

Political Economics Analysis on the Productive Issues of Digital Labor of Media Users

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Abstract

The labor productivity problem of media users using media digital platforms for data production is a new problem of Marxist political economy in the digital economy era. Returning to the theoretical track of Marxist political economy, the analysis of the problem from the three perspectives of the contradiction of the capital general formula, commodity of information products and the total process of commodity production shows that the digital labor of media users is productive. The non-employment change in the productivity of digital labor for media users is a new variation of Marx's classic regulations on the productivity of workers' labor in the era of digital economy, which also reflects that the basic contradictions of capitalism are still using irresistible forces to promote a new reconciliation of communist-oriented production relations within capitalism.

Keywords

Media users; Digital labor; Productivity; Media digital platform.

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of productivity has brought mankind into the era of digital economy, and the use of digital means of production has prompted workers' labor to change from traditional material labor to modern digital labor. The digital labor of media users here specifically refers to the digital media social behaviors performed by media users using the media digital platform. As Marx said, "The difference between various economic times lies not in what is produced, but in how to produce and what means of labor are used to produce. The means of labor are not only a measure of the development of human labor, but also an indicator of the social relations through which labor is carried out. "[1] In the field of information production, the rapid development of digital technology has provided powerful material means for the media communication revolution, spawning a number of influential media communication digital platforms, absorbing and nurturing a huge number of media users, and media users can always use media digital platforms anywhere and voluntarily for free. It has created a large-scale media digital economy. This new social existence has opened up a new problem domain for Marxist political economy. One of the important issues is whether the digital labor of media users is productive.

In other words, in reality, media users' seemingly unproductive media social labor actually brings value proliferation to media digital platforms that appear to be public products, which creates a contradiction. To solve this contradiction, we must go deep into the information production process of the media digital platform to explore the secret of its internal capital proliferation. Marxist political economy believes that labor is the only source of value, so starting from the digital labor of media users is the starting point and key to the study of this issue.

From the perspective of academic history, there are two theoretical approaches to the productive discussion of media users' digital labor. First, the autonomy school represented by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt put forward the concept of "non-material labor", which believed that the non-material labor of workers is the production of the activities of non-material products such as "information, communication, relationship or emotional response"[2], this kind of labor is the latest form of labor that has transformed from traditional material labor to general intellectual labor. With the collective development trend of general intelligence, this part of labor is increasingly unproductive, but it participates in the division of surplus value in the entire field of production. Second, the political economy of communication, represented by Smythe and Christian Fuchs, incorporated labor in the field of communication into Marxist political economy, and proposed the famous concepts of "audience labor" and "digital labor" and believes that the social behavior of media audiences in media communication is also a kind of labor. Especially the development of information technology has increased the mental labor, Christian Fuchs uses digital labor to explain new labor changes and thinks that "All the labor required for capital accumulation in the production belongs to digital labor"[3], "As productive labor, digital labor includes hardware production, content production, and software producer labor and productive user labor"[4]. Research on the impact of approaches, the current academic views on the productive issues of media users' digital labor are mainly divided into two groups, positive and negative. The above point of view is the basis for further research on this issue. Returning to the track of Marxist political economy to analyze this issue will help clarify the fog of thought.

2. PRODUCTIVE ANALYSIS OF DIGITAL LABOR OF MEDIA USERS

2.1. The Emergence of Media Users' Digital Labor Productivity in The Contradiction of The Capital General Formula

Returning to the logic of Marxist political economy and examining the productivity of media users' digital labor, it is not difficult to find that the value proliferation in the information production process of the media digital platform can neither be generated at the stage of capital buying the media digital platform, because it is only used as a mean of purchase or payment, does not generate value proliferation, nor can be generated at the stage when the media digital platform is directly converted into currency, because at this stage the media digital platform only transforms from a natural form to a monetary form, and does not generate value proliferation. Therefore, value proliferation can only occur during the operation of the media digital platform. Information data is the main factor to realize the value proliferation of the media digital platform. However, the media digital platform itself does not produce information data, only media users produce information data. Therefore, only the extensive digital social labor of media users makes the media digital platform have ever-increasing value and use value, so it is the media users that make the media digital platform proliferate in value. Marx believes that "only workers who produce surplus value for capitalists or serve the self-proliferation of capital are production workers." [5] From this perspective, the digital labor of media users is productive labor.

2.2. The Commercial Nature of Information Products Contradicts The Digital Labor Productivity of Media Users

Commodities are labor products that have use value and value and are exchanged. They reflect certain social production relations. Generally speaking, labor that produces commodities and creates surplus value for capitalists is productive labor. Producing goods or providing services is the prerequisite for creating surplus value. As far as the digital labor of media users is concerned, if the information data produced by the media users is not commercial, the

products of the digital labor of media users cannot meet the needs of others and cannot create surplus value, so the digital labor of media users is not productive.

Scholars who hold a negative attitude towards the productiveness of media users' digital labor believe that the digital labor of media users is not productive. Because its labor products are not commercial. On the contrary, such scholars believe that the labor of engineers who process data generated by media users is productive labor. The flaw of this kind of view is that it ignores the use value and value of data raw materials, ignores the commercial nature of digital labor products of media users and also ignores the overall labor characteristics of information product production. It is undeniable that the labor of data engineers is indeed productive labor, but the labor of media users who produce data raw materials is also productive labor, even if some scholars believe that the value of data produced by media users is negligible. This view is just as absurd as thinking that the caregiving labor of workers during the machine industry period is negligible.

In fact, this type of labor is simpler and easier to operate than traditional manual labor in the capitalist production process, but it is necessary labor for capital proliferation. This type of mental labor is equal to the superposition of a certain amount of simple manual labor. Regardless of the final information products of the media digital platform, the information produced by the media users also has use value and value, and its value is also determined by the corresponding socially necessary labor time.

Due to the public nature of the media digital platform, the information produced by media users can be exchanged with information produced by other media users without spending any money, thereby satisfying their own spiritual needs. In addition, the information products produced by media users are also the contradictory unity of use value and value. Media users cannot possess both the use value and the value of information products. Only through the exchange of information products can solve the contradictions of the information products. However, this exchange is superficially different from the exchange between owners of traditional material commodities. The exchange of media users is to browse, comment and give the thumbs-up each other directly on the media platform. The media digital platform makes this exchange possible without spending money, but media users must spend time using the media digital platform. It can be seen that the information products produced by media users are commercial, and this type of information products have use value and value to meet the needs of media users.

Media users browsing, searching, and storing the information data produced by other media users are the process of information data consumption. If the media users' personal information data has no use value and value, the media digital platform cannot attract a large number of media users to use, and the value cannot be realized. proliferation. In particular, the production of high-quality information data by some media users can attract a large number of media users to browse and give the thumbs-up. This type of personal information data has greater use value and value, and can create more surplus value for media digital platform capitalists. It can be seen that the digital labor of media users is productive.

2.3. The Embodiment of The Digital Labor Productivity of Media Users in The Overall Process of Commodity Production

Analyzing the productivity of media users' digital labor from the perspective of the overall process of commodity production can effectively explain the new labor process of capitalism. With the development of information technology, the information production process of the media digital platform increasingly presents a systematic labor process, from the establishment and maintenance of the media digital platform, to the information production of the media digital platform, to the analysis and processing of the information data of the media digital platform and produce the final data commodity, which contains different kinds of worker labor.

In other words, production has increasingly become the production of "total workers." "The characteristic of the capitalist mode of production is precisely that it separates all kinds of work, and therefore also separates mental work from manual work, or in other words, separates various types of work that are mainly mental or manual, assign to different people", "All these workers together, as a production collective, are living machines for producing this product"[6]. The total workers of the media digital platform collectively produce surplus value for the media digital platform capitalists, and their labor is productive. Therefore, the digital labor of the media users who are part of the total workers is also productive.

3. DISCUSSION ON THE NON-EMPLOYMENT OF MEDIA USERS' DIGITAL LABOR PRODUCTIVITY

The production in the digital age has qualitatively improved compared with the production in the machine industry era, which has also led to new changes in the employment relationship. Marx believed that the productive labor of workers "is the labor directly exchanged with currency as capital", and "the labor that produces surplus value for those who use labor"[7]. It can be seen that the productive labor of workers as considered by Marx contains two regulations. The first is the exchange of capital and labor to establish an employment and exploitation relationship. The second is that workers' labor must create surplus value. The first stipulation is the premise of the second stipulation, and the second stipulation is the result of the first stipulation, and the two together constitute stipulations for the productive labor of workers.

However, in the field of modern information production, media digital platform capitalists have implicitly established non-employment labor exploitation relationships with media users through platform sharing and other marketing methods, allowing media digital platform capitalists to obtain the surplus value created by workers without payment and undertake the relevant legal responsibilities that should have been assumed. This new change is different from the first aspect of Marx's regulation of productive workers, but it does not mean that it violates Marx's core criterion for productive workers-whether to create surplus value for capitalists. In the age of Marx, in the market, only capital can purchase labor, and then establish employment labor relations for exploitation. This is an inevitable prerequisite for capitalists to obtain surplus value. Therefore, Marx has the first aspect of labor productivity.

But with the development of technology, capitalists can use more ingenious ways to avoid the direct establishment of legal employment relationships with workers so as to achieve their ultimate goal of obtaining surplus value. In comparison, although the productive labor of workers has changed from hiring to non-employing, the fundamental purpose of pursuing surplus value remains unchanged. This also precisely shows that whether or not to create surplus value for capitalists is the core criterion for measuring whether the labor of workers is productive. The shift from capital's employment of workers to non-employment is actually a more covert and thorough exploitation. From the perspective of the internal operation of the capitalist economy, this new change clearly reflects the new adjustment of capitalist internal production relations caused by the basic contradictions of capitalism. It will be a carnival of capitalism sucking workers' surplus value in the near future, and it will be a weapon for communism to liberate workers in the long run.

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