

A Regulation Theory Perspective on the Relationship Between Playbour and Internet Social Media Platforms

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Abstract: Playbour, as a new type of digital labor, is commonly exploited and involves everyone using the Internet social platforms. The present study will mainly analyze how playbour is regulated by Platform capitalists based on Michel Foucault's "Theory of Regulation", and the regulation process will be presented in the early, middle, and mature stages of platform development. In the early stage, the platform is immature. In order to attract users, the platform will give them a high degree of sovereignty. In the middle stage, Platform capitalists gradually reclaim their sovereignty and the user becomes less autonomous, thus becoming a playbour. In the later stage, the playbour becomes an object of the platform and loses its sovereignty completely in the Cyberspace after being disciplined by the platform. Platform capitalists The purpose of disciplining the playbour is to increase the viscosity of users to the platform and to produce a constant stream of new cultural products for its profit. Through this analysis, this paper argues that such regulation not only exacerbates playbour's exploitation, but also leads users towards commodity worship and deification of the Internet social media platform. The ideological and linguistic culture of the labor community will be hit hard by such an impact. This paper attempts to argue the seriousness of the problem through analysis.

Keywords: playbour, internet social media platforms, capitalism, discipline

1. Introduction

In today's digital economy, Internet users are gradually changing from consumers to producers, giving rise to the group of playbour. playbour is a classification of digital labor. digital labor covers a broader range of jobs related to the digital society, including physical production line workers who produce digital media tools [1]. Playbour has two meanings, one is the unpaid labor performed by players in video games, which is not considered as labor because of its entertainment properties and its value cannot be converted into money. However, the time and effort spent by a player provides value to both the capitalists of the game development. Therefore, player's behavior in the game has been exploited [2]. Another definition of playbour refers to users who perform all unpaid activities, such as publishing their opinions on Internet platforms [3]. The knowledge and opinions produced by these users have value in themselves, and the very act of posting opinions on various portals provides visual benefits to the capitalists of these platforms, so this group is also exploited and the value of their labor has been ignored for a long time.

The content produced by playbour is the cultural knowledge products on the Internet platform and the time they spend in using various platforms. Their production is driven by themselves and there is no external pressure, which makes this kind of labor playful in nature. The reason why playbour still use social media even though they are exploited is not only the objective condition of not being able to leave social media but also another important reason that playbour are exploited. Another important reason is that playbour, like other types of workers, is disciplined by the capitalist system. Discipline theory, first proposed by Michel Foucault, refers to the various rules imposed by the subject of power to control the physical body of the object, including the space and time of its activities, surveillance and punishment. Internet social media itself is the object and expression tool of users, but after capitalism entered the cyberspace, playbour became the object of power, and the length and scope of its activities were strictly controlled from Platform capitalists [4]. This control relies on network surveillance technology, the monopoly of users' personal data and the design of addictive content, whereby capitalism profits from users' production and consumption behavior in its platform. In this paper, we will analyze how Internet social media users become playbour and are regulated by Platform capitalists through the theory of discipline.

2. Literature Review

The term digital playbour was coined by M. Törhönen, L. Hassan, M. Sjöblom, & J. Hamari, describing the unpaid, informal contributions people make to the creation, maintenance, and improvement of game content in digital games that are of [5]. In 2013, Geert Lovink and Ned Rossiter brought the topic into the academy with the publication of the first paper examining the playbour, which explored the issue of workforce in games [6]. Since then, the group of playbour has been studied as part of the labour, and later developed studies of gender in playbour, such as S. Dargonaki, who explored how to achieve gender equality in games and called for game designers to seriously consider the gender of play spaces to create more equal and inclusive play experiences [7]. Another reification of playbour, the act of cultural products produced by users of internet social platforms without compensation in the process of using the platforms, was proposed by Fuchs of producing content by users as a platform owner's unpaid contribution and has a commercial value. In the same field, van Dijck proposes that social media are not isolated technological tools but are shaped by the interplay of various social, cultural and political factors and in this way calls for regulation and control of playbour in terms of policy, law and social practice [8]. In addition, Couldry, N. and Mejias, U. A. proposes digital colonialism, where big data and algorithms collect and analyze playbour's data by Digital colonialism redefines and formulates playbour's identity, values and ways of acting, while playbour as data producers do not receive any substantial returns from these activities [9]. D. Kelsey, and L. Bennett applies Foucault's theory of regulation to the analysis of social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. The impact of the auditing system on playbour [10]. In addition to this, Fuchs' 2014 book *Digital Labour and Karl Marx* laid the groundwork for a research direction in the field that is closely related to Marxism.

This paper will also analyze the influence of Platform capitalists on the use of social media platforms by the playbour group, using Michel Foucault's theory of the discipline.

3. Methodology

Discipline is a new term coined by Michel Foucault to refer to the techniques of power in recent societies. This power can intervene, train and monitor the flesh as well as produce knowledge. The central feature of this technology is normativity. In Foucault's theory, power in the Middle Ages and before was embodied by punishment, which was carried out both physically and mentally. In the 19th century, prisons, symbolizing modern disciplinary techniques, came into widespread use, and

universal surveillance further matured disciplinary techniques. Bianchin proposed the panoramic open-view prison, which was designed as a kind of ring prison, with all cells facing a central surveillance tower, where guards had a clear view of the prisoner's activities. Foucault built on this to create panoptic open-viewism, in which guards or warders are not present, even if they are not, and the watched can achieve self-control through surveillance. In refining the theory of discipline, which has a broad scope of analysis, Foucault engages in a number of critiques of knowledge, illness, mental illness, rules, sexuality, discourse, and ideology. Foucault's discussion of social events through the theory of discipline departs from the concepts of subject and economy. As a result, the academic analysis of social phenomena is no longer bound to psychoanalysis and Marxist political economy.

Foucault argues that the initial object of discipline is the human body, especially in modern Western society, which became the primary object of discipline beginning in the 16th century. In this period, the human body was seen as a malleable material that could be shaped and controlled through various mechanisms and techniques. For example, medical, military, and prison institutions controlled and modified the human body through regimentation mechanisms to conform to specific social needs and power relations. This regulation and shaping of the body are not only about controlling the body but also involve constructing the subject's identity and body. As the social structure develops and the need for regulation increases, the object of regulation is no longer just the human body and behavior; the object of regulation gradually expands from the body to a broader social sphere, including thought, speech, behavior, and culture. In his writings, Foucault emphasizes the power of knowledge and the intellectuality of power, that is, power and knowledge are interpenetrating and interactive. Through the production and control of knowledge, power can shape and control the functioning and behavior of society. At the same time, knowledge itself is influenced by power, and different power relations and practices can lead to different ways of producing and disseminating knowledge. Discipline is usually exercised by the subject of power over the object through discipline. In the case of physical discipline, the disciplinary agency classifies and standardizes the population, and monitors, punishes, regulates, and trains. At the mental level, the disciplinary agency achieves the purpose of disciplining the object through the production of discourse and knowledge, by constructing a discourse that the subject of power identifies with. After a long period of domestication, the "disciplinary society" will be transformed into what Deleuze calls a "self-controlled society", i.e., the object of power will spontaneously identify with the ideology being disciplined. Even if the subject of power no longer gives orders, the objects of power will control themselves, monitor and control each other, and thus the social ideology will converge with the expectations of the subject of power [11].

In *Discipline and Punish*, the purpose of discipline relies on spatial distribution, temporal arrangement, activity control, and punishment to achieve it [12]. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault proposes discursive discipline to complement the scope of discipline [13]. Because of the virtual nature of the Internet social platform, users are not forced to use it, so discipline is accomplished in a more covert way. In this context, "covert" means that Platform capitalists already have a mechanism in place to compel users to behave according to the platform's expectations before they are disciplined to do so. After a long period of disciplined behavior, the users of the platform develop addictive habits and identify with certain rules, and the entire user ecology of the platform moves towards what Derrida calls self-control. Even if the platform no longer restrains users' various behaviors, users will still exercise self-restraint and mutual restraint.

4. Body

4.1. From User to Playbour

The regulation of users by Internet social platforms has not existed from its inception. As a tool for

users to express themselves, the social platform was initially an object of power, while the users were the subject of power. After Platform capitalists intervened, Platform capitalists became the subject of power, and social platforms became the tools for Platform capitalists to discipline users. In this power relationship, users become the object of power. Therefore, the regulation of users by Internet social platforms is experienced as an exchange of power subjects and objects. Scholar van Dijck points out that social media are not isolated technological tools, but are shaped by the interplay of various social, cultural and political factors. In his interpretation of social media, social media as a whole has taken on attributes beyond tools. But on specific social platforms, it can only be called playbour when the user becomes an object of power.

In the first stage of the development of Internet social platforms. When they did not hold a certain market share, platforms needed to transfer power to users in order to attract more users. At this stage, the platform is not profitable, and the content posted by users and the act of interacting with each other on the platform brings usage and online activity to Platform capitalists though. However, at this stage, the content produced by users did not translate into real capital. Wikipedia is a representative example of this, with content compiled by users themselves. Wikipedia also encourages users to communicate through other platforms, such as some pages that provide the names of Telegram group chats that users form themselves (Telegram is a cross-platform instant messaging software that was introduced in 2013). Wikipedia does not monetize its users, and therefore does not need to limit all users' actions to its own platform. Thus Wikipedia becomes a space for users to exchange information resources. When this information is rich enough to form a knowledge graph, it attracts more users to supplement and expand its own information content and system.

After the first phase, when Platform capitalists have a large number of users and a certain market share, they start to reclaim their power in order to reach profitability. What determines whether the platform is profitable or not is the content that playbour creates on the platform for free. Of course, in Foucault's theory of regulation, whether a social platform exists as an object does not depend entirely on whether the platform capitalist is profitable or not, but should focus more on the owner of power. When the power of the platform is much greater than that of the user, it means that the position of the subject and the object has changed. Take "Douban", a social networking site from China, for example, whose early operation model was also decentralized without the involvement of the platform. The platform's communication is based on users creating their own groups and recruiting users who are interested in a certain topic for internal discussions. However, after the platform gained a certain number of users, the platform operator has repeatedly rectified or removed the platform's functions and user-produced content in order to achieve the platform's speech environment expected by the capitalists. "Douban" shares similarities with another social platform from China, Baidu Post. Both platforms have been owned by companies under the capitalist system since their inception. At the beginning of the development of these two platforms, the power of Platform capitalists was less than that of users. When the development reached a later stage, both platforms found their own platform characteristics through their own user characteristics. In recent years, many Internet social platforms will make user portraits of their own platform users in their year-end summaries, which is a direct reflection of platform regulation.

4.2. Playbour's Process of Being Disciplined

As mentioned above, the environment in which playbour is produced is a virtual space, and playbour is not forced to use a certain platform, so Platform capitalists' discipline is not directly effective. Under this situation, platform's initiatives to make users use it consistently over time are a necessary prerequisite for the platform's discipline of playbour's discipline is a necessary prerequisite for its implementation, and is one of the components of the discipline.

4.2.1. Initial Period

When social media platforms are first established, they invite a large number of celebrities in order to attract users and enhance the visibility of the platform. In Foucault's discourse regulation theory, this is a manifestation of regulation through knowledge. Different social media platforms will invite celebrities from different fields according to their own positioning. Twitter, for example, was one of the first social media platforms to invite celebrities. As a micro-blogging and social networking service, Twitter invites celebrities in the entertainment industry, such as Ashton Kutcher, Justin Bieber and Katy Perry. "Zhihu", a social Q&A site, invites resident celebrities from different fields of knowledge, such as Olympic champion Sun Yang and Tsinghua University professor Wu Jun. Unlike ordinary users, the presence of these invited celebrities on social media platforms and the content they produce can be directly translated into real capital, i.e., they bring a lot of users and attention to their platforms. These resident celebrities are themselves the spokespersons of the social media platforms, and the knowledge they possess is produced through a specific platform, which means that the platform has the knowledge and the right to speak, thus playing a role in regulating ordinary users.

4.2.2. Mid-term Period

In order to increase user stickiness, platforms usually adopt strategies such as providing personalized content and offering personalized settings. This can effectively increase users' comfort level, but is predicated on the platform's possession of users' personal information and browsing data. Although in some regions platform operators are required by law not to disclose user information, users are well aware that their information is known to the platform, regardless of whether the platform party may disclose it. In the case of social media, for example, according to scholar Andrejevic, social media platforms can be considered "prisons". This is because they impose a series of regulations and restrictions on user-generated content to ensure that the content is in line with the platform's interests and policies. In this process, the platforms take control over the users and they become the objects of regulation. According to Foucault's panoptic open-mindedness to explain this phenomenon, the user is a "prisoner" under surveillance. The platform operator, who has information about the users and can punish them when they violate the norms of the platform, is the invisible "prison guard" of the "prisoners". In fact, this view is not exactly a metaphor, using the social media platform as an ontology and the prison guard as a metaphor. In fact, there are indeed cases where the police are live-streaming on social media. On one Chinese live-streaming platform, the police arrested the culprit through the IP address provided by the platform while the grave robber and the cultural relics expert were connected to identify the stolen relics.

4.2.3. Post Period

When users use an established Internet social platform, they are essentially engaging in unpaid content production, whether they are posting information for all users through that platform or engaging in other private activities such as shopping or private socializing through that platform. These platforms turn user-generated content into commercial profits, and this commercialization process makes users a mix of producers and consumers. In the process of use playbour also faces various forms of regulation imposed by the platform. The next section will analyze playbour through both situations as producer and consumer.

When playbour acts as a producer, the content they produce is subject to strict scrutiny. Most Internet social platforms provide users with a set of written instructions on standards of behavior that prohibit inappropriate speech, and this standard usually depends on laws and some moral concepts that generate consensus at the social level. This does not mean that censorship is just or perfect,

however, because the purpose of these platforms in providing codes of conduct is to make it easier to manage users. These rules are flexible in practice and are mainly aimed at ensuring that playbour does not make statements that are detrimental to the platform. In most platforms, non-mainstream political ideas are deleted or the account posting the content is banned once it is published. On some platforms where the founder is well known, if the content is openly critical of the founder, it will also be deleted or not even reviewed. These platforms' control over playbour's speech makes the platform a site of power relations, and the platform operator is the representative of the power structure. The playbour, as the producer and the regulated party, does not accept this regulation completely, but resists it through various means. For example, using homophones to replace some sensitive words, or building a set of vocabulary shared among platform users to metaphorically describe things that are not allowed to be discussed on the platform. In the process of resistance, Playbour also confirms and shapes its own subjectivity, making playbour have a deeper understanding and control over its own behavior.

When playbour is a consumer, he usually spends money on social platforms in two ways. The first is to make online purchases directly through the mall contained in the social platform itself. The platform then regulates this group through the allocation of space and the division of time. In the online shopping pages, various functions construct a new space. People will spend time browsing these pages and will make the same actions under some specific instructions, eventually placing orders on the platform and becoming consumers. The space allocation of a platform depends largely on its page presentation. Take Taobao, a Chinese e-commerce and social platform, for example, the bottom of the Taobao homepage has five functional partitions: the first two buttons function as product feeds, the merchant's dialog box is in the center, followed by the shopping cart, and finally, the after-sales service. The space distribution reserves a lot of space for product display, and users can browse an endless number of pages. The arrangement of functions basically follows the steps of product exchange, i.e., selecting products, buying products and after-sales service, providing convenience for users. Like Taobao, Tik Tok and Kwai are other Chinese platforms that combine shopping and social networking. In Foucault's theory of discipline, the subject of power establishes a precise schedule of what the disciplined must do, and makes the disciplined accustomed to this arrangement through constant repetition. In addition to schedules, temporal regulations should be made for actions so that time can penetrate the flesh of the disciplined. In the online shopping platform, the platform party cannot blatantly set up a schedule for the users and require them to complete some tasks at a specific time. So the platform will set some rewards or develop some mini-games to increase users' browsing and time spent on the platform. Take Taobao as an example, playbour can get product coupons or other freebies if they reach achievements in some games they set up. In Tik Tok, playbour can get cash for videos of sufficient length, but they need to reach a fixed amount before they can be distributed. This activity combines both properties of playbour, in addition to regulating playbour to use the platform with a steady frequency and spend money on it, and by setting up games so that the playbour community continues to be productive on the platform.

4.2.4. The Result of Playbour's Discipline: The Tendency to Worship Commodities

The concept of commodity fetishism was introduced by Marx in *Capital*, referring to the fact that in capitalist society, people see commodities as objects with mysterious power, believing that their value lies not in their use value but in their exchange value, thus giving them a supernatural power [14]. In commodity fetishism, people see the price of commodities rather than their use value, which makes commodities themselves a mysterious thing with supernatural power and value. Under this notion, commodities seem to have the ability to reproduce themselves, rather than being produced by humans as a result. What the Internet social platform is to playbour has the tendency to be a myth.

As mentioned earlier, different platforms draw user profiles for their users. User Persona is the

process of characterizing users through research, observation and analysis of target users. The purpose is to better understand user needs, habits, behaviors and attitudes in order to better design and provide products and services. Usually, user profiling includes information about users' basic information (such as age, gender, occupation, etc.), habitual behaviors, needs and pain points, etc. Unlike traditional enterprises, Internet social platforms generate usage reports from user profiles and release them separately to users in the form of usage reports at the end of the year. The first Internet platform to enable year-end usage reports was Facebook in 2013 with its Year in Review feature, which shows users the most important moments, posts and photos from the past year on Facebook. Since then, many platforms have developed this feature. Some platforms such as have further expanded the public scope of their user profiles. They withhold information about users and post the average age, frequently searched terms and common expressions of platform users on their websites. These tags cater to users' categorization and generalization psychology and social identity psychology. In turn, the terms frequently used by users on a platform increase people's identification with that platform's community. Take the example of "Bilibili", a Chinese video site. Each year, the platform publishes its "buzzwords of the year", which are mostly created by users and are then certified by the platform for wider use. The platform's users are proud of the fact that their words are part of the culture of the platform. Since many platforms have a highly identifiable user base, some users may unconsciously divide themselves into camps when using different platforms, considering themselves to belong to a certain platform and labeling other platforms as stereotypes. For example, "Kwai" is often seen as uneducated because of the average age of its users. "Douban" is seen as a feminist platform because its users are mostly women. Therefore, different types of users also tend to choose which platforms to use by these labels. In this segment, the platform is not just a tool, but functions more like a church, where people with the same ideology gather to communicate with each other. Users inject ideology into the platform, but use it because it covers people with that ideology, and see it as a symbol of a certain ideology outside the platform, a process of alienation of users as playbour. All the contents presented on the platform are produced by the playbour, but the playbour sees these produced discourses as higher than its own will, and this is the result of the playbour being regulated.

5. Conclusion

The process of playbour being regulated by the Internet social platforms undergoes a shift in the power subject-object relationship. During the immature period of the platforms, the people who used these platforms were just ordinary users. After the Platform capitalists interfered with the users, the users lost their sovereignty and were regulated by them, thus becoming playbour. eventually the group of playbour would go to commodity worship as the platform matured, and the platform completed the transformation from a tool to a god. The whole process of regulating users by the platform is carried out under the operation of capitalism, and there is no way to reverse the fate of users becoming playbour and being exploited. If we want to change this situation, we need to develop the Internet social media platforms into the users' own platforms. This needs to be studied from the perspective of platform capitalism, which is not covered in this paper and can be discussed in future study.

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