

Sem (MA) The Politics of Digital Capitalism
Tuesdays 10:15-11:45, room GFG 02-601
Lecturer: Dr Ruben Kremers

DESCRIPTION

Recent years have seen a growing interest in the 'digitalisation' of the global economy. On one level, digitalisation refers to the growing power and influence of big tech companies, such as Google, Apple, Meta, and Amazon. How do these companies make profits? How do they influence governments? How do they threaten to disrupt other industries? On another level, it refers to the growing dependence of our daily lives on digital technologies. We use Google Maps to navigate cities, we use WhatsApp to stay in touch with friends, we buy gifts on Amazon, and we use Tinder to find a date. What are the political implications of these daily dependencies? Who benefits from them? Should they be resisted, or changed? The disciplinary research tradition of International Political Economy (IPE) offers a comprehensive set of social scientific approaches to study these questions, ranging from systemic approaches, such as liberalism, realism, or Marxism, to more situated approaches, such as feminist, post-colonial, and cultural IPE. This course encourages students to engage these approaches to develop a theoretically nuanced and empirically sound understanding of the digital economy.

ASSESSMENT

The requirements for active participation are:

- ❖ Formal registration
- ❖ Reading of two key texts per session
- ❖ Regular attendance
- ❖ Contribution of two pictures to the everyday archive of digital capitalism

Everyday Archive of Digital Capitalism:

This class provides different ways for thinking about how technology shapes the global political economy. My hope is that you will start reflecting on phenomena in your daily life that you might not have previously given much thought to. At least twice during the semester, take a photo of an everyday object, practice, or situation that you feel illustrates or resonates with the ideas discussed in class. Post this on our shared document, along with a short description (250 words). Feel free to use the commenting tools to share thoughts on each other's snapshots.

Term paper:

The paper should be 40 000 characters (+/- 20%), including spaces, and broadly relate to the topic of the course.

Please find the formal requirements and marking criteria in Moodle.

Deadline for submission is 20 September 2023.

Chatbots:

Chatbots based on large language models produce plausible-sounding texts based on statistical probabilities. However, these can be completely wrong in terms of content. Therefore, if you want to use such applications, you need to consider the following:

- ❖ Essays are there to examine your academic progress and skills. They must be authored by yourself. Chatbots are therefore not a permissible tool for generating the final draft of your essay.
- ❖ Chatbots can, however, be a useful tool for exploring the topic of your essay or even for producing bits of text. Please be alert to the fact that while the texts might sound authoritative, there is nothing on the backend of the technology (other than you) that fact checks the results.
- ❖ If you choose to use a chatbot for parts of the essay, add a footnote and explain how you used it, why you used it, and whether it was helpful or not. Moreover, please provide the name of the chatbot and its source (e.g. URL).

OUTLINE

Date	Topic	Literature
	1. Introduction	
	2. Are big tech companies more powerful than states?	<p>Strange, S. (1994). Wake up, Krasner! The World Has Changed. <i>Review of International Political Economy</i>, 1(2), 209-219. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4177099.</p> <p>Pohle, J. & Thiel, T. (2020). Digital sovereignty. <i>Internet Policy Review</i>, 9(4). https://doi.org/10.14763/2020.4.1532</p>
	3. Where do the profits of digital capitalism come from?	<p>Srnicek, N (2017) <i>Platform Capitalism</i>. Polity, pp. 9-55.</p> <p>Watch Nick Srnicek's lecture on 'Platform Capitalism', delivered at Goldsmiths, University of London on 6 February 2017 (link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bYCiUEB7kyg).</p>
	4. Are digital technologies by men for men?	<p>Dunbar-Hester (2020). <i>Hacking Diversity: The Politics of Inclusion in Open Technology Cultures</i>. Princeton University Press. [Introduction: pp. 1 – 22].</p> <p>Weber, C. (2017). The Face of Sexuality: Why Do AI-Generated Sexual Orientations Matter? <i>The disorder of things</i>, 20 Sep: https://thedisorderofthings.com/2017/09/25/the-face-of-sexuality-</p>

		why-do-ai-generated-sexual-orientations-matter.
	5. Does digital capitalism perpetuate colonial legacies?	<p>Benjamin, R. (2019). Race after Technology. Cambridge, UK: Polity. [Introduction: pp. 1 – 27].</p> <p>Madianou, M (2019). Technocolonialism: Digital Innovation and Data Practices in the Humanitarian Response to Refugee Crises. Social Media + Society, 5(3). https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305119863146.</p>
	6. How to critique digital capitalism?	<p>Farrell, M (2020) The Prodigal Tech Bro. The Conversationalist, available at: https://conversationalist.org/2020/03/05/the-prodigal-techbro/.</p> <p>Vinsel, L (2021) You're Doing It Wrong: Notes on Criticism and Technology Hype. Medium, 01 February, available at: https://sts-news.medium.com/youre-doing-it-wrong-notes-on-criticism-and-technology-hype-18b08b4307e5.</p>
	7. Is Artificial Intelligence dangerous?	<p>Crawford, K (2021) Atlas of AI: Power, Politics, and the Planetary Costs of Artificial Intelligence. Yale University Press. Chapter 3: Data, pp. 89-122.</p> <p>Williams, A, Miceli, M & Gebru, T (2022) The Exploited Labour Behind Artificial Intelligence. Noema, 13 October, available at: https://www.noemamag.com/the-exploited-labor-behind-artificial-intelligence/.</p> <p>Watch Louise Amoore's lecture 'Our lives with algorithms' delivered at the Alexander von Humboldt Institut for internet and society on 8 September 2021, available on YouTube, here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cb-NXMB_g2Q.</p>

	<p>8. Why is there an app for everything?</p>	<p>Gerard Goggin (2011) Ubiquitous apps: politics of openness in global mobile cultures, <i>Digital Creativity</i>, 22:3, 148-159, https://doi.org/10.1080/14626268.2011.603733.</p> <p>Morris, J. W. and Elkins, E. (2015) 'There's a history for that: Apps and mundane software as commodity', <i>The Fibreculture Journal</i>, 25, pp. 63-88. https://dx.doi.org/10.15307/fcj.25.181.2015.</p> <p>Watch the first 14:23 minutes of Steve Jobs' launch of the iPhone 1 (which preceded the existence of mobile apps), available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQKMoT-6XSg.</p>
	<p>9. Do influencers commodify social relations?</p>	<p>Bagdogan, S (2023) Hands-On(ly) Vlogging: How Turkish Muslim Women Perform 'Modesty' and 'Piety' in Self-Branding on Their YouTube Cooking Channels. <i>Social Media + Society</i> [online first]. https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051231166446.</p> <p>Brassett, J, Elias, J, Rethel, L & Richardson, B (2023) I-PEEL: The International Political Economy of Everyday Life. Oxford University Press. Chapter 7, pp. 187-198.</p> <p>Watch Bo Burnham's White Woman's Instagram, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xHotXbGZiFY.</p>
	<p>10. Can digital capitalism solve the climate crisis?</p>	<p>Dauvergne, P (2022) Is artificial intelligence greening global supply chains? Exposing the political economy of environmental costs. <i>Review of International Political Economy</i>, 29(3): 696-718, https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290.2020.1814381.</p> <p>Joppa, L N (2017) AI for Earth. <i>Nature</i>, 552: 325-328. https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-017-08675-7.</p> <p>Watch Kate Crawford's presentation Atlas of AI: Power, Politics, and the</p>

		Planetary Costs of Artificial Intelligence (from min 12:45 to min 25:24), delivered on 6 May 2021 for the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, available here: https://www.youtube.com/live/KcefG-0InLE?feature=share&t=765 .
	11. Does digital capitalism change modern warfare?	<p>Wilcox, L (2017) Embodying algorithmic war: Gender, race, and the posthuman in drone warfare. Security Dialogue, 48(1): 11-28. https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010616657947.</p> <p>Wilcox, L (2018) Drones. In: Bleiker, R. (2018) Visual Global Politics. Routledge. Chapter 14, pp. 111-114.</p>
	12. Will ChatGPT change the world?	<p>Greene, P (2022) No, ChatGPT Is Not The End Of High School English. But Here's The Useful Tool It Offers Teachers. Forbes, 11 December, available at: https://www.forbes.com/sites/peteregreene/2022/12/11/no-chatgpt-is-not-the-end-of-high-school-english-but-heres-the-useful-tool-it-offers-teachers/?sh=7c57b74d1437.</p> <p>McQuillan, D (2023) We come to bury ChatGPT, not to praise it. 6 February, available at: https://www.danmcquillan.org/chatgpt.html.</p>
	13. Should we regulate, resist, or repurpose digital capitalism?	<p>Eyert, F, Irgmaier, F & Ulbricht, L (2022) Extending the framework of algorithmic regulation: The Uber case. Regulation & Governance, 16: 23-44. https://doi.org/10.1111/rego.12371.</p> <p>O'Meara, V (2019) Weapons of the Chic: Instagram Influencer Engagement Pods as Practices of Resistance to Instagram Platform Labor. Social Media + Society, 5(4). https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305119879671.</p>
	14. Feedback and Conclusion	