

Is there anybody out there? Social Media as a new social fetish

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**...an empirically based
theoretical reflection on
the participative subject**

1. Context
2. Research Questions
3. Theoretical Reflections
4. Methodological Design
5. Results
6. Conclusions

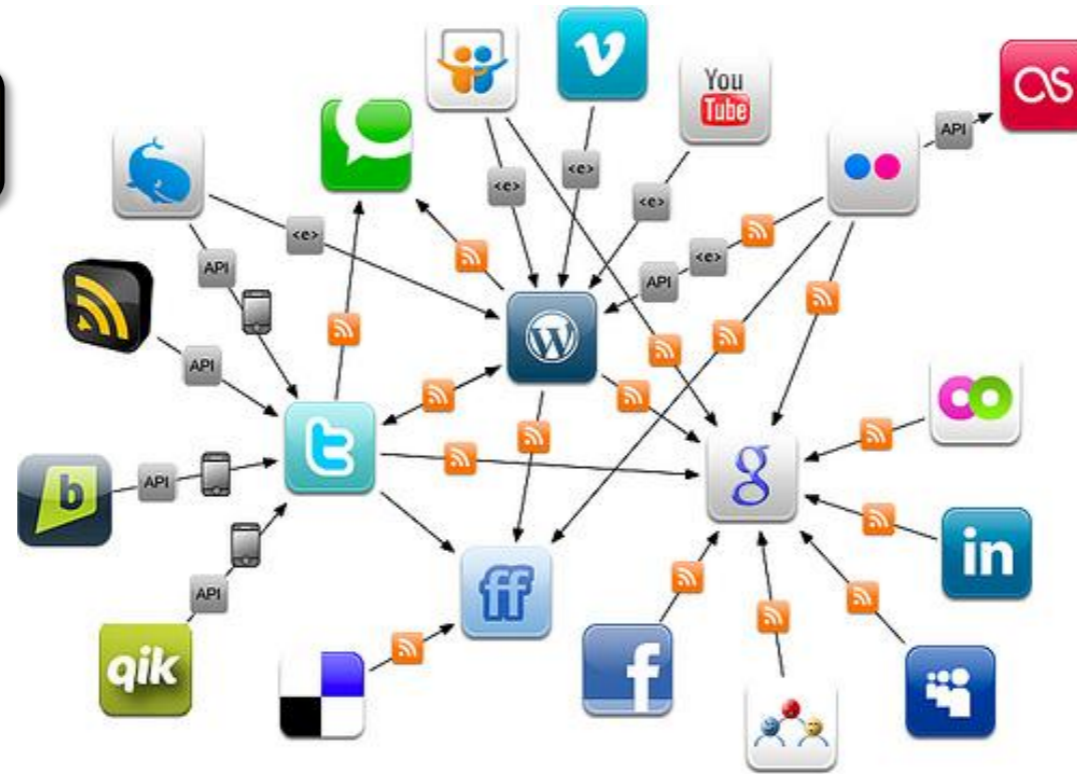
1. Context

democracy

participation

empowerment

well-being



Anne Helmond, May 2009

sociability

social capital

2. Research Question

- How do users deal with Social Media?
 - ✓ Do they become more (inter)active Web-users?
 - ✓ Or might they even become interpassive users?

3. Theoretical context



- Agency of Social Media-user as a key concept in hypermodern world
- “Social Entertainment Age” (globalwebindex 2011)
- “We are the Network – not the Creator” (globalwebindex 2011)

3. Theoretical Context

Interactivity

An alternating process with reciprocal relationships

- Key dimension of Social Media

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Interactivity

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- Key dimension of Social Media

Interpassivity

The consensual transfer of activity or emotion onto another being or object, who consequently 'acts' in one's place.

- A new dimension of Social Media?

3. Example for Interpassivity



Tibetan Prayer Wheel

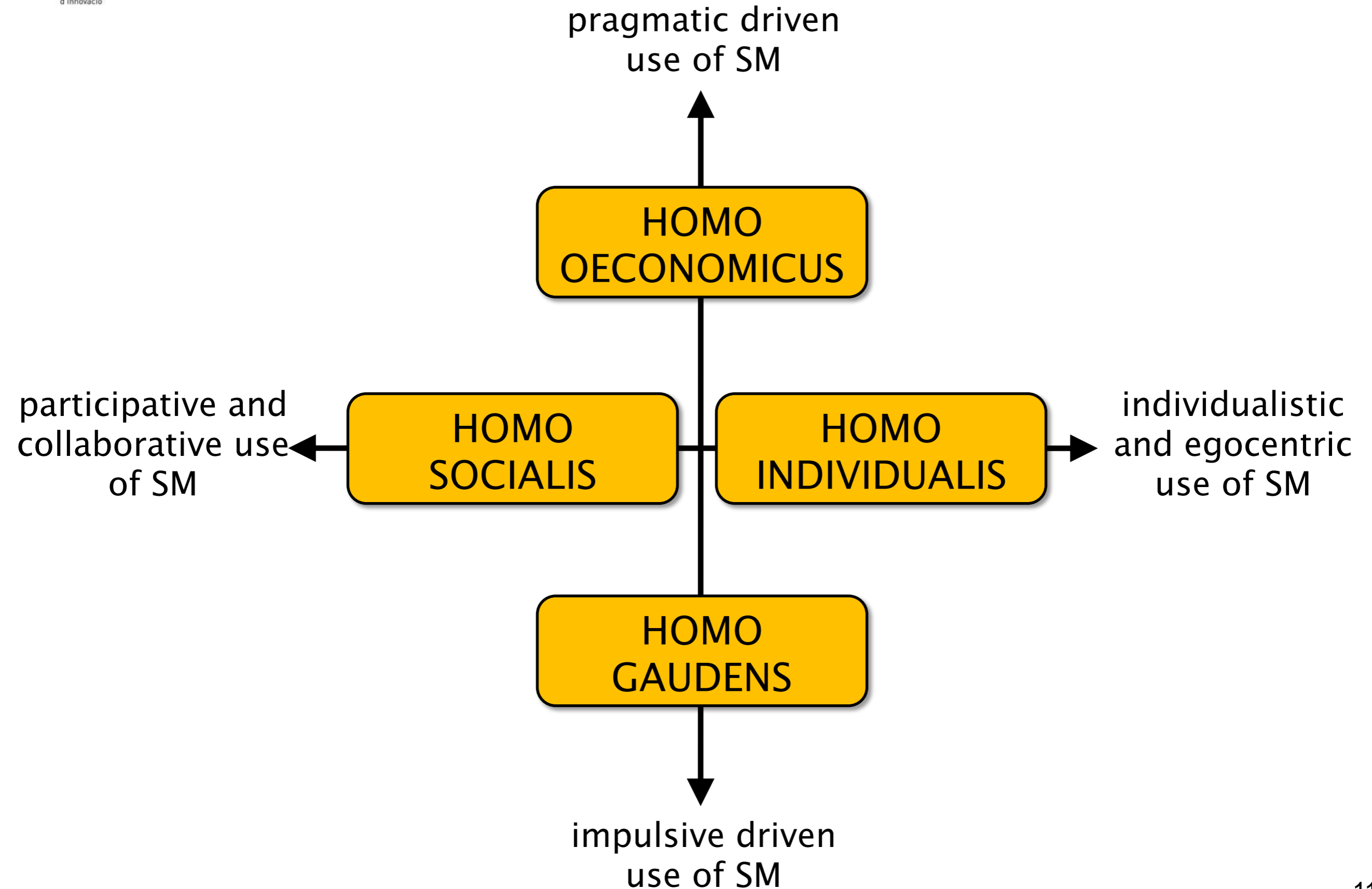
4. Methodological Design



Approach:

- **Qualitative**
 - ✓ Sample: 6 focus groups (total of 41 participants)
- **Grounded Theory-based**
 - ✓ Extraction of code-trees and categories following the paradigmatic scheme proposed by Strauss and Corbin

5. Results



5. Results

HOMO
OECONOMICUS

HOMO OECONOMICUS

Examples

- RSS-feed as fetish
- Practice of job-seeking



5. Results

HOMO GAUDENS

HOMO GAUDENS



Example

- Taking, sharing, consuming and memorizing of photographs



HOMO INDIVIDUALIS



5. Results

HOMO INDIVIDUALIS

Examples

- Gossiping
- “Trawom” – travelling without moving

HOMO SOCIALIS



5. Results

HOMO SOCIALIS

Examples

- Retweeting the 'Spanish revolution'

6. Conclusions

- **The interpassive user**

- ✓ Use of Social Media as a commodity: Users depose their belief onto Other(s). Pressing the 'I like' button makes them feel like a believer or activist.
- ✓ Being (inter)passive through Other(s): Enjoying (or suffering) the 'entertainment' of Other(s) through pure consumption, delegating their own enjoyment.



6. Conclusions

- **Paradox of the so-called attention industry:**
 - ✓ Living in the most (inter)connected, social and interactive era ever known to man.
 - ✓ Most of this attention is only experienced interpassively, creating fetishes, fake realities and the illusion of connectedness and attention.

THANK YOU!

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