

# The Karl Marx Problem in Contemporary New Media Economy: A Critique of Christian Fuchs' Account

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## Abstract

This article focuses on five flaws of Christian Fuchs' approach of Web 2.0 economy. Here, Fuchs' views on immaterial production, productivity of labor, commodification of users' data, underestimation of financial aspects of digital economy, and the violation of Marx's laws of value production, rate of exploitation, fall tendency of profit rate, and overproduction crisis are put into question. This article defends the thesis Fuchs fails to apply Marxian political economy to the contemporary phenomena of Web 2.0 economy. It is possible to avoid Fuchs' errors, and another approach is possible to remake Marxism relevant for an analysis of the new media economy.

## Keywords

labor, new media theory, political economy, communism, critical media studies, Internet

The concept of digital labor is one of the hotly debated issues in contemporary theories on new media economy. Put roughly, digital labor clusters around the questions of how communicative infrastructures of digital media are commercialized and commodified, where the economic value and profit of the new media companies come from, what social consequences the commercial captures of communicative infrastructures imply, and which theoretical paradigm to apply. The last issue involves political assessments that not only analyze the economical nature of digital media but also intervene in social consequences of the very reality of them.

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The ongoing debate on the new media economy, including the exchange between Fuchs (2012, 2015), Arvidsson and Colleoni (2012), Andrejevic (2015), Robinson (2015), Jin and Feenberg (2015), and Bolaño and Vieira (2015), engage with some important aspects of the social relations of ownership and power in commercialized infrastructures of the digital media. Marxism becomes a relevant issue here when the new media theorists try to reconfigure the critical conceptions of labor value, exploitation, alienation, or economic crisis to address emerging new forms of the digital media economy such as surveillance and monitoring of users' data for investment and commercial purposes. On one hand, Marxism has a promising critical potential for offering a systematic approach that explains social roots, political consequences, and ideological reflections of the digital media economy. On the other hand, it is challenged by the new forms of capitalism emerging from digital space and information-based value generation, which could not be foreseen or even imagined back in Marx's time.

Those who reinforce a Marxian account face the challenge of reinterpreting and applying Marx, while the counteraccount, which declares Marx's legacy partially outdated and is at pains to distance itself from Marxism, comes up with new conceptions that attempt to offer more consistent interpretations of the new media economy. In new media studies, the theorists usually focus on the basic conceptions such as labor and exploitation, but I would include here some critical contributions to the debate from other fields that do not ultimately aim to deepen the ongoing issues but rather offer fundamental solutions for social problems that are radically different from Marx's or anyone else's in this regard. Such a critical turn from the classical approaches of social theory is clearly manifested in Thomas Piketty's (2014) *Capital* and his critics.

Piketty is worth mentioning here because his input recently caused an obvious change or even a reversal in some of the Marxist interpretations of the critical media theorists (e.g., Fuchs 2014b). The issue at stake here is that monitoring and surveillance are not only technological tools for digital exploitation of media users or sources for value generation, but they can also be used to watch economic activities of the media companies. This perspective clearly suggests reversing the power relations between usage and ownership of the new media, and turning the tools of exploitation against the exploiters themselves. One of the crucial questions is whether Marxian or non-Marxian proposals, including Piketty, offer a consistent approach for interpreting and changing the social role and impacts of the new media economy. This article focuses on Fuchs' account and his understanding of Marxism with regard to the new media economy, and tries to expose the relevance of a Marxist interpretation of media as it is patronized by Fuchs in response to non-Marxian conceptualizations of the social reality of the new media.

In his previous articles published in this journal (Fuchs 2012, 2015), as well as in his recent book *Digital Labour and Karl Marx* (2014a), Fuchs attempts to offer a Marxian account to understand the economic foundations of the Web 2.0 economy. Considering he is one of the few scholars trying to fill the gap between Marxian critique of political economy and new economic forms of the digital media, we ought to take his point of view in the current debate seriously.

In this article, I will summarize Fuchs' understanding of digital labor economy, and shortly revisit his critics, and then focus on five flaws in his account. There are passages in Marx's economic studies that are completely ignored or misinterpreted by Fuchs and are decisive against his views on digital media economy. Based on the textual evidence, I will argue that Fuchs contradicts the Marxian foundations of the critique of political economy. Fuchs' commitment to offer a Marxian approach lapses into an anachronism due to the following reasons: (1) Fuchs fails to acknowledge that Marx has adopted the concept of immaterial production, (2) he confuses objective human activity with productive labor, (3) he uses an unclear terminology regarding commodification of user data on digital media, (4) he underestimates the financial aspect of digital media economy, (5) he violates Marxian laws of value production, rate of exploitation, rate of profit, and economic crisis.

Here, I will not argue whether Marx's critique of political economy is right or wrong but only show that Fuchs misinterprets him. The critique of Fuchs' account shall serve to remake the Marxian view of economics fruitful for the current debates on digital media economy to reframe the questions of users' online activity, and privacy and personal convenience in the contemporary, socioeconomic context.

The Karl Marx problem I will be discussing here is not simply about the question of whether Marx's social critique still applies today or not, but it is also related to a charge of exploitation in terms of scientific critique and political action. Fuchs' approach cripples the promising potential of Marxism for the issues at stake, and the discussion below attempts to highlight some possible ways to avoid Fuchs' flaws and contributes to gain a solid ground to offer a Marxist perspective on interpreting and changing some crucial components of the new media economy.

## **Fuchs' Understanding of Digital Labor Economy, and His Critics**

Fuchs' theory can be characterized as defensive, on the one side, and progressive, on the other. By defensive, I mean that he offers a critical account rejecting several criticisms of Marx such as Arendt (1998), Habermas (1973, 1988), Lazzarato (1996), and Hardt and Negri (2000, 2004). His approach is also progressive because he tries to apply Marxist political economy to the new forms of capitalist mode of production such as digital labor, value production, and exploitation of Internet users in the new media economy, and so on. This is where he faces further criticisms articulated in Arvidsson and Colleoni (2012), Andrejevic (2015), Robinson (2015), Jin and Feenberg (2015), and Bolaño and Vieira (2015).

Fuchs begins his intervention with a critique of immaterial labor. The concept of immaterial labor became fashionable in current debates first by Lazzarato, and then by Hardt and Negri. Lazzarato (1996, 143–44) defines it as the activity that produces “the informational and cultural content of the commodity.” Hardt and Negri (2004, 108) have adopted this definition and applied it to an extensive Marx critique. They introduce the term as creation of “immaterial products, such as knowledge, information,

communication, a relationship, or an emotional response.” Although they engender immaterial labor in *Empire* (2000, 293) into (1) “informationalized” industrial production incorporating “communication technologies,” (2) “analytical and symbolic tasks,” and, finally (3) “production and manipulation of effect,” they dropped the first type of immaterial labor in *Multitude* (2004, 108). For Fuchs (2014a, 252), the term “immaterial” is misleading, because it discharges into some kind of substantial dualism separating the world into two distinct entities: material and immaterial. Accordingly, spiritual activities such as mental labor, or products of this kind, for instance, information and knowledge, are detached from nature and matter. Fuchs (2014a, 362) argues that the term *immaterial* is unsound in this regard. “In a materialist philosophy, the whole world is material.”

Fuchs (2010, 188; 2012, 141; 2014a, 102; 2015, 67–68) asserts that Internet users generate value for digital media platforms that are sold to advertisement companies. The main source of value production is users’ activities commodified as statistical data. As users are not paid for their activities, their labor is free, unpaid, and infinitely exploited.

Arvidsson and Colleoni (2012, 136) object that Fuchs’ approach on value creation is poorly related to social media platforms. The basic premise of Marx’s labor theory does not hold. Profit of new digital media does not originate from “sale of commodities” but from “appropriation and distribution of value” within the finance sector. Not the value production but the financial rent becomes here fundamental. Andrejevic (2015, 6–7) underlines that the time spent on the Internet has a particular effect on exposure to online ads, which provides detailed data about user behavior. More time spent “creating and engaging with forms of content, in turn, attract and hold users.” He stresses that digital value emerges in “revenue generation” and “financial valuation.” Robinson (2015, 50) asserts that the value circulated in digital space does not come from Web 2.0 but from commercial capital of the advertising sector. Jin and Feenberg (2015, 53, 57) agree with Fuchs that Internet users are “exploited in some sense” but claim that the path Fuchs follows is narrow-minded, because Marx’s own concepts of labor and value do not apply to Internet economy from the very beginning. Finally, Bolaño and Vieira (2015, 57–58) reject Fuchs’ exploitation thesis. User activity does not produce value. The so-called “free” access to digital media is an illusion, and its financial source originates from the advertising sector.

All these criticisms address Fuchs’ approach to his progressive strategy. Some of them overreach a fundamental critique of Marxist political economy via Fuchs’ work; others point at Fuchs’ own inconsistencies. When facing critique, Fuchs usually regenerates his defensive strategy that is practically a kind of theoretic struggle to retain Marx’s legacy for the contemporary critical media theory. In the following section, I show that he fails to do so.

## Immaterial Production in Marx

Let us first begin with mental labor. Marx (1996, 188) gives a famous example about this. What distinguishes, he says, “the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that

the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality." Every type of work is a process transforming raw material into some final product. This process requires conscious mental activity. Marx's *Theories on Surplus Value* document quite a resourceful debate on this matter.

Here, Marx (1965b, 146, 152, 181–82, 240, 256–58, 329, 385–86; see also Marx, 1962, 382, 674) adopts the term *nonmaterial production*, and speaks of "spiritual labor," "spiritual worker," and "spiritual production" as synonyms for "non-material" labor, worker, and production. For Marx, mental labor in nonmaterial production is the work of actors, artists, clerics, doctors, economists, judges, lawyers, mistresses, orators, police officers, priests, professors, servants, scientists, soldiers, state officials, teachers, writers, and so on. Moreover, Marx (1965b, 256–60, 270) underlines that all labor including immaterial or spiritual production endures certain material products. He also argues that the material or immaterial aspects of capitalist mode of production cannot be genuinely understood, unless respective particular historical forms of production are taken into account.

Marx (1965b, 385–86) distinguishes two forms of "immaterial production" in the capitalist production process. The first form is related to the production of "saleable commodities" such as "books, paintings, in short all the products of artistic creation." However, this kind of immaterial production is limited to the extent that, for example, a writer of a joint work such as an encyclopedia "exploits a number of others as hacks." The second form of immaterial production is realized by mental laborer as productive worker. Marx points out that mental labor can be productive and unproductive respectively. For example, a teacher as wage laborer is productive for the owner of the institution. But she is unproductive vis-à-vis her pupils. Similarly, in theaters, "the actor's relation to the public is that of artist, but vis-à-vis his employer he is a *productive worker*."

To characterize a particular production process as material and immaterial depends on the related components in that process. Materiality encompasses all social and historical conditions, factors, and relations of the production process. Thus, mental labor refers to a specific moment within the material production, through which the immaterial production is realized. Put it crudely, the basic difference between mental and immaterial aspects of production process is that the former one emphasizes a necessary component involved in all labor processes, while the latter consummates a certain appearance form of mental labor. This is not acknowledged by Fuchs. He, however, raises a philosophical question in this regard: can we speak of something immaterial in a pure material world? To do justice to Marx, we probably need to follow a dialectical path.

Marx, unlike Fuchs, grasps the world as a reflection of forms of matter on different levels. Some entities or structures may seem like immaterial on one level, while these appear as material on another. Immaterial production is a social structure, which involves both material and immaterial aspects respectively. Mental activities in immaterial labor do really seem different than the physical objects we perceive by our senses. The products of mental labor, however, are an "expenditure of a certain amount of human muscles, nerves, brain" (Marx 1987, 272). Likewise, the virtual reality of

cyberspace seems to be something immaterial. But it is material on the level of electromagnetic and cyber-optic physics.

The Italian autonomists define immaterial labor in terms of its products rather than its social and technical role in capitalist production process. Immateriality of labor refers here, accordingly, to physical features of a labor product, not to its social character. Marx, by contrast, conceives of immateriality not as a second substance involved in a separate section of production process but as the appearance of physical features of the material product and the social relations of the production process. We can reinforce Marx's argument here that the products of mental labor appear to be immaterial entities, which are essentially material on the level of physical, neurological, and biological activities of the human body and on the level of material existence of the very products.

## **Objective Activity and Productive Labor**

Fuchs assumes that Internet user activity is an unconscious production process. By being productive, he means value producing labor for capital. At first glance, this seems to fit into Marx's definition of productive labor. Productive labor, unlike unproductive labor, does enrich capital by entering into direct relation with it. But the same approach violates the very definition of labor being in a direct exchange relation with capital. The exchange relation is not the relation between online media users and online media owners, but the media company with its employees and the media company with other companies. In the Marxian sense, we deal neither with labor nor with productive labor when considering the users of Web 2.0 media. But do the data that are generated, collected, and sold to companies count as commodities?

Marx gives considerable examples that enable a comparison between raw materials of material production and user activity as raw material for value production. Natural resources exploited by capital have the same characteristics as user activity in that both are transformed and commodified in the capitalist mode of production. Natural forces such as steam and water are appropriated by the capitalist and cost nothing. As a human being requires lungs to breathe with, so "he requires something that is work of man's hand, in order to consume natural forces productively" (Marx 1962, 407; 1996, 389). A waterwheel, for instance, is "necessary to exploit force of water, and a steam-engine to exploit the elasticity of steam" (Marx 1962, 407; 1996, 389). It is not the natural resources that produce value but the human labor that appropriates, transforms, and processes them. For this purpose, machines as components of constant capital are widely used. They, however, create no value but simply yield up their own value to the product that they serve to beget (Marx 1962, 308; 1996, 390).

Digital media consist of software and hardware, cyberspaces and workplaces, as well as algorithmic systems and collective organization mechanisms. Based on Marx's theory, the collection of commodified user data would require, first, a procedure processing the raw material of gigantic data about users into useful information before it is sold to the third party. And second, the productive labor does not originate from unpaid user activity but from the labor that creates those software and hardware, cyberspace and

workplace. All the algorithmic systems and machinery yield up their labor to the commodity that is sold to a third party.

### **Users' Data as a Commodity**

Fuchs defines users' data as a commodity sold to advertising clients at a price that is larger than the invested constant and variable capital. The surplus value contained in this commodity is created by users and by employees of the media platforms. "The difference is that the users are unpaid, and therefore infinitely exploited," writes Fuchs (2012, 143). Based on Marx's terminology, we have shown that users' activity does not produce value. This makes us question whether the data that were sold to the third party were already a commodity before they were processed by media platforms, or they were commodified through this procedure. Fuchs is unclear about this. On the one side, he claims that digital media "collects all private data and user behavior and commodifies both," but on the other side, he asserts that users' activity is productive labor. The latter thesis contradicts the process that privately generated user data "become commodified" (Fuchs 2010, 147).

Unlike the user activity on the web, the labor power owned by workers is sold to the capitalist as a commodity. The labor of the worker produces the value, for which he is paid, and the surplus, which is appropriated by the capitalist for free. If user activity already generates value, then this makes the user data already a commodity. If user data have "become commodified" by the corresponding algorithmic procedure, then they were not commodities before their transformation into commodities to be sold to advertising clients. As Fuchs assumes to have discovered the biggest scandal of labor exploitation in human history, he insists on value production generated by the user activity. Notwithstanding, he speaks of an additional commodification process that comes externally to the same procedure. But user activity is accorded to exploitation not as commodity but as raw material. This exploitation character of user activity detaches the same activity from its alleged value and surplus value-creating character. At this point, there is no other option left than that the users' data is commodified by the information processing procedure, which is commonly ascribed to the labor of digital media workers.

### **Dislocation of the Source of Profit**

None of the calculations Fuchs (2015, 67–69) makes with regard to the digital value production on media platforms contributes to the question of where all the profits of media companies come from. His theoretic attention focuses on why user activity is to be considered as unpaid and infinitely exploited labor, while the statistical charts he presents are mostly based on profit shares of media companies. The multiplication of user time spent on the web with the number of users does not prove his exploitation thesis. Moreover, his exploitation thesis dislocates the source of profit made by media companies from selling the advertisement rights to the value production of Internet users. The issues of brand value and financial rent rightfully questioned by Fuchs' critics are additional aspects that are missing from his account.

The increasing rate of exploitation of labor, the decreasing wage of labor below its original value, the decreasing costs of constant capital, the relative overpopulation of workers on market, foreign trade, and enrichment of capital stock are a few of the reasons for the growing exploitation of surplus and for increased profits (Marx 1965a, 242–50). These are also counterfactuals that slow down the tendency of the profit rate to fall. Starting from the assumption that because user activity is productive labor, the lion's share of value production shall be traced back to the infinite exploitation of free labor of "NetSlaves" (Terranova 2000, 33). In this regard, the current dispute between Fuchs, and Arvidsson and Colleoni seems to shift to a strict division between value production, on one hand, and financial realization, on the other. Ergo, the struggle between a defense of Marx's legacy and its autonomist critique is regenerated over and over again.

Although it is correct that the financial sector plays a great role in appropriating and distributing asset value, the same argument does forego that value is not created elsewhere. Arvidsson and Colleoni's reference to the autonomist critique of Marxist political economy does not establish a legitimate basis for developing a completely new theory. Fuchs' objection highlights this tendency, but he pays for that, as I shall argue in the next section, an expensive price: violating the fundamental laws of Marx's political economy. The culminating point we need to recognize in this battle is that the financial maximization of asset value, the direct relation between popularity of a particular Internet platform and its brand value (Arvidsson and Colleoni 2012, 141), as well as the relation between fixed and financial capital (Andrejevic 2015, 11), support a Marxist account of the web economy rather than turn Marx upside-down.

## **Fuchs' Violation of Marxian Laws of Economy**

The rate of exploitation is defined by Marx as the proportional relation of produced surplus to variable capital (exploitation rate = surplus / variable capital). Variable capital is the money-capital to purchase labor power. Constant capital, by contrast, is the money-capital to purchase the means of production such as machinery. Fuchs assumes that because Internet users are not paid for their activities, and yet they still produce a greater part of all the value distributed in the digital era, they exemplify a new kind of productive labor that produces surplus and equals to zero as variable capital. This is why he speaks of infinite exploitation. First, this equation is mathematically impossible. A fraction with zero in the denominator cannot be defined (also highlighted in Andrejevic 2015, 9). Second, Fuchs (2012, 145) tries to solve this problem by separating the variable capital representing wage laborers in media companies and the variable capital referring to the unpaid labor of web users: exploitation rate = surplus / (variable capital 1 + variable capital 2). This reformulation seems to avoid the mathematical error of the zero in the denominator, but it contradicts his assumption regarding the exploitation of users' value production. The alleged value production of the web users is still incalculable apart from the value produced by media employees. As long as Fuchs insists on identifying user activity with value production, this problem remains unsolved. Nevertheless, this has lethal impacts on Marx's theory about falling profit rates and the crisis of overproduction.

The profit rate is defined as the proportional relation of surplus to the sum of constant and variable capital: profit rate = surplus / (constant capital + variable capital) (Marx 1965a, 251). Fuchs' exploitation thesis indicates that the nullified costs of variable capital of users' free labor and the maximized production of surplus explain the huge profit of media companies. This means that as long as the new media economy is based on free labor of Internet users, the profit rates would not fall. Marx, by contrast, wrote that over time, profit rates would fall due to various reasons: the mass of surplus, the accumulation of capital, the capital revenues, the rate of exploitation, and the increase in the number of workers. Falling profit rates, Marx (1965a, 223) underlines, is a particular expression of the capitalist mode of production. The elements of infinite exploitation, by contrast, disable this tendency.

This contradiction leaves two options for Fuchs here. If his thesis on infinite exploitation is true, then we need to modify the whole Marxist critique of political economy, as Hardt and Negri already assert. This leads us to support the autonomist Marx critique that the new forms of capitalism as such did not exist and could not be predicted in the nineteenth century capitalism. Ergo, Marx needs to be rethought. The second option is that the thesis on value production of web users is untenable and should simply be given up. This would conflict with Fuchs' whole approach to make Marx's legacy relevant for the digital media economy.

It is well known but also widely questioned how Marx saw the capitalist mode of production as one that would self-destruct via falling profit rates that end in economic crisis. The theoretical line Fuchs follows not only disproves Marx in this regard but also contradicts Marx's notions of the overproduction and underconsumption crises that ought to originate from users' data. Even if there is an infinite amount of data to be transformed into metadata, and to be sold to the third party, they cannot be overproduced or insufficiently consumed. If user data cannot be overproduced by web users or underconsumed by advertising clients, then Fuchs' alleged digital labor represents an area where Marx's economic laws of the capitalist mode of production do not work. His argument is supposed to be a defense of Marx; obviously, it is not.

## Fuchs on Piketty

Fuchs (2014b) foregrounds a conspicuous combination of his defensive and progressive approaches in a review essay of Thomas Piketty's (2014) book *Capital*. Piketty (2014, 9) famously claims that Marx has predicted an

apocalyptic end to capitalism: either the rate of return on capital would steadily diminish (thereby killing the engine of accumulation and leading to violent conflict among capitalists), or capital's share of national income would increase indefinitely (which sooner or later would unite the workers in revolt).

What Piketty (2014, 228–29) sees as failed returns to capital corresponds to Marx's falling rate of profit and downfall of capitalists. Capitalists either "tear each other apart in a desperate attempt to combat the falling rate of profit" or "they force labor to accept

a smaller and smaller share of national income, which ultimately leads to a proletarian revolution and general expropriation.” Fuchs (2014b, 418) writes how Piketty basically agrees with Marx’s point that capital is undermined by its internal contradictions. But he asserts that Piketty misinterprets the relationship between economic crisis and revolutionary political struggle. Marx speaks of mutually exclusive tendencies involved in profit rates. Countervailing tendencies, such as lowering wages, or particular methods regarding absolute and relative surplus value production make the Marxian law not a deterministic but a tendential one. Crises increase potentials for revolutionary movements, but they do not necessarily cause them (Piketty 2014, 419).

Fuchs displays his progressive approach with regard to Piketty’s proposal for a transparent and fair global tax system. Piketty’s main concern is detecting the sources of and finding realistic solutions for inequality in capitalism. Put simply, economic inequality emerges when “the rate of return on capital exceeds the rate of growth of output and income” (Piketty 2014, 1). Piketty (2014, 27) commends to establish international economic institutions and introduce regulatory policies that surveil tax payments and act swiftly against tax related illegal activities. The problem with the current system is that “multinational corporations often end up paying ridiculously small amounts because they can assign all their profits artificially to a subsidiary located in a place where taxes are very low” (Piketty 2014, 561). So the point is to prevent transnational corporations from exploiting tax loopholes and avoiding taxes. Such measures enable a redistribution of wealth away from capital toward general public services. To increase the capital share and to decrease the wage share, we need an institutional power that is capable of surveilling and regulating all the income-outcome traffic on a global scale.

Piketty (2014, 532) also admits he is not suggesting we abolish capitalism but that we “reassert control over capitalism in the name of the general interest while relying on the forces of private property and competition.” Fuchs (2014b, 427–28) celebrates the idea but extends the limits of Piketty’s theory to revolutionary measures. He mentions Engels’s idea in 1845 to introduce a progressive tax system to raise money for public services and “at the same time replace all the present, unjustly distributed taxes” (Engels 1975, 254). This proposal plans for

a general, progressive tax on capital, at a rate increasing with the size of the capital. In this way, the burden of public administration would be shared by everyone according to his ability and would no longer fall mainly on the shoulders of those least able to bear it, as has hitherto been the case in all countries. (Engels 1975, 254)

Following Engels’s views, Fuchs (2014b, 428) argues that a leftist political agenda must embrace Piketty’s proposal for a global tax system that involves a global computer network both to monitor the financial records of money transactions and to create a transparent and accessible public databank of all the capital flows and corporate revenues. This might be considered as his first step toward transforming the Internet into a noncommercial and free platform for information sharing (Piketty 2014, 426). His proposed metasurveillance system of media companies’ financial actions aims to

reverse the power relations between new media users and owners, and to transform the productive resources concentrated in the hands of the few into a commonly owned and controlled open-access global network system. This certainly is a counterchallenge to Piketty's idea of tax reform, and it requires much more than simply monitoring and preventing the exploitation of legal loopholes by international companies. Fuchs targets the digital exploitation of new media users, calling on them to intervene and control in the very structures for digital information to capture media owners and to confiscate the means of digital communication. In this vision, the digital exploitation of Internet users finally disappears. Fuchs' account shares much of the revolutionary goals of a progressive agenda to transform the future of the new media economy, even if his defense of Marx suffers from the aforementioned flaws.

## Conclusion

We might rightfully wonder how Fuchs conceives of a Marxist political agenda for a digital media economy that violates Marx's fundamental laws of the capitalist mode of production. In the end, what we encounter here is that Fuchs becomes a victim of his own ambition by drafting ideological tasks into a progressive agenda for the new century. This agenda does not rely upon but rather repudiates the fundamentals of Marxism. This might be an unfortunate fallacy for a theory at its abstract levels of conceptualization and methodology, but it is even more unfortunate in its practical application when it exacerbates the conspicuous call to a political action in a slogan such as "Digital Workers of the World, Unite!" (Fuchs 2015). Here, what the message implies at first glance leads to a conclusion that is entirely alien to what Marx's theory indicates.

The core of the Karl Marx problem in this debate appears to arise from Fuchs' greatest asset, which is also his main flaw: the idea of the infinite exploitation of prosumers. It seems to me that we have two mutually exclusive options at hand. Either we give up the idea that Internet users are NetSlaves, or we do not. Although it is quite unlikely that Fuchs would pick the former option, the counterposition, as I have exposed here, not only avoids Fuchs' controversial errors but also enables us as Marxist scholars of communication to carve out a secure terrain for the kind of political agenda that Fuchs ultimately endorses. This option would involve unconditional patronage for a noncommercial Internet, surveillance-free digital media, and transparent information sharing in global network systems. The list of political responses can be extended, but it does not include, as far as I am concerned, the infinite exploitation of web users.

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