

The background is black with white line art. It features several interlocking gears of various sizes. A network of white lines connects several white circular nodes, creating a web-like structure across the page.

Edited by
Christian Suter
Jacinto Cuvi
Philip Balsiger
Mihaela Nedelcu

The Future of Work

The logo consists of a gear shape with the word "Seismo" written inside in a stylized font. Below "Seismo", the word "outside" is written in a smaller, lighter font.

Seismo
outside

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4 The Increasing and Invisible Impact of the Working Consumer on Paid Work

George Ritzer and Piergiorgio Degli Esposti

4.1 Introduction

The world of work and labour is being transformed in many ways by an array of well-known and documented forces. Much has been written about automation and robotization and how they have eliminated a multitude of tasks and dramatically changed many of the remainder. Here we focus on a largely ignored force that is having much the same kind of effect on the world of work and has served to amplify the effects of these other changes; the increasing importance of one type of prosumer, the 'working consumer'. While consumers have always worked, a series of relatively recent changes (i.e. new self-service technologies; the explosion of consumption on the Internet) have served to highlight the importance of the working consumer, prompting a recent expression of concern for the 'overworked consumer' (Andrews 2019). Increasingly today, the consumer has little choice other than to work in order to consume. As a result, workers (this time the 'consuming producer' another type of prosumer) have become less significant in those contexts in which working consumers have been of growing importance. The consuming worker should be understood as a traditionally paid worker, but one who naturally consumes in a consumption-based economy. Many workers have lost their jobs because of the increase of tasks undertaken, both consciously and unconsciously, by working consumers.

The basic principle is that the increasing amount of work being carried out by consumers rather than by paid employees is a largely invisible aspect of the 'work revolution'. These consumers offer many advantages over workers, one of which is that they often work for little or no pay. There is a growing requirement for working consumers which impacts, both negatively and positively, the paid worker market. Often blind to this impact we tend

to think of producers (workers) and consumers in binary terms. In fact, all consumers must inevitably do some work and producers must inevitably consume. If we think in this way, we can begin to see that consumers have done and currently do an increasing amount of work which was at one time and in different contexts carried out by paid workers.

Previously, prosumption has been considered as the fusion of production and consumption (Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010; Ritzer 2014; Ritzer 2015). Here we move away from this generalization to focus on one type of prosumer—the ‘working consumer’ (Dujarier 2016; Rieder and Voss 2010). The working consumer can be defined as an increasingly important sub-type of prosumption, as the consumer takes part in several parts of the production while consuming, often unknowingly, with only achieving little, if any earnings. The first object of this chapter is to explore the implications of the working consumer on paid employment. Afterwards, the issue of a market for working consumers will be considered, including their effect on the paid labour market (or so-called ‘consuming workers’). These distinctions are based on the view that both produce and consume (prosume), although they do so in different ways. The working consumer produces in order to consume whereas the consuming worker consumes in order to produce. It is argued that working consumers cannot be considered to be a part of a labour market, but that their work nevertheless is getting into conflict with paid labour. This has a series of consequences for both types of labour, which will be discussed conclusively.

4.2 Prosumption and Working Consumers

Although prosumption (including working consumption) has always existed, in the contemporary world it is now taking on many new forms creating the ‘new prosumer’. The working consumer is located along a continuum between production and consumption. This is true of both bricks-and-mortar consumption settings such as McDonald’s and IKEA but also of online digital sites like Amazon, Facebook, and Google. The fusion of production and consumption as well as that of digital and material is augmented in settings involving both the digital and material. Amazon, for example, supplements its powerful online presence with bricks-and-mortar settings such as its Whole Foods supermarket chain and Amazon Go convenience stores thereby producing and consuming in the online digital world and the material world at the same time.

Although some research on the working consumer and similar ideas has been done, more attention has been devoted to general issues of prosumerism. While these concepts are almost unknown in popular literature, many scholars have been using them and other overlapping concepts for decades. In the past, other scholars have dealt with the process without using the term prosumption. In fact, the phenomenon itself is not new and is undoubtedly more primordial than either production or consumption. Hunter-gatherers could be seen as prosumers as they produced their own food and then consumed it, maybe even consuming it as was produced. People were prosumers before they were defined as such classing themselves as either producers or consumers. This distinction gained traction with the Industrial Revolution as many people left home or the farm to work in production settings (i.e. workshops, factories). More recently the Consumer Revolution has brought a sense of people as consumers with the development and proliferation of specific sites (i.e. stores, shopping malls) where people go to consume.

As a result, both in the past and now, scholars and laypeople have tended to analyse the economy focusing on production or consumption, as well as workers or consumers, a situation which requires correction. Concern with prosumers in general and working consumers, in particular, should help correct that error.

While we have always been prosumers or, more specifically, working consumers, the increasing fusion of work (production) and consumption today is much clearer to both casual observers and scholars who have created and expanded upon these concepts. Other authors have dealt with similar or closely related phenomena such as *produser* (Bruns 2008), 'co-creation' (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004); marketing's 'service-dominant logic' (Vargo and Lusch 2004), 'wikinomics' (partly based on the idea that businesses put consumers to work on the Internet), 'DIY' (Fox 2014), 'craft consumption' (Campbell 2005), 'mass collaboration' (in both production and consumption) (Tapscott and Williams 2008), and 'consumer co-production' (Etgar 2008), makers-fixers-sharers and testers (Degli Esposti 2015). Although these ideas and others, such as the consumer as the manager of workers on sites such as Yelp (Andrews 2019), overlap and have their strengths it is the idea of the prosumer that has been most influential in social science and in our work.

In her work on surveillance capitalism, Zuboff (2019) makes the point that in their relationship with Internet sites like Google and Facebook people cannot be seen as customers as there is no economic exchange, price or profit, but neither as workers as they are not paid for what they do. If they are neither consumers nor producers (workers), perhaps it is better to see them for what they are, prosumers.

The Digital Revolution has turned the dualistic thinking of the Industrial and Consumer Revolutions on its head. These tended to focus on either the producer (worker) or the consumer. Such binary thinking is impossible to sustain, especially on the Internet, where it becomes virtually impossible to separate the deeply intertwined acts of production and consumption. For example, in writing on someone else's Facebook page (production), one must have consumed information on that page or elsewhere. The Digital Revolution has sounded the death knell (although it should have been tolled long ago with the rise of postmodern theory) for modern binary thinking in general and especially in regard to the economy. Rather than the binaries of production and consumption, there is increasing interest in prosumption where the two processes are fused in various ways and to varying degrees.

Contemporary interest and use of the prosumer concept can be traced to Alvin Toffler's (1980) thinking on the *rise of the prosumer* as well his later work with Heidi Toffler (2006) on the *coming prosumer explosion*. This work was only part of Toffler's broader thinking on social change, especially the third wave or post-industrial society. This idea received attention and popular interest for a time although it did not attract the interest of scholars and find its way into academic literature.

Although Toffler's work on prosumption was unseen by most scholars the idea and phenomenon was recorded in the study of McDonald's and its broader influence through the 'McDonaldization of society' (Ritzer 1983; Ritzer 2018). Of particular interest is the way in which McDonald's, as well as its emulators, extenders, and some predecessors such as earlier chains of fast-food restaurants like Dairy Queen and cafeterias like Automat, put its customers to work in its bricks-and-mortar settings. Customers (consumers) in these restaurants are required to, at least in part, 'produce' their own meal by doing work, for example carrying food trays to the table, disposing of garbage when the meal is finished all of which was previously done by paid employees. The line between consumer and worker is therefore blurred, or partly, in fast-food restaurants.

This is also now the case in many other bricks-and-mortar settings. Once the traditional department store had many paid workers doing a wide range of tasks *for* consumers (imagine!). Now with fewer employees consumers do much of the work themselves such as locating purchases among a vast array of products, scanning tags to check or find prices, and scanning purchases when they leave via a self-service lane. Supermarkets still have many employees; however, they are often supplemented by self-service checkout lanes where customers scan purchases, weigh their produce, and bag their purchases. Gone are the days when there were employees available to pump gasoline in

service stations. Customers now not only pump (produce) their own gasoline but also pay for it by scanning their credit cards. Customers increasingly use self-check-in kiosks at hotels and airports. They are more and more likely to have to find their own cars in car rental lots, wash their cars at automated car washes, and check out their selections in libraries. IKEA's customers must not only trek through its seemingly endless maze on their own in an effort to find what they are looking for while discovering and selecting other products in the course of their rambles, but must also assemble products such as bookcases purchased in store at home.

Perhaps the epitome in the use of the working consumer in the material world so far can be found in Amazon Go's convenience stores (ten had been opened by early 2019 with as many as 2000 planned). Amazon Go is at the forefront (another being salad chain Sweetgreen, [Zraick 2019]) of efforts by bricks-and-mortar shops and malls to better compete with online sites by further increasing the use of working consumers and limiting the number of paid employees. As a result, customers are forced to perform work traditionally done by paid employees. The Amazon Go 'grab-and-go' system allows consumers to enter the bricks-and-mortar shop and to quickly and easily make their selections (groceries, ready-to-eat meals, meal kits, etc.). Because of Amazon Go's extensive use of digital technology there is no need to wait in line to pay for purchases as it offers checkout-free shopping via the Amazon Go app. Uber has done much the same thing as rides are prepaid through an app. Passengers can exit an Uber without the need to pay or tip. Other shops and malls are likely to follow the Amazon Go model by utilising technology that recognises customers and their preferences as soon as they enter leading them to likely sites and products.

Amazon will likely integrate its Amazon Go stores, Whole Foods' supermarkets, and bricks-and-mortar book stores into its far more important digital business. It may use its distribution centers for digitally ordered products or as launch pads for its nascent drone-delivery system. Amazon is expanding in a multitude of directions, augmenting its online business in so many different ways that it has created the fear of monopoly similar to that of the 19th-century railroads that led to the development of anti-monopoly laws.

We are clearly in the early stages of the emergence of augmented businesses involving ever-tighter integration of the digital and the material and the degree in which they strengthen one another. In addition to the use of drones other advances being considered are shops staffed by robots using facial-recognition software and the use of 3D printers (or additive manufacturing), which allow consumers to materially produce what they will consume.

These advanced technologies highlight the major role that they play in enabling working consumers to do things (e.g. manufacturing products with 3D printers) that in the past could only be done by paid employees.

While the working consumer remains important to the existence and development of bricks-and-mortar businesses, as well as to those that integrate bricks-and-clicks, the most important contemporary examples of the increasing centrality of the working consumer are to be found on Internet sites such as Google, Facebook, and Amazon, as well as more specific sites like TurboTax and LegalZoom. It is virtually impossible to interact with human employees on most Internet sites, including those that sell goods and services, because work done by paid employees is comparatively expensive, prone to mistakes and is unreliable. The near-total absence of human employees online is also due to the fact that most online work is performed by advanced technologies. Additionally and central to this argument is that online consumers do a lot more unpaid work which is not required of them in bricks-and-mortar settings. Often they have no choice but to do such work. Amazon working consumers, for example, must do all of the digital work involved in ordering the myriad products available on their website and many others like it. In the case of books, buyers who select on the basis of online reviews written by other working consumers, can also rate and produce reviews of other books themselves. Increasingly, these working consumers may even author the digital books for sale on the site. As a result of all of the work being carried out by its working consumers Amazon has less need for paid employees such as clerks and book reviewers although it does employ many thousands of people who, stifled by routines, rules, and metrics, work like robots in its distribution centres as well delivering products to its working consumers (Scheiber 2019). The increasing power of Amazon in many sectors is forcing a large number of bricks-and-mortar shops, most notably bookshops, out of business with consequent job losses and unemployment.

4.3 Digitalization of Labour

Digital processes and technologies are thought of as intrinsic to contemporary society offering many benefits as they innovate or re-envision daily processes. The digital era adds value to how people navigate life from shopping for essentials to booking a vacation. The incorporation of digital technologies has enabled companies to develop new services as is done by many tech start-ups, or has allowed conventional bricks-and-mortar businesses to remain competitive. Companies of all types have become integrated with digital technology

in varying degrees. While some businesses remain as either physical (brick-and-mortar) or digital (social media) the vast majority evolve into hybrids. For example, many retail companies allow consumers to visit their stores in person and/or engage with an online catalogue and purchase system.

The nature of employment is also evolving from labour once rooted in the physical or material world, through the development of Internet communication technologies (Kässi and Lehdonvirta 2018). Remote working, fixed-hour work arrangements and project-based contracts are now commonplace. Platform-based companies such as the Big Five (Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, Microsoft) are not merely digital technologies that facilitate various activities for users, but they are technological, economic, and social-cultural configurations (Van Dijck, de Waal and Poell 2018). These platforms collect information about user behaviour and preference generating an enormous amount of data, or big data, which is then processed by algorithms which in turn aid the development and creation of upgraded products and services (Dawar 2016). Application of this data is seen as a marketing tool for customer relationship management providing platforms with a competitive advantage (Dawar 2016). Utilization of big data and algorithms also drives the platform's profitability and many decision-making elements. Algorithms are not only used to manage the work that is performed but are used to control almost all aspects of the job, including worker performance and behaviour (Marrone and Finotto 2019). Digital platforms are also developing into sites for work which is entirely web-based and/or physical labour allocated through the platform (Berg et al. 2018; Gajewski 2018). Digital labour has two distinct types, crowd work and online freelancing. Crowd work tasks are subdivided into smaller work units such as data entry or survey completion. Contest-based work refers to such things as designing a logo that is voted on by an entity that requests the task (Schmidt 2017). Through online freelancing individuals are selected to complete more substantial tasks such as editing, translation, or graphic design (Schmidt 2017). Although digital labour can be divided into these two types in reality the division is blurred with digital labour being seen as a continuum of online labour from microwork to online freelancing (Schmidt 2017). Some digital, if not all, platforms have 'attempted to evade existing labour regulations' as they rely upon being considered as a new or untraditional form of labour (Berg et al. 2018, 6; Jourdain 2018, 6). On sites that require users to supply or generate content, particularly social media sites, content moderators are needed to monitor uploaded content and to remove unacceptable material. Although algorithms are also used to assess questionable content, the judgment of human workers is still essential for quality control (Berg et al. 2018).

The three business forms, brick-and-mortar, brick-and-clicks, and digital platforms, each have their own characteristics relating to goods and services offered as well as their labour needs. A business may enter the market primarily in a certain form but as it continues to adapt to remain competitive it may mutate into a different or hybrid form fluctuating between the physical and digital. Changes wrought by the digital era have impacted, not only business development, but entire industries and markets as well as shaping consumer participation and engagement. The roles of consumer and worker have also become muddled as they flow between varying degrees of prosumption as required by the company's structure. The nature of paid work itself is changing dramatically with an increasing shift away from solid jobs in material settings to more liquid, virtual work woven between physical and digital spaces. Workers are increasingly moving out of traditional full-time jobs in large organizations, either by choice or force, into the on-demand gig economy in which people regularly move from one short-term position to another. With the rise of platforms workers are increasingly employed outside standard regulations, being characterized by low wages, exclusion from welfare protection and also from the possibility to get access to traditional union rights (Marrone and Finotto 2019). Moreover, platform's exploitation seems to not be limited to the same workers, but it also affects the same context in which they operate. Platforms, in fact, are also able to influence social life in the cities as they are increasingly becoming crucial infrastructure upon which urban economy relies (Marrone and Peterlongo 2020). Many factors allowing such changes are only possible through varying layers of exploitation, intricately employed to increase the profits of companies. The digital era is often thought of as increasing employment opportunities through, for example, the gig economy, however, this innovation has increased worker exploitation through unstable jobs which are less financially rewarding and are often accompanied by poor working conditions. Those impacted most by this exploitation are those whose involvement is fundamentally required by the profit-making company: the worker and the consumer. Users, or consumers, are required to interact with digital platforms to request services such as booking a room on Airbnb or hiring someone to assemble furniture through TaskRabbit, thus performing a type of unpaid work. The use of hyper-logical algorithms as surrogate supervisors of paid workers employed by digital labour platforms often results in unfair worker assessment and treatment (Berg et al. 2018).

4.4 Digital Platforms and the Gig Economy

While prosumption and the working consumer have helped profit-making companies reduce labour costs digitization has facilitated this process. The digital era has enabled entrepreneurial profit-making companies to recognise and create niche markets that can be monetized and made profitable through digital technologies. Although they promote services as tools to benefit the consumer they emanate from within the economic system itself and their priority is to make a profit. These companies have identified consumption practices previously performed by the working consumer for free which do not require specialized skills to complete. As individuals raise their standards as to what constitutes decent work many tasks outside of their paid working life are outsourced to others through the gig economy.

A contradictory flow is occurring in the labour market. Structural processes are being introduced that encourage or require unspecialized working consumers to perform many tasks once performed by paid consuming workers causing many low-skilled workers to be laid off. These laid-off workers then become job seekers and gig-based companies are in need of cheap labour. With the rational goal of efficiency in mind these new businesses seek to employ unskilled workers willing to perform low-level tasks for low pay and poor working conditions. Through this shift contracted gig workers become a specific subset of the P-A-P (Prosumer as Producer) continuum (Ritzer 2017), sharing many attributes with the working consumer particularly the requirement that they use their own assets to perform their jobs.

As companies grow accustomed to cost savings and benefits provided by working consumers their ethos of the treatment of the consumer is applied to paid workers. The aim of extracting value is especially evident in the gig economy as capitalist companies exploit workers through poor working conditions and minimum wages in order to maximize their labour savings. Gig economy working conditions, like that of low-level consuming workers, are generally considered indecent and dehumanizing. There are relatively few benefits with irregular and/or non-guaranteed hours, little or no training, and limited possibility of career advancement (Muntaner 2018). The nature of the work is also alienating, similar to that of the online working consumer as many activities are performed in solitude, with little or no contact with those requesting the service and limited contact with co-workers. Underutilization of the gig worker perpetuates this feeling of loneliness (Graham et al. 2017). As the work is intermittent the time between tasks is often accompanied by long periods of idleness, which adds to the sensation of restlessness and isolation. Importantly, gig work does not provide employees with work that

could be considered to be meaningful. Similar to Amazon employees, gig workers are required to juggle multiple bosses: their immediate supervisor, the algorithm that dictates the amount of work and how the process must be performed, performance metrics and consumer ratings (Bajwa et al. 2018). The relationship between the digital and physical increases the pressure as well as the level of possible exploitation on the worker.

While jobs in the gig economy are recognizably demeaning being unemployed is much worse, therefore, the unemployed or under-employed settle for these poor conditions in order to receive at least some pay. Since many such jobs are contract positions pay varies greatly depending on demand. Many potential gig workers are given false promises that the work will be lucrative so they take the risk. Therefore, supply meets demand and low-level workers begin new, demeaning jobs with a gig-based company seeking to minimize its labour costs.

The increasing prevalence of work in the gig economy also makes it difficult for gig seekers to find and keep employment. Unless job seekers are highly educated, skilled, or have unique abilities, they have little power in the labour market as they are easily replaceable and unlikely to have anyone representing their interests. Despite the associated problems or dissatisfaction an increasing number of people will be employed in the gig sector in the future. It is true that some gig economy jobs offer empowerment, autonomy, a wide variety of tasks, networking, and working schedule flexibility which renders the job meaningful and decent. Certain working environments of gig work also offer an alternative to the restrictiveness of conventional corporate workplaces. Some types of gigging enable greater personalization of both the workplace and the work.

4.5 Of Unemployment and Employment

Because of the increasing importance of working consumers people are losing their jobs, being forced into part-time work, are under-employed, or not getting paid jobs at all. Although there are no hard data supporting this yet, it is a logical argument. Several studies have shown how automatization and robotization are affecting the future labour market, putting low-skilled employees out of work (e.g. Frey and Osborne 2013; Manyika et al. 2017). It is clear that working consumers are doing what was once traditionally paid work. It can, therefore, be argued, that working consumers overtaking prior tasks of paid workers, will have similar consequences to those of automatization. Both developments will simultaneously create other jobs, though often

demanding higher levels of skill, which will be discussed later in relation to working consumers.

Consumers are working, often seemingly happily, on an unpaid basis or for poor reward. But the advantages of working consumers over paid workers do not stop at being unpaid or poorly paid. These unpaid or poorly paid working consumers offer the profit-making organization many advantages apart from savings in labour costs. Savings are also made in marketing, advertising, and in salespeople used to induce traditional customers.

While profit-making organizations still have many short and long-term obligations to paid workers, there are few, if any, responsibilities to working consumers. In addition to paying a wage to paid workers employers may also be responsible for various costly benefit programs such as health insurance, retirement programs, and paid vacations. There are no such responsibilities to working consumers.

In addition, paid workers need to be provided with the necessary and often costly 'means of production' such as places to work (offices, factories), tools, and machines (assembly lines, computers). By contrast, some working consumers pay for the purchase and upkeep of their own means of production such as home offices, associated utilities, computers, and transportation, if they drive for a ride-sharing company for example. Working consumers also cost less to serve. Fewer paid personnel are needed in shopping sites such as department stores because prosumers now do much of the work themselves. There are even greater savings in terms of the increasingly important consumption on Internet sites like Amazon and eBay, and travel sites such as Trivago, KAYAK, and Expedia where there are almost no paid employees, with the unpaid working prosumers doing virtually all of the work. Other savings are derived from the fact that products are either stored by working consumers as is the case with much for sale on eBay and used books on Amazon, or are sold on more of a just-in-time than a just-in-case basis. Amazon does not warehouse the vast majority of the books and other products it offers for sale but rather obtains them from third-party sellers, often themselves working consumers, as they are ordered.

These advantages and savings are an irresistible attraction to profit-making organizations which covet both fewer responsibilities and most importantly from the point of view of profits, a great reduction in costs.

The future of work will involve more and more activities that are not work. The future will bring with it less paid work and more unpaid activities by working consumers. Obviously, many people will continue to be paid to work and new paid work is being created by the ongoing revolution in the working world.

While we have discussed its role in job losses, working consumption also leads to job creation. One of the best examples involves bloggers who turn their activities into paid work by, for example, finding advertisers for their blogs or by using their success as bloggers as a springboard into becoming reporters, book authors, etc.

More importantly, working consumption, and prosumption in general, relies on and has led to the creation of millions of new jobs for paid employees. For example, because of the billions of dollars spent by its working consumers Amazon employs about six hundred million paid employees. Then there the innumerable number of workers in companies involved in producing the systems, Smartphones, ATMs, self-checkout technology, websites, and so on that make working consumption on the Internet the norm. It is possible that more jobs are lost as a result of working consumption than are created by it but more importantly is the fact that those who obtain these new paid jobs are unlikely to be the same people who lose their positions as a result of the working consumer. For example, an unskilled supermarket worker or bank teller is not likely to find their way into the high-tech industries that owe their existence, at least in part, to the increasing centrality of working consumption. Those industries often require a more advanced or different skill set.

4.6 The Market for Working Consumers

As the former part of the chapter has indicated, it is crucial to conceptualize the working conditions of working consumers, due to their increasing importance in contemporary capitalism, producing a large amount of value without realizing it. Given this background, we discuss whether there exists a market for working consumers and the nature of that market (is it a labour market?). Furthermore, we investigate how it relates to the well-established market for paid employees (consuming workers).

Beyond the fact that we do not think of consumers as working, we do not imagine a market for consumers per se because they do not meet the criteria for a market. They are not seen as offering any goods or services and they are not paid, at least in a traditional sense, for what they do. Although we may not think of consumers in general as a market, it however makes sense to think of working consumers as being involved in a market as in many cases they *are* doing work that could be, and often was and is, performed by paid employees. In many cases working consumers are replacing paid workers and therefore should be seen in the same light, at least from a market point of

view. Some working consumers can also be seen as being 'paid', or economically rewarded, for their work. This is not the case in a bricks-and-mortar setting such as a supermarket where prices are the same whether one uses a traditional checkout lane or 'works' on a self-checkout line. It is nevertheless arguable that those who order books online from Amazon for example are 'paid' with lower prices. The same is true for the dwindling number of service stations that offer full-service and self-service lanes where those who pump their own gasoline get lower prices than those who do not.

The market for working consumers is very different than the general conventional market and also from the market for paid employees. These markets generally consist of two distinct roles, sellers and buyers (Granovetter 1995; Zelizer 1983; Ahrne et al. 2014). Those involved in markets understand their distinct roles and the expectations associated with them. They also understand the expectations associated with their relationship to one another. For example, in a labour market workers understand that they are sellers and their employers are buyers and they understand the expectations associated with those roles and relationships.

Although binary thinking is involved in both the general conventional market and, more specifically, the labour market, binary thinking is clearly rejected in work on the prosumer, including the working consumer and the consuming worker. With the concept of seller and buyer the working consumer and the consuming worker is almost always both. While they are buying goods and services, working consumers are, in a sense, selling their services to the supermarket or Amazon, albeit for the minimal return of a price lower than would have been the case if they did not 'work'. These entities in turn sell goods and services and are buyers of the services offered by working consumers which they 'pay' for in the form of lower prices.

The concepts of buyer and seller are simplistic binary perspectives which erroneously imply that the parties involved fully understand their roles as buyers and sellers. Working consumers do not fully understand that they are working or at least doing tasks similar to those performed by paid workers. They do not regard themselves as sellers nor do those who use their services actually buy them in the conventional sense. Buyers do not fully understand that they are buying the services of working consumers. If neither buyer nor seller fully understands what they are doing, can this therefore be regarded as a conventional market?

Within the dualistic perspective of seller-buyer, there is the concept of an economic exchange between them. In many cases involving the working consumer, where no such exchange occurs, this concept does not apply. By definition, working consumers work as they consume often doing so with no

economic advantage. Those who use the self-checkouts at the supermarket are an obvious example. Working consumers may read (consume) and write (produce) on another's Facebook page whilst receiving no economic result for themselves although Facebook increases its economic value each time this occurs. Facebook, Twitter, and others do not pay for the work done by prosumers; however, it uses the income from the burgeoning revenue derived mainly from the tasks performed by working consumers to increase its offers. Or put in another way, by posting and commenting, users produce most of the content on social platforms. This is what keeps other users active and leaving data footprints, which are profitable for platform providers. This revenue is not shared with the working consumers who are the main source of the big data that is the ultimate source of its the success of many social platforms.

While conventional workers in the kinds of businesses discussed here are relatively powerless (e.g. Amazon warehouse workers), working consumers are much more powerless as they are not fully aware of what they are doing. Working consumers also lack the resources of paid workers and those who use their services. There are laws, contracts, and Unions that strengthen the position of paid workers; however, these do not exist for working consumers. As they do not regard themselves as working, they do not demand such things. Working consumers are invisible to the Government, Management, and Labour Unions as they do not regard them as being engaged in labour. This means that these agencies are not available to give them the power accorded to paid workers. To summarise, the market for working consumers are not similar to a conventional labour market, because of the fluid roles of buyers and sellers, the lack of economic exchange and invisibility of their working rights.

Markets are usually seen as existing outside of organizations, but organizations can be seen as existing within markets *and* markets as existing within organizations although these binary perspectives are problematic. Working consumers are neither clearly in a market outside or inside an organization. For example, is there a market outside of Amazon for its working consumers? In theory, they can take their working consumption elsewhere, to a competing website or to a bricks-and-mortar superstore. However, these businesses struggle competing with the increasingly hegemonic Amazon, including its bricks-and-mortar entities. This serves to make Amazon a market in itself. In general, despite growing augmentation, the markets for working consumers remain separate from one another, especially in regard to digital and bricks-and-mortar markets. The conditions of working consumers, therefore, become less flexible, as they cannot choose the most favourable site for consumption, but increasingly have to accept rules of hegemonic organizations like Amazon.

If working consumers are not clearly in any market, are they part of organizations such as Amazon, Facebook, and Twitter? Although increasing integral and crucial to these organizations as both consumers and workers they are decidedly *not* part of them. They are not recognized as part or members of any organization, are not paid (at least directly) by them, have no workspace, and receive no benefits. Working consumers give an enormous gift to these businesses in that they consume what the business has to offer and do most of the work required to obtain the offering free of charge. Working consumers do all this and more while the entities that they work for owe them little and provide them with little or nothing. This constitutes an invisible exploitation of workers that seems more extensive than the one of industrial capitalism, since working consumers are left unaware of their labour and the connected rights they are entitled to.

Working consumers cannot be said to belong to either markets or organizations, but they are related to both. Furthermore, as working consumers do not view themselves as such, they do not see themselves as part of a market or as part of an organization such as Amazon. Organizations prefer this because it absolves them of any responsibility or obligation towards these consumers.

Markets and organizations have hierarchies which often overlap; the position of the working consumer in these hierarchies, like everything about them, is unclear and ambiguous. While working consumers are critical to the success of organizations such as Amazon, Amazon Go, Facebook, and Google, they do not occupy a clear position in their hierarchies. They are seen, and see themselves, as outsiders. They play a key role in making those hierarchies possible and economically successful but are not seen, and do not see themselves, as part of these hierarchies. They are ‘outsiders within’ (Collins 1986, 26).

As outsiders, they play little or no role in the creation and administration of the markets and organizations in which they operate. These are organized by other major players in the markets and those at or near the top in organizations. While they are essential to many markets and organizations they must function in accordance with ground rules created and managed by others.

It would seem that working consumers fit better with ‘switch-role’ rather than fixed-role markets although they do not so much switch roles, in for example from buyer to seller and back again, but rather hover between both. The switch-role idea, however, is undermined by its binary thinking. Worse is the notion of ‘fixed-role markets’ since working consumers *never* occupy a fixed role as they are never either buyers or sellers but to varying degrees always a combination of the two.

Markets typically operate within formal and informal rules; however, there seem to be few if any of any of these which involve the relationship between working consumers and the settings in which they work. Again, this is because consumers do not see themselves as working and the settings in which they work do not see them as workers. Given these vagaries little in the way of rules concerning working consumers has emerged. Rules that exist have been created one-sidedly by those who run the settings and are designed to work to their advantage. Working consumers have created very few rules as they are largely unaware of what it is they are doing. Their position on the periphery of everything, especially markets and organizations, gives them little power to do anything, especially create the rules by which they operate.

Those who occupy the role of working consumer are sometimes seen as being without qualities, with many different, loosely defined qualities (Musil 1930) or lacking in extrinsic relationships (Helmer 1970). Without intrinsic relationships people also lack 'qualities', depth, a centre. In terms of this discussion, as they do not regard themselves as working consumers and they have no extrinsic relationships, they are unable to see themselves as having qualities, at least in their role as working consumers. Instead, they rely on others, especially markets and organizations, to define them and their qualities, or lack thereof. As they are largely invisible to both markets and organizations their definitions are vague and ambiguous.

While buyers and sellers can be seen as having agency (being conscious and creative about their actions), can the same be said for working consumers? As they frequently combine elements of buyer and seller, there must be at least some agency involved in what they do. However, because working consumers do not regard themselves as buyers or sellers, let alone working consumers, can they be seen as being agents if they are not conscious of their role?

As working consumers by definition work, can they be seen as part of a labour market? A labour market is defined as an arena in which people offer their labour-power in exchange for wages, status, and other job-related rewards (Kalleberg and Sorenson 1979). Working consumers, however, do not receive wages or other economic or job-related rewards. This is partly due to the fact that they are not regarded as holding jobs and therefore not part of the labour market. Although they labour, working consumers are largely seen as consumers and not workers. Conscious of this Management relies increasingly on working consumers rather than paid employees as they are not seen as workers, receive no wages and, more broadly, because of the associated cost-savings. In fact, working consumers pay for the privilege of doing their work as they buy and use their own equipment as well as pay for the products and services available at the businesses they visit.

The labour market is particularly segmented and stratified. Some workers exist in a favourable labour market whereas many others are found in a less favourable or unfavourable segment, both of which have many gradations. The unemployed and underemployed are in a whole other segment and are even more disadvantaged. The growing number of gig workers (e.g. Uber drivers) may be thought of as belonging to yet another segment. Working consumers have never been thought of as labour, let alone in a labour segment, and would therefore need to be defined in yet another segment or category, one that has never been previously considered.

A primary favourable labour segment offers high wages, job stability, good working conditions and solid opportunities for advancement, whereas a secondary unfavourable segment the antitheses of these and other variables. There is great concern for the plight of those who are employed in a secondary segment. Working consumers would seem to occupy yet another, as yet uncategorized, segment which also has many even more unfavourable characteristics. In fact, it may even be less desirable than that of those who are poorly paid, in unstable positions, with poor working conditions, and little opportunity for advancement. In general working consumers are paid little or no wages, and there is little stability as they move from one consumption setting, either bricks-and-mortar or digital, to another. Another negative of their working conditions is that they often do low-skilled work, sometimes on a kind of assembly-line or at check-in/out counters or in the work they do online. Even though they work online, they are set apart from the online labour market, which includes those who labour for pennies on such systems as Amazon's Mechanical Turk. There is also no opportunity for advancement for working consumers either on or off-line. The whole idea of advancement for a working consumer is ludicrous—being 'promoted' to a first-rate user of Amazon.com or a champion user of the self-service checkout lane?

In bricks-and-mortar settings, paid employees and working consumers constitute a kind of internal labour market in which they are sometimes in competition with each other. Because they are not paid, preference goes to working consumers overpaid employees often costing them their jobs, pushing them into part-time jobs and thereby reducing their income. This cutting-edge approach may lead many profit-making organizations to shift as much work as possible from paid workers to working consumers as there are great economic savings to be had in relying on unpaid working consumers rather than paid workers.

Although working consumers may obtain status in a variety of ways by serving as preferred reviewers for Amazon or acquiring a large number of likes on Facebook, in the main they are performing thankless tasks which offer

little or nothing in terms of status. For example, they may get approbation from fellow consumers on full-service lines in supermarkets for working for nothing while they themselves are having these tasks done for them by paid cashiers and baggers.

Marx and Blauner outlined the concept of alienation in terms of powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation, and self-estrangement. Although working consumers are not as powerless as lower-tier paid employees they have little power in bricks-and-mortar settings for example, where they have no choice but to use self-service systems and are propelled along them in a kind of assembly-line fashion. Online the situation is even worse where working consumers operate in a mindless fashion in ways dictated by the system. It would be difficult to think of tasks like pumping one's own gas as meaningful. Working consumers also operate in isolation from other consumers who hold paid jobs and they may be seen as self-estranged as they mindlessly do a variety of tedious tasks both off and online. Although working consumers can be thought of as alienated they are not as alienated as the now disappearing assembly-line worker. In fact, they do not regard themselves as alienated because they do not see themselves as workers. Their problems are largely invisible, built into the structures within which they operate; they are not social-psychological.

Some working consumers do obtain a type of status, however, at the moment it is impossible to think of them as having jobs and being a part of the labour market although, as paid employment declines and working consumption increases, a future labour market may include working consumers. It is possible that in the future we will need to pay people to be working consumers giving them a variant of a guaranteed annual wage not only for the work they do but also in order to keep the economy operating at a high level. This may make the idea of a guaranteed annual wage more palatable than now because working consumers can be seen, in part, as working.

Currently, working consumers are not seen as part of the internal labour market of organizations such as Amazon as they are not internal to it. This results in alienation and the lack of favourable working conditions. Nevertheless, this development does not seem to get reversed, since organizations profit from the missing recognition of consuming work. However, they do labour that is very similar to that carried out by paid workers; therefore, this may need to be reconsidered in the future. Working consumption should be seen as labour and the working consumer regarded, at least in part, as internal to such organizations as they do an ever-increasing amount of the work that takes place in them requiring payment (at least in some sense) of a wage.

4.7 The Relationship between the Markets for Working Consumers and Paid Workers

4.7.1 Two Separate Peacefully Co-Existing Markets

While it is certainly the case that not all areas of the economy involve paid workers, working consumers, those shopping in bricks-and-mortar and on-line settings, are involved. It is not hard to think of paid workers as existing in a market, especially a labour market; however, it is unusual to think of consumers in that way. Once we combine 'working' with 'consumers' it is much easier to think of them as existing in a market.

The markets for paid workers and largely unpaid working consumers in these areas of the economy, although interlinked in various ways, can be seen as being separate markets existing alongside one another. While paid workers are typically seen as being involved in a labour market, consumers, whether or not they are regarded as working, are not. In fact, (working) consumers are seen as being served by those who exist in that labour market. Even though working consumers are not seen as functioning in a labour market, although this may change in the future, they may be viewed by others (e.g. sellers) as a market for their products and services. Working consumers can be seen as being in a separate labour market that peacefully co-exists with that of paid workers. Although working consumers are not necessarily conscious about their role in the market, paid workers know very well about the existence of working consumers and encourage them, on the one hand, because it means a significant reduction in work and on the other because it means a gain for the company and therefore a 'guarantee' of the conservation of their paid work itself.

Certainly, up to now, this has been the case. While all consumers must by necessity work it is only in recent years that structural changes have put them in conflict with one another. In the past, paid workers and working consumers were in a generally harmonious relationship with one another. Paid workers provided goods and services and working consumers took and paid for them. While these consumers carried out actions that could be considered as work, such as studying advertisements and price lists or transporting their purchases home, it was generally *not* work that overlapped with or threatened the work being done by paid employees.

Working consumers still engage in such actions today as they study advertisements and price lists although they are now more likely to be found online. In general working consumers continue to co-exist peacefully with paid workers; however, contemporary developments have brought the two

into conflict with one another. For example, in the past consumers had to trek to the restaurant to pick up their take-out orders and the work involved did not pose a threat to paid workers but with the advent of online sites as Grubhub and Uber Eats, working consumers who pick up their own food are doing the job of the delivery person free of charge meaning that they are in direct conflict with paid workers.

4.7.2 Two Markets in Conflict with One Another

The consumers of interest here are working whether or not they are being paid or otherwise economically rewarded for their work. They exist in a market and that market exists alongside that for paid workers. In some ways, these markets complement each other but of greater interest and importance is the degree to which they compete or conflict. The two-sided market notion became very popular in literature with the development of credit card payments, the videogame industry and especially the rise in social network platforms. These two types of agents (paid and unpaid workers) interact on pre-existing free platforms. Agents value positively the presence of those of the opposite type but may value negatively the presence of agents of their own type. Some new platforms introduce fees and subsidies so as to divert agents from pre-existing platforms and make a profit (Belleflamme and Tulemonde 2009). Broadly speaking a two-sided market is one in which two sets of agents interact through an intermediary or platform and the decisions of each set of agents affect the outcomes of the other. Two-sided markets often generate a situation where members of one side use a single platform and the other side uses multiple platforms (Armstrong 2006). Most products and services that have redefined the global business landscape in recent times tie together two distinct groups of users in a network. These users serve what can be called a two-sided market or two-sided network (Eisenmann et al. 2006). Platforms consist of two-sided networks which bring together the two groups of users seeking products and services. These platforms have infrastructures and rules that facilitate the transactions of both groups where costs and revenues are generated by both sides (Eisenmann 2007). The market for working consumers constitutes an alternative to and can be in conflict with the market for paid employees, or at least to the positions of some of those who operate within it. This view can be questioned, however, because it operates with the kind of binary perspective that has already been critiqued on several occasions here.

4.7.3 Market Fusion

As previously mentioned, the paid worker and consuming worker markets operate with a strong binary perspective; however, if we look at this issue from the point of view of a more integrative approach which sees the fusion of producer and consumer in the prosumer, we can begin to regard paid workers and working consumers as existing in a single market. This has powerful implications for both and their relationship to one another. In fact, although unknowingly, working consumers and paid workers exist in and will increasingly constitute a single market in which they will become ever more interchangeable. The rise of platform capitalism is enabling a new set of alternative forms of enterprise. In the absence of guiding social principles to balance progress and profit, these new enterprises are unlikely to fill the gap in social needs left by the collapse of corporations. So far, creative destruction has been big on destruction but not so great on creation, at least as far as jobs and social welfare are concerned (Davis and Shibulal 2018). We now live in the midst of a new and particularly powerful phase of creative destruction, one that involves rapid evolution of digital technology, swift proliferation of new digitally-based organizations, and the destruction of various business sectors and their enterprises rooted in the material world. New technologies are at the base of many economic changes brought into existence and deployed by capitalist enterprises and entrepreneurs. As a result of these changes, new economic forms (i.e., home or ride-sharing) are pitted against older forms (hotel chains, taxicabs) with the increasing possibility that the new forms will win out, changing or obliterating the older alternatives (Ritzer and Degli Esposti 2020). Moreover, although creative destruction should involve creative creation, from the moment in which transformations in the market take place at an uncontrolled speed, creative creation lags behind, leaving as a consequence a lake of workers and consumers who must rediscover their role within of the market. Creative destruction is not a minor, quantitative or incremental change but involves major, qualitative, and revolutionary changes.

Market fusion may involve the creation of non-proprietary, open-source software platforms that can be used to support local cooperatives in which the role of the working consumer is essential. These operating systems are relatively cheap and efficient and can be applied quite broadly benefiting those that need to accomplish tasks cost-effectively and on a grand scale.

4.8 Conclusion

The importance of theorizing the working consumer has been underlined, as it is beginning to form a significant role in contemporary production. The concept is rather unknown in academic literature and is dominated by a questionable binary thinking of the prosumer as a generalized term. It seems particularly important to explore the invisible exploitation of working consumers, since companies do not owe them any long-term obligations, such as providing health insurance, decent wage, or retirement plans. This is naturally beneficial to companies' reduction in costs but is problematic for consumers who remain unaware of their work and its connected rights.

Moreover, we investigated whether there exists a market for working consumers, since they are replacing paid workers and therefore could be seen in the same light from a market point of view. Working consumers cannot be considered to be a part of a traditional labour market, with its fluid roles of buyers and sellers, the lack of economic exchange and invisibility of working rights. They are neither seen as internal to organizations, where they are excluded from established hierarchies and not given any status or rights. As there are no prospects for advancement or meaningfulness, working consumers will feel alienated from their tasks. Nevertheless, there is a purpose of relating a market of working consumers to one of paid workers, as it enables an understanding of future labour. The two markets can be perceived have separate markets, that has been coexisting rather peacefully, but now are increasingly conflicting, as they contain similar tasks. But through an integrative perspective, we can understand both actors in a single market, where they will become even more interchangeable than they are now.

There are major changes unfolding in the labour market, where the consumer is working even more than was true historically. Maybe their tasks will be paid in some sense in the future. But as this chapter has suggested, it will become crucial to fill the social gaps created by the development, that is mainly pushed forward by reduction in labour costs rather than fairer conditions.

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