

Research on Karl Marx's News Communication Thought

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Abstract: Karl Marx's social activities throughout his life were always accompanied by the newspaper industry, and journalism was his only formal occupation. Marx's views on news communication are a summary and analysis of his perspectives on news communication activities throughout his life. Although Karl Marx did not systematically and comprehensively study news communication, nor did he systematically discuss his own thoughts on the subject, he had considerable experience in journalism throughout his life. He worked as a journalist, newspaper editor, and also ran a newspaper. Two-thirds of his and Engels's writings were published in the form of newspaper articles and political pamphlets. [1] Marx's thoughts on news dissemination can be seen in his anthology.

1. Introduction

After summarizing, it is not difficult to find that Marx's theories on news communication are mainly reflected in the following aspects:

1.1. Adhere to the Party's control over newspapers and periodicals

The concept of the "Newspaper system" is an important aspect of Marx's press theory and also the core content of his views on news. Marx firmly believed that parties should have their own organs of public opinion and propaganda, and must have their own newspapers.

Marx participated in the "Rheinische Zeitung", "Neue Rheinische Zeitung", "International Herald" and other more than ten newspaper enterprises, in order to directly guide the German revolution, Marx returned to Germany from France in 1848, and Friedrich Engels jointly founded the world's first Marxist newspaper, "New Rheinische Zeitung", Marx himself as the chief editor of the newspaper.

Marx once told Engels: "We cannot write for a party newspaper that is not edited by us, but by ourselves." [1]

Marx's position on running a newspaper is clear, his attitude is firm, and he is neither ambiguous nor compromising. He and Engels firmly expressed their attitude to the leaders of the German Socialist Workers' Party: "We cannot align with those who openly say that workers are too uneducated to liberate themselves and must, therefore, be liberated from above by the philanthropic bourgeoisie, whether large or small. If the new organ of the Party adopts a position suited to the views of these gentlemen, if it becomes a bourgeois rather than a proletarian newspaper, then we are sorry to have to publicly oppose it and end the solidarity with you that we have always shown while representing the German Party abroad. I hope it doesn't come to that." [1]

1.2. Newspapers and periodicals have their own developmental laws

In the early Rheinische Zeitung period, Marx pointed out that "the press itself complements each other to form a complete system." This concept of the "system" of the press is very important, as it distinguishes the press from the field of literature and enables Marx to observe the characteristics of the press from the perspective of the press as a whole. [5]

At that time, Marx had clearly classified the political press, the philosophical press, the literary press, the religious press, the entertainment press, and so on. These newspapers, with their different aspects, forms, and styles, complement each other's strengths and weaknesses. It has formed a new field that is closely related to other areas of society but differs in terms of social status and function—it regulates social life by expressing and creating social opinions and acts as the "third factor" and the "rational organ" of society. At the same time, it also has a certain degree of autonomy and its own laws: "In order for the press to fulfill its mission, it must, first of all, not be subject to any external pressure but acknowledge that it has internal laws, which even plants have, that it cannot and must not lose through tyranny and brutality." [5]

Marx regarded public opinion as "a natural and universal form of communication" and "a general state of public psychology", while "newspapers circulate as the paper money of public opinion" and are "instruments of widespread and anonymous public opinion". [5]

1.3. Newspapers should serve the people

Marx emphasized that the press is and should only be the public expression of the everyday thoughts and feelings of the people (the people who really think in the way of the people), and that "the press cannot become a real press without passing through a necessary stage of development derived from its nature." The people's press must have a common temperament that "harmoniously integrates all the true elements of the people's spirit," "just as every rose petal gives off the fragrance of a rose and exhibits the qualities of a rose." But at the same time, people's newspapers should not only have one type, one appearance, it should be composed of a group of newspapers with common characteristics but also their own styles. [5]

"Under normal circumstances, each element that constitutes the essence of the people's press should first develop its own characteristics." For example, the Leipzig Zeitung and the Rheinische Zeitung, "The newspaper (the former) mainly caters to those interested in political facts, while the latter) mainly caters to those interested in political ideas. Naturally, facts do not exclude ideas, and ideas do not exclude facts. This is the most important characteristic of the press." [5]

During the Rheinische Zeitung period, Marx still followed Hegel's view of the state, believing that the state was the highest form of ethical entity. He also had a fantasy about establishing a rational state that was above class, represented the interests of all people, and guaranteed the freedom of everyone. He hoped to achieve top-down reform through dialogue and the expression of demands in the people's press.

In 1849, when Marx presided over the first proletarian daily newspaper, Neue Rheinische Zeitung, he began to explicitly replace the original broad "people" view with class analysis and put forward public opinion supervision: "The press, according to its mission, is the defender of the public, the tireless critic of those in power, the omnipresent eye, and the frenetic mouthpiece of the spirit of a people who passionately defend their own freedom." However, due to strategic needs, the orientation of the newspaper remained as an organ of the Democratic Party. During the period of the First International, Marx put forward the idea that internal party newspapers should not be allowed to oppose the party. In his later years, Marx, together with Engels, began to reflect on the theory of public opinion consensus, exploring and attempting to propose a concept of the party press that was

"formally independent and morally influential", and examined the problem of the institutionalization of public opinion supervision. [5]

1.4. Journalism requires the pursuit of truth

Marx pursued the truth throughout his life, which was also evident in his attitude toward the news.

In the article "Review of the Recent Prussian Censorship Order" (hereinafter referred to as "Censorship Order"), Marx perceptively observed that the censorship order has too many ways to restrain the truth, such as the stipulation that "censorship of books and newspapers must not prevent people from serious and humble discussion of truth", Marx believes that this provision specifies the discussion of truth as requiring both "serious" and "modest" discussion. It is not the content of truth itself that is discussed, but something beyond it, and Marx strongly condemns this stipulation.

In the Order to Review, Marx argued that the duty of the truth-seeker is to "go straight to the truth" rather than "look around."

In the Order to Review and Inspect, Marx satirizes the character of the censors as "if it were derived from their status", which is obviously not in line with the truth. As Marx shrewdly observed, the more such prosecutors there are, "the less opportunity there is for the press to improve." [1]

Marx also published in the German and French Yearbooks their own practice of constantly pursuing truth: "We are not dogmatically facing the world with new principles; the truth is here, kneel down!" From the principles of the world, we elucidate new principles for the world..." [1]

According to Marx, part of the press should involve "the discussion of academic questions, the review of popular works... Differences of opinion can be found, so that ideas can be exchanged and selfless criticism can be made." [1] This also reflects Marx's belief that journalism needs to pursue the truth.

1.5. News is a report on current events

Truth is the lifeblood of news, all news is based on truth, and Marx obviously recognized this.

Writing for the New York Daily Tribune, Marx complained to Engels helplessly: "It is very difficult to write for the newspaper now because nothing is happening locally in England, and the economic situation has not changed significantly." [1] This is enough to show that Marx had clearly recognized that news is a changing fact, and that the greater the range of changes in a fact, the greater the possibility of it becoming news, while the smaller the range of changes in a fact, the less likely it is to become news.

Marx also realized that news needs to be unknown before it is reported, and he emphasized that the essence of "news" is "facts" that are "unknown" to individuals or certain groups. [1] Marx also contrasted philosophy with journalism: "From the very beginning, philosophy was set against the general character of the newspaper, which is alien to it—the constant readiness for battle, the passionate interest in the sensational problems of the day, which require urgent coverage." [1] As can be seen from the term "enthusiasm for current issues", Marx recognized that although news is an unknown fact, this unknown fact must not be too far from the present and must be related to the current concerns of people.

1.6. Freedom of the press should be guaranteed by legislation

The operation of news communication activities is based on the freedom of the press, and press legislation specifically guarantees this freedom. Marx said, "Without freedom of the press, all other freedoms are in vain." [1] He even argued that "the press is the realization of human freedom." [1]

Marx was extremely critical of the unreasonable censorship of the press. In his article "The Censorship Order", he said, "The censorship of books and newspapers always requires the press and publishers to believe that they are ill, and even if the press and publishers present proof of their health, they must still receive treatment." [1]

Marx called for press legislation to guarantee the freedom of the press, and he once pointed out that "the absence of legislation on the press is the abolition of the freedom of the press from the sphere of legal freedom, because the freedom recognized by law exists in a state in the form of law... The press and publication law is the legal recognition of the freedom of press and publication." [1]

Marx opposed artificial interference in the dissemination of news, especially excessive government intervention. He said, "In order for the press to fulfill its mission, it must first not have any mission assigned to it from the outside... To acknowledge that it has its own internal laws from which it should not and cannot be rid." [1] Of course, this also reflects that Marx recognized and respected the inherent laws of news communication activities, which is an important aspect of Marx's theory of news communication.

Regarding the mission of the press, Marx also discussed that the press should be a "defender" of society, a "tireless critic" of those in power, and a "mouthpiece" for the people.

1.7. News communication activities can influence or even change society

Since its inception, news communication has had both a direct and an indirect influence on the development of society, and changes in some social systems have been promoted by news communication activities.

Marx and Engels used their own "Neue Rheinische Zeitung" as a "command post" to direct the German bourgeois revolution, which had a profound impact on Germany and even the world.

Marx also keenly observed that news communication activities can have a profound impact on people's thoughts and, to a certain extent, affect their daily activities, thereby influencing society as a whole. He said of the reconstruction of India: "This unity which the British achieved by the sword, will now be consolidated by the telegraph and will endure forever... The free press, introduced for the first time into Asian society and led chiefly by the common descendants of Indians and Europeans, is a new and powerful element in the reconstruction of this society." [1]

In summarizing their experience six months after the Neue Rheinische Zeitung ceased publication, Marx and Engels wrote: "The greatest advantage of the newspaper lies in its ability to intervene daily in the movement, to speak directly from the center of the movement, to reflect history to the fullest day after day, and to create a continuous and lively interaction between the people and the newspaper." [1]

It can be seen that Marx had a grand vision and clearly realized that news communication activities could influence and even change people's thoughts. Perhaps this is why he and Engels devoted their lives to using the press to guide the workers' movement and promote the development of the entire era.

2. The background of Marx's theory of news communication

Marx said, "The essence of man is, in reality, the sum of all social relations." This also means that man is essentially a product of society, and his primary attribute is the social attribute. A person's social activities, and even the development of his philosophical thoughts, are inseparable from the social environment in which he lives.

To discuss Marx's theories on news communication, it is natural to study and analyze the era in which Marx lived.

2.1. Social environment

From an economic and technological standpoint, the embryonic form of the press emerged in Europe from the 14th century onward with the production of handwritten and printed leaflets. In the mid-15th century, Johannes Gutenberg's invention of the printing press facilitated a surge in European printers entering the publishing and printing industry. This development enabled them to report on significant domestic and international news events, thereby fostering the advancement of the press industry and laying a practical foundation for news dissemination activities.

With the development of the first and second industrial revolutions, the capitalist economy continued to evolve, the bourgeoisie grew, and they constantly pursued new and greater interests. On the other hand, this promoted the development of news communication activities.

Marx lived from 1818 to 1883, a period during which the first and second industrial revolutions overlapped. By this time, many European countries, such as Britain and France, had already completed the initial capital accumulation for capitalism, and capitalism was no longer in its embryonic stage. As a political force, capitalism had gradually begun to take its place on the political stage.

Voltaire, Montesquieu, Rousseau, and others, as new bourgeois intellectuals, constantly criticized feudal dictatorship and opposed religious ignorance and privilege. They demanded freedom and democracy, believed that "all men are created equal," supported "natural human rights," and argued that "the study of God" should be replaced with "the study of man." Under the guidance of these thinkers, bourgeois revolutions began to break out in various European countries.

European countries have frequent exchanges and share common religious beliefs, which makes it very easy for the ideologies and cultures of one country to spread quickly to others.

At that time, Marx's homeland, Germany, received, on one hand, the egalitarian ideas of Voltaire and others, who argued that "all men are created equal"; on the other hand, the church, royal power, and other feudal forces were too powerful, with constant internal strife and serious local divisions that stubbornly hindered the development of capitalism. Although the feudal system was already in turmoil across the entire European continent at that time, and the bourgeois revolution in Germany was already in its brewing period, the feudal forces in Germany were still obstructing social progress. As a result, the bourgeoisie and the working class faced a common enemy - the feudal landlord class.

Marx realized that the development of society was obstructed by the stubborn forces of feudalism and struggled against them. His "Inspection Order" issued in 1842, was aimed at the stubborn forces of German feudalism.

On the other hand, throughout Europe, with the development of the Industrial Revolution, the working class continued to grow and gradually began to emerge as a political force. They oppose the oppression of the bourgeoisie against themselves, demand their rights, and wage a constant struggle against the bourgeoisie.

With the development of the times, the expansion of Marx's social activities, and his own vision, he felt an increasing sympathy for the workers. After he went to France and other countries to observe the prosperity of capitalism, the oppression of the working class, and the constant struggle of the working class, he began to use the press as a platform to encourage the working-class movement and criticize the bourgeoisie's oppression of the working class. In *Capital*, he said that capital "dirties the blood flowing through every pore."

2.2. Personal experience

Marx studied at two universities, Bonn and Berlin. He embraced the ideas of Voltaire and others on freedom and equality, recognized that all people are born equal, and opposed the oppression of one class by another.

Marx formally engaged in journalism, initially as a means of making a living. In June 1842, Marx had a violent quarrel with his mother, which resulted in the cancellation of all financial assistance from the family. He was extremely eager to make a living by engaging in the press and publishing industry. [2]

Marx never left the newspaper industry in his life, and his extensive newspaper activities were the practical basis for the development of his thoughts on news communication. He and Engels constantly used the press as a platform to fight against oppression alongside the oppressed class. The *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* was founded in 1848 to guide the bourgeois revolution in Germany and to work with the bourgeoisie against the feudal landlord class. Marx, of course, was ultimately, along with the working class, fighting against bourgeois oppression alongside the working class. The most direct manifestation of this was his participation in a series of activities in newspapers such as the *Workers' Vindication* and the *Social-Democrat*. Marx, together with Engels, also praised and analyzed the "Paris Commune movement," a proletarian revolutionary movement.

Martin Luther used the press in the past to promote religious reform. Perhaps because of similar historical experience, Marx always regarded the press as a stage for revolutionary struggle, and used news dissemination to carry out revolutionary struggle and ideological propaganda. Marx's newspaper activities and Marx's main social activities are almost inseparable from Engels. He participated in the newspaper activities and was almost always influenced by Engels. Many propositions and ideas were put forward by him together with Engels, such as the *Communist Manifesto*. In other words, Engels's active participation and cooperation are integral to the development of Marx's communication theory.

Influenced by Hegel and others, Marx did not break away from idealism in the early days, which is directly reflected in the article "Order of Review." His concept of the free competition of ideas implied the following idealist assumption: People are rational, and they will consciously choose the truth based on rationality. [3]

3. The practical significance of Marx's theories on communication is

We study history, people, and even individual thoughts with the ultimate goal of impacting our lives today and providing guidance for the future. Marx's theories on news communication indeed guide and influence the news communication activities of later generations.

Marx has insightful views. In his news communication theory, he grasps the essence of news, utilizes it, and integrates it with revolutionary struggle and social practice. Marx's news communication theory is an important part of Marx's scientific thought system, which enriches, refines, and develops Marxism.

Marx's theory of news communication had a significant impact on the October Revolution in Russia and quickly spread around the world, influencing the global proletarian revolution.

In China, Marx's theories on news communication also influenced the development of Chinese news, newspapers, and the entire Chinese revolution. Periodicals such as *Xiangjiang Review* and *New Youth* are activities carried out under the influence of Marx's theories on news communication.

Based on Marx's thoughts on journalism and communication, and after integrating them with China's specific practices, Mao Zedong noted that in the field of journalism and communication, China should allow "freedom of criticism and freedom to express different opinions" among the people, while also enforcing the people's democratic dictatorship against hostile elements and destructive forces. "Our system does not allow freedom of speech for counter-revolutionaries, but only for the people themselves." [4]

Today, we are studying the Marxist concept of news, and some of its core ideas come from Marx's theories on news communication. In China, the news media is the mouthpiece of the Party and the

people and seeks the truth. These are also influenced by Marx's theories on news communication. Over the past hundred years, Chinese Communists have combined Marx's thoughts on journalism and communication with China's specific national conditions, enriching and developing the Marxist concept of journalism. This has given it a new connotation for the times and has continuously enriched, improved, and developed the Marxist concept of journalism to better align with the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

Marx's theories on communication have influenced, and will continue to influence, future generations.

4. Conclusion

Marx had a long-term vision and could grasp his thoughts from the essence of news. All his life, he used newspapers to engage in revolutionary struggle and public opinion propaganda, and regarded newspapers as a position for the dissemination of ideas.

Marx's news communication theory mainly includes seven aspects, such as the party running newspapers and periodicals, the press needing to pursue truth, and the freedom of the press being guaranteed by legislation. It has its historical background and is a product of the continuous development of the European Industrial Revolution, German society and even the entire European capitalist economy. Of course, the emergence of Marx's news thought and his personal social activities, as well as the advancement of his thought and understanding of The Times, are also inseparable. Another person may not be able to understand news communication at that time as deeply as Marx did, nor may they be able to use news communication as Marx and Engels did.

Marx's communication theory has enriched Marxism and serves as the historical basis for Marxist views on news. It has exerted an important influence on both its time and later generations and continues to influence and shape subsequent generations.

Although Marx's theories on news communication have some limitations, they do not diminish their overall value. When we study Marx's news communication theory, we should base our analysis on the times, consider the current reality, grasp the essence of Marx's news communication theory, and continuously develop the Marxist news concept.

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