

The affective labour of consumers in regards to the co-creation of value onto social media: a netnographic enquiry

This work is, ideally, divided in two part. In the first one I address some theoretical issues, basically reflecting upon the concept of *affective labor* featured by Autonomist Marxism and Elisabeth Wissinger. In the second one I address some methodological issues, basically re-elaborating the *netnographic method* of Robert Kozinets.

The aim of my thesis has been to study and understand in a systematic way the *affective labor* performed by consumers onto the social media, intended as a leading practice of co-creation of value. On one hand I define 'affective labor' as the ability of a social group, situated in a contingent social context, to arouse an affective flow and to fix it in transient shapes (emotions), in order to channel it toward a productive purpose. On the other hand I considered the 'co-creation of value' onto social media as an activity which pertains to the *discourse* of consumers rather than to the consumers *per se*. Therefore my *guiding hypothesis*: '*Since the Internet is a discourse-created phenomena, it is hypnotizable that it would be a certain dynamic of consumer discourse at creating value, rather than the bodies of consumers*'. Following this hypothesis I actually discovered that online co-creation of value not only depends on the discourse but also on a specific discursive dynamic hinged on as system of communicative frictions.

As it is well-known online consumers create value since their communicative interactions are systematically monitored by companies, which (by means of techniques and devices for *Sentiment Analysis*) transform them in product innovation and brand reputation. Therefore my *cognitive question*: *How do online consumers perform affective labor? Or, thorough which kind of practices online consumers do manage their affective investment in order to create that flux of information that companies harness and capitalize?*

In order to answer to this qualitative question I drew on the *netnographic method*, basically developing a personal declination of it rather than just applying it. In order to do so I elaborated a 'practice-based netnographic approach', mainly drawing on Richard Rogers' epistemological motto: 'Follow the medium'. My empirical research has produced two key heuristics: the concepts of *web tribe* and *narrations of self*. On one hand, differently from classical *tribal marketing*, I conceive of a *web tribe* as a *social space* rather than a *social group* made out of people 'in love with' a particular brand. Specifically I define a web tribe as a flux of communication that: a) flows through and springs from specific 'places' of the 2.0 web (forums, blogs, social networks, etc); b) converges on specific brands or products; c) converges on specific topics of conversation. On the other hand I conceived of 'narrations of self' as common discursive practices through which the members of a web tribe valorise the brand and themselves. In this way online consumers interacting within a 'tribal space' come to converge on some shared practices by which *defining* the brand value and their identities, rather than on a specific brand value and on common definition of identity *per se*. Thus, I came to the conclusion that the web tribe is a *dispositif* that catalyses and formalizes the affective flow of consumer; in this way the 'tribal dispositif' governs the affective labor of consumers organizing it in a form that is suitable to be harnessed and exploited by companies and brands.