The New Method of Proposing Anarchism: The Discourse Community of Anarchist on the Internet

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Abstract

This research paper starts with giving definition of what is anarchism. Instead of being related to chaos and violence for most of the time, anarchism is a political ideology that believes in an ideal society with no authoritarianism and the use of coercive power, while holding critical perspectives toward the existing societies and institutions (McLaughlin, 2012, p.25). The main focus of this research paper is the anarchist community on the social forum Reddit, and the paper introduces some of the components of it as a discourse community, including the interactions between the community members, the threshold for new members to integrate into the community, and the role played by the "experts". This section will bring out the discussion of the focused topic within this anarchist community, which will draw the argument that the community is focusing not merely on anarchism and related political ideology, but also broader social justice issues like police violence and rights of the working class.

The Definition of Anarchism

Before starting to analyze anarchist communities on social forums, one may become curious about what exactly is anarchism. It is rather difficult to define anarchism. For most of the time, people view this term negatively with images of riots, violence, and chaos. They think about the symbol of a capital letter "A" in the color of red and black. They think about people wearing black masks, setting fire on the streets, throwing things on the buildings, and making destructions everywhere (Ervin, 2021, p.33). These images perhaps can only represent a very small part of anarchism and its movements, and it seems to be less frequent for people to positively relate this anarchism to things like decentralization and the pursuit of freedom, which are also important components of the anarchist ideology.

Overall, as a part of political theory, the view of anarchism is defined to have an ideal society that is non-coercive and non-authoritarian, while being critical toward the existing societies and their institutions (McLaughlin, 2012, p.25). The anarchist ideology doesn't aim to abandon all the rules, but questioning the importance of states and seeking freer lives with no oppressions. In real life, the anarchist views are reflected through different anarchist protests opposing institutions like banks and capitalist governments, and the formation of communities like the Dignity Village in Portland and Freetown Christiania in Copenhagen, which are largely self-governed by the residents living within them instead of being operated by the states.

As for the connection with violence, it is true that violence and vandalism can still be seen in some of the anarchist movements, but it is rather inappropriate to consider the use of violence as an unique feature of anarchism, while it can also appear in other kinds of social movements. More importantly, the use of violence and coercive power by the states is the main focus of criticisms from the anarchist views, and it is also argued by some of the views that the state itself is the major source of violence in the world (Turner, 1998, p.25). Those criticisms can be seen not only in the anarchist movements in real life, but also in the anarchist communities on the Internet.

Research Method

The research project mainly involves the methods of conducting observations and gathering academic materials related to the features of anarchism and some of its goals. The observational study mainly focuses on the posts and comments made in the forum of r/anarchism on Reddit. The method of conducting observations focuses on several things, including the common themes that are discussed in various posts, elements like social justice for racial

minorities and the working class that are reflected in posts and discussions, and some of the terms used or beliefs held by the community members. Combining with the information collected from academic articles about anarchism, the observations and analysis of these topics can make contributions in finding the shared goals within an anarchist community and its connections to the broader social events.

Some Components of the Online Anarchist Community

The anarchist communities on the Internet can be seen in different social forums such as Reddit and Twitter. There are also individual websites for anarchist posts and online archives of books and articles related to anarchism. In this paper, the main focus will be the anarchist community on Reddit.

In this community, the members interact with one another through creating posts and giving comments. There are different kinds of posts, such as the videos or pictures of protests and other anarchist activities, discussions about certain anarchist theory or political events, and self-expressions of one's comprehension from the anarchist views. The community members will browse those contents and use comments to give feedback or continue the established discussion. All these contents and discussions related to the anarchist, however, also involve certain political terms or the names of specific social events, which the new community members will need to learn in order to participate in the discussions. For instance, the term "left-wing", "right-wing", and the ideology of "anarcho-communism". When those terms are used in the conversations, they are likely considered by default to be known by the participants, and will not be further explained. The new members, in this case, will either choose to ask about them in the forum, or

to search them on the Internet and check the online anarchist archives. It's not just a process of learning new terms, but also that of integrating into the anarchist community.

Sometimes, however, the "experts" in this anarchist community, which are users that have certain knowledge of anarchist theories and act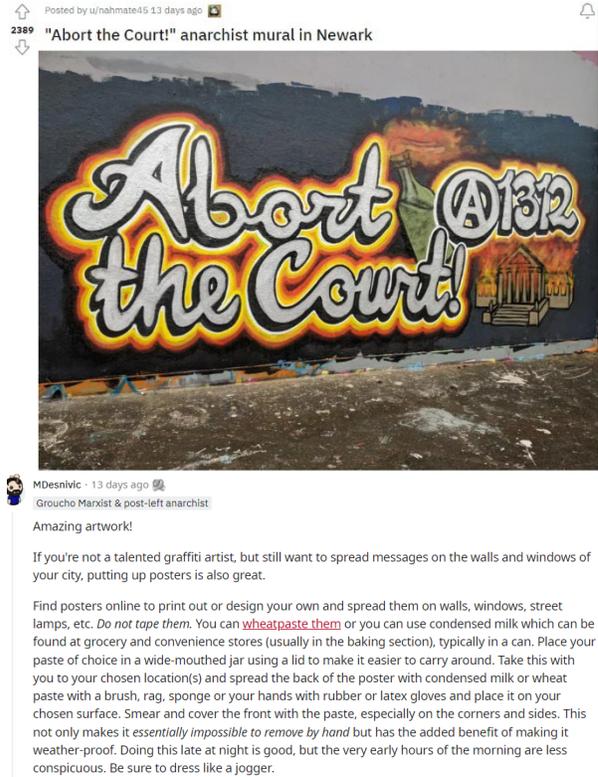ivities, will play roles in interacting with new members and sharing the knowledge they have to other members in the community. For instance, there is a post in the Reddit anarchist community of a picture displaying a mural artwork that expresses anarchist belief (Nahmate45, 2022). In the comment section of this post, there is a user showing compliments to the artwork and, more importantly, introducing methods of how to spread anarchist messages using graffiti or posters, and how to prevent those posters from being easily removed. This

user is an example of the "expert" in this anarchist community, and it can also be implied that the user has certain experiences of conducting similar activities.

As an anarchist community, one might easily expect all the contents in this community to be related to anarchism. This is true to some extent. However, it is not the only topic that can be seen in this community.
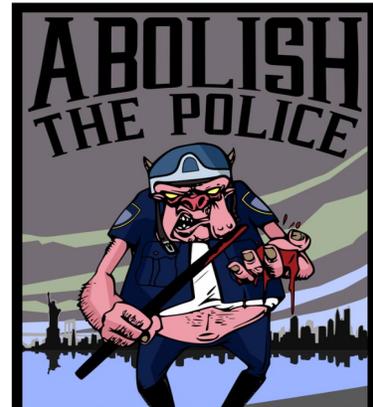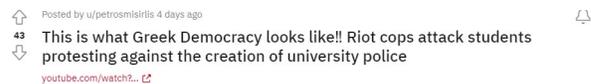
The community's goals and focuses

As being introduced in the first section, the two main views of anarchism is to have an ideal society that is non-coercive and non-authoritarian, and to be critical toward the existing societies and their institutions (McLaughlin, 2012, p.25). In the anarchist community on Reddit, these two views have been widely shared and emphasized as well, and they can be reflected from various posts the community members have made. Except for those that discuss anarchist theory and express thoughts related to anarchism, for instance, there are posts that criticize how capitalism creates hierarchy and inequalities, and videos and pictures that expose or criticize government's actions or policies that involve the use of violent forces. Other than that, there is another main focus of criticisms in the Reddit anarchist community, and that is the institution of the police system, or more specifically the use of police violence.

During the process of observational study, the researcher noticed that the anarchist community tends to be hostile towards the police system. There are artworks and memes that are created to criticize police violence and appeal for the abolishment of the police system (figure 1), and posts that aim to expose events involving police violence can be seen frequently (figure 2). Some of the terms like ACAB and 1312 (both terms mean "All Cops Are Bastards") used commonly by the community members can also reflect their hatred toward the police system. However, the hostility toward the police system is perhaps not

surprising to see in the anarchist community, since it is closely related to the goal of anarchism. In the "About Community" section of the anarchist community on Reddit, it is stated that "Anarchists advocate a self-managed, classless, stateless society without borders, bosses, or rulers" (2008). Considering that one of the anarchist views is to pursue the ideal society with no authoritarianism and coercive power, it can be inferred that the police system, which is the main institution for suppressing civil protests and enforcing rules to normal citizens, will become the main focus of criticisms and receive hatred from the anarchist community.

Apart from that, another noticeable finding of the observational study is that many of the posts reflect the focus on the issues of broader social justice, such as racial violence, the rights of the working class, and the homeless people's dilemma, and some of them remain to be related to the police violence and dissatisfaction to the existing political system. For instance, there was a post that shared the experience of helping homeless people, with the title "While the police were evicting homeless people ahead of a sudden snowstorm, we were giving out sleeping bags, tents, and tarps" (SAFEBoulder, 2022). It is implied that the police are being merciless to the homeless people and tend to ignore their sufferings. This post doesn't just express sympathy toward the homeless people, but also shows the attitude of disapproval to the police system. There are also other examples of posts that support union movements or appeal for the rights of racial or sexual minority groups. The members in this anarchist community tend to express attitudes of either approving or sympathies toward those social justice issues. While these reflect the anarchist view of criticizing the existing societies, they are also able to connect the anarchist beliefs to the broader society and perhaps expand the influences of them.

Conclusion

In fact, such a trend within the anarchist community of relating contents to not just initial anarchism ideology but also the issues regarding broader social justice may resemble something else. It is demonstrated by Fantasia and Voss (2004) in their book about union movement that one of the main features of the new strategy of social movement unionism is its connection with, not just the issue with workers' wages, but also topics broader social justice like race, gender, and citizenship in order to expand the democracy and influences of the union movements (p,129). To some extent, the trend within the anarchist community is similar to this feature of social movement unionism. Both communities initially follow a certain ideology, but also go beyond them and strive to connect their beliefs to the broader social justice issues. What can be researched further, however, is the consequence for anarchist communities to connect their beliefs to broader social justice issues. Whether it also aims to expand its influences or not is still a question waiting to be answered.

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