Chapter 11
Valorising the Cultural Content of the Commodity: On Immaterial Labour and New Forms of Informational Work

Jonathan Foster
University of Sheffield, UK

ABSTRACT
A change in the informational content of the commodity, along with the emergence of a decentralized networked communications environment, has given rise to new forms of informational work. Drawing on the thesis of immaterial labour this chapter explores how these new forms of informational work e.g., information aggregation systems for accessing the judgments of many minds, the distribution of digital free, and opportunities for the co-production of information goods, have emerged to valorise the cultural content of the commodity. The chapter begins by introducing the topic of information goods, and by identifying the main tenets of immaterial labour. This is followed by a discussion of these new forms of informational work within the context of proprietary and non-proprietary information production. The chapter concludes with a critique of the exploitation and use of immaterial labour in a networked information economy.

INTRODUCTION
In 2006 the editors of Time magazine chose You as their person of the year. The decision captures well the shift from production to consumption that is one of the hallmarks of a networked information economy. In an industrial information economy the activities of production, distribution, and consumption tend to be distinct value-adding phases. In a networked information economy, these activities tend to be more interrelated, with an accompanying increase in influence of the consumer-public. This increase in influence is due to two main developments; first a change in the informational content of the commodity, along with an accompanying increase in the economic value of information goods, and second the emergence of an integrated decentralized communications infrastructure. Both these developments have in turn given rise to an intensification in relations.
between consumers and other consumers, and in relations between consumers and organizations. Drawing on the thesis of immaterial labour, this chapter will investigate how both these developments have led to an emphasis on the valorisation of the cultural content of the commodity; and on the mechanisms and strategies through which such valorisation takes place e.g. information aggregation, free distribution, and co-production. The chapter begins with a brief review of the main features of information goods. This is followed by a description of the main tenets of the immaterial labour thesis; and a discussion of the typical mechanisms and strategies by which the cultural content of the commodity is valorised in a networked information economy. The chapter concludes with a short critique of the exploitation of immaterial labour within a networked information economy.

**INFORMATION GOODS**

An economy can be differentiated from other sectors of society by virtue of its focus on the organized production, distribution, exchange, and consumption of tangible and intangible goods. The economic value of tangible goods, e.g. food, clothes, a house, derives from their physical properties; while the economic value of intangible goods, e.g. a book, film, a computer program, derives from the value of the informational content that they contain. An important implication of the difference in value is that physical, tangible goods are rival; while informational, intangible goods are non-rival. Rival goods are goods where their consumption by one person necessarily diminishes the capacity of a second person to consume the same goods. One person’s consumption of an apple for example necessarily diminishes the capacity of a second person to consume the same apple. In contrast one person’s reading of an e-book does not necessarily diminish the capacity of a second person to read the same text. My reading of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* in digital form does not necessarily diminish the capacity of another reader to read the same text. Additionally my digital copy of *The Complete Works* is also non-rival in a secondary sense, in that once the initial digital copy is created further copies of the same text can be created at negligible cost. This is in contrast to the resources needed to produce additional items of tangible physical goods.

Apples are rival. *If I eat this apple, you cannot eat it.* If you nonetheless want to eat an apple, more resources (trees, labor) need to be diverted from, say, building chairs, to growing apples, to satisfy you. *The social cost of your consuming the second apple is the cost of not using the resources needed to grow the second apple (the wood from the tree) in their next best use (Benkler, 2006: 36).*

The pertinent question for society is who decides the next best use of the natural resources for the production of which type of tangible physical goods. This is a decision normally informed by profit. While information goods are non-rival, they can be excludable. While one person’s listening to a particular piece of music does not necessarily diminish the capacity of a second person to listen to the same piece of music, a second person can depending on the format or method of distribution be excluded from listening to the same piece of music. Others can be excluded from having access to information, typically on the basis of property rights but also on the basis of price and access. Therefore information goods can be further divided into excludable ‘club information goods’, e.g. *Sky Sports*, the *Spotify* music service in its *Premium* version, and non-excludable ‘public information goods’ e.g. *Spotify Free, Last.fm*, and other publicly accessible content and services. A final characteristic of information goods is that information goods are both input and output of their own production process; a characteristic which Benkler (2006) after Isaac Newton calls ‘standing on the shoulders of giants’. And while
Related Content

Impact of Athlete Role Model on the Behavioural Intentions of the Youth in Egypt

Determinants of Attitudinal Loyalty in Retail Banking: Evidence from Nigerian
[www.igi-global.com/article/determinants-of-attitudinal-loyalty-in-retail-banking/159109?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/determinants-of-attitudinal-loyalty-in-retail-banking/159109?camid=4v1a)

CRM in the Banking Sector: Framework and Application
[www.igi-global.com/article/crm-banking-sector/74361?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/crm-banking-sector/74361?camid=4v1a)

Consumer-to-Consumer Electronic Commerce: An Emerging Stream of Research
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/consumer-consumer-electronic-commerce/6977?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/consumer-consumer-electronic-commerce/6977?camid=4v1a)