

The Political Economy of Working-Class Social Media Commerce: Digital Capitalism and the Engelsian Concept of Working-Class “Property”

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Abstract: Social Media platforms, from being simply a mode of communication, have, recently, evolved into digital “marketplaces”, which have been facilitating the exchange of commodities within the working-class. In addition to the digitalisation of the medium of exchange value creation, which gives the worker a certain amount of regulated autonomy, this has also reinvigorated the debate about owning property and its utilisation for credit and profit generation by the working-class. The term, ‘Property’ in the paper, is not restricted to only real estate property but encompasses everything which has the potential to generate an exchange value for its owner. The paper generalises Engels’s ideas about property owned by the workers from two of his major works, “*The Housing Question*” and “*The Condition of the Working-Class in England*” and uses the same to analyse the political economy and growing popularity of social media-based commerce among the working-class. Through data collected from the university town of Dunedin in Aotearoa New Zealand, a town with an extensive and established system of social media-based commerce, the paper puts forward the relevance of the *Engelsian* critique of the idea of uplifting the working-class simply by giving them control over the possession of property, in the age of digital capitalism. In doing so, the present paper talks about how digital capitalism utilises social media and its associated platforms for commercial exchange to keep the cycle of accumulation in the capitalist social system intact by further exploiting the working-class.

Keywords: Friedrich Engels, digital capitalism, housing question, property, social media, working-class

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1. Introduction

Friedrich Engels has been one of the most controversial yet influential figures of Marxist theory since the death of Marx in 1883 (Mavroudeas 2020). Two of his most famous works, namely, “*The Condition of the Working-Class in England*” (1845) and “*The Housing Question*” (1872) have long been seen as classics within urban sociology and anthropology. However, in both these works, Engels brings forward certain very important points related to political economy and the ownership of property by the working-class, which almost always get overshadowed by his brilliant depictions and analysis of the terrible conditions of the working-class lives. Engels speaking from a perspective informed by industrial capitalism, approaches the term “property” through a paradigmatic lens of housing and land. Property, however, is a contested term within the contemporary information and post-industrial society because of the complexities

which have arisen within the information society, especially in terms of non-physical but material entities like information and knowledge themselves becoming properties with significant exchange and rentier values (Fuchs 2019a). However, the significance of the term “property”, be it psychological or physiological, is immense within Marxist theory as, “[c]ommunists [...] bring to the front, as the leading question [...] the property question, no matter what its degree of development at the time” (Marx and Engels 1848, 519).

To Engels (1892), private property is primarily a tool of social domination which serves to keep the social status quo intact. His ideas surrounding the properties owned by the working-class clearly lay out the methods through which the capitalist social system uses the working-class owned properties for its own benefits (Engels 1872). Engels (1892) mentions that capitalism utilises the fact that the working-class owns properties and is thus hypothetically placed in a position to extract monetary value out of the same, to reduce the general wage levels in the society. It does so, so as to provide the exploiter and purchaser of the labour-power of the working-class, capitalism, the complete surplus value (Engels 1892). Engels (1878) also realised that this surplus value cannot be appropriated unless there is a distributive mechanism which actively aids this purpose. This realisation made him progress from his ideas of property and talk about the method of distribution within capitalism and its impact on the creation of class differences (Engels 1892). He brings forward how new means and modes of production are initially resisted by the old mode of distribution (Engels 1892). Within contemporary capitalism, both these ideas find relevance because not only is there a valorisation of working-class property directly in terms of exchange value and accumulation of profits, but it is the mode of distribution and circulation itself, highly communicative in nature, which becomes an active facilitator of the new source of profit-accumulation.

Communication has always been the foundation upon which the socio-economic fabric of the society is constructed, and social media is an important component of the same within the information society of the twenty-first century where it is not only a technology but rather a techno-social system (Fuchs 2014c). Burston, Dyer-Witford and Hearn (2010) also associated this digitalisation of the society with the actually existing socio-political realities, and opined, “*the term ‘digital’ does not simply refer to digital machines and processes but to the entire political, social and economic context and infrastructure within which they have emerged. This is how we now live in the ‘digital age’*” (Burston, Dyer-Witford and Hearn 2010, 215). While the previous centuries were dominated by industrial and finance capitalism, contemporary society has witnessed a gradual evolution towards the primacy of information (Castells 2009), where information has become a major aspect of the capitalist production and circulation process. This alteration of the capitalist production and circulation process was done through an emphasis on the utilisation of information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as computers and televisions, which function digitally and not mechanically. Castells (1996/2010) rightly extends this by saying that though “information” has been central to human societies since a long time, the peculiarity of the contemporary usage of ICTs is that communication and information have evolved into being a raw material for the production of surplus value.

The present paper focuses on one of the most recent, yet most dynamic, innovation in the domain of digital communication – social media, more precisely Facebook. Within the large domain of functions, which Facebook performs along with its primary functionality of aiding communication between the users, the emphasis of the paper is on the element of working-class commercial activities within Facebook.

Technology does not operate within a vacuum. Since Facebook draws a huge share of its revenue from advertisements (Fuchs 2008; 2014c), it has an implicit interest in keeping its advertisers afloat and thus also has a stake in avoiding the economic crash be it through an accumulation crisis (O'Connor 1984) or through an overproduction crisis (Mandel 1978) or through any other forms of crisis. This again calls for an understanding of communication that can analyse social media use as a material practice itself (Fuchs 2020; Mosco 2009) and social media's utilisation as a facilitator of capital accumulation. The integration of the digital ecosystem with the physical "brick and mortar" framework of profit-accumulation is essential because, as Fuchs (2019a) rightly mentions, digital capitalism today, co-exists with "finance capitalism, hyper-industrial capitalism, crisis capitalism, authoritarian capitalism, neoliberal capitalism, mobility capitalism, global capitalism, etc." (Fuchs 2019a, 3).

Communication is fundamentally important to human society because it is the process through which individuals construct their sociality and become parts of social groups, relations and other collective social institutions (Fuchs 2020), either voluntarily or involuntarily. Capitalism uses this sociality of the human beings as a weapon for domination. Rosa Luxemburg (1913/2003) in her seminal work *The Accumulation of Capital* stated, "[t]he process of production is based on the continuation of two different, though closely connected factors, the technical and social conditions – on the precise relationship between men and nature and that between men and men" (Luxemburg 1913/2003, 4).

The relation between "men and men", referring to the importance of communication in the society, is in no way inferior as an analytical tool in theorising the contemporary modes of capitalist exploitation. The overcoming of the marginalisation of communication within Marxist theory (Fuchs and Mosco 2016) is critical if one is to analyse contemporary social relationships, which are products of the enclosures enforced upon society by digital capitalism (Hall and Stahl 2012). Such an analytical perspective is especially important when certain forms of technology have become so normalised that they have become an integral part of human sustenance itself. It should be noted here that most of the technological innovations that have been normalised in the daily lives of people are communicative in nature.

The idea that communication has always been an important factor in the generation and sustenance of class inequalities (Fuchs and Mosco 2016), is further accentuated when these normalised communicative technological advancements are used for the accumulation of profits, as is the case of the subject that is the focus of the present paper – social media commerce in the context of working-class property. The digital means of value creation use the relationship between labour and digital technologies along with the existing modes of social organisation within capitalism to continue alienating the workers from the means and products of their own production (Fuchs and Sevignani 2013, 204). Keeping up with this evolution, social science has also brought in new techniques and conceptual paradigms to analyse the new form of society such as "free labour" (Terranova 2000), "immaterial labour" (Hardt and Negri 2000), "digital labour" (Fuchs and Sevignani 2013), and the like. One of the primary aspects of almost all these various understandings of labour within contemporary society is the emphasis on how labour as a conceptual element intersects with the political economy of ICTs (Briziarelli 2014) in digital capitalism.

The present paper attempts to argue that digital capitalism has brought forward a method of profit-accumulation and reproduction of capital by converting the personal property of the working-classes, be it in the form of housing or other artefacts, into commodities with exchange value and coercing the working-class into, as Engels

(1843) says, utilise them for the fulfilment of reciprocal needs and requirements, especially through trade and commercial activities. It has done so by bringing forward digital modes that encourage such commercial practices and subsume the working-class in within these modes of circulation.

The central questions that the current paper attempts to answer are the following ones: What is the relevance of working-class social media commerce in sustaining the capitalist system? How does this form of digital commerce utilise existing networks of digital communication?

First, the paper engages with the processes through which social media commerce is aiding the transformation of the personal properties of workers into commodities of commercial trade. Second, taking cue from that, the paper analyses the conditions and causes under which workers engages in social media commerce with other members of society who, more often than not, are also from the working-class. Finally, based on the two problematised analytical situations mentioned above, the paper goes into bringing forward an attempt to understand how social media commerce is changing the fabric of social reality. It argues that the rapid growth of social media commerce is emerging as a tool, aided by the crisis of neoliberal capitalism, that is converting society into a society of customers. All the three aspects mentioned above contribute to an understanding of how social media commerce supports capitalist profit accumulation, both digitally and physically, either directly or indirectly by exploiting the perennial social crisis and rampant consumerism already existing within society.

2. Working-Class Social Media Commerce: A New Paradigm Within the Capitalist System

Social media, one of the most recent advancement in technology, bases itself on communication and uses communication to extract further profits and surplus value from the working-class. Primarily, it does so through targeted advertisements and encouraging the users to spend time on the platform (Fuchs 2019; 2015; 2014c). This encouragement occurs through masking its capital accumulation model (Fuchs 2017) by making platforms free to use. It also attains a high level of participation because it provides the users a brief respite from capitalism's mass scale alienation (Fuchs 2017). Social media commerce, especially within the working-classes, capitalises on this very element of respite by using digital communities and spaces created by the users for promoting commercial activities between them and thus again pushing the working-class into an alienated existence dominated by capital.

Social media commerce, in the context of the current paper, refers to commercial activities on social media platforms such as Facebook and to certain extent, Instagram. The focus of the paper is on Facebook because the commercial aspect of social media on Instagram is still not as developed as it is on Facebook¹. It must be mentioned at the onset that social media commerce, in the current context, does not refer to ways in which Facebook earns its revenue directly, but rather encapsulates the processes where users engage in commercial activities on social media that aid larger capitalist firms to make profits both within and outside the digital ecosystem. It is the analysis of this relationship that this paper attempts to bring forward.

¹ However, Facebook has been attempting relentlessly to initiate the process on Instagram as well through Instagram Shops <https://about.fb.com/news/2020/05/introducing-facebook-shops/>

Social media commerce helps capitalism in the development and scattering of networks, which as Banaji (2020) describes, is one of most important properties of capitalist accumulation strategies. Marxist terminology terms this very quality, as Banaji (2020) mentions, the moment of circulation within the capitalist cycle of accumulation. The development of these networks also emphasises the shift from industrial capitalism to newer forms of capitalism. In the contemporary society dominated by digital capitalism, social media takes up the task of generating these networks of circulation, which were previously dominated by merchants and traders (Banaji 2020). This functionality also makes social media a typical case of the techno-social model (Fuchs 2021, chapter 2) that emphasises the social character of technological innovations under capitalism. Facebook brought forward FM (Facebook Marketplace) in the year 2016 as an extension of its already well-established technological framework. The official declaration from Facebook regarding the ushering in of Marketplace on the social media platform stated,

Facebook is where people connect, and in recent years more people have been using Facebook to connect in another way: buying and selling with each other. This activity started in Facebook Groups and has grown substantially. More than 450 million people visit buy and sell groups each month – from families in a local neighborhood to collectors around the world. To help people make more of these connections, today we’re introducing Marketplace, a convenient destination to discover, buy and sell items with people in your community. Marketplace makes it easy to find new things you’ll love, and find a new home for the things you’re ready to part with. We’ll continue to build new options and features to make this the best experience for people².

As is evident from the statement itself, Marketplace or FM, was designed so as to exploit the relations of communication that users had built up on the social media platform. “Marketplace makes it easy to find new and used items such as clothes, furniture, cars and even your next home to rent”³. FM encourages the usage of social media as a means of intra-working class or intra-user commerce. FM, in some ways, capitalised upon the practices of “Buy and Sell” groups on Facebook. These “Buy and Sell” groups, however, operated more as normal groups, where the user had to describe manually the details of the product listed. FM did away with all of these lengthy procedures and made it easy to list commodities for sale with a full-fledged user interface integrated within Facebook to aid in listing the commodities and accurately describing the state of usage they are in, which points towards, in Marxian terms, the unused use-value of the commodity on sale.

² See <https://about.fb.com/news/2016/10/introducing-marketplace-buy-and-sell-with-your-local-community/>

³ See <https://www.facebook.com/marketplace/learn-more/buying>

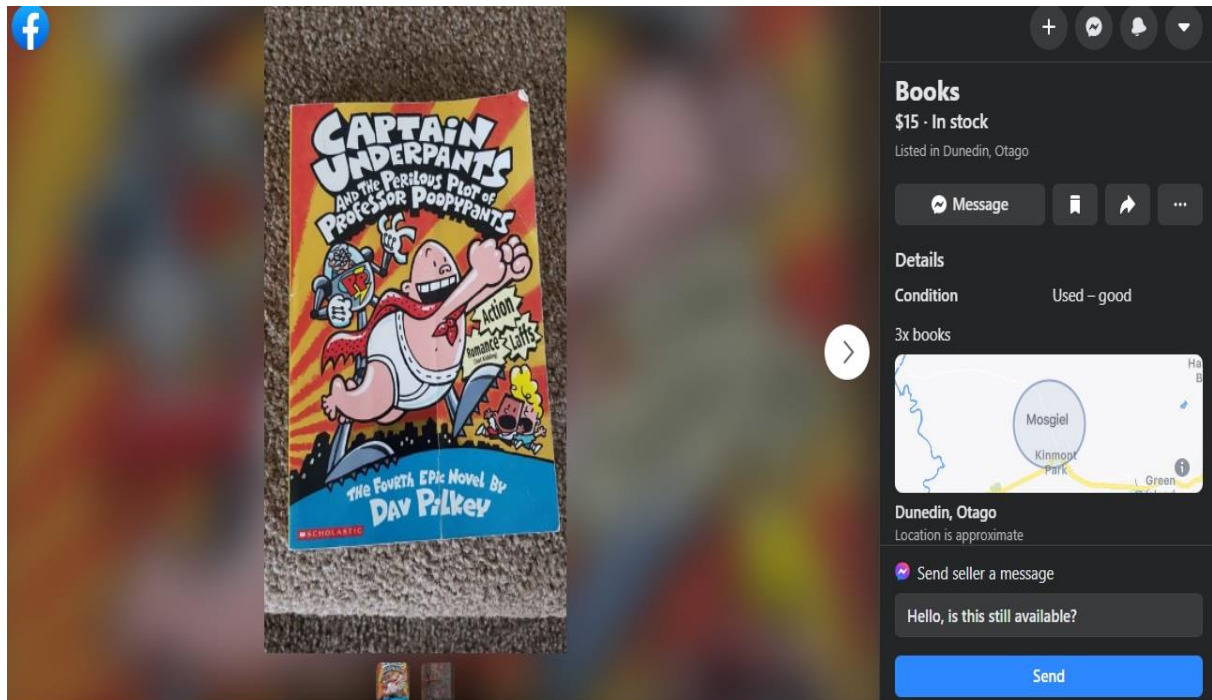


Figure 1: A book on sale on Facebook. Facebook makes it easier to describe the condition and location of the commodity. (Source: Facebook Marketplace)

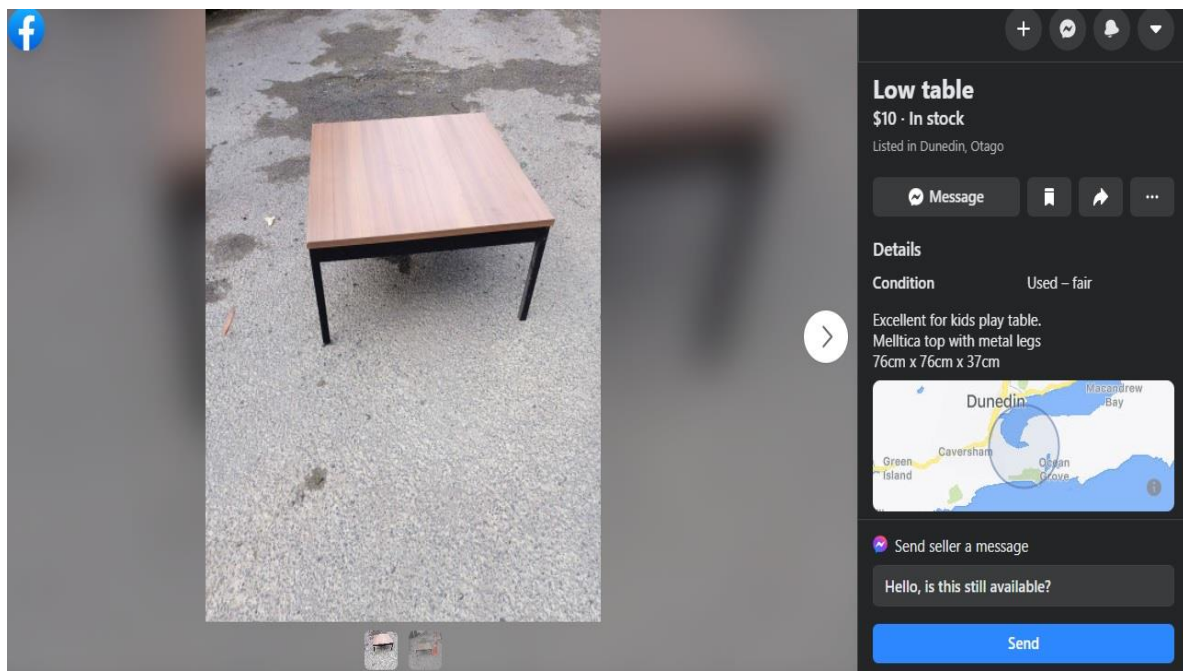


Figure 2: A table listed on Facebook with an elaborate description. It can be noticed how Facebook provides an instant option to get in contact with the seller with pre-configured messages. (Source: Facebook Marketplace)

The introduction of FM, or rather the institutionalisation of social media e-commerce, has furthered the practice of “buy and sell” and has made buying and selling more mobile, institutionalised and popular. The increase in mobility was achieved through the integration of a designated FM tab in the Facebook app that allows the user to access the Marketplace option more easily in comparison with commercial FB groups,

for which a considerable amount of Internet data had to be used in addition to the complexities raised by the user interface itself.

The current study is based in Dunedin, a city located in the south of Aotearoa New Zealand with a population of approximately 125,000⁴. It has five well established networks of social media commerce on Facebook Marketplace, namely, “Otago Flattening Goods”, “Otago Flattening Goods II”, “Second Hand Books Otago Uni”, “Dunedin Buy/Sell/Trade”, and “Otago Flattening Goods for Students”⁵. The 5 groups combined on average had around 29 listings every day over the last six months. The users in these groups mostly focus on the buying and selling of used products⁶. Some of the most commonly listed or sold items on the groups are clothes, books, household amenities, etc. In addition, there are also occasional listings of flats and other accommodation related products. There are almost no centralised listings i.e., the number of listings coming from companies or agencies focused on pure commercial trading. Occasionally new products are listed⁷ but mostly sales are focused on used goods.

Through volunteer sampling, a total of ten respondents were selected for participation in this pilot study. Following selection, in-depth interviews were conducted with each of the respondents where a variety of questions were asked including the reason of their usage of social media for commercial activities like buying and selling instead of established websites like eBay or TradeMe, their usage of the money they received through selling of their personal products, etc. These respondents were selected based on the number of items which they have listed on Facebook for sale over the last 6 months. Out of the total interviewees, three (3) were engaged in doing manual labour where the rest were engaged in either academic or other forms of intellectual or digital labour.

3. Social Media Commerce as a Site of Exploitation

Jenkins (2008) describes social media to be an expression of the culture of participation, where “consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content” (Jenkins 2008, 331). His ideas focus on social media’s capacity to be the foundation of an alternate media which can destroy the monopolistic control over media following which, media can become democratised. However, as Fuchs (2014b; 2014c) shows, social media is not a completely democratised space but rather is an extension of the authoritarian social system. This relation between technology and society has tremendous influence over the everyday lives of people as technological advancements, in every era, have come to define what Gardiner (2000) calls the style of life. For instance, Qui, Gregg and Crawford (2014) described the iPhone to be a watershed moment in the history of techno-cultural advancement because it represented a paradigmatic shift in the manner in which social practices within and outside the industries was organised and conceptualised. Crawford previously had described the iPhone to be “a key moment of metastasis when an already intimate, popularized technology expanded to encompass a host of media forms” (Crawford 2012, 219).

Social media commerce, similar to the iPhone, is also one such moment because it has fundamentally transformed the ways in which the non-capitalist classes engage in the circulation and distribution process. It has significantly altered the dynamics of

⁴ Refer to <https://www.stats.govt.nz/tools/2018-census-place-summaries/dunedin-city>

⁵ These are public groups that can be easily found on Facebook.

⁶ There are other commercial FB groups that focus on small and independent producers’ direct sales.

⁷ Products that have been bought but not used at all.

ownership by ensuring a constant circulation of both commodities and money within the capitalist society which allows it to further accumulate profits. In the entire process, it must be remembered that both the “producer” and the “consumer” of the commodity, understood in the classical Marxist sense as anything which satisfies the needs of the individual (Marx 1867), within social media commerce almost always come from the same social class. This exchange within the working-class of the personal properties of the working-class, which is itself entrenched within a crisis ridden system, ensure that the class mobility of the working-class remains stagnant. Taking cue from Engels (1845) on this process, one can also say that the entire cycle of social media commerce ensures that nobody has the potential of “rising above their class” (Engels 1845, 321) because the exchange value “temporarily accumulated” by the working-class again gets formally accumulated either as direct profit or rent by the capitalist class.

Social media commerce within this socio-political milieu, can be said to be one of the most important aspects of social media today where there is a direct overlap between the existing economic system and the manner in which people use social media. The expansion of the term “digital” can also be used to put into perspective in relation to the capitalist strategy to allow people to sell physical “items” to other people directly, in the process turning them into commodities, without any intermediary except the digitalised medium facilitating the exchange. This exchange can be looked at either through a simplistically optimistic or through a critically informed paradigm. There are significant voices which have argued, from the former perspective, that with a mass-scale social level digitalisation of everything, capitalism will eventually come to an end because it will lose its ability to draw surplus value from most of the commodities (Mason 2016). However, this view does not take into account the power of capitalism to restructure itself with the changing dynamics of society.

Engaging in commercial activities through social media is significantly different than other digital e-commerce platforms like Amazon or eBay because social media commerce is a site of the direct exploitation of communicative and social media labour where the combined labour of users is exploited in creating the symbolism associated with the technology (Fuchs 2015; Hardt and Negri 2000). While for Amazon or eBay operated marketplaces, the communication follows the actual exchange, for FM, it is communication itself which facilitates the exchange. Communication here, as Fuchs (2015) has highlighted, becomes a material force of exploitation within society. The desire to use communication as a material tool of accumulation has contributed to FM emerging as a popular tool for digital commerce among common people. Most of the people interviewed for the study responded in affirmative to the growing popularity of FM as a viable alternative to other e-commerce websites especially those selling used goods:

- “It depends on the item, but I generally look for second hand first, via Facebook”.
- “If I get a good deal, I would be happy to buy from the marketplace. It is faster than others”.
- “Always Facebook for used”.

Another major difference is that while in the case of e-commerce sites like Amazon, it is the economic structure in its entirety which more often than not determines the price of the product or the commodity on sale, but in the case of FM, price is determined by a coalition of various factors such as the state of social crisis and the personal need of the seller. Needs, as Marx (1857/1858) pointed out, can be both natural and socially produced. Capitalism depends on the latter more than the former to produce surplus

value. It is within the paradigm of the latter where it can produce consumerism which hinges upon an everlasting state of continuously evolving needs, which is a significant driving force behind the proliferation of commercial activities through social media in the hope of generating some individual monetary capital, even if temporarily. These needs are crucial for capitalism because as O'Connor (1984) argues, the needs of the working-class determine the demand for consumer goods, and if the demand for consumer goods increases, also the value composition of capital itself increases (O'Connor 1984, 157). Social media commerce caters to the process of satisfying this growing demand for consumer goods by temporarily allowing the working-class to control some amount of the exchange value of the commodity. The challenge for social science today is thus to come out with a holistic understanding of the term accumulation itself and the process in which it is being performed in the information society. It is something, which cannot be done unless one takes into account communication within the larger gambit of social processes, especially communication through digital means and the relationship which this form of communication shares with its non-digital predecessors.

Contemporary capitalism is “profoundly ideological” (Fuchs 2019a, 4) because it works through creating a universal consumerism and an all-encompassing commodification, which in turn, keeps on replenishing the old needs while at the same time, creating new needs within the society, which can only be satisfied by monetary capital. This entire process of the creation of new needs within society leads to the analysis of the production of new modes of consumption (Harvey 2006, 8) and takes one back to Marx’s statement about money being the alien essence that dominates and subsumes human existence (Marx 1844, 172). As Marx (1857/1858, 408) mentions, the production of new consumption can only be produced through three distinct methods, “firstly quantitative expansion of existing consumption; secondly: creation of new needs by propagating the existing ones in a wide circle; thirdly: production of new needs and discovery and creation of new use values” (Marx 1857/1858, 408, quoted in Harvey 2006, 8)

Social media commerce allows capitalism to give vent to the above-mentioned processes. It gives the working-class access to a certain amount of capital, the usage of which depends upon external factors beyond their own control. The constant creation of new needs, either out of crisis or out of the consumerist nature of capitalist society, enables social media commerce to be a vital aspect of capitalist accumulation because it temporarily counters low wages in the economy, which cannot be mediated through normal e-commerce websites like Amazon where the relations between the value and the price of a commodity are more rigidly established.

The uniqueness of Facebook Marketplace or in general any other potential social media commerce platform is that these platforms work as a model that is based on communication and accumulation through indirect sales. They are also different from other models such as the one used by Airbnb and Uber because Facebook use for commercial activities is gratis. But Facebook is potentially more exploitative than other platforms because even though it does not charge a fee, it encompasses within its platform a diverse range of accumulation strategies, especially advertising that feeds on the user’s cognitive instincts and commerce, which involves direct physical exchange. While other e-commerce websites work on a model based on the primacy of accumulation through direct sale, Facebook works through encouraging users to GET involved in resales so as to increase the direct sales of others, which are the platform’s potential advertisement and financial sources.

Fuchs (2017, 293) argues that Airbnb builds its capital accumulation model on individuals' alienation from the community in order to promise community experiences via Airbnb and commodify community. Community as ideology helps masking Airbnb and other capitalist platforms to their "for-profit capitalist businesses aiming at making monetary profits" (Fuchs 2017, 293), but also helps them in gaining a high level of social acceptability. Thus, although the exchange of commodities for money within the working-class is not entirely new with websites like TradeMe and eBay doing it for years, the new medium through which this exchange is being propagated within the society certainly demands academic attention because of its uniqueness in comparison to other established modes of this form of exchange. Coupled with cybernetic domination (Wiener 1961), it creates a scenario where every click and every message become a part and parcel of the profit-making mechanism of capitalism. Under this current mode, it does not matter if one is merely browsing or scrolling through social media. The entire digital ecosystem works in a manner that encourages and enables every activity into becoming a potential source of capital accumulation. A political economic analysis of social media commerce that proliferates through Facebook and the groups therein reveals the integration of social media commerce into the broader contours of the general structure of the capitalist economy that revolves around profit generation.

Facebook groups created for the purpose of commercial activities do not earn any revenue for the users or its facilitators. In an indirect fashion, they help keeping Facebook a gratis platform by diverting profits to its financiers by exploiting the constantly changing working-class composition that results in a constantly varying pool of needs and requirements within society (Hardt and Negri 2004) as well as the existing culture of consumerism at a mass scale (Fuchs 2019a). This culture of consumerism works through the conversion of human beings into nothing but profit-making machines (Engels 1845). The conversion of individuals into appendages of the broader system of profit-accumulation is one of the most important effects of the rampant consumerisation of the society where each individual witnesses another individual as consumer and not a fellow human being. In other words, individuals become, as Engels (1845) says, a source of capital for further accumulation.

4. The Information Society and Social Media Commerce

Bell (1974) characterised contemporary society by two interrelated processes, the change from a goods based economic structure to a service and information based one, along with the increasing importance within the social structure being placed upon workers in the professional and technical sectors. While theorising social media commerce, this argument has to be extended and modified, because through the proliferation of platforms like FM, what one witnesses is a physical mode of commodity circulation within the working-class being promoted by a digital platform. The primacy of the information-based economy still holds but it is characterised, in certain cases like the present one, by a complicated web of social capital circulation based upon the exchange of physical commodities. Without the physical circulation of capital through exchange of commodities, the digital platforms cannot sustain themselves as the latter can only remain free and counter its own lower marginal costs by an economics of scale if the former keeps on accumulating profits and diverting those in the form of investments to the latter. So, while the "new men" like the mathematician and the scientist (Neilson 2018, 885) still hold a dominant position in the society, they cannot, on their own, be the controllers of the society since the reproductive value of the commodity produced by them is extremely low (Marx 1867). There, thus, arises the requirement of a physical circulation model, which can concurrently exploit, the materialistic needs

of the people as well the digital labour of the people entwined within the alienated production process in the society.

Social media commerce facilitates the process of creation of capital of a new kind in the information society, where the relation between the price of the commodity and its value is different than what it had been under pure industrial capitalism. The value of a commodity, according to Marx (1867) is determined by an addition of three factors – constant capital, variable capital and surplus value while the price is fixed, as Rigi (2014) summarises, through a process which takes note of the supply and demand existing in the market. The price often exceeds the value, thereby paving the way forward for the creation of profits. The realisation of this surplus value and profit occurs in different forms such as interest, rent or through profits drawn from the market or by reducing the variable capital involved in the production process (Marx 1894). In the current age, along with these forms of accumulation, there is an additional accumulation of digital rent on information and advertising (Rigi 2014) as well, which has become a vital aspect of the sustenance of digital monopolies like Google and Facebook.

The free access to social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter as opposed to platforms like Airbnb where for the final product one has to pay a fee (Fuchs 2017) can be explained through two interrelated theoretical arguments. At first, one needs to acknowledge the relevance of Marx's (1867) insight that products of science, which are primarily products of mental labour, are almost always priced lower than its value because the labour-power required to reproduce the same is often significantly lower than the original labour-power invested. Taking cue from that, one can then refer to Staab and Nachtwey (2016) who take this further by saying that digital capitalism attempts to tackle this particular problem by reducing the market price of the products of science so that lower profits can be nullified by an economy of scale (Staab and Nachtwey 2016).

So, in spite of the fact that a huge amount of investment goes into, both in terms of constant and variable capital, creating an algorithmic platform like Facebook Marketplace, which can facilitate commercial activities on social media, charging a rent or a fee for access would simply encourage other platforms to invade the niche space that platforms like Facebook have carved out for themselves. This becomes especially relevant in the case of Third World economies like India where sites like Airbnb and Uber have been facing tough competition from local platforms like Oyo Rooms and OLA. The free access to Facebook has not generated such competition. Additionally, the press releases made by Facebook regarding its free access to users establishes a public consciousness that helps retaining its tremendous user base⁸.

Facebook's economy of scale makes it easy for the platform to popularise any new development that it introduces. Facebook's task, in popularising parts of its framework like Marketplace, becomes easier because it is already a part of the digital eco-system in the domain of communication and advertising, with the latter constituting the bulk of its revenue model (Fuchs 2015; 2014c). The only thing which Facebook had to do to make Marketplace a dominant mode of distribution and circulation was to encourage its 2.45 billion⁹ users to start using it to sell their personal property. For achieving this aim, Facebook made FM more accessible and doing away with any trading fees, which

⁸Facebook has made many such statements over the years. In 2018, it said, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-5600803/Facebook-WONT-charge-users-subscription-fee-opt-targeted-ads-completely.html>. Again, in 2019, <https://www.businessinsider.com/facebook-changes-free-and-always-will-be-slogan-on-homepage-2019-8?r=AU&IR=T>

⁹ See <https://www.businessofapps.com/data/facebook-statistics/>

most other domains charge. These combined and interrelated processes contributed towards Facebook's monopolisation of social media commerce.

A significant aspect of these monopolies is the rise of mobile applications (apps), and the purposes for which these apps are used which is again dependent to a large extent on communication and participatory culture. Facebook utilised this participatory culture already existing within its communicative platform to promote and expand FM. Engaging in commercial activities through Facebook nullifies some important factors which previously acted as hindrances within sites like eBay or TradeMe such as, initial investment, time and ease of access. With eBay or TradeMe, one needs to go through a certain process while listing the commodity, which is both time consuming, at times expensive and a bit complicated. Facebook, on the other hand, allows one to sell, "*on the go*" for free and with no success fees¹⁰. In other words, while on eBay, the listing process is more mechanical in nature, the listing process on Facebook is in a way organic in nature, which enables the user to make use of their spontaneous will and freedom. This fact can be verified to a certain extent, from the field data itself as three of the interviewees put it:

- "Facebook as a medium, as opposed to something like TradeMe, has the advantage of not requiring an investment to sell an item. So, I can get more out of the sale, as opposed to when I have to sell on TradeMe".
- "It's an excellent platform, free and easy to use. I stopped using TradeMe completely because the fees got too high".
- "I reckon it's an easy platform to sell things and better than TradeMe because TradeMe has the extra cost that goes to them whenever you sell any item. Facebook encourages me to sell more".

Theories about social media have often talked about the element of communication and its usage for digital profit generation by using communication as a production process in itself (Fuchs 2020; Williams 1980). While for the workers, it is the exploitation of variable capital by the capitalist in the form of wages which increase the profits of the capitalist, for the capitalist however it is the entirety of the social capital which produces the surplus value and in turn helps in increasing the rate of profit (Rigi 2014). By using the power of communication, the entire structure attempts to remain at an equilibrium by providing the capitalist with enough social capital to invest in producer goods by increasing the circulation of consumer goods through social media. The consumer goods produced from the producer goods, would again be out in the market with exchange values and the cycle of profit-accumulation, thus, continues.

5. The State of Permanent Social Crisis

Crisis, of any form, has a huge impact on the social fabric of any society. With every crisis, there occurs certain alterations within the society which become characteristic of societies as history moves forward. The present crisis, which has slowly but definitely become a permanent feature of lives under contemporary capitalism has somehow forced the working-classes to transform its personal properties into commodities. Personal properties are different from private property as they do not naturally, without a market to appropriate it, have the ability to generate profits. Social media commerce provides this market to encompass of all use value within the accumulative capitalist

¹⁰ The fee payable to the website if the product gets sold.

circuit thus promoting contemporary capitalism from being an agency of formal subsumption to an agency of real subsumption (Negri 2003). This process where the productivity of labour somehow becomes redundant because the production process itself becomes a commodity through a complete reorganisation of work through the application of communication technology, constitutes what Negri (1989) based on Marx (1867) calls real subsumption, the unequivocal and complete realisation of the law of value (Negri 2003; 1989). When users use Facebook to “sell on the go”, they are not only being exploited on the basis of unpaid digital labour (Fuchs 2014a) but also on the basis of the fact that their productive forces no longer determine the value of their labour-power (Negri 2003). The relationship between the value of the commodity and labour-power become further complicated when the same kind of product is continuously used for profit-accumulation.

The act of resale does not generate profit for the capitalist directly but rather, it creates the conditions that make capital accumulation possible. So, while for the seller, it is true, that there is no profit because the resale usually gathers a lower price than the original one, the point that has to be studied is the direction of investment or expenditure of the generated price in the case of a resale. Harvey (2006) correctly argues that under a system that depends on commodity production, it is the exchange that determines the relationship or separates the aspects of production and consumption. Drawing from Marx (1867) that, Harvey argues that the concept of use value is the determining factor in establishing the relationship between commodities and human needs. However, use value is almost always related to the qualitative aspect of economic relationships while exchange value is related to the quantitative dimension. Under real subsumption, it is this relationship between the use value and exchange value that gets blurred because all use values, already utilised or hitherto unutilised, become potential avenues for the generation of exchange values.

Social media commerce aids the working-class to make use of the unutilised use value of the commodity. Hence, even though the resale of the used goods on social media does not make any profits for the working-class, it does allow the working-class to invest that money back into the market. If the resale had not taken place, and social media would not have accelerated or facilitated the process, this investment would not have taken place. Additionally, the person buying the commodity also pays for a certain amount of use value that the commodity can still offer, as a part of the same has already been used, and inevitably finds himself/herself again in need of the very same commodity in the future.

Mandel (1975, 525-526) characterises the primary sustaining factor of the socio-economic fabric of the capitalist mode of production as the generalisation of commodity production. Social media commerce aids to sustaining generalised commodity production by temporarily enabling the working-class to satisfy its needs for consumer goods by consuming the commodities that have already been produced so that new commodities of the same kind can be produced for more consumption at a rapid pace. This new paced cycle of production requires investment from the working-class at regular intervals. As many as eight interviewees affirmed that they do in fact, buy or have to buy, the same kind of consumer goods, with the money they earn by selling their personal property. This temporary monetary capital or financial stability generated by the sale, thus, again gets accumulated as new profit for the capitalist who produces consumer goods.

According to Kowalik (2014), the Austro-Marxist Otto Bauer argued that capitalists who engage with the production of consumer goods constantly accumulate a portion of profits attributed to the production of producer goods, which then allow “for a more

rapid production growth of the means of production” (Kowalik 2014, 62) can be a useful analytical argument to make in this regard. However, the current’s assumption that there existed no problems of surplus value realisation (Kowalik 2014), can be critiqued based on the fact that it is precisely the problem of realisation during economic crisis, which makes capitalism invent these new methods to realise the already existing surplus value available for consumption in the market. This realisation, however, does not and cannot happen through the conventional methods because under the aegis of contemporary capitalism, the working-class is always surviving under the conditions of economic and socio-psychological crises. The economic crisis inevitably results in lowering the capacities of the working-class to consume commodities, which can call forth an overproduction crisis. The result of an overproduction crisis, again, is the failure of the capitalist infrastructure to realise the existing surplus value in the market because with the dwindling wages, the system simply does not allow the working-class to consume the commodities already available in the market. We are here reminded of Luxemburg’s (1913/2003) idea that the absence of any regulatory mechanism on private production is a fundamental problem of capitalism (Luxemburg 1913/2003, 6). It is the absence of this regulation that subsequently leads towards overproduction and economic crisis. In other words, as long as capitalism evades the problem of realisation, the chances for it to avoid the crisis increase.

In the contemporary times, capitalism has reacted to this crisis of realisation by creating a mechanism that ensures that capital does not remain fallow (Mandel 1978; Engels 1843) but keeps on getting invested and circulated. In this regard, for the capitalist, the personal property of the working-class is a hindrance because in an overproduction crisis, it is temporarily blocking the worker to consume more commodities that have already been produced. Social media commerce ensures the mobility of capital in society in a manner that allows capitalism to counter this very problem. It uses the state of crisis to create a situation where working-class property is sold on social media, which enables the working-class to make a temporary gain out of the commodity as response to the state of crisis or to fulfil their consumerist needs. During the course of the present study, not many respondents talked about being able to save their money or even wanting to do that. In other words, except the exception of one respondent, who talked about saving money to repay a loan, which is also a form of capital accumulation, all the others affirmed to investing the money back into the market directly or indirectly, sometimes through rent payments or by buying the same kind of consumer goods that they had sold.

The digitalisation of the mode of exchange has facilitated a wide variety of commodities, which previously had limited exchange values to become significant aspects of further accumulation of profit. Capital has become financial money capital, a form where it becomes absolute and does not distinguish between producer and consumer goods during accumulation (Luxemburg 1915). Overproduction and its associated economic crisis (Mandel 1978) have also contributed to this popularisation of social media commerce. The existence of a huge inflow of consumer goods within the market with the majority of the population unable to buy those creates exactly the kind of problem that Bauer had rejected as Kowalik (2014) elaborates. In spite of the fact that FM allows the users to fix prices of their own, these prices are mediated by a complex web of social crisis and the resulting natural or social needs. The prices of these existing range of commodities determine the value which the working-classes put on their personal properties for sale in social media.

The freedom and accessibility provided by Facebook in listing the commodities can be seen in light of the argument made by Fuchs (2016, 37-42) that within capitalist

structures, there is always a provision of relative freedom, which the system provides to the working-class to express themselves but within certain limits. Social media commerce enables the sellers to generate exchange value out of items which were only of use value previously and it does so by hinging on the continuous state of crisis and ever-increasing need within capitalism, both of which are dialectically related to each other.

One of the interviewees responded to be living on the streets due to eviction and thus had to resort to selling off personal goods to survive. The respondent admitted having been forced to keep the price low so as to facilitate quick sale, thus bringing in a new dimension to the procedure in which capitalism utilises the element of “time” for domination (Shippen 2014). In the case of social media commerce, this domination is performed through a continuous easing of the process of subsumption of the working-class within the capitalist circulation process by exploiting the state of crisis and immediate needs of the working-class. This is also reminiscent of Engels’s (1872) arguments about the housing properties owned by the working-classes whose prices vary significantly due to other associated processes which are outside their own control:

The growth of the big modern cities gives the land in certain areas, particularly in those which are centrally situated, an artificial and often colossally increasing value; the buildings erected on these areas depress this value, instead of increasing it, because they no longer correspond to the changed circumstances. They are pulled down and replaced by others. This takes place above all with workers’ houses which are situated centrally and whose rents, even with the greatest overcrowding, can never, or only very slowly, increase above a certain maximum. They are pulled down and in their stead shops, warehouses and public buildings are erected (Engels 1872, 319).

The autonomy of the working-class, in a manner that reminds us of Engels’s (1872, 319) description of housing, is at the mercy of capitalism in spite of the ownership of property. The sustenance of social media commerce depends on the sustenance of the crisis within the society, both materialistically and psychologically. Taking note of some of the answers which were revealed during the field work by the interviewees, the relation between needs, crisis and the act of selling become explicitly established:

- “I lost my job, so selling the items was the only way to go ahead”.
- “I had just been forced to move to a new property, along with moving costs, on the first day I had to pay for other associated services, I had no money for food, I am unable to work and so selling was the only option left”.
- “I had bills due so, I needed to make money fast, so I sold a few items”.

Engels (1872; 1845) was able to bring forward the conditions within which the working-class could be coerced by the system into doing away with their properties. His emphasis that mere owning of properties cannot alter the exploitative relationship between the capitalists and the wage earner (Engels 1872) can be witnessed even today. The basic philosophy of capitalism which is to extract surplus value from the working-classes, as Engels (1878) said, stands correct within the entire process of social media commerce. Facebook, it is widely known, generates a high amount of profits through the targeted advertisements listed on its user interface (Fuchs 2014c). It works through encouraging the people into using Facebook for a variety of different purposes through which it can redirect those users to the advertisers, the main source of sustenance of

Facebook itself. Through the proliferation of social media commerce, capitalism attempts to maintain the delicate balance between the need-satisfaction of the working-classes and the profit-accumulation of the capitalists by rendering the oppression of the working-classes invisible within digital capitalism so as to delay the socio-economic crisis or any form of social revolutionary movement.

6. A Society of “*Customers*”

The French Marxist Henri Lefebvre (1991) talked about the utilisation of social space, an all-encompassing element of the human society created by human beings themselves, as a means of production within capitalism. Space is an important concept in the present discussion because this is where the exchange gets facilitated. Engels’s (1845) emphasis on the living conditions of the working-class and the dialectical relationship between those living conditions, their own properties such as housing and land, and the effect of those property holdings on their wages play a crucial part in explaining and analysing the social space which capitalism creates and utilises, as Lefebvre (1991) says, as a means of production. The contemporary social space is being increasingly mediated by communicative technologies, where social relations themselves have become digitalised in nature. This digitalised social space constitutes the social relations without which it is impossible for anything to find its way to the market (Marx 1867).

Marx, however, designated the factory to be the place where the process of surplus value creation is located in. Marx argued that the contract which formally bounded the employment relationship between the capitalist and the worker actually constitutes the basis of the production of surplus value. Contemporary capitalism has transgressed the limits imposed upon it by Marx in terms of “place” and has, through the utilisation of social space and communication, informalised the nature of contracts. This informalisation, driven by capitalism’s desire to convert everything into profit generating commodities, has enabled it to commercialise the social relations formed by human beings and makes them see other human beings within the society as the possessors of private property or customers, at times both.

This is also similar to Bauman’s (1999) concept of modernity where he states that the foundational ideology of the contemporary society is to place each human being as a commodity and a consumer (Bauman 2005). This, on its own, shapes the dialectical relationship between use and exchange values constituted by the fact that a commodity always has a certain, as Marx says, non-use value for those who own the commodity and a use value for those who do not own it. And the sustenance of capitalism as an economic system, depends on the sustenance of the capitalist society, a major aspect of which is to generate this exchange between the possessors and the non-possessors on financial terms.

Bauman (2010) argues that technological innovations that affect dominant social practices are not entirely new aspects of society but rather are manifestations of already existing needs and processes. Taking cue from Bauman (2010) and relating it to O’Connor’s (1984) analysis of individualism being the most powerful weapon in dominating the working-class, one can argue that social relations, even under digital capitalism, that are not only structured by communities but also by organisational forms that are technologically mediated and created (Hall and Stahl 2012), are working examples of capitalism’s drive to separate the individual from its class or community while still retaining the power to exploit the social relations established within the communities by the working-class. As Engels (1845) says, it is to the benefit of capitalism that human beings treat other human beings as objects of exploitation so that:

[p]eople regard each other only as useful objects; each exploits the other, and the end of it all is that the stronger treads the weaker under foot; and that the powerful few, the capitalists, seize everything for themselves, while to the weak many, the poor, scarcely a bare existence remains (Engels 1845, 329).

By manipulating the digital means of communication, the dominant medium today, within which new social relations get formed and the existing ones get mediated, capitalism creates digital spaces of alienation (Fuchs 2019b, 148), where capital still dominates but only in a more indirect fashion by utilising the participatory culture of the social media users. This allows capitalism to convert human beings into customers. Engels's (1845) theory regarding the entrapment of the individuals within their narrow private interests through capitalist manoeuvrings also sheds light on the process in which an already existing communicative framework makes it not only easier but also attractive to the working-classes to engage in social media commerce, and not focus on cooperative living.

The brutal indifference, the unfeeling isolation of each in his private interest, becomes the more repellent and offensive, the more these individuals are crowded together, within a limited space. And, however much one may be aware that this isolation of the individual, this narrow self-seeking, is the fundamental principle of our society everywhere, it is nowhere so shamelessly barefaced, so self-conscious as just here in the crowding of the great city. The dissolution of mankind into monads, of which each one has a separate principle, the world of atoms, is here carried out to its utmost extreme. Hence it comes, too, that the social war, the war of each against all, is here openly declared (Engels 1845, 329).

Social media commerce makes “selling”, as an activity of one exploiting the other, a normal routinised activity as some of the responses which were received during the course of the present study exhibit:

- “It makes it easier and encourages me to sell more. I probably would not sell the items if I did not have Facebook”.
- “If Facebook did not exist, I would have donated my stuff. Facebook definitely makes things easier especially for someone like me with a busy schedule”.

This normalisation also has a relationship with the labour process theory as elaborated upon by Braverman (1998), who talked about how the reduction in the cost of production can only be done through an extreme control over labour. Subsequently, O'Connor (1998) writing about capitalism and its production process, spoke about how advanced capitalism always harbours an interest in commercialising not only the produced commodities but also the production process itself. In other words, in a drive to accumulate more profits, capitalism inevitably attempts to control the dynamics of the relationship existing between labour-power, labour control, the production process and the market. Taking cue from Castells's (2010) argument about the increasing utilisation of ICTs by global monopolies in both production and circulation, it can be said that capitalism has performed both the above-mentioned processes identified by Braverman (1998) and O'Connor (1998) through the application of communication. The commercialisation of the means of communication has not only enabled capitalism to control the labour outside the formal production process but has also successfully allowed it to exploit people with a limited social life by getting them being involved with the society through making

it easy for them to engage in commercial practices on social media platforms, as one of the interviewees put it,

I think it would be much harder to sell items if FM were removed, as I do not have a large social circle. I'd still be inclined to sell things but would have to find another way, as I find the physical stores very daunting.

Capitalism, by emphasising on social media commerce, in certain ways, has used the power of socialisation to accumulate further profits. It not only aids in transforming people into customers, even from the perspective of other people who are customers themselves but also helps in sustaining the system by temporarily delaying the crisis. It does so by creating a mechanism which ensures that capital does not remain fallow (Mandel 1978; Engels 1843) but keeps on getting invested and circulated. There is a transformation of the entire society into a customer pool, where each individual is a potential customer of not only the monopoly capitalist but also of every other individual, who is again a customer of the same monopoly capitalist. This digitally connected social pool of customers, aided by a rising consumerism (Bauman 2005) transforms human beings into profit bearing machines (Engels 1845), which makes the exchange process smoother and faster. Some of the responses of the interviewees, which can be quoted to be a testimony to the argument, are:

- “People usually just focus on the items and not the seller”.
- “It helps that I am invisible and do not have to personally interact with the customer. The entire focus is on the price and negotiation”.

The utopian post-capitalist advocacy that digitalisation will lead to an end of capitalism (Mason 2016) do not hold good, when capitalism moves towards extracting surplus value and profits from each and every stage and level of the production process, including the digital components (Staab and Nachtwey 2016). Capitalism as a system recognises, if not explicitly then implicitly, that unless and until, there is a continuous circulation of valorised capital, it is impossible for capital to sustain itself. All societies are spaces that are constructed out of certain shared meanings (Bauman 2001). Because most of the individuals interpret society, both as a space and as an organisation, in a certain manner, there is a shared and dominant understanding of society. Capitalism, through its promotion of social media commerce, attempts to alter this very social understanding of the social space to satisfy its need for the circulation of capital which ultimately increases the value of capital. The only way to achieve this, while keeping the wages down and maintaining the class distinctions brought forward by distribution (Engels 1878), is by encouraging and/or coercing the working-classes to start putting a value on their properties as Engels (1887) had described to be the case of Germany in the preface to the second edition of his “*The Housing Question*” (1872):

For “[b]ourgeois and petty-bourgeois socialism [...] strongly represented in Germany[...] wish[es] to turn the workers into owners of their dwellings [...] this is a point which has been shown in a very peculiar light by the industrial development of Germany during the past twenty years. In no other country do there exist so many wage workers who own not only their own dwellings but also a garden or field as well [...] With the introduction of machinery all this was altered. Prices were now determined by the machine-made product, and the wage of the domestic industrial worker fell with this price. However, the worker had to accept it or look for other work, and he could not do that without becoming a

proletarian, that is without giving up his little house garden and field, whether his own property or held by him as tenant. Only in the rarest cases was he ready to do this (Engels 1887, 427-430).

This process ensured that the social mobility of the working-class remains restricted (Engels 1845) because of its restricted exchange relations with its own class, the value generated by which can be accumulated as profits wholly by the capitalists again. The exchange value on the working-class properties, thus, only serve as mere temporal anomalies, which are necessary to facilitate further accumulation. Digitalisation, in this regard, makes it easier for capitalism to initiate further exchange within the society, and make the working-classes see their counterparts as objects to be exploited, as customers, rather than their fellow workers (Engels 1872).

7. Conclusion

Engels (1843), like Mandel (1978), noted that stagnant capital cannot generate any surplus value. It was only the capital in circulation which allows capital to continuously valorise itself, in the process generating profits. Under digital capitalism, technological advancements serve the purpose of further valorising the already existing value (Hall and Stahl 2012), and social media commerce plays an important part in this process because it allows capitalism to exploit the rising productive capacities of the working-class, which had made it possible to produce enough for the society (Engels 1872). The primary aim of the capitalist system, however, is not mere production, but rather the generation of profits and surplus value through production. It aims to do that by altering the relation between living and dead labour in such a way that the latter dominates the former (Tronti 2019; Marx 1867). Social media commerce allows capitalism to create a system of successive consumption, which through the successive and continuous exploitation of dead labour, creates the basis for further accumulation within contemporary capitalism. The valorisation of capital within social media commerce, however, does not only occur through the exploitation of dead labour but also by exploiting the digital and living labour performed by social media users in communicating and circulating the commodity within the society. This continuous valorisation under digital capitalism occurs through an exploitation of communicative technological systems and constitutes, in Negri's (2003) words, a real subsumption of the entire society by capitalism. With the coming of this real subsumption, there has occurred, a possibility of complete blurring of the differences between personal and private properties, which has in turn, resulted in the conversion of all use values to exchange values explicitly and universally.

Although independent property has been historically analysed as being the foundation upon which socio-political stability is built on, under capitalism the individual property of the working-class is the mere ownership of the means of consumption (O'Connor 1984, 17-19). The preceding sections have described how the digital ecosystem is integrally related with the overall capitalist accumulation processes outside digital spaces. This relation is mediated by a web dominated by economic crisis, consumerism, and the constant need of capitalism to produce for production's sake. It has been shown in this paper that the Internet and the activities which occur therein are not something that is completely alienated from the physical world (Jurgenson 2012), but rather are informed and influenced by the wider society.

The relationship between production and exchange is such that without exchange, production can happen but not vice versa (Engels 1878). Capitalism, infested with the

desire to produce in order to accumulate profits, thus, is in a continuous need for generating improved means of exchange and distribution within the society. These new means of distribution, again, as Engels rightly notes, usually face a strong resistance from the established ones. By initiating commerce through popular social media platforms, digital capitalism countered the resistance from the old modes of distribution through the immense participation of the people and by devising a process in which even the old modes keep on accumulating profits, partially at least, as well. In commercialising communication technologies and using them as a means of production (Fuchs 2020), capitalism has transformed communication into a medium to generate profits (Grohmann 2016).

Utilising the argument from Staab and Nachtwey (2016) against those of Mason (2016), Facebook, a free service (Fuchs 2019a), can be said to have demonstrated that the element of lower marginal costs is only a temporary hindrance to the monopolies and they can still accumulate profits, digitally, physically or through a combination of both, by maintaining the circulation cycle of capital. Social media commerce exhibits that the petty bourgeois utopia of turning every worker into a small capitalist by providing property rights, which Engels (1872) had critiqued, still stands as an unrealistic utopia. Engels's (1892; 1872; 1845) arguments that private property can never be the basis of liberation but only of domination find relevance when one analyses the reasons for which the working-class get engaged within social media commerce, which are almost always related to the existing social crisis, either materialistically or physiologically. The ownership and circulation of personal properties as commodities through social media commerce today constitute an important part of the exploitative structure of capitalism, the analysis of which is highly important within digital capitalism (Fuchs 2018). In this regard, Engels (1887) remains highly relevant as he had noted long ago:

[t]he ownership of the house, garden and field, and security of tenure in the dwelling-place is becoming today, [...] not only the worst hindrance to the worker, but the greatest misfortune of the whole working class; the basis for an unexampled depression of wages below their normal level (Engels 1887, 431).

The socio-economic crisis does not allow the working-class to utilise the full use value of their properties and put it back into the market thus allowing the commodity to keep on generating exchange value. The temporary monetary gains, when invested again, in the purchase of commodities, leads to an accumulation of capital which becomes the living embodiment of the dead labour infused within not only the commodity itself but also of the many "hands" which circulated it. This scenario also bears testimony to Engels's (1872) point that the ownership of property by the working-class, on its own, neither improves the conditions of the working-class nor automatically results in class mobility. Engels (1872; 1845) directs one to think that it is the entire social whole which determines whether the ownership of any property can be indeed progressive in nature. In other words, as long as capital dominates the working class as an alien force (Marx 1867), the potential of the working-class ownership of properties as an emancipatory force remains abysmally low.

Social media commerce utilises the participatory culture within social media, controlled by the monopolies (Fuchs 2014c), for profit-accumulation and valorisation of already existing capital within the society. Since social media is an important part of that communicative paradigm within digital capitalism, Fuchs (2014c) argument about the necessity of rethinking the simplistic models of participation which almost always place social media as a liberatory force within contemporary capitalism stand as an

important and vital point. Fuchs (2014c) rightly states that true participation enables human beings “to be part of the decisions and to govern and control the structures that affect them” (Fuchs 2014c, 57). Ownership of personal property by the working-class as Engels (1872; 1845) had mentioned, does not hold any revolutionary potential as long as capitalism successfully initiates the commercial exchange of those properties by controlling the social dynamics, both economically and culturally, as a whole. Social media commerce functions through converting working-class property into commodities, the commercial exchange of which leads to further profit-accumulation for the capitalist class because the monetary inflow of capital generated by the working-class seller through social media commerce gets diverted to either the consumption of further commodities or, as a response to crisis, towards production and circulation. In this context, social media makes the capital accumulation process smoother by aiding the working-class in generating monetary income so that capitalism can continue to realise the full surplus value and exploit the complete labour-power available in society. This exploitative cycle of capitalism can only be resisted by rupturing the alienated digital spaces (Fuchs 2019b) through a socio-political struggle against the entire capitalist system itself, which, in turn, can re-establish a humane society, free from the consumerism and commodification, which digital capitalism, or capitalism in general, establishes in the society. This humane society can finally be an antidote to the crisis that capitalism generates.

I assert that thousands of industrious and worthy people – far worthier and more to be respected than the rich [...] do find themselves in a condition unworthy of human beings; and that every proletarian, everyone, without exception, is exposed to a similar fate without any fault of his own and in spite of every possible effort (Engels 1845, 335).

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