

Digitalising Labour By Attention Economy In Online Games

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Abstract: *The pervasiveness of digital labour in modern societies is on the rise, including in the culture industry. Online gaming and players experiences are not exempt from the mechanisms of digital labour and digital capitalism. Drawing from semi-structured online interviews, this article analyses the capitalistic nature of the digital gaming experiences of 41 Chinese online gamers. The article argues that gamers can be considered happy and convenient digital labour in the eyes of media companies, as players generate surplus value via advertising and purchasing in-game features. The role of players acting as unpaid digital labour is invisible to themselves, though the production of value is not mandatory but voluntary. By drawing from the concept of attention economy, this research argues that online games are naturally designed to grab the gamers' attention by providing continuous opportunities to increase scores, skills, and ability levels, which, in turn, cultivate the players' competitiveness and increase engagement. This mechanism resembles the basic characteristics of capitalist culture, that is the desire for sustained and endless growth, more money, more products, and more profit.*

Keywords: *Online games; digital labor; attention economy; digital capitalism; play and work.*

I. Introduction

'Digital labour' is a concept rooted in the Italian autonomist, workerist/Operaismo worker's rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the 'wages for housework' movement founded by Selma James in 1972 (Wolf, 2014). The concept of the 'digital economy' is defined as the 'moment where work has shifted from the factory to the social realm' (Fuchs & Seignani, 2013). Italian autonomists would describe this phenomenon as the "social factory". Studies that looked at the digital labor involved in social media were some of the first critiques of digital labor (Stanfill, 2014).

Online gaming is an aspect of the culture industry and can also be considered a product of capitalism, as game manufacturers attempt to persuade players using all the resources available to them (Adorno, 2005). Processes, platforms, and production models in Chinese gaming industry have changed dramatically over the past decade (Zhao, Von, Morgan-Thomas & Buck, 2020), and access to free and low-cost applications has significantly favoured game development. Cheap digital distribution on digital platforms has allowed casual games to experience rapid and sustained growth, driving a new economic model premised on a platform-capitalist attention economy and games as a service.

This article focuses on a new form of capitalism in the digital arena, namely digital capitalism, which concerns the relation between the gaming experience and the game industry and how gaming platform development leads to a more monopolistic, controlled and economically sustainable industry. As Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (2007) theorised, game development is a 'new spirit capitalism' model that involves autonomous and creative work.

The article first draws on capitalist political and economic theory to summarise the concept of digital labour and apply it to Chinese game culture. Through online interviews, 41 gamers were surveyed about their online gaming experiences. The article further analyses the image of game players and argues that gamers may take the role of "happy and convenient digital labour" through the principle of "attention economy" that serves to cultivate the players' competitive consciousness.

II. Literature review

2.1. 'Play' and 'Work' in Digital Platforms

From the traditional perspective of capitalist political and economic theory, play and pleasure in a game must be limited and should make people feel a sense of guilt to prevent them from “irrationally” diverting their attention from productive labour (Dyer-Witheford & De Peuter, 2009). Hence, game and pleasure have been considered by Dyer-Witheford & De Peuter (2009) as a mean operating against the capitalistic system. However, with the popularization of digital technology, the boundaries between real and virtual and between labour and entertainment have blurred. Recently, scholars have begun to focus on a form of labour that combines work and play among online consumers (Duffy, 2016; Heath, 2012; Micheletti, & Stolle, 2014). In the era of digital media, information technology and global production systems have jointly created a new form of labour: ‘digital labor’. Fuchs (2014) defines digital labour from the perspective of the political economy. His theories transformed the knowledge culture of consumption into productive activities and pointed out that ‘digital labour’ is cultural labour involving both physical production and productive consumption such as the production of hardware, information and software.

Along similar lines, Terranova (2000) argues that “free labour” in online platforms represents the nature of labour “widespread in late capitalist societies”. Similarly, gamers happily accept ‘digital labour’ but are deprived of capital such as time and money. This exploitation involves activities such as game interface chat, game commentary, game blogging, fan’s interactions, game package modification and virtual space construction. Scholz (2012), on the other hand, believes that digital labour is creative work consumed by individuals on social networks and a free form of labour. Following on from this idea, Scholz (2012) critically analysed the new forms of social occupation, exploitation and labour in the digital economy through case studies.

Digital labour activities produce a large amount of commercial data and resources for media companies. According to Roach (1997) theory of ‘audience commodity’, the main driving force for commercial mass media comes from the audience. In this process, a media platform sells products to consumers and then sells the investment of consumers (time and money) to the investors. Web Shore pointed out that ‘play’ and ‘labour’ on the Internet are closely linked to this concept of digital labour because the Internet provides a ‘playground’ as well as a ‘factory’, thus producing the figure of the ‘worker-player’. By investigating the relationship between players and games, Cassidy & Loussouarn et al. (2013) constructed a comparative taxonomy of the concepts of games, work, gambling and labour. As they described it, unpaid labour and worker-players can indeed be classified as forms of digital labour. Terranova (2004) expands the definition of the forms of digital labour to ‘worker-player’, ‘consumer’, ‘producer’ and ‘user’, which should all be classified as ‘free labour’. Based on the concept of worker-player or digital labour, Runge & Gao (2014) argued that game companies produce a large amount of surplus value and huge profits.

Within games, the attributes of players are both productive and consumptive. The audience appears to enjoy the fun of spontaneous playing. In fact, it is regarded as the value-added capital in the value-added mode of digital industry, especially since the essence of players acting as unpaid digital labour is invisible to themselves. Secondly, the products of traditional labour are mainly in material form, while the products of digital labour are based on the tastes and interests of workers / consumers, which leads to the inevitable reality that the digital labour force has inadvertently become unpaid labour. Third, in traditional employment labour, the act of labour and periods of rest are separated. In a game playing situation, labours eliminate the boundary between playing and labour in time, content and method. Thus, it is difficult to establish a distinction between labour and consumption.

2.2. Simulacra, simulation and hyperreality

Jean Baudrillard put forward the concepts of ‘simulacra’, ‘simulation’ and ‘hyper-reality’ (Baudrillard, 1994), which were considered to “summarize the overall characteristics of the post-modern world”. ‘Simulacra’ is a phenomenon that describes being divorced from reality. According to Baudrillard, “this is the process of murdering reality.” The simulacrum is formed through the destruction of the logical relationship between the signifier and signified. In Baudrillard’s view, the contemporary social order is a simulacra order.

'Hyperreal' is another concept within Baudrillard's theory, in semiotics and postmodernism, which describes the inability of consciousness to distinguish reality from a simulation of reality, especially in technologically advanced 'postmodern' societies. Hyperreality is seen as a condition in which reality and fiction are seamlessly blended together so that there is no clear distinction between where the real ends and where the fiction begins. Technically, hyperreal allows the co-mingling of physical reality with virtual reality (VR) and human intelligence with artificial intelligence (AI). Participants engaged in a hyperreal environment might feel more involved with the hyperreal world and less with the physical real world. Kellner (2008) pointed out that Baudrillard's theories of simulation and 'simulationism' focus on a hyperreal order and its ideological effect produced by digital media. Furthermore, Macintosh & Shearer et al. (2000) believe that Baudrillard's concepts of simulacra and hyperreality describe the current social state of society. For example, advertising becomes a real stage of illusion, and the Internet becomes a hyperreal virtual space. Similarly, online games typically feature simulacra and hyperreality, especially in real simulation games. For example, James Adrian used a war-game to replace created by the Bland corporation with Flying Coffins so that the labour cost and money can be saved. Other examples such as the sports games FIFA and NBA2K prove that simulacra, simulation, and hyperreality have entered every aspect of people's life. Baudrillard's simulation, simulacra and hyperreality theory provides a powerful perspective for us to study the digital media era and online players.

Following from the discussion above, the hyperreal disintegrated simulacra is the generation by models of a real world without origin or reality: the hyperreal. For this reason, video games as a type of simulacra technology have been considered by Ferris (2019) to be "electronic heroin" that poisons youth. The interaction between video games and physical sports breaks down the boundaries between reality and simulacra. At this point, Baudrillard inherits McLuhan's concept of 'implosion'; the hyperreal can be considered an implosion of two characteristics: the disappearance of a boundary and the disappearance of meaning. Hence, online gaming becomes product of the blurring of the boundaries between games and reality. The hyperreal is constructed by different codes and we are no longer able to actively pursue the truth, but only to respond to the commands of those codes. In hyperreal cyberspace, as Taylor & Taylor (1994) argued, identity becomes plastic, 'the process is similar to a robot receiving instructions from a code. Humans are manipulated by machines and no longer have their own ideas'. Players respond to instructions through digital codes via the gamepad to enter a hyperrealistic utopia. In this way, the movement of a human body becomes the rapid movement of the fingers between the buttons of the game and becomes the movement of digital commands. In this sense, the nature of sports disappears when the movement of the body is eliminated, and sports are replaced by simulacra.

III. Research method

An internet-mediated interview method has been employed in this research in order to investigate how Chinese gamers interact with online games, the time and effort spent playing the game and how players interact with each other. The internet-mediated interviews were conducted through *Wechat* (a mobile text and voice messaging service owned by the Chinese social media giant *Tencent*). An internet-mediated interview is an online research method conducted using computer-mediated communication (CMC), such as instant messaging or video. The interviews were conducted on social media rather than by a face-to-face interview to avoid geographical problems since interviewees are located in different provinces in China. The author joined fan forums for online games on *WeChat* and advertisements were released in order to recruit participants. Potential participants contacted the author in response to these advertisements on the online platforms, and interviews were arranged. The audio calls and each interview lasted between 15 and 20 minutes. 41 players were chosen as participants after three rounds of recruitment.

Joining fan groups enabled the author to find a representative population of Chinese gamers more accurately because, notably, there is no readily available sampling frame for Chinese audiences of the online entertainment industry. *WeChat* groups were identified as potential interview groups by searching for terms such as "online games" or "online battle teams". Three rounds of recruitment were conducted to enrol interviewees. In the first round, the purpose of the research was briefly explained to gauge how many people would participate. In the second round, if the number of participants was large, an interview outline was sent to gather background information about the potential interviewee. This information served to explore a potential interviewees' initial ideas, age and also to ascertain whether they were fans who were long-time devotees of the game. In the third step, the final pool of 41 participants was chosen as the most suitable interviewees. Following this, the interviewees were provided with the interview date and time, compliance declaration and an information sheet about the interview.

IV. Gamers: happy and convenient 'digital labour'

According to Smythe (1977), traditionally, television stations relied on advertising as a source of profit. From the perspective of political economy, the audience's attention has shifted into labour so that digital capitalism sells the attention of gamers as a labour product to advertisers creating value. Through this process, the attention of the gamer becomes money and the data generated is surplus value. The time and money spent by gamers become means of multiplying capital. Gamers play games for fun and enjoy so that the effort of the gamers to produce value is not 'mandatory' but voluntary. This shows the concealment of exploitation, and it is hard for gamers who are exploited to perceive it since the process is covert and because they actually enjoy the acts of playing, interacting and messaging. Through interviews, the research presented here shows that the perception and behaviour of consumers of digital media, Chinese online gamers in this case, have indeed gradually evolved into an unconscious form of play and labour. The lack of perception of exploitation and use of money and energy is illustrated by the behaviour of gamers being characterized by a strong sense of alienation while playing the game. In addition, according to the data contained in Kantar's 2019 survey (Zhang, 2020), digital media and gaming platforms in China are used daily by 45.9% of young people aged between 18 and 25, with an increase of 13.7% over 2018. Behind the significant coverage and increase in the frequency of use of digital media in China, this research demonstrates that gamers generally suffer from boredom when they do not use digital media. This also suggests how contemporary Chinese youth are alienated by digital media and is illustrated below by some of the interviewees viewpoints:

Chen:

I play games every day when I get up, while I eat, before going to bed or while I am just relaxing. I really like to play games. Without games, I would feel bored. Sometimes I even feel out of control because of playing games as I don't realise how long I have been playing for. I could play for hours without realising and spend a lot of money without really noticing. I always need to upgrade my resources and buy new weapons to progress quickly in the game.

(Chen, male, Macau)

Zhuang:

I play mobile phone games every day in my dormitory, canteen, at home and while I am traveling. I feel released when playing after a long time studying. Sometimes I can't even tell whether I am studying or playing since everything is done on the phone or laptop. I think video games have become an integral part of my life.

(Zhuang, female, Hong Kong)

The quoted above clearly suggest that games for Chen and Zhuang have eliminated the boundaries between labour and games, work and life, time and space. Zhuang's words reveal a blur between gaming and studying, as they are both conducted on the same digital platforms, as well as showing unawareness of the time spent playing. As Dallas Smith's 'audience commodity theory' points out, games are actually diverting consumers' attention from production when using digital media. The time spent on playing games, chatting, posting comments and other activities all represent labour time. In analysing the phenomenon of electronic alienation and digital labour on Facebook, Fuchs & Mosco (2015) pointed out a similar phenomenon, where the social media website embodies an intensified exploitation mechanism based on the connection between exploitation of time and alienation for the final benefit of economic return for media companies. In the same way, when players are in a social and economic context in the form of groups, playing games presents the value-added aspect of labour. Although players like Zhuang and Chen produce daily traffic and data for the media and for advertisers to produce added values for their industries, these players do not receive any economic return themselves. What is more, digital media may cause players to indulge in games and the Internet, leading to anxiety and depression. The manifestation of player labour reveals a different nature from the labour force of Marxist theory, as playing games is no longer a revolutionary force against capitalism but becomes embedded in the capitalistic logic itself. When gaming becomes commercialised and mainstream, playing becomes a covert and unpaid form of labour.

According to the theory of alienated labour, the products of labour, a kind of alienated object, depends on the contribution that producers voluntarily make to create surplus value. The experience of Chen above illustrates the voluntary contribution to the creation of value for the gaming company, as he spends real money to buy equipment upgrades to progress in the game. While in this case money and labour are spent on enhancing gaming skills and equipment, the same logic applies to building an alternative image of self in the online gaming environment. In fact, since the beginning of the era of digital media, digital labour products such as 'beautified' images in games and the language symbols in chat have constructed a new world, a virtual landscape. Digital

products are no longer used by human beings but become the main body that influences, controls and language, imagination and self-consciousness, as illustrated by the experience of Zhang.

Zhang:

I usually spend a lot of money to buy equipment and skins in video games. Although they do not need to be updated frequently and are not really needed to progress or beat other players, buying equipment such as hats, necklaces, boots or cloaks to dress up in the game makes me confident and happy as a gamer. If I don't dress up, I feel that other players often avoid me. And to be fair, I don't often approach players with old skins and clothes to team up.
(Zhang, male, Zhuhai)

According to Zhang's words above, the investment of money and time in choosing gaming outfits plays a significant role that goes even beyond the progress in the game. Zhang always buys new accessories even if they are not required for progressing or increasing abilities and skills in the game. This is because images presented without processing and beautification are considered ugly and isolated by the players. These aesthetic phenomena have created a tacit collective consensus among users. Scholz (2012) believes that "equipment makes mankind become machines". Human beings have been deconstructed and alienated with technologies, to the point that games must maintain beauty and aesthetic standards even in the online gaming environment. Therefore, gamers have become an important part of capital production and create the 'wealth spectacle' and 'capital imagination' by constituting the happy and cheap 'digital labour' of the digital age. Digital labour is one of the most important labour forces in the contemporary gaming industry as data collected through the immaterial labour of consumers are able to respond to rapidly changing market dynamics and create effective cycles of commercialisation and value extraction.

Further interviews revealed an even deeper sense of immersion into the online environment, the gameworld. The narratives in gameworld involve the authentic experience of the player's own avatar and specific moments, events or extended storylines. For example, Mei, a game player, described her immersive experience in the game.

Mei:

Characters are more of less people to me. Fighting alongside them is very exciting experience to me. Sometimes I find myself in memorable situations that in the game where I feel very happy. Take for example when I team up with my online best friend and we pass the hardest level together. That is a priceless experience that gives me a lot of happiness, excitement and motivation, both in the games and in real life too.

Mei's immersive experience can be described as a state of deep immersion in the digital space, especially the individual effort and voluntary investment of time, resources and knowledge when working with other characters in the game. In this respect, Mei's experience transpires authenticity of feelings when sharing success with other players and to achieve empathy through tedious or difficult tasks. In an immersive experience of the game world, personifying unique game characters allows them to feel the vast digital game world while escaping the tedium of everyday life. This interpretation means that the game world is seen as a digital playground for role-playing and exploration, but also as a real and fantastical place, in a sense, where the player can live in. This is evidence by the translation of happiness and excitement into real life mentioned by Mei, after she succeeds in a difficult task in the game.

In a further in-depth conversation with Mei, I found that such an immersive experience can take different characteristics depending on individual players. Mei, for instance, sees her role in the game as a team player and socialiser. As she mentioned: 'every time a team member wins the game, I feel a sense of team glory and achievement'. Indeed, most massively multiplayer online games function as one novel form of a new "third place" (Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982) for informal sociability. The "third place" is a social space which is neither work nor home, but rather represents informal social life. With this gaming network, gamers can reliably find each other, just like they could at the local pub or park in the days before texting and phone tracker apps. The sense of relaxation, engagement, and interaction that games give players is consistent with the general social environment. Hence, when exploring the sense of gaming, apart from "pastime", "sport" and "entertainment", socialisation can be attached to one's gaming experience. Certainly, Mei also admitted to me that as a socialiser in gaming, she gives herself game-related goals, and vigorously sets out to achieve them. This usually includes some gaming tasks such as accumulating and disposing of large quantities of high-value treasure and weapons.

Even though socialising is a relaxing method of discovering what other players know about the business of accumulating points, their knowledge can be applied to the task of gaining gaming resources. To sum up, what gamers often refer to as 'immersive experience' actually involves complex interaction experiences, including a sense of accomplishment and sociability.

In addition to the interaction and competition between players, there is also interaction and competition between players and the game itself. This type of gamer like to consider gaming as an internal machination to them. They try progressively esoteric actions in wild, out-of-the-way places, looking for interesting features (ie. bugs) and figuring out how things work. According to another interviewee Ming, game immersion is to find out the ultimate 'secret'.

Ming:

Every game has its bugs. I always try to find them out and exploit them to my advantage. Sometimes I manage to get extra gaming credits, skips levels, or obtain upgrades for free. It is mostly funny and entertaining to find these bugs, although sometimes, once I discovered too many bugs, I can achieve so many skills and equipment that the game becomes boring after a while.

Richard Bartle (1996) famous writer, research on MUD gaming defined this type of gamer as explorers who find delight in having the game expose its internal machinations to them. To find the bug, sometimes it is necessary to score extra points so that explorers can enter the next phase of exploration. This requires players to spend a lot of time immersed in gaming. Hence, the meaning of gaming to this type of gamer is found in a full and deep interaction with the online world. It's the sense of wonder that the virtual world imbues that they crave. Indeed, as Ming told me he is a professional gamer and when he discovers the bugs of a game he can win easily. However, he also admitted that scoring points all the time and upgrading excessively can become a worthless occupation, which makes gaming boring, when it should actually be a competition of speed and patience. As a result, the immersive experience of the game is much lower for the explorers once they successfully challenge the game and discover bugs.

Thus, the most memorable experiences in games aren't always hedonistic and escapist. Interestingly, social interactions, exploration and achievements are probably the most desired gaming experiences for Chinese gamers. The motivation behind game immersion is interest-oriented, inviting players to volunteer their time and money to put their daily experiences into the game while playing, thus blurring the line between 'play' and 'work'. As a result, the gaming community is a formal working place, rather than a refuge, though it provides the immersion experience that players expect and crave. In the process, gamers produce excess value for the gaming platform by spending money of various aspects, be it aimed at socialising, exploring or achieving.

V. Competition in gaming and attention economy

According to the above discussion, the boundaries between play and work become increasingly blurred during playing, thus creating 'digital labour' for gaming companies via the players' contributions in terms of time, energy and money, and largely through the 'attention economy' generated by competitive mechanics within games. Attention economy is based on anything that tries to capture our limited attention. Because companies can profit from people's attention, there is intense competition within the attention economy (Davenport, 2001). The emphasis of the attention economy in the digital cultural industry implies that workers are not only the employees of enterprises but also the consumers through immaterial labour. This also implies the dilution of the meaning of labour and the dullness and leisure of the separation between jobs. The following shows how the interviewees Liang and Liu get their attention caught by the games.

Liu:

*I use Internet phrases to chat with my teammates in a game, such as '666'. Since the members in our battle team all know what "666" means, it is easier for us to collaborate in game competitions. Whenever '666' appears in the chatbox, I know that I must immediately open it and reach out to my teammates, as they require my full dedication for an upcoming battle, a task, or because they need suggestions on what new piece of equipment to buy.
(Liu, male, Zhuhai)*

Liang:

When I am bored, I play computer games and read posts about strategies on gaming websites. I always check if anyone has replied or liked any of my posts because often, I can send friend invitation and expect invitation from people who read my posts on gaming forums. It's almost addictive to post something just to get some replies and find new teammates to play with. Sometimes I even pay for a premium account subscription to be more discoverable by more gamers and expand my friend list. (Liang, female, Lanzhou)

From the responses above, it appears that both Liu and Liang experience fall within the scope of the attention economy Liu's attention is constantly diverted to checking his chatbox, waiting for his teammates to contact him and start a game, while Liang repeatedly checks gaming forums to find new people to play with. Players like Liu and Liang trade attention for experiences. The role of money is to give players the ability to shift their attention toward the experiences they most want to have or to serve as a form of "option premium" against the expectation of future enjoyment, exactly like Liang does when he paid for his subscription to discover more in-game friends. Further, when Liang checks notifications and friend invitations in the game system utilising his leisure time, his time is put to use, and so is his attention. Liu chats with teammates in between games in exchange for more 'insider' information to upgrade the game experience, which is a social commitment to the gaming system. Fuchs (2014) defined the gamers who participate in game improvement 'play-workers'. This concept of digital labour should not be limited to the gamers who improve a game's design. Fuchs (2014) 's argument can be further expanded to encompass other ways to bring profits which are generated in the process of playing a game. With the popularity of free-to-play games, producers have shifted their revenue channels to advertisers, relying on the attraction of the game to form an attention economy. Under the manipulation of commercial interests, digital technology and online games constantly cater to gamers' instinctive pursuit of leisure and entertainment, prompting players to ignore the control and deprivation of technology. Some games even charge players by the hour. These tend to be large-scale, multiplayer games that could monetize on a high number of players. Early examples included Island of Kesmai, GemStone or Legends of Future Past (\$1.80 in the '90s). In exchange for a fixed amount of money per hour, gamers would be entertained. This business model was driven by supply-side economics, that is the distribution of these games took place over early networks and was priced for the time used.

In today's digital gaming landscape, from the above interviews, it also appears that different players value their attention differently. Some players prefer to spend their attention on the game, and others prefer to spend their attention on socialising, dressing equipment and VIP experiences. As Meng continued, this attention attraction starts with a very low cost. As each reward accumulates and returns, the investment cost increases, and the expected value of gaming commitment increases, which urges players to compete for a score.

Meng:

The game encourages me to keep refreshing the score and watch out for my gaming status. Because I want more score, I usually set a goal for me to fulfil the tasks. But I have to check the score at least once a day and play a little, otherwise the progress is lost. In this process, you can start by investing in only a few items, but if you want to reach high skill levels quickly, you must buy more and more weapons, play every day and expand your circle of teammates rapidly.

As an example from Arena of Valor, the game dashboard clearly records gaming scores by days, weeks and months, which provides the motivation for gamers to continue a period of friendship by rewarding the continuity of engaging in the gaming. This is a tangible resource and a process of investment of time and energy by the gamers. As the investment increases in terms of time (days and weeks) and game coins, it can eventually be exchanged for equivalent rewards within the game. For Meng, investment in building gaming experience is a regular daily habit and process that has become a mission for Meng to complete each day to maintain and increase the score. Those who have established high-frequency and long-term investment in-game friends attempt to complete tasks daily to achieve increased rewards and progress rapidly in the game. This desire encourages players to compete for points, which, in turn, leads gamers to invest more money and time their gaming experience, as Meng explained.

This shows the basic characteristics of capitalist culture - the need for sustained and endless growth, more money, more products and more profit. When social interactions take place in a gaming system that is designed mainly for players to compete with coins and scores, the capitalist "equivalent system" equates to the "gaming score". As a consequence, players are influenced by a deep-rooted desire for "more": a state where there is more

value, more trading and higher score. The "more" mindset and repetitive behaviour to fulfil the goal in gaming is an addictive condition, as Liang admitted above. It encourages gamers to act mechanically and repeatedly to increase score. The mechanism behind the addiction is the desire for numbers, that is, the ever-increasing value of gaming scores, in-game socialising or the process of beautification embodied by the number of teammates or items possessed in the game. Grosser (2014) offers more on this interactive loop; he thinks that endless cycles of interactions like this "takes advantage of users' desire for more content to force consistent generation of media content. This means that the user will see the notification and click the number to complete the instruction." During the gaming session, players repeatedly check friendship values to look for more rewards or values, and this reminder for a player to complete the friendship indicators, will then be cleared in the player's "to do list". In this way, attention economy ensures a habit of the game culture, which shows that social engagement in games has shifted from a detached curiosity to utilitarian capital exchange. Once again, we see that the gaming mechanisms are combined psychological needs of human beings of persistence, accumulation of time and emotion.

VI. Conclusion

This article has revealed how 'digital labour' continually provides products for the accumulation and development of digital capitalism taking Chinese online gamers as an example. This process heralds the exploitation of capitalists in industrial society which has been replaced by digital exploitation. This results in a redefinition of the concept of media consumers since the ideological hegemony of commercialism exploits this digital labour. While digital labour provides an avenue for earning money from a game and requires massive investments of attention. Attention is among the most valuable things that human beings can provide. This article argues attention in gaming has been traded for experiences. The role of money is to give players the ability to shift their attention toward the experiences they most want to have. Hence, gamers usually earn joy, entertainment and social rewards, and are willing to invest time and money in gaming to obtain those.

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