

Discussion 6 General Comments

The Google Inspired Question:

When, if ever, is it ok to use an advertisement blocker on the web? (Make sure to assess both that advertisements are a revenue stream for websites and that such a practice is both exploitation in and of itself and very likely targeted based on previous surveillance/exploitation.)

1. Be careful not to misunderstand about what Fuchs is claiming regarding exploitation. On his definition exploitation is the extraction of *surplus value*, which will be value over and above what is needed to pay for the people providing the service and maintaining the infrastructure (see p. 104). Crazy high wages to support expensive lifestyles won't count as a way around surplus value. Shareholders who don't do any work but somehow manage to own to output of the work of others will be a problem too. In the case of using the Internet the problem Fuchs has with regard to profit is that it is extracting more value than it should given the efforts put in by the "users" (aka unpaid employees). To challenge this you are going to need an argument that shows that either there is no surplus value being extracted or that argues that while this *is* exploitation on Fuchs definition he is mistaken to think that this is unfair. Both will need to be sophisticated.
2. Ad blockers block ads in one of two ways. [See this page for a quick summary](#). This is important because *how* the ads are blocked will change the nature of your arguments regarding whether or not the ad hosts are still being paid (yes, in one case) or advertisers receiving value (likely not in both cases).
3. One way to justify the exploitation that Fuchs argues is rampant on social media sites while simultaneously working within the critical theory model is to argue that it produces or exacerbates the gap between the haves and the have-nots such that it hastens the revolution. This isn't necessarily a *good* reason for this exploitation but you might find some value in considering it.
4. Get some *actual* alternative social media examples that do not follow the same economic models that Fuchs outlines as being exploitative. You should be able to find these online (why don't you know about them already?) but if you need to look in the text for some then look around pages 117 and 173.
5. Keep oppression in mind as well as exploitation. Fuchs doesn't talk about it directly but we did in class. For Marx oppression was the lack of realistic alternatives and the use of this by those in power for their advantage. If the argument "If you don't like ads then don't use the site, they are the cost of entry" is made/considered then the possibility that such talk is coming from a place of oppression needs to be considered. If there really are no viable alternatives then it is possible that this statement amounts to coercion because there is no other choice when it comes to participating in modern society.
6. Consider that it *might* be possible to have the web look like it does now but with a change to the models in the background. For example, since surplus value *is* exploitation

if we want to remove exploitation then the surplus value could be returned to those it was generated from. The companies could still pay everyone, cover maintenance costs, and do R&D, but instead of distributing profits to shareholders or paying very high wages to executives it would give this value back. The more you use Facebook the more you get paid. The more you write for the Huffington post the more you get paid. Etc. This could work for ads as well and you could event *choose* the sorts of ads that you see. Now, there would clearly be consequences to this that you will need to work out. What I am suggesting here is that these models are technically possible and might suggest a middle ground between where we are now and "everything is free so everyone starves and there is no Internet (which isn't really going to be the case but how it is being painted in some drafts)".

7. Many drafts are overlooking the request to consider the surveillance that takes place in producing targeted advertisements. This needs to be considered for a full answer to the question.
8. How is blocking ads outright different from ignoring them? Consider magazines, these are full of advertisements, many of which are not looked at (or barely looked at as the pages are flipped). Or in the "old days" when people used to leave the room during commercial breaks, or mute the TV, or switch channels, or, or, or...
- 9.

The Wikileaks Inspired Question:

When, if ever, is it ok for Wikileaks (or any similar service) to do what it does? (Make sure to take into account that some of the data has been acquired through offensive hacking, and most (if not all) of the data is private such that those that held it previously would not want it released.)

1. It is very important to keep in mind the place of power in critical theory when forming an answer to this question. Wikileaks is not directed at airing just anyone's dirty laundry and not just any dirty laundry related to the people/organizations who have dirty laundry that it would like to air. It is targeting those people and organizations for whom the regular system of governance operates in favour of, that the system protect by keeping their actions secret where this is not feasible for the rest of us. It is a means of leveling the playing field. Fuchs is rather clear about this and you should be able to easily find some quotes to show that you understand this.
2. Don't be afraid to go straight to the criminal code in Canada. For whistleblowing you'll want section 425.1 and for possession of stolen property you'll want section 354.
3. "[quis custodiet ipsos custodes](#)." This is also an important theme behind the influential graphic novel *Watchmen*.
4. Note that the surveillance content of chapter 7 may also be useful to you when answering this question.