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Capital's Media, Digital Command, and the Fate of Public Communication: Reflections on David Harvey's *The Story of Capital*

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Abstract: David Harvey's *The Story of Capital* offers a synthetic account of capital as a "working totality" organised through multiple, internally related circulation processes. Harvey's treatment of technological dynamism, platform concentration, knowledge production, artificial intelligence, surveillance, higher education, media ownership, and the state-finance nexus provides the textual basis for a communication-centred reading of digital command and public communication. The 2018 tripleC debate among Harvey, Hardt, and Negri situates that communication thread within the journal's own exchange on universal alienation, real subsumption, social cooperation, multiplicity, and praxis. Habermas enters where his account of steering media, communicative action, and the colonisation of the lifeworld clarifies the democratic consequences of media concentration and administrative filtering. Harvey's book clarifies the connections among digital command, time-space compression, oligarchic media power, and the shrinking institutional conditions of public communication.

Keywords: David Harvey, capital, communication, digital capitalism, alienation, Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, Jürgen Habermas, media, platform power, state-finance nexus, public sphere

1. Introduction

David Harvey's *The Story of Capital* presents capital as a moving totality that joins production, circulation, social reproduction, finance, state power, technology, nature, and geopolitical rivalry. Harvey's preface defines capital's mode of production as a working totality built through the circulation of labour power, capital, and credit. The opening chapter then maps capital through "wages, profits, exchange, consumption, realization, rents, finance, merchant profits, interest and state functions" that dynamically intersect with one another (Harvey 2026, xi, 1). That totalising method creates the opening for a communication question.

The communication question concerns the role of media, information infrastructures, software, surveillance, artificial intelligence, logistics, higher education, research institutions, and cultural circulation within capital's movement. In critical communication studies and the critique of the political economy of communication and media, communication names a material and symbolic field in which labour, technology, ownership, ideology, public knowledge, and social struggle meet (Fuchs 2020; Knoche 2025).

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Networks move information and commodities. Platforms organise visibility, data, and attention. Universities, foundations, and research centres authorise knowledge. Media institutions shape the conditions under which publics interpret power, judge credibility, and form political claims.

Harvey provides the textual basis for this question through his discussions of Google's monopoly power, FAANG, AI, military research, transport and communications technologies, the "Netflix economy", urban inequality, billionaire control over "media and information flows", and the state-finance nexus. Harvey presents these materials through a theory of capital as a working totality. My communication-centred reading gathers these passages as evidence of how media, digital systems, knowledge institutions, and communicative infrastructures help organise accumulation, labour control, social reproduction, geopolitical competition, and public authority.

The political stakes concern public communication. Harvey's account of centralised media power, platform monopoly, philanthropic influence over knowledge production, and billionaire statecraft shows how capital shapes access to knowledge, credibility, visibility, and political reasoning. Communication therefore names a field of command and a field of public formation. The issue includes media content and the institutional conditions through which people learn, work, consume, organise, and judge public claims.

The 2018 *tripleC* debate supplies the immediate journal context. Harvey's "Universal Alienation" links alienation to information technologies, AI, debt, housing, struggles over realisation, and the real subsumption of daily life (Harvey 2018a, 2018b). Hardt and Negri locate capitalist extraction in communicative networks, social cooperation, real subsumption, and multiplicities within capitalist rule (Hardt and Negri 2018a, 2018b). Habermas adds the democratic vocabulary that clarifies the consequences for public life: steering media, bureaucratic filtering, one-way communication flows, and the colonisation of communicative spaces by money and administrative power. Read together, these materials position Harvey's 2026 book as a contribution to the critique of communication under capital.

2. Harvey's Mental Map and the Place of Communication

Harvey's "mental map" presents capital as a moving totality. In the opening pages of *The Story of Capital*, Harvey traces capital through money, commodities, production, consumption, distribution, state functions, social reproduction, and spatial organisation (Harvey 2026, 1-5). That map supplies the structure for a communication-centred reading of digital capitalism. Platforms, research infrastructures, financial networks, logistics chains, data centres, cables, ports, airports, universities, foundations, and media institutions coordinate movement across those domains. They connect labour, consumption, territory, knowledge, and state power. They move information, organise circulation, structure access, and help convert social activity into value. The communication-centred reading developed here identifies the media, platform, logistics, and data

infrastructures through which capital now organises content, ideology, representation, infrastructure, and institutional command.

Harvey's discussion of FAANG extends this institutional map. Facebook, Apple, Amazon, Netflix, and Google accumulated a mass of users and capital in the high-tech sector at astonishing speed (Harvey 2026, 131). Harvey also points to Apple's capital accumulation and Elon Musk's pandemic wealth increase as signs of "astonishing centralization of wealth and power in a few hands" (Harvey 2026, 116). These examples anchor the theory in recognisable institutional forms. Communication industries appear as vehicles of centralisation, rent extraction, knowledge control, and class command.

Harvey's account of billionaire media control turns platform concentration into a question of public authority. Billionaire investors consolidate command over media and information flows, linking rentier power to state restructuring. Harvey treats communication industries as instruments of elite power, public authority, and the state's coercive and administrative capacities. Harvey ties oligarchic wealth directly to communication power:

> Billionaires like Mnuchin played a prominent role in the first Trump administration, and they have been stealthily consolidating their control over the media and information flows over the past decades. Their prominence in the second Trump presidency and the appointment of Elon Musk to remake the US institutional structure is telling. Government by and for the billionaires is now the order of the day, to be enforced by an increasingly militarized state apparatus (Harvey 2026, 291).

The passage places media ownership, information flows, state restructuring, and coercive power inside the same political field. My communication-centred reading draws out the institutional implication: billionaire ownership works through media systems, state appointments, administrative restructuring, and militarised authority.

Harvey's account of technological dynamism strengthens the communication thread by naming the technical systems through which capital, states, and military competition reorganise power. Harvey argues that technological, organisational, and "software" dynamism belongs at the heart of any viable theory of capital's mode of production as a "working totality" (Harvey 2026, 65). That claim belongs to Harvey's account of capital's laws of motion. My contribution identifies software, data systems, networks, and platforms as contemporary instruments of accumulation, circulation, labour control, and state capacity.

Harvey gives this extension a direct textual basis in his discussion of military competition and technological development. Harvey writes:

> Whereas there would be minor interest in the cotton textile industry, there would be a much greater interest in the development of aerospace, naval construction engineering, the armaments and munitions industry (which is currently the most

> lucrative industry in the world) and, perhaps most significant of all, communications and surveillance technologies (Harvey 2026, 63).

Harvey names communications and surveillance technologies inside a sequence that also includes aerospace, naval engineering, armaments, munitions, military rivalry, and state power. The communication-centred reading draws out the implication for critical communication theory: communication and surveillance technologies belong to the material history of accumulation, logistics, military power, and monopoly. Digital infrastructures require analysis as systems of command, coordination, and value extraction.

Harvey's chapter on space and time extends the same issue through capitalist spatio-temporal reorganisation. Harvey treats globalisation as another round in capital's production and reconstruction of space and time. He describes the tendency toward the "annihilation of space through time" and the law of "time-space compression" as basic features of capitalist development (Harvey 2026, 146; see also Harvey 1989). Harvey also gives transport and communications technologies a leading role in that restructuring. His claim concerns capital's effort to shorten turnover times, reorganise spatial relations, and accelerate movement across distance.

Internet infrastructures, platform logistics, algorithmic coordination, and financial transmission systems intensify that drive toward speed, compression, and command. Harvey supplies the account of time-space compression and the role of transport and communications technologies. My reading carries that account into contemporary systems that move data, coordinate logistics, organise labour, transmit financial signals, and concentrate control across global networks.

Harvey's chapter on technological dynamism tracks labour displacement and the reorganisation of work. Harvey (2026, 60) writes that "the job market has been radically reconfigured through automation and robotization in manufacturing," producing "widespread job losses," and that "this radical reconfiguration of job opportunities now threatens to be repeated in the case of services." Harvey links that threat to "AI," which he describes as "a misnomer for what should be called 'machine learning.'" Harvey's words move the labour question from manufacturing into services, health care, education, AI, and machine learning. The communication-centred reading locates those changes in platforms, data systems, educational technologies, research infrastructures, and AI systems that reorganise labour demand, technical expertise, public knowledge, and institutional power.

Harvey's discussion of artificial intelligence adds a second layer to the labour question. AI enters his analysis through knowledge production, technological rivalry, and the fixed capital of the general intellect. Harvey (2026, 220) links AI to "the fixed capital of the general intellect" and warns that "the benefits will flow to capital and the ruling classes and the costs will be visited on labour and everyone else", Harvey then situates "cognitive capitalism" inside a broader account of proprietary knowledge and capital's newer technical fields. Harvey (2026, 220-221) writes that "the legal and illegal pursuit

of proprietary knowledge has continued to flourish within the new fields of capital's development".

These formulations identify automation, robotisation, machine learning, AI, proprietary knowledge, and technological rivalry as elements in capital's reorganisation of labour and knowledge production. The communication-centred contribution specifies the institutional terrain: universities, research labs, platforms, data firms, AI developers, copyright regimes, patent systems, and funding agencies own, classify, circulate, monetise, and restrict technical knowledge.

Harvey's labour examples bring the relation between communication and capitalism into the present by shifting the image of capitalist labour toward logistics, software, platform firms, and infrastructural work. Harvey (2026, 79) asks whether the contemporary image of capitalism lies in "the Rana Plaza textile plant, Shenzhen industrialism, the Amazon warehouse workers, the Google workers in San Francisco, the Microsoft workers in Seattle or the huge labour forces at the world's major airports". Harvey's question updates the historical geography of labour. The examples move from textile production and industrial manufacturing to warehouses, platform firms, software labour, airports, logistics, and metropolitan tech clusters. Platform work, code, distribution systems, and infrastructural labour now belong to the contemporary organisation of capital. Socialist imagination therefore requires an accurate account of capital's current forms, alienations, and geographies.

The "Netflix economy" gives the same argument a concrete media example. Harvey writes:

> The Netflix economy requires serious ancillary investments, both upstream in the production of a TV series and downstream in the transmission towers and the reception equipment (TV screens and household electronics), all of which gets monetized, monopolized and capitalized by the streaming organizations (Harvey 2026, 128).

Streaming appears weightless on the screen, yet Harvey returns it to production studios, transmission systems, reception equipment, household electronics, monetisation, monopoly, and capitalisation. Media command rests on infrastructures, labour forces, and urban reorganisations that exceed the platform interface.

Harvey's discussion of place adds another layer of evidentiary grounding. His Bronx/Upper East Side example shows how capital's production of place, scale, and social reproduction shapes daily life and life chances (Harvey 2026, 140). Digital systems operate through those uneven environments. Housing, schools, networks, transport, security, and public visibility all shape who can participate, communicate, learn, work, and move. Harvey supplies the spatial account; my communication-centred reading identifies the digital infrastructures that organise access, visibility, and participation.

3. Universal Alienation and the Digital Organisation of Daily Life

Harvey defines alienation historically and materially through capital's creation of the world market, the spread of class and metabolic relations, and the imposition of value's laws of motion on social life:

> In the Grundrisse, the universality of alienation arises out of the historical tendency within capital to create the world market, to establish its social (class) and metabolic relations everywhere and to inscribe certain identifiable laws of motion into human history under the rule of the coercive laws of competition. The "universality" is specific to capitalism's historical evolution. The capital which labour creates returns to dominate them in both direct and indirect ways as the laws of value and of capital in motion (Harvey 2018a, 426).

Harvey's definition gives alienation a wider social field. His concluding formulation on the same page states the point plainly: "Alienation is not confined to labour" (Harvey 2018a, 426). Alienation enters consumption, urban life, politics, debt, and the social reproduction of existence because capital's laws of motion organise the conditions through which people work, move, communicate, borrow, consume, and imagine political possibility.

Harvey's historical materialism keeps human capacities, suffering, and political possibility inside the material relations that organise daily life. Alienation carries force here because capital's abstractions enter the texture of life: city rhythms, debt obligations, housing pressures, work routines, and collective hopes.

Digital capitalism intensifies universal alienation. Harvey's 2018 abstract states that alienation dominates much of politics and daily life and intensifies through "information technologies and artificial intelligence" (Harvey 2018a, 424). That claim turns digital command into lived pressure. Social media monopolies, surveillance systems, algorithmic management, debt-driven education, and AI-enabled labour displacement alter how people work, consume, imagine, and endure. The "illusion of decentralization" formulation in *The Story of Capital* (Harvey 2026, 111) gains force because Harvey's earlier essay already places alienation inside production and everyday life. The technological and experiential forms belong to one movement.

Harvey expands the terrain of struggle without confining communication to consumption or circulation. In his essay "Universal Alienation", he argues that many contemporary conflicts occur at the point of realisation as well as the point of production (Harvey 2018a, 433-434). His examples include housing, transport, rents, urban protest, and "broadband services" (Harvey 2018a, 434). Broadband access, platform services, data access, subscription systems, and mediated visibility enter the sphere of realisation because people encounter them as costs, contracts, service conditions, rents, and access barriers. Harvey's later account of Google's monopoly and the "illusion of decentralization" gives this point a digital form (Harvey 2026, 111).

The digital realm also belongs to production. Hardt and Negri locate contemporary production in cognitive labour, social cooperation, communicative networks, digital connections, codes, languages, affects, and images (Hardt and Negri 2018a, 416-417). Their account keeps digital capitalism inside the analysis of labour, extraction, cooperation, and productive capacity. Platforms organise labour, command code and data, extract value from cooperative activity, and turn communicative capacities into productive forces. Harvey explains why communication conflicts appear across rents, broadband services, debt obligations, education markets, and urban infrastructures. Hardt and Negri clarify why those conflicts also involve production: digital systems place users, workers, students, tenants, consumers, and households inside circuits of value creation, extraction, and control.

Harvey's emphasis on daily life opens a bridge to Henri Lefebvre's account of socially produced space. Harvey's 2018 essay repeatedly invokes the city, the street, the home, and everyday existence as zones of contemporary discontent. He describes urban uprisings and anti-austerity protests as movements animated by populations alienated by deteriorating conditions of daily life and by the absence of meaningful democracy over the organisation of urban existence (Harvey 2018a, 429, 434). *The Story of Capital* carries that emphasis into capital's totality, social reproduction, state policy, the geography of accumulation, and the spatial organisation of labour and life.

A communication-centred reading extends this daily-life framework to the digital systems that now organise everyday space. Smartphones, algorithmic labour platforms, educational software, logistics systems, urban data infrastructures, and digital payment systems mediate work, movement, debt, education, visibility, and access. Lefebvre gives this extension a spatial vocabulary because everyday life takes shape through produced environments, routines, rhythms, infrastructures, and institutions (Lefebvre 1991). Harvey supplies the account of alienation across urban life and social reproduction. Lefebvre supplies the account of produced space. The communication argument connects those materials to the digital systems that organise daily life under contemporary capitalism.

Harvey's humanist Marxism comes into focus where alienation, Lefebvre's everyday life, housing, debt, urban space, and digital mediation meet. *The Story of Capital* grounds that claim in Harvey's account of space, place, and social reproduction:

> This forces recognition of the spatially differentiated qualities of personal life and of social reproduction as experienced in the daily life of the labourer. These are all embedded in divergent economic, social and environmental conditions and processes operating at different scales. To be raised in the Bronx is to encounter radically different life chances than to be raised in the Upper East Side of Manhattan (Harvey 2026, 140).

The Bronx/Upper East Side contrast links capital's geography to daily life, social reproduction, and unequal life chances. Housing, commuting, neighbourhood inequality,

debt, and urban dislocation become concrete pressures within the movement of value. Harvey's return to Lefebvre strengthens this point. Harvey writes that Lefebvre "replaced the deep mysticism of Heidegger's concept of 'dwelling' with the more prosaic 'inhabiting' as foundational for the everyday life taking place in the material, conceptual and lived spaces of class struggles and endless capital accumulation" (Harvey 2026, 158). Digital mediation extends this spatial frame into platform power, algorithmic management, networked consumption, educational software, rental markets, and uneven access to public visibility. Harvey's political economy keeps lived experience inside the analysis of accumulation.

The politics of alienation in Harvey's 2018 essay clarifies the political danger of digital concentration. Harvey links alienation to resentment, disempowerment, anger, and authoritarian-populist identification. His formulation is blunt: "For alienated, disempowered, frustrated and angry people, such arguments would be compelling. Trump is the President of alienation" (Harvey 2018a, 429). The passage gives the communication argument sharper political stakes. *The Story of Capital* extends the material setting through billionaire power, platform concentration, Google's monopoly, AI, and the state-finance nexus.

This reading applies Harvey's political diagnosis to the infrastructures that channel alienation into disorientation, resentment, authoritarian identification, and organised struggle.

Harvey's conclusion to *The Story of Capital* sharpens the political meaning of alienation by linking wage repression, dispossession, AI, and collective struggle. After identifying the major contradictions of the present as "potential fodder for anticapitalist struggles," Harvey names the social force required to confront them:

> It will take a mass movement of the alienated and dispossessed and some concrete results of specific struggles to awaken the hope and prospect for a better collective future. To make matters worse, AI threatens to reduce labour demand substantially, well into the future. Wage repression is more likely to increase than to decline in coming years without a vigorous campaign against it (Harvey 2026, 343).

Harvey's claim concerns alienation, dispossession, AI-driven reductions in labour demand, wage repression, and organised struggle. The digital application follows from that conclusion. Platform monopoly, algorithmic management, data extraction, AI systems, and billionaire media power reorganise labour demand and shape the channels through which alienation gains political form. Harvey names the contradiction and the need for collective struggle. The communication argument extends that diagnosis to the infrastructures that organise work, public knowledge, and political orientation.

Harvey's wider project also keeps debt at the centre of alienation. In *The Story of Capital*, debt appears as a disciplinary relation that binds present life to future labour:

> Indebtedness becomes an alternative means to discipline whole populations to the requirements of capital. Debts are a claim on future labour. The more indebted the working population, the more bound they are to use their future labour to retire their debts. In advanced capitalism, working people and the population in general are now so thoroughly mired in mortgage debt, medical debt, student debt, auto loans, credit card and consumer debt that they find themselves in a virtual state of debt peonage (Harvey 2026, 240).

This passage clarifies why debt belongs inside the analysis of alienation and digital capitalism. Educational debt channels students into platformised labour markets. Household debt disciplines workers into accepting algorithmic management, unstable schedules, and data-intensive workplace control. Municipal and state debt restructures public services, communication systems, and urban infrastructures. Debt shapes the labour, knowledge, education, and public life that remain materially possible.

4. Hardt and Negri: Communicative Networks, Real Subsumption, and Multiplicity

The 2018 *tripleC* exchange among Harvey, Hardt, and Negri gives this communication-centred reading its immediate journal context. Hardt and Negri's first essay, "*The Powers of the Exploited and the Social Ontology of Praxis*" situates contemporary exploitation within social cooperation, communicative networks, digitisation, automation, and finance. Their second essay, "*The Multiplicities within Capitalist Rule and the Articulation of Struggles"*, extends real subsumption from labour to society and treats capitalist rule through multiplicities across class, race, gender, and other axes of subordination. Harvey's "*Universal Alienation*" and his response to Hardt and Negri place those concerns inside a debate about alienation, daily life, and political praxis.

The first essay directly addresses communication. Hardt and Negri argue that current capitalist development takes shape through cognitive and social production in which cooperation intensifies and becomes "immersed" in "communicative networks and digital connections" that permeate industrial assets, services, agriculture, and the wider economic organisation of society (Hardt and Negri 2018a, 416). The claim connects the 2018 exchange to Harvey's 2026 account of platform concentration, AI, and knowledge monopolisation. Harvey identifies platform concentration, AI, and knowledge monopolisation. Hardt and Negri emphasise the social productivity that makes those forms of extraction possible. Capital valorises cooperative flows of "muscles, languages, affects, codes, and images" within social production (Hardt and Negri 2018a, 416). Digital capitalism depends on the expropriation of communicative capacities distributed across the social field.

Digitisation and automation sit at the centre of Hardt and Negri's account of contemporary exploitation. Their essay describes a phase in which capital develops through the extraction of value from common goods and from the expanded cooperation of living labour in social networks, codes, languages, and affective relations (Hardt and Negri 2018a, 415-417). Their account sharpens the description of Harvey's digital

evidence. Platforms organise cooperative social capacities, sell communication, and extract value from those capacities.

Their account also shifts the centre of gravity from industrial command to the extraction of value from the common. Their essay treats cognitive labour, fixed capital, and social cooperation as the ground of contemporary praxis (Hardt and Negri 2018a, 415-418). Hardt and Negri's emphasis illuminates Harvey's 2026 book. Harvey's discussions of Apple, Google, AI, higher education, and research infrastructures already point towards the commodification of knowledge and communication. Hardt and Negri provide a clearer vocabulary for describing that movement. Knowledge, code, language, and affect become productive forces. Capital seeks to command those forces and to appropriate their yield.

Hardt and Negri's second essay, which is part of their *tripleC*-debate with Harvey, introduces multiplicity as its main analytical gain. Hardt and Negri argue that real subsumption now describes society under capital as well as labour in the immediate production process (Hardt and Negri 2018b, 442). Their analysis treats capitalist rule as a field of interacting differences. Class, race, gender, and other axes of subordination shape the organisation of capitalist society, political subjectivity, and anti-capitalist struggle (Hardt and Negri 2018b, 442-444). They develop this point through racial capitalism and patriarchal capitalism, where racism and patriarchy appear as relatively autonomous structures that capital absorbs, transforms, and redeploys within "properly capitalist" society (Hardt and Negri 2018b, 443-445). Their concept of multiplicity gives feminist, anti-racist, and anti-capitalist struggles a shared analytical field.

Harvey gives the relation between multiplicity and capital a different emphasis. He accepts the value of extending formal and real subsumption to housing and daily life, then adds a caveat: the analysis must specify what enters which circuit of capital (Harvey 2018b, 450-451). His housing example shows the distinction clearly. Housing enters the circulation of interest-bearing capital, debt peonage, and the consumption fund, which generates class relations that differ from the labour process inside industrial capital (Harvey 2018b, 450-451). Harvey gives greater analytical weight to capital's laws of motion, class relations, and the specific circuits through which domination acquires material force. Race, gender, patriarchy, and social reproduction remain central to capitalist society; Harvey's method asks how those relations operate through accumulation, debt, land, rent, labour power, state formation, and financial command.

The communication-centred reading develops from that difference. Hardt and Negri supply the vocabulary of multiplicity, social production, and articulated struggle. Harvey supplies the stronger account of capital's circuits, class relations, and institutional command. Their exchange places communication inside capitalist rule while preserving the distinction between exploitation and wider forms of domination. Digital platforms, research infrastructures, media monopolies, debt systems, and educational institutions organise class power while sorting publics through race, gender, migration status, credentialing, visibility, and access. Communication appears as a terrain where capital's circuits and social multiplicities meet: platforms extract value from cooperative social

life, while public struggles contest the forms of domination that organise access, recognition, knowledge, and voice.

The exchange also creates a more explicit link between social analysis and political organisation. Hardt and Negri's account of real subsumption supports a theory of articulated struggles across the social terrain. Traditional syndicalist forms of organisation retain importance, and the social field of struggle now extends from the factory wall into wider social fields. The communication implication is concrete. Struggles around data extraction, surveillance, housing, care, debt, education, migration, and platform labour all belong to the wider terrain of social production and social reproduction. Harvey's emphasis on realisation struggles resonates strongly here. Hardt and Negri extend the resonance by clarifying that the social terrain itself has become a site of production and extraction.

Hardt and Negri specify praxis under conditions of social production. They argue that Ni Una Menos shows how a strike can move through factories, student collectives, community collectives, households, streets, and other social spaces. Their formulation is precise: "as production becomes increasingly social, so too the traditional forms of strike must transform into a social strike" (Hardt and Negri 2018b, 445). They extend the same logic to anti-racist struggles, including Black Lives Matter in the United States and the Fallist student movements in South Africa, Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall. In their account, racial hierarchy and white supremacy intertwine with capitalist rule across policing, prison systems, racialised state policy, labour regimes, and expropriation (Hardt and Negri 2018b, 445-446).

The communication-centred reading develops the implications of that argument. Ni Una Menos, Black Lives Matter, Rhodes Must Fall, and Fees Must Fall make visible a terrain where labour, race, gender, education, social reproduction, public speech, media circulation, and institutional authority meet. Platform labour, data extraction, debt, migration, racialisation, education, and social reproduction can therefore enter the same analysis of digitally mediated accumulation. Hardt and Negri supply the framework of social production, social strike, multiplicity, and articulated struggle. The communication-centred reading extends that framework to digital infrastructures, platform systems, and public knowledge institutions as part of the terrain on which contemporary praxis takes shape.

The question of praxis enters digital capitalism through the expanded terrain on which accumulation now depends. Harvey's point about realisation struggles already shows that conflict concentrates in the factory and across the infrastructures of everyday life. Broadband access, housing costs, educational debt, rent extraction, subscription systems, logistics networks, and platform labour now organise major zones of dispossession. Hardt and Negri sharpen this development by locating contemporary exploitation in communicative networks, social cooperation, and the extraction of value from languages, affects, codes, and images. Class struggle, therefore, appears across workplaces, households, streets, campuses, media infrastructures, and urban systems at once. That wider field broadens the material basis of class politics. The struggle over

digital capitalism concerns wages, labour demand, and the infrastructures and institutions through which people communicate, learn, move, and reproduce social life. Harvey's call for a movement of the alienated and dispossessed gains sharper strategic meaning in that setting, because communication itself has become a site of production, extraction, and collective contestation.

The exchange reaches its closest point in Harvey's response. Hardt and Negri describe "Universal Alienation" as a strong basis for discussion because Harvey expands alienation into debt, gentrification, urban space, and the world market (Hardt and Negri 2018b, 440-441). Harvey's response confirms the shared direction of the debate and links universal alienation to "the progress of real subsumption of not only labour processes but many aspects of daily life under the power of capital in its various forms" (Harvey 2018b, 452). That sentence belongs to Harvey. My interpretation of the exchange extends Harvey's claim to digital capitalism: alienation names the lived and political pressure of platform command, debt, surveillance, automation, and mediated disempowerment; real subsumption names capital's widening organisation of labour, housing, education, communication infrastructures, and daily life. Harvey supplies the account of universal alienation and the insistence on specifying what enters which circuit of capital. Hardt and Negri supply the vocabulary of communicative networks, social cooperation, extraction, and praxis. Their exchange gives communication a precise place in the argument: a social terrain where accumulation, alienation, subsumption, and struggle meet.

The 2018 exchange sharpens the communication thread that runs across Harvey's 2026 book. Harvey gives the large map of capital's circulation, technological dynamism, monopoly, and state power. "Universal Alienation" supplies the experiential and political pressure of those developments. Hardt and Negri specify communicative extraction and praxis by showing how digital networks, social cooperation, and multiplicity operate inside capitalist rule. The democratic question, then, concerns the injury caused when these institutional arrangements reshape public communication.

Harvey's strategic reflections create a political horizon. Harvey imagines the possibility of a "League of Socialist Cities" and locates anti-capitalist potentials in urban and regional forms that could curb entrepreneurial urbanisation and concentrated private power (Harvey 2026, 342). That image gives the argument a concrete political horizon. It also resonates strongly with the communication question. Cities organise infrastructures, institutions, and public spheres. They remain key sites where media systems, logistics networks, housing, and everyday life can be brought into a common political frame.

5. Harvey, the State, Public Communication, and Habermas

Harvey's 2026 book repeatedly places the state inside capital's moving totality. Harvey writes that significant elements of the contemporary capitalist state are "independent and autonomous but subsumed within" the laws of motion of capital's mode of production (Harvey 2026, 12). Harvey's formulation has great analytical value. The state

appears as a material participant in accumulation through tax flows, debt, infrastructure, treasury functions, financial policy, territorial competition, and crisis management. Harvey's chapters on the state-finance nexus strengthen this point. Harvey describes the state-finance nexus as the "central nervous system" that regulates capital flow and manages foundational contradictions within the capitalist mode of production (Harvey 2026, 317). Harvey also argues that the working population often remains sidelined as billionaire factions struggle for control over this nexus (Harvey 2026, 291-292).

Harvey's treatment of the credit system deepens this picture. In his account, the circulation of interest-bearing capital "hardens" into a coordinating force that gives capital a "central nervous system" adequate to the management of value flows (Harvey 2026, 232). Harvey then notes how planning for the economy increasingly shifts from the state into the offices of financial institutions closely connected to the Treasury and adjacent agencies (Harvey 2026, 233). This formulation gives the argument a sharper institutional anchor. Media empires, digital monopolies, and platform infrastructures operate inside a wider financial and administrative order that channels capital, information, and public authority through the same circuits, a pattern that also resonates with Harvey's broader analysis of abstraction and economic irrationality (Harvey 2017).

The phrase "central nervous system" also helps clarify the relation between finance and communication. Nervous systems transmit signals, coordinate responses, and regulate movement across the body. Harvey's metaphor, therefore, has analytical force for critical communication theory. It points to a finance-communication complex in which information processing, credit allocation, risk management, and public authority work together to govern circulation and accumulation. Treating digital media within that wider regime of coordination gives the analysis greater precision.

The credit system metaphor clarifies why billionaire control over media and information flows carries political significance. Harvey presents oligarchic media ownership as part of a broader reorganisation of class power in which fictitious capital, Treasury-linked finance, philanthropic influence, and platform monopoly shape the conditions of public knowledge. His discussion of centralised media control and Google gives the point a direct textual basis:

> Increasingly centralized control over the media likewise limits public access to critical forms of knowledge production, even as social media and internet technologies create the illusion of decentralization of individual expression. This is one of the most beautiful examples of the rule that the best way to assure increasingly centralized power is through dispersal and decentralization. Individualistic and dispersed peer-to-peer computing activities, for example, contributed mightily to Google's current monopoly power (Harvey 2026, 111).

Habermas helps name the communicative consequence. Once money and administrative power reshape the institutional channels through which publics receive, contest, and circulate information, public communication loses density, reciprocity, and

independence. Harvey's account of digital concentration therefore describes an institutional transformation of the public sphere and an industrial transformation of media markets.

Harvey's earlier discussion of Habermas gives this Habermasian turn a direct textual precedent. In *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Harvey identifies Habermas as a theorist who defends the Enlightenment project through language, consensual action, and communicative reason:

> "It is precisely this kind of relativism and defeatism that Habermas seeks to combat in his defence of the Enlightenment project. […] He, too, turns to the question of language, and in *The Theory of Communicative Action* insists upon the dialogical qualities of human communication in which speaker and hearer are necessarily oriented to the task of reciprocal understanding. Out of this, Habermas argues, consensual and normative statements do arise, thus grounding the role of universalizing reason in daily life. It is this that allows 'communicative reason' to operate 'in history as an avenging force'" (Harvey 1989, 52).

Harvey's 1989 reading places Habermas at the intersection of language, reason, consensual action, reciprocal understanding, and daily life. That connection extends to the institutions Harvey analyses in *The Story of Capital*: media concentration, platform monopoly, higher education, billionaire information control, and the state-finance nexus all shape the conditions under which public communication can occur.

The finance-communication frame also keeps higher education in view. Harvey's discussion of centralised media control and Google's monopoly (Harvey 2026, 111) sits alongside an account of elite universities, corporate philanthropy, and private influence over research agendas. That linkage strengthens a communication-centred reading. The problem concerns media ownership and the institutions that authorise knowledge, shape innovation, and determine which forms of expertise gain public credibility. Harvey therefore opens a route to analysing digital capitalism through the political economy of universities, foundations, and research infrastructures.

Habermas specifies the democratic consequences of Harvey's evidence. Fuchs (2026) situates Habermas's concepts of communication, the public sphere, and the colonisation of the lifeworld within critical media and communication studies, including the analysis of algorithmic control and fragmented digital publics. Harvey's treatment of the state, media concentration, and public institutions gives that framework a concrete material field.

Habermas's steering-media framework identifies the communicative consequences of Harvey's institutional architecture. Habermas argues that money and power function as "steering media" that can replace language as mechanisms of coordination in specific domains of action (Habermas 1987, 322, 390). Habermas acknowledges the efficiency gains that this replacement can produce in material reproduction. Habermas insists that cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialisation depend on

communicative action and mutual understanding. Steering media can generate pathologies when they invade spheres that require communicative coordination (Habermas 1987, 322, 390). The framework illuminates Harvey's book because media, higher education, research institutions, and the political public sphere sit at the boundary where economic and administrative imperatives reshape symbolic reproduction.

Habermas's treatment of mass communication directly illuminates Harvey's discussion of digital monopoly. Habermas argues that mass media "technically amplify linguistic communication", bridge spatial and temporal distances, and intensify the network of communicative action. He also warns that organisational forms can neutralise this expanded communicative potential by establishing "one-way" and "nonreversible" communication flows (Habermas 1984, 372). Harvey shows how dispersed peer-to-peer activity can help consolidate Google's monopoly and how social media can sustain the "illusion of decentralization" amid centralised command (Harvey 2026, 111). Habermas helps explain why that concentration carries economic, communicative, and democratic consequences. Organisational forms shape communication by channelling, filtering, and monetising interaction.

Habermas also provides a vocabulary for the deformation of public communication. In *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas argues that political systems produce mass loyalty through welfare promises and through the selective exclusion of themes and contributions from public discussion. Habermas names "bureaucratic deformation of the structures of public communication" and "manipulative control of the flow of communication" as mechanisms that can uncouple elite self-presentation from real decision-making (Habermas 1987, 346-347). Harvey's 2026 book reaches a closely related diagnosis through political economy. Harvey tracks billionaire concentration, rentier command, philanthropic influence over knowledge production, and the sidelining of popular forces inside the state-finance nexus. Habermas's account shows how those processes reshape communication, legitimacy, and participation. Harvey identifies the political economy of concentrated power. Habermas's theory of communicative action identifies the communicative damage that follows.

The Habermasian angle sharpens the democratic meaning of alienation by connecting Harvey's political economy to reification in communicative life. In *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas returns to Lukács in the chapter "From Lukács to Adorno: Rationalization as Reification" and relocates reification inside everyday communication. Habermas argues that reification reaches "the lifeworld itself" when social relations appear through objectified forms of exchange, administration, and thing-like calculation (Lukács 1971; Habermas 1984, 356). He then links this process to "the delinguistified medium of exchange value" (Habermas 1984, 359-360). The formulation gives the argument a precise mechanism. Money-mediated coordination and administrative management can displace forms of social integration that require language, reciprocity, and mutual understanding.

Habermas develops the same problem in *Lifeworld and System* through the colonisation thesis. Economic and administrative rationalities enter areas of action that

depend on cultural transmission, social integration, and communicative understanding (Habermas 1987, 330-331). Harvey's universal alienation gives that communicative injury a material setting. In "Universal Alienation," Harvey writes that "alienation exists almost everywhere" and identifies alienation in production, consumption, politics, and daily life (Harvey 2018a, 429). He also argues that debt-driven conditions turn democracy into a sham and that the state-finance nexus binds future life to the redemption of debts (Harvey 2018a, 436-437). Universal alienation therefore reaches communication because communication belongs to daily life. Media concentration, platform monopoly, higher education, billionaire information control, and administrative filtering all shape how publics form judgement, contest authority, and circulate knowledge.

This Habermasian line remains anchored in Harvey's account of capital. Harvey maps the material organisation of media power. Habermas identifies the communicative injury that develops when money, administration, and one-way media flows govern institutions that require public reasoning. The result is a reification of communication: public speech, civic attention, expertise, and participation appear as manageable objects inside media markets, bureaucratic procedures, platform architectures, and systems of debt. Harvey supplies the political economy of universal alienation. Habermas explains how alienation enters the communicative structure of public life.

6. Assessment: The Contribution and the Open Questions

The Story of Capital makes a major contribution to Marxist theory and critical communication studies. Harvey offers a synthetic, lucid, and expansive account of capital's totality. The book's strengths are evident from its conceptual architecture. Harvey integrates production, circulation, realisation, technology, finance, fixed capital, social reproduction, extractivism, the rentier, and the state-finance nexus within one moving field. Apple, Google, Amazon, Musk, Silicon Valley, AI, Blackstone, central banks, higher education, and military research all appear inside the same theoretical horizon. That concreteness greatly enhances the book's usefulness for communication scholars.

The book's second major strength lies in its treatment of the state. Harvey integrates the economy and the state within a single moving field. Harvey shows how state functions inhabit the inner structure of accumulation and how financial governance, public debt, infrastructural investment, military competition, and territorial control enter capital's very operation. This framework is especially valuable for media and digital analysis because communication infrastructures often sit at the intersection of state policy, military investment, research funding, and corporate platform expansion.

The third major strength lies in Harvey's historical sensibility. Harvey consistently treats capital as geographically uneven, historically specific, and internally contradictory. This sensibility allows the book to move from Manchester to Shenzhen, from Venice to Silicon Valley, from the factory to the airport, from the university to the central bank. The communication analysis gains force because it appears inside this broader historical map.

The book also invites further work in several areas. Harvey briefly names “cognitive capitalism” and leaves room for further analysis of the specific mechanisms by which platforms extract value from data, attention, user activity, and infrastructural dependence (Harvey 2026, 221). Harvey identifies the centralisation of platform power and the fusion of state, finance, and oligarchy. The book also leaves room for a fuller account of algorithmic governance, data capture, cloud infrastructure, and communication labour. Hardt and Negri help specify communicative networks, the common, and social cooperation. Habermas clarifies the public sphere consequences of media concentration and administrative steering. These open questions indicate where a communication-centred reading can extend Harvey’s project.

A further open question concerns the spatial vocabulary of communication. Time-space compression deserves sustained attention within the communication vocabulary, and Harvey’s chapter on space and time establishes the importance of that emphasis (Harvey 1989, 2026). Digital communication reduces distance, accelerates coordination, reorders scale, and recentres power through infrastructure, finance, and platform ownership. A communication-centred account can treat those developments as part of the political economy of communication.

Another open question concerns political form. Harvey’s framework points toward anti-capitalist transformation and the need for institutional reorganisation, while the exact forms of communicative and political organisation require further specification. Harvey’s emphasis on realisation struggles, the state-finance nexus, and the billionaire capture of media and politics suggests that labour organisation, urban politics, digital infrastructure struggles, media democracy, and public knowledge institutions all carry strategic importance. Hardt and Negri’s language of articulation and multiplicity becomes particularly useful here, as does Habermas’s emphasis on discursive will-formation and the protection of communicative infrastructures from monetary and administrative domination.

A final strength deserves emphasis. Harvey’s book speaks across disciplines and sustains analytical rigour. Political economy, geography, media and communication studies, sociology, urban theory, and critical theory can all enter the argument. That breadth gives the book unusual value for communication scholars. The book creates a shared vocabulary for analysing how capital organises technological change, communication systems, and public life.

Harvey’s strongest institutional line runs through the state-finance nexus, higher education, philanthropic power, monopoly platforms, urban infrastructures, and the struggle over public knowledge. That focus shows why Harvey’s map of capital helps explain the shrinking conditions of public reasoning in the digital age.

7. Conclusion

David Harvey’s *The Story of Capital* reconstructs capital as a “working totality” and gives communication a material place inside that reconstruction. Technological dynamism, platform concentration, communications and surveillance technologies, higher

education, AI, billionaire control over “media and information flows”, and the state-finance nexus appear as institutions and infrastructures through which capital organises circulation, knowledge, visibility, and public authority (Harvey 2026, 63, 111, 290-292).

The communication thread depends on how Harvey treats public institutions. Universities, treasuries, philanthropic foundations, municipal infrastructure, monopoly platforms, logistics networks, and urban systems organise the movement of knowledge, capital, labour, and everyday life. Harvey’s spatial account of “time-space compression” and the “annihilation of space through time” shows how digital communication participates in the reorganisation of territory, infrastructure, scale, and symbolic exchange (Harvey 2026, 149).

The 2018 tripleC debate supplies the key frame for relating Harvey’s earlier essay to the new book. Universal alienation names the lived pressure of capital across production, consumption, politics, debt, and daily life. Hardt and Negri give that pressure a communication vocabulary by locating exploitation in communicative networks, cognitive and social production, real subsumption, and the extraction of value from the common. Harvey’s reply connects universal alienation to the real subsumption of daily life, which returns the debate to the institutional and digital evidence assembled in *The Story of Capital*.

Habermas clarifies the democratic consequence of that evidence. Steering media, bureaucratic filtering, and one-way communication flows identify how money, administration, and concentrated media power can damage institutions that depend on public reasoning. Harvey supplies the political economy of concentrated command; Habermas names the communicative injury within the public sphere.

The political horizon emerges from this combined reading. Harvey calls present contradictions “potential fodder for anticapitalist struggles” and calls for “a mass movement of the alienated and dispossessed” (Harvey 2026, 343). In the digital age, that struggle concerns wages, labour demand, urban life, and the infrastructures through which people communicate, learn, move, and form public judgement.

Harvey’s story of capital is also a story of media command, digital concentration, and the contested future of public communication. Capital now organises communication as infrastructure, labour process, knowledge regime, class command, and political terrain. Public communication depends on infrastructures, universities, treasuries, platforms, and urban systems shaped by capital’s circulation.

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