

数字身份与网络资本主义的异化逻辑  
**DIGITAL IDENTITY AND THE LOGIC OF ALIENATION IN  
NETWORK CAPITALISM**

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**摘要：**本文分析了后马克思主义语境下的数字资本主义现象。Facebook、Instagram、YouTube 等社交媒体平台运用商品拜物教、异化和剩余价值等范畴，探讨数字技术和社交媒体（Facebook、Instagram、YouTube 等）如何将传播和用户活动转化为一种剥削形式。用户不仅充当消费者，也充当信息和数据的生产者，从而创造了一种新的“数字劳动”形式。参与（连接-分享）的意识形态掩盖了异化，将存在本身转化为商品。在网络资本主义条件下，工作与休闲、个人与公共之间的界限日益模糊，这导致了数字异化的形成和主体的去地域化。技术正在变得拜物教化，传播正在成为资本主义总体控制和再生产的工具。

**关键词：**后马克思主义、数字资本主义、异化、数字劳动、拜物教、社交媒体、注意力、参与、自我剥削、主体、算法权力。

**Abstract.** *The article analyzes the phenomenon of digital capitalism in a post-Marxist context. Facebook Instagram, YouTube, and other social media platforms use the categories of commodity fetishism, alienation, and surplus value to examine how digital technologies and social media (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and others) transform communication and user activity into a form of exploitation. The user acts not only as a consumer, but also as a producer of information and data, creating a new form of “digital labor.” The ideology of engagement (connecting – sharing) masks alienation, turning the very process of presence into a commodity. Under the conditions of network capitalism, the boundaries between work and leisure, personal and public, are blurring, which leads to the formation of digital alienation and deterritorialization of the subject. Technology is becoming fetishistic, and communication is becoming an instrument of control and reproduction of capitalist totality.*

**Keywords:** *post-Marxism, digital capitalism, alienation, digital labor, fetishism, social media, attention, participation, self-exploitation, subject, algorithmic power.*

**Introduction.** Modern digital technologies are radically transforming the forms of social relations, work, and communication. The emergence of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and others has led to the formation of a new socio-economic reality in which online activity becomes a productive force. These platforms no longer serve merely as neutral means of interaction; rather, they act as infrastructures for the extraction and accumulation of value. Users, while perceiving themselves as free participants in communication and self-expression, in fact contribute to the generation of profit through their constant engagement, data production, and affective participation.

The ideology of the digital environment is built upon the triad engaging – connecting – sharing, which constructs the illusion of openness, equality, and democratic participation. However, behind this façade lies the logic of digital capitalism, where communication and sociality themselves become commodities. Participation is transformed into a form of labor — often invisible, unpaid, and normalized through the rhetoric of creativity and freedom. Thus, the new digital order integrates the user into mechanisms of surveillance, control, and data monetization, masking exploitation under the guise of connection and community.

*The post-Marxist context of analysis.* Post-Marxism, based on the ideas of commodity fetishism, alienation and surplus value, allows us to reveal the mechanism of functioning of digital capitalism. Whereas in the industrial era, capital appropriated physical labor, today digital labor is becoming the object of exploitation – a set of user actions that create content, data, and engagement. A positive communication experience generates new sources of profit: personal activity turns into a commodity, and the user turns into an information producer.

Marx's concept of alienation takes on a new and intensified dimension in the context of digital capitalism – digital alienation. In traditional Marxist theory, alienation referred to the separation of the worker from the product of labor, from the act of production, from others, and ultimately from the self. In the digital era, this process extends into the sphere of subjectivity itself. A person acting within the media environment experiences a constant division between offline and online selves, between lived experience and its mediated representation. The individual becomes a fragmented or divisible subject, whose identity is dispersed across digital platforms and data traces.

This fragmentation is not merely psychological but structural: digital systems organize identity through algorithmic profiling and predictive analytics, constructing an artificial model of the person based on behavioral data. The result is a paradoxical form of recognition – one's digital "self" becomes more visible to algorithms and corporations than to the person themselves. What seems like self-expression or personalization is, in fact, a process of objectification and codification of identity.

Thus, the loss of integrity and autonomy is compensated by a new kind of digital identification, where subjectivity is externally defined by metrics – likes, followers, engagement scores. In the post-structuralist sense, this signals the “death of the subject”: the replacement of authentic selfhood by algorithmically constructed profiles and performative digital personas. The subject ceases to be the source of meaning and becomes a node within the network — a data-producing function governed by the logic of capital.

*Social media as a space of exploitation.* In the logic of capitalism, platforms organize user labor according to the prosumer model (producer + consumer). Every action – like, comment, repost – turns into a microact of value production. Thus, everyday communication becomes an element of the attention economy.

G. Marcuse pointed out that modern society is subordinated to total integration, when even the opposition turns into a commodity [2, p. 168]. Social media implements this logic through the simulation of participation: the user feels like a subject of freedom, while his activity is fully integrated into the system of data collection and commercialization.

R. Barth and J. Baudrillard showed that late capitalism produces signs instead of things. The logic of production shifts from the creation of material goods to the production of signs, symbols, and meanings. Value is no longer embedded in tangible objects but in representations – in what Baudrillard called simulacra, copies without originals that circulate independently of reality. Within this framework, communication itself becomes commodified: not the message, but the act of communication, the presence of interaction, becomes the object of exchange and profit.

In the digital environment, this process reaches its culmination. Emotions, images, personal stories, and relationships are transformed into quantifiable data – likes, views, shares, and engagement metrics – which are then appropriated by digital platforms as sources of surplus value. What was once private or intimate becomes integrated into the circuits of market logic. Facebook, Google, Instagram, and similar platforms do not primarily monetize content or creativity in a direct sense; rather, they monetize attention, participation, and affect. The user’s engagement itself – time spent online, frequency of interaction, emotional investment – becomes the raw material of digital capitalism.

Thus, sociality is reconfigured into a marketing resource: human interaction is algorithmically analyzed, categorized, and resold to advertisers and data brokers. The digital subject, believing they are communicating freely, becomes a producer of value through their mere presence in the network. As a result, communication loses its autonomous social function and becomes a mechanism for the continuous reproduction of capital, turning the very fabric of social life into a marketplace of signs.



*The logic of participation and the culture of “engagement”*. The ideology of engaging/connecting/sharing is presented as humanistic, but in reality it is a form of disciplinary power. The culture of participation (according to G. Jenkins [7, p. 133]) creates the appearance of democratization, embedding the user in the mechanisms of market production of meanings. “Free” self-presentation turns out to be an economically beneficial platform, and “self-expression” is a way of continuous reproduction of data.

F. Schmidt and D. Cohen [1, p. 28] pointed out that digital capitalism is based on total involvement, in which participation becomes a new form of work. A like is not an act of freedom, but an act of capitalizing on attention. Marx’s “alienation of labor” is being replaced by the alienation of presence, where participation itself acts as a commodity. The user’s emotional energy, attention, and time are extracted and commodified through the interfaces of digital platforms. This process can be understood as the alienation of presence – a condition in which even being online, interacting, or expressing oneself becomes a productive act subordinated to capital.

What appears as voluntary participation or social connection is, in fact, a mechanism of self-exploitation, masked by the rhetoric of creativity, sharing, and community. The user is transformed into a prosumer – both producer and consumer – whose actions simultaneously generate profit for the platform while reinforcing its control. Thus, participation, the central value of the digital age, paradoxically turns into a new mode of subordination, where the boundaries between work and leisure, play and labor, are irreversibly blurred.

*Digital alienation and deterritorialization of the subject*. Online activity leads to the dissolution of the boundaries between work and leisure, personal and public. G. Marcuse and A. Honnet associate this process with reification – the transformation of a living subject into a function of the system [6, p. 75]. Under the conditions of digital capitalism, the individual is deprived of autonomy and finds himself embedded in algorithmic rationality.

Bauman [4, p. 75] describes modern man as a “tourist in the flow of information”, a transient figure drifting through digital spaces without stable grounding or lasting attachments. This metaphor captures the essence of contemporary identity under the conditions of liquid modernity – fluid, fragmented, and constantly redefined by external flows of data and images. The subject no longer possesses a fixed sense of belonging or coherence; instead, identity becomes an ongoing project of self-construction through interaction with algorithmically curated environments.

In this context, virtual space functions as a zone of deterritorialization, in the sense proposed by Deleuze and Guattari, where all boundaries, hierarchies, and distinctions dissolve. The logic of digital communication favors not depth but velocity – the speed of transmission, the frequency of updates, the immediacy of response. Meaning is replaced by circulation; significance gives way to visibility.

The user, moving through infinite digital landscapes, becomes detached from both physical space and temporal continuity, existing in a perpetual “now” dictated by the rhythm of the network.

This condition produces a new form of digital alienation, which is no longer experienced as a disruption but as the default mode of being. The subject is integrated into the flows of information and capital, yet deprived of autonomy over them. The networked individual is at once hyper-connected and existentially isolated, immersed in communication but distanced from authentic experience. Within the framework of network capitalism, such alienation is normalized – it becomes a necessary condition for participation in the digital economy. Thus, the fragmentation of identity, the acceleration of interaction, and the deterritorialization of existence together define the ontological state of the contemporary subject: a being permanently in transit, whose value lies in mobility, visibility, and data productivity rather than in coherence or self-determination.

5. *The ideology of digital consumption.* Modern capitalism seeks to turn communication itself into a consumable product. The concept of “playbour” means blurring the line between play and work: the user gets pleasure, but thereby generates value. The Marxist critique of alienation gets a new meaning here – a person is involved in self-exploitation under the guise of self-realization.

F. Fuchs [3, p. 128] shows that social media construct a special form of virtual reality, where the daily activity of users turns into a tool of supervision and management. This creates an “involved entity” – a participant who voluntarily provides the capital with information about himself. In this sense, social media operate as ideological apparatuses that produce a new type of subjectivity aligned with the logic of capital. The “involved” subject is not coerced into labor but participates willingly, driven by the pursuit of recognition, belonging, and visibility. This voluntary engagement conceals a deeper asymmetry of power: while the user perceives interaction as empowerment, the platform translates it into data capital. Thus, everyday digital activity becomes a form of voluntary submission, where freedom is exercised through structures that continuously monitor, categorize, and commodify the self.

*A new form of fetishism.* Digital fetishism is expressed in the transfer of a sacred function to technology. Platforms are perceived as a natural medium of communication, not as a power structure. As M. Openkov wrote [5, p. 65], modern man does not believe in God, but in a technological order that promises control and transparency. Thus, fetishism is shifting from a product to an algorithm where value is determined by the number of engagements and views. In classical Marxist analysis, the fetishized object hides the social relations of its production; in digital capitalism, it is the algorithm that performs this concealment. The number of likes, followers, and views becomes the new measure of value, replacing traditional indicators of labor or material worth. Users internalize these quantitative markers as indicators of personal significance, success, or identity.

*The social consequences of digital exclusion.* In the context of digital capitalism, the classic forms of alienation – economic, political, and spiritual – are taking on a new technical form. The individual’s consciousness internalizes the mechanics of platforms: self-expression, communication, and play become functions of capital. The transformation of the subject is expressed in the transition from personality to network persona, from experience to data, from autonomy to profile.

Modern post-Marxism (A. Negri, M. Hardt, H. Fuchs) considers these processes as a new phase of capitalist deterritorialization, in which social media perform the function of integration and control. Communication becomes a form of management, and “freedom of engagement” becomes a mechanism for maintaining capitalist totality.

Negri and Hardt describe this as the rise of “biopolitical production”, where life itself – communication, emotion, creativity, and desire – becomes directly productive for capital. Social media exemplify this condition: they integrate subjects into continuous circuits of interaction, visibility, and self-expression, turning the totality of human experience into a source of surplus value. What appears as horizontal and democratic communication in fact functions as a vertical system of governance, where algorithms and metrics regulate behavior, shape opinion, and normalize participation within market frameworks.

In this configuration, communication ceases to be an autonomous social act and becomes a form of management – a subtle mechanism for coordinating actions, emotions, and identities according to capitalist imperatives. The ideology of “freedom of engagement” – the promise that users can speak, create, and connect freely – operates as a powerful discursive illusion, masking the structural asymmetry between users and platforms.

Thus, participation becomes a mode of control: by engaging, the individual reproduces the very system that exploits their attention and data. Digital capitalism achieves its stability not through coercion but through consensual integration, where self-expression and creativity are subsumed under economic rationality. In this sense, the rhetoric of freedom and openness functions as a key ideological support for capitalist totality, transforming communication into a tool for its continuous expansion and reproduction.

*Conclusions.* The post-Marxist perspective allows us to consider digital society as a new stage of capitalist modernization, where classical forms of production, labor and alienation are transformed into intangible and networked ones. In the context of digital capitalism, social media function not just as a means of communication, but as tools for generating added value by exploiting user engagement. Every act of communication – like, comment, repost – becomes an element of digital labor embedded in the data economy.



Digital alienation becomes the basic mechanism of network capitalism: the subject loses his autonomy, his identity splits between physical and virtual existence. As a result, a new type of subject is being formed – involved, transparent, and controlled, for whom participation and self-expression become forms of subordination to algorithmic structures.

Digital identity replaces the inner self with a platform-driven profile, and personal activity becomes a resource for market reproduction. Digital culture forms a special ontology of the subject – dynamic, but subordinated to the logic of data. The concepts of work, leisure, and creativity merge: self – realization becomes work, and freedom becomes a form of dependence. The paradox of the modern digital economy is that people participate in their own alienation, perceiving it as an expression of freedom. Post-Marxism demonstrates that the digital economy is not a rejection of capital, but its new stage – algorithmic and symbolic. The ideology of engagement and “participation” replaces the classical ideology of labor, and digital fetishism replaces the commodity fetishism of the industrial era. Even communication itself becomes a commodity, and social connections become elements of market logic.

Thus, the digital society reproduces the capitalist totality in a new, networked form. Digital labor, alienation, and fetishism are not archaisms, but basic mechanisms of modern power production. Post-Marxist criticism allows us to see in digital culture not a space of freedom, but a new configuration of dependence, in which participation itself becomes a form of exploitation.

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