

Introduction: Understanding Digital Sphere in the Networked 21st Century

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Since the mid-1990s, our society has substantially advanced digital technologies and their continuous and through integration into people's daily lives. In just a couple of decades, our society has gone from being technically primitive to one of the most advanced in the world (Frey, 2015). Digital technologies have consequently expanded the boundaries of our social circles, and new forms of digital technologies, such as social media and digital platforms, have become parts of our cultural activities. In fact, people do not only use social network sites to keep in touch with friends, but also use them to enjoy certain television dramas and popular music. Digital technologies have also changed politics as the users are encouraged to tweet, text, or call in to vote for contestants in everything from reality competition shows to matchmaking endeavours—bridging the gap between our entertainment and our own lives. In the networked 21st century, digital technologies and the media are interwoven, and neither can be separated from contemporary society in most developed and developing nations. By tweeting or uploading people's news and images, the circle of communication is wider than ever (McGivern, 2013). Meanwhile, digital technologies have become some of the most significant tools in the global economy due to their roles as new growth engines for the economy and culture.

As digital technologies and culture have become parts of the fabric of our society, it is critical to understand digital sphere, which offers the reasons for the growth of digital technologies. In other words, with the recent growth of digital technologies and culture, digital sphere—not only illustrating the growth of digital technologies but also their socio-cultural implications in tandem with media and youth culture—needs to be well-received in our networked society (Chon et al., 2013).

Since the current boom of digital technologies and culture cannot be separated from each other, the analysis of digital sphere may need to discuss two different, but connected approaches. It means that while people grasp the increased institutional support, they also need to address the implicitly useful social aspects of technological change, although several different digital technologies have diverse dimensions in these processes (Edgerton, 2010, 681). What I emphasize here is that digital technologies must be regarded based on the sociocultural specificity of digital technologies usage as a whole. Through this sociotechnical examination of transformative digital technologies and culture, people are able to advance some of the complexities inherent in exploring digital technologies and culture as they have manifested (Jin & Schneider, 2016).

Admitting all aspects of our lives today are influenced by digital technologies, what people also have to comprehend is that digital technologies have brought several new problematics, such as digital labor, cyberterrorism and surveillance, and digital bullying that we confront on a daily basis (Fuchs & Sevignani, 2011). Although digital technologies are driving forces for our digital economy and public sphere, they ask us to deal with these socio-cultural issues fairly and timely.

When the Centre for Policy Research on Science and Technology (CPROST) at Simon Fraser University and the Social Science Korea (SSK) team at the Catholic University in Korea host a colloquium on the theme of Science and Technology, Governance, and the Public Sphere in November 2015, several participants discussed diverse forms of digital sphere. Three graduate students introduced in this special issue especially made their impressive presentation with unique subjects and aims.

Among these, Benjamin J. Anderson's paper titled "Contingency and Satisfaction under Digital Capitalism" mainly discusses the working condition of labor in the digitally networked working environment. In his paper, he develops an initial conceptual investigation of a dual trend in the conditions of digital labour, which is the rise of contractual contingency and insecurity and the introduction of fun and hipness into the office environment. By utilizing Max Weber's (1930, 2005) analysis of the protestant work ethic, he explores the ways in which trends in the complicated field of digital labour can be understood as simultaneous processes of periodic exclusion of the reserve workforce and of seeping passive intensification for the secure worker. He especially identifies that new developments like the unpaid internship, the increasing need for self-promotion in the pre-work world, and the educational inflation that characterize our current work environment all contribute to an entrenchment of work ideology that transcends the need for a theistic work ethic.

Nicole Stewart's paper titled "To Upvote or Downvote: Parental Supervision of Screen Time on Reddit Screen Time" deals with a controversial subject in media and technology studies. Situated within the media harm debate, she emphasizes that binary arguments have developed in discourse about the effect screen time has on people and society. She conducted a social network content analysis of conversations surrounding screen time on the user-generated platform Reddit, and the analysis focused on contributors' uses of the term "screen time" and the conversations relating to the implications of screen time for children. The conceptual framework for this research draws from Pinch and Bijker's (1990) social construction of technology to understand how social groups form and how these groups share meanings they attach to the artifact, which is well articulated.

Finally, Rodrigo Finkelstein's paper titled "Safety Information under Neoliberalism: The Chilean Case" explores the production and supply of safety information under a neoliberal regime. Following a political economy of communication framework on the Chilean sector, this paper unpacks the relationship between Workers' Compensation Boards' (WCBs) informational resources and their economic process of exchange within a neoliberal context. The paper provides a well-grounded theoretical outline to analyze safety information and offers a glimpse of the particular kind of informational resources and goods produced by neoliberal WCBs. The following analysis discloses that WCBs are compelled to cede control over their symbolic content to the dynamics of the market place and the logic of profit maximization. Eventually, the paper claims that due to a free market model, Chilean WCBs fail to protect workers' health and safety by producing and supplying distorted rates and corporate friendly knowledge.

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