

Click Work

Motives of “Unmotivated” Internet Use

From Jens T.’s point of view, the wok pan and chef knife set for 10,700 points “*is all still junk*”. Thanks to his persistent Internet work, he has a 47,487 point budget at his disposal. What you can get for that? We’ll see, but what you’ve got, you’ve got. And Jens is an expert in accumulating points and collecting web miles. He explains: “*Here is Collecting from A-Z, ya can make points every day. Ya go here, click for miles, then you click on these four banners, and also down here normally, but I don’t take part in everything.*” It is especially impressive how fast Jens, during the interview and while doing research on prices at the same time, clicks his way through advertising banners that pop up all the time and closes them after a well-calculated period of time. The timing is crucial “*to jack up the percentages.*” Since none of the prizes actually arouse his desire, one does feel inclined to ask what Jens intends to do with all of his “credit”. Of course, it is possible to cash in points and miles for real money, but even Jens admits that he has not clearly understood the process: “*At some point they can also be exchanged for real money, but it’s quite complex.*” Besides he reckons, “*It’s not worth it, it’s such a small amount, it’s not worth the hassle.*”

These impressions are taken from a case from our sample of about twenty interviews, which were conducted as part of the GRF-funded project “Consumption Practices in the Virtual Everyday Economy” at the Centre for Media and Interactivity at the University of Gießen in 2006 and 2007. For this presentation, the interview material will be examined for the motives underlying a type of Internet use that for the most part can be characterized as “unmotivated” (Giddens) – at least in the sense that it cannot be traced to economic interests or consciously reflected reasons. Illuminating the complex configuration of motives (understood as sets of socio-cultural, generational, biographical and situational dispositions among others) is of great significance for an understanding of the new forms of “prosuming” in the era of web 2.0. While voluntarily returning trays at a McDonald’s restaurant can be sufficiently explained by the normative force of generally accepted conventions, the formation of Internet usage as in the case of “click work” is based on factors that have yet to be examined. Drawing on previous work on the problems of agency in the virtual everyday economy, the presentation will depict how and under what conditions the respective practices of Internet-mediated consumption are motivated by a constellation in which a history of interaction with technical

artefacts, like computers or the Internet, take the place of exchange and experience with significant others in a person's life history as compensation. The significance of this question to the prosumer debate will be demonstrated, in particular, in the discussion of Karin Knorr-Cetina's concept of "post-sociality".

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