

## **Conspicuous Prosumption in Web 2.0 – Why Respect is a Highly Rated Currency in Collective Co-Production**

The buzz word web 2.0 denotes new internet platforms that enable the communication and collaboration of users in the internet and thus, new opportunities for an ‘interactive’ internet use. Characteristics of such applications are user-based production of content, comprehensive opportunities for interaction and networking, and user-friendliness. Web 2.0 applications aim at the participation of users in shaping the content of an internet platform. Such applications are most visibly in open source and open content projects (e.g. Linux or Wikipedia), multimedia platforms (such as YouTube or Flickr), online communities, social bookmarking networks, and weblogs. Besides, web 2.0 structures are also deployed for commercial purposes. Labels such as „open innovation“, or „crowdsourcing“, capture strategies of enterprises to delegate particular tasks within the production process to internet users. Thus, consumers directly or indirectly contribute to the company’s value creation.

A common feature of web 2.0 applications is that they enable collaborative co-production of internet users in the broad sense of the term (including production *for others*, as in the case of weblogs or YouTube) – be it in non-profit or commercial contexts. In the literature, such forms of collaborative work are analyzed in more detail by reference to terms such as prosumption, produsage, peer production, and customer or consumer work.

Research on the motives for engagement in open source / open content contexts point to the fact that – beside normative convictions, intrinsic motivations, or the acquisition of competence – social recognition, or reputation, are a central motive for participation. There is only a small body of research on commercial applications. However, findings on the motivations for participation in open source /open content contexts can – due to the similarities in the quality of work – to a large extent be transferred to voluntary consumer work in commercial contexts.

A subjective quest for recognition, reputation, and prestige seems to be crucial in commercial applications, too. With regard to the phenomenon of internet-based consumer work („crowdsourcing“) – for example, when looking at „Top Solver Awards“ (InnoCentive), „promotion points“ (Dell IdeaStorm) or the customer reviewer ranking – it becomes obvious that in community-like structures, the effect of one’s own actions on others is important. Rankings are attempts by enterprises to institutionalize systems of social recognition. Rankings shape one’s individual “profile” in a user / consumer community.

The aim of the paper is to examine in more detail the significance of social recognition and reputation for the participation of users in co-productive internet activities, and to develop an analytic perspective on the performance of users in co-productive web 2.0 applications.

For this purpose, we want to put forward a concept of „conspicuous prosumption“. Terminologically, we obviously lean on Thorstein Veblen’s famous „conspicuous consumption“. Both concepts share a perspective on intended specific effects of activities on other. Beyond that common feature, however, it is productive to contrast the two concepts in order to define the phenomenon of „conspicuous prosumption“. Veblen’s concept “conspicuous consumption“ focuses on the symbolic function of the consumption of luxury goods in (predominantly newly rich) members of the upper class who aim to indicate their (superior) social status to others. On the other hand, „conspicuous prosumers“ in internet contexts – predominantly young and highly educated persons – aim to *acquire* social prestige within their internet communities on the basis of (elaborate) activities.

Thus, the particular difference between ‚old school‘ conspicuous consumption and recent conspicuous prosumption becomes visible: In the former, material wealth is being indicated to (potentially all) other members of society by (passive) consumption, aiming at an *ascription* of prestige mediated by objects of consumption. In the latter, social prestige is acquired on the basis of one’s own *achievement*, and is valid only within the limits of the (internet community in which the contributions of the prosumer are perceived).

Additionally, it can be assumed that conspicuous prosumers aim at the integration into a community, while conspicuous consumers aim at the distinction from other members of society. Thus, conspicuous prosumption is not subject to the inflationary devaluation logic of positional goods.

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