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Cooking and Crafting in a Digital Economy: The Effects of Online Commodification on Leisure Activities

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Abstract:

Growing numbers of people are commodifying their leisure activities on the Internet. This article's mixed-method study of French food bloggers and Etsy handicrafters focuses on the overflow of digital market work into amateurs' domestic lives. Building on the sociology of 'serious leisure', the study examines the novelty of such social phenomenon. We show that traditional serious leisure activities already revealed comparable forms of overflow and similar motives for consent to such spillover effects. However, the study also brings to light three specific effects of online commodification on leisure activities: the new forms of extra work in which amateurs are involved, the transformation of the leisure activity, and the shortening of amateurs' careers.

Keywords: commodification, cooking, crafting, digital work, leisure activity, market work, overflow.

Introduction

Growing numbers of people are commodifying their leisure activities on the Internet. This marketisation of everyday life has been driven by the development of digital technologies, the global economic crisis and the massive propagation of post-Fordist values ('Be an entrepreneur', 'Be creative', etc.) (Adkins and Dever, 2016). The trend has also been amplified by the Covid-19 pandemic. In this article, we analyse the social ramifications of the online commodification of cultural hobbies. How does this online commodification change the organisation of domestic life and the leisure activity itself? We conceptualise as 'overflow' the transformation of amateurs' domestic lives and leisure activities as a result of digital commodification. We argue that digital commodification is not a contained activity conducted in addition to the straightforward leisure activity. Far from it, digital commodification impacts on every aspect of social life (especially family, leisure and physiological time). The spillover effect of leisure activities on other spheres of life has already been documented by the sociology of leisure, and especially the sociology of 'serious leisure' (Stebbins, 1992). However, this article looks into whether digital commodification produces specific forms of overflow, compared with those generated by the leisure activity itself.

Many aspects of the commodification of leisure activities on the Internet have been analysed. Studies have mushroomed on bloggers (Duffy, 2017; Mäkinen, 2020), vloggers (Ashton and Patel, 2018), influencers (Lehto, 2021), Instagrammers (Duffy and Sawey, 2021; Van Driel and Dumitrica, 2021), Twitch streamers (Partin, 2020) and YouTubers (Christin and Lewis, 2021), but also on e-commerce platform sellers (Aspers and Darr, 2022). This growing literature reveals the different forms of digital work performed by ordinary people who are eager to commodify their hobby, such as cookery (Luckman and Phillipov, 2020), crafts (Luckman and Andrew, 2020), lifestyle (Abidin, 2016), music (Baym, 2014) and gaming (Lee and Lin, 2011). Some studies highlight the knock-on effect of digital devices (Christin, 2020;

Ens and Márton, 2021), which can be interpreted as a kind of overflow in our conceptual framework. Our research shows that a stronger commitment to digital commodification is not only due to this digital influence, but also to the specific requirements of ‘market work’ (adapting to demand, competition, etc.). Indeed, digital commodification demands intensive ‘market work’ (Cochoy and Dubuisson-Quellier, 2013). Both digital and analogue, this market work resembles professional marketers’ work, covering designing, pricing, advertising, communicating and all the activities aimed at selling output. This article shows that market work tends to creep into all aspects of amateurs’ everyday lives.

The analysis is based on two case studies: the commodification of influence by food bloggers and the commodification of handicrafts on the digital platform Etsy. For food bloggers, commodification is an indirect output of the online publication of recipes associated with blog audience figures. Given that food bloggers are seen as influencers in their community, brands contact them to purchase advertising space and offer them free products to test along with sponsored posts and work opportunities. Etsy crafters’ commodification is more direct: they sell handmade items such as jewellery, clothes and decorative items on the Etsy.com digital marketplace. After creating a shop on Etsy, corresponding to a webpage, crafters display photographs and descriptions of their items for sale, and the platform collects a €0.18 listing fee and a 6.5% transaction fee. Unlike most media studies, we focus on these two case studies of less professionalised sellers who represent the vast majority of digital content creators and cultural makers. These mere amateurs enjoy their leisure activity, but say they do not wish to make a living from it, unlike professionals who deliberately set out to build a business from their passion. To capture the overflow of digital market work on amateurs’ everyday lives and the reasons why they accept that overflow, we use an original mixed method entailing web scraping in particular. Our findings show that online commodification is one of the ways to shift a hobby to the status of serious leisure. The overflow generated by such

commodification is comparable with the overflow characteristic of traditional serious leisure, albeit with a few differences (regarding extra work, the changing nature of the leisure activity and shorter amateur careers). The article thus aims to assess the novel nature of the social dynamics found.

Literature Review

The sociology of leisure activities has documented the growing commitment of amateurs to their leisure activities over time and the impacts of this commitment on other areas of their lives. Digital and media studies, along with economic sociology, provide alternative explanations for this increasing dedication, often framing it as 'labour'. Our purpose is to merge these different streams of literature to analyse the combined effects of digitalisation and commodification on leisure activities.

Sociology of Leisure: Commitments and Conflicts

The association of leisure with commitment (Shamir, 1988) and labour (Rojek, 2009) is counterintuitive at first glance. Leisure has often been seen as a relatively self-determined non-work activity (Roberts, 1978) associated with freedom (Neulinger, 1974) and regarded as the negation of routine (Dumazedier, 1967). One of the contributions of the more recent sociology of leisure is precisely to lay the emphasis on the commitment required by 'serious leisure' (Stebbins, 1992). Some leisure activities are taken so seriously by their practitioners that they become almost indistinguishable from professions. Consequently, Stebbins states that we cannot conceptualise leisure and work as two separate activities. Different criteria define 'serious leisure': adoption of professional quality standards; development of technical skills; knowledge and experience; and fulfilment and personal benefits (either monetary or symbolic). As such, Tomlinson (1993) considers that such forms of leisure participation constitute a 'culture of commitment' based on the devotee's dedication. The growing commitment to the

leisure activity in terms of time, but also money and identity (Gillespie *et al.*, 2022), is thus attributable to ‘passion’ which can itself be ‘defined as strong inclination towards an activity that people like, that they find important, and in which they invest time and energy’ (Cutolo and Grimaldi, 2023, p. 2).

Leisure sociologists show that the growing commitment to a leisure activity can affect other spheres of life (Stebbins, 1979). This commitment is based on such high behavioural expectations that it can lead to ‘clashes’ with other expectations from ‘the ‘real world’ of work, family, religion, and other social institutions’ (Gillespie *et al.*, 2022, p. 285). The more common conflicts concern family members (Dumazedier, 1967; Shamir, 1988) due to contamination of the domestic sphere by the leisure activity (Julhe, 2011). This phenomenon is what we call ‘overflow’. Our purpose in this article is to understand the impact of the digitalisation and commodification of leisure activities on this social mechanism.

Digital and Media Studies: Incentives to Continue and Digital Work

Recent research in digital and media studies has put forward another explanation for the growing commitment of hobbyists over time when their hobby is digital.

First, this literature shows the particular role played by digital technologies and metrics (Christin, 2020). Socio-technical devices such as forums, comments, likes and thumbs-up emojis give people the incentive to spend more and more time practising the online leisure activity (Ashton and Patel, 2018).

Second, the quest for visibility on digital platforms and social media also drives a growing commitment to the online leisure activity. The coercive pressures exerted by algorithmic management systems exhort people to compete for visibility on the Internet (Wood *et al.*, 2019). Becoming or remaining visible online demands a constant and growing flow of ‘work’ (Ens and Márton, 2021): responding to comments (Ashton and Patel, 2018), click-working (Ens

and Márton, 2021), creating storytelling (Singer, 2019) and crafting an ‘authentic’ persona (Van Driel and Dumitrica, 2021) through ‘personal branding’ (Vallas and Christin, 2018; Wee and Brooks, 2010) and ‘self-commodification’ (Duffy *et al.*, 2021). More generally, this involves engaging in ‘relational labour’ (Baym, 2014). In media studies, the growing commitment to one’s online activity is conceptualised as ‘digital work’ and even though the activities studied are primarily leisure activities, the vocabulary of work is used. Digital work encompasses ‘creative work’ (Abidin, 2016), ‘immaterial labour’ (Gill and Pratt, 2008), ‘affective and emotional labour’ (Lehto, 2021), ‘hope labour’ (Kuhn and Corrigan, 2013) and ‘aspirational labour’ (Duffy, 2017). Bloggers, influencers and content creators engage in ‘labour-intensive processes of production and promotion’ (Duffy and Sawey, 2021, p. 3). Whereas early articles focused on free (albeit value-producing) contributions (Kuhn and Corrigan, 2013), the most recent studies consider growing monetisation by content creators, conceptualising it as ‘professionalisation’ (Mäkinen, 2020).

To sum up, digital and media studies show that people who engage in online leisure activities tend to make an increasing investment conceptualised as digital work. Given that this literature adopts a very broad conception of work taking in activities carried out in the context of leisure, the issue of overflow and, more generally, the articulation between time spent on leisure and the rest of social life is not addressed.

Economic Sociology: From Digital Work to Market Work

The rise of digital platforms encourages the commodification of leisure activities. As indicated by the title of an article by Cutolo and Grimaldi (2023), ‘Engaging with digital platforms can turn leisure passion into entrepreneurial aspirations.’ Such changes add market work to digital work as well as to the practice of the activity itself. This could provide another explanation for the growing commitment of digital hobbyists over time. The concept of ‘market

work' (Cochoy and Dubuisson-Quellier, 2013) or 'marketing work' (Zwick and Cayla, 2011) has emerged in recent years in the field of economic sociology to study marketing professionals (community managers, designers, merchandisers, public relations officers, etc.). The basic idea is that being a market actor implies specific work. This is first conceptualised to understand the work performed by entrepreneurs and market actors in offline activities. Market work is 'work on the market' whose purpose is 'to construct it, move it, organise it, manage and control it' (Cochoy and Dubuisson-Quellier, 2013, p. 4). This includes market positioning, building a brand, promoting products, managing interactions with clients, setting prices, knowledge of trade legislation, and so forth.

Very few studies have focused on the marketisation of leisure activities (Naulin and Jourdain, 2019) and its impacts on other spheres of life. This scarcity might be explained by the 'hostile worlds' perspective developed by Zelizer (2000): passion and money belong to two mutually exclusive spheres. Indeed, leisure cultures develop an 'anti-profit norm' (Grillespie, Leffler and Lerner, 2022) and greed is rejected by their participants (Fine, 1989).

Consequently, the development of the online commodification of leisure calls for a rethink of the classic findings of the sociology of leisure drawing on the combined insights of media studies and economic sociology. This article sets out precisely to uncover what the market work entailed in monetisation implies for amateurs' domestic lives and their leisure activities. 'Overflow' is the concept we use to designate this impact of a given activity on everyday life. Compared with traditional serious leisure or mere digital content creation, are commodified hobbies more conducive to overflow?

Research Methods

This article is based on two case studies: food bloggers and Etsy handicrafters. Both are embodiments of the digital commodification of leisure activities. Capturing the overflow of market work into their everyday lives calls for a mixed-method approach. Most studies opt for

a qualitative approach to a minority of highly visible (and often professional) content creators, extrapolating conclusions from observations of a small fraction of the population to the entire population. Our aim is to combine the ethnographic accuracy of qualitative methods with a quantitative sociology of the entire population.

Interviews were conducted and statistical data collected in France from 2008 to 2021, in compliance with European General Data Protection Regulation. The long data collection timeframe is due to the nature of the activities investigated. In France, food blogs emerged in 2004 and became very popular around 2008. They were mainly hosted on free blog platforms such as Overblog or Wordpress. Data on food bloggers were collected mainly from 2008 to 2012. A second research track was launched on Etsy handicrafters from 2016 to 2021. In France, the Etsy platform was launched in 2012 and became popular a few years later. The level of maturity of both platforms was fairly similar at the time of the study. The long data collection timeframe reveals structural phenomena rather than passing fads. Having the same cultural background and close similarities in user profiles and their practices make the comparison relevant and enable the generalisation of the results.

Sociography and Quantification of Practices

The first source of data came from two surveys and two web scraping data collection exercises. The aim of our quantitative data collection was threefold: to map the culinary blogosphere and the Etsy community (distribution of social properties among digital content creators), to reveal the digital content of creators' practices, and to identify and quantify the phenomenon of commodification and subsequently assess the share of amateurs. The food blogger survey was conducted in March and April 2011, and the Etsy survey in April and May 2020. The food blogger survey was carried out with the help of a food blog aggregator (750g.com), which monitored active culinary blogs in France and collected the e-mail

addresses of their authors. A total of 1,387 active food bloggers were targeted, obtaining 621 responses. The Etsy online survey was sent to all the email addresses found for active French Etsy shops. It returned 248 responses. A web scraping of the 14,415 active French Etsy shops was conducted in 2017 to gather exhaustive quantitative data, with a further exercise on 19,715 shops in 2019. This web scraping was carried out via the Etsy API (Application Programming Interface) in liaison with a computer engineer (Chaves Ferreira, Jourdain and Naulin, 2018). These data provide exhaustive information on online activity by Etsy crafters, in particular regarding commodification.

Quantitative data show that both populations are predominantly women: 94% of French food bloggers in 2011 and 88% of French Etsy handicrafters in 2017 were women. French food bloggers are representative of the French female population in terms of age, education, employment, region and family situation. Etsy crafters are more qualified and more urban than the rest of the French female population.

Ethnographic Studies

The authors conducted 31 semi-structured face-to-face interviews with 12 food bloggers (10 women and 2 men) and 19 Etsy handicrafters (16 women and 3 men). The aim of the qualitative data collection was to understand the actual experiences and practices of amateurs, beyond the public and/or promotional discourse on their activity. The interviewees presented a wide range of profiles in terms of age, gender, location, visibility on the Web, and cooking style or type of handicraft. Eleven of the food bloggers and ten of the Etsy crafters defined themselves as ‘amateurs’ (see Appendix 1). Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 3 hours, averaging at 80 minutes. The interviewees provided insight into their online and offline activities, the commodification of their hobby, and its incorporation into their personal and professional lives.

All interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed and thematically analysed following inductive coding by NVivo software. Pseudonyms are given for all interviewees in this article.

Findings

Why Commodify a Leisure Activity Online?

People who start to commodify their leisure activities online share common characteristics, and also common motivations. Most of the time, food blog and Etsy shop creation occur during a ‘hiatus’, that is to say when creators are homebound for a long period of time (Naulin and Jourdain, 2019; Christin and Lewis, 2021). Women on maternity, parental or sick leave, jobseekers, expatriates, pensioners, and students, often experience a combination of free time and forms of social isolation. The leisure activity and its online commodification initially fill a void and occupy interstitial times.

For those holding a full-time job, marketisation is sometimes regarded as compensation for perceived unpleasant work in their job (lack of fulfilment, boredom, adverse working conditions, frustration, stress, etc.). Diane, who works as a marketing manager for a start-up, created her shop on Etsy (selling textile jewellery) because she was bored with her previous job in a large company:

‘I worked for a British laboratory, which was taken over by an American lab. I was bored. And I said to myself, “A crushing office life is not for me.” Something was missing. I yearned for something else, I felt I could do more enjoyable things. I didn’t feel fulfilled. I loved sewing. And then, I thought, “Take the plunge and create your own online shop.”’ (*Diane, Etsy seller, marketing manager, 29 years old*)

Like Diane, some food bloggers see blogging as a way to escape an unfulfilling job. As Nathalie explained, ‘I was a French teacher in Spain. [Food blogging] was a way out.’

As regards food bloggers and Etsy sellers' motivations, three main results emerge. First of all, amateur cooks and handicrafters consider commodification as a means to extend the scope of their leisure activity to their circle of relatives and beyond. Before commodification, food bloggers used to pass their recipes to family and friends and Etsy sellers used to give their handmade items as gifts or sell them to close relatives. Elisabeth started sewing for her three children: 'I began making bags. They were gifts, gifts for the teachers. And tee-shirts which I flock printed. And later, when I came back off maternity leave, I thought, why not sell?'

Secondly, as a logical extension of the abovementioned point, commodification fosters sociability. Social interactions are developed with clients, readers and peers. Food bloggers particularly appreciate comments from readers who have tried their recipes. As Robert, a food blogger for one year with 65 readers a day, put it:

'There are two ways of sharing: one is sharing by having people taste my recipes, and the other is sharing with people who read and fine-tune my recipes. It's a broader kind of sharing. [...] When I make one of my recipes again, I look up the recipe on my blog and read the comments: this person told me to do that and so on. So I improve, I progress, I don't get stuck in a rut.' (*Robert, food blogger, IT project manager, 45 years old*)

Moreover, joining in conversations on Etsy or blogger forums on leisure-related issues, business questions or unrelated discussions fosters a sense of belonging to a peer community and makes amateurs feel less isolated. Thus, commodification encourages online interactions.

Thirdly, people commodifying their hobby tend to look for visibility and a new form of social recognition, especially in the recent period. The food bloggers interviewed in the 2010s generally presented social recognition as an unexpected (positive) effect of the commoditisation of their hobby. They often mentioned how 'proud' their relatives were (parents, partner, children, friends, colleagues, etc.) when they happened to be mentioned in

the local, national or online media. A good example of this phenomenon is the case of Martine, a retired housewife married to a vet (Yves) who goes by the blogger name of Grannyta). After five years of blogging and an audience of 2,800 to 9,000 readers a day, she told us:

‘The blog has given me things to talk about with my husband. I can tell him things I did without him: cookery workshops, etc. Before [the blog], I was “Yves' wife”. Now, I’m “Grannyta” and he’s “Mr Grannyta”.’ (*Martine, food blogger, retired, 60 years old*)

The new social identity – outside and also within her household – is an unexpected effect of the success of her food blog which gave her a sphere of activity of her own and social recognition. Etsy sellers, interviewed a few years later, more often mentioned recognition by fellow hobbyists, customers, and family and friends as a reason to launch a small-scale business.

Paradoxically, the primary motivations for commodifying a leisure activity appear to be social and symbolic rather than economic, even for Etsy sellers more eager to identify as small entrepreneurs. Few amateurs really expect to make a great deal of money from such commodification.

Amateurs as Market Workers

When amateurs create a food blog or open an Etsy shop, they generally do not expect to spend a large amount of time on commodification in addition to cooking or making handicrafts. However, they gradually become market workers. They learn how to present themselves and their output online, post regularly on social media (Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest and Twitter/X) and interact with their virtual community. Food bloggers also register their blog on web-indexing platforms, write comments to prominent food bloggers and contact brands to build partnerships that will make the blog active, visible and profitable. Such marketing labour

can be very demanding. For example, Nathalie spent a great deal of time answering comments on her output:

‘I answer every comment I receive. If it's someone who doesn't have a blog, I'll reply personally to their e-mail. If it's someone with a blog, I'll post a comment on their blog. That's the deal. That's the way it works. It's a tacit rule.’ (*Nathalie, food blogger, stay-at-home mother and former sales director, 33 years old*)

Likewise, Etsy sellers try to increase their online visibility in order to sell their products by strategically putting competing shops in their list of ‘favourite shops’ (Etsy equivalents of Facebook ‘likes’), hoping that their competitors will reciprocate. Marketing labour is guided by digital metrics that measure the activity and its success. Food bloggers monitor their audience by tracking their number of unique visitors on their blog platform or Google Analytics. Etsy sellers can use a wider range of tools provided by the Etsy platform (notebooks, listings, sales lists, customer databases, scoreboards, etc.).

In addition, food bloggers and Etsy crafters have to define their market positioning: an editorial line for the former and a brand for the latter. Food blogs can take different lines for different audiences as explained by Fabienne, a food blogger:

‘A blog needs to reflect something: either a personality or creative flair. You need to sense the person behind it. It has to express something: a lifestyle, a personality, an artistic side. Some blogs concentrate more on copy, some on pictures and others on techniques. Personally, I'm more “let's get cooking”, but there are some women who are more “dream world”, like a fashion magazine.’ (*Fabienne, food blogger, web editor, 45 years old*)

Food bloggers and Etsy crafters progressively learn to adapt to their blog's infrastructure or Etsy shop when they present their output, just like traditional marketers in analogue points of sale. Many amateurs re-use skills from their main job to commodify their leisure activity (planning, writing, speaking English, etc.). Proficiency in how the market works is mostly

acquired through learning by doing and peer-to-peer learning. Online forums and face-to-face meetings, like food and craft exhibitions, are occasions for food bloggers and Etsy sellers to talk about the best ways to reach an audience and commodify their production. For example, during the 2017 Etsy Made in France show in Paris, discussions between sellers focused on recent changes to the Etsy algorithm to promote national trade and on possible ways to remedy the situation in order to recover their platform ranking. Formal learning devices are more developed in the case Etsy, since many of them are provided by the platform itself in order to help sellers (and thus Etsy) become more visible and sell more. For example, Etsy offers a 'Seller's Handbook' to its sellers and sometimes contacts them by phone to give them advice.

The commodification of a leisure activity also entails many forms of offline market work: production, logistics, order management, price setting and administrative tasks, among others. For Etsy sellers, for example, going to the post office to send packages to customers is part of this work. Consequently, time and production need to be rationalised. Carole, who sells clutch bags on Etsy, sticks to a strict schedule every week:

'On Mondays and Tuesdays, I make clutches. On Wednesdays, I drop them off at my tailor so he can add the fasteners and finish them properly. And on Thursdays and Fridays, I concentrate on communication. On Saturdays and Sundays, I concentrate on production. So it's really a cycle like that.' (*Carole, Etsy seller, student in international relations, 23 years old*)

In the interviews with food bloggers and Etsy crafters, the description of the activity alternated between a leisure register and work vocabulary. Many interviewees spontaneously employed work-related terminology when depicting their leisure activity. For example, Delphine, a food blogger and full-time civil servant, said her blog was 'a full-time job'.

Spiral of Commitment

As shown previously, most of the time, food blogs and Etsy shops are created during a 'hiatus'. When the hiatus period ends, either the online activity ends or amateurs have to find room for it in their everyday lives. Indeed, online commodification is often a time-consuming activity. Food bloggers spend much more time cooking (around three hours a day) than the average French person who cooks (around one hour a day), and 80% of them spend more than one hour per day blogging. Acquired efficiency in commodification work is a way to save time and to incorporate this work into everyday life. However, since this work can be fragmented into a multitude of small tasks, amateurs' work also creeps into every interstitial moment of the day. Marjorie, who sells baby clothes on Etsy in addition to her job in a polling organisation, spends all her free time on her Etsy shop:

'In the evening, at the weekend, usually on my lunchbreak or from time to time, I take little breaks, I think about what I'm going to do that night, I look at fabric, stuff like that on the Internet. And in the evening, when I get home, I really want to make a little pair of slippers, so I sew in the evening.' (*Marjorie, Etsy seller, employed in a polling organisation, 25 years old*)

Many interviewees depict a spiral of commitment in which they gradually spend more time, money and skills on their leisure activity and the associated digital and market work. For example, the number of cookbooks owned for inspiration by food bloggers is positively correlated with the age of their blog.

The spiral of commitment is due partly to passion and partly to the features of online platforms. Online sociability (comments, 'likes', 'following', emails, forums, web metrics, etc.) constitutes a strong incentive to continue with the activity. As Nathalie, a 33-year-old food blogger, put it, 'In less than two weeks, you're hooked. I'm addicted to my blog! It's an incentive to say to yourself, "I've got a comment." That means someone's interested, so I'll carry on.' Integration into a virtual community providing peer exchanges, assistance, support,

and recognition also fosters emulation among amateurs. Commodification work itself encourages a growing commitment in order to improve skills, satisfy customers and increase earnings.

The Transformation of Domestic Life

Commodification tends to transform amateurs' lives. As domestic and pleasurable activities that can take place in all interstitial times, food blogging and Etsy crafting are hard to quantify. Part of the work can be fully incorporated into the daily routine. For instance, food bloggers explain that they do not cook 'especially for the blog'. They publish online the recipes they cook for everyday family meals. Here, production work is experienced as part of normal reproductive work. However, posting homemade objects or dishes and immersion in platform aesthetics tend to transform the amateur's perspective into a marketer's perspective. Food bloggers and Etsy crafters develop a new focus of attention on their everyday lives in order to save the moments that will be posted online, becoming part of the product they are selling. This situation may be perceived as a form of mental workload, as Tue-Minh, who sells paper sculptures on Etsy, explained: 'Actually, I don't really know how much time it takes because it's always on my mind. It's like I'm always on the lookout for what I can post and whether I have something to say on social media.'

Commodification can also transform relationships with relatives. The latter often represent a resource for food bloggers and Etsy crafters. They provide crucial moral support and, when amateurs lack certain commodification skills, household members may step in to help them. For instance, a husband might set up the online shop or take pictures of the dishes for the blog. Vincent, a 40-year-old musician who has a food blog, explained that his partner had helped him with the pastry-making at the start. His brother, a sales representative for a food company,

helped him set prices for the cookery classes he was selling on his blog. Both continued to give him feedback on his undertaking.

Commodifying a leisure activity also implies negotiations with household members. The time spent on the leisure activity and its commodification is sometimes seen as ‘deducted’ from family time. Nathalie, a stay-at-home mother of three, described her family’s reaction to the time she spent cooking and blogging:

‘My husband just says, “I’m fed up with this. You’re either in your kitchen or in front of your computer.” That’s how he reacts [laughs]. My children say, “Mum, can’t you just get off your computer and come play with us?”’ (*Nathalie, food blogger, stay-at-home mother, 33 years old*)

Just like Nathalie, Sandra, who sells textile items on Etsy, considered her commitment to her leisure activity as a ‘sacrifice’ her whole family had suffered:

‘God knows he [her husband] made sacrifices for that because our family life changed completely. On weekends, I would get up at 7 a.m., work all day and go to bed at midnight. So, no more family life, no more going out, no more nothing. We cut ourselves off from a lot of people who didn’t understand. And it’s been difficult for our children too. They’re twelve and sixteen years old now, but my son was seven when I started. And the number of times I heard him say, “Anyway, I know you prefer sewing to your children”. That’s really hard to hear.’ (*Sandra, Etsy seller, legal assistant, 42 years old*)

The space taken by the leisure activity and its commodification (Sandra organises numerous weekend craft shows at which she sells her fabric products) sometimes reconfigures relationships and domestic life.

The Transformation of the Leisure Activity Itself

The content of the leisure activity itself evolves in relation to online commodification. Like market professionals, amateurs tend to adapt their production to trends and demand.

Having a blog encourages bloggers to keep abreast of trends, test novelties, develop creativity and change how they cook and the content of what they cook in specific ways:

‘Yes, I cook more [since I started the blog], and using different produce, for example, new products I see in other blogs. I think it’s a nice idea. There are plenty of products I wasn’t used to cooking and that I now use after seeing them in other recipes. Basically, squash and things like that, [...] agar-agar, and that sort of thing.’ (*Audrey, food blogger, lab technician, 24 years old*)

From a more market-oriented point of view, Etsy sellers might reorganise their production process to meet demand. Such is the case with Belina, a jewellery maker on Etsy: ‘When I have a model that sells well, I make three or four, depending on size, because I know it will sell, but when I’m not sure whether it will sell, I make fewer items.’ Food bloggers are less constrained by market forces than they are by brand partnerships. The nature of a brand partnership is indexed to the blog’s audience metrics: the more unique visitors per day, the higher the remuneration and the greater the subordination of the blogger to the brand. Partnerships range from product gifting, where bloggers receive freebies that they are encouraged to review, through sponsored posts where bloggers are paid to write articles to paid service provision for long-term collaboration and participation in cooking shows and events. Delphine, a 40-year-old civil servant related how she adapted her blog content in response to a problem with a brand. A brand offered her a sponsored post on its new macaroon mix. Delphine knew how to make good macaroons, but she did not manage to make the macaroons using the brand’s mix. So she called the brand and told them that she could not write that they were very good, because the mix made poor macaroons. She suggested ending the partnership, but eventually a ‘compromise’ was reached, which consisted in ‘lying by omission’: she would post a blog entry

about the macaroon mix, saying that it was not intended for people who knew how to make macaroons, that they would not give the same result and were not as good as homemade ones, but that they could be used as a back-up, 'when you've only got 10 minutes and the mother-in-law is turning up.'

Growing commitment to the online leisure activity also alters the time spent on the different tasks performed by amateurs. Quantitative data show that the most lucrative and exclusive partnerships for food bloggers are positively correlated with the blogger's investment in promoting their blog on the Internet, such as having a Facebook page and publishing a newsletter. In this vein, Tue-Minh, a paediatrician who sells paper sculptures on Etsy, considered she spent 'easily two to three hours a day' managing her Etsy shop and her Facebook and Instagram accounts. She regretted that she did not have as much time to make her sculptures: 'I'd like to spend more time crafting and less communicating. Right now, I communicate more than I craft.' In some cases, digital and marketing communication tends to take precedence over crafting or cooking time.

More surprisingly, the object of the passion that drives amateurs might shift from cooking or crafting to communicating and selling, especially for Etsy sellers. For example, as with many other sellers, Marjorie considered a project finished not when she finished sewing a piece of clothing, but when she had photographed the piece and put it on her Etsy shop with a brief description. In some cases, the taste for entrepreneurship may overshadow the taste for cooking or crafting and become the mainstay of the leisure activity. Indeed, business and management activities are sometimes seen as one of the purposes of the activity. Tue-Minh told us that she enjoyed playing shopkeeper on Etsy outside of her job as a hospital paediatrician:

'What I like about it is that it's sort of business game. I never saw myself doing marketing or business studies, things like that. But to gradually discover those things, that's like a game for me. And, since there's no real financial stake for me,

I play shopkeeper, I play business strategy.’ (*Tue-Minh, Etsy seller, paediatrician, 41 years old*)

Although food bloggers almost never define themselves as ‘entrepreneurs’, Etsy sellers embrace this rhetoric much more easily where the main motive for the creation of an Esty shop can be found to be the aspiration to run one’s own business. Beate was particularly clear about her initiative to start a crocheted baby clothes business on Etsy:

‘Crochet was not really... to tell you the truth... I know I write on my shop that it’s always been my passion, but that’s not true. That was driven by the need to find an idea. [...] I wanted to launch my own business.’ (*Beate, Etsy seller, stay-at-home mother, 46 years old*)

Like Beate, some Etsy sellers without crafts skills have taught themselves to make jewellery and bags, mainly from web tutorials, just to be able to open a shop on Etsy. In these rare cases, the online commodification of the leisure activity is entirely driven by a passion for entrepreneurship.

Carrying On ... or OptingOut

Despite amateurs’ efforts, the commodification of food blogging and Etsy selling does not make these leisure activities profitable. According to the Etsy web scraping and our blogger survey, 50% of Etsy sellers earn less than €10 a month and only one-third of food bloggers earn any (amount of) money from their activity. So why do food bloggers and Etsy sellers insist on commodifying their skills and items when they could make crafts and cook for free, for themselves and their family and friends ?

In the long run, hobbyists who carry on with online commodification are those who make a certain success of their activity. ‘Success’ as a food blogger or an Etsy seller is defined by our interviewees as having a large audience or customer base, regardless of economic profit. Even though some amateurs regard commodification as a means to earn pin money and reinvest it in the leisure activity (to buy certain ingredients or fabrics, for example), the main benefits are not economic. This is what Laura, a 29-year-old food blogger, expresses in this interview excerpt: ‘Partnerships are great! I think it's great in that you can discover new products, create new things and deliver on work.’ Expanding the scope of the leisure activity and the sociability and social recognition gained from online commodification (see above) emerge from the interviews as the leading reasons to carry on.

However, a vast majority of digital hobbyists give up commodification after a while. Contrary to media narratives that tend to focus on professionalisation trajectories, the most frequent pathway ends in the activity being dropped. It is always hard for sociologists to capture people who have dropped out of an activity. By design, our empirical samples comprised ‘active’ content creators. However, we were able to partially overcome the problem using methods such as repeated data collection by web scraping. A comparison of the two web scrapings conducted to compare active French Etsy shops in 2017 and 2019 showed that 65% of the 2017 shops were no longer active on Etsy two years later. Etsy metrics revealed that all these shops had been less active (fewer ‘favourite shops’, fewer stars, etc.) and less profitable (lower incomes) than the others in 2017.

Given that food blogging and Etsy selling do not call for a large investment and remain a sideline for hobbyists, it is easy to drop out of (and start up in) online commodification. Different factors account for the high dropout rate. First, as mentioned earlier, many digital hobbies start during a hiatus period. The return to ‘normality’, which often means being back in a paid job outside the home, reduces the time available for hobbies and market work. Second,

having a large audience or customer base is correlated with the time spent on market work. Our survey of food bloggers showed that 54% of bloggers with over 1,000 daily visitors spent more than five hours a week blogging, compared with just 26% of bloggers with fewer than 1,000 daily visitors. The struggle to free up so much time and/or fulfil the other conditions for success can result in exhaustion and discouragement. Third, some amateurs are disappointed by the very low earnings and low visibility they eventually achieve on the Internet. Elisabeth, who has stopped selling textile items since we interviewed her in 2016, expressed such frustration with Etsy platform:

‘I’ve actually realised that if we don’t help [the platform] make money, because we don’t sell a lot or we don’t attract new people to the platform or because we don’t buy advertising, we get a poor ranking. It’s a vicious circle. [...] I’m disappointed with the platform. I find it hard. We’re not helped, because we’re completely invisible.’ (*Elisabeth, Etsy seller, engineer, 42 years old*)

Discussion

For some years now, online platforms and devices have been encouraging people to commodify their leisure activities. Our research set out to identify the motivations and effects of such online commodification of hobbies. By comparing our findings with results from the classical sociology of serious leisure, we can now interpret some of the social dynamics identified as traditional and thereby better highlight the aspects that are new or different.

Digitally Commodified Hobbies as Traditional Serious Leisure

Same Motivations: Extension of Leisure, Sociability and Social Recognition

Three main motivations explain why amateurs are engaging in the online commodification of their leisure activities: the extension of the scope of the leisure activity, sociability and social

recognition. These motivations are almost the same as those associated with the commitment in traditional serious leisure. Indeed, according to the sociology of leisure, leisure is a way to increase self-esteem (Pohl *et al.*, 2000), improve sociability (Bryan, 2000) and affirm self-identity (Haggard and Williams, 1992). From this point of view, the desire to commodify online can be interpreted as an extension of these classic motivations. As shown by A. Darr, ‘Instead of reverting to minimal social engagement, actors in the online marketplaces [...] often choose to actively engage in computer-mediated social interactions’ (2022, p. 10). This desire for sociability transcends the pursuit of (small) economic gain, especially for amateurs. Digital and market devices are viewed as a means to achieve social goals typical of serious leisure. In other words, online commodification is one of the ways to shift amateur hobbies to the status of serious leisure.

This is especially true in the case of leisure activities in the domestic sphere such as cooking and crafting, but also painting, gardening and tinkering. These activities are characterised by their individualisation, their lack of institutionalisation (via associations, for example) and, therefore, their invisibility outside the domestic sphere. Digitalisation and commodification can reverse these characteristics and turn hobbies into more collective, institutionalised and visible activities.

Same Overflow on Amateurs’ Everyday Lives

Our findings on food bloggers and Etsy handicrafters capture the overflow of market work into amateurs’ everyday lives. From an analytical standpoint, this overflow can be divided into two phenomena: a) it refers to extra work beyond the mere activity of producing something for oneself, family and friends; and b) it refers to the spillover of leisure activities into private and domestic life. These two types of overflow have already been identified by the sociology of leisure.

Compared with ‘intimate transactions’ with relatives (Zelizer, 2001), online commodification implies intensive extra work. In our two case studies, this extra work encompasses both digital and market work, requiring specific skills of amateurs. It contributes to the spiral of commitment they experience, as the time and energy demanded tend to increase over time. Such ‘runaway dynamics’ (Ens and Márton, 2021) are particularly fuelled by metrics associated with digital devices (Christin, 2020), especially at a time when ‘metrics become moral injunctions’ (Fourcade and Healy, 2017, p. 24). Additionally, market work entails specific commitments such as responding to potential clients, negotiating with brands and filling orders similar to the work of professional marketers (Juge *et al.*, 2019). It is finally associated with symbolic gratifications: good feedback from customers or audiences (either digitally mediated or not) and even the simple pleasure of being spotted by a brand or managing to sell. Such observation of a growing commitment by amateurs to their leisure activity is common in the sociology of leisure (Tomlinson, 1993) and is characteristic of ‘serious leisure careers’ (Stebbins, 1992). For example, G. A. Fine (1989) discusses the organisational work required by mushrooming amateurs, which can be considered as extra work in our conceptual framework.

Another form of overflow relates to the impact of this extra work on amateurs’ domestic lives. For example, our findings reveal the extension of market work to family members. The leisure activity’s commodification impacts on children, partners and relatives and leads to material, temporal and interpersonal ‘adjustments’ (Torkkeli *et al.*, 2022). Relatives often become assistants, especially for the most technical aspects of commodification. They may also criticise the leisure activity when it takes too much time and space in their lives. Such ‘contamination’ of the domestic space and family network (Julhe, 2011) has been a common finding in the sociology of leisure since R. Stebbins’ seminal work. Some research specifically aims to identify how amateurs try to contain the overflow by negotiating ‘the boundaries

between their hobby and other social institutions surrounding it and them' (Gillespie *et al.*, 2022, p. 287).

Beyond Serious Leisure: The Distinct Impact of Online Commodification on Leisure Activities

A New Kind of Overflow

In the case of the digital commodification of hobbies, the leisure activities themselves as well as the digital and analogue market work are increasingly overflowing into domestic lives. In keeping with previous media studies, our findings show that the seller's own house is turned into a place dedicated to showcasing the leisure activity. As Luckman and Phillipov write, 'Not only does the home become the site of work for artisan food or craft businesses, but narratives of 'home' and 'family' serve as creative resources for the promotion of these businesses.' (2020, p. 3) Many food bloggers and Etsy crafters post photographs of their output in their homes or talk about their children in 'About' sections and forums. This widespread promotion of authenticity, realness, domesticity and amateurism (Brasseur and Finez, 2019; Lehto, 2021) is a common selling technique. It entails showcasing intimacy and personal life to a wide audience (Mäkinen, 2020), which is a form of digital hobby overflow into everyday life. This overflow into private life is also associated with an amateur's mental workload. Online commodification involves paying constant attention to one's everyday life in order to save the moments that will be posted online. Given that the Internet 'never sleeps' and daily life is part of the commodification process, a digital hobby is a kind of 'always-on labour' (Guarriello, 2019, p. 1754).

Transformation of the Leisure Activity

Our study shows that the overflow of market work transforms the leisure activity. As such, market work is more than extra work since it impacts on the activities of producing recipes and making decorative items. In view of the overflow, online commodification is not entirely in line with the ‘serious leisure’ dynamic (Stebbins, 2007), i.e. deeper commitment to the leisure activity for the leisure activity’s sake. Online commodification reshapes leisure activities in specific ways. The transformation takes different forms. First of all, the production process needs to be standardised and rationalised. An important part of market work consists of ‘standardising the supply’: ‘Platforms and users work together to make the transactions resemble those prevailing in anonymous marketplaces,’ (Beuscart and Trespeuch, 2016, p. 3). Food bloggers and Etsy crafters need to adapt to their blog’s infrastructure or Etsy shop when they present their output, much like traditional marketers in analogue points of sale (Araujo *et al.*, 2010). Second, amateurs rationalise their interstitial times, alongside their paid employment if they have one, in order to be as efficient as possible. Like professionals, they have to rapidly produce output, which is far from the serious leisure approach. Third, the output itself is altered: in order to meet demand, amateurs focus on the most successful recipes or items in their output and tend to neglect the others. Finally, online commodification generally reduces the time spent on the leisure activity itself (cooking or crafting) to free up more time for marketisation. An unexpected result of our study is that such alteration of the leisure activity is not necessarily perceived negatively by amateurs who enjoy ‘playing shopkeepers’. The entrepreneurial dynamic becomes part of the passion, especially for Etsy sellers who are directly regarded as market actors, and this tends to change the fundamental nature of the leisure activity.

Towards Shorter Amateur Careers?

The overflow of market work into everyday life may explain the diversity of ‘serious leisure careers’ (Stebbins, 1992) among digital hobbyists. Depending on their online success and their everyday life set-up, food bloggers and Etsy sellers might decide either to stop digital commodification – or temporarily shelve it – or to carry on. Our framework complements the serious leisure literature by providing explanations for both career pursuit and career termination among serious leisure amateurs.

The overflow produced by market and digital demands and the transformation of the content of the leisure activity driven by online commodification, in relation to the life cycle and success achieved online, can explain why many amateurs finally leave online commodification. For others, the rewards of the online commodification of their hobby outweigh its drawbacks and they pursue a serious leisure career both for the love of the activity itself and for the satisfactions derived from its online commercialisation. In Shamir’s terms, both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards produce a greater commitment to the leisure activities (Shamir, 1988). Finally, digitalisation appears to lower the barriers to entry and exit for engagement in a serious leisure career. This leads to a greater number of amateurs getting involved in the online commodification of their leisure activities and serious leisure careers, but also most certainly to higher turnover in these commitments as life circumstances change.

Conclusion, Limitations and Future Directions

This article’s mixed-method analysis of two case studies – food bloggers and Etsy handicrafters – analyses the motivations behind and effects of the commodification of leisure activities on the Internet. It highlights the overflow of digital market work into amateurs’ domestic lives. Building on the sociology of ‘serious leisure’ (Stebbins, 1992), the article examines the novelty of such an overflow. The considered social dynamics are not new in the

main: the same kinds of motivations and spillover effects have already been identified in traditional leisure activities. However, three specific effects of online commodification are identified: the new forms of extra work in which amateurs are involved, the changing nature of the leisure activity (which sometimes goes so far as to include a passion for small-scale entrepreneurship), and the shortening of amateurs' careers due to the reversibility of digital economic devices.

Our research assumes that our two case studies – food blogging and Etsy handicrafting – offer a good lens through which to observe similar approaches to the digital commodification of a leisure activity. However, the comparison of these two case studies has its limitations. In particular, there are differences in the forms of commodification and levels of professionalisation. For food bloggers in the 2010s, commodification was generally an unintended result of online passion sharing. Meanwhile, amateurism, in contrast with the professionalism of chefs and food journalists, was claimed by almost all of them. The more recent Etsy study points up more direct forms of marketisation and, in the age of influencers, a more obvious search for online visibility and professionalisation. Our hypothesis is that the validity of the comparison lies in the similar level of maturity of the two digital devices studied at different times. Despite the boom in digital media and platforms, social dynamics may remain the same. Further research is called for to test this hypothesis and extend the question of the overflow of market work to other cultural fields and other digital devices.

In the future, attention should be paid to the gendered aspect of the overflow. It is not the purpose of this article, but it is important to bear in mind that food blogging and handicrafts are very female activities. This gendered aspect could make the market work driven by commodification all the more 'invisible work' (Kaplan Daniels, 1987). And what about men's leisure activities such as Twitch (Partin, 2020) and mass multiplayer online games (Hommodova Lu and Carradini, 2019)? Previous quantitative findings regarding gendered

inequalities in our case studies (Naulin and Jourdain, 2019) show that male amateurs earn more money than their female counterparts. Does the commodification of male activities necessitate the same leverage of the domestic sphere?

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Author contributions

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Appendix**TABLE List of the interviewees**

Pseudonym	Marketization field	Sex	Age	Occupation	Maturity of online activity	Number of readers per day or number of sales
<i>Food bloggers</i>						
Audrey	Food blog	F	24	Lab technician	2 years	250-800 readers
Charlotte	Food blog	F	22	Student	1 year	100-500 readers
Delphine	Food blog	F	30	Civil servant	4 years	800-1300 readers
Fabienne	Food blog	F	45	IT executive in a computer company	6 years	7 000 readers
Laura	Food blog	F	29	Preparing for a competitive civil servant examination	3 years	1500 readers
Martine	Food blog	F	60	Retired (former housewife)	5 years	2700-9000 readers
Nathalie	Food blog	F	33	Stay-at-home mother	1 year	50-80 readers
Robert	Food blog	M	45	IT project manager	1 year	20 readers
Soizic	Food blog	F	33	Corporate librarian and food writer	4 years	Undocumented
Vanessa	Food blog	F	33	Free lance journalist	6 years	500-2000 readers
Vincent	Food blog	M	40	Musician	2 years	150 readers
<i>Etsy sellers</i>						
Alina	Etsy shop	F	32	Childminder	2 years	Undocumented
Belina	Etsy shop	F	33	Architect	4 years	779 sales
Carole	Etsy shop	F	23	Student	2 years	119 sales

Diane	Etsy shop	F	29	Marketing manager	1 year	3 sales
Elisabeth	Etsy shop	F	42	Engineer	2 years	15 sales
Isabelle	Etsy shop	F	63	Therapist	5 years	45 sales
Marjorie	Etsy shop	F	25	Survey manager for a polling organization	1 year	4 sales
Rebecca	Etsy shop	F	33	Graphic designer	2 years	73 sales
Sandra	Etsy shop	F	42	Legal assistant	4 years	604 sales
Tue-Minh	Etsy shop	F	41	Paediatrician	5 years	41 sales
