

# **From Data to Domination: How Technology Shapes Human Agency**

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## **Abstract**

This study examines how online technology companies leverage targeted advertising, behavioral manipulation, and persuasive technologies to influence users' decisions and actions. It raises awareness of the covert strategies employed by data-monetizing applications and challenges the notion of individual freedom in an era dominated by technological control. Drawing on Yudhanjaya Wijeratne's *Numbercaste* and *The Inhuman Race*, the research explores the pervasive impact of dataism, surveillance capitalism, behavioral surplus, and digital colonialism on contemporary society. The study highlights how these practices erode autonomy, compromise privacy, and shape human cognition. It further investigates the ethical and social implications of algorithms designed to incentivize corporate participation in discriminatory practices while masking imperialistic domination through proxy datasets. The findings underscore the erosion of personal identity, privacy violations, and forms of digital subjugation in a hyper-connected world where every online interaction is meticulously tracked. This trajectory points toward a future in which individual agency is constrained by complex algorithms, dissenting voices are marginalized, and autonomy is increasingly illusory. The study also examines emerging movements advocating for data privacy and digital liberation, highlighting efforts to resist and reform the pervasive influence of the digital ecosystem.

**Key Words:** Behavioural Surplus, Decolonization, Digital Colonialism, Information and Communication Technologies, Surveillance Capitalism, Technopoly

## **Introduction**

Digital colonialism describes how technological corporations use and manipulate user's data to gain control and influence. It is depicted through cyberpunk genre that portrays a doomed and desperate world by reiterating the themes of globalization, multinational corporate dominance, and powerlessness of the masses. With this in the background, this research seeks to highlight the inadequacies in online systems that result in breaches of data privacy regulations without informed consent as personal data is algorithmically processed and subject to categorization. AI correlates human interactions with its technological networks by eliminating our privacy and freedoms, as these companies are silently overseeing every moment. Human experience is being subjected to the market mechanisms of surveillance capitalism, a system that captures all our actions and behaviours by transforming them into data. This data is then utilized by machines to make predictions and ultimately trade in the new behavioural future market. This has led to the commodification of behaviour, where online companies work with "secrecy, indecipherability, and expertise" (Zuboff 71). It is alarming to know that Google's mission of behavioural surplus

now captures everything about us, including our videos, photos, songs, messages, locations, attitudes, preferences, interests, faces, emotions, illnesses, social networks, purchases, and more. Every moment, behavioural surplus is created from the multiple virtual threads of our everyday lives when we interact with Google, Facebook, and all other aspects of the internet's computer-mediated architecture. In fact, under the direction of surveillance capitalism, the global reach of computer mediation has been repurposed as an extraction architecture. This means that the information we provide online is extracted and used for commercial purposes. It wants to know everything about us, but it does not want us to know how much it knows.

Global leaders who support social justice and equality must be acutely aware of the threats posed by the internet's rapid commercialization, particularly to the world's most vulnerable populations, as well as the significant effects it has had on democracy and human dignity. It is concerning that there are no all-encompassing public policies to address this problem. This digital dominance is comparable to colonialism in the modern era. Such imbalance is going to become a big deal in emerging nations where austerity measures are the norm, especially when it comes to the disparities in research and education that lead to an excessive dependence on technology. These are vulnerable countries to hegemony, with powerful IT (information technology) companies fighting for dominance. Because those who can lock people into digital systems of control hold the key to the future, the online populations of the world have consequently become a disputed battleground for data empires. These behemoths have significant sway over the course of governments, and politics. They are also influencing international norms to suit their business strategies, which depend more and more on data gathering, monitoring, and pattern recognition, infringing upon the privacy of countless people. This scenario is unparalleled, as a small sector now wields extensive power over the entire world, monitoring activities and forecasting future behaviours not only of individuals, but entire populations. The situation becomes even more disconcerting when one considers the convergence of public and private sectors in their pursuit of global influence, infiltrating governments, citizen movements, and every facet of connected individuals' lives through digital devices and data collection. Information and communication technologies (ICT), the innovation of artificial intelligence, and the capability to swiftly deploy systems and infrastructure in emerging markets are concentrated in just a few countries, which are currently engaged in a race to achieve hegemony (Zuboff 29).

In today's modern world, we are constantly being watched, monitored, and analysed by technology. Our right to privacy, knowledge, and free will is being threatened by a new economic order called surveillance capitalism, digital colonialism or digital capitalism. This economic system sees human experience as a raw material that can be extracted, analysed, and sold for profit. It has become the dominant logic in technology, and the machines are programmed to follow its economic imperatives. As a result, we have lost control over our own experiences, and we are left feeling helpless. Surveillance capitalists have an invisibility cloak, and they can do anything they want with our information. They claim to empower us, but in reality, they assign a price tag to our subjugation. We are no longer in charge of our own lives – instead, we are being controlled by

algorithms and machines. We must pose some difficult issues to ourselves, such as: will we be employed by intelligent machines, or will sharp minded people be surrounded by smart robots? This significant event should serve as a warning that our long-held hopes for a more equitable and democratic digital future are beginning to look more and more like nightmares. It's time to reclaim the political initiative as we find ourselves in a worldwide struggle between capitalism aspirations and digital capabilities. To counteract this technological domination, we must educate ourselves about the technology we employ, demand transparency from businesses and governments, and bolster data protection regulations.

### **Analysis**

This research demonstrates how major performers of the digital industry triumph over new colonies not geographically but in terms of online power and persuasion as digital colonialism is accomplished through machine insurgency and its damaging consequences. Examining how social media and targeted advertising have impacted consumer decisions, and how e-commerce behemoths have revolutionized the buying experience, making it easier than ever before, we can see how the evolution of digital platforms has drastically changed the way we shop. The contemporary concepts of neo-colonialism and globalization are inherently linked. Both are characterized by economic dominance, cultural appropriation, and indirect political hegemony of technological powers. Thus, it is crucial to undertake a comprehensive analysis of how powerful nations interfere in the affairs of under developed countries. These challenges have resulted in economic instability, cultural estrangement, and political subjugation of developing nations under the guise of technology. To reap the benefits of globalization while reducing destabilization, disparities, biases, and digital slavery associated with technological trends, prudent management of the globalization process is necessary (Riegert 9). Developing countries and enterprises must create mechanisms and institutional arrangements to enhance awareness and understanding of the nature, pace, consequences, and ramifications of the changes resulting from globalization. This research scrutinizes the effects of the ICT (Information and Communication Technology) and globalization on developing and under developed countries by exploring how globalization can exacerbate the gap between affluent and impoverished nations and evaluating the emerging concept of digital slavery (Ogunsola 1). It meticulously examines the considerable gap in the availability and use of technological advancements. Thus, it is necessary to look for solutions and recommendations on how developing countries can compete with advanced nations in the global market. Meanwhile, it is imperative to formulate policies and actions that will mitigate the adverse effects of globalization while maximizing its benefits. By doing so, developing countries can enhance their economic stability, cultural identity, and political independence in a rapidly changing world. These corporate entities, collectively referred to as "Big Tech" (Zuboff 149), wield significant power in information and communication technologies and digital consumer services. They assert their authority by privatizing information, controlling access to online platforms, and setting technological and social standards. An in-depth exploration of the intricate tactics utilized by major technology conglomerates, to maximize their financial gains and their

sophisticated employment of tools to evade oversight and bypass regulations while leveraging their considerable political sway and capabilities to engage in exploitative practices is hereby discussed. This unyielding pursuit of capital accumulation perpetuates a cycle of data collection, resulting in a world where everything revolves around algorithms. This concept, known as data capitalism, seeks to subject all facets of life to datafication, to ensure its continual accumulation and circulation. They typically seek consent to record, utilize, and trade individuals' data via end-user licensing agreements (EULAs), commonly encountered by internet and software users. These agreements obligate users to click 'agree' or 'accept' prior to utilize a service, without acknowledging the impacts of such practices (Dalton et al. 7).

It is imperative to know that machine learning also provide companies with risk scores for each employee, which can be used to maintain or terminate them. This practice is known as "job polarization," where companies opt for smart devices over smart people (Zuboff 123). Some business leaders, economists, and technologists describe this growth as a crucial and inescapable outcome of computer-based technologies, neoliberal ideology, politics, cultural and institutional conventions to bring high-quality innovative products and services. However, this spread of information happens silently but relentlessly, like a "colossal oil slick engulfing everything in its path" (Wijeratne 122). The digital organization can collect biometric data, such as sleep-related data and audio signals of a person's activity, movement, positions, respiration, and heart rate while sleeping. Another mobile marketing enterprise suggests "life pattern marketing" by gathering location and other data from "phones, satellites, vehicles, and sensors" to collect intelligence on daily behavioural routines (Wijeratne 149). The location schemes in Android combine cell-tower data with GPS (global positioning system), Wi-Fi networks, and other information taken from photos, videos, and other sources. Thus, our lives are rendered as information, whether we are searching for acne ointment, engaging in a political debate on Facebook, or checking out a recipe or sensitive health information on Google. Wijeratne in *Numbercaste* also mentions Frank Pasquale who calls it as a "dark market" (154) as there is a striking ideology of invasion and hegemony hidden in these assertions and possessions. These twenty-first-century invaders do not ask for consent; they develop cynical terms-of-services agreements whose stipulations are just obscured and inconceivable (Wijeratne 120). So, the fundamental questions that confront us at every turn are, "who knows? who decides? and who decides who decides?" (122).

Wijeratne in *Numbercaste* also discusses the alarming consequences of a society where people are judged and valued based on a numerical score assigned to them by a powerful corporation called NumberCorp. Those who have a high score are granted access to various privileges while those who have a low score are subjected to discrimination and are "marked as sex offenders, declined entry to bars and clubs, denied credit cards by banks, and prohibited from apartments by student housing" (Wijeratne 84). This raises the concern that every technology that humanity has created has been used to "oppress, destroy and divide people" (Wijeratne 85). Additionally, Patrick Udo in *Numbercaste* inspects how individuals with high-scoring algorithms are no longer bound to poverty or the social ladder and raises critical questions about the authority

of Mr. Julius Common and the programmers, responsible for these technologies (Wijeratne 86). Further, he asks, are we not free? what happens when NumberCorp becomes ubiquitous? will we have to rely on machines to manage social relationships because we have forgotten how to trust each other? Of course, Mr. Julius Common would argue that NumberCorp is changing the world for the better, but it is essential to consider what kind of world such technologies will create. In a hyper-consumerist model, “records, credit, and influence” are the primary factors that determine human worth (Wijeratne 141). He critiques the company’s slogan “if you want to grow your number, keep raising your social network reach, and post stuff that people will like and share” (Wijeratne 142). Wijeratne argues that the more prominent one’s friends are, the more reputable one will be, and the more affinities one has, the more power one holds. He raises concerns about how these big data systems that know people better than they know themselves, so, they can “threaten, sue, hack or close off their data and accounts” (Wijeratne 169). Wijeratne highlights how technology, which was supposed to make our lives easier and better, is being used to oppress and segregate people, where the value of a person is measured by online reputation and influence. Such a system undermines human dignity, democracy and privacy. Furthermore, he evaluates how these corporations have access to our intimate information, by manipulating our choices and behaviors. In such a society, Wijeratne in *Numbercaste* argues that authority has shifted from humans to algorithms, and our fate is determined by machines rather than our own free will.

Facebook, on the other hand, has become one of the most authoritarian and startling sources of predictive behaviors. New supply operations can render measurable behavior carried from the nuances of an individual’s nature to their sense of time, sexual orientation, intelligence, and other personal facets. The corporation’s immense machine intelligence capabilities converge these data into prediction products. Likewise, *Numbercaste* discusses the privacy concerns surrounding mobile marketing enterprises and their data collection practices. The company’s owner can control or delete data by “disconnecting the Wi-Fi or Bluetooth link from the app or by changing the passwords” (Wijeratne 152). Besides it, user’s data and information are used for third-party sharing, targeted advertising, and Google Analytics purposes. In addition, Wijeratne mentions Michal Kosinski who revealed that “all of our interactions are being mediated through digital products and services which means that everything is being registered” (Wijeratne 63) and emphasized that corporations or administrations should not take any action without users’ permission. They are continuously working to build the world’s largest expression and behavior datasets by assessing utterances, emotions, behaviors and opinions. Thus, Wijeratne highlights that our general public is stupid and sentimental fool, we should integrate to quit such detestable aspects of digital life (Wijeratne 176).

Likely, Zuboff refers to these computational strategies of data extraction, monitoring, information controlling, and behavioral modifications as “machine intelligence” by investigating surveillance capitalism’s monetary imperatives (Zuboff 50). She refers to Hal Varian who emphasizes that “every activity a user performs, is assessed as a signal to be scrutinized and kept within the system” (Zuboff 51). In other words, Google reads users’ minds to match ads to their

interests and appeals as those attractions are traced through their online behavior. With Google's access to behavioral data, it can figure out what a particular individual is thinking, feeling, and doing at a specific time and place. Google, through computer science, can convert that data into predictions of who will click on which configuration of what ad as the basis for a final "matching" result, all calculated in Google through which it can deduce thoughts, feelings, intentions, and interests of individuals with an automated architecture without the person's awareness, knowledge, and consent (Zuboff 58). She also mentions Eric Schmidt and Jared Cohen's book on the digital age, titled *The online world is not truly bound by Terrestrial Laws... It's the World's Largest Ungoverned Space*, manifests that cyber space's lawlessness is a major success factor in surveillance capitalism (Zuboff 73). Google and Facebook kill online privacy security, weaken or obstruct privacy-enhancing law-making, and thwart every attempt that lessons their role known as, "cyber libertarian" an ideology described by Frank Pasquale (Zuboff 77).

Despite this, Wijeratne's other novel *The Inhuman Race*, a work of dystopian fiction, portrays a future in which children participate in lethal contests for sport. The story is set in British Ceylon, now known as Sri Lanka, in the year 2033. The landscape is littered with the remnants of shell-blasted hotels, and a "synthetic voice with a Chinese accent announces the Bluetooth device's readiness for pairing" (Wijeratne 29). The Silent Girl, the protagonist, who relies on her radio for communication and a homemade spear for protection as she traverses the ruins of Colombo. In a world where artificial intelligence and robots are ubiquitous, Wijeratne makes a compelling argument for sentience among these children. Amid the rubble of Colombo, The Silent Girl and her companion, Pissa, struggle to survive in a Darwinian battle of survival of the fittest. The world has been transformed by the emergence of advanced artificial intelligence and the discovery of extra-terrestrial life. Ceylon finds itself under the governance of a British Empire that has been plagued by a range of issues, including corruption and power struggles, resulting in widespread despair and destruction. The Silent Girl awakens on the coast following the deployment of a radioactive bomb by Chinese destroyers, which aimed to force the British to withdraw. She and other children, who live among the ruins, occasionally receive aid in the form of biscuits and milk from charities. The Silent Girl communicates through tape recordings, and she befriends Pissa, a spy from another faction, who helps her find safety. Through this novel, we acknowledge that globalization, state power dynamics, and corporate capitalism have a complex interplay. Multinational corporations have gained significant influence over states and their policies, resulting in a shift in power away from states and moves towards transnational corporations (Acharya 965). This has facilitated the expansion of corporations, allowing them to exert control over global economic and political systems. The influence of multinational corporations in shaping global affairs needs critical examination, especially in light of the corporate capitalism-induced, and market-driven globalization that is leading us towards a post-human society. States have become soft power, while corporate capitalism has become hard power, dictating when and where war or conflicts over resources are to be declared or manufactured. Corporate capitalism decides how free markets should be promoted through the IMF (International Monetary Fund), World Bank, WTO (World Trade Organization), and directs state-to-state bilateral agreements. States and

civil societies are submitting their sovereign authority and political will to the greater good of supranational norms of globalization favourable to corporate capitalism. Thus, it is a time to re-examine this power dynamic and ensure that the interests, psyche and individuality of individuals should not be sacrificed for the benefit of multinational corporations.

### **Conclusion**

In today's world, technology has become an integral part of our lives. It has the power to transform our present and shape our future. However, it is needed to acknowledge that the impact of technology on our society is significant. Therefore, we should put forth sustainable and eco-friendly technologies that have a minimum impact on the environment. To assure global access to technology, we must "bridge the digital divide" (Schiller 59) by providing affordable and approachable network connectivity to all areas without any discrimination. It will not only empower people to access online information and data devices but will also produce golden opportunities for economic prosperity and rise. Moreover, encouraging digital literacy and expertise is pivotal to empower people to operate, utilize and benefit from technology while being conscious of its possible dangers. It is vital to instruct people on how to use technology ethically to protect user privacy and data safety. Companies must be held responsible for their data accumulation practices and offer users authority over their personal information. Fostering accountability and responsible use of social media platforms is also indispensable to avoid the increase of disinformation, indoctrination, hype, propaganda and hate speeches. Furthermore, it is urgent to build an environment that reinforces research and technological advancements through innovation, revolution and cooperation of governments, educational institutions, and private sector. By investing in modern technologies positively like artificial intelligence, blockchain, and bots, we can achieve success and seek inventive solutions to unravel worldwide challenges. Thus, technology has the capacity to make a better world to live in, but it is our duty to make sure that it must be served for the greater good for humanity. By cheering sustainable and accessible technologies, fusing the digital divide, advocating digital and algorithmic literacy and proficiency, and promoting ethical and moral use of technology, we can make a future that is inclusive for all.

Technology has taken over almost every aspect of our lives. But with the rise of technology, powerful capital forces are claiming more and more control over the digital world. There are troubling questions that continue to arise with increasing frequency, and we must take action to protect ourselves. We need to be aware that by simply clicking the "I agree" box without reading the agreement, we can be inadvertently giving up our rights and becoming entangled in oppressive contract terms. Even browsing a website can obligate us to its terms-of-service agreement, whether we know it or not. According to this new reality, companies such as Google and Facebook are leading the charge in machine intelligence, including machine learning and other computational operations that enable them to predict behavior; our lives are being pillaged for behavioral data the moment our needs are met, all for the benefit of others. We cannot deny that unless we take decisive action to constrain or outlaw this logic of accumulation, surveillance capitalism will become the dominant form of capitalism in our time. Although individuals and groups can have

their thoughts, feelings, intentions, and interests inferred by this technology, it frequently functions without their awareness, knowledge, or consent. We need to be extra careful these days to safeguard our rights and data in the digital era. We must take action to guarantee that we maintain control over our lives and that our information is not exploited against us. Before committing to anything, we must be aware of the terms and conditions we accept and take the time to carefully study them. By doing this, we may preserve our independence in the digital age and shield ourselves from the potentially damaging impacts of surveillance capitalism. Ultimately, the aim is to achieve an impartial and unified global digital landscape that fosters innovation, creativity, economic growth, and cultural diversity. While technology has made life easier, safer, and more convenient, overconfidence in technology has also caused much havoc. Technology as a global solution for the destructive forces of capitalism will always be contradictory: it may resolve some problems while causing others that need to be addressed. Therefore, it is imperative to have a comprehensive approach to technology and its usage while ensuring that it serves the common good for all people and respects their rights, respectability and dignity.

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