

Digital labor under the Threshold of Digital Media

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Abstract: Digital labor, as a new theoretical form of "audience commodity theory" in the digital media era, represents a new form of production and labor. This paper explores the unique features of digital labor in labor form, labor products and labor time, and combining Marx's theory, it further reveals the alienation and exploitation of human social relations, emotional value and social class in the process of digital labor, and finally makes suggestions on the unequal relationship between platform and workers in the process of digital labor.

Keywords: Digital labor; Digital Capital; Labor Theory of Value; Non-Employment Exploitation

1. The origin and development of digital labor theory

In the early studies of the critical school of communication science, the labor issue was the research blind spot. In 1977, Dallas in the spread: western marxist blind spots "audience" concept, think the audience constitute goods, the media audience attention as a commodity sold to advertisers, audience attention advertising is a kind of labor, labor issues became the focus of academic debate, laid a foundation for the study of digital labor. Domestic research is the extension and development of the study on the concept, expression, ideology, labor process and alienation of foreign digital labor, but the research direction is slightly different. Foreign main research general digital labor of Internet users, which is different from the traditional employment relationship of free labor, and domestic academic circles focuses on the analysis of professional labor in Chinese Internet society, the digital labor is paid, still can use the framework of capital employment labor analysis, for most of the Internet users are involved in free labor research still need to deepen.

2. The characteristics of digital labor in the Internet era

2.1 Form of labor: production and consumption symbiosis

Free labor for Internet users is the form of digital labor studied in this paper. Users in the process of using digital media, the production of information content free to create surplus value for the platform, the free information production has duality, the user plays the dual role of producers and consumers: one is as content "producer", the user's original content of production release, share resources dynamic, thumb up comments forward behavior to platform provides a large amount of information data, platform is not directly produce information content, but have all information resources, platform by providing technical support and services for massive UGC data and user information. The second is digital work as a media "consumer". In order to meet the needs, users' a series of behaviors on the Internet provide the Internet platform with data and attention that can be used for commercial development. The platform monitors and collects information about users' preferences in video watching, article reading, online chatting and other behaviors, and sells these information to advertisers as commodities, so as to provide data support for advertisers to accurately push advertisements.

It can be seen that not only the products of the users' labor will be commercialized, but the users themselves will also become the goods sold to advertisers. Take Bilibili as an example, in 2016, the user contributed content accounted for more than 90%; in the fourth quarter of 2020, the average monthly active UP of B station was 1.9 million, the average monthly video contribution reached 5.9 million, and the monthly active users reached 202 million. The surge of users not only produced a large number of original community content, but also brought the rapid growth of advertising business. Internet users play the dual role of network information producers and consumers. On the surface, the platform is a content provider and the users are the consumers, but in fact, the content producers

are the majority of Internet users. The information content of the platform will not be consumed by consumption or possession, but will be continuously produced, but it also covers the employment relationship between producers and consumers in the traditional sense, blurs the boundary between traditional production and consumption, and thus depriving the interests of producers.

2.2 Labor products: non-material and emotional coexist

The Marxist school of autonomous doctrine believes that the contemporary labor mode has been transformed into non-material labor. Molz Orazarato first put forward the concept of "non-material labor", which refers to the labor that produces cultural content and commodity information. The products of labor under the traditional employment relationship are mostly material forms, while the products under the Internet digital labor are usually non-material content based on people's personal life, experience and interest sharing. In the era of mass media, mass media attracts the attention of the public by producing professional content, and the attention and loyalty of audiences is the labor force paid in the process of watching. In the era of several media, the user the labor subject not only attention, the content of creative production of information, also into their cognitive and emotion, the user's digital labor process is often the interest and knowledge, emotion and experience, social relationship, therefore, the Internet enterprise to the user's labor process and behavior path for data tracking and analysis, can often be very accurate for user portrait.

While expressing themselves on social media platforms, users will actively invest in their emotions and labor to build their own social identity in order to build their own social circle and maintain social relations. Therefore, the labor process of Internet users is also the process of their emotional expression and exchange. Relying on technical services and resource support, the platform encourages and guides labor subjects to actively conduct self-expression and emotional investment, so as to complete the commercialization and monetization of labor products. From each Internet platform slogan can find out, such as netease news "attitude", "B stand" what are you interested in video in B station ", douban" our spiritual corner " and so on, these feelings concept type slogan to convey to the user the spirit of the brand and advocate, encourage users through the platform reveal personality, construct self, seek recognition, so as to deepen the platform and user between spirit and value identity.

2.3 Labor time: the bridging of the boundary between production and leisure

Inspired by the Marxist theory of labor reproduction, Dallas Smaz believed that people are also reproducing labor when they relax and relax. Previous view that the audience use media to take the initiative to meet the demand, and to review the relationship between the audience, labor and platform, the researchers found that the alleged, meet the demand of the audience platform is often guide the audience to build false desire, and often through the way of emotional connection constantly attract audience reproduction data flow, through virtual emotional satisfy let audience become a part of labor production. As of December 2020, the scale of Chinese Internet users reached 989 million, mobile Internet users accounted for 99.7%, and the per capita weekly Internet time was 26.2 hours. The huge digital society composed of nearly one billion Internet users marks that all aspects of their production and life are accelerating to connect with the Internet. When netizens use the media for leisure and entertainment or seek for self-worth and identity, they enter into the process of information production and labor in the Internet industry.

"Labor hours are the measure of social value production in social media."Fox thinks the more time people spend on social media, the longer he works, and the more data they create for advertisers. The time of users' social media use is commoditized, not paid but privatized by capital, and labor exploitation occurs. From the marxist theory of surplus value, production surplus value has two ways: one is to extend the labor time, digital media age, the whole society is a big factory, Internet users labor broke the boundaries of time and space, even leisure time users are produce surplus for Internet companies value; Second, increase labor intensity. With the development of information technology, the working place, time and way of workers are no longer fixed. Users spend more and more time and energy online to produce massive data products, and participate in the value production of capital through various ways, which also makes more Internet users become digital labor.

3. The exploitation and alienation of users' digital labor process

Marx's labor theory of value points out that capitalists rely on the means of production and squeeze the surplus value of workers for labor exploitation, showing the surplus labor or unpaid labor in the form of employment with wages as remuneration, which covers the essence of the exploitation of the surplus value of workers. Marx once proposed four forms of labor alienation, which Fox agreed that digital labor contains exploitation and that it means "four alienation"; Andreyevich and others used the concept of alienation and

exploitation to discuss the free digital labor of the Internet; the latter also revealed that the degree of exploitation of media users is not significantly different from that of industrial capitalism.

3.1 The commercialization of social relations under reproduction

Internet platform by stimulating users diversified material and spiritual needs, let the user browse information behavior become labor practice, user thumb up, forwarding, comments, micro labor in express themselves at the same time, the social relations network also be included in the platform of data production and consumption, completed the process of value creation and economic production. On the one hand, under the social background of rapid development of new urbanization, rapid flow of urban and rural population and atomization of interpersonal relations, mobile social platforms platform meet the psychological needs of users to communicate with strangers. Xu Dehua and Liu Ting think based on mobile social platform relationship should be summarized as a weak relationship, but the "weak" relationship "clearly shows the nature of the" strong relationship ", the relationship can not only help urban users expand their circle to obtain information and job opportunities, and can also help them to find the right stranger, and establish close relationship, interest in social interaction, meet the user's emotional needs. Internet platform, on the other hand, is the use of users to carry out the social psychological demand and demand to achieve the purpose of the profit, the user to network social communication production of content and data become platform party unique information content, platform continuously provide economic benefits, platform will also to user data and advertisers value exchange, through the user social relations.

It is worth noting that fox, Anderson, brits, and other scholars with "public self monitoring" "participatory surveillance" to reflect the network age users digital labor consciousness, negative Internet research "participatory democracy" in "citizen voice" optimism, from the perspective of political economy research calls for users alert to digital capitalism of the network of public commercial erosion, reflect on network information age users of alienation and commercialization.

3.2 Emotional exploitation under labor alienation

Fox pointed out that digital labor is based on the four alienation of human beings, that is, the alienation of human itself, the alienation of labor tools, the object of labor and the products created by it, among which the alienation of human itself is the most noteworthy. In the view of some scholars, the development of media technology services has brought about the prosperity of participatory culture and promoted the equal and democratic participation of netizens in all aspects of society. However, it cannot hide behind the hidden extraction and exploitation of Internet labor value, and the subject of emotional alienation, under the platform capital operation, although people still willing to put all their energy in the positive in the media platform actively construct self image and maintain social relations, but as most netizens said "wake up the first thing is to open the phone", people gradually become a "half unconscious, half forced, involuntary" state of labor, in the process of use does not get the spiritual satisfaction, but present more addiction, emptiness, the alienation of loneliness and anxiety. With the emotional cultural symbols and labor products, become the influence of people and reality of power, people in the real world, the loss of identity, and even exacerbated the social relations between people and emotional alienation, become contradiction and conflict between groups, group polarization phenomenon intensified important factors.

3.3 Social class solidification under capital accumulation

Capital includes economic capital, cultural capital and social capital. The transformation between these three factors reveals the inequality between the platform and the workers from the perspective of digital labor. first, Internet enterprises can effectively transform economic capital into cultural capital and social capital; next, In the process of the initial cultural capital accumulation, The amount of cultural capital often plays a decisive role in whether the platform can win a place in the "field" where "multiple forces compete", While accumulating the cultural capital, The platform also transforms this capital into economic capital and social capital, To obtain economic benefits and attract more users' attention and participation with the unique community culture; last, The formation of an "explanatory community" that gathers people's common interests and views has accumulated more social capital for the platform, And constantly bring economic and cultural benefits, Although the use value of social media is realized in the user participation process, But platforms have control over all aspects of information, technology and rules, Thus extracting the residual value of the user data.

In the era of digital economy, digital network media and technology are reshaping new forms of social communication. People

use social media to share views, exchange information, exchange emotions, and conduct self-expression and social communication. However, people's class relations are also facing new hierarchical differentiation in the Internet environment. Get high attention opinion leaders have a strong influence and public opinion guide, and the bottom of the workers rarely get attention and remuneration, which makes the digital workers between economic benefits, cultural capital, social class increasingly inequality, platform of entry and resource support will further aggravate the phenomenon of cultural capital distribution imbalance, the rich richer, the poor poorer. It is difficult for the bottom workers to exchange and communicate through value resource acquisition and social resource possession. As time passes, they are more accustomed to network participation in social classes consistent with their own capital level, and gradually adapt to the current situation.

Epilogue

Returning to the most basic question of "audience labor theory", "whether the audience labor participates in value production", there is no doubt that the audience labor in the era of digital economy is productive, and intellectual knowledge, emotional experience, social relations and other factors have gradually become the tools and elements for users to participate in value production. On the one hand, we should actively affirm the value of Internet platforms to meet people's needs to establish social relations and realize self-worth, and have the potential to correct the confluence of individualism and collectivism; on the other hand, we should be cautious about the free possession and exploitation of the platform. For the emerging problems, we can start from four aspects: first, to promote the study of alienation and exploitation, strengthen the government's supervision of the digital platform employment system; Second, the use of artificial intelligence technology to improve productivity, to liberate and alienated workers, to realize the gradual transformation of the digital economy development model; Third, using the advantages of blockchain technology immutability and imforgerability, tracing the source, location and fair distribution of digital labor producers, realize more work and more gain; Fourth, the establishment of a shared digital media platform, exploring new types of labor organization relations, improve the data management system, regulating the data acquisition and use of internet platforms through legal and administrative means, in the process of digital labor, the platform and users will jointly share the fruits of digital labor.

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