

# Viewing the Exploitation of the Audience in the Online Advertising Market from the Perspective of Digital Labor

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**Abstract:** With the rapid development of the digital age, the data is like mercury. Along with the Internet era, the advertising industry has updated from Web1.0 to 3.0 based on SEO. What changes have taken place in the role of the wandering fish(audience)in the changing river of this era? Do readers still consider themselves to be served by new media data? All the conveniences they get don't need to be "repaid"? This paper focuses on the advertising operation market from the perspective of digital labor, looks into whether the role of the audience is exploited by capital in the advertising industry, discusses the breeding environment of digital capital, and tries to analyze the whole process of capital accumulation and expansion.

## 1. Introduction

Mr. CAI yuanpei once put forward in "the sanctity of labor": "labor, not only metalworking, carpentry, etc., who use their own labor to make a career beneficial to others, whether he used physical strength, brain, are labor. With the development of The Times, the concepts of affective labor and Playboy have been derived on this basis. Marx explained the exploitation of labor by capital in material labor. What role do Internet users play in the information age? Do they still think they are being served by the Internet advertising market? All the conveniences they get don't need to be "repaid"?

## 2. Communication and Labor in the Online Advertising Market

In June 2019, China's Internet population reached 854 million, with a penetration rate of 61.2%<sup>[1]</sup>. The scale of Chinese Internet users is equal to the total population of Europe, so the value of the Internet can be seen. At the same time, the number of mobile Internet users is almost equal to the total number of Internet users, which also shows that the mobile terminal is becoming the first choice of Internet users.

In 1974, Smythe Dallas pointed out in his article "Blind Spot"<sup>[2]</sup> that there was a blind spot in the discussion of western Marxism among cultural scholars at that time, believing that they ignored its inherent "economic basis" and paid too much attention to ideology, and put forward the "audience commodity". That is, the media industry is not selling programs, but selling people to advertisers. For audience, watching TV is a labor process to promote the capital accumulation of media industry. In the new era of digital society, is the audiences commoditized and sold on the Internet?

When you open NetEase Cloud Music, you can see a column called "push songs every day"; when you open Taobao, The system will display "guess what you like"; when you talk with your friends about Starbucks, you will receive the information stream ads of Starbucks coupons in the evening. Compared with these, there are more accurate and direct cashing methods. Tencent opened up a small number of data initially, including online behavior data, dynamic data, UGC data, demographic data and social channel data. This brings better crowd orientation to many brands. Through the current Tencent Data Management Platform, Demand-Side Platform can use such data for Real-Time Bidding. With the support of data, advertising can be directly positioned at the target audiences, which makes the delivery quality more efficient.

### **3. From “Audience Commodity” to the Commercialization of Digital Labor**

Smythe Dallas pointed out in the “audience commodity” that advertisers buy the services provided by audiences, and these services have some predictability, which can predict the time, there are a number of predictable audiences, will use some specific communication tools. Audiences trade at specific prices in the markets of producers and buyers (advertisers). Mosco also pointed out that audiences are the main commodity, and media companies produce audiences and then sell them to advertisers, so the labor/labour of audiences is the main product of mass media.

With the development of Internet technology, this theory has been continuously optimized and improved, and more scholars have made further explanations, which is what we see today—“digital labor”.

Tiziana Terranova proposed the concept of free labor in “Social” in 2000: on the one hand, users can comment, thumb up, communicate, create web pages, improve web pages. On the other hand, they are doing “free labor” for the Internet industry. “Through cultural and technical Labour, continuous production of value is completely unaffected by online social mobility”<sup>[31]</sup>, she says. And the information produced by free labor is shamelessly trafficked and exploited.

Back in today's advertising industry, the extremely popular User Generated Content and Precision Targeting also have this “digital economy of free labor” phenomenon. Big data enables users are growing their own habits, emotions, preference, medium testing companies to use the Device ID, Cookies record these users “behavior data”, to provide these data to media companies, including its advertising exposure, arrival rate, all kinds of data to retarget the target audience, and finally show customized advertising ideas to specific users in the right scene at the proper time.

In addition to these hard technological exploitation, there are some “soft pressures”. The field theory holds that every action of a person is affected by the field in which the action takes place, and the field does not only refer to the physical environment, but also includes the behavior of others and many factors connected with it. In the age of social media, everyone is using WeChat and Weibo, so “I” should also use it, otherwise it will be abandoned by the times. Everyone said this product is very useful, “I” may also try to buy. The Internet classifies and packages user-generated information into product advertisements, promotes sales through placement, and creates word-of-mouth marketing for products.

Under the combination of hard and soft, the audience is exactly like a mouse: what are the UGC produced by opinion leaders? Is the so-called word of mouth deliberately “made” out? The process of audience information from being collected, packaged, and sold isn't a typical example of digital capital accumulation? Collect, analyze, drop, and reanalyze. This is a cycle and a digital labor phenomenon in today's advertising industry.

### **4. Exploitation in the Online Advertising Market**

#### **4.1 Double Exploitation - Ugc and Producer Exposure**

User Generated Content means that the information is Generated by the User. In recent years, there are many cases of advertising marketing created by UGC, and NetEase Cloud Music “see the power of music” is a typical one. In March 2017, a sea of red appeared on the Hangzhou subway: 5,000 selected music reviews were posted, and the discussion immediately exploded on social media. NetEase Cloud Music printed the hot comment short sentences written by users, combined with the name of the song, and printed them on the outdoor billboards. Passengers who saw the subway ads took pictures and shared them on their social media platforms, further inflaming the topic.

So who will benefit most? Definitely NetEase Cloud Music. Once the UGC content event was promoted, NetEase Cloud Music rose to the top of the music category in the App Store within two days, and it also developed rapidly on major social media platforms. It's worth noting that the reviews were actually created by users themselves, which is in line with an emerging compound -- Producer, Producer + User. Audiences are both users and producers.

On the surface, this kind of marketing achieves a win-win situation, which not only brings

“resonance” to the audience, but also brings traffic, money, and reputation to the enterprise. But its essence is a kind of exploitation to the user - capital eats the developer's free lunch. The real originator of the music review might just point to the board and say, “look, this is my words.”

So why is it called double exploitation? Companies eat the free lunch of UGC, and the audience is sold to advertisers so that their successful monetization can be seen as the first level of exploitation, and the second level is the content, which are also produced by themselves. For example, when people see these advertisements of NetEase Cloud Music, people in the subway will take photos, punch cards, add tags and position them. This coincides with the concept of free labor in Tranova. They advertised “soft ads” for free on various social platforms, and this is the easiest way to encourage people to action-word of mouth.

## 4.2 The Open Source Movement and the Identity Card of the Audience

In 2001, the first year of the blogging movement, a group of programmers who had opened up the field of source code developed many new blogging software. The software is not only free, but also open source; They allow anyone with basic computer knowledge and skills to easily, quickly and cheaply build their own interactive website<sup>[4]</sup>. This is the original form of the “open source movement”. However, who will ultimately benefit from the series of optimizations that come with open source code?

Immaterial labor is labor that produces immaterial products, such as ideas, images, communication methods, emotions, or social relationships<sup>[5]</sup>. In today's advertising world, the more successful advertising campaigns are, the more they rely on the work of non-material workers. Modding originally meant that game players wrote game code, adapted it based on the original game programming, changed the characters in the game, changed the interface of the game environment, created new tasks, equipment, music and so on. Generally speaking, such adaptations will not charge other users, which is a free circulating gift. It is important to note that game developers can experience the game for free and optimize the original version according to these Modding without any cost.

Audience identity card, specific to the information field is the Device identification code. Participating in many AD purchases requires the supplier to provide a “Device ID,” which is a one-time flushing that uniquely identifies a device. This is the foundation of the mobile Internet advertising industry, especially CPI (Cost per Install) advertising, device ID is particularly important. CPI ads are calculated based on the actual number of installations, and advertisers can use the Android ID to exclude duplicate installations. Whether the Device ID can be provided or not is to determine the actual arrival of the advertisement, through this ID, advertisers also can remove the repetitive audience. With the unique identity card of the audience, the advertising company can detect the user data provided by the third party media, and see the status of the advertisement: exposure, arrival rate, audience rating, etc.

Through the detection data of Device ID, media companies can more intuitively understand the performance of a product on the platform, so as to adjust the advertising strategy. Media monitoring companies embed codes into advertisements. Once users enter relevant terms, the advertisements will be presented on the user's client. The monitoring companies then packages and sells the data of these users to the media company. No matter how the audience response, whether it is ridicule or thumb up, as long as the response, that has successfully reached the audience. In fact, the response of the audience is already doing the next round of “ads” for advertisers' products. Similarly, the audience will not get any compensation from it, and a large amount of data capital will flow back to the enterprise for the next round of use.

The flow chart of the behavior path is as follows:

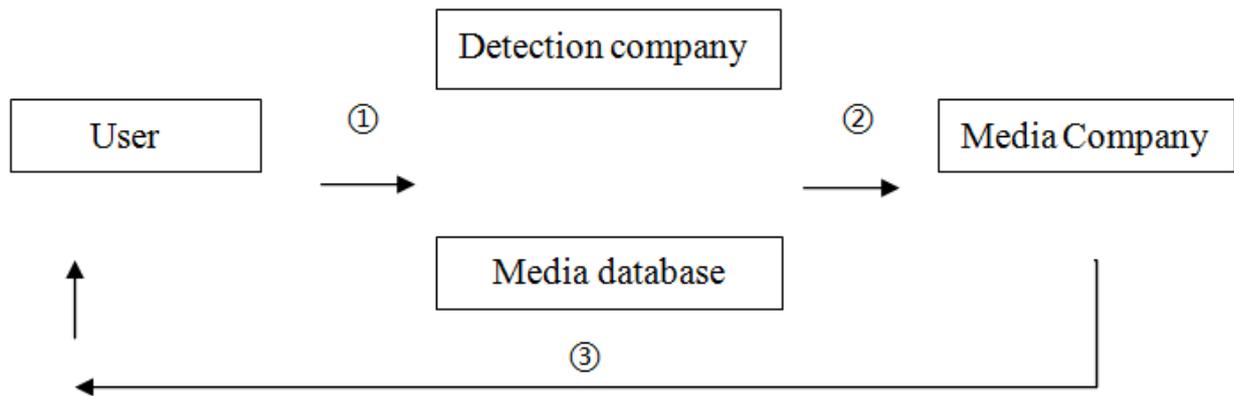


Fig.1 Target Audience Path Flow Figure.

①:When users browse advertisements or related information,they will leave behavior data,which will be recorded by third-party detection companies or media companies.

②:The recorded behavior data will be transmitted to the media company that has purchased the corresponding data,and the media company will analyze the data.

③:The media company sorts out the analyzed data,formulates the advertising position and content suitable for its audience,and delivers corresponding advertisements according to demand,reducing the repeat rate and the traffic consumption of non-designated audiences.Use the user's behavioral data back to the audience.

## 5. Chinese Audiences' Resistance to the Practice of “Digital Labor”

Netizens' resistance to digital labor is mainly based on the following two ways. The first is the shrinking of the circle:from QQ to blog, from microblog to WeChat, until the emergence of many functional niche social apps in recent years,it is not difficult to see that users are narrowing their circle through the use of social media.Blog,almost anyone can log in to view the article pictures and comments; Tencent's QQ has an extra “defense line”-need to add friends;Weibo,just like rotary sushi,can receive information as long as you follow,and communicate through “forwarding”,“comments”,“likes”and”private messages”.Micro blog has the word limit,the content is shorter but a lot of information;WeChat times,the environment is more private.Functional social software is open for a certain need.The user narrows down the scope of receiving information step by step, eliminating unnecessary information,and choosing a more suitable APP may be a kind of resistance to “information flood”and”being labored”.

The other is to choose to close the circle of friends function,or indirectly uninstall WeChat or QQ. After the interview, the following reasons can be summarized:the first is the proliferation of advertising, purchasing, wechat business.purchasing agents and wechat business in the circle of friends brush a lot of selling information every day,promoting a variety of unknown goods,when time has passed, people don't want to see those anymore.The second is to avoid useless socializing. As the life circle expands, it is inevitable to constantly add new “friends” in work, entertainment and other occasions, and they are also drawn into groups one after another, forced to pay attention to one public account after another ...Over time, they may not even know they have an amazing number of friends, but the people who interact and comment are still the same.Considering that there are too many “nodding friends”, they should be cautious when sending a circle of friends: check before sending pictures, and double check their group before sending a circle of friends. Maybe it is better to choose close it.

“It takes up too much time of mine.” This is also a inevitable reason to close their circle of friends.

## 6. Conclusion

The age of the Internet, netizens are immersed in a virtual world built by code. They discuss how well an ad was shot but don't know the company have previously estimated tens of millions of times the experience of Internet users and millions of Internet users search, discuss habits - the whole advertising campaigns can be said to be the netizens have made by themselves, they provide a series of demand, attention, discussion and even creativity. Finally, the media platform will make this advertisement made by users themselves, then sold back to the user.

Audiences really need to improve their network media literacy and view the products of the data era from a critical perspective.

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