

Connection and Anti-connection: A Study on Digital Labor of Knowledge Videos

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Abstract. People's knowledge anxiety is caused by information explosion. At the same time, the development of media technology enriches the video industry. Under this background, knowledge videos have a wide audience. Taking knowledge videos as the research object, this paper adopts the interview method to analyze the practice of digital labor connection and anti-connection. It is found that the digital labor of knowledge videos can consciously eliminate over-connection, but the transition of connection-anti-connection is spiraling, and there are many forms, such as strikes and re-work. This research enriches the theoretical research of digital labor to a certain extent.

Keywords: Digital labor; Knowledge video; Connection; Anti-connection; Social acceleration.

1. Introduction

With the information revolution engulfing the world, Internet technology has been applied to the media production and dissemination process. After continuous trial and revolution, the Internet abandoned the imitation of mass media and established the connection between people and content. Being online anytime means that people can browse digital content at any time, so a large number of professional digital labor and productive consumer digital labor have emerged.

The development of platforms such as the knowledge zone of bilibili fits the social background of the age of knowledge anxiety, and more and more people resort to the Internet to keep pace with social development. According to the data, in 2021, there were 183 million users studying on bilibili, and the broadcast volume of knowledge content has reached 49% of the total broadcast volume of PUGV videos [1]. They often browse knowledge videos with the goal of entering a higher school, obtaining employment, or taking certificate examinations, and voluntarily do digital work for non-entertainment content under the pressure of reality. The dilemma of digital labor of knowledge video lies in the fact that they need to learn knowledge, stay focused and resist the temptation from the Internet, therefore, they have to repeatedly grope for the boundary between connection and anti-connection.

Previous research has been concerned that digital labors are under the pressure of over-connection, and researchers have put forward strategies of anti-connection in terms of the platform [2], media survival [3], and individuals and society [4]. However, in a connected society, labors have to return to connection. Therefore, this paper adopts the interview method to present users' anti-connection practices from the perspective of digital labor and analyzes the reasons and practical behaviors of users working for knowledge videos and the motivation of such videos triggering anti-connection. In addition, this paper dialectically explores digital labor's work and strike, and reveals the relationship between them and the cyclical state between them. This study applies anti-connection to the theoretical exploration of digital labor and provides an anti-connection perspective for analyzing the initiative participation of digital labor.

2. Literature review

2.1 Digital Labor and the Turn of Audience Subjectivity

In 1951, Dallas. W. Smythe proposed that the main product of commercial mass media was audience attention. In the 1970s, his monograph *Communication: The Blind Spot of Western Marxism* marked the formation of the theory of audience commodity. He believes that the final

product of mass communication is the labor of the audience, that is, the audience's leisure time, and he launched a debate on Western Marxism with the theory of audience commodity.

After the information revolution, the boundary between production and consumption gradually blurred [5]. The commercialization of the audience's labor is more concealed than that of the traditional media era [6]. The audience commodity theory was born out of the era of radio and television, and it lacked the interpretation of the complex interaction between the media and the audience.

Compared with the audience commodity theory, digital labor is more suitable for analyzing the problems in the electronic media era. Playbour is the most typical extension of digital labor research. This concept is used to describe players who are addicted to video games and bring profits to game companies but rarely get feedback [7].

Apart from playbour, there are many research branches of digital labor, such as digital labor in the media industry and the relationship between people and technology [8]. Xia Bingqing broke through the single exploitation framework when analyzing digital labor in the fields of "e-tailer's support for farmers" [9]. Fuchs summarized in detail three ways of capitalist exploitation of digital labor, that is, coercion, alienation, and appropriation [10]. In the analysis of the relationship between humans and technology, Sun Ping shows the tense competition between technical politics and the bottom narrative [11]. Hu Yiqing pointed out more macroscopically that technological progress has made the media a technical vehicle in all fields of society [12].

In the era of accelerated social development, the research on digital labor has turned to the resistance of labor subjectivity. Labor resistance research has appeared in both traditional manufacturing and digital industries. Qiu Linchuan selected Foxconn as a typical example of labor resistance in traditional industries. He discussed the value and success possibility of online labor resistance [13]. In the digital industry, Cao Jin and Zhang Nanhua analyzed the resistance of the members of the network subtitle group under the framework of exploitation [14]. Hu Qizhen, a scholar from Taiwan Province, investigated the digital labor resistance from the perspective of neo-liberal work ethics [15]. It can be seen that there are the following differences between digital industrial labor and traditional industrial labor, that is, first, the relationship between digital labor is more atomic, and their resistance is partial, limited, and short-term [16]; second, the digital labor involved in the platform is unstable and unequal [17].

The subjective resistance to digital labor has different forms in different industries and times. Their resistance either resorts to the Internet, forms labor organizations, or anti-domesticates digital media, but the anti-connection practice of digital labor is the most common.

2.2 Research on Anti-connection

Anti-connection of digital labor is to disconnect under certain conditions, and anti-connection is also an individual right to the Internet. People exercise the right of invisibility, the right to being forgotten, and the right of connection control to restore their private space, time, and freedom [18]. The anti-connection of digital labor is the expression of social media burnout [19] or media anti-domestication [20].

In recent years, the research on anti-connection as a means of digital labor resistance has gradually increased. Some scholars interpret anti-connection as the deceleration strategy of social acceleration, showing the picture of media use in the state of over-connection of users. Other scholars pay attention to privacy protection and self-expression, highlighting the characteristics of the double-edged sword of anti-connection, that is, providing users with a sense of security while weakening their voices [4]. The research on disconnection is not limited to the scope of social life: some studies provide the significance of radical resistance and political practice to anti-connection [21]. In a word, previous research on digital labor resistance is a reflection of the motivation, social background, and product thinking of anti-connection, but they ignore the internal relationship between connection and anti-connection.

2.3 Research on Knowledge Videos

Knowledge videos are mostly found on bilibili, Xiaohongshu, WeChat Channel, and Massive Open Online Course (MOOC, henceforth), and are mainly divided into tutorials and experience sharing. The digital labor of this content has a certain particularity, that is, acquiring the required knowledge in connection, and then choosing to disconnect after connection, while the latter is the result of social pressure and the persuasion of knowledge videos themselves.

At present, the research on knowledge videos focuses on the perspectives of self-media [22] and knowledge dissemination [23]. There are few studies in the field of digital labor. Besides, existing studies only focus on the influence of knowledge videos on fans [24]. The particularity of this kind of video digital labor has not been touched, that is, the disconnected learning it advocates is contradictory to the practice of connecting digital labor, and the labor of this content has the dual attributes of entertainment and learning. This paper will focus on this kind of special content, and investigate the practice of connecting and anti-connecting the digital labor of knowledge video.

3. Research Methods

In this paper, the semi-structured interview method is used to analyze the impact of knowledge videos on connection and anti-connection from the perspective of interviewees. Interview is a qualitative research method, which can obtain the interviewee's subjective attitude and emotion towards a certain thing or social phenomenon, and analyze the interviewee's deep thinking and psychological or action changes under different backgrounds [25].

Through interviews, the author understands the Internet characteristics of interviewees and the reasons for obtaining knowledge videos and outlines their basic images. During the interview, the author explores the different attitudes of users to different categories of videos and explores the subtle differences between digital labor in different stages.

From July 29 th, 2022 to August 16 th, 2022, the author found 12 interviewees who watched knowledge videos on bilibili, Xiaohongshu, WeChat Channel, and MOOC. They all had clear goals, but they are confused about the excessive connection in the use of mobile phones, such as the average daily use time of more than 6 hours, and problems such as distraction in the process of acquiring knowledge. The interview is mainly divided into three sections. The first section is about users' watching situation, including the situation at that time and the reasons for watching. The second section explores the psychological state of users watching videos and its influence on the connection. The third section mainly asks about users' attitudes towards over-connection and countermeasures. The interview lasted from 21 minutes to 80 minutes, mainly through a Tencent meeting, supplemented by a WeChat follow-up visit, and some of them were conducted in face-to-face contexts. After the interview, the author collates the interview materials, extracts the key contents, and analyzes the practice of digital labor connection and anti-connection.

Table 1. Basic information of interviewees

| Serial number | Gender | Age | Occupation | Goal | The platform for watching knowledge videos | Interview duration | Interview method |
|---------------|--------|-----|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------|
| S1 | Woman | 20 | Undergraduate | Teacher Qualification Examination and Unified National Graduate Entrance Examination | WeChat, MOOC, and bilibili | 80 minutes | Interview |
| S2 | Woman | 28 | Master candidate | Employment | Xiaohongshu, bilibili, and Browser Video | 28 minutes | Meeting and WeChat follow-up visit |

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|-----|-------|----|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|------------|------------------------------------|
| S3 | Woman | 21 | Undergraduate | Taking China's Legal Profession Admission Examination | Bilibili, and Zhihu | 78 minutes | Meeting and WeChat follow-up visit |
| S4 | Woman | 23 | Being on the staff | Studying for Master Degree | Bilibili, Xiaohongshu, Douban, and Weibo | 28 minutes | Meeting and WeChat follow-up visit |
| S5 | Woman | 21 | Undergraduate | Taking Interdisciplinary Unified National Graduate Entrance Examination | Bilibili, Zhihu, and Baidu | 40 minutes | Meeting and WeChat follow-up visit |
| S6 | Woman | 21 | Undergraduate | Taking the Unified National Graduate Entrance Examination | Bilibili, Douban, and Weibo | 1 minute. | Meeting and WeChat follow-up visit |
| S7 | Man | 20 | Undergraduate | Taking the Unified National Graduate Entrance Examination | Bilibili, MOOC, Xiaohongshu | 25 minutes | Meeting and WeChat follow-up visit |
| S8 | Man | 23 | Master candidate | Career Planning | Xiaohongshu, Douban, and computer video player | 26 minutes | Meeting and WeChat follow-up visit |
| S9 | woman | 19 | Undergraduate study | Teacher Certification Examination | Xiaohongshu, and WeChat | 60 minutes | Meeting and WeChat follow-up visit |
| S10 | man | 20 | Undergraduate | The Application for Direct Admission from Master to PhD | Bilibili, and MOOC | 80 minutes | Interview |
| S11 | Man | 21 | Undergraduate | Taking the Unified National Graduate Entrance Examination | Bilibili, and MOOC | 30 minutes | Meeting and WeChat follow-up visit |
| S12 | Man | 20 | Undergraduate | Taking Postgraduate Candidates Exempt from Admission Exam | Xiaohongshu, and bilibili | 37 minutes | Meeting and WeChat follow-up visit |

4. Knowledge Video Platform and Digital Labor

Fuchs's definition of digital labor in Digital Labor and Karl Marx is that "digital labor is a part of the collective labor force in which electronic media exists, uses and applies. They are not a definite occupation. They are defined by the industry they serve, in which they are exploited by capital" [26]. The clout accumulated by bilibili makes the platform gain revenue by advertising and setting up paywalls, but the audience who worked for it did not get a return and became the digital labor of knowledge content under the exploitation of the platform. The characteristics of knowledge-based users' labor are as follows: first, the audience's attention, like, coin, etc. are working for the media

for free; second, the behavior of audience punching and sharing is to produce network data for the platform.

Parsons believes that in the fast-paced modern society, people are deeply involved in accelerated social production [27]. Under this logic, people aim at increasing their competitiveness and “voluntarily do something that they really do not want to do”. People are only nominally free not to participate in competitions [28]. Competitors cannot have enough competitiveness only through traditional learning methods, so they watch knowledge videos for replenishment.

At present, knowledge videos are mainly gathered in bilibili, Xiaohongshu, WeChat Channel, and MOOC. The first three platforms are based on the PUGC production mode. Bilibili and Xiaohongshu recommend videos to users with algorithms, and WeChat Channel is promoted by private clout. MOOC takes systematic college course videos as its main content, relying on users’ independent search. Producers of these knowledge videos perform in the central area, attracting users to watch videos with down-to-earth self-presentation and natural stage settings [29].

Platform and content producers use algorithms, activities, and communities to promote users’ digital work and exploit their surplus value. The platform algorithm mechanism is used to increase video exposure. Among them, bilibili has a campus partition, and the official account of the campus operation organizes punch-in tasks, such as studying on the same day, submitting self-made teaching manuscripts, publishing posts, and following activity accounts. The content attracts the audience by providing free materials. If the users want to acquire the information, they need to share the specified content to WeChat Moment or follow, like and collect under certain conditions. The cost of the producer is not high, and the marginal cost of sharing is even close to zero, but the income is quite abundant, that is, they use algorithm rules to incite huge traffic at a very low cost, and thus get advertising, share and other income, while the LOGO on the shared objects advertises to the audience. When dealing with the exploitation of platforms or producers, digital labor can often identify the intention and come up with countermeasures. Respondent S12 adjusted the visibility of WeChat Moment [30] to avoid social embarrassment and he said that he just built another WeChat account to share contents.

Some uploaders achieve three goals by creating groups, that is, sharing new videos to the group for the first time can show their attention to their fans; it can contribute to the first round of data accumulation; dividing circles into groups can measure the loyalty of fans and complete the “thrilling leap” of goods to money.

5. Connection and Anti-connection of Knowledge Video Digital Labor

5.1 The Motivation to Realize the Connection

The original intention of digital labor of knowledge video audience is usually to acquire knowledge and experience in connection and serve the goal of struggle. Respondent S1 was in the stage of knowledge accumulation, and she watched such videos in order to get new cognition and opinions. The reason why she watched such videos was to learn more professional knowledge and lay a solid foundation. Some users watch knowledge videos for self-improvement. For example, respondent S7 attended German and accounting classes unrelated to his major on MOOC.

During the interview, the most frequent word mentioned by interviewees is passing the examination. This metaphor for passing the examination reflects people’s demand for anti-connection. However, young people have formed hyper attention in games and movies, that is, their attention leaps between different tasks, and they like stimulation and dislike monotony. This leads to users’ difficulty in resisting the temptation of electronic media in their studies, so they are caught in the dilemma of connection and anti-connection.

5.2 The Motivations to Trigger Anti-connection

Connection is not only the way for users to meet their needs but also the fuse of anti-connection of knowledge video audience. The unique nature of this kind of video is incompatible with the

impetuous atmosphere of the video platform and the characteristics of focusing on entertainment [31]. The imitation behavior and anxiety of knowledge video digital labor prompt their anti-connection.

5.2.1 Active imitation of digital labor

Respondent S3 took the essence of knowledge videos, imitated appropriate learning methods, and paid attention to the over-connection. The classmate of respondent S10 was an uploader of the science and technology zone, and S10 set the goal of doing his own project well. S5 had imitated the study and lifestyle of the uploader but found that the uploader's style may not fit herself. Finally, she made adjustments while imitating.

Digital labor imitates selectively but carries out the transformation of "imitation-imitated" outside imitation. Respondent S5 believed that being a learning uploader could urge oneself. Whether imitating or being imitated, its purpose is to reduce over-connection.

5.2.2 Anxiety caused by knowledge videos

In the Internet mimicry environment, the mixture of rumors and truth and the increase in the cost of obtaining information have brought Internet anxiety to the audience. Knowledge videos also show this problem. Joiner et al. found that Internet anxiety is negatively related to Internet use [32]. Audiences with high Internet anxiety tend to be anti-connected.

The anxiety caused by knowledge videos comes not only from the process of acquisition and screening but also from the content itself. The following interviewees mentioned the experience of anxiety caused by watching videos in interviews.

Table 2. Audience anxiety caused by video content

| Respondent | Content that triggers anxiety | Background information | Solution |
|------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| S1 | Experience sharing videos that renders stress | Under the pressure of exam preparation and hard student work. | Put down the mobile phone and exercise. |
| S2 | Complex videos | Before the exam, or preparing for job hunting. | Rest for a few days. |
| S3 | Comments | Preparation for China's Legal Profession Admission Examination. | Only watch useful videos. |
| S4 | Useless videos | Preparation for the Unified National Graduate Entrance Examination on staff. | Uninstall frequently used applications. |
| S5 | Experience sharing videos of clickbait | Examination weeks. | Hide the phone. |
| S8 | Experience sharing videos of successful students | Preparation for the Unified National Graduate Entrance Examination. | Use <i>tomato to do</i> application, and go to study room or live study room. |
| S9 | Videos of clickbait and videos of sharing success stories | Preparation for Teacher Certification Examination. | Stop and think. |

The exhortations of cultivating concentration abound in knowledge videos, and the audience either hates or accepts them, but the touch of such videos on people cannot be deleted. Respondents S1, S4, and S9 could still recall only a few words after closing the videos, and anxiety seems hard to avoid.

The problems of using clickbait and rendering anxiety in this kind of video made interviewees S1, S3, S5, and S9 feel urgent and depressed, while some interviewees S3, S8, and S9 felt the peer pressure competition from the content or comments. Another choice for the audience was to use entertainment and leisure (S2, S1) to avoid pressure, and struggle after the entertainment reaches saturation.

6. Strike and Re-labor under the Practice of Anti-connection

6.1 Digital Strike: Deconstruction Strategy of Over-connection

With the improvement of learning intensity, digital labor fight against distraction with moderate anti-connection. After initially overcoming the temptation of entertainment content, the richness of video content and the availability of technology promote users' anti-connection state to become better.

Respondent S6 said, "If the video is too long, I will watch it in sections, so as to train my concentration and make moderate anti-connection a habit. After the audience watches the long video of the tutorial consciously anti-connects, the state of deep learning can spontaneously dissolve the over-connection. Respondent S7 believed that "watching MOOC videos needs to keep up with the rhythm and take notes so that systematic learning should be more attentive". The simulation of tutorial videos in the real teaching mode changes the way users receive information from electronic media and helps the audience concentrate like in offline lectures. Respondent S9 attributed her concentration to the atmosphere created by media technology. Video soundtrack and interaction enhanced the immersive experience of watching videos, making it even with nicer atmosphere than offline".

At present, the expansion of people-to-people connection and the change of content distribution mode aggravate the growth of people-to-content connection. Restraining the over-connection within people, between people and content can help people regain their state of concentration. Under the background of accelerating society, individuals will restrain themselves to learn and think in order to gain stronger competitiveness. Watching knowledge videos is the fastest way to increase their knowledge. When the videos that people come into contact with are guiding, systematic, and atmospheric, users will spontaneously participate in them, reducing the closure of the connection. In this case, the digital strike has no confrontation and conflict, and the result brought by the strike is softer. In addition, the digital labors who successfully strike may become uploaders in the study zone, and make their anti-connection experiences into videos and upload them to the network, so as to establish connections with other audiences. The video of the strikers will affect more audiences, so the digital strikes happen again and again.

The strike behavior of digital labor of knowledge videos seems to be highly dispersed, but with the help of the Internet, audiences unite across regions through online communities, supervise and encourage each other, and resist over-connection.

6.2 Strike and Labor: The Cyclic State Switching

The state that users get rid of over-connection and enter anti-connection is not always continuous, and there is an intermediate zone where connection and anti-connection are repeatedly switched. Objective constraints and aggressive self-propagation have played an important role in this.

Respondent S1 indicated that she had been in a state of connection-anti-connection cycle, especially when she finished work unrelated to her studies. "When I recall the advice of 'choosing' in the video, I get anxious, but I cannot help turning on my mobile phone, and then I lock the screen when I think of the video ...". Respondent S9 also had a similar experience of turning on a mobile phone just for turning it on.

Digital labors tend to anti-connect through self-control, but the temptation of entertainment, redundancy of social interaction, and the desire for relaxation all pull digital labor into the connection. However, when the digital labor swings between connection and anti-connection and re-work, their mood is already different. When they re-work, the users will inevitably feel remorse, and this feeling will be strengthened in the next anti-connection.

Marx discussed labor alienation as labors' products in turn enslaved labors [34] in Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 [33]. In the digital media environment, users work for digital products but fall into the digital paddock under the product technology mechanism.[35], be enslaved by products and work again. The alienation of digital labor has led to the audience repeatedly seesaw between strikes and re-labor. Therefore, the digital strike is an elastic behavior, and the controlled connection provides space for users' self-discipline to a certain extent, but the abuse of technology

and the self-propagation of contradictions act on the anti-connection, which may eventually lead to the collapse of the strike [36].

7. Discussion and Conclusion

From the perspective of the connection and anti-connection of digital labor, this study analyzes the digital labor of knowledge video. The present study explores the anti-connection practice of the audience of knowledge video under the background of digital media, makes up for the research gap of the existing theories on the digital labor strike, and puts forward a new perspective of analyzing the strike. In addition, this paper makes a dialectical analysis of the relationship between connection and anti-connection, denies the linearity of the connection-anti-connection path, and points out the state of repeated switching between them in the practice of digital labor. Labors are connected with knowledge videos because of the need to increase their knowledge or upgrade their skills. Among them, the audience of knowledge videos are mostly young people, and their hyper attention in the digital media environment leads them to be attracted by other content besides receiving the target information, thus entering one new connection after another. Therefore, a moderate connection is alienated into over-connection.

However, the boundary between connection and anti-connection is fuzzy, and anti-connection resides in connection. Connecting with knowledge videos will promote users' deep learning, thus eliminating over-connection. In addition, the connection-anti-connection path is not linear, and both external temptation and inner ease can pull digital labor back into the connection. There is a natural contradiction between the demands of the progress of digital labor and the demands of leisure, so it creates a state of the cycle. There are still limitations in this study. Interview is a research method that focuses on analyzing linguistic information, and the interview materials may have limitations due to the expression of the research object. The interviewee is still a "black box", whose words may not express themselves, words and deeds do not match, and their avoidance of talking about the topic. All of their behaviors will affect the discussion of the research. In the field of anti-connection and digital labor, further research on different research methods is needed.

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