

From Public Good to Private Gain:

How EdTech Industry Business Models are Reshaping Higher Education

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Communication and Digital Media Studies

Faculty of Social Science and Humanities



Digital Regulation in the Public Interest: 2nd annual symposium

hosted by the Faculty of Social Sciences

March 2025

a virtual symposium exploring research related to public and private governance, widely defined, in our increasingly (commodified) knowledge-driven digital society

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Venture Capital Investment Sources for EdTech Start-Ups

Investment Source	Examples
GAFAM Venture Capital Arms	Google Ventures, Microsoft Ventures (M12)
Philanthropic Foundations of GAFAM CEOs-Owners	Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Emerson Collective, Bezos Family Foundation
Venture Capital Firms	Reach Capital, Learn Capital, GSV Ventures, Owl Ventures, Rethink Education, New Markets Venture Partners
Angel Investors	Reid Hoffman (Co-founder of LinkedIn), Peter Thiel (Co-founder of PayPal), Mark Cuban (investor and Shark Tank star), Ashton Kutcher (head of Sound Ventures)

The Ed Tech Market Map





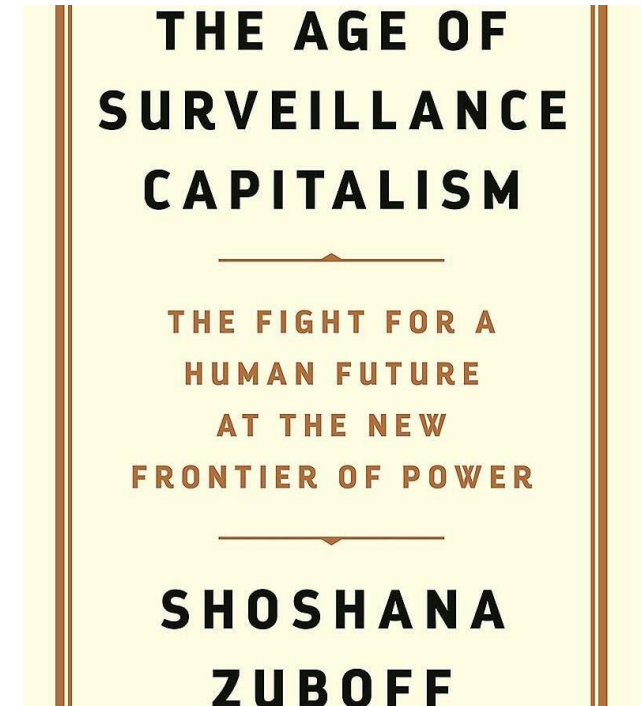
An ed-tech tragedy?

Educational technologies and school closures
in the time of COVID-19

EdTech Business Models

- “Powerful organizations, from big tech corporations and financial investors to EdTech consultancies and international bodies, exploited school closures to try to reform the social institution of schooling into a digital-first or even digital-only ecosystem” - Ben Williamson, 2023

EdTech Business Model #1: Platform Capitalism is the Classroom



Report Calls Online Program
Managers 'Wolves in Sheep's
Clothing'



Consultation



**Course
Development**



**Marketing &
Recruitment**



**Program
Launch**



**Ongoing
Support**

EdTech Business Model #2:

Privatizing-Public Partnerships (PPPs) – Online Program Management (OPM) firms

EdTech Business Model #3:
Copyrighted Ed Content is
“King”

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content

is KING

Sumner Redstone

Circa 1994

A portrait of Sumner Redstone, an elderly man with light brown hair, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and a blue patterned tie. He is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera.

EdTech Business Model #4:
Crowdsourced Prosumer Labour



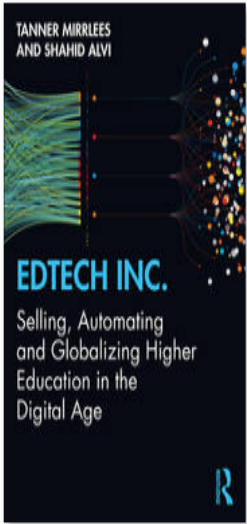
BY JEFF HOWE BACKCHANNEL JUN 1, 2006 12:00 PM

The Rise of Crowdsourcing

...ourcing? Sending jobs to India and China is so 2003. The n
... everyday people using their spare cycles to create con
... solve problems, even do corporate R&D.



EdTech Industry Controversies



Chapter

Profiting on Higher Education

Platform Capitalism Is the Classroom

By *Tanner Mirrlees, Shahid Alvi*

Book [EdTech Inc.](#)



New study confirms that many EdTech companies exploit children's data and there is nothing to stop them



ACLU RESEARCH REPORT

Digital Dystopia

The Danger in Buying What the EdTech Surveillance Industry is Selling

ACLU



Chapter

Globalizing Higher Education

Platform Imperialism

By *Tanner Mirrlees, Shahid Alvi*

Book [EdTech Inc.](#)

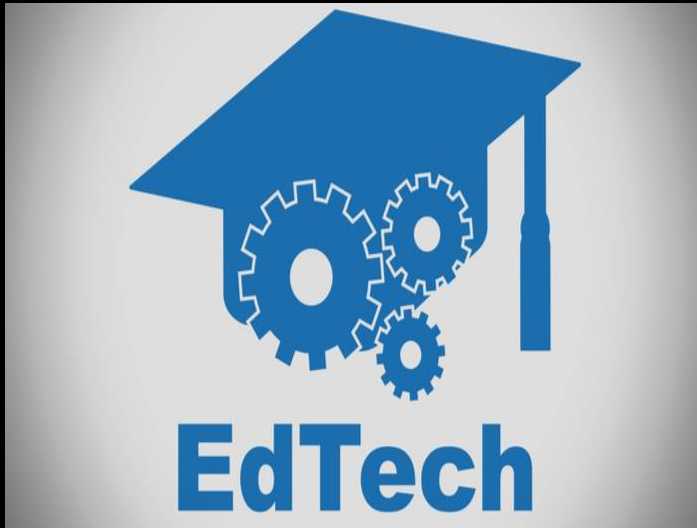
TIME

WORLD'S TOP **EdTech** COMPANIES

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

statista 

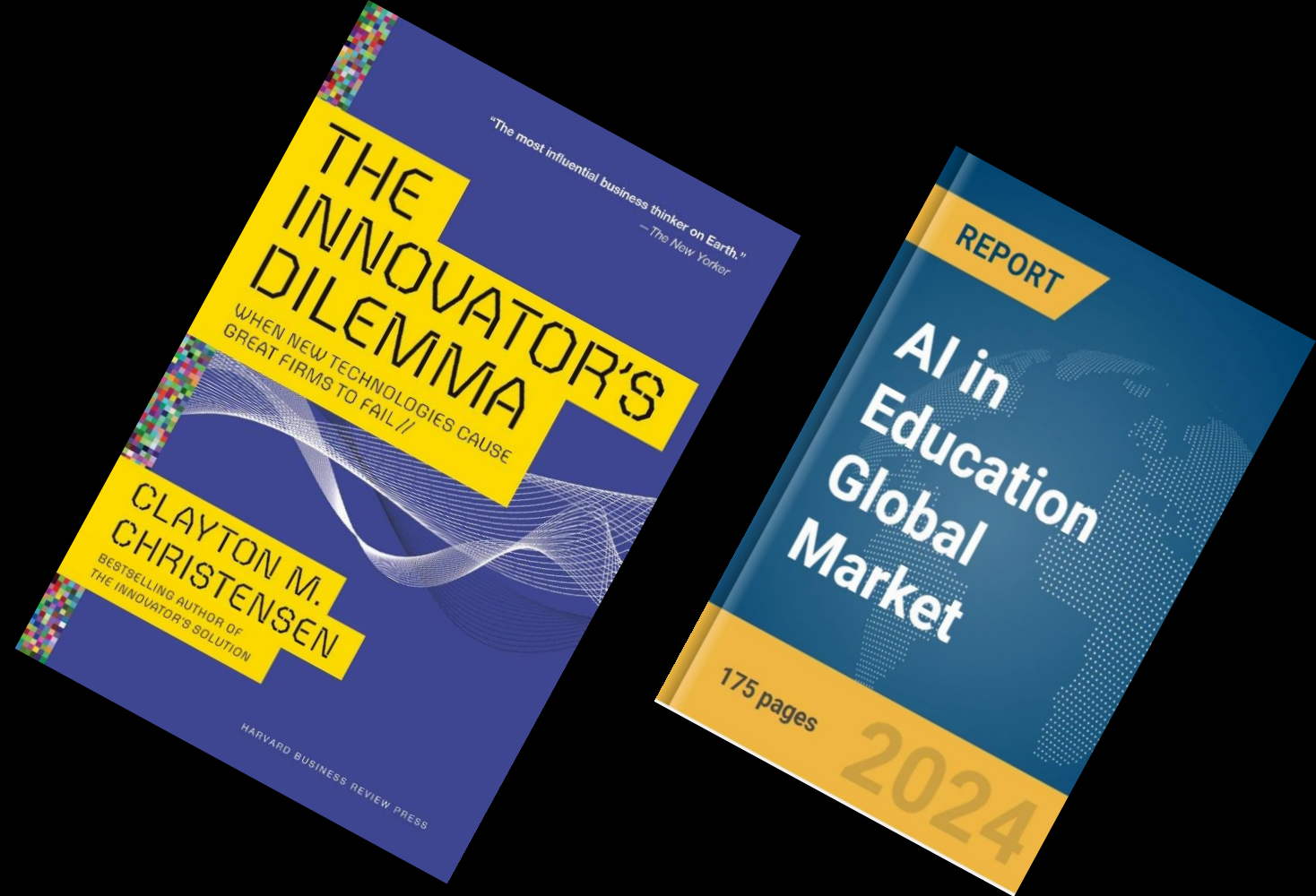
2024



'Unethical, illegal': Wage theft scandal hits Markham-based online teaching company

EdTech Industry: Policy and Regulation

- “We know there is financial benefit to companies...but the educational benefit is unclear because we have so little evidence regarding the impact on learning” - Sam Sellar, Dean of Research in Education Futures and Policy at the University of South Australia, 2023



“Fifteen years from now more than half of the universities will be in bankruptcy, including the state schools. In the end, I am excited to see that happen” – Clay Christensen, 2013

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