



From the East India Company to Silicon Valley: Digital Platform Governance and Data Colonialism in the Global South

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ABSTRACT

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This conceptual study examines digital platform governance as a management mechanism through which contemporary digital capitalism can reproduce patterns of dependency and unequal value appropriation associated with colonial power. Drawing on critical political economy, postcolonial scholarship, and platform governance literature, it compares the East India Company with contemporary technology corporations without treating their legal authority or coercive powers as equivalent. The analysis considers five dimensions: market entry and legitimacy, infrastructural dependence, value extraction, information-based control, and the concentration of economic gains. Using a historical-comparative interpretive approach, the paper examines how corporate rules, infrastructure ownership, data access, and automated decisions shape participation in digital markets. South Asia provides the principal regional context within the broader Global South. The resulting implications concern responsible data stewardship, transparent participation rules, vendor-dependency assessment, human review of consequential automated decisions, and meaningful stakeholder redress. These organizational measures complement wider policies for digital sovereignty, competition, and local technological capacity. The analysis develops conceptual arguments rather than statistically tested relationships.

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1.0 Introduction

Historical accounts frequently depict colonialism as a completed historical phase, characterized by naval fleets, physical outposts, agricultural estates, and imperial administration. While this perspective captures historical facts, it remains theoretically insufficient. It misleads modern analysts into treating colonialism purely as a territorial phenomenon that concluded with the lowering of imperial flags and the declaration of independence. Consequently, twentieth-century liberation struggles ranging from South Asian independence to the emergence of free African and Caribbean states are perceived as absolute conclusions that restored local sovereignty. However, this interpretation mistakes the end of direct political rule for the eradication of systemic control. Beyond land seizure, colonialism operated as a comprehensive framework designed to restructure financial markets, categorize citizens, siphon economic wealth, dictate intellectual paradigms, and foster psychological reliance. When viewed as a broader system, the modern era reveals itself not as postcolonial, but as an era of post-territorial hegemony. Today, resource extraction and societal control function seamlessly without physical annexation. Digital servers have replaced traditional colonial ledgers, data tracking has superseded historical censuses, and virtual platforms have become the modern equivalents of physical plantations. (Couldry & Mejias, 2021; Ragnedda & Ruii, 2022; Mejias & Couldry, 2024)

This study proposes a systematic comparative argument: the core dynamics of colonial exploitation have evolved rather than vanished. Historically, entities like the British East India Company stripped subjugated populations of physical commodities, workforce productivity, agricultural income, and political autonomy, justifying these actions through narratives of commerce, modernization, and social progress. In the contemporary era, transnational tech conglomerates harvest personal data, user attention, behavioral habits, cultural tendencies, and emotional patterns (Arshad & Mobeen, 2024). These operations are masked by promises of digital inclusion, operational convenience, and complimentary services. Consequently, the boundaries of resource extraction have shifted from traditional outposts like shipping ports, mining facilities, and transport networks toward modern digital touchpoints, including search engines, algorithmic feeds, cloud storage systems, and automated predictive models. While historical colonial capitalism depended on the physical transport of labor and commodities across global trade routes, modern digital capitalism relies on converting daily human experiences into computational data points. This subtle data gathering occurs so smoothly that it is rarely perceived as a form of exploitation. Ultimately, the hidden nature of this digital infrastructure is not an accidental feature; it is the fundamental source of its authority. (Zuboff, 2022; Mejias & Couldry, 2024; De Seta, 2023)

We must be careful when comparing today's tech firms with the old East India Company. Modern technology businesses are not the same as those historical trading groups. They do not own private military units, they do not collect taxes from farming land, and they do not rule over physical countries. Because of this, we are looking at structural similarities rather than saying they are exactly identical. This approach uses economic history to demonstrate how wealthy systems change their methods over time while keeping the same old habit of taking most of the profits.

Both the old trading groups and modern online platforms control networks, gather information, make users rely on them, and move money from poor areas to rich countries. Both claim to help the world grow while changing societies to make money for foreign owners. It does not matter if they take a worker's time or track online habits; both models turn human life into profit. This long-standing system shows that while tools change, the basic rules of control stay the same.

This research positions itself at the intersection of digital geopolitics, postcolonial studies, critical political economy, and management. Its central management concept is digital platform governance: the arrangements through which platform owners establish participation rules, distribute decision rights, control access to data and infrastructure, and organize accountability across their ecosystems. Platform governance also involves relationships with users, business participants, regulators, and other stakeholders (Gorwa, 2019). Algorithmic governance is treated as one mechanism within these arrangements, rather than as a synonym for the entire governance system. This distinction makes it possible to examine the corporate decisions behind data extraction while retaining the paper's concern with sovereignty and social inequality.

The paper asks how digital platform governance helps explain structural similarities and differences between historical corporate colonialism and contemporary data colonialism, and what these comparisons imply for responsible management in the Global South. It makes three connected contributions. First, it compares corporate arrangements across historical settings without assuming institutional equivalence. Second, it connects platform rules, infrastructure dependence, and the distribution of data-derived value with the autonomy of participating organizations and communities. Third, it develops managerial implications alongside the existing policy agenda for digital sovereignty. South Asia remains the principal regional context; the discussion does not imply that all Global South countries or all digital platforms operate under identical conditions.

2.0 Literature Review

The historical East India Company originated strictly as a merchant enterprise rather than a territorial domain. Following its royal charter in 1600, it gained access to the Indian Ocean economy through specialized merchant privileges, targeting the trade of raw textiles, regional spices, saltpeter, opium, and high-value colonial goods. Its foundational influence relied heavily on merchant diplomacy, sovereign legal charters, armed trading posts, and strategic alliances with indigenous rulers. Gradually, following the pivotal conflict at Plassey in 1757 and the subsequent extraction of Bengal's revenue collection rights in 1765, this commercial entity transformed into a ruling territorial power. It evolved into an unprecedented institutional hybrid: a private joint-stock enterprise that managed public governance, collected state taxes, commanded militaries, enforced judicial systems, and funneled the vast economic assets of a wealthy subcontinent toward metropolitan capital accumulation.

The extraction process executed by this corporate enterprise extended far beyond the simple transport of physical commodities; it fundamentally altered the underlying financial framework of the occupied populations. Agrarian revenue models specifically the permanent, individual peasant, and village-level tax settlements transformed traditional rural relationships into commercialized,

taxable, and bureaucratically trackable frameworks. Native farmers and craftspeople were forcibly integrated into transnational mercantile networks, while regional weaving hubs that had historically dominated global markets were pushed into asymmetrical competition with emerging industrial capitalism in the West. Furthermore, local poppy cultivation was systematically anchored to trade networks with East Asia, illustrating how imperial extraction intertwined multiple distinct societies into a unified global mercantile network. Consequently, corporate dominion did not simply seize existing assets; it entirely remolded the structural conditions under which domestic wealth was generated.

The corporate monopoly and subsequent imperial state also maintained control through the strategic management of information. The ruling administration systematically mapped, calculated, classified, translated, surveyed, and compartmentalized the population. Rather than merely reflecting existing social dynamics, the state census actively generated rigid administrative categories of identity (Arshad, 2023). Topographical maps did not simply mirror geographic features; they transformed physical landscapes into organized, governable spaces. Ethnographic profiles, legal codifications, fiscal registries, regional gazetteers, and dialect classifications reduced intricate social structures into organized bureaucratic records. Critical scholarship has established that imperial knowledge production was never a neutral academic pursuit, but rather an administrative instrument of statecraft (Cohn; Dirks). This directly complements wider theories demonstrating how the intellectual construction of the non-Western world was fundamentally bound up with geopolitical dominance over it (Said).

Technical infrastructure served a double purpose. Railway networks, telegraph lines, irrigation canals, printing presses, postal networks, judicial courts, academic institutions, and contemporary administrative systems did establish long-lasting structures and methods of integration. However, their structural configuration was systematically bound up with resource extraction, monitoring, military deployment, fiscal collection, mercantile export, and imperial correspondence. While rail networks transported agricultural crops and civilian populations, they were equally configured to transport military personnel and unrefined raw resources. The telegraph system facilitated the transmission of data, yet it simultaneously functioned as the neural network of imperial governance. Furthermore, Westernized education developed new intellectual demographics, but it concurrently institutionalized the ruling language as the mandatory vehicle for socioeconomic progress and systemic authority. Consequently, imperial innovation simultaneously introduced modernization and enforced structural subordination.

This dual nature is crucial for analyzing the contemporary technological landscape. Imperial frameworks were never exclusively restrictive; they simultaneously generated fresh opportunities, civic spheres, specialized occupations, and ideological awareness. However, the overarching configuration of the entire network remained dedicated to metropolitan wealth accumulation. In a similar manner, contemporary software platforms provide agency to consumers while permanently anchoring them within extractive structural networks. The core historical takeaway is not that innovation is naturally imperialist by nature, but rather that technology assumes a colonial function when its structural networks, engineering criteria, proprietary rights, information streams, and

conceptual classifications are systematically engineered for external wealth accumulation and imbalanced geopolitical management. (Arora, 2022; Mignolo, 2021; Gurumurthy & Bhatt, 2022) The management relevance lies in the relationship between commercial authority and accountability: ownership and control over essential infrastructure can shape the terms on which other actors participate in economic life.

3.0 Methodology

The study uses a conceptual, historical-comparative approach to interpret corporate power across two different institutional settings. Critical political economy informs the analysis of value extraction and dependency, while postcolonial scholarship informs the discussion of knowledge, representation, and sovereignty. Management research on platform architecture and governance supplies a complementary perspective on how digital ecosystems are organized (Tiwana et al., 2010). These perspectives are brought together through an interpretive synthesis of published scholarship. The paper does not report a survey, interviews, an original archival dataset, or statistical tests. Its conclusions are analytical interpretations rather than estimates of causal effects.

The comparison considers the East India Company's corporate-imperial development between 1600 and 1858 and the contemporary operations of major technology platforms. Discussion of later colonial institutions provides historical context rather than evidence of practices confined to Company rule. Five thematic dimensions organize the comparison: market entry and legitimacy; infrastructural dependence; value extraction; information-based control; and the concentration of economic gains. Digital platform governance connects these dimensions through decisions about market access, contractual rules, infrastructure, data use, and accountability. The comparison identifies similarities alongside differences in political authority, coercion, legal status, and participants' capacity to exit or contest decisions.

The analytical contribution is to connect critical accounts of data appropriation with the organizational arrangements through which platforms coordinate economic activity. Ecosystem research shows why relationships among interdependent participants matter for strategy and value creation (Jacobides et al., 2018). This paper extends that discussion conceptually by asking who controls participation, who captures data-derived value, and who can challenge consequential decisions. Data colonialism is used as a critical interpretive lens for these asymmetries, rather than as a claim that every platform reproduces colonial relations. The analysis does not establish a direct historical lineage between the East India Company and particular technology firms.

Additionally, the analytical design is driven by a firm dedication to localized insights and regional frameworks. A vast majority of contemporary literature regarding technological control originates directly from the geographic hubs where that authority resides—namely academic networks, research centers, and policy organizations across North America and Western Europe. Reversing this trend, this research positions the non-Western world, with a specific emphasis on the territories of Southern Asia, as its foundational analytical environment and the principal testing ground for its theoretical ideas. This choice is not an attempt to prioritize isolated local histories; it represents a structural correction intended to counter a deep-seated institutional imbalance across the discipline. Academic researchers specialized in peripheral histories have consistently shown

that insights gathering from the outer edges of global networks carry a profound intellectual validity, simply because structural subjugation is encountered with the greatest intensity in those specific spaces (Spivak; Mignolo). Because this specific Asian territory serves both as the ancestral testing ground for merchant-monopoly expansion and as a contemporary arena for rapid tech-platform integration, it provides an extraordinarily revealing vantage point for systemic comparison.

Before launching into the structural evaluation, several foundational concepts must be clearly established. The term technological colonization describes the expansion of imperial patterns of control including resource extraction, enforced reliance, intellectual subordination, and the central accumulation of wealth into modern software infrastructures, global standards, digital networks, and information ecosystems (Arshad et al., 2023). While drawing on existing literature, this perspective builds on previous arguments by grounding these claims in institutional structural comparisons rather than simple metaphors (Kwet). Similarly, the concept of data-driven subjugation highlights the capture of human life through digitized metrics in a way that structurally mimics the ancestral seizure of physical land and human labor (Couldry & Mejias). Crucially, both historical and modern frameworks involve transforming daily human existence into a profitable resource for external corporate growth, completely bypassing local democratic oversight or fair economic return (Gulshan et al., 2026). Furthermore, datafication signifies the translation of human activities, emotional expressions, physical movements, spoken language, identity markers, and personal interactions into measurable, archived, and marketable informational assets. Rather than being a simple engineering milestone, this shift represents a fundamental transformation in how social reality is lived and experienced. In the same vein, behavioral monitoring capitalism defines an economic model where consumer data, collected during routine online interactions, is systematically harvested, processed, and utilized to forecast and manipulate future consumer choices as a highly profitable market asset (Zuboff). Finally, platform economics emphasizes the strategic dominance of digital systems acting as global intermediaries (Srnicsek & De Seta). These networks capture, structure, and monetize data flows by leveraging user lock-in mechanisms, high switching costs, and compounding network benefits that naturally produce anti-competitive, monopolistic market environments.

Digital platform governance encompasses corporate policies, contracts, technical access arrangements, and accountability processes that structure participation in a platform ecosystem. It includes both governance exercised by platform firms and the wider institutional relationships that constrain or enable their decisions (Gorwa, 2019). Algorithmic governance refers here to the use of automated systems to implement decisions such as ranking, visibility, access, and eligibility. This narrower mechanism operates within the platform's broader governance arrangements. Cognitive colonialism describes the paper's critical interpretation of how commercial systems capture and shape attention and meaning; it is not a measured psychological condition. Epistemic marginalization concerns the exclusion or distortion of local knowledge and languages. Digital sovereignty refers to the institutional capacity to negotiate, regulate, and contest digital arrangements. These are analytical concepts, not measured independent or dependent variables.

4.0 Findings and Results

Within the contemporary era, corporate entities have once again emerged as a primary instrument of global statecraft. Large technology conglomerates do not typically seize physical land, yet they administer the critical infrastructures upon which civic dialogue, commercial trade, academic instruction, personal identification, correspondence networks, physical transit, and even state authority routinely rely. Search algorithms dictate information discoverability, while digital networks systematically organize human focus. Cloud infrastructure providers manage both public and enterprise systems, just as digital marketplaces strictly police software distribution. Furthermore, machine-learning models guide intellectual synthesis, and data-driven marketing networks commercialize user activities. Financial transaction services and digital identification frameworks redefine commercial exchange and civic belonging. Consequently, the commercial network serves as the contemporary trading port; cloud databases act as the new storage facility; and digital information functions as the modern unrefined commodity.

The marketing language surrounding the online network economy is remarkably altruistic, promising consumers seamless integration, everyday convenience, civic spaces, intellectual development, media consumption, and individual agency. Digital applications are routinely framed as entirely complimentary. However, these cost-free mechanisms function directly within capitalist frameworks, serving as the primary interface through which resource extraction is initiated. Consumers compensate providers not through traditional currency, but via informational assets, human focus, and behavioral transparency. Individual inquiries, scrolling pauses, content interactions, media sharing, spatial coordinates, photographs, commercial transactions, vocal prompts, and psychological indicators are systematically converted into data inputs for forecasting frameworks. Consequently, individuals are not simply market purchasers; they operate as uncompensated data producers whose routine existence is transformed into unrefined input for automated algorithmic output.

This processing of resource drainage has an exceptionally deep impact throughout various emerging economies. Massive populations of digital users residing across diverse territories in the Middle East, Latin America, Africa, and Asia produce immense quantities of operational data, yet they keep only an insignificant percentage of the economic gains generated by those informational resources. Instead, the accumulating revenues, advanced engineering skills, registered patents, remote cloud infrastructures, and artificial intelligence systems are heavily centralized inside the world's leading technology centers, most notably China and the United States. Such a structural pattern creates a computerized version of classic center-edge economic imbalance: the international borderlands supply behavioral inputs, consumer market scaling, cultural patterns, and low-wage digital workforce, while the dominant central jurisdictions retain complete ownership over lucrative departments like automated forecasting, processing architecture, commercial advertising networks, corporate cloud storage, and copyrighted frameworks.

The historical comparison identifies recurring questions about corporate entry, dependence, information, and value appropriation. The East India Company expanded through trade privileges and later territorial power, whereas contemporary platforms expand through

services, contracts, network effects, and infrastructure. Both settings invite examination of who establishes participation rules and who benefits from the resulting economic relationships, but their mechanisms of enforcement are substantially different. From a management perspective, the relevant issue is how platform owners coordinate participation while retaining control over resources that other organizations need. Digital platform governance therefore links the paper's critique of extraction to concrete decisions about access, data use, and the terms of commercial participation (Tiwana et al., 2010; Gorwa, 2019).

Table 1. Historical comparison and implications for digital platform governance

Governance dimension	Historical colonial setting	contemporary corporate-platform setting	Management implication
Entry and legitimacy	Trade privileges and royal charter	Connectivity, services, and participation agreements	Examine the rights and obligations attached to participation.
Infrastructure and dependence	Trade routes, ports, forts, and warehouses	Cloud services, digital marketplaces, and software ecosystems	Assess continuity, portability, and switching constraints.
Rules and authority	Company administration and coercive territorial powers	Contracts, technical standards, and platform policies	Distinguish commercial rule-setting from state authority; clarify accountability.
Information and control	Revenue records, mapping, and administrative classification	Data analytics, profiling, and automated ranking	Establish data stewardship and review of consequential decisions.
Value appropriation	Commodity trade and land revenue directed toward imperial accumulation	Data-derived advertising, fees, and infrastructure revenues	Examine how benefits and risks are distributed among participants.
Knowledge and representation	Colonial education and administrative categories	Search visibility, language support, and AI classifications	Assess local context, representation, and access to redress.

Note. This table summarizes the paper's conceptual comparison. The mechanisms differ in legal authority and coercive capacity; the comparison does not imply historical equivalence.

4.1 Cognitive Colonialism, Attention, and Platform Incentives

Territorial colonialism seized land; digital colonialism increasingly captures attention. This shift does not make contemporary domination less serious. It makes it more intimate. The colonial frontier has moved from external geography to internal geography: cognition, desire, emotion, habit, memory, language, and the subconscious. The digital subject is addressed not only as citizen or consumer but as a stream of signals. Interfaces are designed to hold attention, provoke reaction, deepen engagement, and produce predictable behavior. The scroll, the notification, the recommendation, and the personalized advertisement constitute a behavioral architecture.

The perception of autonomy is fundamental to this structural design. Online users navigate digital spaces under the impression of absolute voluntary action: executing searches, liking content, viewing media, completing purchases, posting updates, and sharing information.

However, these individual decisions are heavily channeled within virtual ecosystems systematically optimized for behavioral engagement and corporate monetization. While the global internet originally surfaced as an open window to the outside world, contemporary platform capitalism steadily transforms that window into a highly individualized enclosure. Phenomena like specialized filter bubbles and ideological echo chambers are never random systemic glitches; rather, they are entirely aligned with commercial business models that profit from personal relevance, high emotional intensity, and extended user retention. Consequently, the digital user operates with apparent liberty inside a carefully engineered cage whose boundaries are constructed from individual preference, ingrained habit, and algorithmic prediction.

This dynamic generates a manifestation of authority that is far less conspicuous than historical imperial coercion, yet arguably much more expansive in its ultimate scope. Historically, classical colonialism regulated the physical body through statutory law, fiscal taxation, state policing, and organized labor systems. In contrast, contemporary digital capitalism manages the human mind through behavioral incentives, continuous feedback mechanisms, user interface engineering, automated algorithmic curation, and psychological capture. The contemporary individual is no longer restrained by physical iron bonds, but rather bound by everyday convenience, systemic dependency, and neurochemical dopamine triggers. This structural arrangement does not imply that online participants are devoid of individual agency; individuals consistently utilize digital platforms for creative expression, political mobilization, financial enterprise, and social connection. However, any autonomous agency executed within these extractive networks remains permanently confined by the underlying engineering of those very infrastructures.

Consequently, the framework of mental subjugation assists in defining a contemporary era of systemic reliance. The core issue extends beyond the mere harvesting of user information; rather, the fundamental human capacities for cognitive focus, intellectual interpretation, communal integration, and personal aspiration are systematically refashioned by networks whose principal obligation is market profitability rather than democratic welfare. Just as historical imperial academies utilized colonial curricula to dictate what qualified as valid scholarship, contemporary software platforms leverage algorithmic prominence to determine what is deemed significant, trustworthy, appealing, attractive, pressing, or authentic. Ultimately, the governance of human attention transforms directly into the governance of perceived reality. (Zuboff, 2022; Couldry & Mejias, 2021; Andrejevic & Selwyn, 2022) Viewed through digital platform governance, this raises a business-ethics question about the objectives chosen by platform managers. Engagement and advertising revenue should be evaluated alongside user agency, fair treatment, and the ability to challenge harmful platform practices.

4.2 Digital Platform Governance, Corporate Accountability, and Sovereignty

National autonomy is conventionally conceptualized as governance over physical territory, national boundaries, statutory regulations, and institutional enforcement. However, within the contemporary computerized age, independent statehood additionally demands oversight over digital information streams, processing infrastructure networks, application standards, automated

decision-making frameworks, and intellectual dissemination systems. A sovereign country might well preserve its official political independence while remaining fundamentally reliant on external cloud computing architectures, foreign operating systems, international communication platforms, overseas transactional networks, external machine-learning models, and foreign software ecosystems. While this dynamic does not constitute traditional imperial governance, it represents a profound and critical deficit in genuine state sovereignty.

Software networks exercise governance completely outside of democratic elections. They police human expression through systemic content moderation, information discoverability scaling, account termination protocols, commercial marketing regulations, automated tracking algorithms, and content recommendation architectures. These administrative actions configure public conversation in manners that are routinely far more instantaneous than statutory legislation. Under this mechanism, an ideological movement can instantly achieve prominence or be rendered completely invisible; a linguistic group may receive priority or face systemic marginalization; an enterprise can rapidly expand or completely dissolve; unverified rumors may rapidly propagate or face immediate containment; and cultural representations can be improperly classified or commercialized devoid of original context. Consequently, the traditional state function of maintaining public order systematically relocates into corporate-owned operational systems.

Automated administrative frameworks simultaneously inflict structural intellectual harm. A significant majority of machine-learning frameworks are heavily engineered using Anglo-American institutional paradigms, commercially sourced information, Western intellectual frameworks, and English-language datasets. Consequently, linguistic systems like Arabic, Urdu, Bengali, Persian, Pashto, Hindi, Sinhala, Tamil, Nepali, alongside multiple Indigenous and African vernaculars, are routinely marginalized, incorrectly translated, or analyzed via simplistic taxonomies that strip away cultural subtleties. Local colloquial expressions, theological references, verbal histories, poetic styles, and ancestral narratives become exceptionally challenging to encapsulate mathematically. Even when automated systems fail to comprehend a specific societal heritage, they continue to categorize, prioritize, regulate, and commercialize that heritage. This dynamic establishes a contemporary manifestation of intellectual marginalization. (Birhane, 2021; Mohamed et al., 2021; Haggart & Keller, 2021)

This systemic dilemma intensifies as automated intelligent networks are introduced into social welfare, civic governance, academic institutions, legal practices, investigative journalism, regional development strategies, human resource recruitment, economic operations, and public law enforcement. If societies within developing regions fundamentally depend on computational architectures that are engineered, managed, and financially optimized within foreign corporate jurisdictions, then intellectual reliance inevitably solidifies. The core challenge does not stem from technological integration itself, but rather from integrating these systems entirely devoid of strategic negotiating leverage, institutional transparency, native linguistic compatibility, civic accountability, or democratic regulation. A technologically independent nation does not isolate itself from global innovation; rather, it deliberately dictates and negotiates the terms of its engagement. For organizations adopting these services, sovereignty debates have a practical

counterpart in control over business data and decisions. Procurement teams and senior managers need to consider which decisions remain internal, which are delegated to a platform, and how disputed outcomes can be reviewed. These are implications of the conceptual analysis, rather than findings from organizational fieldwork.

4.3 South Asia: Platform Dependence and Organizational Autonomy

The South Asian subcontinent is foundational to this evaluation, having historical experience with conventional physical imperialism alongside ongoing exposures to computerized reliance. This extensive territory incorporating Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and neighboring states boasts massive demographic volumes, accelerating online commercial spaces, dynamic electronic entrepreneurship, and profound linguistic multiplicity. Conversely, these nations simultaneously contend with fragmented data privacy regulations, structural platform reliance, high vulnerability to digital disinformation, underdeveloped native-language machine-learning ecosystems, and minimal strategic leverage when dealing with multinational technology conglomerates.

The imperial history of the South Asian region illustrates how mercantile operations, financial liabilities, regional aristocracies, defense compacts, bureaucratic adjustments, and physical infrastructure can systematically convert a business footprint into total political subjugation. The historical enterprise seldom maintained authority solely via military coercion; instead, it leaned heavily upon local intermediaries, indigenous allies, legislative apparatuses, taxation frameworks, and intelligence systems. In an identical manner, modern technological reliance is never driven exclusively by external forces. Domestic administrations regularly outsource cloud infrastructure, local enterprises depend on overseas software ecosystems, general consumers prioritize everyday user convenience, regional marketers bankroll surveillance-centered commercial models, and domestic elites routinely profit from algorithmic prominence. Consequently, digital imperialism is mutually engineered through the combination of external multinational corporate influence and internal state institutional deficiencies.

Concurrently, online interaction within South Asian societies is by no means completely passive. Electronic systems have significantly amplified educational reach, cross-border financial remittances, digital commerce, public political discourse, remote healthcare delivery, emergency disaster management, collective social mobilization, and the market integration of small enterprises. Cellular telephony has effectively linked rural demographics with urban markets and domestic circles (Hashmi et al., 2023). Furthermore, electronic financial transactions have substantially minimized everyday commercial friction, while web-based instruction has introduced entirely new pathways for academic accessibility. Simultaneously, international diasporic networks continuously maintain ancestral cultural and financial ties via multimedia platforms. Any objective scholarly assessment must acknowledge these specific advancements; hence, the fundamental question is not whether electronic infrastructure provides individual empowerment it undeniably does. Rather, the core dilemma is whether such empowerment, when exercised entirely devoid of digital sovereignty, ultimately fosters a more profound architecture of systemic reliance.

The intricate linguistic landscape of the South Asian region offers a striking demonstration

of this systemic challenge. Whether it is an individual employed in Dhaka's apparel sector, an academic student residing in Gilgit-Baltistan, an agricultural worker within the Punjab plains, a Pashto-speaking migratory laborer, or a Tamil-speaking resident in Jaffna—all frequently engage with multinational digital networks. However, the foundational software architectures of these platforms remain heavily engineered around global commercial incentives and dominant international languages. Within this model, indigenous insights are transformed into raw information, regional speech patterns are repurposed as training datasets for machines, and local behavioral habits are converted into corporate advertising space. Concurrently, these domestic communities seldom obtain equitable financial returns, regulatory administrative oversight, or genuine intellectual representation. They are made intensely visible as mere behavioral resources, yet they remain systematically disenfranchised as independent knowledge creators. (Arora, 2022; Gurumurthy & Bhatt, 2022; Khan & Hussain, 2023)

Consequently, the primary objective for this territory revolves around strategic digital negotiation rather than electronic isolationism. To achieve this, South Asian administrations urgently require targeted investments in native-language machine-learning ecosystems, comprehensive data privacy legislation, robust cross-border policy alignment, open public electronic infrastructure, updated market competition frameworks, advanced cybersecurity capabilities, and autonomous algorithmic verification protocols. Concurrently, these nations must foster domestic universities and academic research institutions that are thoroughly equipped to analyze technological dependency from an indigenous perspective, rather than continuously depending on intellectual frameworks imported directly from the global technological power centers under evaluation. The corresponding organizational priority is to assess dependence before it becomes difficult to reverse. Enterprises and public institutions can examine the portability of their records, the continuity of essential services, access to customer relationships, and the conditions governing a transition to another provider. The feasibility of these measures varies with organizational resources and market alternatives.

4.4 Knowledge Governance and Data Stewardship

Historical imperial dominance was fundamentally contingent upon the authority to generate and control knowledge. Within this framework, demographic censuses tabulated subject populations, geographic cartography solidified physical boundaries, ethnographic studies neatly categorized local communities, and statutory legal codes systematically reduced complex societal dynamics into rigid administrative classifications. Concurrently, topographical surveys converted physical terrain into taxable revenue, formal educational academies reshaped internal mental landscapes, and institutional archives meticulously preserved the state's authorized version of historical truth. Consequently, this body of information was never merely descriptive; it was intensely productive, actively manufacturing the precise governance taxonomies through which colonial populations were managed and controlled.

Modern electronic information executes a remarkably parallel function. Automated big data processing, behavioral recommendation frameworks, predictive modeling, biometric registration repositories, content monitoring protocols, and artificial intelligence taxonomies do

not merely mirror societal dynamics; rather, they actively configure them. Under this mechanism, the structural classifications of a platform dictate available identity frameworks, while automated recommendation feeds determine cultural exposure. Simultaneously, financial credit assessment algorithms channel economic opportunities, and digital search engines establish intellectual authority. Furthermore, automated translation systems reinforce linguistic hierarchies, just as content moderation policies heavily dictate the boundaries of public political expression. Ultimately, the administrative authority to categorize individuals translates directly into the operational authority to govern them.

This systematic risk intensifies considerably when computational knowledge is misconstrued as value-neutral simply due to its technical architecture. In an identical fashion, historical imperial classifications were conventionally advertised as rational, scientific, and purely administrative protocols; such rhetoric of objectivity routinely masked the underlying dynamics of imperial dominance. In the contemporary era, the widespread vocabulary of algorithmic optimization, operational efficiency, user personalization, and machine learning can similarly obfuscate embedded value judgments, market-driven incentives, racial or linguistic partiality, and deep-seated geopolitical imbalances. Information is never raw in an entirely neutral or uncorrupted manner. Instead, it is systematically gathered through targeted infrastructure, organized via pre-defined taxonomies, computed through specific statistical models, and analyzed through the lens of corporate institutional priorities.

Consequently, an emancipatory, decolonial framework applied to computerized knowledge demands a rigorous critique regarding several foundational elements: the entities responsible for data harvesting, the ownership structures of physical infrastructure, the creators of structural taxonomies, the specific languages integrated into the system, the autonomous bodies auditing statistical models, the ultimate beneficiaries of financial surplus, and the channels available to challenge automated decisions. Furthermore, it interrogates who achieves visibility within these networks and under whose specific terms. These inquiries do not constitute minor technical details; rather, they represent fundamental questions of national sovereignty, institutional justice, and collective historical memory. Within organizations, these questions translate into data stewardship: assigning responsibility for the collection, interpretation, sharing, retention, and correction of information. Managers should assess whether platform classifications serve legitimate organizational purposes and whether affected stakeholders have accessible channels to question them.

4.5 Connectivity, Dependence, and Participation in Platform Ecosystems

The most highly evolved configurations of institutional power seldom present themselves as overt subjugation; instead, they manifest under the guise of developmental opportunity. Just as the historical East India Company secured its initial footprint via mercantile exchange and commercial entry, contemporary digital networks integrate into society by offering complimentary services and universal connectivity. This foundational promise is sufficiently authentic to remain deeply persuasive: interpersonal communication is streamlined, information becomes instantly retrievable, commercial enterprises locate target demographics, domestic circles maintain constant

contact, academic students acquire web-based education, and public citizens find a voice. While these advancements constitute genuine individual freedoms, the underlying architecture of information extraction remains permanently embedded within the very prerequisites of system accessibility.

General users rarely perceive a sense of subjugation while engaging with digital search engines, social communication networks, mobile hardware, cloud architectures, or artificial intelligence interfaces. On the contrary, the user experience is frequently gratifying and highly productive, which explains precisely why technological reliance remains so ideologically subtle. Under this dynamic, the individual often develops a strong psychological and behavioral attachment to the very operational infrastructures that harvest their personal information. Consequently, systemic capture is perceived merely as operational convenience, comprehensive behavioral surveillance is interpreted as user personalization, automated behavioral modification is misconstrued as situational relevance, and absolute market monopolization is experienced as structural simplicity. Ultimately, the user interface successfully converts structural dominance into everyday subconscious habit.

This dynamic by no means implies that general users lack intellectual capacity or operate merely as passive, agency-deprived victims an assertion that would simply resurrect historical imperial paternalism. On the contrary, populations throughout developing societies exhibit highly resourceful, strategic, and adaptive behaviors. They frequently leverage digital networks to challenge authoritarian administrations, engineer commercial enterprises, sustain interpersonal relationships, acquire professional competencies, coordinate community mobilization, and preserve cultural narratives. Nevertheless, the exercise of individual agency does not dissolve overarching structural imbalances. Just as a colonial-era laborer could derive functional utility from an imperial railway network while that transport infrastructure remained fundamentally integrated into an exploitative resource extraction system, a modern user can simultaneously benefit from a digital platform while that application remains embedded within an extractive global information economy (Srnicsek & De Seta, 2022; Doctorow, 2023; Kwet, 2021). At the organizational level, the same tension concerns the balance between market access and bargaining autonomy. Participation in a digital ecosystem can create opportunities while exposing an enterprise to decisions made by actors it does not control. This makes the governance of interdependence a strategic concern (Jacobides et al., 2018).

5.0 Discussion and Conclusion

Any rigorous scholarly discourse must carefully avoid both technological determinism and hyper-rhetorical inflation. Electronic systems are not inherently imperialistic by nature; rather, they possess the capacity to decentralize academic knowledge, minimize systemic transactional expenses, elevate disenfranchised viewpoints, optimize emergency disaster response, facilitate remote healthcare delivery, broaden web-based learning pathways, and catalyze novel commercial initiatives. Furthermore, the global proliferation of open-source initiatives, digital public goods, indigenous innovation hubs, and civic technology undertakings clearly indicates that computational frameworks can effectively advance public welfare objectives. Consequently, the core issue does not reside within the technological infrastructure itself, but rather within the

domain of political economy specifically regarding asset ownership, regulatory governance, data extraction, institutional accountability, and structural dependency.

Furthermore, any precise analysis requires a clear analytical distinction between formal historical imperialism and contemporary digital capitalism. While the East India Company wielded overt territorial jurisdiction, enforced coercive fiscal extractions, and commanded sovereign military apparatuses, modern transnational technology conglomerates operate primarily through civilian contracts, algorithmic code, market dynamics, and digital infrastructure. Under this contemporary arrangement, general users routinely provide formal legal consent, even though such authorization is frequently obscured within dense, largely unintelligible terms-of-service agreements. Additionally, modern nation-states preserve their legal sovereignty intact, even in instances where they completely lack internal technical and administrative capacity. While these operational variations are analytically significant, such formal distinctions do not obliterate fundamental structural resemblances; historically, imperial mechanisms have perpetually reconfigured their operational modalities to align with evolving historical contexts.

Internal state accountability must simultaneously be acknowledged, as modern technological reliance is by no means orchestrated solely by transnational corporations. On the contrary, domestic administrative bodies frequently adopt foreign platforms completely devoid of regulatory oversight, while judicial systems consistently lag behind rapid technological advancements. Furthermore, educational institutions routinely prioritize consumerist digital literacy over critical digital citizenship, and regional commercial enterprises continually incentivize surveillance-driven marketing models. Concurrently, political factions weaponize algorithmic disinformation for strategic gain, indigenous elites leverage these networks to consolidate social influence, and general citizens regularly surrender personal data privacy in exchange for operational convenience. Consequently, any genuine emancipation of the contemporary digital order must fundamentally incorporate comprehensive domestic structural reform, rather than remaining confined merely to the rhetorical critique of Silicon Valley.

Ultimately, the pursuit of digital sovereignty must never be conflated with technological isolationism. The overarching objective does not entail severing societal integration from global information networks, nor does it involve romanticizing a pre-digital historical era. Rather, the definitive target is to strategically negotiate equitable participation within transnational computational architectures. In this context, sovereignty denotes the authentic institutional capacity to select, regulate, verify, tax, internalize, and legally contest systemic operations, rather than chasing an unrealistic fantasy of complete autarky. While developing societies fundamentally require global technological connectivity, such integration must not be allowed to degenerate into systematic resource extraction completely devoid of institutional accountability. (Rahman, 2021; Gurumurthy & Bhatt, 2022; Arora, 2022) The comparative approach also has limits. It combines historically different institutions and does not use a systematic review protocol or a defined empirical sample. The analysis cannot establish the prevalence of the mechanisms discussed, measure their strength, or distinguish their effects across platform types and countries. The managerial implications are reasoned deductions that require contextual evaluation and future

empirical assessment.

5.1 Managerial and Policy Implications for Digital Decolonization

5.1.1 Managerial Implications

The analysis identifies four practical priorities for organizations that operate platforms or depend on them. These priorities translate the paper's argument into management decisions; they are not presented as interventions whose effectiveness has been empirically tested in this study.

First, senior management should assign clear responsibility for platform and data governance. Procurement, information technology, compliance, and business units need a shared understanding of who authorizes data access, approves changes to platform relationships, and responds when a service affects customers, employees, or business partners. Oversight should include how corporate performance targets influence the treatment of these stakeholders.

Second, platform dependence should form part of strategic risk assessment. Before adopting a service, managers should consider data export arrangements, integration requirements, switching costs, and the consequences of service interruption or a change in contractual terms. Where feasible, organizations can retain usable copies of essential records, test continuity arrangements, and negotiate workable exit provisions. Dependence cannot always be eliminated, but its consequences can be identified and managed.

Third, organizations should establish accountable data practices. Collection and reuse should be linked to a clear purpose, with access controls and retention arrangements appropriate to the information involved. When automated systems support consequential decisions, a responsible person should be available to review disputed outcomes. Assessments should consider language and local context, particularly where imported systems classify South Asian users or organizations.

Fourth, platform operators should make participation rules understandable and provide workable complaint and appeal mechanisms. Organizations using platforms should assess these arrangements when selecting providers and review them as their reliance grows. The central management question is whether the relationship distributes benefits, responsibilities, and opportunities for redress in a way that can be justified to affected stakeholders.

5.1.2 Policy and Institutional Implications

Decolonizing the digital architecture constitutes a comprehensive policy agenda rather than a mere rhetorical slogan. This transformative process initiates with the critical realization that information does not operate simply as a commercial commodity; instead, it represents a collective social resource generated by distinct communities, cultural systems, linguistic expressions, physical bodies, and interpersonal dynamics. Safeguarding this data fundamentally demands the implementation of robust privacy legislation, progressive market competition policies, open public infrastructure, internal technological proficiency, and transparent democratic oversight. Ultimately, this approach necessitates a foundational shift in conceptual imagination, transitioning from viewing individuals merely as digital consumers to recognizing them as rights-bearing citizens participating equitably within computational ecosystems.

Initially, developing nations must establish robust data privacy legal frameworks alongside

autonomous regulatory data protection tribunals. Within this paradigm, user consent must be substantively meaningful rather than a mere administrative fiction, while highly sensitive information—specifically including biometric markers and geographical tracking records—demands elevated levels of legal safeguarding. Consequently, statutory mechanisms must strictly enforce principles of data minimization, specific purpose limitation, individual user entitlements, mandatory data breach disclosures, and systemic accountability obligations. Furthermore, sovereign administrations must strategically negotiate equitable fiscal taxation and collaborative data-sharing structures with transnational platform conglomerates. Under this economic model, if substantial value is extracted from a domestic user base, a proportional segment of that economic surplus must be systematically reinvested into local societies via corporate taxation, public electronic infrastructure development, localized academic research funding, and comprehensive digital literacy initiatives.

Additionally, the development of public electronic infrastructure must be pursued where strategically viable, provided it is anchored by rigorous operational safeguards. Publicly managed networks encompassing digital identity frameworks, transaction payment systems, healthcare informatics, educational networks, and social welfare distribution portals must remain fundamentally transparent, rights-centric, and subject to external institutional audits, ensuring that state infrastructure does not degenerate into centralized state surveillance. Concurrently, prioritizing native-language machine-learning models represents a crucial geopolitical necessity. Developing sophisticated artificial intelligence systems for regional languages such as Punjabi, Bengali, Urdu, Pashto, Hindi, Tamil, Arabic, Persian, Sindhi, Sinhala, and Nepali demands the systematic assembly of premium linguistic datasets, ethical data annotation protocols, continuous philological research, and community-led governance frameworks. Ultimately, in the absence of absolute linguistic sovereignty, broader national digital sovereignty remains inherently incomplete.

Furthermore, sovereign nations must cultivate domestic cloud hosting capabilities and advanced cybersecurity architectures. Over-reliance on external cloud infrastructure inevitably introduces critical jurisdictional, macroeconomic, and national security vulnerabilities; however, the deployment of regional data repositories, standardized public-sector cloud benchmarks, and collaborative cybersecurity protocols can effectively mitigate this operational exposure. Concurrently, independent algorithmic oversight tribunals must be established to rigorously evaluate high-impact automated systems deployed within public communication, financial sectors, social welfare administration, law enforcement, academic education, and human resource employment. Ultimately, any computational algorithms that systematically influence individual civil rights or life opportunities must remain completely transparent and legally contestable.

Additionally, academic institutions throughout developing societies must establish themselves as foundational hubs for critical digital decolonial research. These universities should systematically investigate corporate platform dominance, algorithmic partiality, electronic labor dynamics, indigenous language computational technology, jurisprudence of cyber law, information ethics, and macro-political economy specifically through regional analytical

frameworks. Concurrently, fostering South-South multilateral cooperation remains an absolute strategic necessity. Because no individual developing nation possesses sufficient leverage to effectively negotiate or contest international digital monopolies independently, regional alliances must actively collaborate to standardize regulatory benchmarks, coordinate corporate taxation, align market competition policies, establish unified data transfer protocols, and co-engineer artificial intelligence governance frameworks.

Ultimately, public digital literacy initiatives must advance far beyond rudimentary technical operation. Modern citizens fundamentally require a critical framework of digital comprehension: specifically, an understanding of how transnational platforms commodify human attention, the structural mechanisms through which disinformation proliferates, the systemic trade-offs between personal privacy and operational convenience, the ways algorithmic architectures manipulate objective reality, and the processes by which data aggregates into geopolitical power. Consequently, any society that remains incapable of critically decoding its own computational environment becomes profoundly vulnerable to a sophisticated, contemporary variant of structural illiteracy. (Ragnedda & Rui, 2022; Mohamed et al., 2021; Khan & Hussain, 2023)

5.2 Conclusion

The historical transition from the mercantilism of the East India Company to the contemporary operations of Silicon Valley does not represent a simplistic narrative of linear repetition. Historical evolution seldom manifests in identical configurations, and any comparative framework that dismisses historical specificity fundamentally lacks analytical validity. Structurally, the East India Company asserted governance through physical naval fleets, military fortifications, standing armies, fiscal revenue collectors, cartographic mapping, and imperial jurisprudence all rigorously enforced by coercive physical violence and ultimately underwritten by the metropolitan state apparatus. Conversely, transnational technology conglomerates exercise governance via interactive platforms, decentralized cloud architectures, mathematical algorithms, technical standards, user interfaces, predictive behavioral systems, and proprietary terms-of-service agreements mechanisms reinforced by international intellectual property regimes, structural network monopolies, and the systemic regulatory capture of democratic institutions. While these material variations differ profoundly and demand distinct analytical treatment, the foundational dynamics of resource extraction, manufactured structural dependency, asymmetric knowledge control, and the centralization of economic surplus generated at the global periphery remain remarkably continuous across historical epochs. Ultimately, this comparison uncovers structural recurrence rather than literal historical duplication: the stubborn persistence of a political economy characterized by asymmetrical capital accumulation that seamlessly reconfigures its institutional apparatus to align with each historical conjuncture while systematically preserving its underlying grammar of structural domination.

The imperial frameworks of the nineteenth century systematically converted agrarian terrain, human labor power, and primary raw materials into metropolitan wealth by forcefully restructuring indigenous agricultural economies, dismantling regional manufacturing industries, enforcing aggressive land revenue mechanisms, and subjugating local populations through

colonial jurisprudence, demographic classification, and institutionalized education. In a striking structural parallel, the contemporary twenty-first-century computational order transmutes human attention, behavioral patterns, emotional expressions, linguistic nuances, collective memory, and interpersonal sociality into valuable data capital. This modern transformation is driven by the total platformization of daily life, the commercial exploitation of behavioral surpluses, the universal deployment of extractive user interfaces, and the algorithmic management of digital citizens under systems responsive to corporate profitability rather than democratic accountability. Historically, the imperial subject was rendered manageable via state censuses, cartographic mapping, educational assimilation, fiscal taxation, and carceral police apparatuses that made the native population legible to imperial administrations and global capital. Conversely, the contemporary digital subject is engineered into a manageable unit through algorithmic profiles, curated data feeds, engagement optimization metrics, algorithmic credit tracking, predictive recommendation engines, and behavioral forecasting models that render the networked population entirely legible to the surveillance capitalist state. Ultimately, within both paradigms, the operations of institutional power commence by translating human life into a highly legible format; furthermore, this systematic generation of legibility remains intrinsically linked to the engineering of economic exploitability, proving that any enforced regime of visibility operates fundamentally as architecture of vulnerability. (Couldry & Mejias, 2021; Zuboff, 2022; Birhane, 2021)

Achieving an equitable digital future does not necessitate the abandonment of technological advancement, and no rigorous discourse surrounding digital decolonization advocates for a reactionary retreat to pre-digital societal modalities. Rather, it will materialize through the arduous, inherently political processes of democratizing electronic infrastructures, decolonizing technological epistemologies, dismantling transnational platform monopolies, establishing open digital public goods, and ensuring that the economic surplus derived from the collective social and cultural activities of developing populations does not continuously migrate upward and outward in the total absence of democratic accountability, fair redistribution networks, and epistemic acknowledgment. These systemic interventions do not represent superficial technical modifications at the periphery of an otherwise functional framework; on the contrary, they constitute profound structural transformations that demand a complete conceptual reimagining of the interplay between technology, political sovereignty, and distributive justice. Developing societies do not require technological isolationism; instead, they fundamentally demand collective digital bargaining leverage. Critically, this leverage must not be obtained as a benevolent concession from dominant global actors, but rather as the direct outcome of organized political mobilization operating concurrently across domestic legislation, regional institutional coordination, multilateral international governance, and grass-roots civil society advocacy. Ultimately, the global periphery must transition decisively from functioning as a mere raw-material reservoir for behavioral data extraction to acting as an equal co-creator and co-governor of technological landscapes designed to advance holistic human flourishing rather than compounding corporate platform accumulation. For management scholarship, this also directs attention to how corporate governance choices influence the distribution of risks and benefits

across digital ecosystems. Accountability for data use, participation rules, and consequential automated decisions is central to that agenda.

Digital platform governance provides the management link between the historical comparison and contemporary debates about data colonialism. The paper's central argument is that control over participation rules, data access, infrastructure, and automated decisions can create unequal relationships even where digital services offer substantial benefits. Responsible management therefore requires attention to the distribution of authority, value, and accountability across platform relationships. In South Asia and other Global South settings, organizational safeguards need to work alongside public regulation, local technological capabilities, and collective bargaining over digital arrangements. The historical comparison offers a critical framework for examining these relationships; it does not establish that all platforms reproduce colonial rule or demonstrate causal effects across firms and countries. Future empirical research can examine when particular governance arrangements strengthen organizational autonomy and when they deepen dependence.

Contribution

Riaz Hussain Shah,: Problem Identification and Theoretical Framework

Syed Amir Sohail: Data Analysis, Supervision and Drafting

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