the US-led power bloc has orchestrated against China already signals an accelerated global transition that mixes geopolitical, ideological, and technological shifts to an amplified

extent. Critically, Smythe's insights on the politically-embedded nature of technology, his theoretical bridging of communication to political economy, and, ultimately, his fascination with the nature and direction of China's developmental path, have become ever more pertinent for anchoring analysis of global commutation in which China is assuming a central role.

The first aim of this panel is to bring forth Smythe's intellectual legacy so as to link critical inquiry of the unfolding contestations with social struggles of the 20th century. While critical scholars often evoke Smythe's concept of audience commodity and his treatment of "work" when examining immaterial labour and the new modes of exploitation in digital capitalism, Dallas Smythe has much more to offer. His critique of capitalist realism and the "dependency road", and his consistent support for national sovereignties to extend democratic participation in development and governance, exemplifies the kind of critical praxis aimed at contesting unequal global power structures. Above all, one should remember that Dallas Smythe blazed a path of challenging Cold War-enforced sinological orientalism and engaging China's self-proclaimed socialist theories and practices of development. For critical scholarship today though, the so-called China question remains unresolved, ever-more perplexing, and increasingly challenging. Hence, it is time to extend Smythe's pioneering visit to historically situate China today as part and parcel of the long global transition.

The second aim of this panel is to revisit, on both the theoretical and empirical level, the nexus of communication, technology, and development that has characterized China's modernization experience since the 1970s. To the extent that global digital capitalism extends exploitation, polarization, and depression, the actions of communities, institutions, and states destabilize any version of digital universalism. In particular, amidst China's claim that it has not only blazed a Chinese path of modernization, but also engendered a "new form of human civilization" at a time of profound capitalistic crises and global power shift, the knowledge regime has sustained old ways of thinking. In light of this, it is time to extend Smythe's critical acumen to the Digital Age and to examine what constitute development, what mode of social embeddedness makes a developmental agency, and what material relations enable the communication of specific development politics.

Ultimately, as the world is at the crossroads of stagnation and antagonism, as China is hosting the 2020 annual conference of the International Association for Media and Communication Research in Beijing, we draw inspirations from Dallas Smythe to create a dialogue space for collectively exploring the possibility for shared development. Our conceptually-driven and empirically-based research addresses the intersections of communication, technology, and development within and beyond China from historical, global, and comparative perspectives. Specifically, the four papers in the panel starts with Yuezhi Zhao's SFU archive-based research of Smythe's China related research and the enduring value of his pivotal question for China's developmental path, and followed by an exploration of Smythe's critique of capitalism realism and its implications for the development of socialist realism in Chinese media culture by Changchang Wu, Dependency

Road's Chinese translator. Then, the third paper in the panel, by Yu Hong, focuses on digital technology and analyzes the political economy of China's conflicted engagement with global capitalism. Finally, Ying-fen Huang, from her vantage point as a Taiwan-originated Chinese scholars, critique the cultural politics of China's unfinished business

Submission ID

978

Revisiting Dallas Smythe in China: Theoretical and Methodological Implications After Half-Century

Authors

Prof. Yuezhi Zhao - Simon Fraser University and Tsinghua University

Abstract

Drawing from Dallas Smythe's China-related works, SFU-based archival research of his China field trip notes, as well as recollections of my personal encounters with him, this paper explores the theoretical and methodological implications of Smythe's historical trips to China in the 1970s. From his willingness to understand China's development path on its own term to his farsightedness about the zig-zag nature of China's pursuit for socialism, from his explicit borrowing of Mao Zedong's conceptual tools to his profound sense of humility in acknowledging that he did not know enough about China, especially what the vast masses of the Chinese people were thinking, to make firm judgments, we can learn much in addressing "the challenge of China" and reorienting research in communication, culture, technology and development in the post-pandemic era. Although his Cold War-era academic counterpart Wilbur Schramm was more successful in inaugurating China's reform-era communication research with his China-trip lectures and high-level academic diplomacy 40 years ago, it might be the spirit of Smythe who laughs last as China's developmental path takes a conflicted but perhaps irreversible "New Era" turn toward socialist renewal, with "politics in command", "cultural screening", and self-reliance in technological innovation assuming growing importance in both policy and practice.

Submission ID

982

On Socialist Realism of Communication in Digital China

Authors

Prof. Changchang WU - East China Normal University

Abstract

In his work *Dependency Road and Experience of China*, Dallas Smythe might be the first western Marxist to elucidate the great significance in building the socialist realist culture and communication, vis-a-vis the virtually impregnable capitalist realist culture. Based on, and necessarily due to, the singularly precious legacies of his, the article is, in the era of the so-called neo-cold war or information warfare, to probe into the feasibility, and also possibility of building the socialist realist cultural and communicative frontiers in digital China. The primary task that could have done, for the state-owned media, in particular, is the re/construction of the cultural and communicative hegemony in the digital-sphere, or which amounts to the same thing, in the attribution of social use, the cultural Chinese-ness in terms of the young generation who has already descend into, or indulge in the Lockean possessive individualism and the social Darwinism. Just as crucial is, with the smoldering neo-conservative and populist movements around the Globe North that had been revived and, to a great extent strengthened by the internet, to highlight, having the aid of technologies and varieties which are produced by them, humanism and social moralities which had tremendously been overshadowed in the past forty years, which amounts to rejecting what Zizek (2000:326) denies as today's liberal blackmail that courting any prospect of radical change paves the way for totalitarianism, and consequently to forge the non-tentative but steadfast target of the socialist moral economy, as envisaged by Lin Chun(2013:42).

Submission ID

983

Planning Digital China for the Future: An Unfinished Agenda

Authors

Prof. Yu Hong - Zhejiang University

Abstract

Digital transition, or the shifting assemblage of the cybersphere, is a primary dimension of global transition. And digital China is a key variable therein, rendering its stance the starting place to trace transitions. One should ask, what is the state's mandates for the governance of transitions? In what capacity, and in what direction, is the Chinese state engaged in governing transitions? Research for these questions uses China's Five-Year

Plans (FYP)—the planning instrument that dates back to 1953 and expresses the party’s decree for direction and strategy—as a departure to trace and characterize: 1) the state’s normative and strategic goals; 2) systems, processes, and disagreement said to cue the geopolitical-economic workings; 3) projects implemented for making a possible future, all of which are interlaced with functional and relational roles assigned to the cybersphere. Along with the “policy-and-policymaking as text” approach, this book also moves beyond the scope of texts to examine key sites of political economic dynamics within the cybersphere.

Submission ID

984

Lost on the Dependency Road: The Politics of Cultural Screens in a Compromised National Sovereignty

Authors

Prof. Yin-Feng Huang - Simon Fraser University

Abstract

As a protectorate of US imperial power, the development of Taiwan and its transformation of communication and technology have been under the shadow of the aegis of Pax Americana, which deliberately serves the US’s ever-changing geopolitical interests in East Asia by encircling and dividing China. The island’s dependency road is therefore manifested in its rapid neoliberal democratization, an overly vibrant yet extremely polarized “civil society,” and, most critically, a communication and discursive sphere that is highly fissured and fragmented, all of which comes at the expense of limited and compromised national sovereignty. It inevitably creates a predicament in Taiwan’s “culture screens,”—a term coined by Dallas Smythe that refers to the ideological aspect of its national culture—which have to fiercely combat with the separatist spirits from inside and outside of the island. Due to the deepened Cold War and a renewed informational war started through the concerted efforts of the US and its allies, Taiwan, with its strong economic ties to mainland China, has been set against its own motherland through events such as the US’ tactic for the so-called “strategic ambiguity” on the “One-China policy” by approving record high arms sales to turn Taiwan into an “unassailable hedgehog” against the mainland. Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. (TSMC), the world’s most valuable chip maker, was not only forced to halt its supply of chips to Huawei but was threatened to enforce compliance with a request for data submission and relocate its production chain to the US by the Department of Commerce as part of its informational warfare. The Taiwan authority is also complicit with Western discourse on the smear campaign waged against mainland

China over the current pandemic crisis. This essay adopts Smythe's critique of the "dependency road" and the notion of "cultural screens" to unravel the contested terrain of cultural politics, where China's sovereignty is negotiated, compromised and undermined by the lingering imperial power over the Taiwan Strait.

Submission ID

987

Inteligencia Artificial y políticas de comunicación: regulación del riesgo y mercados nocivos

Authors

Dr. Daniela Monje - Universidad Nacional de Córdoba

Abstract

Cada año los desarrollos en Inteligencia Artificial (IA) avanzan en el mercado de bienes y servicios, áreas de salud, transporte, energía, seguridad, comunicaciones, medio ambiente y un amplio espectro de prácticas de interacción y consumo inculcadas a la vida pública y privada de las personas. Dentro del repertorio de regulaciones sobre su tratamiento formuladas explícitamente, o debatidas en diferentes regiones y países (América Latina, China, EE.UU.) el caso de la Unión Europea (UE) resulta paradigmático en cuanto a la posibilidad de ordenamiento legal que propone, basada en usos antes que en innovaciones tecnológicas específicas.

El estado actual del debate en la UE, indica que la opción preferida en términos deregulación sería aquella que únicamente se aplique a los sistemas de riesgo inadmisibles, alto o limitado, dejando abierta la posibilidad de que todos los proveedores de sistemas de IA que no se encuentren dentro de estas categorías sigan un código de conducta. Los requisitos se referirían a datos, documentación, trazabilidad, comunicación de información, transparencia y vigilancia humana entre otros aspectos.

La pregunta que formulamos entonces es: ¿Los sistemas de información que contabilizan, procesan y analizan los movimientos, emociones, preferencias de millones de ciudadanos en el mundo mediante la captación de sus datos en plataformas y redes sociales no representan una zona de alto riesgo e incluso de riesgo inadmisibles?. La aplicación de formas de IA en la construcción de perfiles de usuarios, de consumidores e incluso de votantes o en el análisis y diseminación de información, de fake news y en procesos de censura privada demanda reflexiones en este sentido. En efecto la computación en el borde y la computación cuántica al tiempo que generan posibilidades inexploradas, dan lugar a conflictos referidos a derechos como la libertad de expresión o a la protección de datos personales que han de ser replanteados desde la perspectiva de la economía

política de la comunicación, en tanto forman parte de un modelo de negocios en expansión basado en el almacenamiento, acumulación y procesamiento de datos en tanto activos y por tanto, deben ser leídos en el marco de cadenas de valor digitales globales, lo cual requiere una especificidad, habida cuenta que su consideración en tanto activos, es epistémicamente más compleja que su analogía con los recursos naturales.

El manejo de información sobre el comportamiento social que se hace posible mediante sistemas de IA, no registra precedente en la historia de la humanidad y sin dudas puede ser leído en la escala de los riesgos ya que la opacidad de ciertos procesos produce un debilitamiento de los mecanismos de resguardo, retarda acciones de reparación y al final del día debilita el sistema democrático

La aplicación de IA a procesos info-comunicacionales de escala global demanda claves de lectura analíticas que consideren estos desarrollos tecnológicos en el marco de lo que definimos como Bienes Públicos Globales. Esta necesaria articulación entre mercados info-comunicacionales digitales y derechos humanos puede dar lugar a resguardos específicos y prevenir potenciales derivas hacia su conformación en mercancías controversiales, propias de los mercados nocivos.

Submission ID

992

Platformizing cultural creativity: The power relation between gaming entrepreneurs and Tencent in China

Authors

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Ms. Chao Li - Soochow University

Ms. Wanqing Deng - Soochow University

Mr. Wenhao Lu - Soochow University

Abstract

China has seen an expanded domestic gamer base (7.2 billion) alongside \$27.8 billion market revenues amid the global pandemic (Statista, 2020). Among many contributing factors, gaming entrepreneurship assumes an increasingly important role for the copious body of gaming startups and the recent release of successful titles (e.g., Arknights and Genshin Impact). Championed by the state, pro-entrepreneurship policies (e.g., “Mass Entrepreneurship and Innovation” and “Internet+” in 2015) have also fueled venture creation endeavors around various gaming businesses. More importantly, such policies

foreshadow the burgeoning platformization of contemporary Chinese society, which has manifested noticeable overlaps and similarities with the same process in Western societies (de Kloet, et al., 2019). In this vein, major digital platform providers like Tencent have either built a foothold in the domestic game industry or attempted means of industrial restructuring based on their platform technologies and services (Kerr, 2017).

Therefore, platform dependency becomes an industry norm as numerous gaming entrepreneurs hatch, build, and scale their new ventures by heavily relying on digital platforms and related services. For instance, given the absence of Google Play in China, releasing games through which platforms is a paramount financial and operational concern to gaming ventures within the Android ecosystem. Besides, most gaming entrepreneurs often perceive the imperative to join and compete in platform-based incubation programs because of the limited business resources they possess in the early startup stage. As such, the platform providers rise to an unprecedented position that mediates how games are produced, distributed, consumed, and reused at the infrastructure level. Nonetheless, gaming entrepreneurs by default are disadvantaged in a power relation wherein the platform providers hold the advantageous end (Kerr, 2017). Such a power asymmetry, albeit with backlash from entrepreneurial communities (Zhang, 2020), continues to persist and is even poised to intensify on the account of worsening fundraising hardships in China (Huang, 2020).

Limited literature has detailed how platformization affects media entrepreneurs in China, especially the recurring concerns over cultural creativity. Although recent research has cast new light on amplified grass-root, self-enterprising creativity through platforms like Kuaishou (Lin & de Kloet, 2019), hardly can a likewise celebratory tone be applied to the examination of gaming entrepreneurship in my case. As the platform providers impose rules and values of cultural production on the dependent entrepreneurs, it is inevitable that entrepreneurs' creative expressions are circumscribed (Kaye et al., 2020). Moreover, the ubiquity of heavy monetization and knockoff among Chinese games, along with the ensued social issues (e.g., addiction, loot boxes), adds another layer of doubt to how digital platforms foster creative digital labor and entrepreneurialism.

As a pilot work, this study aims to examine the contour, structure, and performance of Tencent's gaming entrepreneurship scheme, which is emblematic of the platform providers' endeavor to exploit creative force. This scheme is a tentative term coined by the authors to encompass different gaming entrepreneurship-related departments and programs in Tencent. In specific, there are four major actors constituting the scheme: WeGame, Tencent Investment, Tencent Games Without Borders (GWB), and A.C.E. Program. Each actor has distinct responsibilities catering to gaming entrepreneurs' needs across the startup lifecycle; also, their functionalities are either built on Tencent's digital platforms or synergized with the underlying technical infrastructure. Besides, choosing this case is conducive to exploring the tensions associated with platform dependency. For instance, most gaming entrepreneurs assumed collaborating with Tencent as a "gold ticket" to survive and thrive in the hypercompetitive domestic market. On the flip side, their business

goals and operations were subject to platforms' data analytics and algorithm-driven business framework, which often led to aggressive and arbitrary business interventions from Tencent.

Drawing on curated information about these major actors (e.g., news coverage) and interviews with entrepreneurs who have been involved, this study preliminarily finds that first, Tencent's gaming entrepreneurship scheme is still a moving object but manages to improve the platform giant's tarnished image within the gaming entrepreneur community through a set of outreach efforts. Second, in line with Tencent's corporate culture, the relationships between and among the main constituents of the scheme are rather characterized as collaborative competition. It has driven the actors to shift their visions of gaming startups from profit-centered to creativity-oriented. Third, given the infancy of the scheme, Tencent is yet to thoroughly integrate its entrepreneurial supports into its established platform ecosystem, rendering most supports short-lived, and poorly connected with the digital platforms.

Submission ID

1019

Streaming strategies by Brazilian traditional broadcast media groups

Authors

Mrs. Cintia Augustinha Freire - Fluminense Federal University

Prof. Adilson Vaz Cabral Filho - Fluminense Federal University

Abstract

With the arrival of streaming services by several foreign media groups, traditional Brazilian media groups developed distinct strategies that involve partnerships, own and/or independent models of national productions, besides the offer of specific service. This proposal intends to analyze such strategies that Brazilian television media groups are developing, due to the consumption changes by the audience, with increasingly non-linear and fragmented characteristics. New broadcast production and flows are understood in free TV, pay TV and especially streaming, which result in services and practices not yet regulated by the State, but consist also of important components for the implementation of a democratic communication.

This scenario enables large media groups to operate in broadcasting and telecommunications, extending their reach by expanding in the Brazilian territory locally, regionally and also globally, so that they can continue to increase and emphasize the

lobby for the development of public policies that will ensure their interests to the detriment of the Brazilian population (MORAES, 2016). It also indicates that society lacks minimum conditions to operate communication services, because citizens' interests are not a priority, but the profit of large conglomerates.

Foreign groups seek to consolidate themselves in the country by acting with Brazilian groups in broadcasting and controlling telecommunications (CABRAL, 2020). They introduce new flows of production and distribution, which bring possibilities and challenges to everyday life. Society needs to be aware of the rights involved and, at the same time, to demand regulation that brings democratic bases for the use of the communication by media groups.

Parliamentarians are a barrier encountered by the Brazilian population, as there's not enough commitment to regulate media, even with the arrival of new services in the broadcast market, because of the strength of traditional media groups. The phenomenon has been maintained in despite of the revolution caused by the consolidation of the Internet and several new ways of watching TV (WOLFF, 2015).

These new actors have anticipated the legislation, amplifying already existing problems, by engaging and creating strategies that monetize the sector, investing in technology and appropriating the data generated through algorithms, which turn human life into capital (COULDRY, MEJÍAS, 2019), dictate the quality and value of access and use, without concern for how they will impact the daily lives of people, due to the meaning generated for them daily in their offline life (BASTOS, 2020).

Therefore, it is up to the people's representatives to take part actively in regulatory processes and create public policies that are needed for the sector. Regulating the media is part of the democratization process in Brazil, mainly to encompass and affirm cultural values, diversity, citizenship, among other elements. Despite social and economic inequalities in Brazil, both participation of the State and the population are fundamental in this process.

Submission ID

1027

Transnational Media Structures and Content

Authors

Dr. Lee Artz - Purdue Northwest

Abstract

Based on developments in media structures in Asia, Latin America, Europe, and Africa, evidence indicates an emerging transnational, cross-border pattern of joint ventures and co-productions that transcend previous cultural imperialism practices. Major media from every region--Reliance in India, Dalian Wanda in China, O Globo in Brazil, Naspers in South Africa, and Banijay/Endemol in France--have forged regional partnerships as well as collaborating with more global producers such as Sony, Comcast/Universal, and Disney. No longer do Western media determine themes or content in hit movies seen by millions. Rather, a new hegemonic culture of consumption, social hierarchy, and spectacle expressed through expanding national diversity is emerging from the transnational production by capitalist media. In addition to providing a political economy of transnational media production, this presentation outlines the recurring dominant ideological themes present across culturally diverse media content. Capitalism rules, but this new stage is transnational.

Submission ID

1034

Cloudwork mediation platforms in Brazil: autonomy and specific forms of work subsumption to capital

Authors

Dr. Jonas Valente - Bra

Dr. Helena Martins do Rêgo Barreto - Federal University of Ceará

Abstract

The article discusses the subsumption of the communication workers in labor mediation platforms and the effects of these exploitation models on the autonomy of individuals. The analysis falls on Brazil, a country of continental dimensions that added more than 13 million unemployed people in 2021. For the study, ten digital platforms were selected: Workana, Freelaweb.com.br, 99 Freelas, Get Ninjas, Freelas, Comunica Freelancer, Wedologos, Vintepila, Vinteconto, and Rockcontent Talent Network. From their analysis, we discuss 1. The subsumption model of intellectual work; 2. The contents of the contracted tasks; and 3. The impact on workers' autonomy. The sewing between theoretical premises and empirical analysis allows us to verify and describe contemporary forms of amplification of labor precarization. A process accelerated in the pandemic, which facilitated the introduction of technologies due to social isolation and fostered the demand for the development of paid microtasks, a phenomenon called turkerization (BRAZ et al.,

2020). The article is divided into four parts. Firstly, it discusses concepts forged to explain the impacts of technologies on the economy, such as "gig economy" (GRAHAM; ANWAR, 2019), sharing economy and platform economy, as well as more generalizing concepts, such as "cognitive capitalism" (HARDT; NEGRI, 2005), "digital capitalism" (SCHILLER, 2011) and "platform capitalism" (SNIRCECK, 2017). We present the adopted Marxian analytical framework, which takes as one of the central elements of capitalist dynamics today the increasing subsumption of intellectual labor to capital, facilitating the codification of knowledge, the control of workers and production chains, and the intensification of the exploitation of labor-power. It then presents the proposition of "work mediated by digital platforms" in contrast to concepts such as "digital" work (FUCHS, 2015; SCRIBANO, LISDERO, 2019; FRAYSSÉ, O'NEILL, 2016; GRAHAM et al., 2017), uberization (ABÍLIO, 2019; SLEE, 2018) or even servitude of the service proletariat (ANTUNES, 2018). It asserts that such mediation occurs both in relation to capital in general, facilitating the manifestation of the system's determinations, and, at a more micro-level, from the actions of economic agents who connect various sides of the labor relation. The third part mobilizes the already mentioned analytical categories to verify the active mediation of platforms and their impacts in relation to the weakening of labor ties and the creation of dependence on these infrastructures, also reaching the result of the work, developed with less autonomy. The conclusions point out that, although the creative activity's subsuming difficulty remains, the mediation of platforms widens this process and can be identified as a new stage of the real subsumption of labor, in which the use of science and machinery is fundamental, changing the means of production, labor productivity and the relationship between the capitalist and the worker, and hindering the organization of the working class today. This research aims to contribute to understanding the consequences of the contemporary adoption of Information and Communication Technologies in the global South.

Submission ID

1303

Notes Towards a Materialist Understanding of Progressive Solidarity

Authors

Dr. James Compton - University of Western Ontario

Abstract

This paper argues that there is a need for a renewed materialist understanding of progressive solidarity.

Since the election of Donald Trump as American President in 2016 there has been a surge in scholarly and journalistic publications decrying the emergence of a so-called "post-truth" era (McIntyre, 2018). Faith in mainstream liberal institutions, including government and

journalism, has faltered, while bad-faith politicians and conspiracy theorists label news organizations “fake news.” Meanwhile, misinformation is rampant on social media, and some prominent right-wing broadcasters, as governments around the world struggle to control a deadly global pandemic that an influential minority of citizens believe to be a partisan hoax. The location of politics has become decidedly unstable.

Many liberal and conservative commentators blame “Trumpism” for this turn of affairs. And while his encouragement of far-right politics certainly deserves critical attention, this research project starts from the assumption that Trumpism, and the hyper-polarization of public life that has flourished around the world, are symptoms of broader political, economic, and social legitimization crises. It will use an historical lens to situate various debates, particularly on the left, to understand how a progressive politics of solidarity may be operationalized.

The project will seek to contextualize these debates through historical analysis following in the tradition of work pioneered by E.P Thompson (1968) and later developed by Ellen Meiksins Wood (1995). In doing so it seeks to map the changing political and economic context – crises and contradictions within neoliberal capitalism’s mode of production – that mediate the particularities of social experience. To borrow a phrase from British cultural critic Raymond Williams (1977), the project seeks to locate and map the “structure of feeling” of the current historical conjuncture.

The first step will be to document the contradictions and social struggles that have emerged since the so-called Great Recession of 2009 and the disruption of global financial capitalism. As Nancy Fraser (2019) has argued, the hegemonic common sense of neoliberal capitalism has become destabilized and finds itself challenged from all sides – from the Occupy Wall Street protests and Black Lives Matter protests on the left, to the reactionary backlash from the far-right seen in the January 6 siege of the U.S. Congress and the occupation of Parliament Hill in Ottawa, Canada. The project will seek to make visible current, and unresolved, struggles to define a new hegemonic common sense.

Finally, the project will consider the prospects for developing forms of democratic politics based on progressive solidarity. Can a progressive politics be anchored in a sense of class solidarity? Or do we need to fundamentally rethink the politics of difference and solidarity, as suggested by some liberal (Alexander 1998) and radical feminist critics (Arruzza et al., 2019)?

Submission ID

1409

The mining Bitcoin industry: technical evolution and the monopoly of production

Authors

Ms. Gina Viviane Mardones Loncomilla - Universidade Federal do ABC

Abstract

The end of 2008 could not have been more propitious for the emergence of a cryptocurrency that promised revolutionize the current stage of capitalism. The bursting of the housing bubble and the credit market that had expanded since 1990s would characterize the exhaustion of neoliberalism and its flexible model of regulation. The financial crash that plunged the world into one of the worst crises was compared to 1929s Great Depression by many analysts who focused on its similarities, such as the liberal belief in *laissez-faire* (LIMA 2009) – and particularities, such as the immediate response and intervention of the State in 2008. (MAZZUCHELLI 2008)

These sporadic renewals of capitalism are commonly associated with technological transformations. As Albuquerque(2019) says “crises are demarcators of deep institutional changes that modifies structures of the global economy – the 2008 crisis would characterize decisive points in a broad set of changes” (ALBUQUERQUE 2009)

Bitcoin emerges in this context. It is the first digital currency based on the so-called *blockchain* technology, a cryptographic system that operates as a method of production and transaction of cryptocurrencies without the need for intermediary institutions. It is on this system where Bitcoin industry’s largest investments and profits will be concentrated. Also known as mining, the instance of cryptocurrency production has expanded rapidly in a short time since Bitcoin’s creation: from simple home computers to powerful higher-performance equipment. This has been made possible by the investment of capital to develop the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) that form the material basis of so-called mining pool.

Although the profusion of this phenomenon has presented from the beginning as a decentralized alternative dispensing the the role of the State and private agents (financial institutions) (ALIZART 2020; ASSANGE et al 2013), the dynamics in the productive instance led to a monopolization process. Thus, based on the following questions: How is the mining industry structures? What Does this dynamic reveals? –this article aims to understand how the technical evolution of cryptocurrency extraction companies took place, and from there, to elaborate a critical analysis of the relationship between innovation and the continued self reproduction of capitalism.

To this purpose, in a first moment, the technical aspects of blockchain will be described, as well as the evolutionary process of technological base that led to the professionalization of mining. Then, with the contributions of Schumpeter and the neo-Schumpeterian current (Nelson& Winter) we will bring the characterizations of the innovation process in the

microeconomic scope, associating it with the extration of cryptocurrencies. Finally, based on brazilian marxists readings such as Eduardo da Motta e Albuquerque, César Bolaño, and Edemilson Paraná we intend to discuss the problems involved in this phenomom of the blockchain and Bitcoins' industry, such as the financial speculation and technological concentration.

With due epistemological distances, it is understood that both approaches contribute to elaborate a critical analysis of the relationship between the monopoly of cryptocurrency production and the innovation of technical infrastructure.

Submission ID

1450

Foundations of Failure: western liberal democratic political economy. China's alternative model

Authors

Dr. Marcus Breen - Boston College

Abstract

When China released its 14th Five Year Plan in 2020, the western media offered coverage that fit the usual and expected negative coverage of China. The US newspaper of record, the New York Times began the first paragraph and the first words in the paragraph about the Five Year Plan, with "China's Communist Party." This is a trope for US readers. It warns of a counter-system to liberal democracy, drawing on Judeo-Christian images of the "evil" of collective community with economic redistribution priorities. It is a negative ideology that was established to crush the US left after its rise in the 1930s, culminating in the House Un American Activities Committee (HUAC) hearings that began in the late 1930s. The headline for the article typified western media coverage with language that semioticians in media and communication would recognize as prejudicial for its use of questionable language: "China's Leaders Vow Tech 'Self-Reliance,' Military Power and Economic Recovery." (Buckley and Myers, October 29, 2020). Each word and grammatical character can be ascribed a negative semiotic connotation. Wanning Sun described the western media portrayal of China within a framework of "unfair coverage, bias and selective reporting" (2008, 32). Such media coverage acts against the possibility of public understanding of Chinese political economy, its foundations in planned economic theory and methods as well as its contribution to human development within the socialist model of development. As such, the 14th Five Year Plan offered the continuation of "innovation-driven development" and "high quality" growth," in a report about the National People's Congress (Qin 2021). The absence of adequate public comprehension of China's rise is

important to consider in approaches to political economy of communication, because of China's emerging influence and power. This knowledge vacuum means that the intersection of misleading media coverage in the US about China misunderstands the rise of China due to its five year plan methodology. Simultaneously, the lack of knowledge about political economy that is informed and guided by state planning, reproduces the prevailing liberal democratic public policy method of private ownership with winners and losers, offering no recourse to alternative knowledge. Such an approach can be considered a failure when compared with the State planning system of China. Considerable effort is needed by researchers and journalists to incorporate into political economy of communication more information about the value of state planning for technology, media and communication, thereby increasing public knowledge about alternative systems to the chaos of liberal democracy.

Submission ID

1515

From "digital labor" to "digital prisoner": Repositioning audience in digital capitalism

Authors

Mr. Haodong She - 中国传媒大学

Abstract

Over the past two decades, digital labor has emerged as a key analytical tool for understanding audience/users in the contemporary digital economy. This is a continuation of Dallas Smythe's audience labor theory (1977) in the digital age and multi-disciplinary scholars have contributed to critiquing and developing this concept in a global context.

Among others, most political economists consider user activities as free labor which is eventually exploited by Internet platforms (Andrejevic, 2007, 2012; Petersen, 2008; Fuchs & Sevignani, 2013; Fuchs, 2014). However, authors of cultural studies argue that user activities indicate a trend towards participatory culture which may empower consumers by providing them with control over media content (Jenkins, 2006; Banks & Deuze, 2009).

Different from the previous analysis, this paper demonstrates that with the capitalist information revolution, today's audience is neither "exploited labor" nor merely "participatory consumer", but "*controlled digital prisoner*".

To examine the tension between users and platforms, this paper selects and analyses a pair of the most contradictory digital concepts – user data and digital privacy. In terms of theoretical framework, this paper adopts information processing and Marxian political

economic theory to explore the formation and valorization process of user data, and then introduces cybernetics theory to clarify the power relations between users and platforms.

As a result, several tentative conclusions are developed as follows:

First, it is the behavioral information that is *naturally* produced when users browse a webpage, click a button, or purchase a commodity. Behavioral information is the vital property of human activities, which is neither owned by anyone nor automatically transformed into data.

Second, monitoring techniques (such as event tracking and IP geolocation) are applied widely by platforms to encode behavioral information (raw material) into data (commodity). Notably, digital surveillance is not only a process of labor realization, but also a feedback mechanism. The monitoring of users delivers instant feedback to the capitalist system and enhances the predictive capabilities of Internet companies. It thus offers a cheaper and more efficient mode of demand management, making it unprecedentedly easier to create and control consumers and minimize market uncertainty.

Third, the heart of digital privacy issues is not that the platform knows too much, but that the public knows too little. On the one hand, ICTs deprive people of their private space and pack their daily life into two places – offline public places and online public places. On the other hand, in both real space and cyberspace, Internet platforms are always protected strictly. Information brings control, and inequality in information circulation leads to the power gap between users and platforms. The power gap leaves users tightly controlled in a digital capitalist system without any ability to counteract.

This article concludes that in digital capitalism, the position assigned to the audience/users is not the labor who contribute surplus-value, but the prisoners who are carefully monitored and controlled.

Keywords: audience labor, user data, digital privacy, digital surveillance, digital prisoner

Submission ID

1683

Political Economy of Beauty Influencers: From China's Wanghong Economy to the Global Cosmetic Industry

Authors

Dr. Zexu Guan - School of Journalism and Communication, Beijing Language and Culture University

Abstract

Influencers can be found wherever social media are commonly used. Scholarship shows how influencers have become key actors on social media platforms in China and elsewhere (Arriagada & Ibáñez 2020; Duffy 2018; Guan 2021; Nieborg, Duffy, & Poell, 2020). While current research offers subtle and insightful analysis about the popularity of influencers regarding specific social, cultural, and technological contexts, it usually does not explain why certain clusters of creators, like beauty influencers, emerge and become a global phenomenon on diverse digital platforms. Addressing this issue, this article develops an alternative perspective to interpret the global mechanism of influencer production. This research begins with the close observation of China's wanghong economy; in the end, it offers a framework to interpret the beauty influencer phenomenon across the globe.

This article draws inspiration from political economic research, which focuses on "the social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources, including communication resources" (Mosco, 2009, p. 2). It interrogates the power relations and resource distribution behind the cultural practices of influencers by examining the connections between beauty influencers and the global cosmetic industry. Specifically, it explores the role of beauty influencers from the perspective of the cosmetic industry and asks how this global industry participates in the development of beauty influencer segment.

First-hand data has been collected through interviews with sixteen Chinese beauty influencers, four advertising agents, and three PR managers from transnational cosmetic enterprises. In addition, the research builds on business reports, news articles, and academic literature about the global cosmetic industry.

This research shows that the global cosmetic industry proactively appropriates and boosts the popularity of beauty influencers. Its role in shaping beauty influencers' cultural production is as large as key platforms, such as YouTube or Weibo. With a long marketing-led tradition, the global cosmetic industry seeks to occupy media outlets and use celebrities to promote beauty ideals in every age. In the digital age, the global cosmetic industry takes beauty influencers as a vital marketing channel and spends a growing amount of money to sponsor their content production. Because of major players' increasing marketing budget on social media, beauty influencers obtained the chance to gain monetary rewards, which further stimulates more and more people to start an influencer career. More importantly, transnational giants from the cosmetic industry, such as L'Oréal and Procter & Gamble, perform their influencer marketing on a global scale, strengthening beauty influencers as an entrenched genre on various platforms. It should be pointed out that identifying the globalness of influencer phenomenon does not cancel particular positions of societies or groups. Diverse countries do not develop the influencer/wanghong economy equally on the international dimension and such economy does not benefit people equally on the domestic dimension.

By unpacking the role of the global cosmetic industry, this research emphasizes the power of the manufacturing industry, not taking influencers as a mere phenomenon of the information economy or platform economy. Thus, research on digital capitalism should not be limited to platforms replacing legacy companies. Rather, YouTube and Weibo can walk hand in hand with L'Oréal and Procter & Gamble, benefiting from the influencer craze.

Submission ID

1734

Will Nationalism Change Your Purchase Decisions?

Authors

Ms. Ren Mengjie - Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications

Abstract

In recent years, the "domestic product wind" has blown into the capital market, and more and more local brands have begun to try to use the "domestic product" marketing strategy to promote their products. This phenomenon is a vivid form of consumerism being coerced and practiced by nationalism. This study takes the "domestic products" marketing craze in the business world as an entry point, puts forward the political economy hypothesis that consumer ethnocentrism affects consumers' purchasing behavior, and demonstrates it through experiments with controlled variables. With decades of booming globalization, consumers are exposed to products from a variety of sources, so the decision to choose between foreign and domestic products has changed not only for consumers, the industry, but also academics. be significant. Domestic and foreign products, commerce and politics, objects and symbols, from the perspective of consumer-centrism, the nation is imagined as a community, and consumers are driven by the power of imagination to habitually make preference choices for commodity consumption. Preference is not only psychologically oriented, but also supported by action, and it also faces the compromise of making choices when multiple identities conflict.

Submission ID

1758

Commodification , spatialization and structuration : the Development History of Wechat from the Perspective of Digital Capitalism

Authors

Ms. Xiaoqian Tan - Sun Yat-sen University

Abstract

With the emerging information and communication technology to reconstruct capitalist production, capitalism increasingly depends on the control of information, thus promoting the development of digital capitalism. The political economy of communication pays attention to the exchange value of communication, especially the complex relationship between commercial interests and the expression of public interests in the development of cultural communication industry. Based on this, this paper analyzes the development of Wechat from social media to the " mobile digital infrastructure" carried with it, examines the development history of Wechat as an important Internet platform in China.

In terms of commodification, Wechat provides a platform that contributes to the commodification of content and productivity, while Wechat itself, which reflects digital technology, has become the object of commodification; in terms of spatialization, the boundary of Wechat's industrial power system continues to extend and become a kind of digital infrastructure; in terms of structuration, Wechat serves the mainstream values, swaps commercial capital and symbolic capital with mainstream media, and seeks political capital in the globalization of promoting the export of Chinese culture and technology.

In addition, based on the development process of the Internet platform represented by Wechat, this paper further puts forward the characteristics of mobility and nodalization, which is used to supplement the analytical framework of political economy of communication in the development of platform society.

This paper argues that the flow logic becomes natural and legitimate in digital capitalist society. Internet platforms represented by Wechat generate interests by striving for legitimacy in flow manipulation, and the government increases its political influence in the process of expanding the commercial interests of the Internet platform. Among them, the internet platform based on flow has become a commercialized form of capital exchange and a bargaining chip for social power competition, which reflects the logic of political and commercial development in China's digital capitalist society.

Submission ID

1765

THEORISING AND MAPPING MEDIA OWNERSHIP NETWORKS IN AUTHORITARIAN-POPULIST CONTEXTS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF AUSTRIA, SLOVENIA, HUNGARY AND TURKEY

Authors

Ms. Marlene Radl - University of Vienna

Ms. Tjaša Turnšek - Mirovni inštitut / Peace institute

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Dr. Burçe Çelik - Loughborough University London

Abstract

This paper explores the changes in the structure of media ownership in selected Central and Eastern European countries in the context of the rise of authoritarian populism and anti-democratic backlash. Recent media research suggests that populism can be understood in part as a response to the failure of tackling concentrated media ownership (Freedman, 2021). Expanding this work, our paper uses social network analysis (SNA) to investigate changes to media ownership looking at both ownership structures as well as concentration dynamics. The paper covers developments in Austria, Slovenia, Hungary and Turkey over the past two decades, during which authoritarian tendencies were evident in all four countries, albeit to varying degrees.

While contextualising the authoritarian-populist transformations in the countries under study, we explore how national media spaces have changed accordingly in structural and economic terms. Contrary to studies that focus on the discursive aspects of populist communications treating populism as a performance, style or rhetoric that articulates the people against the elite (Mudde, 2004; Laclau, 2005), this paper emphasizes the substantive, political-economic and institutional aspects of populist politics (see Tugal, 2020). Hence, the authors strive to shift the discussion on populist communications from 'what populists say through media' to 'what populists and populism do to media'.

Understanding the transformation of media ownership structures as intrinsic to the political economic re-organization of authoritarian populism, the paper provides evidence that the rise of populism is accompanied by extensive changes to media ownership networks, suggesting that such changes may be instrumental in consolidating and maintaining populist regimes.

Going beyond conventional market concentration indices, SNA has recently been used as a useful tool to avoid a medium-specific approach to measuring media ownership

concentration (Birkinbine & Gomez, 2020). Combined with a comprehensive dataset indicating the owners of high-reach news media outlets in the print, TV, and online sector for the years 2000, 2010 and 2020, the method allows us to visualize conspicuous changes in the network structures and determine the centrality and density of the ownership networks over time. Preliminary results indicate that far-reaching changes have taken place over the past two decades, pointing to the emergence of dominant media actors and increasing polarisation between large, dominant media groups and more marginal players in all four countries.

The paper offers a novel way of addressing the question of populist control over media systems: It adds valuable cross-national ownership data to the discussion of media-populism-relations, expands the possibilities of SNA to study media ownership concentration and derives propositions from these findings, which shed light on the political-economic restructuring of media spaces within authoritarian-populist contexts.

Submission ID

1804

The crisis of Journalism: what is the role of the State?

Authors

Prof. Elsa Costa e Silva - Communication and Society Research Centre, University of Minho

Abstract

Journalism has historically been an essential resource for democracy. However, recent crises of democracy, such as the growing electoral abstention, the resurgence of populist currents and the proliferation of the so-called fake news, came to demonstrate that the journalistic function is still essential for liberal societies westerners. Like Education, Health and Justice, journalism is a public good.

Journalism is an essential tool for scrutiny and access to verified and credible information, which is fundamental for the mechanisms of representation and deliberation associated with corporate governance. Several recent studies have shown that journalism has positive effects on the quality of democracy and political representation. The press has a particular importance. There is scientific evidence that the functions performed by newspapers are not fully guaranteed by other media (Druckman, 2005; Facorro & Fleur, 1993; Katz et al. al., 1973). Newspapers have been essential in the production of research journalistic report on abuses of power by various institutions (Schudson, 2008) and the closure of local newsrooms is associated to growing political polarization (Darr et al., 2018, Schulhofer-Wohl & Garrido, 2013, Masket, 2019). The journalistic exercise in the context

of press freedom is still associated with lower levels of corruption (Hamada, Abdel-Salam, & Elkilany, 2019).

However, the business of journalism faces a worldwide crisis and Portugal is no exception. News information has never been a commercial activity that provide an economic return on its own. Citizens never paid the real value of the information, since, since it is a commercial enterprise, information has always been “subsidized” by advertising. With advertising revenues diminishing, the Portuguese paid press circulation is in a situation of unprecedented economic fragility, aggravated by the recent pandemic. Thus, journalism is essential and fundamental in democracies but there is currently no business model that commercially support this activity. This puts in the spotlight the role of public authorities in guaranteeing the social function of journalism.

In democratic societies, the issue is not whether the State must intervene (because it always does), but what is the combination of powers that will produce the best result. Given the current economic and financial situation of Portuguese journalistic companies and the Portuguese social and political context, this communication will examine what could be the role of the State in Portugal and will outline the possible principles of public policies. Mostly, it is about ensuring that any public strategy looks not only at the industry, but above all aims at ensuring that there is a social response to the need of information, which must be of public interest, and balanced in terms of proximity, diversity and quality.

Submission ID

1810

University excellence and the commodification of the Academia. Analysis of the methodology applied by international university rankings (QS, ARWU, THE)

Authors

Prof. Ángel Campos Campos - University Rankings

Prof. Enric Saperas - King Juan Carlos University

Abstract

University rankings are the most original component and the most typical product of the neoliberal academia. Together with the publishing industry, the citation indexes and databases, the international academic associations and the evaluation agencies, rankings define the contemporary institutional dominant paradigm context for research and education in social sciences. Despite that during the 1980s and 1990s university rankings firstly developed a national scope for evaluating academic performance, since de 2000s

they have achieved an international corporate profile that fits the neoliberal ideology of international competition. Over the past decade, since their consolidation as instruments to measure the quality, reputation and productivity of universities and research centers, the rankings have achieved an international consensus for the evaluation of science and education. Rankings are currently institutions that work in a very similar way to financial markets rating agencies, by providing measurable standards in the struggle for top positions that would lead to the international reputation needed to attract students and scholars in the world marketplace of the academia. Therefore, policy makers, financial agents and the public opinion have in university rankings a hierarchical criteria to measure and compare the educative offer and the research performance, contributing for the transformation of universities into agents for the reproduction of the knowledge industry in nowadays context of commodification of Higher Education.

University rankings have developed different criteria for the evaluation and assessment of “excellence”. Although some differences can be found among these criteria, most of the rankings consider three key components: i) bibliometric indicators and citation indexes to measure the impact of research activity; ii) reputation surveys conducted among scholars and employers; and iii) the ability to attract international students and scholars. This presentation aims to describe and compare the methodologies developed by the three most relevant university rankings: the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU; best known as the Shanghai Ranking), the QS World University Rankings, and the Times Higher Education World University Rankings. The objective is to study, from a political economy of knowledge perspective, the function of university rankings in the neoliberal academia, in order to analyze how they are operationalizing the notions of “academic excellence”, “academic reputation” and “academic competence” as standards for the university market. Thus, this work gives continuity to a line of research developed uninterruptedly during the last decade in which the institutional frameworks of international media and communication research have been analyzed in previous contributions (including research articles and presentations in international conferences).

Submission ID

1885

Cultivating Attentive Subjects: Self-Study Room, Usefulness, and Neoliberal Work Culture

Authors

Mr. Changwen Chen - National University of Singapore

Abstract

Over the last several years, China has seen the rise and fall of various forms of sharing economies, such as ride-hailing, bicycles, portable chargers, co-working space, etc., and each of them reshaped a certain relationship between people, technology, and environment to sustain itself. Scholars who work on labor studies have eloquently demonstrated the social consequences of emerging economies on labor conditions, especially the impact of technologies deployed to the labor process within the working space. This paper tends to push the boundary of labor studies by going beyond the focus of labor process in the section of production that is entangled with the dichotomy of exploitation and resistance as well as capital and labor, especially in the context of China where the whole system is normally reduced as authoritarian capitalism, and switching attention to a much more invisible while equally important section: reproduction, a term adopted from Althusser that emphasizes more on the relation of production than biological reproduction. To this end, this paper investigates a newly emerging form of sharing economy in Urban China, namely, sharing self-study room (共享自习室), which has existed in almost every prefecture-level city of China. These spaces typically have an elegant environment with fascinating interior design, fully equipped facilities for various needs of learning activities, and common rules of behaviors, and the business model is that people would pay for renting a seat to study for hours, days, and even a whole year. The theoretical significance of self-study room lies in that it can address the gap in not only the sociology of education that centers on formal schooling and its relation to labor regime while the amateur learning is ignored, but also the labor studies that focus on the power relations within working space. Apart from an analysis of political economy on sharing self-study room that contextualizes its existence, I conduct an ethnographic observation within the space and in-depth interviews, to explore how certain work culture is produced by the discourse self-study rooms they adopt to justify and promote themselves, the spatial settings they arrange, and media technology people use within the space. I argue that the sharing self-study room has been the disciplinary space for people to practice, perform, and internalize the work ethic before they engage in the working regime, which is facilitated by both spatial and temporal reconfigurations within the study room. The space within is divided based on light and sound, which contributes to cultivating attentive subjects who are expected for being responsible for their own efficient utilization, and a differentiated commodification of time is practiced to value the time that is paid while devaluing others that is not paid, which delivers a neoliberalist perception of “usefulness” of time. In a word, this paper contributes to the labor studies by illustrating how the Chinese work culture is reproduced outside the working space making the whole work system dynamically sustainable.

Submission ID

1932

The public support to the audiovisual in Brazil: understanding the crisis

Authors

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Dr. Othon Jambeiro - Federal University of Bahia (UFBA)

Abstract

The article presents and discusses the aspects of continuity and changes in the public support for developing the audiovisual production sector in Brazil and in the relationships within and among institutional actors - with emphasis on the Federal Government - and on the market, considering players and independent production companies. Until 2016, this sector experienced an expressive cycle of development. Between 2009 and 2016, more than 6,200 independent producers were registered in the Brazilian Film Agency (Agência Nacional do Cinema-Ancine), a condition to compete for the public funding; from 2009 to 2018, the Audiovisual Sector Fund (Fundo Setorial do Audiovisual-FSA) provided R\$4.7 billion for public calls, with an expressive concentration on the production of feature films; and on the production and programming of TV content. More than 80% of the FSA's revenues come from the sector itself, through the collection of tax incentives, paid by telecommunications companies that commercially exploit audiovisual in Brazil. In the sum of the wealth produced by the country, the audiovisual share increased from R\$ 11.5 billion in 2009 to R\$ 24.5 billion in 2014, that corresponded to about 0.45% of the national GDP, a value that exceeds sectors such as the pharmaceutical industry (Ancine, 2019). In 2019, the discontinuity of the policy, the stoppage of Ancine - manager of federal public funding - and the interruption of public calls from the FSA - the main source of investment - added to the effects of digitalization and the expansion of streaming, with impacts on the logic production and circulation of works. The Covid-19 pandemic is another condition that has changed the central processes in the audiovisual chain. Therefore, this article identifies the conditions of continuity and changes in the scenario of promotion of audiovisual content production in Brazil, which culminated with these mechanisms interruption in 2021. By understanding the positioning of the main agents involved in this crisis, this work points out the important agendas to conduct the audiovisual policy in the country in the coming years. The problem that guides the discussion is: what are the central issues in the political and technological scenario constituted over the last few years to understand the relationship of independent production companies among them, with market development institutions in Brazil and with exhibition and circulation companies? The work is theoretically based on the literature of Political Economy of Communication (HARDY, 2014; IKEDA, 2021; MORAIS; JAMBEIRO, 2020; WASKO, 2014; et al); and the Media Industries (CALDWELL,

2020; CANESSO, 2021; DOMINGUES et. al, 2019; PERREN, 2016; O'REGAN, 2011, et al). The methods and techniques adopted in the research include the analysis of data from Ancine, companies and class entities in the independent audiovisual production sector and media groups. The authors have a database with information about producing companies of different sizes and regions of the country. (The discussion dealt with in this article integrates a broader research dedicated to the examination of the audiovisual public policy in Brazil, financed by CNPq).

Submission ID

2047

African Images Constructed by Grassroots Bloggers on Chinese Short Video Platforms: A Perspective of Transcultural Political Economy of Communication

Authors

Ms. Xinyu Wang - School of Journalism and Communication, Tsinghua University

Abstract

For most Chinese people, the global pandemic has hit the pause button on foreign travel. But there is still a window for even the most grassroots Chinese to embrace the world. With the prevalence of short video platforms (mainly Douyin and Kuaishou) in China, plenty of Chinese people post videos to share their overseas lives. In recent years, Douyin and Kuaishou have seen an amazing surge in Africa-themed videos, which are produced by Chinese grassroots bloggers working or living in Africa. These videos offer the domestic audience new insights into Africa, but also reflect problems of racial prejudice, gender stereotypes, and platform capitalism.

This study explores the complicated images of Africans constructed by Chinese bloggers on Douyin and Kuaishou, and also the reasons behind them. Based on the critical perspective and intersectional analysis framework of transcultural political economy of communication (Chakravartty & Zhao, 2008), this study first conducted content analysis to 400 randomly sampled videos, and then chose two bloggers with the most popularity as analysis cases to carry out critical discourse analysis (CAD). All the related videos, live streamings, and comments were analyzed.

The study finds that, compared with African images in Chinese mainstream media, the images in short videos are more vivid, characterized by “grassroots perspective”, “spectacle” and “Chinese style”. The shooting scenes are mainly in backward rural regions, the content mainly about Africans’ daily lives, often with the color of Chinese

culture. Furthermore, these videos highlight Africans' primitive and impoverished lifestyle and their talent for singing and dancing.

This study has also concluded two typical images of Africans: "African Brothers" and "Exotic Beauty". The latter adds a supplement of gender particularity to the former.

- **"African Brothers"** represents African workers in Chinese factories. On the one hand, they are pictured with good qualities like being friendly, unsophisticated, optimistic, hard-working, and strong. On the other hand, they are also seen as poor and barbaric. They are called "brothers" by the Chinese blogger but appear very obedient and inferior in their relationship.
- **"Exotic Beauty"** refers to the young African girl featured in the videos, who is intensely "sexualized" under the camera. While being praised for her beauty, she is gazed at and oppressed by both the patriarchy and the racial order.

The positive part of the African images may be due to the decentralization of the Internet, grassroots empathy in the Global South, the historical friendship between China and Africa, and Socialist notions of racial equality. **Yet the profit-seeking nature of platform capital leads to the alienation of inter-cultural communication, the "othering" of the Africans, and the deepening of racial prejudice.** Many bloggers cater to vulgar tastes, stereotypes, male chauvinism, national pride, and even racist ideas of some Chinese grassroots audiences. This study reflects upon the racial attitudes of Chinese people and the negative effects of capital-led technology platforms. It also calls for Chinese mainstream media to adopt more vivid forms to help enhance the mutual understanding and respect between China and Africa.

Keywords: short videos, grassroots celebrities, African images, racialization, transcultural political economy of communication

Submission ID

2228

Migrant class women in Platform economy — take the babysitter of mother outsourcing agent as the starting point

Authors

Dr. YUDONG GAO - National Chengchi University

Abstract

With the rapid development and application of platform labor in China, the whole society has set off a large-scale discussion upsurge of the relationship between technology, platform, labor and person. The trend of ' mediaization of labor ' has brought more communication areas into the discussion, and gradually promoted the development of communication political economy in mainland China from ' finding another way ' to '

manifest learning'. Through literature review, it is found that when discussing China's platform labor with the method of communication political economics, the subjects of attention are basically focused on male-dominated practitioners such as takeaway riders, drivers and computer program, and some literatures focus on female-dominated platform practitioners such as 'online red' and 'computer program', but most of them are middle-class intellectual women. Few relevant literatures pay attention to the migrant women in the domestic labor outsourcing platform and the impact and influence of the new working mechanism of the platform, especially the outsourcing of childcare is most deeply affected by the platform, which has changed from the previous "acquaintance economy" to "platform economy"

Starting from the theoretical context of Marxist feminism, this paper expounds the process of privatization, marketization and platformization of parenting in domestic work after China's reform and opening up, and the new characteristics of labor produced by the injection of platformization into domestic parenting. The problem consciousness of this paper is how Marxist feminism theory, as a western theory, can explain and participate in China's current platformized gender labor context. The research questions mainly focus on : (I).What role does platformization play in the socialization of domestic labor (regarded as one of the strategies of female liberation) ; (II)What is the impact and change of platform on the form and process of female workers engaged in domestic work ; (III)How can the migrant class women unite under the trend of platform and strive for more their own rights and interests.

The author selects babysitter as the breakthrough point, this group of women in today's platform of rapid development of Chinese society presents triple control, namely in the original family of patriarchy control and work control from the employer's family, after the birth of platform, as the mother's agent ,babysitters' labor is facing a new job monitoring and evaluation system, worthy of in-depth excavation and exploration, supplement platform research experience of Chinese migrant women.

This paper collects relevant government reports, magazines and news, and selects T and H two maternal and child service platforms, and selects dozens of babysitters in China's first-tier cities, using participatory observation and semi-structured interviews to study. It not only states the historical changes, but also reflects on the gender division of labor in the platform society, so as to enrich the research dimension of Marxist feminism theory in China's experience and platform economy.

Submission ID

2232

From "Algorithm" to "Data Practice": Technology and Affective Labor in Short Video Performance

Authors

Mr. Siyang Qiao - Wuhan University of Technology

Mr. Wenhao Zhou - Shaanxi Normal University

Abstract

According to the third quarter financial report of Bilibili (a Shanghai-based video website) in 2021, its average monthly active users reached 267 million and average monthly active video-create-users reached 2.7 million. Bilibili is becoming a cultural community and video platform for young people. Users' choice of video content is closely related to the visibility of the platform. Moreover, the algorithm recommendation of the platform is constructing a labor relationship, in which the algorithm can "quantify" the users self through their data practice. In this process, users were satisfied with the social interaction and affective needs.

This research focused on the technology of platform through participatory observation and in-depth interviews to understand the technical support of the website how to keep users active and promote affective labor generation, and to reflect on the manipulation of affective labor in video performances.

The video platform, this research shows, constructs the digital and competitive mechanism of users in video performance through algorithm recommendation and users' data practice. This has prompted video-create-users and non-video-create-users to gradually form a "cooperative way" in the video performance and reach a mutually beneficial labor "negotiation". However, individual autonomy plays a role in video performance, prompting users to selectively accept information or reverse operation, so as to avoid the push of homogeneous content and the generation of emotional anxiety.

Although technical advancement simplifies operations and satisfies requirements, the algorithmic logic of technology is becoming a potential factor manipulating video performances. As a cultural community where young people gather, the "user-oriented" discourse practice of Bilibili should pay more attention to stimulating the vitality of user creation, rather than allowing individuals to succumb to self compelled and become "believers" of big data. With the help of positive affect, users try to construct "self technology" and become the ethical subject of their own actions, thereby stimulating the subjectivity of the video-create-users and non-video-create-users in video performance. The affective labor can be a process of self-satisfaction and self-enjoyment for the users in the video performance.

Submission ID

2249

Repositioning Financial Journalism Practice in Zambia's Media Landscape

Authors

Mr. George Sichinga - City, University of London

Abstract

Zambia, Africa's second largest producer of copper, defaulted its payments to external investors who rejected the country's deferral of an overdue \$42.5 million interest payment in 2020 (Hill, 2020), making it the first African nation to default amid the coronavirus pandemic. This was after repeatedly failing to win a six-month payment freeze from Eurobond holders who account for about \$3 billion of Zambia's sovereign debt (Hill and Mitimangi, 2020). The Economist quickly labelled Zambia the new Zimbabwe (The Economist, 2020), a year after the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank had declared Zambia among 18 African countries at high risk of debt distress (IMF, 2019).

However, despite the important economic issues facing Zambia, local journalists have not interrogated government to explain the recent Eurobond default and what it means for Zambia's reputation in the world.

This study therefore takes a mixed methods approach that draws on 20 interviews and a small-scale survey to understand perspectives of financial journalism in Zambia. Financial journalism may be an established practice in western media that enables economic dialogue of various national and international issues. Also, communication science scholars may now be devoting a lot of attention to financial journalism (Straub, 2018), scrutinising the role financial journalists play in forewarning economic collapse (Cernat, 2014; Manning, 2013). Hayes (2014:59) for example describes a financial journalist today as the "meat and drink to media enterprises." However, aside from the works of Hamusokwe (2019), Tomaselli (2009), and Zirugo (2019)'s review of award-winning financial journalism in Africa, not much work has been conducted on financial journalism as a practice on the African continent.

Adopting political economy of media theory, the study interrogates Zambian journalists, academics, and economists to identify prevailing gaps in the journalism training and how that could impact overall financial journalism practice. The research finds that Zambian journalists, academics, and economists are dissatisfied with the way financial journalism is performed at the organisational, personal, and product levels. The findings show that the media and stakeholders want to see an improved performance of financial journalism to not only mirror western world practice but also to facilitate for an informed public who would then participate in governance and public discourse.

Keywords. Zambia, Political Economy, Financial Journalism, Media Landscape, Economists, Coverage

Submission ID

2280

The Role of News Media in Addressing Wealth Taxation: Topics and Social Actors

Authors

Dr. Hendrik Theine - Vienna University of Economics and Business

Dr. Maria Rieder - University of Limerick

Abstract

A key facet of contemporary capitalism is the widespread increase of economic inequality. While large disparities in economic resources between different social classes is an essential feature of capitalist relations in general, this trend has become especially pronounced in recent years (e.g., Alvaredo et al., 2018). In line with such developments, there seems to be an upswing in interest regarding wealth inequality, its drivers and associated policies in recent public debates. For several years now, signs have been accumulating that the topic of wealth inequality is back on the public agenda, exemplified among others by the occupy Wall Street movement's famous slogan "we are the 99 percent" (Dube & Kaplan, 2012) or the global interest in Thomas Piketty's book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Grisold & Preston, 2020).

This paper sets out to study the public debate on wealth and inheritance taxation by example of the news media coverage of seven daily and weekly German newspapers from 2000 to 2018 (Welt am Sonntag, Die Zeit, Der Spiegel, Die Welt, FAZ, SZ and taz). Rooted in the tradition of critical discourse studies, we use topic modelling, a method for large corpora text-mining, to identify the frequency, distribution and change of various topics in the news coverage across newspapers and time. In particular, we pay attention to key events and dynamics that influence media coverage, keeping in mind as well the question of how emerging topics are able to remain relevant over time, given when they are introduced and how far their coverage extends. In a second step, we quantify the representation of (different types of) social actors in the news media including their time- and newspaper-specific occurrence. In a third step and based on a qualitative analysis of legitimization strategies, we zoom in on specific roles and agencies assigned to such actors and their ability to influence media dynamics or even to set entire debates.

Tentative findings suggest that topics associated with political parties and the political realm are at the centre of the debate, while topics of social justice and the problematisation of wealth inequality are rather at the margins. In line with the centrality of the political realm, we find that governments, politicians and political parties are among the

key social actors that drive the debate around wealth and inheritance taxation. Other social actors such as think tanks, employers' associations and trade unions/ welfare organisations also contribute to the debate, but to a lesser extent. In relation to Network E's objectives, we particularly aim to contribute to a refined understanding of social actors' responses and strategies in the realm of distributive politics.

Submission ID

2284

Public Service Platform as New Governance for Alternatives to Platform Capitalism

Authors

Mr. Seoyeon Park - Simon Fr

Abstract

This study aims to propose the public service platform model as new governance for an alternative to platform capitalism, focusing on the case of Korean public food delivery services, *Baedal Teukgeup*, which is Special Delivery in Korean. In the food delivery platform market around the world, cut-throat competition has been continuing among oligopolistic companies. Food delivery services substantially impact local communities compared to tech platforms like social media since they mediate transactions among economic agents such as advertisers, small restaurants, delivery workers, and users. However, as long as the platforms pursue rent revenue in the name of transaction fees and are bent on rising corporate value in the stock market while relying on financial capital, the problems that those economic agents as the multitude face are inevitably bound to worsen.

This study argues that the fundamental problem of platform capitalism is data ownership, a matter of who is authorized to accumulate and manage data, and platform ownership, a matter of who owns the technological means to utilize the accumulated data. The model of a public institution as a developer and player guarantees that both ownerships belong to the public overcomes the limitations of the top-down regulatory approach and the platform cooperativism's bottom-up approach. Given that platform services play an infrastructural role in human interaction and resource exchange, the role of the government in managing and expanding social overhead capital and the value of public broadcasting, which is the use of the commons for the public interest, can be applied to the platform industry. This study compares and analyzes *Baedal Teukgeup* and other private oligopolistic platforms in terms of ownership structure, terms and conditions, and revenue model. Furthermore, it explores how the public service platform improves the conditions faced by economic

agents using it and contributes to revitalizing the local economy and its limitations. Finally, this study argues that public service platforms can be a major check on market failure due to intensifying competition in that the government arbitrates governance between various stakeholders participating in transactions through the platform. It also emphasizes the role of the public service platforms as an agent that induces competition based on mutual trust and balance in the market.

This study raises questions about whether it is reasonable to limit the role of the government to only regulators to correct market failure caused by oligopoly. It is urgent to develop a practical alternative to rentier capitalism and unstable working conditions that platform capitalism aggravates. The sustainable platform ecosystem can only stem from attempts to contemplate the social role of digital platforms and solve the problems of data ownership and platform ownership.

Submission ID

2329

Conditioned Growth: The Political Economy of Sports Media in China after the Mid-2010s

Authors

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Abstract

This research documents and analyzes the dramatic growth and transformation of sports media in China after the mid-2010s. It argues that such growth is part of three interrelated processes: the state's market-oriented media policy, transnational and domestic capital's relentless pursuit for profit, and rapid development in China's digital infrastructure. It is conditioned by, and manifests the dynamics of, the transforming political economy of China's media and technology sectors.

Into the fourth decade of market-oriented media growth, sports media in China received a booster shot in the mid-2010s from a new policy initiative. The State Council's Opinion on the Promotion of Sports Industrial Development and Consumption (also known as the No. 46 Document) in 2014 vigorously pushed for more investments and sponsorship in sports-related sectors. Notably, it loosened up restrictions on the purchase of media rights of sporting events and immediately triggered fierce competitions for domestic and international sports content. In a few years, a small number of private companies including Tencent have gained strong footing in the marketplace.

The mid-2010s and later witnessed massive inflow of investment in sports media from within and beyond Chinese borders. Faced with market saturation in the US, the National Basketball Association (NBA) continued its long-term endeavor to cultivate the Chinese media market with remarkable success. Domestically, the unpredictable capital market helped some market leaders (e.g., Tencent and iQIYI) and created financial disasters for some others (e.g., LeSports and PP Sports). Meanwhile, some deep-pocket Chinese companies have reached further into the global market, including Wanda Group signing up as a FIFA (International Federation of Association Football) partner in 2016 and Alibaba joining the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) The Olympic Partner (TOP) program in 2017.

Sports media owed much to digital networking and economic growth in China. In 2021, solid infrastructure development has brought Internet access to more than 1 billion people. This state-backed endeavor set the foundation for sports media to reach the largest audience group in the world, and provided precious distribution capacity for private businesses while state media still monopolized over television networks. In addition, China's digital sector has nurtured a number of fast-growing companies able to compete on a global scale. Notably, it took Alibaba less than two decades to grow from a team of eighteen to the sole provider of cloud computing service for the Olympic Games.

To conclude, an examination of sports media yields important insights into the development of Chinese media and technology sectors. It shows that the Chinese state continues to encourage, and set parameters for, market and capital expansion. The inflow of capital in the domestic market took place concurrently with the transnationalization of Chinese capital, which further intensifies China's integration into the global market. Growing out of infrastructure buildup, corporate growth, and policy support, sports media in China must be conceptualized as part of a larger picture of political-economic transformations.

Submission ID

2368

Dual Commercialization of TV Programs in the Global Media Market

Authors

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the new ways in which TV programs are being commercialized in the recent media environment where the production and sale of media contents takes

place in a global marketplace. Today, TV programs are watched in many regions beyond the country where they were produced, which has led to an increase in foreign investment in program production. This phenomenon has been increasingly reinforced by the rise of global Over-the-Top (OTT) services such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video.

In the midst of this trend, two Korean TV dramas aired one after the other last year (*Vincenzo (Binsenjo)* and *True Beauty (Yeosin-gangnim)*) were strongly criticized for their product placements that were presenting Chinese brands' products which were not even sold in Korea. In such case, it can be said that the drama is doubly commercialized in that it becomes a kind of showcase in which the product is placed, while at the same time the drama itself must become a product to be sold in the global market in order to enhance the advertising effect of the product placed in it.

Focusing on this case, this study will look at the way how a very poor form of capital-driven cultural infiltration can be made, and what negative impacts this can have on the content itself, from a political economy perspective. Also, it will discuss in detail the context in which the way of the product placement was criticized at that time, implying that the approach of producing media content which is only possible on the basis of the global market can rather sometimes reinforce the nationalistic attitudes of the audience.

Submission ID

2378

From Paris to Glasgow ... but where are we now?

Environmental crisis, business-as-usual finance, and ideology over substance in net-zero transition

Authors

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Abstract

This paper provides an updated assessment of deepening environmental crisis, punctuated by the Paris climate agreement of 2015, and the latest Glasgow climate conference (COP) in 2021. It is concerned with the ideological debates around transition to a net-zero carbon society, and how, despite irrefutable certainty from climate science, dominant media and political discourses are firmly centred on 'business-as-usual' approaches. It is written on the backdrop of deepening environmental crisis, as exemplified by successive warnings from climate scientists, culminating in the most recent international assessment of the climate crisis as a 'code red for humanity' (IPCC 2021).

In taking a longitudinal approach, the paper investigates the extent to which, despite deteriorating environmental markers in the time between Paris and Glasgow, there is a recent but palpable optimism from economic (especially financial) and political actors as well as media outlets in the global North. This optimism takes a specific theme concerning the role of a range of financial instruments to deliver technologies to allow societal reprieve from increasingly out of reach environmental targets.

The paper analyses how the financial sector has increasingly positioned itself as the most effective provider of solutions to net-zero transition. This focus on finance examines hedge funds as particular financial instruments that require close scrutiny by those concerned with environmental crisis. Furthermore, the paper examines examples of high-profile initiatives, arguing that critical attention needs to be paid to financial instruments known as ESGs (Environmental, Social and Governance investments) and carbon offsets. The paper contends that the popular discourse around ESGs is less about the real or effective solutions and the materiality of climate change and societal transition, and more firmly takes the form of an ideological 'fix' which performs little more than to act as a site of continued, unabated capital accumulation on an ever-increasingly depleted planet.

The paper thus reprises and updates the concept of the 'techno-finance fix' (Morgan 2018) to shed light on the dissonance between the stark warnings of climate scientists, and the promise that not only will the 'correct' technologies required to achieve transition towards climate neutrality be found and developed, but that the market, specifically financial instruments, are the 'correct' means of ensuring these technologies are brought to market, halting climate breakdown, and saving societies. To this end, the paper provides case studies of untested and indeed patently unsafe technologies that are increasingly foregrounded and pushed as investment opportunities. The paper argues that, when analysed through the lens of the techno-finance fix, not only are discursive ideologies prevalent in terms of the 'hype' surrounding technologies such as BeCCS (bioenergy, carbon capture and storage) and renewed focus on nuclear technologies as 'green', but also, in the financial instruments that are seen as the most effective way of funding these technologies.

Submission ID

2393

Digital News Media as a Social Resilience Proxy: A computational political economy perspective

Authors

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Abstract

In this paper, we argue that the digital news media may serve as a proxy for social resilience in terms of uncovering meanings and themes that framed the perception of the pandemic in the public sphere. The public sphere approach has been evaluated and reconsidered *ad nauseam* in the last thirty years. An extensive list of factors limiting the deliberative, communicative action ideal of the public sphere includes fragmentation, media concentration, marketization, commercialisation, digital intermediaries, echo chambers, post-democracy, and fake democracy to name a few. Yet the COVID-19 emergency has painfully exposed the need for just such a rational communication space in which citizens could find relevant information with rational discussion on how to cope, adapt and overcome a global health crisis. When physical mobility was limited, the media served as a focal point providing unprecedented coverage of political, economic, and social conditions affected by the uncontrollable spread of the virus. The media also provided citizens with a range of potential behavioural orientations in line with ongoing scientific research. We observe the digital news media from a systemic and political economy perspective, which allows us to interpret their societal role in fostering (and limiting) social resilience, managing, and potentially overcoming the crisis. To understand the role of the digital news media for social resilience, we employed computational techniques that allowed us to decipher broad tendencies and shifts in news media reports over the course of four major waves of the pandemic (in terms of daily infection rates) between January 2020 and December 2021. We selected a total of 21 news portals in Croatia based on audience reach, regional coverage, and ownership (public, private, non-profit). We used computational techniques of natural language processing and machine learning to analyse and compare all news reports related to the pandemic and published during the analysed period (N = 174921).

Submission ID

2413

Towards an "informalized regulation" of private Internet firms in China

Authors

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Abstract

Research Question and Arguments

In their seminal research, Koop and Lodge advance two definitions of regulation, respectively a "pattern-based" definition and an "essence-based" definition, with the former being more detailed than the latter. While the "pattern-based" definition clarifies who are the regulators (public-sector actors) and who are the regulatees (economic activities of private-sector actors), the "essence-based" definition simply clarifies what a regulation process looks like ("the intentional intervention in the activities of a target population", Koop & Lodge, 2007, p.104) and refrains from prescribing who regulates, who is regulated, and how regulation is effectuated on the ground. The research question studied in this article takes inspiration from the essence-based regulation. Based on the large conceptual freedom allowed within an essence-based regulation, the question addressed in this paper is as follows: to what extent does the Chinese party-state resort to an "informalized regulation" in ensuring its control of private Internet and social media firms? The two dimensions of informalized regulation investigated in this paper include the party-building endeavors in private Internet firms since the 2000s (e.g. creation of grassroot organisms of the Chinese Communist Party inside privately-owned Internet firms) and the creation of semi-official industrial associations. Different from their counterparts in democratic settings, industrial associations play out as an important vehicle through which the party-state ensures corporate compliance.

This paper argues that in comparison with the regulation unfolding in democratic settings, one big particularity of the regulatory process in the Chinese authoritarian context lies in the simultaneous mobilization of formal regulation and informal regulation. The advantage of the two-pronged approach to regulation is the complementarity between them: since the Chinese party-state has no direct and formal oversight over privately-owned economic actors, it has to resort to informal, indirect, and amorphous regulatory methods which are able to reach what the formal regulation cannot reach. However, as will be demonstrated with the biography analysis and the analysis of the party-building endeavors in the top 100 Chinese Internet firms from 2000 to 2020, it is not because the regulation unfolds under informal forms that it is less effective than formal regulation. On the contrary, the fact that informalized regulation is not driven by clearly defined rules creates a significant level of leeway for the party-state, allowing it to nudge private firms into the direction it desires.

Data and Research Methods

This article is based on two datasets compiled by the author. First, the party-building track record in the 100 most influential Internet firms. The list of the 100 top Internet firms comes from the annual report co-released by the Internet Society of China (ISC) and the Chinese Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) since 2013. To ensure the relevance of our data, we choose the ranking contained in the report of 2020. For each Internet firm figuring on the list, we check six pieces of information either from its official website or from other Chinese and English-language sources: 1) the year of creation of the firm, 2) headquarter of the firm, 3) existence or not of a party cell within the firm, 4) (if yes) year of creation of the party cell, 5) (if yes) mentioning or not of party-building in the official communication of the firm, and 6) (if yes) creation or not of a dedicated column on the official website of firm for presenting the activities of party-building. This database allows us to measure the intensity of the party-building activities inside private firms over time.

Second, the biography information of the successive leaderships of the Internet Society of China from 2001 to 2019. The Internet Society of China, created in 2001, is the oldest industrial association in China in the area of the Internet and social media. In the past two decades from 2001 to 2019, five leadership teams have been put in place respectively in 2001, 2004, 2008, 2013, and 2019. We have built a dataset which includes the biography information of all the individuals who have served as the vice-presidents of the ISC. The background of these people is coded into three categories: government officials, private entrepreneurs, and renowned scholars. The comparison of the percentage of each category of individuals over the past two decades enables us to find out the intensity of cooptation among successful private entrepreneurs.

Submission ID

2493

Feminist public service media? Theoretical elaborations and the case of Switzerland

Authors

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Abstract

Who made Switzerland what it is today? This was the question of a thematic focus of the Swiss Public Service Broadcaster SRG in fall of 2013. In four “exceptional docufiction films”, the SRG (2013: n. p.) portrayed “six outstanding personalities in Swiss history”. Given Switzerland’s notoriously difficult relationship with gender equality (e.g. Schmid 2020; Fuchs et al. 2019), male overrepresentation among these personalities was to be

expected. But those in charge decided to only portray men. A public debate followed quickly (see e.g. aij 2013, jro 2013). Social media users (#schweizerinnen), historians and politicians criticized the decision.

The 2013 incident seemed to have left its mark. In 2014, the SRG committed itself to a strategic goal concerning female representation: “SRG wants to increase the proportion of women in management to 30 percent by 2020” (SRG 2014: 6). Another reason to set this goal must have been a study by Hungerbühler and Valsangiacomo published in the same year. As part of a large research initiative funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation on gender equality, Hungerbühler and Valsangiacomo analyzed female representation in the SRG’s content and organization between 1980 and 2010. The findings were desillusionating.

SRG’s struggle with gender equality is not a unique case. Underrepresentation of women in content and organization is an issue most media struggle with (e.g. Bleyer-Simon 2021, Djerf-Pierre/Edström 2020). However, PSM have a special obligation to provide a universal service, meaning a service for everyone (e.g. Lowe & Savage). This paper answers the question whether and how PSM contribute or should contribute to gender equality. It starts with a theoretical elaboration on media representation and on (self-)regulatory measures as a means to promote gender equality in media. It then outlines and contrasts four theoretical positions regarding the idea of feminist PSM: human rights, impartiality, political economy and news values. The theoretical part closes with an overview on the state of research.

In the empirical part, the paper examines how gender equality has been developing at the SRG, particularly in the last ten years. Combining document and qualitative content analysis (e.g. Karppinen/Moe 2019, Puppis 2019), an indepth analysis of the SRG’s annual reports and other publicly accessible statements and data has been conducted. These findings were triangulated with two expert interviews (e.g. Van Audenhove/Donders 2019): One with the head of SRG’s new diversity board and the other with the equality officer of the SRG’s union SSM. The conclusion is that the SRG has now entered a phase of awakening when it comes to gender equality.

Submission ID
2543

NeoGlobalisation' and 'Reorienting' for a new Paradigm Shift amid the Dumb Drums of War, 2022 – Glimpsing New Imaginaries, Trends, Concepts and Values through the Fog of War

Authors

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Abstract

This paper examines current socio-technical, political economic, technological trends and analyses whether and how they prefigure a veritable paradigm shift towards new Era of 'NeoGlobalisation in line with the core theme of IAMCR conference. The paper draws on historical political economy methods to address whether and how both material trends as well as discursive shifts may be tending towards requisite novel Imaginaries and narratives favourable to more sustainable forms of globalisation..

For this paper, the key test or measure of any meaningful new era of 'NeoGlobalisation' is to overcome one major (spatial) contradiction of the modern capitalist era, the glaring cleavage between : .a) on the one hand, an economic and financial system never more deeply integrated and interdependent at the world scale and .b) on the other, political cultures and mediated public spheres that are predominantly siloed around/within specific national, imperial, ethnic or cultural identities and boundaries. This latter face of the contradiction is often marked by a sense of exceptionalism, superior values and priorities, or animated by domineering, aggressive, even violent and militaristic views of others (Indeed, public and media discourse in some old imperialist heartlands now host certain novel currents of extreme nationalism and xenophobia, often laced by naked racist or ethnic hatreds).

After a short introduction, section two of the paper will draw on a specific historical approach towards exploring potential shifts towards successive new socio-technical and political-economic 'paradigm' , including its geo-political dimensions (such as 'NeoGlobalisation'). This specific (neo-Schumpeterian) approach addresses the mix of continuities as well as changes across certain key factors or dimensions (such as those identified in section three)

Section three will apply this method to advance a critical, if situated (west European) empirically-based analysis of evolving trends and notable tendencies over the past 5-10 years, including the recent experience of the Covid pandemic. This analysis will centre on four key aspects of any emergent new and sustainable socio-technical paradigm:

.a) the relations between state and economy and social classes, shifts in political currents and key challenges;

.b) Main contours of change in leading-edge techno-industrial developments, plus key shifts in knowledge and infosphere domains [now including the media /comms. services sector;

.c) strategic geopolitical relations, key fissures, stress lines and configurations of global power;

.d) shifts in public and private forms of power, new concepts, understandings, social movements, or currents in the mobilisation and expressions of power,

Section 4 of the paper draws on the preceding empirical analysis to address whether and how recent material trends and discursive shifts are tending towards a more peaceful, mutualist and sustainable era of 'NeoGlobalisation'. What do they imply for novel Imaginaries, concepts and narratives which prefigure or flag meaningful new forms of global economic, political, ecological and military relations -- and so help overcome the long-festering spatial contradiction of the modern capitalist era identified above [in the opening paragraph].

Section five examines the implications for current thinking and practices within both the academic field of media/journalism studies and the professional field of journalism and newsmaking –how may they better engage with and assist [rather than hinder] the co-construction a new era of 'NeoGlobalisation'?

Submission ID

2576

How realists theorize: Abduction, retroduction, practical adequacy, and the political economy of communication

Authors

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Abstract

Political economists of communication have (accurately) described our approach a “realist” or “critical realist” one. However, PEC scholars rarely articulate the (critical) realist paradigm’s assumptions or their implications for PEC scholarship and practice. This paper addresses this theoretical and methodological gap by engaging with key works on theory and method in critical realism — particularly Andrew Sayer’s *Realism and Social Science* and Danermark et al.’s *Explaining Society*. Then, it situates those insights in relation to PEC.

PEC scholars have noted that the realist paradigm calls for a balancing of empirical observation and theoretical interpretation. This is not incorrect. However, this paper argues that *how realists theorize* deserves much greater attention. Specifically, this paper identifies two modes of reasoning — abduction and retroduction — that are central to realist research, generally, and PEC scholarship, specifically. Unlike induction and deduction, which operate strictly at the level of empirical, abduction and retroduction provide a means of explaining how *unseen* structures and mechanisms — class, capital, and the profit imperative, for instance — shape and are shaped by everyday practices. In short, abduction involves recontextualizing empirical phenomena using new and different frameworks in order to generate plausible explanations for their manifestation. And retroduction involves thought experiments and comparative case studies (among other techniques) to tease out the characteristics of underlying structures and mechanisms. The bulk of this paper is dedicated to explicating these two modes of reasoning (abduction and retroduction) and illustrating their application in several key works of PEC scholarship.

Importantly, abductive and retroductive inferences are always fallible. So, this paper also considers how realists adjudicate between competing explanatory accounts based on their practical adequacy (i.e., how *useful* they are for understanding and guiding research and practice). This paper argues that practical adequacy can justify the sort of scholar-activism many PEC scholars are involved in. In short, abductive and retroductive inferences not only guide emancipatory interventions by identifying the likely structures and mechanisms behind unjust social conditions; those interventions also serve as retroductive “experiments,” which are useful for assessing whether structures and mechanisms operate the way we think they do. In short, engaging with how realists theorize (i.e., abduction and retroduction) can serve PEC scholars in conducting their research, intervening in commercial media and capitalist society, and using those experiences to further refine our accounts and strategy.

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2603