

Research Article

# From Post-Fordism to Data Capitalism: A Critical Analysis of Cognitive and Networks Economics in the Film “The Great Hack”

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**Abstract:** Using an analysis of the film “The Great Hack,” this paper aims to examine the economic transformation of society from the post-Fordist era to the information society. The film reveals how data and information have become key commodities in today's digital age, impacting various aspects of social and economic life. The film “The Great Hack” serves as the main case study in this research, which uses a qualitative approach. Content analysis and critical discourse analysis are the instruments used in this study. This method involves reading literature on relevant economic and social theories, as well as conducting a critical analysis of the film's content and message. This research uses the theoretical frameworks of post-Fordism, network society, cognitive capitalism, and information society to study the forms of economic change that have occurred. The results of the study show that the film “The Great Hack” adopts the principles of post-Fordism that have developed in the digital context, resulting in a network society, the concept of cognitive capitalism, and a network society where data is the main resource. In conclusion, the film shows how the principles of post-Fordism have developed in the digital context, resulting in a network society, the concept of cognitive capitalism, and a network society in which data is the primary resource. The practices of Cambridge Analytica demonstrate cognitive capitalism, which shows that economic value comes from knowledge and information.

**Keywords:** Cognitive Capitalism; Economic Transformation; Information Society; Post-Fordism; The Great Hack.

## 1. Introduction

The current digital era has brought about significant changes in the economic and social structure of global society. This transformation, which began with a shift in the production paradigm known as post-Fordism, has evolved into what we now recognize as the information society. The information society is characterized by the fact that the production and management of knowledge and information are of utmost importance (Webster, 2014). In the information society, technology for the production, manipulation, and communication of information is crucial. It also influences social and productive processes, as well as personal and political identities. One of the key factors determining wealth and power is the ability to generate, transform, and disseminate information. As a result, information is the battleground for economic, social, and political advancement for individuals, businesses, and governments.

The emergence of the information society is not only linked to the spread of digital information and communication technology, but also to the economic and political changes that occurred during the last few decades of the 20th century, including the end of the bipolar world and the emergence of globalization and new production paradigms. Since the early 1960s, this shift has been described with definitions that, from various perspectives, tend to refer to the same phenomenon.

Concepts such as “post-industrial society,” “post-modern society,” “post-Fordism,” “knowledge society,” “network society,” and “cognitive capitalism” emerged during the

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second half of the 20th century (Kumar, 2020). Underlying these descriptions is a shared awareness of a historical break with previous forms of production and social organization. Under this new paradigm, information and knowledge have become the primary inputs in the economy and organization of contemporary society. The documentary film “The Great Hack” Amer (2019) presents an interesting case study of how these changes have affected the dynamics of power, privacy, and democracy in the digital age.

In Castells (2011) view, we are now in the era of the “network society,” where social and economic organizations are based on the flow of information. Meanwhile, Zuboff (2023) argues that “surveillance capitalism” occurs when data becomes a highly valuable commodity in this context. This concept is illustrated in the film “The Great Hack” through the story of Cambridge Analytica, an organization that used the personal data of social media users for political manipulation. In addition, there has been a shift towards what Moulrier-Boutang (2011) calls “cognitive capitalism,” which prioritizes creativity and knowledge in value creation.

Fuchs (2010) also states that, in this new paradigm, the use of labor has shifted from material production to immaterial production, namely, data production and manipulation. Furthermore, Webster (2014) also emphasizes that the information society encompasses not only technology, but also major transformations in economic, cultural, and occupational structures. “The Great Hack” shows how these transformations have changed the political and social world, raising important questions about privacy, freedom, and the meaning of democracy in the digital age.

Using “The Great Hack” as a lens, this paper aims to examine the economic changes that have occurred in society from post-Fordism to the information society. This paper analyzes how economic and social paradigm shifts are reflected in the data manipulation practices revealed in the film, focusing on four key elements: post-Fordism, network society, cognitive capitalism, and the information society. This analysis is important because it provides a deeper understanding of the social, political, and ethical issues that arise as a result of digital transformation. To create policies and practices that protect the public interest in the digital age, it is important to understand the dynamics of power in the data economy, as stated by (Flyverbom & Murray, 2018).

## 2. Literature Review

Media studies and sociology form the basis of this research. First, the concept of post-Fordist regulation Aglietta (2000) and Lipietz (1987) argue that the shift from organized mass production to a more specialized and flexible production model is demonstrated by post-Fordism. This is in line with Amin (1994) opinion, which emphasizes that post-Fordism encompasses changes in consumption and production patterns. Second, Castells (2013) argues that advances in information technology have given rise to a new type of social organization that focuses on the logic of networks in the concept of network society. The network society consists of social and media network infrastructure, which serves to regulate almost all aspects of life (Dijk van Jan, 2006).

Third, cognitive capitalism was developed by Moulrier-Boutang (2011) this concept shows a phase of capitalist development in which the production of value increasingly depends on data processing and knowledge. Furthermore, Vercellone (2007) says that “common knowledge” is very important for cognitive capitalism, in which collective knowledge is its main productive force. Finally, Bell (2019) proposes the concept of the information society, which is also adopted by Webster (2014) where this concept describes a society in which the creation, dissemination, and control of information are of paramount economic and cultural importance. Furthermore, Castells (2011) defines “informationalism” as the technological paradigm that shapes contemporary society, expanding on this understanding.

This study also reviews the literature on data surveillance and the digital economy. Zuboff (2023) coined the term “surveillance capitalism,” which describes a new method of accumulation that relies on data extraction and monetization. Furthermore, (Couldry & Mejias, 2019) refer to data extraction as “data colonialism,” emphasizing the impact of data extraction on individual freedom and autonomy.

### 3. Method

Content analysis and critical discourse analysis are the instruments used in this qualitative research. The documentary film “The Great Hack” by Amer (2019) is the main subject of analysis; it is used as a case study to examine the real manifestations of the theoretical concepts discussed. Post-Fordism, network society, cognitive capitalism, and information society are the main themes of the film identified for use in content analysis. This method follows the approach outlined by Krippendorff (2018), which emphasizes the importance of contextualization for understanding media content.

Using the model developed by (Fairclough, 2013) critical discourse analysis is used to examine how the film constructs narratives about democracy, data, and privacy in the digital age. This method allows researchers to uncover the ideological assumptions underlying the representation of issues in films. This study not only analyzes films, but also reviews previous literature on modern economic change and how it affects society.

### 4. Results and Discussion

The documentary film “The Great Hack” by Amer (2019) is the main subject of analysis, used as a case study to examine the real manifestations of the theoretical concepts discussed. Content analysis and critical discourse analysis are the instruments used in analyzing the forms of post-Fordism economic change, network society, cognitive capitalism, and information society.



Figure 1. Film The Great Hack 2019.

#### Post-Fordism

The concept of post-Fordism describes a shift from the Fordist model of production and consumption to a more specialized and flexible economic and social organization. This idea emerged in response to the economic crisis of the 1970s and rapid technological advances. Post-Fordism refers to a more flexible production system based on flexible technology and work processes, a skilled and adaptive workforce, and more diversified consumption patterns, which are the main characteristics of post-Fordism (Amin, 1994).

Post-Fordism marks a shift from conventional mass production to more specialized and flexible production methods. We see manifestations of post-Fordism in more sophisticated and digital forms in the context of “The Great Hack”. Flexible accumulation and Schumpeterian competitive states are characteristics of post-Fordism (Jessop, 1995). This is clearly seen in the actions of Cambridge Analytica, using advanced technology to analyze and manipulate customer data quickly and efficiently, as in the film “The Great Hack,” showing how Cambridge Analytica adopted post-Fordist values in the data industry. Lash & Urry (1993) use the term “reflexive accumulation,” in which the main source of added value is knowledge and information. The film reveals that the company used “psychographic models” to create highly detailed voter profiles, enabling political campaigns to tailor their messages to individual preferences and concerns (Amer, 2019).

This business collects and analyzes Facebook users' personal data to create highly specialized psychographic profiles that transcend the Fordist era. Furthermore, post-Fordism involves major changes in the structure of work (Amin, 1994). We see in the film how “knowledge workers,” who are experts in data analysis and behavioral psychology, are replacing traditional jobs. This depicts the new economy as one of “symbolic-analytic workers” (Reich, 2010).

### **Network Society**

Network society refers to a society supported by communication and information technology. According to (Castells, 2011) Today's global society has shifted from the industrial era to the information era, moving from the production of physical goods to the production of information and knowledge. Network society is a newly constructed social structure. The film "The Great Hack," with Castells' concept of network society in his book of the same title, "The Rise of the Network Society," is used to analyze it. The film provides us with an illustration that the global digital network has changed the structure of power and social dynamics.

The ability to program and connect networks is key to a network society. Using data, Cambridge Analytica manipulated social networks and public opinion (Castells, 2011). This is in line with the concept referred to by Van Dijck, (2013) as "culture of connectivity," in which social media platforms become an important infrastructure for social opinion and interaction. Through "commons-based peer production," the democratization of networked society can occur (Bates, 2007). However, the downside of this possibility is seen in the movie "The Great Hack," where data collected from users is used for personal and political gain.

### **Cognitive Capitalism**

Cognitive capitalism is a phase in the development of capitalism in which data processing, creativity, and knowledge become key to the production of value. Moulier-Boutang (2011) developed this idea, emphasizing the importance of "immaterial labor" in the modern economy. The ideas of Moulier-Boutang (2011) and (Vercellone, 2007) created the concept of cognitive capitalism, which is relevant for analyzing the data economy depicted in the film "The Great Hack".

The film "The Great Hack" 2019 shows cognitive capitalism through commodified knowledge and personal data about human behavior. Cambridge Analytica made personal information valuable by using psychographic analysis and behavioral prediction. This shows what Fuchs (2010) calls "consumer capitalism," where social media users function as both producers and consumers of data.

The film also shows how the "digital labor" of social media users, which includes likes, shares, and other online interactions, is capitalized on by companies such as Cambridge Analytica and Facebook. This is in line with Terranova (2000) argument about the digital economy having "free labor," where everyday activities carried out online can generate economic value. This reflects a new form of exploitation in which users' everyday online activities are transformed into unpaid "digital labor" Fuchs (2010).

### **Information Society**

The information society is characterized by the fact that the production and management of knowledge and information are of paramount importance. In the information society, technology for the production, manipulation, and communication of information is very important. This also affects social and productive processes, as well as personal and political identities. One important factor that determines wealth and power is the ability to produce, transform, and disseminate information (Webster, 2014).

As a result, information is a battleground for economic, social, and political advancement for individuals, businesses, and governments. Webster (2014) and Castells (2013) studied the concept of the information society, providing researchers with an understanding of the broader social transformation that was later depicted in the film "The Great Hack." In the information society, the commercialization of information has been warned about by Schiller (2024) where information or data becomes a commodity that can be bought and sold. The film "The Great Hack" gives us an idea of how personal data is turned into a tradable commodity.

This also reflects what Zuboff (2023) terms "surveillance capitalism." Furthermore, Webster (2014) identifies five definitions of the information society: technological, economic, occupational, spatial, and cultural. This film touches on all these aspects, showing how big data technology affects the economy, employment, social space, and culture. The information society must have "information literacy" (Mansell, 2010). In the film "The Great Hack," many users are unaware of how their data is collected and used. Furthermore, (Lyon, 2001) coined the term "surveillance society," in which data collection and analysis are used as mechanisms to control society. This film explains how digital surveillance can be used to control public opinion and democratic processes.

## 5. Conclusion

The film “The Great Hack” presents a compelling case study of how the economic shift from post-Fordism to the information society has transformed the social, political, and economic world. It shows how the principles of post-Fordism have evolved in the digital context, giving rise to networked societies, the concept of cognitive capitalism, and networked societies where data is the primary resource.

The practices of Cambridge Analytica exemplify cognitive capitalism, which suggests that economic value comes from knowledge and information. However, as the film shows, these changes also pose major challenges to democracy, social justice, and privacy in the information society. A critical analysis of the film provides insight into the urgent need for stronger regulation, better digital literacy, and an ethical approach to the development and use of information technology. Furthermore, this analysis highlights the importance of understanding the power dynamics within the data economy to formulate policies that protect public interests in the digital age.

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