

Analyzing Work Collaboration Software

Rohan Aslam

University of Toronto Mississauga

CCT300: Critical Analysis of Media

Dr. Steven Logan

October 3rd, 2025

In his work, McLuhan (1964) argues that the real message of any technology is the habits it forces upon us and the ones we develop around it. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we not only began using tools like Zoom, Slack, or Microsoft Teams to keep working, but we started living through them. These platforms have changed our relationship with work, the spaces we operate in, how communication flows, and shifted the power dynamic between employers and employees. In this critical analysis, I argue that work collaboration platforms don't simply support labour in the modern digital age but, behind the guise of supporting communication, have instead reengineered our sense of time and space, pushing an expectation of constant presence, forcing the workers who use such platforms to be like nodes in a circuit that is constantly flowing.

Collaboration tools like Slack and Zoom entered the industry with the promises of freedom and efficiency. In 2015, *Business Insider* claimed Slack to be the “startup that wants to kill email”. Zoom became interchangeable with remote work and meetings during the pandemic, positioning itself as the platform that allowed you to work from anywhere seamlessly. But in reality, work became something that employees now must carry everywhere. “Circuit logics increasingly perforate time and space, enabling users nearly universal access while simultaneously rendering them accessible whether they are engaging or not.” (Packer et al., 2023, p. 150) Employees feel always accessible, regardless of whether they are truly able to engage or not. Wanting some head down time to work becomes impossible as you can always be messaged and engaged with, even when you may not want to. The software that allows

you to log in and do your work allows your boss to check in on you and always keep you under the microscope.

Another major benefit of work collaboration software is being able to meet anywhere without worrying about commuting or space. However, this comes with its own set of problems. By removing the natural friction and hurdles of meetings, these platforms have created a continuously growing number of calls. The “available” green dot status supports these ever growing amounts of meetings, transforming availability into a feeling of neverending visibility. Messages outside of work hours now feel compulsory to respond to. Kornbluh (2023) captures this feeling, stating “Immediacy’s temporality of instantaneity resists tether. . . a hurry-hurry that compresses time into a tingling present” (p. 9). I understand Kornbluh’s quote as that feeling of immediacy that many of us experience when working with tight deadlines. This has become even more amplified with work collaboration software. Tasks that once could wait until you had time feel like demands waiting for an instant response, especially because one’s status is available. A digital message that you have yet to respond to now feels like a supervisor hovering at your desk waiting for your response.

Work collaboration platforms have not just changed the way we perceive time; they have changed the way we view our space. Bedrooms have started to become boardrooms, back-grounds are judged for professionalism, and family interruptions are now common workplace humour. Packer et al. (2023) note that “the standard home-to-work commute has been transformed. . . into some combination of working from home and attending to home from work via screens” (p. 154). In other words, the home itself has been turned into a part of the office. Our personal spaces, once used to get away from work, are now associated with it. This change in how we view our spaces has also intensified Zoom fatigue. Bailenson (2021) argues that faces of coworkers on screen appear at a distance normally meant for conversation with our family and loved ones (p. 4). Added to this is the constant reflection of ourselves that we see in every meeting. “Zoom users are seeing reflections of themselves at a frequency

and duration that hasn't been seen before in the history of media" (Bailenson, 2021, p. 10). This results in users being aware and observing their own faces, backgrounds, and homes to avoid professional scrutiny. The once comfort of being in your own home becomes a place of surveillance and self-doubt, leaving employees exhausted even after the call and workday ends.

One of my most important arguments against work collaboration software is the culture of surveillance and distrust it has created between employees and employers. These platforms are designed with monitoring functions in place that blur the line between necessary functions and overbearing monitoring. Many of these apps track user activity, including but not limited to mouse movements, keystrokes, logins, and even idle time. An article for the Globe and Mail found "Employers can use monitoring software to track the location of their staff, record their keystrokes, take screenshots of their devices — even take pictures using the device's camera without their employees' consent" (Lindzon, 2022). A delayed reply, which may just be a bathroom break or a walk to the kitchen, may now be seen as a sign that the employee is slacking off. As Packer et al. (2023) state, "Digital and biometric screens work in more flexible ways: their sieves can be altered for one individual, place, or metric on demand. Which information, through what channel, at what speed, and for how long can easily be regulated by simple and prevalent software." (p. 156) A manager can use such software and start surveillance, putting the worker under a microscope whenever they choose. This creates what McLuhan (1964) has coined the message of the medium. The software is not simply connecting workers, but conditioning them into continuous attention. Much like Big Brother in Orwell's 1984, the thought of always being watched creates an environment of constant paranoia for the characters. For employees who may be working under controlling managers, these two situations may not be so different, creating stressful conditions.

In conclusion, platforms like Zoom, Slack, and Teams are sold as tools for connection, but I argue that in reality, they have enabled employees to be monitored and tracked. They have

changed how we see time, turned our homes into offices, and made workers and managers relate silence to slacking. Despite claiming to boost collaboration, these tools often force employees to spend time pretending to be productive rather than actually being productive.

References

- Bailenson, J. N. (2021). *Nonverbal overload: A theoretical argument for the causes of Zoom fatigue*. *Technology, Mind, and Behavior*, 2(1), 1–6.
- Lindzon, J. (2022, June 10). *Working from home? Your boss may be spying on you*. The Globe and Mail.
- McLuhan, M. (1964). *Understanding media: The extensions of man*. McGraw-Hill.
- Orwell, G. (1949). *1984*. Secker & Warburg.
- Kornbluh, A. (2023). Introduction. In *Immediacy, or, the style of too-late capitalism* (pp. 1–23). Verso.
- Kornbluh, A. (2023). Circulation. In *Immediacy, or, the style of too-late capitalism* (pp. 24–43). Verso.
- Packer, J., Reeves, J., & Sandvig, C. (2023). Circuitous maximus: Automobility, flow, and driverless futures. In *The prison house of the circuit: Politics of control from analog to digital* (pp. 145–170). University of Minnesota Press.