

### **Wikinomics: How mass collaboration changes everything**

*Don Tapscott & Anthony D. Williams*

Penguin, New York, 2006 \$25.95 (hard), pp. 320

The book at hand is the first one that systematically addresses the economy of the contemporary Internet, recently transformed from a medium that is predominantly information oriented toward a medium that is increasingly used for communication and community building. In new media research, this transformation has been labeled with categories like Web 2.0 and Social Software. Given the circumstances, it is likely that this transformation will have an impact on the work of researchers in the field of media and communication studies.

Tapscott and Williams argue that the emergence of social software (they speak of the “new Web”) has brought about a potential for an economy that is based on mass collaboration. They term the resulting economy “wikinomics.” The task of the book is to show that and how mass collaboration does not reduce, but can enhance, profitability. Wiki-

nomics would be based on four principles: openness (of standards and external involvement), peer production, sharing, and acting globally (pp. 20–30).

Tapscott and Williams introduce seven wikinomics business models (peer pioneers, ideagoras, prosumers, new Alexandrians, platforms for participation, global plant floor, and wiki workplace). These would-be new models of competition all share one element:

These new forms of peer production enable firms to harvest external knowledge, resources, and scale that was previously impossible. Whether your business is closer to Boeing or P&G, or more like YouTube or flickr, there are vast pools of external talent that you can tap with the right approach. Companies that adopt these models can drive important changes in their industries and rewrite the rules of competition. (269–270)

Most of Tapscott’s and Williams’ Web 2.0 strategies are based on the cost-cutting effects of the global outsourcing of labor, supported by the Internet. In reality, this strategy has in the form of new self-employment already produced precarious forms of flexibility with more risks. It has been accompanied by less social security and less permanent and secure employment. The most probable result of an economy based on wikinomics will be an increase in precarious and unpaid labor that benefits certain companies that exploit unpaid labor and pay increasingly more people for only a strictly limited time for specific tasks. This could result in an increase of the income gap with corporate gains on top and flex-workers, temporary workers, and the unemployed at the bottom.

*Wikinomics* shows how mass collaboration and digital gifts can be subsumed under capitalist logic. Commercial Web 2.0 applications are typically free for users; they generate profit by gaining as many users as possible and selling advertisement space to third parties and additional services to users (Fuchs, 2008). The more users, the more

profit. The more services are offered for free, the more profit can be generated. The contemporary result of wikinomics is not the emergence of “a new economic democracy ... in which we all have a lead role” (p. 15), as claimed by Tapscott and Williams, but a - subtly operating coercive and highly exploitative capitalist economy that tries to reduce labor and other investment costs by the global dynamic outsourcing of labor to Internet users, competitors, and subcontractors with the help of Web 2.0.

Because it lacks grounding in scientific discourse and is extremely sloppy in dealing with scientific sources and quotations, *Wikinomics* is not a scientific monograph but more a guide for business leaders. Nonetheless, it is worth reading for those who want to observe how affirmative thinking and uncritical ideology operate within the discourse on Web 2.0.

There is an important truth in the work of Brecht (1932/1964), who wrote that the usage of the media in the interest not of the few, but of all, is unfeasible in the capitalist social order. Web 2.0 and *Wikinomics* show that networked communication in a capitalist order serves the economic interests of the few.

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## References

- Brecht, B. (1932/1964). The radio as an apparatus of communications. In J. Willett (Ed.), *Brecht on theater* (pp. 51–53). New York: Hill and Wang.
- Fuchs, C. (2008). *Internet and society: Social theory in the information age*. New York: Routledge.