# **6th Story - Algorithmic Territories**

Within the fractured web of human and artificial cognition, the tale *Algorithmic Territories* unfolds—a narrative where the promise of a *total* history collapses under its own ambition. As Claude Lévi-Strauss postulated, history, when strained through the sieve of totality, delivers nothing but a skewed portrait, incomplete and selective, marked by discontinuities that belie the façade of continuity.[[1]](#footnote-1) This story dives into the pulsing heart of advertising in the algorithmic age, scrutinizing the interplay of politics, economics, geography, and culture on a canvas that is both vast and intricately detailed. We will be witnessing together the sociocultural flows through the digital landscapes of Southeast Asia, adopting unique hues as they permeate the diverse terrains of the region, painting a vivid tableau of how automation and artificial intelligence reshape and redefine the contours of cyber colonialism. This is not just the history of a region, but a dissection of the very idea that a singular, coherent historical narrative can ever truly capture the essence of human experience.

## **Southeast Asia’s Cyber Terrain**

In Southest Asia, the dream of connecting with the world is a wish that is not unique to any one person in particular. For people with a lower standard of living and limited mobility, especially, the dream of knowing the *world beyond*, one different from the familiar, becomes even stronger. The Internet has brought high expectations to the citizens of developing countries, especially in Southeast Asia. While the Internet connects people to information, in itself the Internet is a promise that opens the user to new employment, new opportunities and new experiences. The global village - cyberspace - is expected to be the driving force for *flattening the world*.[[2]](#footnote-2) Google, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, What's App, TikTok, Amazon, Alibaba, Apple, and Samsung have given hope that new living conditions and international spaces will allow the populations of developing countries access to a living environment similar to the developed world.

Southeast Asia is a region in Asia that encompasses the countries located to the south and east of the Asian region, including Brunei, Cambodia, Timor-Leste, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar (also known as Burma), the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. The region is known for its diverse cultures, tropical climates, beautiful nature, rich history, and vibrant economies.[[3]](#footnote-3) Southeast Asia is considered the most accessible tropical region in the world since it is strategically located on the sea route between East Asia and the Middle East-Mediterranean world.[[4]](#footnote-4) More than a thousand years ago, Southeast Asia was considered a Suvarnabhūmi (Sanskrit: Land of Gold).[[5]](#footnote-5) Hence, this has been the most frequently invaded area by people outside the region. Chinese, European, Japanese, and American colonization have had profound impacts on the cultural, economic, and political characteristics of the area.

From 111 BC to 938 AD, for more than a thousand years, Northern Vietnam was under Chinese rule.[[6]](#footnote-6) China has had a long history of cultural, economic, and political influence in the whole region. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the Chinese influence in Southeast Asia became more intense; large numbers of Chinese immigrants arrived in the region, particularly in present-day Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Various European powers also exerted their influence and control over Southeast Asia for hundreds of years, including the Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, British, and French. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to arrive in Southeast Asia in the 16th century, establishing colonies in present-day Indonesia, East Timor, and Malaysia. The Dutch arrived in the region soon after and established their own colonies, including present-day Indonesia and parts of Malaysia. In the 19th century, the British established colonies in present-day Malaysia, Singapore, and Myanmar (Burma), while the French established colonies in present-day Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos.[[8]](#footnote-8) These colonial powers brought Western ideologies and practices to the region which have had a profound impact on the economies, cultures, and politics of this area.

During World War II, Japanese Fascism invaded most of the former Western colonies under the concept of *Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere*.[[9]](#footnote-9) The Japanese occupation had significant consequences on the region, causing widespread suffering, displacement, and economic disruption. After Japan's defeat in the war, many of the former Western colonies in Southeast Asia became independent nations.

The United States took the Philippines from Spain in 1898. Internal autonomy was granted in 1934, and Filipinos celebrated their independence in 1946.[[10]](#footnote-10) The US has had a remarkable political, economic, and military influence in the region throughout the 20th century and into the 21st century. During the Cold War, the US was involved in supporting anti-communist governments and military forces in Southeast Asia, most notably in the conflict in Vietnam that lasted from 1955 to 1975 and had a long-lasting impact on Vietnamese and the region.[[11]](#footnote-11)

The consequences of colonialism, independence struggles and wars left various enduring socio-cultural issues in each country in Southeast Asia. In the present, living conditions throughout Southeast vary dramatically from country to country and from rural to urban. In urban areas, the living conditions in Southeast Asia are convenient, with access to modern infrastructure such as shopping malls, hospitals, and international schools. However, in rural areas, the living conditions are often more modest, with limited access to basic services such as clean water, electricity, and healthcare. Based on economic situations, countries like Brunei, Singapore and Malaysia have a high standard of living, while countries like Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos have a lower standard of living.[[12]](#footnote-12)

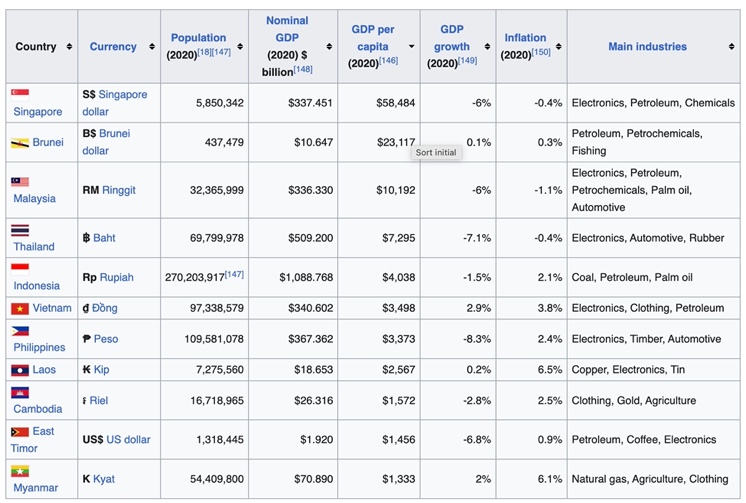


Figure S6. 1: Per Capital GDP in Southeast Asia ©Wikimedia Commons.[[13]](#footnote-13)

While the level of development in Southeast Asia varies by nation, in general, it is a region on the road to development with understandable economic and social limitations. Most inhabitants of the region share a common desire for improved living standards and economic conditions. Achieving the goal of a better life is a general human aspiration. Striving to overcome inferiority, weakness, and disadvantage is a socially appreciated effort. While the hope of a future characterized by a higher standard of living motivates Southeast Asians to dream, their common query is, ‘How can we realize that aspiration? Can the *global village* fulfill its initial promises? Does the digital environment implement the expectations of ordinary people? Does the use of products and services of former mother countries carry one toward the same living standards as their former colonizers?’

Internet access in Southeast Asia has grown rapidly in recent years. As of 2021, the percentage of people in Southeast Asia with access to the internet fell into a range as low as 37% in Timor-Leste to a high of 93.8% in Malaysia. In general, internet penetration is highest in more developed countries like Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand, and lower in less developed countries like Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Timor- Leste.[[14]](#footnote-14)

*Image*

Southeast Asia is considered to be a rapidly growing market for e-commerce, with countries like Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, and the Philippines witnessing a significant increase in online shopping. The region is home to over 650 million consumers, making it an attractive destination for both local and international businesses.[[15]](#footnote-15) The factors driving the growth of e-commerce in the region include the increasing availability of the Internet and mobile devices, the growing middle class, and a younger demographic that is mainly a digital native generation, who are familiar and comfortable with online purchases.[[16]](#footnote-16) In addition, improvements in logistics and delivery infrastructure make it more efficient for businesses to reach customers across the region. As a result, the e-commerce market in Southeast Asia is expected to continue growing with projections that it could reach over 200 billion dollars by 2025.[[17]](#footnote-17) This is considered an emerging digital colonial market that is the targeted market of not only global digital empires but also local digital imperials. Former colonized peoples have become the new colonizers in their own region.

There is a mix of local and international e-commerce platforms operating in the region, most notably including Lazada, Shopee, Grab, Zalora, Tokopedia.[[18]](#footnote-18) All the e-commerce platforms originate from Singapore and operate extensively throughout Southeast Asia, except for the Indonesian Tokopedia. The e-commerce platform Lazada was acquired by China's Alibaba Group in 2016. Alibaba's acquisition of Lazada exemplifies the efforts to expand its international presence in the area. There is serious competition between the regional and international platform companies. However, the regulatory restrictions and diverse cultural and linguistic differences across the region also create significant barriers for multinational corporations, giving opportunities to local platforms. The *cyber-neocolonial* situation in Southeast Asia has exposed numerous characteristics of classical colonial concepts, especially the emergence of new empires in the region.

With a rapidly expanding internet user base and increasing mobile penetration, digital advertising in Southeast Asia is a significantly growing industry. Key players in the region include Google, Facebook, Lazada and TikTok, and regional platforms such as Shopee and Tokopedia. There is not enough yet consideration of privacy issues and a lack of common regulations on how to handle personal data in the region, the basis for targeted advertising to develop rapidly at the moment.[[19]](#footnote-19) Various local businesses make efforts to do business and advertise on social networking platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Purchasing ads on social networks is vital to the success of business owners. Selling products through live stream videos on social networks and the purchase of social network ads have currently become common business practices in Southeast Asia, especially in Vietnam.

E-commerce in Vietnam has also experienced remarkable growth in recent years.[[20]](#footnote-20) Major e-commerce players in the Vietnamese market include Lazada, Shoppe, and Tiki (a local e-commerce platform), while social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram are also popular channels for online shopping. The key platforms in digital advertising in Vietnam include Facebook, Google, and Zalo (a prominent Vietnamese social media platform). Social media advertising, video advertising and mobile advertising are the dominant forms of digital advertising in this country.

Globalization and integration with the international market system while reinforcing the growth of local businesses is the challenge of many developing countries, including Vietnam. This is especially pertinent for the fields of e-commerce and digital advertising. Multinational digital platforms have continuously adapted their products or services to meet the needs and preferences of local markets. They have focused on improving language functions and creating products and services suitable to Vietnamese cultural characteristics and tastes. In addition, the Vietnamese government has also issued policies to encourage the development of local digital platforms in the country.

Despite being a socialist country, Vietnam has operated a free market and multi-stakeholder economy since the late 1980s. The State currently plays the role of coordinating private sector and international trade through policies and laws. The State-owned companies that were established during the economic reforms period known as *Đổi mới* (the 1980s) have largely been privatized or sold to the private sector.[[21]](#footnote-21) The Vietnamese government, however, implemented different policies supporting the development of information technology and e-commerce enterprises.[[22]](#footnote-22) Tiki and Zalo are two typical representations deriving significant benefits from the incentives provided by this policy shift.[[23]](#footnote-23)

The rapid development of the e-commerce and digital media market in Vietnam has also created pressure and confusion in dealing with arising social issues related to this new phenomenon. As a general issue, the growing power of multinational corporations generates numerous difficulties in the enactment of law and policy.[[24]](#footnote-24) The situation has become more complicated and urgent with the profound impacts of multinational platforms. In the era of transnational digital connectivity, international political conditions play a crucial role. There is an urgent need to unify transnational policies because the major part of social problems related to the global platforms can only be solved through the alignment of international law.

As a matter of fact, harmonization of laws is certainly difficult, especially in Southeast Asia–a region of cultural diversity, language, and political institutions. Furthermore, remnants of patriotism from the period of liberation revolutions have made the unifying process more complex. Various currents of conservative nationalist thought continue to play a decisive role in numerous parts of this region.[[25]](#footnote-25) Facing the social technological challenge, instead of trying to coordinate regulations, many countries choose to solve their problems locally. In an effort to control this situation, several governments have employed algorithms to impose cyber fences and walls within their countries.

## **Cyber Frontier**

For the former colonial countries on the road to development, their optimistic dreams about *the flat world* are, in fact, simply colorful and fragile soap bubbles.[[26]](#footnote-26) The ideas of non-boundary connectivity exist together with the algorithmic barriers; the dreams of an ideal cyber life go along with the possibility of being exploited again in another way; the promised equality cannot bridge social distances between regions; the collaborative opportunities show the tendency to becoming a new method of domination; the free market involves various dependent and controlling factors. The inequality between the capital owners of AI and users becomes deeper and deeper.

*Digital censorship*

To some extent, cyber-colonialism has spread globally with an intense concentration in developing countries, and obviously in Southeast Asia. Control, manipulation, and exploitation are practiced by different power sectors. Cyberspace boundaries have been erected by algorithmic barriers to create digital censorship. Imposed by governments, private companies, or other entities, digital censorship is normally claimed with various reasons, such as protecting national security, preventing the spread of harmful or offensive content, or suppressing dissenting opinions. [[27]](#footnote-27), [[28]](#footnote-28) Common examples of digital censorship include the blocking of social media platforms like Facebook or Twitter, the removal of specific websites or content from search engines, and the use of filters or firewalls to prevent access to certain types of information or websites. While digital censorship can be used to protect individuals or society from harmful content, it can also be used as a tool of oppression, limiting freedom of expression and restricting access to information. Clearly, digital censorship might generate negative effects on individuals and societies, including the limitation of critical thinking, stifling creativity, and impeding the development of a free and democratic society.

In parallel to corporate censorship, state censorship also maximizes efficiency in cyberspace through the use of high-tech automated systems. The practice of restricting or suppressing online information is seen in many geographic areas, especially in the Global South. Although the censorial algorithms are theoretically designed to identify and remove content without human review or oversight, the major part of digital censorship formulas is initially programmed and governed by specific groups or individuals that are likely motivated by specific political or ideological attitudes. Therefore, the subjective limitations are the obvious characteristics of censorial algorithms.

In addition, similar to the hidden agenda underlying the mining of personal data, lack of public transparency over digital censorship in cyberspace is widespread. With thousands of hidden facts, contemporary media only reveals to the public what they want users to know. In developing countries, especially, the ability to participate in social decisions related to technology-based governance systems is fairly limited. Surveillance cameras, sensory networks, and cookie protocols are continuously present in our daily life, but there are various barriers for the users to understand how they really work and, therefore, how to change the inequalities associated with the digital world.

Narrowing the gap between ordinary people and tech owners is significantly obstructed by a biased legal system. As Pasquale wrote in *The Black Box Society*

The law, so aggressively protective of secrecy in the world of commerce, is increasingly silent when it comes to the privacy of persons… While powerful businesses, financial institutions, and government agencies hide their actions behind nondisclosure agreements, ‘proprietary methods’, and gag rules, our own lives are becoming increasingly open books. Everything we do online is recorded; the only questions left are to whom the data will be available, and for how long.[[29]](#footnote-29)

As a matter of fact, human rights in cyberspace are an important issue, which has not received enough attention in various parts of the world and, most notably, not in Southeast Asia.

*Digital states*

Globally, multinational technology corporations are gradually establishing various powerful digital states. At the present, Alphabet, Meta, Amazon, and Alibaba own billions of active accounts, a number much larger than the population of many countries around the world. In the Southeast Asia region, there are over 400 million internet users and, among them, young people between the ages of 16 and 24 are spending an average of 10 hours a day in cyberspace.[[30]](#footnote-30), [[31]](#footnote-31)

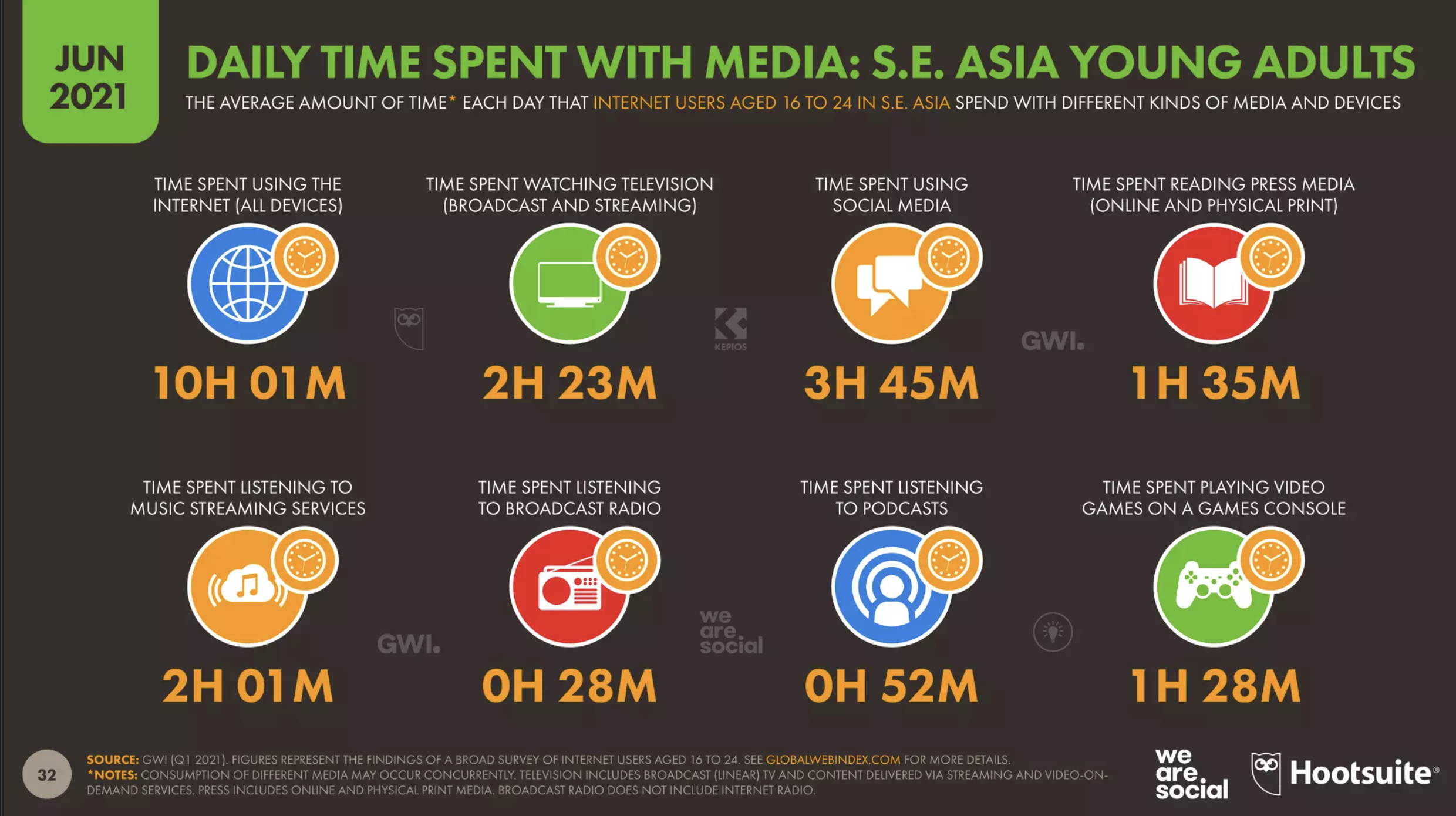


Figure S6. 2: Daily Time Spent With Media: S.E. Asia Young Adults. ©datareportal.com.

With a large number and active participation, platform corporations have made a profound impact on society and especially on young people. Therefore, a single activity on any given platform can cause an immediate effect on a large population. For example, changes to Facebook's algorithm that decides how content is prioritized in newsfeeds of individual users can have a major impact on user perceptions. Similarly, changes to privacy settings or data collection policies can significantly limit the use of features on the platform. The operating regulations of platforms play a similar role to governing regulations of states. By agreeing on the user contracts, we might say that customers have applied for immigration to these digital states.

From user perspective, these types of digital states also generate similar feelings of belonging or personal identity within communities. For example, many people who regularly use Instagram might have a clear sense of identity concerning the Instagram community. *Instagrammers* commonly share various social and cultural norms such as women's beauty standards. Feelings of dependency on platforms can be fleeting or deep; however, they are common sense.

Furthermore, platform corporations also emphasize their state characters in their imperialist act of annexation. At the present, Google, Facebook, and Amazon are the dominant empires in the West.[[32]](#footnote-32) Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent, and Xiaomi of China are trying to expand their dominance in the Eastern Region.[[33]](#footnote-33) These companies are constantly expanding their power by acquiring smaller companies, especially as it becomes public and a potential threat. Google itself is among the most prolific acquirers of start-up companies; at some stages, it has purchased a new venture weekly.[[34]](#footnote-34) Facebook has also swallowed Instagram ($1bn), WhatsApp ($19bn), and Oculus ($2bn) and invested in drone-based internet, e-commerce, and payment services.[[35]](#footnote-35) In 2016, Alibaba acquired a controlling stake in Lazada–a leading e-commerce platform in Southeast Asia, for $1 billion; in 2018, it also acquired Daraz–an e-commerce platform in South Asia that operates in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Nepal. [[36]](#footnote-36), [[37]](#footnote-37)

The takeover of other companies has become a common strategy of technology corporations. These acquisitions mostly aim to achieve economies of scale, expand into new markets, acquire new technologies or intellectual property, and diversify their product or service offerings. The most important reason, however, is to eliminate threats from rivals and strengthen the power of the empire. Intensive competition is now observed between platform corporations, international technology companies, and local ones. It seems inevitable that small, local companies that do not transform into multinationals and acquire rivals will become the targets of the next acquisition.

There is a large technological capital gap between developing and developed countries, especially in AI capital ownership. In Southeast Asia, currently, the distribution of access to and use of digital technologies such as the Internet, computers, and smartphones is no longer as difficult as it was in prior decades. However, the ability to access and own AI capital remains a distant prospect. There is a requirement for a massive and advanced digital infrastructure to nurture AI and exploit Big data on the Internet through algorithms. Meanwhile, most server farms–the brains of AI, and technologies related to machine learning applications are the property of platform corporations. Even the US government must spend public money to rent cloud computing services from the clouds of Amazon or Microsoft.[[38]](#footnote-38) Clearly, owning such a progressive infrastructure is much more difficult for developing countries. AI has become a target of the race among tech giants. As Amy Webb mentioned that ‘The supranational flatforms are the most control over the future of AI’.[[39]](#footnote-39) The potential for big tech empires to monopolize cyberspace into the future is strong, limiting the opportunity for developing countries to own of AI technology.

Furthermore, in developing regions, public information technology systems have now become outdated and inefficient. Non-commercial organizations (such as political parties, associations and religious organizations) cannot rely totally on classical public media to advertise their propaganda as in the past. Media systems of global platforms have gradually subsumed the market share, influencing public communication significantly. Reacting to this loss, plenteous governments have introduced new laws and policies to control the platforms and convert privately owned social networking spaces into national online spaces. Likewise, several governments have attempted to establish their own digital communication systems and social network infrastructure. They normally require or even oblige citizens to use this infrastructure. For example, China banned the operation of global platforms operating on their territory, and the Chinese government now restricts their population to the use of only national applications.[[40]](#footnote-40)

Digital inequality in cyberspace has also been reflected in labour peculiarities in the information technology industry. There is a contrasting picture between the *tech elite* and the slavery working group in the technology industry. Generally, the tech elite are are typically highly educated and experienced in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), and they often hold leadership positions at major tech companies or venture capital firms. The majority of tech-elite individuals live and work in developed countriesm, and they are known for their high salaries, access to exclusive networks and events, and influence over the direction of the technology industry. In the humorous words of Lovink, ‘The tech elite—the group of (usually young, white and male) developers as a *pure* medium; an abstract mathematical environment, untouched by society, neutral of class, gender or race, capable of *routing around* the problems caused by the dirty old world outside’.[[41]](#footnote-41) The social impacts of the tech-elite are enormous in the digital era. Many machine decisions are influenced by their creators of various algorithms. For example, at present, the right of decision-making on blocked information, target audience, and government loans is mostly based on programming formulas. As Tristan Harris stated during the Congressional Hearing in the US on January 8, 2020: ‘Never before in history have 50 designers made decisions that would have an impact on two billion people.’[[42]](#footnote-42)

Meanwhile, many workers serving in the technological industry are based in low-wage regions such as nations in the southern hemisphere and developing countries. These worker positions are often ‘shaped by implicit ideas that such populations don’t need—or are less deserving of—livable wages and economic stability.’[[43]](#footnote-43) The lives of low-wage workers are impacted by the precarious living standards of the localities where they reside. To some extent, low-income tech workers suffer from a new form of slave exploitation. At present, we do not see large-scale labor exploitation through slavery, which often requires spreading racist beliefs that dehumanized entire populations in the last centuries.[[44]](#footnote-44) Neo-slavery developed on the background of cheap and precarious exploitative labor practices.[[45]](#footnote-45) Regularly, low-income tech workers are assigned to simple jobs that serve the system processes and are paid according to the practice of piece work.

For example, to learn about this job market, Elisa Giardina Papa, an Italian artist, worked remotely for several North American *human-in-the-loop* companies that provide *clean* datasets to train AI algorithms to detect emotions.[[46]](#footnote-46) Among the tasks that the artist performed were categorizing emotions, annotation of facial expressions and recording her own image to animate three-dimensional characters.[[47]](#footnote-47) The purposes of this work are used either to identify the moods of consumers or to detect potentially dangerous citizens who pose a threat to the state. Numerous tech workers in developing countries received similarly small tasks, working 15 to 18 hours a day to earn a small amount of income. Various tech companies are pushing these people into slave working conditions. Naomi Klein claimed that ‘Job cannot call a real job when it does not provide the workers with the proper working conditions, working benefits for a sustainable living.’[[48]](#footnote-48)

The situation of this labour inequality tends to increase with the development of technology. The automation era will first affect precarious technology worker groups. Automatic programming software that offers the similar performance of IT engineers has now become more popular. With limited access to advanced training, tech workers in developing countries are considered basic-skill working groups that are most likely to be replaced by machines. Although digital states are identified as Virtual World entities, their geography is still interpreted in many ways, one of which is the specificity of the technological labour force.

In addition, technology corporations also pay attention to geographical aspects when considering the possible technologically experimental or trial markets. In 2017, Facebook launched its online shopping platform, Marketplace, in several Asian countries, including India, Indonesia, and Thailand.[[49]](#footnote-49) In 2019, Amazon began to test its cashier-less convenience store concept, Amazon Go, in Mexico City.[[50]](#footnote-50) In the article *South Africa’s Private Surveillance Machine is Fueling a Digital Dpartheid* Karen Hao and Heidi Swartz specifically described how tech corporations in South Africa have been using AI surveillance tools to monetize their private security surveillance business.[[51]](#footnote-51) Tracking population movement and facial recognition systems to trace individuals is being done through thousands of private cameras in Johannesburg.[[52]](#footnote-52) Public data has been stored by private companies and commercialized freely on the market. This surveillance application is considered to be the initial trial for the further surveillance systems of the other continents.

Testing new IT applications in developing countries is a simple, inexpensive, and efficient investment. From a different perspective, however, this can be considered an inhumane act directed toward those disadvantaged groups that doesn’t hold the tools, abilities and legal conditions to defend themselves.

*Digital and nondigital*

The combination of different technologies has currently submerged people in the mixed world of real and virtual. The actual actions of users confirm the effectiveness of advertising messages on the internet , and partisan propaganda verifies the level of influence in each administrative region.

Tracking users with devices such as personal phones, security cameras, and automatic audio receivers, digital providers easily monitor and control the real-time actions of users. The actions of tagging people and locations on social media are an example of effective methods for tracking and collecting information. An additional efficient method for locating users is the *location tracking feature* on mobile devices. Placing a virtual assistant like Amazon's Alexa in customer homes is a deceptive way to harvest private information on intimate relationships, and the use of electronic payments through payment platforms such as PayPal or Wise is a form of tracking personal financial situation.

To confirm the effectiveness of advertising and propaganda messages in digital space, the current machine learning methods are able to connect personal information in physical and virtual spaces instantly. Using a typical tracking process as an example, the AI system notes user interests through search engines, and then sends targeted advertising. When the customer initially views an advertisement, a first-time fee is paid to the publisher by the advertiser. Subsequent and additional fees are paid as users click on various embedded links. This complex process of manipulation connects individual pieces of data regarding how the user interacts with published advertisements with data regarding user geolocation, time, electronic payment and electronic election transactions.

At the moment, users in general and, specifically, those in developing countries are controlled and exploited using multiple strategies, ranging from simple devices to more advanced AI technology, from global to local forces, from both physical and mental influences. For economic benefits, digital owners apply various tactics and strategies. Ironically, even Google recognized its own influence when it began to use the slogan ‘Don't Be Evil’ in 2000s.[[53]](#footnote-53) As Coeckelbergh warned, ‘AI may lead to new forms of manipulation, surveillance, and totalitarianism, not necessarily in the form of authoritarian politics but in a more hidden and highly effective way’.[[54]](#footnote-54)

Southeast Asians have been eager to find a new horizon and to undertake an emotional, mental, and physical migration to the digital world. However, the reality may lead them to consider what they need to face and solve. They should navigate the digital native generations especially, to an equal path. Decolonizing cyberspace is a crucial action. Raising the awareness of existential problems to the public is a current focus. Technology skills education for the younger generation is essential. The overall community retains responsibility for limiting the negative effects of the platform economy. Taking radical actions to stop AI surveillance, data collection, and targeted economics will be the hope to free people in former colonial regions and arrest new forms of exploitation.

In Southeast Asia, a limited number of community actions focused on these issues have been launched, the forthcoming Asia-Pacific Digital Rights Festival being one of them.[[55]](#footnote-55) The week-long festival in May 2023 in Chiang Mai, Thailand aims to promote and protect digital rights in the Asia-Pacific and is expected to be the largest-ever gathering focused on this region. The 3rd ASEAN Digital Ministers’ meeting, which took place on February 2023, was also organized to conduct general discussions on new policies related to artificial Intelligence technologies, leading towards an innovative, responsible and secure ecosystem in the region.[[56]](#footnote-56)

Southeast Asia is an experimental, data, consumer, advertising and labour market for AI capitalist corporations. AI is considered to be the foundational infrastructure of 21st-century society.[[57]](#footnote-57) Are developing countries in Southeast Asia able to own AI capital without the revolution that would turn it into public ownership? This question might not be answered with a conservative-nationalist approach. Moving towards regional and global integration is essential for securing an equal future for the global population in general, and for the people of Southeast Asia region in particular.

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   Thomas L Friedman, *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*, Macmillan, 2005. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
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