

Research on digital survival based on digital capitalism

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Abstract: *This study delves into the emergence of digital capitalism, focusing on its profound impact on the digital survival of individuals in modern society. Through anticipating a range of social issues arising in the context of digital capitalism, we observe these problems continuously encroaching upon each individual. The sweeping wave brought about by digital capitalism significantly affects our digital existence in three main dimensions: individuals in society, individuals with themselves, and individuals with others. Through a comprehensive analysis of the social issues under digital capitalism, this study aims to gain a deep understanding of the realistic challenges faced in digital survival. Moreover, it seeks to provide thorough reflection and practical recommendations for addressing these challenges. By conducting a dimensional analysis of digital survival, we aspire to contribute to finding more comprehensive and sustainable development paths for individuals and society in the era of digital capitalism.*

Keywords: *digital capitalism, digital survival, dimensional analysis*

1. Introduction

As we enter the era of digital survival, digital technology is also contributing significantly to the process of globalizing capitalism. The advent of digital capitalism in the information age is characterized by the influence of digital technologies, with information networks being a representative force. These technologies exert substantial impact on various aspects of society, leading to a series of changes in the operation of capital and triggering numerous transformations in other fields. Digital capitalism has emerged as a dominant force in the current world, sweeping through with unparalleled strength. Digital technology, with its cutting-edge capabilities, navigates challenges wherever it goes. While we enjoy the convenience brought by digital technology, we unwittingly find ourselves succumbing to the erosion of digital alienation, falling into a new breeding ground without even realizing it[1].

Domestic research primarily situates concepts such as digital labor and digital workers within the context of reality, studying strategies and methods based on the current situation in modern society. Alternatively, it examines instances of digital exploitation on various websites, such as Facebook, Twitter, Sina Weibo, Bilibili, etc., combining theory with practical analysis[2]. In his article, X. Zhao points out that in the current era of information civilization, digital technology cannot escape its fate as a profit-seeking tool. This highly covert profit-making method intensifies amidst the development tide of economic globalization. The personal labor achievements of content creators are engulfed in the process of commodification. Under the guise of entertainment, individuals are unaware of the pros and cons, unwittingly becoming part of the digital workforce in the digital age. Using this as an example, we can observe that the operating models of many similar websites exploit digital labor based on digital platforms. Through such analysis and reflection, we can gain a clearer understanding of the significant impact of digital capitalism on social production and labor. W. Wang straightforwardly proposes the idea of rational and bold utilization of capital[3]. In the current process of globalization, the influence of digital capitalism is unavoidable. However, under the conditions of our current socialist market economy, we can boldly use digital capital for a new round of digital economic development. On the other hand, J. Lan introduces a new perspective, suggesting a reevaluation of alienation as a positive force. Given the unpredictable future of rapid technological advancement, especially with the exponential progress of digital technology according to Moore's Law, this acceleration may not only surpass our control but also break through the shackles of capitalism. At this point, alienation becomes a new weapon to break free from the constraints of capitalist barriers. When studying digital capitalism, it is crucial to recognize that the starting point and foundation lie in the current reality, with the practical application of theoretical research being a key objective.[4]

In foreign research, Dallas Smythe, in his work "Dependency Road," early on pointed out the

interpretation of digital labor. He argued that broadcasting and television merely serve as representations provided to the consuming audience, with the audience being treated as commodities, contributing invisible labor to broadcasting and television companies. This perspective corresponds to the current digital era, where the listening and viewing labor of the past is now represented by digital labor. Subsequently, Dan Schiller defined digital capitalism, stating that its notable feature is the infiltration of information networks into various aspects of the capitalist production process, extending its influence to every corner of social life[5]. Christian Fuchs conducted a comprehensive analysis on this issue, publishing a series of works. He believes that understanding the core concept of digital labor is central to exploring the issue of digital capitalism today. Digital labor, using its concealment under the guise of entertainment, attracts us to contribute to the accumulation of digital capital. Unbeknownst to us, we are drawn into the profit-seeking process of digital platforms as free commodities. Terranova pointed out that free labor emerges in this context, with our consumption being entangled in the production process. Digital laborers, during enjoyable entertainment, unknowingly suffer from hidden exploitation. Nick Land highlighted the rapid development in the Shanghai region of China, noting it as a force that other cities around the world find challenging to catch up with. He observed a power in China, particularly in Shanghai, that operates beyond the constraints of capitalism—an accelerating force that surpasses the development of contemporary capitalism[6].

2. People and Society: The new alienation of digital labor

Karl Marx conducted a profound exploration of alienation, positing four forms of alienation within the production relations characterized by private ownership of the means of production. These forms are: alienation of labor itself; alienation between the worker and the product of labor; alienation between individuals and their "species" essence; and alienation in interpersonal relationships.

In the current landscape of digital labor development, the characteristics of modern digital labor alienation manifest in several aspects. Firstly, there is the capitalization of digital labor itself. Initially prevalent on the internet, digital labor existed with the aim of enhancing labor subjectivity. However, contemporary digital labor has gradually degenerated into a profit-seeking tool for capital, with the profit motive penetrating the neutrality of digital technology itself. The capitalization of digital labor has become an unstoppable trend in the global market, deviating from its original essence and forcibly assimilating into the modern capitalist system. Secondly, the products of digital labor have similarly become alien entities. In the capitalist market based on private ownership, the alienation of labor products is inevitable. As a form of free labor, digital labor creates value when users interact with screens, and through platform aggregation and algorithm integration, it ultimately becomes a tool for profit. However, as producers of data, we cannot claim ownership, and this big data information can, in turn, influence and even manipulate us. Therefore, the alienation of digital labor extends to our own species essence. Most people have yet to realize that the modern cyberspace installs an invisible shackle, and the "freedom" perceived by digital laborers is merely a surface phenomenon. This form of alienated labor turns our lives into a means of maintaining individual survival, deviating from the essence of freedom. This alienation, through a more covert pathway, affects us, with powerful digital forces as an invisible ruling power accelerating our confusion and decline. The alienation of human species essence inevitably speeds up the estrangement and reorganization of interpersonal relationships. Gradually, a "digital hierarchy" emerges in human interactions, where the exchange value of information becomes guided by traffic. In recent years, some attention-seeking "internet celebrities" have engaged in exaggerated and outrageous behavior to attract attention and monetize traffic at higher rates. If this continues, human existence will become increasingly instrumental, and relationships between individuals will revolve around the central point of profitability. Such behaviors exacerbate the inequality in the distribution of benefits among workers and accelerate the alienation of human relationships[7].

3. People and themselves: the change of man's subjectivity

From Socrates' "know yourself" inscribed on the lintel of the Delphic Oracle to Protagoras' assertion that "man is the measure of all things," from Nietzsche's concept of the "overman" to the deconstructionist notion of the "twilight of subjectivity," the issue of subjectivity has consistently been a fervent topic in the realm of philosophy. The question of self-identity accompanies the growth and development of each individual throughout their life. In today's digital age, the development of human subjectivity has similarly undergone a complex situation of elevation and simultaneous challenges.

3.1. Virtual practice enhances human subjectivity

Virtual practice refers to "the sensory activities of the subject in virtual space, utilizing digital means

for bidirectional objectification according to certain purposes." The continuous advancement of network digital technology has played a crucial role in the emergence of virtual practice, permeating various aspects of social life and gradually assuming a prominent position in our daily lives. Subjectivity, on the other hand, pertains to the characteristics and attributes that individuals exhibit and express in their social practices of understanding and transforming objects. Specifically, it refers to "the conscious initiative shown by individuals as subjects in their relationship with objects." This encompasses elements such as autonomy, self-determination, selectivity, and creativity[8].

Virtual practice, compared to the real-world practices undertaken by traditional subjects, exhibits several distinctive changes that have propelled significant development in human subjectivity. Firstly, there is an expansion of the subject practice domain, with virtuality as the primary manifestation, enhancing the subject's selectivity. Real-world practices involve transforming objective entities within physical space, whereas virtual practices transcend the limitations of physical space. Leveraging virtual technologies on computers, virtual practices construct a hyper-realistic perception of a new world within the realm of cyberspace. While virtual practices take on a digitized form, they inherently retain a tangible reality, being a portrayal and creation based on the real world. Virtual practices break free from spatial constraints, enabling the development of human subjectivity to transcend from physical space to cyberspace, creating entirely new spatial conditions and introducing new choices. Secondly, virtual practice enhances the autonomy of subject practice activities. Real-world practical activities are often constrained by various objective historical conditions, a limitation broken by the rise of online spaces. Through virtual practice, we achieve the reproduction of various possibilities previously imagined, providing the subject with unprecedented freedom and autonomy. This freedom not only surpasses spatial constraints but also establishes conditions in time, shattering the layers of constraints imposed by real-world historical conditions. Finally, virtual practice elevates the subject's creativity, opening up new realms of thought. The emergence of various virtual domains in cyberspace, created by the rise of online spaces, elevates the development of the subject's autonomous agency to a new level. It establishes a broader horizon, expanding into new territories beyond previous cognitive limitations. In virtual practice, the subject's cognitive abilities, awareness, and perceptual capabilities experience an unparalleled enhancement in creativity that traditional real-world practices cannot achieve.

The emergence and rise of virtual practice have enriched the forms of human activities, elevating our levels of engagement, particularly in the realms of spatial geography, temporal conditions, and cognitive development. In these three aspects, virtual practice has facilitated significant leaps in human autonomy, selectivity, and creativity.

3.2. The impact of digital existence on human reality

In the early stages of the emergence of virtual practice, the unprecedented opportunities and significant developmental prospects it brought are undeniable. As we engage in everyday virtual practices, it is challenging to imagine that this remarkably convenient mode of engagement also introduces substantial issues and influences on our comprehensive development. When studying "human," our starting point is the "real person," referring to the existence of people in reality within the framework of historical materialism.

The reality of human existence is twofold, encompassing both natural and mental aspects. The impact of virtual practice on us is primarily evident in the following two aspects. Firstly, concerning the natural existence of humans, when we become engrossed in the virtual world, virtual practice significantly influences the development of our physical functions. Prolonged immersion in the virtual spaces created by virtual practices, where most daily tasks can be accomplished with just a "click of a finger," magnifies our inherent inertia. For instance, the popularity of various food delivery and online shopping platforms in recent years has allowed many individuals to comfortably stay at home without needing to step outside. In this scenario, the immersion in virtual practice has led to numerous negative effects on both physical and mental health, with people experiencing health issues and a continuous degradation of physical functions. In recent years, diseases typically associated with aging, such as diabetes and heart diseases, have quietly extended their reach to younger individuals. Moreover, the incidence of psychological disorders such as depression and social anxiety is steadily increasing[9].

Secondly, virtual practice also simultaneously impacts our mental existence. Although the advent of virtual practice initially contributed to the development of our subjectivity, as it evolved, it introduced certain issues that exacerbated the crisis of subjectivity. The self-identity crisis that exists in real-world practices has not been alleviated but rather intensified in certain aspects through the evolution into virtual practice. In virtual spaces, our bodies are encoded as digital entities, often existing in a "non-present" state, and these digital entities gradually begin to engage in activities that encroach upon our physical bodies. The big data networks on which these digital entities rely continue to be wielded by digital powers. Designers of digital platforms, driven by the maximization of their own interests, incorporated addictive

algorithm mechanisms from the beginning, causing individuals to not only easily lose themselves in virtual spaces but also become deeply ensnared, unable to extricate themselves. People entrapped in the contradiction between the virtual and the real undergo the loss of their emotional bearings, the erosion of personal independence, and the absence of self-identity. In the era of digital existence, the primary mode of communication for individuals has shifted to virtual interactions based on digital platforms. While virtual interactions enhance the convenience and reduce the costs of interpersonal communication, persisting in this manner is detrimental to the emotional development of individuals and may even trigger emotional crises. In recent years, there has been a growing number of "otaku" individuals, and the proportion of young people living alone has significantly increased. People in digital spaces rely on virtual communication for emotional sustenance, leading to a gradual reduction in face-to-face communication. Some individuals become accustomed to interactions in the online space and grow hesitant toward real-life interactions, giving rise to issues such as social anxiety. The freedom of digital identity allows individuals in virtual spaces to construct multiple distinct virtual selves across different platforms, potentially leading to confusion and disorientation during role transitions. The state of being "non-present" in the virtual space, when prolonged, can cause individuals to excessively indulge in the online world and start evading reality. This complex confusion between the virtual and the real not only affects our daily lives but, over time, can plunge us into a state of "digital alienation," where independent personalities cease to exist. In the age of the internet information explosion, distinguishing between true and false information becomes challenging. Amidst this vast environment, lacking discernment can lead us to become unwittingly part of the "mob mentality," swept along by the current. Moreover, in this era of "attention economy," many platforms and media, driven by self-interest, disregard factual truth, leading to the proliferation of fake news and reports, causing many individuals to fall into confusion. The self-value of individuals, caught in the squeeze of commercial culture, the culture of entertainment unto death, and consumerism, becomes shrouded in self-doubt. Another segment of individuals may persist in immersing themselves in a self-image crafted under the "filter," seeking false social approval by conforming to widely imposed aesthetic standards[10].

4. People and Others: Changes in communication in digital space

4.1. The reconstruction development of virtual communication

The development of digital technology has created a new space for digital interactions for modern humans. Naturally, our modes of communication have undergone revolutionary changes. In the blink of an eye, the era of "slowly in the past" can only be nostalgically recalled when reflecting on the past. Liberated from the constraints of time and space, the ways we interact have witnessed epochal transformations.

The reconstructive development of virtual interactions first manifests as a reconstruction of social relationships. The stringent order and complex relationships present in the real world are completely shattered. Social classes and formalities can be ignored, and as the body relinquishes its dominance to digital entities in online interactions, some of the awe and taboos in the real world dissipate. In this specific cyberspace, everything undergoes a carnival-like subversion, traditional rituals and strict hierarchical constraints cease to exist. The relationships in the online space represent a liberation and release from real-life social relations, creating a subversive reconstruction of relationships that offers a carnival-like interactive experience. The current state of digital network social activities is unprecedentedly lively, akin to the description of "carnival" by Bakhtin—universal, free, equal, and subversive. Just as in the chain of the information production cycle in the online world, we also participate in a series of processes involving the production, reception, and transmission of information, acquiring the identity of "participants."

Another manifestation of the reconstructive development of virtual interactions is the diverse and personalized construction of virtual selves. Modern digital space interactions are like attending a grand masquerade together. We can freely dress up as roles entirely different from our daily lives, switching personalities, voices, appearances, and genders at will. This unprecedented interaction experience brings a great sense of satisfaction to our psychology. In the virtual digital space, people's interactions rely on digitized entities constructed by digital symbols. It differs from face-to-face communication in real life. Through this virtuality, not only can emotional needs be satisfied, but it also serves as a special way to help individuals realize their ideal self-worth. For example, on various digital platforms, we can have more than one identity. In the virtual space, our vast physical world has been tightly compressed into a tiny micro "global village," characterized by universality, real-time interaction, limitless interactivity, and freedom, collectively shaping the current state of communication. However, the carnival-like characteristics of the digital network space still reflect external changes, and the essential nature of communication in real life remains unchanged. The phenomenon of communication alienation will not

be eliminated by the emergence of virtual digital interactions. This intermittent carnival can temporarily help us escape the troubles of communication alienation. At the same time, virtual interactions also face relative challenges[11].

4.2. The digitization of traditional data

Virtual interactions require support from traditional data. Traditional data refers to macro data related to society, population, space, and urban economy. As shown in the graph, survey statistics and remote sensing mapping are two major methods for obtaining traditional data. This basic method is commonly used, and I won't elaborate on it here. Traditional methods of data acquisition will continue to play an important role within a certain spatiotemporal range until digital technology completely replaces them. Therefore, traditional data acquisition methods still need attention. Moreover, traditional methods have accumulated a large amount of historical spatial information for cities, and this urban memory cannot be replaced by any modern technology. In the era of digital survival, new tools and platforms for big data applications can digitize these foundational data, creating large databases for more intuitive and convenient use. This also ensures the historical continuity of this urban information.

For example, digitizing traditional statistical yearbooks to create a database and then using webGIS technology to seamlessly integrate the yearbook database with various administrative boundaries, forming a visualized yearbook database for easy querying. Leveraging web-based regional analysis models, the previously complex GIS spatial analysis and thematic map production are transformed into simple web operations.

5. Conclusion

The conception of the benign development of digital survival is proposed based on the current reality. In the current context, we are gradually providing a better development environment, a more complete institutional guarantee, and a more rigorous legal system for digital survival. Thanks to the efforts of the country in digital construction, the convenience of digital life has taken a leading position worldwide, which is evident to all. This study on the issue of digital survival under digital capitalism aims to reveal some of the negative impacts of digital capitalism on our society and individuals. By investigating the root causes, the study attempts to find solutions to resist the negative effects of digital capitalism in the era of digital survival. A detailed examination of previous literature reveals a lack of practical exploration, with most studies relying solely on a theoretical perspective and lacking practicality. However, due to the limited level of understanding and academic ability of the author, there are still many shortcomings, and the understanding of the issue is not comprehensive enough, and the theoretical analysis is not deep enough.

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