How do we *prosume*? A formal typology of prosumption

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Abstract

Prosumption is not an exclusively digital phenomenon, but Internet and digital technologies enable users to participate more frequently in the development of products or other artifacts and become the so-called prosumer—producer and consumer combined. However, the extent to which this is the case remains to be determined. The existing classifications of prosumption are tailored to both non-digital and digital prosumption. Departing from these classifications, this article identifies the formal characteristics of prosumption that occur across different spheres in which the phenomenon is manifested. A new typology of prosumption is proposed as an analytical instrument that allows researchers to encompass the full spectrum of variation in prosumption and examine the differences of prosumer practices in various spheres (digital and otherwise). The proposed typology is based on three dimensions: the nature of prosumer activities in collaborative terms, the initial reason to engage in a prosumer activity, and the level of skills required from a prosumer.

Keywords

Internet and digital technologies, prosumption, digital prosumption, typology of prosumption

Introduction

With the Internet and digital technologies, prosumption is becoming an increasingly taken-for-granted activity. Previous analyses focused on various activities, ranging from individual adaptation of mass-produced products to environmental activism and practices. Technologically facilitated prosumption is regarded as a logic of operation and mode of acting underlying and defining the digital economy (see Ritzer, 2015a). A prominent example of prosumption in the digital space is social networking platforms (Facebook, Instagram, X, YouTube, etc.). The owners of these platforms provide users with a technological framework, but all the content, which is the reason for using these platforms, is created and shared by the users themselves.

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Admittedly, prosumption defined as mass participation and collaboration may not be fully realized, as the opportunity for participation provided by digital technologies often remains unfulfilled. The majority of users continue to use digital services as traditional consumers rather than active participants and creators (Bruns, 2008: 2, 2012: 818; Fuchs, 2017: 38). Nevertheless, technologies provide the user with the types of conditions allowing them to act as a prosumer: a producer and consumer combined.

Although prosumption is not an exclusively digital phenomenon, some researchers consider digital prosumption as one of its more novel and distinctive variants (see Dusi, 2017). However, the extent to which this is the case remains to be determined. Digital technologies have enabled the expansion of prosumer activities quantitatively, i.e. in volume and space. But whether prosumption in the digital space is qualitatively different in any particular way, or whether it parallels and replicates the former forms of prosumption remains a question that is to be further explored through empirical research. To achieve this in a systematic manner, analytical instruments are necessary. A number of classifications have been developed that facilitate a more complete understanding of the characteristics of prosumption. However, they vary in regard to the content and degree of abstraction, classification criteria, and address different aspects of the phenomenon. This article aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the existing classifications of prosumption and prosumer practices, and to propose a new typology as a more complete mapping of this heterogeneous phenomenon.

A significant proportion of academic research on digital technologies and their impact is conducted from a structural perspective, analyzing, for example, the economic interests of entities that create and control different technical and socio-technical structures. In such instances, user involvement in productive practices is studied from this standpoint as well. Studies and observations of this kind find, among other issues, that digital economy and user productive practices reproduce social and economic inequalities (see Lukács, 2020; Ting, 2023).

However, researchers studying users' productive practices (not limited to the digital ones) also stress that they have the potential to promote agency and challenge the established social institutions to serve users' own needs (see e.g. Chen, 2015; Rau et al., 2023). Therefore, the attitudes and understanding of users themselves are an important area of research, as they motivate and support taking action. By developing a typology that encompasses the perspective of prosumers, we can more thoroughly understand the heterogeneity of prosumption and incorporate the implicit connection between the macro and micro levels of the social world. The capacity of the concept of prosumption to reflect this connection further exemplifies its analytical utility.

The proposed typology is constructed as a formal analytical instrument not limited to a specific theoretical perspective, and is capable of being applied in diverse contexts of interpretation. In the most general sense, this standpoint employs the methodological approach of analytical sociology, which provides an argumentation of the logic of formal analytical instruments, as well as their capacity to reflect links between macro and micro levels (see Ylikoski, 2021: 49–51). The logics of the formulation of the typology also draws upon the distinction between the social form and the content of different spheres of social life (see Simmel, 2009: 22–23, 46–48). Therefore, this article seeks to identify formal characteristics of prosumption that occur in different contexts and is inherent to this form of interaction between the individuals and towards their environments.

The purpose of the proposed typology is twofold. Firstly, it aims to systematically classify possible different forms of prosumption, taking into account the perspective of the prosumer. Next, the typology is proposed as a tool that may be applied to assess and compare the manifestations of prosumption in different spheres, and to evaluate whether digital prosumption in its empirical manifestations demonstrates any particular features and takes on some specific forms.[1] It also helps parse through debates on the extent to which the effects of digital technologies are transforming society, and to identify the essential characteristics of these potential effects.

The concept of prosumption is manifested in a multitude of domains, and when it acquires a digital form, the dynamic and ever-changing nature of a digital space must also be considered. Therefore, it is beyond the scope of one article to examine all the potential empirical manifestations of prosumption

in general, and digital prosumption in particular. The objective of this paper is limited to the development of an analytical tool that would assist in the systematic assessment of the diverse range of prosumer activities. I start with a brief overview of the concept of prosumption, providing a background for the critical discussion of the existing classifications. A suggested new typology is presented in detail in the second section. The concluding third section discusses its application and sociological relevance.

Prosumption: the concept and classifications

The concept of prosumption originated prior to the Internet and the subsequent development of digital technologies. The term is credited to the American futurist Alvin Toffler, who introduced it in his book *The Third Wave* (1980). The author understood prosumption broadly—from household work, repairs, and volunteering, to the adaptation of mass-produced products and services to one's needs and wants, as well as the user's participation in the development and creation of products.

According to Toffler, prosumption was the dominant form of economic activity in pre-industrial societies, but due to industrialization and the rise of the market, the functions of production and consumption were separated and purified. In a post-industrial society with evolving technologies, there is a movement towards the repeated convergence and fusion of these functions (Toffler, 1984 [1980]). Examples of such activities are products produced and consumed on a Do-It-Yourself basis, self-service checkouts in shopping centers, ATMs, creation of object design, as well as participation in ecological movements, etc. (see Bruns, 2016; Denegri-Knott and Zwick, 2012; Dusi, 2018; Rau et al., 2023; Rayna and Striukova, 2016).

American sociologist George Ritzer conceptually developed the prosumption term. Ritzer states that digital prosumption creates preconditions for a new form of capitalism, where the capitalist does not in essence control the content and quality of the products created and consumed by prosumers but takes the profit generated by this process. According to Ritzer, this new form of capitalism is characterized by the fact that it is based on the unpaid labor of prosumers (Ritzer, 2013, 2015b, 2015c; Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010; Ritzer et al., 2012). Bibliometric analyses indicate that in the last decade, prosumption in the field of social sciences was most often associated with co-creation, user-generated content (UGC), and informational capital (Shah et al., 2019: 1030, 2020).

In discussing the participation or engagement of users, it is also important to consider that the participation itself can be differentiated according to the level of involvement. Digital technologies increasingly enable forms of participation that can be labelled passive participation (e.g. users consent to the collection and accumulation of their data, to the usage of computing power of their devices, etc.). Such forms of participation could be considered an object of the gift economy (see Bühler et al., 2024) as they entail consent to give or share certain goods. However, this is only partly the case, as not all people are able to give the informed consent or are asked for it (e.g. children on social media, bystanders in shared images, authors of pieces of art that are used to train the AI tools, etc.). Therefore, this type of *participation* differs from more active forms of involvement in that it does not necessitate action on the part of the actor. In contrast, active participation implies the performance of some action. When attempting to conceptualize prosumption including the perspective of the prosumer, it is important to recognize this distinction.

The existing classifications based on different aspects of prosumption, including the digital one, allow for a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon. Some of them are more general and oriented towards a broad understanding of prosumption. Others are more detailed or are oriented towards specific aspects of certain activities and the content of them. They complement each other but are based on different classification criteria and, therefore, account for certain aspects of the phenomenon's multifaceted nature. The objective of this overview and assessment of the existing classifications is to clarify their essential characteristics and to identify significant formal features that should be included in the further systematic typology of prosumption.

Ritzer's Prosumption Continuum

George Ritzer proposed an analytical tool—the Prosumption Continuum—which is designed to reflect the extent of an actor's involvement in the production and consumption of a product. The endpoints of this continuum are marked as "Prosumption-as-Production" and "Prosumption-as-Consumption," with "Balanced Prosumption" situated in the middle (Ritzer, 2013). Ritzer's tool encompasses all possible forms of production and consumption between the two ends of the continuum. He argues that production and consumption are just phases of prosumption, which in reality almost always overlap (Ritzer, 2016: 10). The classification proposed by Ritzer is broad and rather abstract, but it opens the way for more detailed classifications. Ritzer aims to demonstrate the scope and range of activities that can be attributed to prosumption, as well as to emphasize the fact that traditional producers tend to employ consumers' inclinations to engage in productive practices.

While Ritzer's classification is considered a suitable starting point for further typologies, an important criticism of his conceptualization must also be taken into account. As noted by Detlev Zwick, Ritzer's Prosumption Continuum, such as it is formulated, has limited analytical capability, since it places very different activities under the same categories. According to Zwick, it is important not only to distinguish abstractly between the phases of production and consumption but to also pay attention to how certain artifacts are being produced and consumed (Zwick, 2015: 488). Therefore, if prosumption is treated as an all-encompassing process with certain theoretical implications ("prosumer capitalism"), it is reasonable for Ritzer to approach it as a continuum. But if the concept is employed as a formal analytical instrument, it is more useful to make a more clear-cut distinction between its different forms.

Chen's classifications of prosumption

The argument on the exploitative character of prosumption elaborated upon by Ritzer is both implicitly and explicitly developed in at least several other classifications. Katherine K. Chen (2015) outlines the potential for exploitation attributed to the phenomenon, proposing to analyze prosumption not only in for-profit organizations but also in state sectors, and NGOs and voluntary associations. This approach allows for the further analysis of the adverse consequences of prosumption. Chen identifies them as the following: the immiseration of workers; cognitive overload and suboptimal decision making; deepened stratification; stigmatization of the vulnerable and increased alienation; and parasitic prosumption (Chen, 2015: 447–451). Chen's proposition to assess the effects of prosumption beyond the scope of for-profit organizations represents a broader understanding of prosumption, one that does not limit it exclusively to economic relations and that accounts for it in different areas of social life.

Chen also elucidates another aspect of prosumption that Ritzer (2015a) mentions but does not prioritize in his wider critique, i.e. that some prosumer activities are aimed at replacing the traditional producers and creating alternative social structures, practices, products, and services. In this regard, Chen identifies three forms of prosumption: (1) transformational prosumption (agentic action and meaning-making by prosumers); (2) disruptive prosumption (acting against the generation of profits and orientation towards efficiency, challenging the legitimacy of traditional institutions); (3) prefigurative prosumption (acting towards a desired societal order, enacting new ideas and practices compared to received norms). The latter two types are meant to "disrupt institutions or prefigure desired society" (Chen, 2015: 452). This observation is consistent with the concept of "creative destruction" that Ritzer and Degli Esposti (2020a) discuss in the context of digitalization. They identify prosumption as the precondition and origin of creative destruction (Ritzer and Degli Esposti, 2020a: 5) which refers to the empowering potential (for better or worse) of prosumption. In both aspects discussed here, Chen's conception of prosumption indicates, among other things, the diversity of motivations for users to engage in prosumer activities.

Dusi's five types of prosumption

The aspect of exploitation and empowering is also reflected in Davide Dusi's (2017) typology. Dusi suggests that there are at least five types of prosumption: (1) producer–consumer collaboration in product development; (2) customer self-service; (3) basic digital prosumption; (4) bricolage; (5) collaborative (peer-to-peer) prosumption (Dusi, 2017: 4). Nevertheless, in essence, this classification encompasses two broad categories: activities where the traditional producer takes advantage of the productive aspects of consumer practices (the first three types) and those where actors, aiming to achieve their own goals, replace traditional producers and thereby alter the existing structures (the remaining two types).

Therefore, it might be implied that the dialectic of exploitation and empowerment is inherent to the phenomenon of prosumption. However, for the purposes of a formal analytical investigation, it is worthwhile to set aside the specific theoretical interpretations that tend to emphasize one aspect or another, and to pose the following question: is it possible that a certain prosumer activity might be beneficial (perhaps, indirectly) to someone other than the party engaging in it, and at the same time empower the actor to achieve their goals and change existing structures? Empirical examples allow answering this question in the affirmative.[2] The relative importance of these two characteristics will depend on the theoretical perspectives applied, the nature of the interpretation, the goals of the analysis, and the specific object of a study. Nevertheless, any systematic typology of prosumption should anticipate that the involvement or engagement of a prosumer may be primarily driven by different motivating factors and possibly take different forms as a result.

Other classifications

The proposition that potential differences between the motives driving individuals to engage in or be involved in prosumer practices represent an important foundation for classification is also reflected in the typology proposed by Marie-Anne Dujarier (2014). While not precisely committed to the concept of prosumption, she analyzes the productive practices of consumers. Dujarier employs the concept of *consumer work* and presents its typology based on four aspects: 1) the way the work is prescribed and organized; 2) the actual work done; 3) the output of the work; 4) the meaning that the activity has for those who carry it out. Dujarier's analysis is limited to cases where there is a clear producer/supplier of the service, product, or infrastructure. Such a producer/supplier is the main beneficiary but is not the same actor who performs the work. Therefore, this conceptualization is mostly defined by the economic sphere.

Dujarier identifies three types of users' productive practices: 1) directed self-production; 2) collaborative coproduction; 3) organizational work. In the first type, consumers work in order to consume; this includes activities such as self-service at gas stations, ATMs, self-service checkouts in shopping centers, shopping in electronic stores, etc. The second type is most commonly observed on the Internet, where companies are able to exploit the unpaid activities performed by a large number of users. The third type encompasses activities that are carried out in order to choose a product or service as subjectively and to ensure it is as socially acceptable as possible (e.g. looking for information as to whether an item of clothing was manufactured using child labor, when such information is not provided by a producer, Dujarier, 2014: 565). However, these types do not include all possible prosumer activities. While consumers in clearly defined commercial spheres engage in productive practices "in order to consume," it can be assumed that prosumers in other spheres might engage in such practices for purposes other than mere consumption. Such purposes include, for instance, creativity or self-realization (see Chen, 2012).

Piergiorgio Degli Esposti (2016) identifies four types of prosumers, also suggesting that the motivations behind their practices may vary. Degli Esposti (2016: 109) proposes that prosumers engage in user productive practices as "makers, fixers, sharers and testers." This classification serves to enhance the

comprehension of the multifaceted nature of prosumer practices reflecting the heterogeneity of the spheres and content of prosumption, as well as different inclinations to take part in it. Nevertheless, as the author himself acknowledges, the proposed types are not mutually exclusive, as a prosumer may engage in making and sharing, fixing and sharing, or testing and sharing. The category of "sharers" is distinct from the others, as it indicates involvement in prosumption and the artifacts that result from it are not limited to private use. Consequently, it is an important criterion for the further development of a systematic typology.

In the advent of the notion of the "prosumer," Philip Kotler suggested a classification that also contributes to the explication of the heterogeneity of the phenomenon. It highlights that actors involved in prosumer practices have different levels of skills and experience. This classification is relatively straightforward and not overly complex. It encompasses two "prosumer profiles": The Avid Hobbyist and The Archprosumer (Kotler, 2010 [1986]: 58–59). The former engages in prosumption to satisfy their interests or express their skills. The latter avoids being a part of a mass consumer society and using mass-produced products altogether and specializes in different practices to meet their own needs. This, again, indicates different motivations to engage in prosumer practices. Furthermore, it is plausible that having different levels of skills and experience might not only facilitate engagement in productive practices, but also direct users to engage in such activities individually or collectively, depending on their confidence in their skills.

The latter distinction is more thoroughly explored by Ritzel and colleagues (2022). They argue that the decision whether to engage in prosumer practices individually or cooperatively is determined by the motivations of the actors involved. Such an insight is of particular significance when examining prosumer practices from the perspective of an actor. Ritzel et al. distinguish between private prosumer (p-prosumer) and commons prosumer (co-prosumer). Grounding their argumentation on the examples from the energy and agriculture sectors, Ritzel et al. discuss individual photovoltaic prosumers who are connected to a power grid, home gardening (p-prosumers), as well as energy neighborhoods that implement peer-to-peer energy exchange and are based on algorithmic Smart home energy management systems, virtual power plants as a form of energy prosumer communities, community gardening in urban areas and community-supported agriculture (CSA) initiatives (co-prosumers). Ritzel et al. propose that co-prosumers are more often ideologically and politically motivated, community-oriented and seeking common welfare maximization. Whereas p-prosumers tend to exhibit a greater proclivity towards independence from commercial value chains and autonomy (Ritzel et al., 2022: 303). As this typology is based on the analysis of specific activities, it includes mostly those forms of prosumption where alternatives to established structures are created to satisfy the needs of prosumers and, therefore, it does not exhaust the heterogeneity of prosumption in its entirety.

Towards a new typology of prosumption

A systematic formal typology of prosumption should allow for an understanding of the intensity and extent of specific prosumer activities, it should also contribute to at least a partial understanding of the actors' motivations to engage in such activities. The existing classifications indicate that there are differences in motivations between different actors and activities, so it is worth capturing this in a more detailed way. Admittedly, specific motives vary and might be very particular to one or another activity. Nevertheless, it is necessary to consider certain characteristics of activities and actors when attempting to develop an analytical instrument that would direct empirical research towards a more detailed examination of prosumers' motivations.

Classifying criteria

Prior to elaborating on the classifying criteria for the proposed typology, it is possible to identify certain characteristics that are attributed to prosumption in the classifications discussed above, yet which overlap

or are dialectical. It was already mentioned that the exploitation/empowerment distinction is essential to prosumption but the interpretation and explanation of particular activities in this regard depends on the point of view of the analysis and the theoretical approaches applied. It is conceivable that both characteristics can be inherent in the same activity. There is a dialectical relationship between production and consumption, and prosumer practices often maintain this character, i.e. some conditions to engage in empowering practices (technological, etc.) exist precisely because they benefit someone.

Another condition that is very important in the development of some features and directions of prosumption is the space where they occur—is it digital, *real*, or the space that connects them. Many prosumer activities first and foremost occur in the digital space, and this is where the actors are most actively involved in such activities. Moreover, the digital space enables prosumption in potentially new directions. However, some of these activities (e.g. customer self-service) can take place both in the digital and the *real* space, and this is not necessarily an essential characteristic of those activities. The extent to which certain forms of prosumption are more specific to the digital space is a question that can be best answered through empirical studies. In order to achieve this, systematic analytical instruments are needed that form the basis for the evaluation of the totality of such practices.

Assessing the existing classifications of prosumption, it is now possible to formulate several criteria for a formal systematic typology. These criteria reflect the heterogeneity of activities that fall under the concept of prosumption, while also pointing to the different motivating factors influencing the actors engaged in prosumption. As they are not equally evident, they require a different extent of explication. The criteria for the proposed typology are the following:

(a) The nature of prosumer activity in terms of *cooperation*, i.e. private (individual) or collaborative. This feature is implicit in almost all the aforementioned classifications. When evaluating prosumer activities from the perspective of an actor, the feature of collaboration is important as it may facilitate the motivation to act and become involved in certain activities. On the other hand, individual participation may indicate the importance of a combination of some other features (e.g. skills).

(b) The initial *reason* to engage in a particular prosumer activity. As mentioned above, in a clearly economic sphere, consumers usually take on productive practices to obtain a particular product or service for their own use. However, the concept of prosumption is applicable to other spheres of social life as well. In reference to other classifications, the inclination for some prosumers to share artifacts that are made, fixed or being tested was captured by Degli Esposti (2016; his other three categories—"makers, fixers and testers"—could be further employed as sub-categories in even more fine-grained analytical instruments than the one developed here). Moreover, this criterion is identified taking into account Chen's indication that prosumption could be understood as both a means and an end, and may be intended as creative activities (Chen, 2015: 447; see also Chen, 2012). The specifics of Dujarier's classification ("[work] in order to be able to consume," Dujarier, 2014: 562) are also considered. Furthermore, manifestations of prosumption discussed by Ritzer indicate that only some prosumer activities are tied exclusively to consumerist inclinations ("Prosumption-as-Production" and "Prosumption-as-Consumption"). Although Ritzer positions these forms on a continuum, the very idea of a continuum is set aside here for several reasons.

Firstly, the rules for the construction of a typology require that the criteria and the types developed do not overlap, i.e. they must have clear distinctions and must be mutually exclusive. Secondly, Ritzer's conceptualization of prosumption is tied to specific theoretical implications (the Prosumption Continuum is employed by Ritzer to develop the argumentation for "prosumer capitalism"), whereas the typology formulated here is sought as a formal analytical instrument that is not tied to specific interpretative contexts. Admittedly, almost every typology of social life consists of ideal types around which the empirical referents are more or less centered. Therefore, the social reality is most likely to be more akin to the continuum.

However, for formal analytical purposes and in order to explicate on the heterogeneity of prosumption, it is necessary to delineate boundaries between the classifying segments.

(c)   The required or preferred *skills*, meaning whether specific technical or professional knowledge facilitates involvement in a particular prosumer activity. Ritzer's broad conceptualization, as well as Kotler's types and the analysis of prosumption by Chen (2015: 449) indicate that prosumption includes some activities that require specific skills (or that having some skills may facilitate participation). Moreover, particular prosumer can be more skilled in certain activities than in others. Therefore, different motivations may be needed to engage in an activity with or without some specific skills. This criterion comprises any technical knowledge and skills, as well as specific competencies and knowledge of certain topics.

Typology of prosumption

The typology of prosumption based on these criteria is presented in Table 1. This is a formal typology, i.e. it details the different forms this phenomenon may acquire in both the *real* and the digital space.

Table 1. Typology of prosumption.

	Particular skills are required or preferred		No particular skills are required	
	Private	Collaborative	Private	Collaborative
Prosumption for sharing	(1) skilled sharer p-prosumption	(2) skilled sharer co-prosumption	(3) amateur sharer p-prosumption	(4) amateur sharer co-prosumption
Prosumption for own use	(5) skilled user p-prosumption	(6) skilled community prosumption	(7) amateur user p-prosumption	(8) amateur community prosumption

The proposed typology consists of eight types of prosumption (the way they are named incorporates some notions from other authors' classifications, see Degli Esposti, 2016; Ritzel et al., 2022). The resulting types refer to several differences between prosumers. They are identified as sharers and users, as skilled and amateur. "Communities" in the naming of the types indicate that prosumption can take place in more or less closed groups to primarily satisfy the needs of their members, whereas the collaborative prosumption of sharers is identified as co-prosumption.

Although the proposed typology is formal, it is necessary to ascertain whether all the types do have or may have empirical equivalents and are meaningful:

1.   "skilled sharer p-prosumption": creating electronic music while using digital tools (Born, 2022: 316) or specialized apps, such as GarageBand; creating YouTube gamer videos (see Chia, 2021); writing a blog in one's free time on one's professional topics (see Davis, 2014);
2.   "skilled sharer co-prosumption": user engagement in the development of open-source computer operating systems; user-generated maps on platforms such as Wikimapia and OpenStreetMap (see Bittner and Glaze, 2021);
3.   "amateur sharer p-prosumption": creating lip-sync (imitating singing along to a music track) videos on TikTok; writing fan-fiction on social media or other platforms (see Jones, 2011);
4.   "amateur sharer co-prosumption": citizen science initiatives in *real* space, as well as carried out via digital technologies (e.g. Foldit); Wikipedia;
5.   "skilled user p-prosumption": DIY-type works (repairs, sewing, coding one's own internet page, etc.) performed by individuals with particular skills instead of hiring others; prosumption of medicines enabled by digital technologies and allowing users to bypass professional "gatekeepers"

(see Liu and Lundin, 2020); making solar energy for one's own use, or growing one's food (traditional way, or including new technologies, see Vicdan et al., 2024);

6. "skilled community prosumption": crypto-currency mining collectives; Energy Neighborhoods and Virtual Power Plants (see Ritzel et al., 2022);

7. "amateur user p-prosumption": user-curated music playlists on Spotify and other music platforms (see Durham and Born, 2022); monitoring one's own health via digital devices and apps; online political participation via social media platforms, gaining information to make political decisions (see Yamamoto et al., 2020); self-service in shopping centers, ATMs, electronic shops;

8. "amateur community prosumption": community-based services, such as sharing food and other goods (see Norbutas and Corten, 2018); Maker communities and Fablabs (see Cenere, 2022); music and literary social media fandom groups, engaged in enhancing and producing their own experience, e.g. Jane Austen readers' communities on Instagram and Facebook (see Krueger, 2019).

The list of examples is not exhaustive and is subject to further updates. Its purpose is to verify whether each type has observable or potential empirical cases. Arguably, however, any particular prosumer activity should qualify as one of the types above. Moreover, some digital platforms may cover several types of prosumer activities. For example, non-specialized social networking platforms (Facebook, X, TikTok, etc.) can also be used for purposes related to some professions. That is the case because many digital platforms are both a space and a means of prosumption (Ritzer and Degli Esposti, 2020b: 355); and if they are complex, then there may be numerous possibilities in how they could be used, depending on the goals, needs, and skills of the user. It is also important to reiterate that the mere use of social networking platforms does not necessarily indicate that the user is engaging in prosumption as an active participant. Therefore, there is a need for empirical studies of specific activities in order to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. When employing the proposed typology as an analytical tool for prosumer activities, it would be worthwhile to further approach such activities at the individual level, which would allow uncovering the specific motivations of actors and compare them between types.

Conclusion

The development of digital technologies over the last couple of decades has led to a renewed focus on user productive practices and, in particular, prosumption (although it is not a primary or entirely digital phenomenon). The classifications of such activities that have been formulated so far reflect the heterogeneity of this phenomenon and point to the different theoretical approaches that may be taken. The typology proposed in this article systemizes the existing classifications by highlighting the essential characteristics of prosumption that allow explicating on the heterogeneity of the phenomenon. In this way, several significant criteria for the classification of prosumer activities were identified: differences in terms of collaboration, general reasons for engaging in a particular prosumer activity, and the level of required or preferred skills. This led to the identification of eight types of prosumption: (1) skilled sharer p-prosumption; (2) skilled sharer co-prosumption; (3) amateur sharer p-prosumption; (4) amateur sharer co-prosumption; (5) skilled user p-prosumption; (6) skilled community prosumption; (7) amateur user p-prosumption; (8) amateur community prosumption. These types are subject to further, more fine-grained specifications.

The typology presented here is an attempt to propose a novel formal analytical instrument that would assist in comprehending the extensive range of prosumption and in further investigating features of this phenomenon through empirical research. Following the logic underlying this typology, such studies would allow elucidating the variety of particular motivations underlying engagement in prosumer activities. In addition, they would facilitate an understanding of the relationship between these motivations and the decisions/needs to undertake activities individually or collaboratively. Furthermore, they would

provide insight into the effect of having some specific knowledge and skills on the motivation to engage in prosumer activities in certain spheres.

As the proposed typology is not intended for application only in the digital space, empirical research should also uncover whether some forms (types) of prosumption are more characteristic to it and whether digital prosumption has any unique features. The concept of prosumption is one of the attempts to articulate and define the effects of digitalization on the creation and usage of content, products, and artifacts. The productive practices of consumers, and prosumption specifically, were often approached either in the context of marketing research and strategies, or from the critical perspective aiming to reveal the dynamics of power relations between actors. However, in the first case, such concepts tend to become slogans or buzzwords to demonstrate the revolutionary nature of digital technologies (similar tendencies can be observed with regard to the technologies that fall under the umbrella of AI), but their meaningfulness and validity and the phenomena they denote are not analytically substantiated. The typology suggested in this article provides a conceptual and analytical framework for this descriptive work.

In studies adopting a critical approach, authors proceed analytically, frequently investigating the manner in which new technologies and the logic of acting they impose are employed as a means of power and control. However, other consequences of this logic of acting are not always considered. The typology proposed here provides an instrument to take into account their complete range. The analysis presented in this article is based on the proposition that while the development and utilization of digital technologies have significant negative social effects, they are not limited to them. Prosumption occurs in different areas of social life, extending beyond purely economic relations and encompassing various contents. It also denotes one of the modes in which the interaction of actors and groups develops in the face of digital technologies and facilitate a deeper understanding of the process.

The digital aspect is regarded as encouraging a wider sharing and uptake of prosumer practices, but the extent of this process remains to be examined. The so-called techno-optimistic perspective posits that digital technologies generate a fundamentally novel environment that fosters progress in various domains of social life, particularly in relation to the generation and utilization of information and knowledge. Critics and techno-pessimists would highlight a number of challenges to the stability of social and cultural institutions, as well as the exploitative nature of digital technologies and the concentration of power. Nevertheless, the extent and the specific nature of digital prosumption can only be evaluated in comparison to more traditional prosumer practices. The typology proposed in this article is intended to serve as a framework for such a comparison and evaluation (e.g. combining it with the systematic literature analyzes of the empirical research on prosumption). Furthermore, it contributes to the development of analytical tools that would assist in understanding the heterogeneity of prosumption.

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Notes

1. These two aspects are also intertwined, as a question of interest might be how digital prosumption is manifested in a particular sphere of social life, e.g. in science or environmental movements.

2. For example, using social networks or blogging platforms for communication (user-generated content is used by the owners of such platforms for attracting other users and sales advertisements) in order to create alternative computer operational systems that would replace the existing commercial ones, or to exchange some items and other goods that might otherwise not be freely available in the market, etc.

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