



Qualman, Eric. (2009) Socialnomics: how social media transforms the way we live and do business. John Wiley & Sons, New Jersey

Review

Monica Costache¹

At the time when this review was written the on line search results for the following key words and associations were these : “carti marketing internet” : 609.000 results; “carti marketing online” : 470.000 results; “internet marketing” : 154 million results; “marketing online” : 267 million results. These figures may very well be normal for the online space but when they are to be used by content value the gift of information becomes a burden.

To shed new light on Internet survival techniques, enter Eric Qualman, author of “Socialnomics: how social media transforms the way we live and do business” . Never mind the awkward name, if you are wondering if this book can help you better navigate through the apocalyptic wave of information heading your way every second of your on line life the answer is affirmative. The initial empathy for the Internet user faced with a massive amount of info is continued by an extensive and detailed description of a great mechanism that can help everyone make sense of their online lives. That mechanism is social media.

Throughout the book we learn what social media is, how does it work, what are its ups and downs and, most importantly, how do we make the best of it. For those who take on the task of reading the eight chapters of this book, time will not seem wasted. Answers, explanations , information and connections make this work easy to read and relate to. It is so easy to navigate that one wonders why the author opted for a paper version published at John Wiley & Sons , given his preference for the online environment. Whatever the reasons may be – a wish to relate to an off-line-book-reading

¹Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, University of Bucharest, costache.monica@gmail.com

audience, creating the foundation for a personal blog or making a statement via the Paper Back Robin Hood charity - the very fact that we question the reason for a book being published is evidence that modes of acquiring and sharing information have shifted dramatically.

The more traditional step-by-step, page-by-page approach to the 2009 New Jersey edition can be very well complemented by a rather goal-oriented, key-word focused reading. The structure of the book allows for both: a short presentation of each chapter in the Contents section stands for a quick review complete with guidelines and the actual text provides subtle references to important issues discussed on previous pages. Thus, the book loses nothing on cohesion even if one jumps from "World of mouth goes world of mouth" to "Death of social Schizofrenia" rather than going from page xiii to page 265.

My personal journey began with chapter 8: "Next steps for Companies and The "Glass House Generation". I was curious to find whether I belong to the above mentioned cohort or not. The image of a future when social media is so powerful that it reconfigures work and personal relationships lead me to chapter 4: "Obama's success Driven by Social Media". Is on line networking so powerful even as we speak? Yes it is. And taking care of that personal "social graph" is the best key to success one can hope for. So says Obama's outstanding campaign results.

What about the not-so-famous-people? They should read chapter 5: "I care more about what my neighbour thinks than what Google thinks". Qualman says it best when he remarks on this simple truth: "We've always valued word of mouth; social media puts it on steroids by allowing you to search for it". Notice the term "word of mouth". It is also part of the first chapter's name: "Word of mouth goes world of mouth". If it is "out there", somewhere on the Internet, then someone, somehow, sometime next day, or next year for that matter, will find it. Or it will find him/her. Then, to be sure, with information in hand, that someone will enter in share mode. Via on line or off line, information flows make the world as transparent as a soap bubble. Eventually, everybody will know. There is no place for those who take on the proverbial "head in the sand" attitude.

Chapter 6: "Death of social schizofrenia" goes even further and questions the possibility for people or companies to still have distinct personas performing at the same time. Choosing to put forward the more playful and daring persona and constantly updating information can result, as it often does, in a "braggadocian behaviour" friends and colleagues may not be so happy to hear about. In fact, they will be downright depressed if your life seems "so much cooler" than theirs. The extent to which bragging about facts of life can have a positive effect for society in general is discussed in chapter 3: "Social media= Braggadocian Behaviour". The opposite behavior is also an online favorite. Preventive behavior can be a desired feature to acquire both in the online and off line environment. Since "what happens in Vegas stays on Youtube" people will think twice until they engage in activities that could offend other people's social sensibilities.

The general rule would be to live your life "like your mother was watching". Read all about how such a thing could be happening right now in chapter 2 "Social media= Preventive behaviour". In the not so distant future companies will face a dilemma of

managing the "preventive" principle. Keeping a low-profile may seem like the best strategy to avoid PR issues but, in the long run, it is detrimental both for business and sales. Nobody likes a weak link in their network. If you have nothing to say to anyone why bother showing up on line? Chapter 7 "Winners and losers in a 140- Character world" shows the way to change into a "winner" while avoiding the "loser" behaviour.

If you have read this far maybe you are wondering if this paper is an academic review or part of a general advertising campaign.

It is an honest question and it deserves an honest answer. I do admit to a certain style osmosis after reading this book and I am aware of the general conventions when writing for an academic journal. However, bending these rules is not without reason. In fact I can state two reasons.

The first would be the fact that this is not your normal academic book. It is not a manual to teach students by. It has nothing on social methodology and the ease with one reads it can be attributed to the replacement between stiffness of style -sometimes attributed to the intellectual's elite expression of thought - and playful connections complementing an interesting logic. Writing a review about such a book can not be "all work and no fun". However, no matter if the reading experience is an exciting one, there are some red flags to mention.

The first reaction when reading the title was somewhat negative. I was expecting a social analysis of the Internet era and, from the first page, "Socialnomics" seemed to be out of touch with reality. Economy has always been embedded into the social. Is it really necessary to emphasize the shift from (simple) economy to "people driven economy". Is there no respect for context anymore? A more appropriate relationship between title and content seemed "medianomics" or "new media nomics" (to distinguish from just "media" roughly made up by newspapers and televisions). Maybe, if we consider that "new media" is "social media" then the title could be accepted as appropriate.

As I mentioned earlier, there is a lack of sociological methodology and references. No word on Mark Granoveter's breaking work: the concepts of "social graph" and "social networks" are taken for granted. The same applies for Malcolm Gladwell's "law of the few". Eric Qualman supposes that since everybody is online the differences won't matter. In fact, the winners of the 140 character world share similarities with the connector type described by Gladwell. I wonder how many people will see that connection?

Another issue not fully addressed is the stability of "socialnomics" theory. True, the trend is to replace newspapers, books and other "traditional" media by social media communication but is there really no stopping it? Are we to live more online than offline? How does that help society at large? If ever there was an Achille's foot for a book then this would be it for Socialnomics: What happens if everyone goes offline? There is a part of the book inquiring about the possibility of the advertising network on the Internet to collapse. However, no extension to the general interconnection network is made. The only constant thing is change and someone writing about the ever evolving Internet environment should at least consider an alternative version. Is a global interconnected

web the planet's best asset or it's greatest weakness? Why is there no word on this matter?

The good news is that books are not supposed to be "all rounded". Where one writer fails to see a point there is creative freedom for another to express an alternative position. Is this book rounded enough to write a paper about it ? The answer is simple: yes. More than that, I believe this book will make history. It's that important.

Personally , I believe it will have the same impact on the social sciences as George Ritzer's *McDonaldization of Society*. In fact, if all things go according to the best socialnomics scenario, this book may very well be considered a herald of a new society that George Ritzer declares to be in favor of: "I'd like to see a society in which people are free to be creative, rather than having their creativity constrained or eliminated." (<http://www.georgeritzer.com/>)

With this in mind I return to the second reason mentioned above: writing style .By using such an colloquial / "baba sociology" manner I am trying to incorporate and underline the importance of the paradigmatic shift this book introduces.

The time of the "one-to-many" style of presentation and business is over. If you have a message for the world the best thing to do is come down from the ivory tower and speak in a manner that the audience can relate to. The most successful strategy is to incorporate as many connections as possible in the content to be released. Someone, somehow will find a way to relate to it. Text developers must find better ways to speak to the "reader" turned "audience". For the market economy ,just like in *The Wizard of Oz*, the invisible hand of the market is no longer invisible. Competition, self-interest, supply and demand are no longer subjected to lucky guesses. There are out there, broadcasting live on YouTube.All you have to do is tune in.

The message Eric Qualman is sending via this book is : to survive in the new 140 character world one does not need to forget everything. Quite the opposite : one needs to remember. Socialnomics may seem like an incredible jump into the future but is nothing more than a bit of history repeating. Learning the lessons of Dale Carnegie on making friends and influencing people is far more productive today than following the David Ogilvy approach to sales and customers. Your potential clients no longer want to be told what and where to buy. Surprisingly, associating self with brand has become a source of self enhancement and personal satisfaction. Status enhancement by use of material belongings is no longer limited to top brand cars and millionaires. It goes global as the Internet becomes more unified.

As a conclusion, here are three categories I believe will benefit the most from this book. To the marketer/entrepreneurs : here is a book to help you navigate and learn the rules of marketing self and company. To the not-so-economically-inclined: read this book and see what the world is coming to. To the sociology/anthropology student : check the pages for clues to further research.