

## Chapter 12

# Innovative Role of Users Within Digital Economy: The Case of Information/Knowledge Flows at Social and Semantic Networks (Web 2.0/3.0)

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### ABSTRACT

*Contemporary economic and financial crisis is closely associated with social innovation. This process profoundly influences cyberspace's phenomena within our globalized communications paradigm. The correspondent debate on the articulation of crisis and innovation was reconceptualized by Marx, Nietzsche, Sombart, Schumpeter, David Harvey, etc. However, Manuel Castells elaborated an economic but also communicational explanation, which seems to us closer to the current crisis. Castells uses the notion of "space of flows" created and shared by globalized capitalism, across information and communication networks at cyberspace. The aim of this chapter is to reflect on "information and knowledge flows" in the present crisis conjuncture. For example, within Facebook content privacy is being debated and even engenders reluctance on user fidelity. In fact, social networks shouldn't deliver just information flows but also knowledge flows, which may become central means of production/consumption.*

### INTRODUCTION

Within contemporaneity, knowledge flows sometimes complement or complete information flows. Other times though, knowledge competes with information, replacing or even destroying it, to produce something else, in what concerns content useful for economic, social and cultural activities.

In order to clarify such issues, this text will structure content through several questions and hypotheses, and by identifying subsisting limitations as well as clues for future debates and studies.

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## **A BACKGROUND: CREATIVE DESTRUCTION AND INNOVATION**

The present economic/financial global crisis is deeply articulated with *social innovation*.

One mode of addressing this problematic is to deconstruct and reconstruct this concept 'social innovation'. First of all, it should be differentiated from the insufficient notion 'innovation', even if this last term already means an application of creativity to society. However, 'social innovation' is a richer term, as it allows: (a) to precise the multiple instances of newness within civil society, and even within the State; (b) to distinguish between: on one hand, *innovation social means* (i.e. ways of doing original and useful things) such as cultural creativity and open source methods; and, on the other hand, *innovation social aims*, as the enhancement of citizenship and cultural literacy.

Various connotations or pioneer ideas around the connection between economic crises and social innovation can be found in authors as the following ones: Benjamin Franklin on changes in communities (1996); Robert Owen (1995) and utopian socialism; Karl Marx (1988) about economic crises and socio-political transformations; Joseph Schumpeter (2009) reflecting on creative destruction, a concept derived from Marx and Sombart contributions); and, more recently, in Akhter Khan (2005) referring bottom up community development), Muhamad Yunus (suggesting microcredit for innovators). Other important research on social innovation was developed within the fields of territorial/regional development (Frank Moulaert, 2010), solidarity and social economy (Jean-Louis Laville, 2010), and some other essays about governance relations, cooperation, and cultural difference. The idea of creative destruction was recently applied as well to the restructuring of the city (Page, 2001), globalized culture (Cowen, 2004), modernist theatre (Ackerman, 2007), American literature (Fisher, 2000), and music industry (Dodge, 2006).

However, Manuel Castells elaborated an explanation that seems closer to the actual crisis, which is economic but also communicative. Castells (2009) introduces the notion of a 'network society', founded on a 'space of flows' created by globalised capitalism across information and communication networks at cyberspace, namely at webs where corporations, universities and other institutions/organizations implement: production, marketing and consumer driven strategies that need a constant innovation, and the respective communication and diffusion. Other studies reflect on the contemporary mass media communication paradigm and cyberspace processes (Katz, 2002).

Considering such theoretical context, this paper reflects on the *information / knowledge flow crisis* that it is observable specially within digital social networks, like *Facebook, Twitter, etc.*, where e.g. the question of content privacy is presently being debated, and even engenders reluctance to fidelity in which regards the very paradigm of digital social webs. To understand this phenomenon, we may note that, during the last decades, information became a central means of production, and recently the same has become true for knowledge. In this context, *social innovation within global communicative networks involves not just informational flows, but more and more knowledge flows*. These two economic and social assets may complement and complete each other, or compete between them. The result is often the enhancing or the devaluating and even the destruction of raw information flows, and their replacing by knowledge flows richer in meaning. Such creative destruction phenomenon is not yet very clear within digital social networks (the *Social Web* or Web 2.0), but it is more visible inside Web 3.0 (the so-called *Social Semantic Web*). The main difference between these 2 paradigms of cyberspace flows is that Web 3.0 sites (Wikipedia, Freebase, etc.) often transform raw information into commented or debated knowledge, via a more profound commitment than it happens within Facebook and other similar social networks, in what regards the elucidation of the implicit meaning circulating within shared messages. In particular, social innovation may be based on artistic creation and on scientific invention, and combine both these knowledge strategies into a specific practical tactic or activity within the social fabric.

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