Social Media

Social Media
a critical introduction

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What is a Critical Introduction to Social Media?

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Key concepts

Social media
Critical theory
Marxist theory
Critical political economy

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Overview

What is social about social media? What are the implications of social media platforms such as Facebook, Google, YouTube Wikipedia, Twitter, for power, the economy and politics? This book gives a critical introduction to studying social media. It engages the reader with the concepts needed for critically understanding the world of social media with questions such as:

- Chapter 2: What is social about social media?
- Chapter 3: How meaningful is the notion of participatory culture for thinking about social media?

- Chapter 4: How useful are the concepts of communication power and mass self-communication in the network society for thinking about social media?
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- Chapter 11: How can we achieve social media that serve the purposes of a just and fair world, in which we control society and communicate in common?

This book introduces a theoretical framework for critically understanding social media that is used for discussing social media platforms in the context of specific topics: being social (Chapter 2), participatory culture (Chapter 3), communication and media power (Chapter 4), political economy (Chapter 5), political ethics (Chapter 6), surveillance and privacy (Chapter 7), democracy and the public sphere (Chapter 8), power and transparency (Chapter 9), collaborative work (Chapter 10), the commons (Chapter 11).

Social Media and the Arab Spring

2011 was a year of protests, revolutions and political change. It was a year where people all over the world tried to make their dreams of a different society reality. Wael Ghonim is the administrator of the Facebook page "We are all Khaled Said". He says that this page and other social media were crucial for the Egyptian revolution: "I always said that if you want to liberate a society [. . .] if you want to have a free society. [. . .] This is Revolution 2.0. [. . .] Everyone is contributing to the content".[1] Technology analyst Evgeny Morozov, in contrast to Ghonim, says that social media do not bring about revolutions: the talk of Twitter and Facebook revolutions is "a naive belief in the emancipatory nature of online communication that rests on a stubborn refusal to acknowledge its downside" (Morozov 2010, xiii). Pointing, clicking, uploading, liking and befriending on Facebook would be "slacktivism" – "feel-good online activism that has zero political or social impact. It gives those who participate in 'slacktivist' campaigns an illusion of having a meaningful impact on the world without demanding anything more than joining a Facebook group" (Morozov 2009). For Morozov (2013, 127), Ghonim is "a man who lives and breathes Internet-centrism" – an ideology that reduces societal change to the Internet.

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1 http://technorati.com/politics/article/revolution-20-wael-ghonim-thanks-mark, accessed on July 2, 2013.

Social Media and the Occupy Movement

2011 was also the year in which various Occupy movements emerged in North America, Greece, Spain, the United Kingdom and other countries. One of their protest tactics is to build protest camps in public squares that are centres of gravity for discussions, events and protest activities. Being asked about the advantages of Occupy's use of social media, respondents in the OccupyMedia! Survey[2] said that they allow them to reach a broad public and to protect themselves from the police (for the detailed results see: Fuchs 2013):

- "As much as I wish that occupy would keep away from a media such as Facebook it got the advantage that it can reach out to lots of people that [. . .] [are] otherwise hard to reach out to" (#20).
- "All of these social media [. . .] Facebook, Twitter etc. helps spread the word but I think the biggest achievement is Livestream: those of us who watch or participate in change can inform other streamers of actions, police or protest moving from one place [. . .] to another. That saved many streamers from getting hurt or less arrests" (#36).

At the same time, the respondents identified risks of the use of commercial social media:

- "Facebook is generally exploitative, and controls the output of Facebook posts, the frequency they are seen by other people. It's a disaster and we shouldn't use it at all. But we still do" (#28).
- "There have been occasions where the police seemed to have knowledge that was only shared in a private group and/or text messages and face-to-face" (#55).
- "Events for protests that were created on Facebook, but not organized IRL [in real life]. Many 'participants' in calls for protests on Facebook, but at least 70% of them [don't] [. . .] show up at the actual demonstration" (#74).
- "Twitter has been willing to turn over protestors' tweets to authorities which is a big concern" (#84).
- "Censorship of content by YouTube and email deletions on Gmail" (#103).
- "Yes, my Twitter account was subpoena'd, for tweeting a hashtag. The supboena was dropped in court" (#238).
- "Facebook = Tracebook" (#203).

Unpaid Work for the Huffington Post

The Huffington Post (HP) is the most popular news blog in the world. Arianna Huffington started it in 2005. It has been based on the contributions of many unpaid voluntary bloggers (Fuchs 2014). In 2011, AOL bought the Huffington Post for

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2 The data collection for the OccupyMedia! Survey took place from November 6, 2012 until February 20, 2013. I conducted the research as an online survey. Its aim was to find out more about how Occupy activists use social media and what opportunities and risks of social media they see. The survey resulted in a dataset with $N = 429$ respondents.

US$315 million and turned it into a profit-oriented business. The writer Jonathan Tasini, who had contributed to the HP, filed a $105-million class action suit against HP, arguing that it unjustly enriched itself from its bloggers' unpaid contributions when it was turned into a business and acquired by AOL. Tasini stated: "In my view, the Huffington Post's bloggers have essentially been turned into modern-day slaves on Arianna Huffington's plantation. [. . .] She wants to pocket the tens of millions of dollars she reaped from the hard work of those bloggers."[3]

What is the role and potential of social media in protests and revolution? Is social media use a form of clicktivism and slacktivism that soothes the conscience of concerned middle-class people who do not want to take risks? Is it a powerful tool of protest? What is the role of commercial interests, the state and politics in social media? Do activists and citizen journalists run the risk of being monitored and surveilled by the police and exploited by social media companies that turn the voluntary work of users into money? And if this is the case, then what are the alternatives?

In order to answer such questions, we need to study social media critically. But what is social media? And what is critical thinking?

1.1. What is Social about Social Media?

Questions that many people immediately ask when one employs the term "social media" are: What is social about social media? Are not all media social? These questions have to do with another question: What does it mean to be social?

Information and Cognition

Are human beings always social or only if they interact with others? In sociological theory, there are different concepts of the social (see Chapter 2). Some say that all media are social because they are part of society and aspects of society are present in the technological artefacts we use. This means that if you sit alone in front of your computer, type a document in your word processor and are not connected to the Internet, your activities are perfectly social: the ideas you think and write up refer to ideas of other people and what is happening in society; the word processor has certain features and functions that were all designed by humans for certain reasons and under specific working conditions. So cognition is a social activity. The computer you use may have been assembled in China and the raw materials out of which its components were made may come from mines in Africa. You cannot see all the labour that goes into the computer, but nonetheless it is a tool that was created in society by humans who experience certain working conditions. If we employ this broad understanding of sociality, then not just Facebook is social, but also television, the radio, the telegraph, posters, books, wall paintings and all other forms of information.

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3 www.forbes.com/sites/jeffbercovici/2011/04/12/aol-huffpo-suit-seeks-105m-this-is-about-justice/, accessed on July 2, 2013.

Communication

Other people say that not all media are social, but only those that support communication between humans. Communication is a reciprocal process between at least two humans, in which symbols are exchanged and all interaction partners give meaning to these symbols. Computer-mediated communication did not start with Facebook and Twitter: Ray Tomlinson sent the first Internet email from one computer to the other in 1971.[4] If we understand social activity to mean communication or symbolic interaction, then not all media use is social. Based on this understanding, it is not social if you write a document alone, but it is social to send an email or chat with a friend on Facebook. Communication is a basic feature of all societies and all human activity. We cannot live and survive without communication, just like we cannot survive without food and water. Communication takes place routinely in everyday life.

Community

Some communications that take place repeatedly result in something more than just social relationships – they involve feelings of belonging together or friendship. Communication turns this form of the social into community. A certain share of the communications on Facebook is part of communities of personal friends, political activists, hobby or fan groups. But online communities are not new; they existed already in bulletin board systems such as the WELL (Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link) in the 1980s.

Collaboration and Co-operative Work

A fourth form of sociality is collaboration or co-operative work. The research area of computer-supported co-operative work (CSCW) was founded in the 1980s and deals with how computers enable human co-operation. Collaborative work, as for example the co-operative editing of articles performed on Wikipedia or the joint writing of a document on Google Docs, is not new in computing, although the popularity of Wikipedia and wiki platforms such as Mediawiki, PBWorks, Wikispaces is a more recent development. CSCW was already the subject of academic discussions in the 1980s when a conference series started with the first ACM Conference on CSCW that took place in December 1986 in Austin, Texas. The concept of the wiki is also not new: the first wiki technology (the WikiWikiWeb) was introduced by Ward Cunningham in 1995.

Information, Communication, Collaboration and Community are Forms of Sociality but What is Now Social about Facebook?

There are different forms of the social, such as information, communication, communities and collaboration. When we talk about "social media", we have

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4 See http://openmap.bbn.com/~tomlinso/ray/firstemailframe.html and http://openmap.bbn.com/~tomlinso/ray/ka10.html, accessed on July 2, 2013.

to be careful to specify which meaning of the term "social" we are employing. Therefore, studying social media is in need of social theory and social philosophy. These tools of thought allow us to come to grips with the basic meaning of terms such as sociality, media, society, power, democracy, participation, culture, labour, communication, information, the public sphere, the private realm, etc. that are often employed when discussing social media, but often poorly understood.

All computing systems, and therefore all web applications, as well as all forms of media can be considered as social because they store and transmit human knowledge that originates in social relations in society. They are objectifications of society and human social relations. Whenever a human uses a computing system or a medium (also if s/he is alone in a room), s/he cognizes based on objectified knowledge that is the outcome of social relations. But not all computing systems and web applications support direct communication between humans, in which at least two humans mutually exchange symbols that are interpreted as being meaningful. Amazon mainly provides information about books and other goods one can buy; it is not primarily a tool of communication, but rather a tool of information, whereas Facebook has in-built communication features that are frequently used (mail system, walls for comments, forums, etc.).

Social media is a complex term with multi-layered meanings. Facebook contains a lot of content (information) and is a tool for communication and for the maintenance creation of communities. It is only to a minor degree a tool for collaborative work, but involves at least three types of sociality: cognition, communication and community. Chapter 2 focuses more in depth on the concept of social media.

Understanding social media critically means, among other things, to engage with the different forms of sociality on the Internet in the context of society. If one compares the most frequently accessed websites in 2013 to the ones that were popular in 2000, then one sees that the most accessed sites in 2000 were MSN, Yahoo, Excite, AOL, Microsoft, Daum, eBay and Altavista,[5] whereas in 2013 the most accessed websites in the world include Google, Facebook, YouTube, Yahoo!, Baidu, Wikipedia, Windows Live, QQ, Amazon and Twitter, Blogspot, LinkedIn, Wordpress.[6] The difference is that these platforms now include social networking sites (Facebook, LinkedIn), video sharing sites (YouTube), blogs (Blogspot, Wordpress), wikis (Wikipedia) and microblogs (Twitter, Weibo). There are relatively new companies in the Internet business that did not exist in 2000. What makes sites like Facebook distinct is that they are integrated platforms that combine many media and information and communication technologies, such as webpages, webmail, digital image, digital video, discussion group, guest book, connection list, or search engine. Many of these technologies are social network tools themselves. Social networking sites, sharing sites for user-generated content, blogs, microblogs and wikis, just like all other

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5 According to alexa.com, version from August 15, 2000, archived on http://web.archive.org/web/200008150 52659/, www.alexaresearch.com/clientdir/web_reports/top_websites_nonclient.cfm, accessed on July 2, 2013.
6 According to alexa.com, version from February 25, 2013.

media, are social in the broad understanding of the term as information. Some of them support communication, some collaborative work, content sharing or community-building. These latter three forms of sociality have, due to the rise of platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn, Wikipedia or YouTube, become more important on the World Wide Web (WWW).

The discussion shows that understanding social media requires asking and engaging with a lot of theoretical questions. This book invites the reader to engage with theory and philosophy for understanding contemporary media. Social theory not only allows us to understand the meaning of concepts, it also allows us to ask important questions about the world and it can be fun to theorize and to discuss theories with others. And the best questions we can ask are critical ones. But what does critical thinking mean? And why does it matter?

1.2. What is Critical Thinking and Why Does it Matter?

When discussing the question "What does it mean to be critical?" with academic colleagues, many have the immediate reaction: we are all critical because we ask critical questions and criticize the work of our academic colleagues. Scholars who characterize themselves as critical thinkers or critical theorists often question these claims. They emphasize the term "critical" and the need for being critical in order to stress that in their view not everyone is critical and that a lot of thought (academic or not) is uncritical. Their basic argument is that not all questions really matter to the same extent for society and that those whom they call uncritical or administrative researchers often focus on questions and research that is irrelevant, or even harmful, for improving society in such a way that all can benefit. They are concerned with questions of power.

Power

Power is a complex concept, discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, that focuses on communication power. Power has to do with who controls society, who is taking important decisions, who owns basic resources, who is considered as being influential, who has the reputation to influence and change society, who is an opinion maker, or who defines dominant norms, rules and values. The question "Who is in power?" immediately begets the question "And who lacks the capacity to influence and change things?". Power asymmetries mean that there are groups of people who benefit in society at the expense of others, by using them for their own ends and deriving advantages that do not benefit society as a whole or those who are being used.

It makes a difference whether one asks questions about society with a concern for power or not. Let's come back to the topic of social media. One can ask a lot of questions that ignore the topic of power. For example:

- Who uses social media?
- For what purposes are social media used?
- Why are they used?
- About what do people communicate on social media?
- What are the most popular social media?
- How can politicians and parties best use social media for obtaining more votes in the next elections?
- How can companies use social media for improving their advertisements and public relations so that they make more profits?
- How much average profit does one click on a targeted ad that is presented on Facebook or Google bring a company?
- How can a company make profit by crowdsourcing work to users and employing free and open source software?

Such questions are not uncommon, but rather quite typical. Yet they include two problems. First, many of them ignore the topic of power. They do not ask the questions who benefits and who has disadvantages from the use of social media, the Internet and ICTs (information and communication technologies) and how the benefits of some are based on the disadvantages of others. Second, such questions are based on a particularistic logic: they are concerned with how certain groups, especially companies and politicians, can benefit from social media and ignore the question of how this use benefits or harms others and society at large. So uncritical questions ask, for example, how *companies* can benefit from social media, but do not discuss the working conditions in these companies – the wealth gap between the well-off, managers and shareholders, on the one hand, and the large number of the unemployed, the homeless and precarious workers on the other hand, and the rising inequality in the world.

Let's go back to the three examples of social media in the Arab Spring, the Occupy movement and the Huffington Post. What does it mean to ask critical questions in the context of these examples?

Asking Critical Questions about Social Media and the Arab Spring

- Which power structures are underlying contemporary revolutions and protests?
- How do they influence the use of social media?
- What are the realities, opportunities and risks of social movements' social media use?
- Does the corporate character of platforms like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube negatively impact social movements' use?
- If so, how?

- How do social movements try to establish and use alternative, non-profit and non-commercial social media? What are the advantages and potentials of such platforms in contrast to for-profit platforms?
- Which problems and limits do such alternative platforms face in capitalist society, in which the control of resources (money, time, attention, influence, etc.) is asymmetrically distributed?
- Is there a risk that governments monitor social movements' social media use and use the obtained data for repressing, torturing or blackmailing activists?
- Which forms of economic and political censorship of social media are there, how do they work and what needs to be done to fight against them?

Asking Critical Questions about Social Media and the Occupy Movement

- What kind of movement is Occupy and how does it relate to the power structures of contemporary society?
- What are the realities, opportunities and risks of Occupy's social media use?
- Which potentials for creating a public sphere in protests does the use of livestreams and alternative social media have in protests?
- How do governments try to monitor the social media use of activists and why is this problematic?
- How can activists best handle the contradiction between increased public visibility and increased police surveillance that shapes Occupy's social media use best?
- What is activists' perceived role of social media in the Occupy movement?
- How do they assess the empowering and limiting aspects of social media?
- Which advantages and disadvantages do Occupy activists see in relation to the movements' use of commercial digital media and alternative, non-commercial, non-profit digital media?

Asking Critical Questions about Unpaid Work for the Huffington Post

- What is a commodity and and what is the process by which something is turned into a commodity (=commodification)?
- How does commodification work on social media such as the Huffington Post?
- What is the role of advertising in these models? What is the role of users' activities in these models?
- Why is commodification in general, and on social media in particular, problematic?

- What are the negative implications of crowdsourcing and targeted advertising?
- What does exploitation of labour mean?
- In what way is the labour of users on social media exploited?
- How can the use of Facebook be exploited labour even though I am not paid for it, I do it in my free time and I find that it is a fun activity that is helpful in my everyday life?
- How can Facebook use be labour even though it is so different from working in a coal mine and feels more like singing a song with friends at a campfire?
- Can something be exploitation even though it does not feel like exploitation and is fun? Do users actually think about corporate social media use as labour?
- Do they see any problems? If so, what problems? If not, why not?
- How do trade unions, data protection agencies, privacy advocates, consumer protection groups and social movements react to the existence of this digital labour?
- Are there any alternatives to commercial social media? What are the opportunities and limitations of alternative social media?

The list of questions is exemplary and far from complete. It shows that many critical questions can be asked about social media and need to be asked. Thinking critically about society and the media is concerned with creating structures of society and the media where everyone can benefit.

1.3. What is Critical Theory?

Critical theory is a specific form of critical thinking. Why is it relevant for understanding computer technologies?

The history of communication and transport technologies is not a progressive success story. Although many people today benefit in mutual ways from using books, telephones, trains, cars, television, radio, computers, the Internet, or mobile phones, the history of these technologies is deeply embedded into the history of capitalism, colonialism, warfare, exploitation and inequality. Winseck and Pike (2007) show, with the example of the global expansion of cable and wireless companies (such as, for example, Western Union, Commercial Cable Company, Atlantic Telegraph Company or Marconi) in the years 1860–1930, that there was a distinct connection between communication, globalization and capitalism. Edwin Black (2001) has shown in his book *IBM and the Holocaust* that by selling punch card systems to the Nazis, International Business Machines (IBM) assisted them in their attempt to extinguish the Jews, ethnic minorities, communists, socialists, gay people, the handicapped and others. The Nazis used these systems for numbering the victims, storing and processing where they should be brought, what should happen to them, and for organizing their transport to extermination camps

such as Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald, Dachau, Majdanek, Mauthausen, Ravensbrück or Sachsenhausen. IBM made an international business out of mass murder (*I-B-M*) by accumulating profits from selling data storage and processing machines to the Nazis. The punch cards covered information on where a victim would be deported, the type of victim he/she was (Jew, homosexual, deserter, prisoner of war, etc.), and his/her status. Code status 6 was "Sonderbehandlung" (special treatment), which meant death in the gas chamber. Black has shown that the system was delivered and maintained by IBM and that IBM New York and the German Nazi state made rental contracts. Black (2001, 9) says that there was a "conscious involvement – directly and through its subsidiaries –" of IBM "in the Holocaust, as well as [...] in the Nazi war machine that murdered millions of others throughout Europe". The computer and the Internet have their origins in the military-industrial complex and were later commercialized. They both first served the interest of war before companies discovered the profitability of these technologies. The examples show that corporate, military or state interests often stand above the communicative interest of humans.

This book is based on a concern for human interests and for overcoming the global problems of society. We live in turbulent times that are shaped by worldwide inequality, global economic crisis, global ecological crisis, war and terrorism, high unemployment, precarious living and working conditions, rising poverty levels, etc. Can all benefit in this situation from social media? Or is it likely that only some benefit at the expense of others? In this book, I ask questions about power and (in)equality in contemporary society. I want to stress that it is important to be concerned about alleviating inequality and creating a society of equals, in which all benefit and lead a good life. The book is based on the normative assumption that we need a society and social media that benefit not just some of us, but all of us. This universal concern makes this book a critical book. Therefore it is called "Social Media: A Critical Theory".

Critical theory is especially connected to one name: Karl Marx.

You Want me to Read Karl Marx? Are You Crazy? Why Should I Do That?

Karl Marx does not need much introduction. He was a thorough theorist and fierce critic of capitalism, a public intellectual, a critical journalist, a polemicist, a philosopher, economist, sociologist, political scientist, historian, Hegelian, author (with Friedrich Engels) of the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) and *Capital* (1867, 1885, 1894), a leader of the Communist League and the International Workingmen's Association and one of the most influential political thinkers in the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

But wasn't Marx responsible for the horrors of Stalin and the Soviet Union? Marx did not live in the 1930s, when Stalin organized show trials and killed his opponents. So he cannot really be blamed for what happened more than 50 years after his death. Furthermore, in many of his writings Marx was deeply concerned with humanism and a democratic form of socialism, whereas Stalin and his

followers were arguably not (for a thorough discussion of why prejudices against Marx are incorrect, see Eagleton 2011).

The capitalist crisis that started in 2008 has made clear that there are huge gaps between the rich and the poor, owners and non-owners of capital and that there are big problems of capitalism. The Occupy movement has made class an important topic. Occupy Wall Street argues that there is a "corrosive power of major banks and multinational corporations over the democratic process" and that "the role of Wall Street in creating an economic collapse [...] has caused the greatest recession in generations".[7] Occupy London defines itself as "part of the global social movement that has brought together concerned citizens from across the world against this injustice and to fight for a sustainable economy that puts people and the environment we live in before corporate profits. [...] Ordinary people – families, small businesses and communities – are being forced to pay for a crisis they didn't cause".[8]

Marx analyzed how class, capitalism, crisis and power work and what the potentials of struggles for a better world are. Occupy and the reality of capitalism make Marx's themes very topical. The engagement with Marx can help us to better understand the situation we are in today, the problems society is facing and how struggles for a better future can be organized.

But isn't Marx a nineteenth-century thinker? Why should I read him if I want to understand social media? Obviously, Marx did not use Facebook. So why should I care about his works today?

So, You Tell Me that Marx Invented the Internet?

Some scholars have said that Marx never commented on networked media (McLuhan 2001, 41). But Marx discussed the implications of the telegraph for the globalization of trade, production and society, was one of the first philosophers and sociologists of technology in modern society, anticipated the role of knowledge labour and the rise of an information society and was himself a critical journalist. This shows that somebody who cares about the analysis of media and communication has many reasons to engage with Marx. Marx stressed the importance of the concept of the social: he highlighted that phenomena in society (such as money or markets and, today, the Internet, Facebook, Twitter, etc.) do not simply exist, but are the outcome of social relations between human beings. They do not exist automatically and by necessity because humans can change society. Therefore, society and the media are open for change and contain the possibility of a better future. If we want to understand what is social about social media, then reading Marx can help us a lot.

In his work the *Grundrisse*, Marx described a global information network, in which "everyone attempts to inform himself" about others and "connections are introduced" (Marx 1857/1858, 161). Such a description not only sounds like an anticipation of the concept of the Internet, it is also an indication that Marx's thought is relevant for Media/Communication Studies and the study of the Internet and social media. This passage in the *Grundrisse* is an indication that

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7 www.occupywallst.org/about/, accessed on July 2, 2013.
8 www.occupylondon.org.uk/about/about-occupy-london-2, accessed on July 2, 2013.

although the Internet as technology was a product of the Cold War and Californian counter-culture, Marx already anticipated its concept in the nineteenth century – *Karl Marx invented the Internet!*

How Can One Define Critical Theory?

Ben Agger (2006, 4f) argues that critical social theory is based on seven foundations:

- It is a critique of positivism and of the assumption that theory is value free.
- It argues for the possibility of a better future without domination and exploitation.
- It sees domination as a structural phenomenon.
- It shows how humans, who live in structures of domination, tend to reproduce these structures in false consciousness.
- It is interested in everyday life such as the workplace and the family.
- It conceives structure and agency as dialectical.
- It sees liberation as a process that must be accomplished by the oppressed and exploited themselves.

Relating these aspects to Marx's works, we can identify six dimensions of a critical theory:

1. Critical ethics.
2. Critique of domination and exploitation.
3. Dialectical reason.
4. Struggles and political practice.
5. Ideology critique.
6. Critique of the political economy.

1. Critical Theory has a Normative Dimension

Criticism "measures individual existence against essence" (Marx 1997, 61f). This means that critical theory is normative and realistic, it argues that it is possible to logically provide reasonably grounded arguments about what a good society is, that the good society relates to conditions that all humans require to survive (the essence of humans and society), and that we can judge existing societies according to the extent they provide or fail to provide/humane conditions.

2. Critical Theory is a Critique of Domination and Exploitation

Critical theory questions all thought and practices that justify or uphold domination and exploitation. Domination means that one group benefits at the expense

of others and has the means of violence at hand that they can use for upholding the situation where the one benefits at the expense of others. Exploitation is a specific form of domination, in which one group controls property and has the means to force others to work so that they produce goods or property that they do not own themselves, but that the owning class controls.

An example is that a slave-owner owns a slave as property and owns all products that the slave creates; it even allows killing her/him if s/he refuses to work. A somewhat different example is that Facebook Inc. is a company controlled by private shareholders who own the Facebook platform. Facebook's users create data whenever they are online that refers to their profiles and online behaviour. This data is sold to Facebook's advertising clients who are enabled to present targeted advertisements on users' profiles. Without Facebook users, there would be no profit. So, one can say that users create the monetary value and profit of Facebook. But they do not own this profit, which is rather controlled by Facebook's shareholders. So, also, Facebook users are exploited.

Marx formulated the categoric imperative of critical theory "to overthrow all conditions in which man is a degraded, enslaved, neglected, contemptible being" (Marx 1997, 257f). Critical theory wants to show that a good life for all is possible and that domination and exploitation alienate humans from achieving such a society. Marx therefore identifies the "task of philosophy [. . .] to unmask human self-alienation" (Marx 1997, 251). In deconstructing alienation, domination and exploitation, critical theory also makes demands for a self-determined, participatory and just democracy. Participatory democracy is a society in which all decisions are made by those who are concerned by them and all organizations (workplaces, schools, cities, politics, etc.) are controlled by those who are affected by them. Such a society is not only a grassroots political democracy, i.e. a society controlled by all people, but also an economic democracy, in which producers control the production process and the means and outcomes of production. Critical theory wants to make the world conscious of its own possibilities. The "world has long dreamed of something of which it only has to become conscious in order to possess it in actuality" (Marx 1997, 214).

3. Critical Theory Uses Dialectical Reasoning as a Method of Analysis

Dialectical reasoning is a philosophical method for understanding the world. The dialectical method identifies contradictions. Contradictions are "the source of all dialectics" (Marx 1867, 744). Dialectics tries to show that and how contemporary society and its moments are shaped by contradictions. A contradiction is a tension between two poles that require each other to exist, but have opposing qualities. Basic contradictions are, for example, those between being and nothingness and life and death: all things have a beginning and an end. The end of one thing gives rise to a new thing. So, for example, the music industry's trial against the Napster filesharing platform resulted in the end of Napster, but

not in the end of the filesharing technology, as the rise of related technologies such as Kazaa, BitTorrent and the PirateBay platform showed.

Contradictions result in the circumstance that society is dynamic and that capitalism assures the continuity of domination and exploitation by changing the way these phenomena are organized. Dialectics "regards every historically developed form as being in a fluid state, in motion, and therefore grasps its transient aspects as well" (Marx 1867, 103). The "movement of capitalist society is full of contradictions" (Marx 1867, 103). In a contradiction, one pole of the dialectic can only exist because the opposing pole exists: they require and exclude each other at the same time. In a dominative society (such as capitalism), contradictions cause problems and are to a certain extent also the seeds for overcoming these problems. They have positive potentials and negative realities at the same time.

Marx analyzed capitalism's contradictions, for example: the contradictions between non-owners/owners, the poor/the rich, misery/wealth, workers/capitalists, use value/exchange value, concrete labour/abstract labour, the simple form of value/the relative and expanded form of value, social relations of humans/relations of things, the fetish of commodities and money/fetishistic thinking, the circulation of commodities/the circulation of money, commodities/money, labour power/wages, subject/object, labour process/valorization process, subject of labour (labour power, worker)/the object of labour (the means of production), variable capital/constant capital, surplus labour/surplus product, necessary labour time/surplus labour time, single worker/co-operation, single company/industry sector, single capital/competing capitals, production/consumption, productive forces/relations of production.

The tension between opposing poles can be resolved in a process that Hegel and Marx called "sublation" and "negation of the negation". Sublation is a difficult concept that helps us to understand how change happens. For example, it can be used for explaining what is new and old about the contemporary form of social media. The German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel first introduced this concept. It is difficult because its meaning is not intuitively clear. This has to do with the fact that the term comes from the German word *Aufhebung*, which cannot be directly translated to English. It has three meanings: (a) to eliminate, (b) to preserve and (c) to lift up. Hegel used this notion as a language game in order to express that change of something means that (a) the current state is eliminated, (b) some aspects of the old state are preserved in the new state and (c) a new quality emerges in the new state. Marx applied the concept of sublation to society in order to explain how it changes.

Take the example of Facebook. It is a sublation of earlier Internet platforms: (a) It eliminated the dominance of other Internet technologies, such as, for example, guest books on websites. Nowadays it is much more common that users write on the walls of their Facebook friends. But (b) the guest book has also been preserved on Facebook: the wall is a kind of guest book. And (c) Facebook is more than just a guest book for commenting; it also includes features such as email, photo and video sharing, discussion forums, fan pages and the friends list.

Marx was concerned with dialectical relations in society. So, for example, there is a dialectical relation between labour power and wages: labour power is the capacity to work; work is the transformation of nature by human activity so that goods emerge. In capitalism, a lot of labour power is organized as wage labour. So wages exist only in relation to labour power (for paying labour power), and capitalism forces workers to earn wages in order to have money for buying goods. Labour and wages cannot exist without one another in capitalism. Workers, however, do not have the power to determine their wages. Marx (1867) argued that the power of the owners of firms that employ workers results in the circumstance that they only pay parts of the work the labour performs, only a certain number of hours a day, whereas the other part is unpaid. The work that is performed unpaid is called surplus labour and the unpaid work time (measured in hours) surplus value. Surplus labour is a specific form of labour that emerges from the relation of labour power and wages in capitalism. The production of surplus value is the source of profit. For example, if workers in a company produce goods that are sold for €10 000, but their wages are only €5000, then there is an unpaid surplus labour that has produced a profit/surplus of €5000. Marx considers the unpaid production of surplus by workers and the appropriation of this value by capitalists to be the main scandal and injustice of capitalism. He therefore argues that there is a class relation (contradictory interests) between workers and capitalists.

Capitalism's class relation is another dialectical contradiction. Marx says that its sublation is not possible within capitalism, but requires to overcome this type of society and to build a new society. We will come back to the concept of surplus value in Chapter 5.

There are contradictions in capitalism that are persistent and not frequently sublated. They are at the heart of human misery in capitalism. Their sublation can only be achieved by political struggle and means the end of capitalism. These are especially the antagonisms between productive forces/relations of production, owners/non-owners, the poor/the rich, misery/wealth, workers/capitalists, dominated groups/oppressors. The contradiction between productive forces and relations of production is partly sublated in crisis situations, but reconstitutes itself right in the crisis. Its true sublation can only be achieved by the overthrow of capitalism. If, in capitalism, an important contradiction is the one between the owning class that exploits the non-owning class, then the goal of critical theory is the representation of the interest of oppressed and exploited groups and the overcoming of class society. "It can only represent a class whose historical task is the overthrow of the capitalist mode of production and the final abolition of all classes – the proletariat" (Marx 1867, 98).

In formulating a critique of exploitation and domination, critical theory develops "new principles for the world out of the principles of the world" (Marx 1997, 214). Dialectical thinking argues that the foundations of a classless society develop already within capitalism; that capitalism, on the one hand, produces new forms of co-operation that are, on the other hand, within class relations, forms of exploitation and domination. In capitalism, the forces of production are at the same time destructive forces.

4. Critical Theory is Connected to Struggles for a Just and Fair Society – It is an Intellectual Dimension of Struggle

Critical theory provides a "self-understanding [. . .] of the age concerning its struggle and wishes" (Marx 1997, 315), it can "show the world why it actually struggles" and is "taking sides [. . .] with actual struggles" (Marx 1997, 214). This means that critical theory can help to explain the causes, conditions, potentials and limits of struggles. Critical theory rejects the argument that academia and science should and can be value-free. It rather argues that political worldviews shape all thought and theories. There are deeply political reasons why a person is interested in a certain topic, aligns himself/herself with a certain school of thought, develops a particular theory and not another one, refers to certain authors and not others because modern society is shaped by conflicts of interests, and therefore, in surviving and asserting themselves, scholars have to make choices, enter strategic alliances and defend their positions against others. Critical theory holds not only that theory is always political, but also that critical theory should develop analyses of society that struggle against interests and ideas that justify domination and exploitation.

5. Ideology Critique: Critical Theory is a Critique of Ideology

Ideologies are practices and modes of thought that present aspects of human existence that are historical and changeable as eternal and unchangeable. It is possible, for example, to claim that there is no alternative to Facebook and that the organizational model of Facebook, which uses targeted advertising, is the only possible form of a social networking site. Facebook is so dominant and has more than a billion users. Many of its users have several hundred contacts. It is difficult to imagine that there could be an alternative to Facebook because we are afraid to lose the possibility of communication with these contacts. But what if one could import all these contacts to another platform that does not have complex privacy policies, does not use targeted advertising and where all Facebook contacts are available? Ideologies claim that things cannot be changed, have always been or need to be the way they are now. Marx, in contrast, argued that everything in society is social, which also means that it can be changed by humans and that all things have a beginning and an end.

Ideology critique wants to remind us that everything that exists in society is created by humans in social relationships and that social relationships can be changed. It wants to bring "problems into the self-conscious human form" (Marx 1997, 214), which means that it wants to make humans conscious of the problems they are facing in society and the causes of these problems. Arguments like "there is no alternative to capitalism, neoliberalism, competition, egoism, racism, etc. because man is egoistic, competitive, etc." forget about the social character of society and create the impression that the results of social activity are unchangeable things. Critical theory provides an "analysis of the mystical consciousness that is unclear about itself" (Marx 1997, 214).

6. Critical Theory is a Critique of the Political Economy

Critical theory analyzes how capital accumulation, surplus value exploitation and the transformation of aspects of society into commodities (commodification) work and what the contradictions of the capitalist mode of production are. A commodity is a good that is exchanged with other goods in a certain quantitative relationship: x amount of commodity A = y amount of commodity B. "In the critique of political economy, therefore, we shall examine the basic categories, uncover the contradiction introduced by the free-trade system, and bring out the consequences of both sides of the contradiction" (Engels 1843/1844, 175). Critical political economy is concerned with how resources are produced, distributed and consumed and which power relations shape these resources. These resources can be physical productions, such as a car, but also non-physical goods, such as information. The information uploaded to Facebook is produced by users, but not owned and controlled by them: Facebook obtains the right to sell data about the uploaded information and your usage behaviour to other companies. It controls the profits derived from this process. Also, attention has its own political economy on the Internet: not everyone has the same power to be heard, seen and read on social media. Powerful actors such as, for example, CNN or *The New York Times* have much more visibility than a single political blogger. George Orwell was describing an animal kingdom, in which some animals are "more equal than others" (Orwell 1945, 85). On capitalist social media such as Google, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, some users are more equal than others – which means that there is inequality.

1.4. Critical Theory Approaches

The Frankfurt School – Not a Sausage, but a Critical Theory

The Frankfurt School is a tradition of critical thinking that has its origins in the works of scholars like Herbert Marcuse, Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno (for introductions see Held 1980, Wiggershaus 1995). All six dimensions of Marx's theory can be found in the Frankfurt School's understanding of critique and can be exemplified by studying Marcuse's (1988, 134–158) essay "Philosophy and Critical Theory", Horkheimer's (2002, 188–252) essay "Traditional and Critical Theory", Marcuse's (1988, 43–87) article "The Concept of Essence" and the section "The Foundations of the Dialectical Theory of Society" in Marcuse's book *Reason and Revolution* (1941, 258–322). These texts are apt because they describe the fundamentals of how the thinkers of the Frankfurt School thought one should study society.

Critical theory is *ethical*. It has a "concern with human happiness" (Marcuse 1988, 135). It is a *critique of domination and exploitation*. It holds that "man can be more than a manipulable subject in the production process of class society" (Marcuse 1988, 153). The goal of critical theory is the transformation of society as a whole (Horkheimer 2002, 219) so that a "society without injustice" (221) emerges. Like Marx, critical theory makes use of *dialectical reason*. It argues that concepts

that describe the existence of capitalism (profit, surplus value, worker, capital, commodity, etc.) are dialectical because they "transcend the given social reality in the direction of another historical structure which is present as a tendency in the given reality" (Marcuse 1988, 86). Critical theory wants to advance *struggles and political practice.* "The materialist protest and materialist critique originated in the struggle of oppressed groups for better living conditions and remain permanently associated with the actual process of this struggle" (Marcuse 1988, 141). It advances a *critique of ideology* by trying to show that capitalism's central phenomena in many presentations of reality "do not immediately appear to men as what they are 'in reality', but in masked, 'perverted' form" (Marcuse 1988, 70). Critical theory bases its ideas on Marx's *critique of the political economy* (Horkheimer 2002, 244).

Jürgen Habermas built his approach on the classical Frankfurt School and at the same time worked out the concept of communicative rationality, by which he went beyond the classical tradition. Habermas (1984, 285f) distinguishes between instrumental (non-social, success-oriented), strategic (social, success-oriented) and communicative action (social, oriented on understanding). Habermas (1971, 53) conceives instrumental action and communicative action as the two fundamental aspects of social praxis.

Communication is certainly an important aspect of a society free of dominations. It is, however, in capitalism also a form of interaction, in which ideology is, with the help of the mass media, made available to dominated groups. Communication is not automatically progressive. Habermas differentiates instrumental/strategic reason and communicative reason, whereas Horkheimer draws a distinction between instrumental reason and critical reason (Horkheimer 1947) and, based on it, between traditional and critical theory (Horkheimer 2002). Habermas splits off communication from instrumentality and thereby neglects that, in capitalism, the dominant system uses communication just like technology, the media, ideology or labour as an instrument for defending its rule. Communication is not pure and left untouched by structures of domination; it is antagonistically entangled into them. For Horkheimer (based on Marx), critical theory's goal is man's "emancipation from slavery" (Horkheimer 2002, 249) and "the happiness of all individuals" (248). Horkheimer has in mind the emancipation of communication just like the emancipation of work, decision-making and everyday life. His notion of critical rationality is larger than Habermas' notion of communicative rationality which risks becoming soaked up by non-critical approaches that use Habermas' stress on communication for instrumental purposes. The concept of communication can be critical, but is not necessarily critical, whereas the concept of a critique of exploitation and domination is necessarily critical.

Critical Political Economy of Media and Communication – Studying the Media and Communication Critically

Dwayne Winseck (2011) provides a map of the landscape of Political Economy research in Media and Communication Studies by identifying four approaches and speaking of Political Economies of Media:

- Neoclassical Political Economy of the Media,
- Radical Political Economy of the Media,
- Schumpeterian Institutional Political Economy of the Media,
- The Cultural Industries School.

In his seminal introduction to the field, Vincent Mosco defines the Political Economy of Communication as the "study of the social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources, including communication resources" (Mosco 2009, 2). Marxian Political Economy of Communication decentres the media by "placing in the foreground the analysis of capitalism, including the development of the forces and relations of production, commodification and the production of surplus value, social class divisions and struggles, contradictions and oppositional movements" (Mosco 2009, 94). Graham Murdock and Peter Golding (2005) argue that the Critical Political Economy of Communications analyzes "the interplay between the symbolic and the economic dimensions of public communications" (60) and "how the making and taking of meaning is shaped at every level by the structured asymmetries in social relations" (62). A critical political economy of social media is particularly interested in the power relations that govern the production, distribution and use of information of platforms like Facebook.

The following terms have been used for naming this field: Political Economy of Communication (Mosco 2009), Political Economy of Communications (Wasko 2004; Wasko, Murdock and Sousa 2011), Political Economy of Culture (Calabrese and Sparks 2004), Political Economy of Information (Garnham 2011; Mosco and Wasko 1988), Political Economy of Mass Communication (Garnham 1990) and Political Economy of the Media (Golding and Murdock 1997b; McChesney 2008). All of these approaches refer mainly to Winseck's second approach.

The Critical Political Economy of Communication studies media communication in the context of power relations and the totality of social relations and is committed to moral philosophy and social praxis (Mosco 2009, 2–5). It is holistic, historical, cares about the public good and engages with moral questions of justice and equity (Murdock and Golding 2005, 61). Golding and Murdock (1997a) mention five characteristics of the Critical Political Economy of the Media:

- holism,
- historicity,
- realist and materialist epistemology,
- moral and philosophical foundations,
- a focus of the analysis on cultural distribution and on the distribution between the private and public control of communications.

Important topics of the Critical Political Economy of Communication include media activism; media and social movements; the commodification of media content, audiences and communication labour; capital accumulation models of the media; media and the public sphere; communication and space-time; the concentration of

corporate power in the communication industry; the media and globalization; the media and imperialism; the media and capitalism; media policies and state regulation of the media; communication and social class, gender, race; hegemony; the history of communication industries; media commercialization; media homogenization/diversification/multiplication/integration; media and advertising, media power (Garnham 1990, 1995/1998, 2000; Hardy 2010; Mosco 2009; Wasco 2004).

Dallas Smythe (1981, xvi–xviii) identified eight core aspects of a Marxist political economy of communications: materiality, monopoly capitalism, audience commodification and advertising, media communication as part of the base of capitalism, labour power, critique of technological determinism, consciousness, arts and learning.

Critical Political Economy and the Frankfurt School are Two Critical Theories but Do We Really Need Two of Them?

There are connections between Critical Political Economy and the Frankfurt School's stress on ideology. For Murdock and Golding (1974, 4), the media are organizations that "produce and distribute commodities", are the means for distributing advertisements, and they also have an "ideological dimension" by disseminating "ideas about economic and political structures". The approaches of the Frankfurt School and of the Critique of the Political Economy of Media and Communication should be understood as being complementary. There has been a stronger focus on ideology critique in the Frankfurt School approach for historical reasons. For Horkheimer and Adorno (2002), the rise of German fascism, the Stalinist praxis and American consumer capitalism showed the defeat of the revolutionary potentials of the working class (Habermas 1984, 366f). They wanted to explain why the revolutionary German working class followed Hitler, which brought up their interest in the analysis of the authoritarian personality and media propaganda. The Anglo-American approach of the Political Economy of the Media and Communication was developed by people like Dallas Smythe and Herbert Schiller in countries that did not experience fascism, which might be one of the factors that explain the differences in emphasis on ideology and capital accumulation. Whereas North American capitalism was based on pure liberal ideology and a strong consumer culture, German capitalism after 1945 was built on the legacy of National Socialism and a strong persistence of authoritarian thinking.

Horkheimer's (1947) notion of instrumental reason and Marcuse's (1964) notion of technological rationality open up connections between the two approaches. Horkheimer and Marcuse stressed that in capitalism there is a tendency that freedom of action is replaced by instrumental decision-making on the part of capital and the state so that the individual is expected to only react and not to act. The two concepts are grounded in Georg Lukács' (1923/1972) notion of reification, which is a reformulation of Marx's (1867) concept of fetishism. Reification means "that a relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires 'phantom objectivity', an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people" (Lukács 1923/1972, 83).

Capitalist media are modes of reification in a double sense. First, they reduce humans to the status of consumers of advertisements and commodities. Second, culture is, in capitalism, to a large degree connected to the commodity form: there are cultural commodities that are bought by consumers and audience commodities that the media consumers become themselves by being sold as an audience to the capitalist media's advertising clients (see the debate about audience commodification: Murdock 1978; Smythe 1977). Third, in order to reproduce its existence, capitalism has to present itself as the best possible (or only possible) system and makes use of the media in order to try to keep this message (in all its differentiated forms) hegemonic. The first and the second dimension constitute the economic dimension of instrumental reason, the third dimension the ideological form of instrumental reason. Capitalist media are necessarily a means of advertising and commodification and spaces of ideology. Advertisement and cultural commodification make humans an instrument for economic profit accumulation. Ideology aims at instilling the belief in the system of capital and commodities into humans' subjectivity. The goal is that human thoughts and actions do not go beyond capitalism, do not question and revolt against this system and thereby play the role of instruments for the perpetuation of capitalism. It is of course an important question to what extent ideology is always successful and to what degree it is questioned and resisted, but the crucial aspect about ideology is that it encompasses strategies and attempts to make human subjects instrumental in the reproduction of domination and exploitation.

A critical theory of media and technology analyzes "society as a terrain of domination and resistance and engages in critique of domination and of the ways that media culture engages in reproducing relationships of domination and oppression" (Kellner 1995, 4). It is "informed by a critique of domination and a theory of liberation" (Kellner 1989, 1; see also Feenberg 2002; Kellner 2009).

Critical Theory and Critique of the Political Economy of Social Media

Frankfurt School Critical Theory and the Critical Political Economy of Media/Communication have both developed critiques of the role of media communication in exploitation, as means of ideology and potential means of liberation and struggle. Both traditions are valuable, important and complementary approaches for studying social media critically. The approach presented in this book is methodologically grounded in a combination of Frankfurt School Critical Theory and the Critique of the Political Economy of Media/Communication/Information/Culture (for this approach see also Fuchs 2009a, 2011b).

Marx developed a Critique of the Political Economy of Capitalism, which means that his approach is:

(a)   an analysis and critique of capitalism,
(b)   a critique of liberal ideology, thought and academia,
(c)   transformative practice.

The globalization of capitalism, its new global crisis, the new imperialism and the role of knowledge and communication in capitalism (anticipated by Marx's notions of the means of communication and the General Intellect) have resulted in a renewed interest in Marx that should also be practised in Media and Communication Studies (Fuchs 2011b). To a certain extent, the German tradition of the Critique of the Political Economy of Communication has engaged with Marx and connected these works to the analysis of the role of communication in capitalism (see, for example, Holzer 1973, 1994; Knoche 2005). The problem is that these approaches have, due to limited language capacities and limited resources, hardly been translated into English, which has left their impact limited to national levels and has resulted in a lack of international diffusion. Horst Holzer (1994) spoke of Marxian analysis as the forgotten theory of communication in the German world (Holzer 1994).

Holzer (1973, 131, 1994, 202ff) and Manfred Knoche (2005) distinguish four functions of the media in capitalism that are relevant for the Marxist Critique of the Political Economy of the Media and Communication:

1. Capital accumulation in the media industry.
2. Advertising, public relations and sales promotion for other industries.
3. Legitimization of domination and ideological manipulation.
4. Reproduction, regeneration, and qualification of labour power.

Holzer and Knoche have provided a good framework that is, however, too structuralistic and tends to lack the aspect of struggles.

A more complete task for a Critical Theory and Critique of the Political Economy of Communication, Culture, Information and the Media is to focus on the critique and analysis of the role of communication, culture, information and the media in capitalism in the context of:

- processes of capital accumulation (including the analysis of capital, markets, commodity logic, competition, exchange value, the antagonisms of the mode of production, productive forces, crises, advertising, etc.),
- class relations (with a focus on work, labour, the mode of the exploitation of surplus value, etc.),
- domination in general,
- ideology (both in academia and everyday life)

as well as the analysis of and engagement in:

- struggles against the dominant order, which includes the analysis and advancement of
- social movement struggles and
- social movement media that
- aim at the establishment of a democratic socialist society that is based on communication commons as part of structures of commonly-owned means of production (Fuchs 2011b).

The approach thereby realizes that in capitalism all forms of domination are connected to forms of exploitation (Fuchs 2008a, 2011b).

Based on the methodological combination of Critical Theory and Critique of the Political Economy with a special interest in Karl Marx's works and dialectical philosophy, this book presents a critical theory of social media, which means that it outlines the predominant forms of capital accumulation of social media, the class relations and modes of surplus value exploitation underlying these capital accumulation models, and analyzes the ideologies underlying capitalist social media and the potentials and limits for alternative social media and struggles for a just society that enables commons-based digital media.

"Philosophy is preserved in science as critique" (Habermas 1971, 63). If we want to conduct a critical analysis of social media, then we require a critical philosophy as a foundation. The tradition that goes back to Hegel and Marx is the most suitable critical philosophy tradition for such a project. Dialectical philosophy can provide a strong philosophical and theoretical grounding of Critical Media and Communication Studies (Fuchs 2011b, chapters 2 and 3). It is well suited for helping to bridge gaps in the field of Critical Media and Communication Studies (between the focus on structure and agency, subject and object, reason and experience, technology and society, economy and culture, pessimism and optimism, risks and opportunities, work and pleasure/joy, alienation and self-actualization, etc.) and for avoiding one-sided approaches.

Critical theory "never simply aims at an increase of knowledge as such" (Horkheimer 2002, 249). The task of this book is therefore not simply to produce new knowledge about social media, but to enable critical insights into the potentials and limits of social media that can enter into struggles for a just society. Critical theory wants to bring "to consciousness potentialities that have emerged within the maturing historical situation" (Marcuse 1988, 158). It analyzes "the tension between potentiality and actuality, between what man and things could be and what they are in fact, [since this] is one of the dynamic focal points of this theory of society" (Marcuse 1988, 69). This book analyzes the actuality of social media in contemporary capitalism and the potentials and limits for overcoming the corporate character of social media and for establishing a truly participatory Internet within the context of a participatory democracy.

Economic theory becomes critical theory by the insight that capitalism's "natural objectivity is mere semblance" and that it "is a specific historical form of existence that man has given himself" (Marcuse 1941, 281). This book wants to contribute to the insight that the capitalist character of social media, i.e. their grounding in profit logic, commodity logic, (targeted) advertising and exploited labour is not a necessity, but a historical consequence of the commercial and capitalist organization of the Internet. Deconstructing the semblance of the necessity of corporate social media wants to contribute to the formation of consciousness about and struggles for a public, commons-based Internet.

RECOMMENDED READINGS AND EXERCISES

If you want to understand social media in a critical manner, it makes sense to start with foundational readings in critical theory. Therefore readings recommended in this section include works by Karl Marx, Herbert Marcuse, Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno and a debate between Adorno and Karl Popper on what the notion of the critical means in the social sciences. Three more readings (by Nicholas Garnham and Lawrence Grossberg) focus on a foundational debate about what it means to study the media and culture critically.

Marx, Karl. 1843. Toward the critique of Hegel's philosophy of law: Introduction. In *Writings of the young Marx on philosophy and society*, 249–265. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett.

In this famous work Marx introduces his concept of ideology and argues that religion is the "opium of the people". Ask yourself:

- What does Marx mean by ideology? What are its characteristics?

- Give some examples of ideologies.

- What are important ideologies today?

- Where have social media merged with ideologies? Provide some examples. What exactly is the content of these ideologies? What claims are they making? What does reality look like and how can you determine what reality looks like in contrast to the claims made by social media ideologies? Search for examples and discuss them.

Marx, Karl. 1844. *Economic and philosophic manuscripts of 1844*. Mineola, NY: Dover.

This is one of Marx's earliest works on labour, capital, private property, estranged/alienated labour and communism. It is generally considered as his most important work for grounding a humanist critical theory that wants to create a society in which all humans live a good life. Questions for discussion and consideration:

- What is, for Marx, the most fundamental problem of capitalism?

- What does Marx mean by alienation (note: a synonymous term is estrangement)?

- How does Marx understand the term "communism"?

- How can Marx's concepts of capitalism, labour, alienation (and alternatives) be used for understanding social media critically?

Marcuse, Herbert. 1932. New sources on the foundation of historical materialism. In *Heideggerian Marxism*, 86–121. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.

Although written in 1844, Marx's *Economic and philosophical manuscripts* were only published in 1932 (in German, later in English and other languages). Marcuse's text is one of the first reviews. It helps you to better understand Marx's philosophical text. Read first Marcuse and then Marx. Discuss in groups and compare the results:

- What do Marx and Marcuse (based on Hegel) mean by the essence of a thing? Try to give some examples of the essence of something.
- What is the difference between the essence and the existence of something in society? Try to give some examples.
- What is the essence of social media? What is the existence of social media? Is there a difference between the essence and the existence of social media?

Horkheimer, Max. 1937. Traditional and critical theory. In *Critical theory: Selected essays*, 188–243. New York: Continuum.

Marcuse, Herbert. 1937. Philosophy and critical theory. In *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*, 134–158. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

These two articles were subsequently published and are two foundational texts of the Frankfurt School. They try to explain what Critical Theory is. Exercises:

- Every person in the classroom writes down how s/he defines "being critical". Compare the answers and make a list of which elements of criticism were identified.
- Discuss in groups and compare the results: How do Horkheimer and Marcuse define critical theory? What are the important elements of critical theory?
- Compare your own definitions of critique in the initial exercise to Horkheimer's and Marcuse's understandings. Argue what commonalities and differences there are.
- Discuss: What are purposes and tasks of a critical theory of the Internet and social media?

Marcuse, Herbert. 1941. The foundations of the dialectical theory of society. In *Reason and revolution: Hegel and the rise of social theory*, 258–322. Amherst, NY: Humanity Books.

In this chapter, Marcuse discusses how Marx used Hegel's dialectical philosophy for constructing a dialectical theory of society. Discuss in groups and compare the results:

- What is dialectical philosophy? Try to give some examples of dialectical philosophy.
- What is, for Marx, a dialectical theory of society? Try to find some examples of dialectical relationships and dialectical development in contemporary society.
- What are basic assumptions of a dialectical theory of the Internet and social media? Try to formulate a general concept and to give some examples.

Adorno, Theodor W., Hans Albert, Ralf Dahrendorf, Jürgen Habermas, Harald Pilot and Karl R. Popper. 1976. *The positivist dispute in German sociology*, 1–122, 288–296. London: Heinemann.

The positivist dispute was a debate in German sociology in the early 1960s about what it means to be critical. The main participants were Theodor W. Adorno and Karl Popper. Jürgen Habermas and others also contributed to the debate. Ask yourself:

- How does Popper define critique? What are basic elements of his understanding?
- How does Adorno define critique? What are basic elements of his understanding?
- On which aspects do Popper and Adorno agree and disagree?
- Which elements are needed for a critical theory of the Internet and social media? What are basic assumptions of such a theory if it is based on Adorno? What are its basic assumptions if it is based on Popper?

Garnham, Nicholas. 1995a. Political Economy and Cultural Studies: Reconciliation or divorce? *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12 (1): 62–71.

Grossberg, Lawrence. 1995. Cultural Studies vs. Political Economy. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12 (1): 72–81.

Garnham, Nicholas. 1995b. Reply to Grossberg and Carey. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12 (1): 95–100.

Critical Political Economy and Cultural Studies are two important approaches for studying media and communication. They have both to a certain degree been inspired by Marx's works. In 1995 Nicholas Garnham, a major political economist of the media, and Lawrence Grossberg, an important Cultural Studies scholar, had a now famous debate about the relationship of Political Economy and celebratory Cultural Studies. The debate focuses on the role of class, gender, race, production, consumption, work, leisure, ethics and politics for studying the media and shows profound disagreements between the two scholars.

- Discuss the major points of disagreement between Garnham and Grossberg. Make a systematic and ordered list of arguments that show Garnham's argument on the one hand and Grossberg's opposing argument on the other hand. Give a name to each topic of discussion and think about how these topics are related.
- Try to form your own opinion on this debate. Discuss your views first in groups and compare the results of the group discussions.

Think about whether, and how, the two different positions that Garnham and Grossberg take play a role in studying social media and the Internet today.