Cultures of E/valuation on the Social Web. A very short introduction to the special issue

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Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.22148/001c.33086

The Social Web is a network of people and platforms, of performances and products; of reactions, opinions, judgments, and comparisons; of emotions, valuations, and affects; of evaluations, ratings, and rankings. Shared and connective practices lead to emergent, fluid, and sometimes quite stable, cultures of valuation and evaluation, managing issues of identity, world view, and social participation.

In the late fall of 2020, the conference Digital Practices,[1] virtually held in Basel (CH), asked about such cultures and issues, focusing on practices of reading, writing, and evaluation on the social web. Following up on that conversation, and zooming in on evaluation practices, we are glad to now introduce a special issue of the Journal of Cultural Analytics entitled "Cultures of evaluation on the social web".

The aim of the special issue is to present theory-conscious studies of selected facets of digital cultures of evaluation across a broad range of discourses on the social web. At the same time, bringing together papers from linguistics, literary studies, and digital humanities, it is our aim to take stock of common denominators, but also differences, in method and theory, instilling discussion for a cross-disciplinary data-driven and data-intensive inquiry of valuation and evaluation within "data humanities".[2] The types of discourse covered will include online lay book reviews on platforms such as Goodreads and LovelyBooks, as well as reviews of non-literary "products" such as cooking recipes, restaurant reviews, and concerts.

Drawing from a timely and diverse cross-disciplinary array of theoretical frameworks of "valuation" and "evaluation" from disciplines such as linguistics, literary studies, and data science, the bulk of the papers collected in the special issue will address their specific research topic through an interaction between theoretical modeling and real-world data.

Together, the collected contributions will offer a diverse picture of today's valuation and evaluation cultures on the (social) web. Each paper will examine a different aspect of how value is attributed and negotiated by thousands of people on the web, the discourse being typically mediated by an ordinal scale of votes and unfolding within the limits of a platform or forum.

The theoretical frameworks will document a wide scope of approaches on "valuation" and "evaluation"—covering aesthetic and Bakhtinian perspectives from literary studies,[3] pragmatic, usage-based, corpus-linguistic/corpus pragmatic[4] and sociolinguistic approaches from linguistics,[5] and approaches from data science that address evaluation apparently "theory-lessly".[6]

"Cultures of evaluation on the social web" will take the form of a rolling issue, with new contributions published regularly in the *Journal of Cultural Analytics*, starting from "Between consumers and fans. Writing fan reports as a multifunctional evaluation practice" by Simon Meier-Vieracker, published together with this introductory piece.

In addition, an overview paper (co-authored by the editors of the special issue) will map the current field from an interdisciplinary "data-humanities" angle and discuss potential future developments. There, the editors will address the issue of "valuation" and "evaluation" on the web in its heterogeneity as portrayed by the papers, but, importantly, they will assume a synthetic vantage point: highlighting the common denominators, methodological linchpins, and shared open questions of a "data humanities".

Notes

1 https://digitalpractices2020.philhist.unibas.ch/en/

2 https://culturalanalytics.org/post/1210-mind-the-agent

3 von Heydebrand and Winko, "The Qualities of Literatures. A Concept of Literary Evaluation in Pluralistic Societies."

4 Spitzmüller, Flubacher, and Bendl, "Soziale Positionierung: Praxis und Praktik. Einführung in Das Themenheft."

5 Gee, "Semiotic Social Spaces and Affinity Spaces. From The Age of Mythology to Today's Schools."

6 Knoop et al., "Mapping the Aesthetic Space of Literature 'from Below.'"