

Summaries

Erich Pawlik: Digital Capitalism on Its Way to the Global South. Digital technology is seen as significant hope for the revitalization of capitalism, which is beset by numerous crises. In the context of the Global South, digitalization extends beyond mere resource extraction and labor exploitation; it also aims to tap into new markets. This essay argues that understanding this development requires an examination of the interplay between technological advancement, power dynamics, and social change – an aspect often overlooked in critical political economy. Initially, the internet was promoted by its inventors and early users as a tool for fostering a free and democratic future. However, new global power structures have emerged, characterized by alliances between digital capitalists and increasingly authoritarian states. In the Global South, digitalization has contributed to the rise of a growing middle class that is adopting lifestyles similar to those of the middle classes in industrialized countries. This middle class serves both as a target for and a vehicle of new business models associated with digital capitalism. In these transformed societies, remnants of the colonial past persist in modified forms, including enduring power relations, the reconfiguration of local cultures for the benefit of colonial interests, the suppression and erasure of local knowledge, and the continuation of social inequality. Alongside these issues, the rise of the surveillance state and other elements of digital authoritarianism are becoming more prevalent. Given the global nature of digital capitalism, fostering solidarity-based perspectives requires a global network of local initiatives that can transcend the silo mentality that often exists.

Lilija Wedel: Digital Experiences and Interests in Post-Soviet Central Asia. Digital technologies are reshaping societies and forms of statehood worldwide – including in the Central Asian republics of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Yet these transformations unfold unevenly, reflecting regional variations in political agendas, economic capacities, and societal openness. This paper offers a comparative analysis of how digital products and infrastructures are integrated, regulated, and utilized across the five states. It focuses on government digital strategies, private-sector developments, and digital practices in education, civil society, and memory culture. Methodologically, the study draws on a qualitative evaluation of policy documents, media sources, and expert contributions. The aim is to identify regional convergences and divergences without resorting to simplified, Western-centric frames of comparison. By critically engaging with dominant narratives of digitalization, the paper provides a nuanced understanding of Central Asia's position within global transformation processes. The comparative perspective further reveals postcolonial dynamics and emerging geopolitical constellations in the digital age.

René Haras: The Digital Divide – A barrier for informal learning? The usage of digital media allows new forms of informal learning and affects informal learning

processes. In the current Digital Divide research, unrestricted access to digital media is seen as a precondition to gain benefits from new technologies. This case study aims to determine whether informal learning can happen despite of disadvantages in access and usage of digital media. The goal is to identify spheres for informal learning with digital media usage in everyday life. For this purpose, a qualitative content analysis was applied to analyse informal learning episodes of digital media usage in Kenya. The results indicate that the Digital Divide does not have to be an external barrier for informal learning opportunities. Based on the needs of individuals, access barriers can be reduced and opportunities for informal learning can be created. Finally, possible implications to support informal learning with digital media are discussed.

Caterina Rohde-Abuba & Kristina Kreuzer: Kidfluencing as Digital Child Work? On the Commodification and Commercialization of Childhood on the Internet. The term “kidfluencer” refers to children and juveniles who have gained popularity on social media platforms by creating and sharing content. Kidfluencing may be highly commercialized, incorporating various brand collaborations, sponsorships, and other commercial ventures. Based on a theoretical framework that combines the perspective of children as social actors in the digital realm with sociological approaches to child work and child labour, this paper will analyze the phenomenon of kidfluencing through TV and online documentaries about German-speaking kidfluencers and their parents as well as a netnographic analysis of their Social media accounts. The analysis shows that in kidfluencing age-specific practices of friendships and leisure time are digitally commodified to generate traffic on social media and create advertising contexts for product placement. Kidfluencers are an important element of digital supply chains and often execute all content creation tasks themselves. However, aspects of commercialization tend to be negotiated between parents and professionals, leading to a risk of exploiting children.