

An Analysis of Internet Buzzwords from the Perspective of Marxism

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Abstract: This paper aims to explore internet buzzwords from a Marxist perspective. Its main contents include: first, what internet buzzwords are; second, the nature of internet buzzwords understood through Marxism; third, critique of internet buzzwords; fourth, how Marxists should respond to internet buzzwords. Internet buzzwords constitute a major cultural feature of the internet age. They have gained increasing importance as the proportion of the internet in people's daily lives keeps rising. Chairman Mao once stated: "In the realm of propaganda and ideological work, if correct ideas do not occupy the position, erroneous ideas will take it." As Marxists in the new era, people must keep pace with the times, promptly accept and understand new things, and make contributions on the cultural and theoretical fronts. This paper is written to clarify fundamental principles. Errors and omissions are inevitable, and critics are welcome to bring forth new ideas through critical examination.

Keywords: Internet buzzwords; Historical materialism; Marxism

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1. What are internet buzzwords

When researchers attempt to study the roles this topic plays in concrete real-world contexts, they must first arrive at a scientific and objective definition, which serves as the foundation for sound research. If researchers break down the term "internet buzzword" literally, they get "internet," "popular," and "word (language)."

The "internet" is an inevitable product of globalization. The author holds that the core function of the internet is communication. Later-emerging functions such as entertainment and video-audio services are merely by-products that appeared when technology advanced to a certain stage. Compared with traditional communication means, the internet has brought about revolutionary changes. The author will not dwell on its temporal convenience, but on how it imposes fewer restrictions on human beings. The internet does not demand the professionalism and authority required by traditional information-communication means. This means conditions have been created for people without relevant professional training and education to participate in discussions and generate topics. In short, the special nature of the internet grants itself and its

derivatives a popular-mass character ^[1].

The adjective “popular” carries a sense of timeliness, meaning something new and recent. From a sociological perspective, popularity is always associated with young people. Young people are full of vitality and creativity. They are more inclined to break conventions and bring forth innovations, which gives “popular” its temporal dimension ^[2].

“Language” is an extremely broad subject. For brevity, only the parts relevant to the discussion are addressed. The most direct meaning of language is a tool for interpersonal communication. Its secondary function lies in classification, and the attributes of such classification are shaped by the adjectives preceding the word “language.”

Conclusion: Internet buzzwords refer to time-sensitive communication tools created and disseminated by broad groups of people, especially young generations, on the internet platform.

2. Understanding the nature of internet buzzwords from a Marxist perspective

Marx pointed out: “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness” ^[3]. This means human beings cannot produce isolated ideas and viewpoints detached from their historical circumstances and social relations. Culture created by human beings inevitably embodies the ideology of its creators. From the perspective of historical materialism, under feudalism, art, poetry, and culture centered on religion and served the interests of popes, royal families, and landowners. Under capitalism, they represent the interests of capitalists and bureaucrats. Therefore, the author explicitly opposes depoliticizing internet buzzwords. To put it plainly: human beings cannot produce things beyond the scope of their own cognition, and this will not change according to people’s moods or thoughts. All depoliticization of cultural products is in effect a form of repoliticization ^[4]. The bourgeoisie denies the progressive nature and real-world reflections in artistic and literary works, trying to confine them to pure literature and pure landscape themes. Now they attempt to confine internet buzzwords purely to entertainment. The unprecedented popular-mass character brought by the internet makes such confinement increasingly difficult. Impacts of real-world phenomena such as economic crises and financial bubbles are increasingly reflected online, marking the beginning of people using the internet to carry out political struggles.

For those who seek to distort the nature of internet buzzwords, the study only needs to point out what Marx long ago observed: “Men’s ideas, views and concepts, in short, men’s consciousness, change with the changes in men’s conditions of life, in their social relations, in their social existence” ^[5].

3. Critique of internet buzzwords

If the previous sections offer affirmation of internet buzzwords, this part delivers a sharp critique. Since internet buzzwords form part of internet culture in the new era, the critique of them is also a critique of internet culture. Yet critique itself is not an end; people do not critique for critique’s sake. It exists entirely for the purpose of construction.

3.1. Online violence stemming from internet buzzwords

First comes violence generated by internet buzzwords, namely online violence. The author will not list specific examples, for online violence stemming from internet buzzwords is widely known. The author

does not regard online violence as something entirely new. Oppression and unequal treatment experienced in real-life society have found expression on this new online platform. Ultimately, these contradictions boil down to class contradictions, from which online violence originates ^[6]. One feature of online violence is irrationality. Its purpose lies purely in attack rather than discussion; it produces nothing new. Its greatest harm does not consist in inflicting harm on certain groups, but in causing everyone to abandon rational thinking and resort to useless, vulgar phrases instead. Next, the author takes gender-related contradictions as an example (allowing this temporary digression, for the author holds it necessary to fully understand concrete historical contexts and their own interpretations of this issue) to better illustrate their viewpoints.

With the development of productive forces, primitive communes disintegrated, giving rise to private ownership and class society. Gathering labor undertaken by women in communal societies could not accumulate sufficient surplus value, and means of production gradually fell into male hands, bringing patriarchy into being. The Industrial Revolution boosted productive forces and greatly narrowed gaps in people's labor capacities. Nevertheless, due to physiological factors, women could generate less surplus value and the reproduction-of-labor-power costs for women were higher than those for men. As a result, patriarchy persisted for a long time. Patriarchal oppression goes hand-in-hand with class oppression and constitutes one manifestation of class-based oppression. This forms the historical background of gender-related contradictions that endure to this day ^[7]. Nowadays, many people with patriarchal ideas claim that "women are inherently less intelligent than men" and "women ought to bear children and do housework." Yet both men and women are equally hard-working and equally intelligent. No one has the right to interfere with women's freedom to choose whether to bear children, nor with their freedom to pursue jobs that interest them. Meanwhile, some bourgeois women look down upon proletarian men from the lower social strata while objectifying themselves before bourgeois men. The author opposes patriarchal ideology as well as bourgeois feminism. As Engels put it: "The first prerequisite for women's emancipation is the return of all women to public labor" ^[8].

This explains the fact that gender-related contradictions are, in essence, class contradictions. Once this point is made clear, all online violence rooted in gender discrimination loses its ground.

In short, opposing online violence means upholding scientific discussion. Marxists never shrink from scientific discussion. On the contrary, overcoming vulgar phenomena such as online violence further proves the correctness of Marxism.

3.2. Petty-bourgeois nature of internet buzzwords used by online left-wing groups

While internet buzzwords still warrant much critique, the author prefers to connect them with real-world people. As a comparatively progressive group, online left-wing groups require timely correction and critique to preserve their integrity, enhance their progressiveness, and eliminate erroneous tendencies. The critique starts with the internet buzzwords that online left-wing groups favor and frequently employ.

First, it is necessary to define the two terms: online left-wing groups and petty-bourgeois nature.

As the name suggests, online left-wing groups refer to left-wing collectives on the internet. They acquire Marxist-Lenin-Mao thought only one-sidedly and in isolation. Compared with concrete Marxist theories, they prefer slogans divorced from concrete contexts or fragmented excerpts from theorists' works. The author does not deny that online left-wing groups are more progressive than ordinary groups, yet their ideas and actions never escape the scope of petty-bourgeois interests.

Politically, the petty-bourgeoisie are characterized by vacillation between left and right. On the one hand, they demand resistance against oppression and exploitation; on the other hand, they tend to waver and

even admire exploitation. While they advocate democracy and freedom, they may also endorse autocracy or extreme democratization. Though they oppose the big bourgeoisie and authoritarianism, they may follow the big bourgeoisie and join reactionary camps ^[9].

Lacking practical experience, online left-wing groups are keen to express their viewpoints via internet buzzwords, which serve as condensed summaries of viewpoints or behaviors. Political internet buzzwords in particular are provocative and easy to understand. Admittedly, this has expanded the ranks of online left-wing groups and pulled more people out of political apathy. Yet it has also given rise to the characteristics of poor theoretical grasp and the prevalence of utopianism among online left-wing circles. It must be noted that these traits are not accidental. For one thing, most online left-wing participants are students. They are at a stage without practical experience and can only perceive things indirectly. Their concern for politics stems not from their own hardships, but from value-driven worries over social crises and sympathy for the proletariat. This inclines them toward romantic and politically radical ways of articulating viewpoints. For another, admittedly, the author cannot expect everyone to immediately grasp profound theories and put them into practice. Given the features of internet buzzwords, seasoned Marxists have to set aside complex theoretical knowledge and instead use internet buzzwords to arouse the political awareness of the masses. Therefore, the online left-wing phenomenon is less a fixed group than a transformation process for Marxists within internet-driven new-era culture. The critique is not directed against this process itself. The author criticizes those online left-wing members who try to stand still at this stage and believe that publishing what they regard as “mature” and “rigorous” viewpoints online can bring about revolutionary victory. When online left-wing voices utter slogans such as “Long live the people!” and “Proletarians, unite!,” they should be prompted to reflect on why the people deserve lofty status and what purposes proletarian solidarity serves. People should seize every opportunity to develop the internet buzzwords they favor into genuine revolutionary theories. After being tempered by authentic Marxist theory, committed online left-wing participants will gradually cast off their petty-bourgeois leanings. As Marx wrote: “The weapon of critique cannot, of course, replace the critique of weapons; material force can only be overthrown by material force; but theory, once it grasps the masses, will also become a material force.”

4. How Marxists should treat internet buzzwords

Marxists are the vanguard of communism. They possess certain theoretical knowledge and the capacity to disseminate ideas. Concerning internet buzzwords, Marxists must resolutely oppose all viewpoints that seek to render them purely entertaining and depoliticize them ^[10]. They should make use of internet buzzwords to expand revolutionary ranks. At the same time, attention must be paid to the online left-wing groups emerging alongside internet buzzwords. Progressive elements among them should be assisted to step out of the online left-wing state as soon as possible and guided to delve into theories; practical action ought to be undertaken only after a fairly solid theoretical foundation has been built. Moreover, Marxists themselves must keep up with developments in the new era. Internet buzzwords that may seem progressive today may be replaced by more convenient forms of expression tomorrow. As an advanced political collective, keeping pace with the times is insufficient; people must strive to lead the times. Emancipating the mind, seeking truth from facts, and keeping pace with the times constitute the living soul of Marxism and will always serve as the fundamental ideological weapon for adapting to new situations, understanding new things, and accomplishing new tasks.

5. Conclusion

The objective laws of things operate independently of human will. More than thirty years have passed since the drastic changes in Eastern Europe and the disintegration of the Soviet Union plunged the international communist movement into a low ebb. The capitalist world celebrated its supposed triumph, yet the new era has not brought the rosy world predicted by the bourgeoisie. Repeated economic crises and unrest across the globe have shattered the so-called “end-of-history thesis.” Pressed by harsh real-world realities, people have once again taken up the works of Marx, Engels and Mao Zedong. In this fast-moving era, people can finally cast off the petty-bourgeois nature reflected in internet buzzwords and sincerely utter the words Mao Zedong repeated countless times to alert people: “Cast away illusions, prepare for struggle!”

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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