Research Africa Reviews Vol. 9 No. 2, August 2025

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Satgar, Vishwas, *Digital Capitalism and Its Limits: Technotopia, Power and Risk*. Publisher: Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2025, pp. 297. ISBN-13: 978-1776149438.

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Introduction and Central Thesis

This edited volume, written from a Marxist-inspired theoretical lens, explores how digital technology adoption is presenting risks and creating power differentials across different spectrums of societies. Through a series of thematic chapters—ranging from innovations in automotive industries to digital solutions such as taxi-hailing apps and electronic channels of commerce, to critiques around the neo-classical economic model—the volume situates how these innovations are playing out in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). The book speaks to the evolution of digital capitalism that is enabled by artificial intelligence and quantum computing. While the collection reviews these dynamics from a South African context, the discussions in the book are applicable across others.

Key Arguments

The edited collection uses case studies and reflections on the uptake of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) to explore the notion of digital capitalism and how its uptake is presenting both risks and innovations. Given the Marxist orientation of the book, the volume explores how these technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), have negative impacts. The chapters in this collection highlight how innovations enabled by digital technologies are accentuating the ongoing polycrisis. The book shows how rapid advancements in technology are impacting employment, climate, and democracies. It rightly argues that digital capitalism is creating multiple societal inequalities in the financial sector and negative effects on climate change, including labor redundancies due to automation. This edited volume invites readers to be critical of "Technotopia" as an ongoing project of digital capitalism, given the risks and contradictions it presents for human and non-human life. It highlights

multiple risks, such as the growing digital divide. The book generally presents a pessimistic outlook on technological advancements, particularly regarding the labor precarity they create. It not only explores gaps in literacy but also the challenges presented in sectors such as the gig economy. This allows for a direct critique of how digital automation and related innovations, such as those in the automotive sector, are shrinking jobs as they "enhance" efficiencies in enterprises.

The volume further raises several policy and empirical questions on the influence of digital technologies in present-day society. At the policy level, it raises questions around the regulatory landscape and related risks such as data privacy in the context of digital capitalism. The latter is particularly linked to the rise of a surveillance society and targeted advertising driven by algorithmic data. The book notes lags in the regulatory landscape. Other empirical questions worthy of further investigation relate to how societies should react to the evolving dynamics in the technology space. The book also engages in critiques of the current neo-classical economic model, raising concerns around its exploitative and extractive nature. In fact, one of the chapters proposes an innovative commons-based economic model that is participatory and human-centered. Moreover, the volume advocates a transition towards a green economic model that would decenter the current capitalist framework, which is leading to negative impacts on climate change. This is essentially a call for environmental justice.

The collection concludes with reflections on the nature of the state, building on the premise of hegemonic state theory. While the book invites readers to reconsider the role of the state in a digital age, it promises to examine this theme more fully in a future series. Nevertheless, it demonstrates how technology is not only disruptive to governments and associated market democracies but also a force to contend with from a political economy perspective. The book's ideas remain radical in some instances, such as the calls to replace the military, the police, and other national security organs (cf. p.161). While the argument is valid, the alternatives to such a perspective are not fully explored. The volume ends on a socialist note with calls for degrowth and decolonization and encourages readers to remain critical and reflective on the transition to a green economy model given the critiques around digital capitalism. Dismantling the structures, as the study hopes, remains a compelling challenge given how entrenched capitalism is in society.

Overall Appraisal

The edited volume is a welcome addition to the scholarship around the implications of digital technology on the everyday. It contributes to theoretical debates about the intersection of technology, capitalism, and the associated risks. The book relies on a series of scenarios largely from a South African context to examine the risks and

contradictions presented by technology. It also offers a useful lens to situate how digital capitalism is reshaping class dynamics in society and how it envisions the future. The book speaks to an interdisciplinary audience and contributes to debates around opportunities and risks premised on techno-realism.

Research Africa

ISSN 2575-6990.