

SOCIAL BUTTONS AND PEER-TO-PEER SECOND-HAND MARKETPLACE INTERACTIVITY ON LETGO

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ABSTRACT:

Despite appearing in different forms with multiple endemic functions in digital peer contexts, prior research is engrossed with a focus on the *Like* and *Share* buttons. Therefore, it pays scant attention to the remaining social button variants, which are brought into play by users on a day-to-day basis in the social web. Addressing this lacuna, this study seeks to contribute to our understanding of the online buttonised usage phenomenon, by examining social buttons usage in the context of the *Letgo* consumer-to-consumer online marketplace. Drawing on qualitative interviews with 17 'Letgoers' and online participant observation, the study shows that social buttons represent an enabling and facilitation mechanism, which temporarily eliminates the digital user need (i.e., orthographic need) to type and retype. This conduction culminates in specific user behaviour, which is motivationally shaped by the digital need – least effort – fulfillment equation. The study further claims that while peer-to-peer marketplace activity on *Letgo* necessarily involves user participation, it is alienated in the sense that the buttonised process is beyond the reach of Letgoers' knowing and meaningful (digital) intervention. Hence, it should rather be understood as a practice of delegation to algorithmic conduction.

KEY WORDS:

digital marketplace, *Letgo*, online participation, second-hand transaction, social buttons, user alienation

1 Introduction

In a websphere growingly buttonised or haptic,¹ social buttons can in no way be unmoored from the everyday fabric of the digital web. Inscribed to a front-end language, such as HTML, Javascript or ReactJS, social

¹ See: ELO, M.: Digital Finger: Beyond Phenomenological Figures of Touch. In *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, 2012, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 1-12; HEILMAN, T. A.: Tap, Tap, Flap, Flap. Ludic Seriality, Digitality, and the Finger. In *Eludamos: Journal for Computer Game Culture*, 2014, Vol. 8, No. 1, p. 33-46.

buttons are essentially software agents developed to help users to interact with web content and peers through a simple click.² Introduced by the American news aggregator platform *Digg*, and having been around for nearly a decade, this tiny web element is in fact no *ex nihilo* phenomenon. Historically, it can be traced back as early as the emergence of the digital web. To call it up at this point: from the 1960s to 1990s there was the ARPANET. Initiated with four computer nodes in 1969, ARPANET was known as the first computer-to-computer signal sent between UCLA and the Stanford Research Institute.³ In as much as laying the groundwork for today's "platform capitalism",⁴ the success of ARPANET was hailed as an apotheosis of the blurring of boundaries between the local and remote, which as a result, made possible the idea of universal free computing.⁵ Following a split in 1989 into ARPANET and MILNET, the DARPA acted as a beacon for 'Web 1.0'.⁶

Marking the early stage of the web, this digital contraption suggested a unidirectional (user-to-computer) 'read-only' technology, meaning it supports a few users to read digital content on websites, which includes static HTML pages upgraded infrequently – thus a read-based interaction/engagement with the computer only.⁷ In 2004, tentatively, the second generation of web standard interchangeably referred to as 'Web 2.0' or "social web" saw the light of day.⁸ Unlike its predecessor, social web is a 'read-write', people-centric web technology.⁹ Emblematic of the disintegration of a largely static digital media ecology of the late second millennium, its interactive quality allows messages or more specifically the cultural content to be self-generated by the 'passive' media spectacles of the past. With the emergence of Web 2.0, the definition of the potential receiver is no longer mass-directed. In fact, it can be self-directed; the retrieval of a specific message is now self-selected.¹⁰ All told, packaged in the popular discourse as the "collaborative, participatory version of the web",¹¹ social web represents an interactive, liquid user-centric media ecosystem of the new millennium, in which the roles of issuers and receivers are blurred,¹² and it is inarguably the foundation of several cutting-edge technologies of our time, such as the social buttons.

2 Literature Overview

Previous research into social buttons links the emergence of these digital, software artifacts with the arrival of the social web.¹³ Fitting neatly to today's (digital) "short-cut culture",¹⁴ social buttons are mainly regarded as haptic objects and extensions of human touch – as a corporeal behaviour.¹⁵ It serves the purpose of

eliminating the need to write, rewrite *ad interim*, since it is a pure read-click standard. Dominated by the *Share* and *Like* buttons, the clickable fabric of such (supplemented by read-write structure) is well operable under manifold peer contexts across the social web at the present. It enables diverse user tasks to be implemented through a single click. Take, for example, the *Share* button. On *Facebook* or *Twitter* in which users are largely active, emotionally engaged and socially networked,¹⁶ and productive (and cooperative) occupations are unremunerated,¹⁷ the *Share* button acts to catalyse and even amplify peer communication without a specific linguistic act associated. On popular micro-blogs (e.g., *Medium*) or news outlets (e.g., *New York Times*, *The Guardian*), the *Share* button helps in the facilitation of syndication and/or cross-fertilisation of cultural content on varying topics ranging from politics and sports to COVID-19 through a single click, thereby easily opening up the public discourse. Donors on online charity sites like *GoFundMe* or simply using free social tools like *Facebook Fundraising* can help a charitable giving campaign to scale up through time and space by hitting the *Share* button alone – thus affording reaching a wider audience in a one-click manner. To shift, popularly utilised by social media users for varying motivations, including socialising, feed backing, giving or seeking attention,¹⁸ and discerned to be the "paralinguistic affordance of the social media",¹⁹ the *Like* button feeds into digital peer sociality by helping in the forge and maintenance of social ties with less of a vocal information exchange²⁰ and more of a moral obligation to click back.²¹ In this connection, seen as a complementary facilitator of the worldwide digital fabric, it is cherished and celebrated for empowering users and promoting self-sufficiency and thus fosters dealienation.²² In distinction to being seen as a lightweight way of expressing an evaluation of a post through a mere click or an index for popularity,²³ the *Like* button is regarded as a "digital-endorser-objectivised", that affects both the identity formation and self-esteem especially for the adolescent, namely for 'Zoomers'.²⁴ As Röttgers' variation of Descartes' proposition states: "I am seen, therefore I am; or even: I am liked, therefore I am."²⁵

Aside from being a cut-through gadget for the *homo digitalis*, existing academic literature also lays out that social buttons are increasingly mobilised by digital platforms to constantly metrify user actions that can ultimately be harvested and repurposed to optimise web/app usage, to bolster brand strategies²⁶ and to be sold to third parties on commercial grounds.²⁷ Utilised billions of times on *Facebook* daily,²⁸ the *Like* button

2 See: GERLITZ, C., HELMOND, A.: Hit, Like and Share. Organizing the Social and the Fabric of the Web in a Like Economy. In *DMI Mini Conference*. Amsterdam : DMI, 2011, p. 1-29. [online]. [2021-08-05]. Available at: <https://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/7075/1/CerlitzHelmond-HitLinkLikeShare.pdf>; LJUNBERG, J. et al.: Like, Share and Follow: A Conceptualisation of Social Buttons on the Web. In STIGBERG, S. (ed.): *Nordic Contributions in IS Research*. Berlin : Springer, 2017, p. 5-4.

3 DARPA: *Apanet*. [online]. [2020-03-08]. Available at: <https://www.darpa.mil/attachments/ARPANET_final.pdf>.

4 See: SRNICEK, N.: *Platform Capitalism (Theory Redux)*. London : Polity, 2016.

5 MCKELVEY, F., DRISCOLL, K.: ARPANET and Its Boundary Devices: Modems, IMPs, and the Inter-Structuralism of Infrastructures. In *Internet Histories*, 2018, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 31-50.

6 CERE, C.: *Digital Culture*. London : Reaktion, 2008, p. 33.

7 SALISHA, T.: *World Wide Web: From Web 1.0 to Web 4.0 and Society 5.0*. Released on 18th March 2019. [online]. [2021-06-06]. Available at: <https://medium.com/@tuhfatussalisah/world-wide-web-from-web-1-0-to-web-4-0-and-society-5-0-48690a43b776>.

8 See: GERLITZ, C., HELMOND, A.: Hit, Like and Share. Organizing the Social and the Fabric of the Web in a Like Economy. In *DMI Mini Conference*. Amsterdam : DMI, 2011, p. 1-29. [online]. [2021-08-05]. Available at: <https://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/7075/1/CerlitzHelmond-HitLinkLikeShare.pdf>.

9 SALISHA, T.: *World Wide Web: From Web 1.0 to Web 4.0 and Society 5.0*. Released on 18th March 2019. [online]. [2021-06-06]. Available at: <https://medium.com/@tuhfatussalisah/world-wide-web-from-web-1-0-to-web-4-0-and-society-5-0-48690a43b776>.

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13 See also: GERLITZ, C., HELMOND, A.: Hit, Like and Share. Organizing the Social and the Fabric of the Web in a Like Economy. In *DMI Mini Conference*. Amsterdam : DMI, 2011, p. 1-29. [online]. [2021-08-05]. Available at: <https://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/7075/1/CerlitzHelmond-HitLinkLikeShare.pdf>.

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Pragmatics, 2016, Vol. 92, p. 30-42.

16 JENKINS, H.: *Convergence Culture*. New York : NYU Press, 2006, p. 20.

17 FUCHS, C.: *Critical Theory of Communication: New Readings of Lukács, Adorno, Marcuse, Honneth and Habermas in the Age of the Internet*. London : University of Westminster Press, 2016, p. 26.

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19 HAYES, R. et al.: One Click, Many Meanings: Interpreting Paralinguistic Digital Affordances in Social Media. In *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 2016, Vol. 60, No. 1, p. 171-187.

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21 XU, X. et al.: Moral Obligation in Online Social Interaction: Clicking the "Like" Button. In *Information & Management*, 2020, Vol. 57, No. 7, p. 1-30.

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27 For more information, see: VAN HEERDEN, D. et al.: Online Engagement: Implications of the 'Like' Button. In *The Retail and Marketing Review*, 2020, Vol. 16, No. 2, p. 109-134.

28 HE, C. R.: *Introducing New Like and Share Buttons*. Released on 6th November 2013. [online]. [2021-02-05]. Available at:

has proved to be an efficient leverage, as it secures a great deal of revenue even for third party businesses collaborating with juggernaut social media, such as *Facebook* or *Twitter* where, for example, average gross revenue earned from a *Facebook Like* (fan) is 8 American dollars.²⁹ Waxed with each mouse click, this digital structure, also known as “the *Like* economy”, can be loosely defined as a discreet metrification construct, which helps with the evocation of user interactivity through a mere button. Thereby, the one that the social is of particular economic value, as user interactions are instantly transformed into comparable forms of data and presented to other users in a way that generates more traffic and engagement.³⁰ So, while one’s liking (virtual thumbs-up) a peer content or a feed on *Facebook*, forebye messaging means further-enriched user interactivity, the *Like* button simultaneously serves the purpose of (re)capturing and generating a quantised map of affective relations, that users display on the web (without them knowing or realising), almost on a minutely basis. Containing variegated demographic and intimate information, these metrics, also illustrating today’s hegemonic data politics, are employed by platforms to (re)optimise in-web/app user experience or can readily be sold to third parties for marketing purposes (e.g., targeted advertising).³¹

Previous research on the online buttonised usage phenomenon seem to be engrossed with a focus on the *Share* or *Like* buttons, and on the stock of micro-level socio-technical reality thereof.³² As one might easily discern, this limited scholarly investigation apparently leaves us with a paucity of insight into other social button variants, which function day-to-day under manifold peer contexts in the social web. To address this desideratum in the literature, this study aims to examine buttonised usage processes on the *Letgo* consumer-to-consumer online marketplace. Generating fresh insight, such investigation, we believe, helps to expand our understanding into existing stylised buttonised activity corridors across the web.³³ That being the case, second-hand consumer-to-consumer commerce as a digital peer context is selected for entailing a well-organised clickable usage infrastructure, which essentially serves the purpose of facilitating second-hand transactions. Such enabling and facilitating mechanism forebodes a rich buttonised property, by way of which meanings and the information pertaining to second-hand commodity exchange can be transmitted back and forth among peers. With this in mind, in this study *Letgo* is selected for delivering such buttonised quality. For the analysis of social buttons, the authors draw on qualitative interviews with 17 *Letgo*ers as well as online participant observation in the *Letgo* web and app environment. The study discusses that second-hand peer transactions, complementing written-communication, are viable through a one-click structure on *Letgo*. Such

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29 CARTER, B.: *The Like Economy: How Businesses Make Money with Facebook?* Indianapolis : Que, 2011, p. 21.

30 See: GERLITZ, C., HELMOND, A.: The Like Economy: Social Buttons and the Data-Intensive Web. In *New Media & Society*, 2013, Vol. 15, No. 8, p. 1348-1365.

31 See: BALL, J.: *The Anatomy of a Click: What Happens to Your Data Online*. Released 9th October 2018. [online]. [2021-07-05]. Available at: <https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/what-happens-when-you-click_uk_5bb60455e4b028e1fe3b43a3>; KOSINSKI, M. et al.: Private Traits and Attributes Are Predictable from Digital Records of Human Behaviour. In *PNAS*, 2013, Vol. 110, No. 15, p. 5802-5805; ROSENDAAL, P. C. A.: We Are All Connected to Facebook... by Facebook! In GUTWIRTH, S. (ed.): *European Data Protection: In Good Health?* Heidelberg : Springer, 2012, p. 3-19.

32 See, for example: GERLITZ, C., HELMOND, A.: Hit, Like and Share. Organizing the Social and the Fabric of the Web in a Like Economy. In *DMI Mini Conference*. Amsterdam : DMI, 2011, p. 1-29. [online]. [2021-08-05]. Available at: <<https://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/7075/1/CerlitzHelmond-HitLinkLikeShare.pdf>>; GERLITZ, C., HELMOND, A.: The Like Economy: Social Buttons and the Data-Intensive Web. In *New Media & Society*, 2013, Vol. 15, No. 8, p. 1348-1365; ERANTI, V., LONKILA, M.: The Social Significance of the Facebook Like Button. In *First Monday*, 2015, Vol. 20, No. 6. No pagination. [online]. [2020-08-17]. Available at: <<https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/5505>>; BERNRITTER, F. S. et al.: Why Nonprofits Are Easier to Endorse on Social Media: The Roles of Warmth and Brand Symbolism. In *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 2016, Vol. 33, p. 27-42; HAYES, R. et al.: One Click, Many Meanings: Interpreting Paralinguistic Digital Affordances in Social Media. In *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 2016, Vol. 60, No. 1, p. 171-187; JONG, T. S., DRUMMOND, J. N. M.: Hurry Up and ‘Like’ Me: Immediate Feedback on Social Networking Sites and the Impact on Adolescent Girls. In *Asia-Pacific Journal of Health, Sport and Physical Education*, 2016, Vol. 7, No. 3, p. 251-267; LJUNBERG, J. et al.: Like, Share and Follow: A Conceptualisation of Social Buttons on the Web. In STIGBERG, S. (ed.): *Nordic Contributions in IS Research*. Berlin : Springer, 2017, p. 54; ROSENDAAL, P. C. A.: We Are All Connected to Facebook... by Facebook! In GUTWIRTH, S. (ed.): *European Data Protection: In Good Health?* Heidelberg : Springer, 2012, p. 3-19; SUMNER, E. M. et al.: A Functional Approach to the Facebook Like Button: An Exploration of Meaning, Interpersonal Functionality, and Potential Alternative Response Buttons. In *New Media & Society*, 2017, Vol. 20, No. 4, p. 1451-1469; VAN HEERDEN, D. et al.: Online Engagement: Implications of the ‘Like’ Button. In *The Retail and Marketing Review*, 2020, Vol. 16, No. 2, p. 109-134; XU, X. et al.: Moral Obligation in Online Social Interaction: Clicking the “Like” Button. In *Information & Management*, 2020, Vol. 57, No. 7, p. 1-30.

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endemic performance goes hand-in-hand with a user’s behaviour, which is motivationally shaped by the digital need – least effort – fulfillment equation. The study concludes that while peer-to-peer marketplace activity on *Letgo* involves user agency (that feeds into initiation and maintenance of online marketplace activity), it is alienated in that the buttonised process is beyond users’ knowing and meaningful, direct intervention. Therefore, it is a sole practice of delegation (i.e., bereft of true engagement) to the algorithmic conduction.

This article has been divided into three parts. The first part specifies the methodology used. The second part demonstrates that the buttonised structure on *Letgo* represents an enabling and facilitation mechanism, which temporarily dispenses with the user’s need to type and retype. In this section, we discuss that the affordance that comes with the social buttons indeed goes hand-in-hand with specific user behaviour, which is motivationally shaped by the digital needs – least effort – fulfillment equation. We also claim that users in their marketplace interactions make-do with the buttonised structure to cushion ‘peer damper’ inflicted by lowballers or users posing as if out of pocket on *Letgo*. Finally, the last section suggests that while a haptic structure encapsulates a meaningful agency – click-sparking, maintaining commodity exchange, it is at the same time alienating, since the buttonised process on *Letgo*, at some point, namely data processing, requires a discreet machine conduction, which lies beyond users’ knowing and meaningful intervention. By that means, *Letgo*ers are alienated from the technology they use. They find themselves doing their share of tasks: merely delegating social buttons (the software agent) in the marketplace interactivity.

3 Methodology and Data

This study seeks answers to following research questions:

RQ1: How do social buttons operate in a context characterised by peer-to-peer second-hand commerce?

RQ2: In what ways does the buttonised structure come into play in terms of online user behaviour?

RQ3: What effect does the buttonised structure bear upon the overall usage process?

Qualitative interviews with 17 *Letgo*ers and online participant observation form the methodological basis for this study. Semi-structured in-depth interviews with users over a two-year period in 2019 – 2021 were conducted. Largely pursued during pandemic lockdown, the interviews were completed online using *Skype*. These meetings lasted between 35 and 50 minutes and were taped via the call recording feature on *Skype*. Data that was collected was transcribed and discarded. Anonymity was strictly preserved for all respondents. Recruited through snowballing and networking, participants were predominantly women, aged 20 – 31. Being Bachelor’s students or new graduates, they mainly come from the lower-middle class and use *Letgo* over a 2 – 5-year period to buy and sell used stuff online. Selling their personal second-hand stuff, they earn up to 350 – 450 TRY (Turkish Lira) on a bimonthly basis.

In this study, researchers also undertook online participant observation. Spending two-and-a-half years on the *Letgo* web and app environment, a user account was set and the first author posed as a second-hander to get the feel of how, in the medium of the buttonised structure, second-hand peer-to-peer marketplace interactivity is organised. Subscription to *Letgo* secured a thorough exploration of the digital marketplace as well as the documentation of the buttonised usage process through screenshots. In the course of covert participant observation (that helped in the minimisation of the observer effect), authors, in the capacity of second-hand buyers, interacted with sellers. It made possible a better understanding and a direct, hands-on experience into the operation of buttonised conduction on *Letgo*. This emic knowledge also enabled us to better grasp and identify with the buttonised communication process among peers in the marketplace. As part of online participant observation, screenshots were useful in visualising *Letgo*ers’ one-click way of interactivity, which we believe can make the buttonised process on *Letgo* more concrete in the minds of readers. The qualitative interviews and online participant observation enabled authors to establish a nexus between the conduction of social buttons as a software agent and peer usage process developing insights in that respect.

4 Social Buttons: Lazy Users and the Peer Damper

Being part of the “social web” that distinctly fosters the ability of ordinary users to organise processes and cross-refer cultural content,³⁴ *Letgo* is a virtual flea market aiding peer communication apropos of second-hand commodity exchange. Here, this human interactivity, beside written-communication (i.e., messaging), can be afforded through the use of a haptic software suite: the social buttons. Originally deriving from the Middle French word *boton*³⁵ – a small, often digital object on a machine that you press in order to operate it,³⁶ buttons are the short software designed to perform miscellaneous user tasks through a mere click. Speaking of *Letgo*, these tiny tactile objects are geared towards the click-spark and maintenance of second-hand peer transactions. Hence, they densely provide the basis for a finger tipped intra-user marketplace interactivity. Developed to fulfill pre-defined user tasks through striking a click, social buttons temporarily remove users’ orthographic need to type and retype – thus making peer communication on *Letgo* even easier and snappier. To delineate, social buttons on *Letgo* are basically a rich, two-layer set-up that operates as ‘product’ and ‘price query’ buttons, respectively. Speaking of the former, clicking the *Hi! Is it still available?, I’m interested* or *Hi! I’d like to buy it* buttons, users can easily inquire and find out if the product they are interested in on *Letgo* is still for sale. As such, in querying a product, they can technically utilise each of the foregoing buttons, too. For instance, the *Hi! Is it still available?, I’m interested* or *Hi! I’d like to buy it* buttons, that can be made use of at a time to discover whether a product is on hand. The clickee or, in this case, the seller without an articulation affords to respond to such buttonised query in a matter of seconds, smashing the *Yes, it is still available* button. Prior to/thereafter a price query, second-handers can push the *What condition is it in?* button to make sure if a product is overhauled or modified. Finally, Letgoers can in the first place tap into the *Is the price negotiable?* button in place of product query buttons to discern if a find is likely a bargain. In such a scenario, provided that the seller replies through hitting the *Yes, the price is negotiable* button, the clicker or, in this case the buyer can go the extra mile to achieve a good bargain. So, with the buttonised structure up and running in the marketplace process, users are empowered to make a product or price query, to respond to peers in an easy, sole-click fashion. *Temporarily* dispensing with the acts of type or retype, in other words, reading and mouse-clicking could alone actuate and help to maintain peer-to-peer marketplace activity on *Letgo* – literally within seconds.

Table 1: Performance of social buttons on *Letgo*

Users’ Buttonised Product Query on <i>Letgo</i>	
Clicker (Buyer)	Clickee (Seller)
<i>Hi! Is it still available?</i>	<i>Yes, it still is available</i>
	<i>I’m interested</i>
	<i>Hi! I’d like to buy it</i>
<i>What condition is it in?</i>	<i>It is in good condition</i>
Clicker (Buyer)	Clickee (Seller)
<i>Hi! Is it still available?</i>	<i>Yes, it still is available</i>
	<i>I’m interested</i>
	<i>Hi! I’d like to buy it</i>
<i>Is the price negotiable?</i>	<i>Yes, the price is negotiable</i>

Source: VATANSEVER, A.: 700 TL Ucuz Boş Kasalar. [online]. [2021-03-27]. Available at: <https://www.letgo.com/tr-tr/i/ucuz-bos-kasalar_3c68fde0-6894-482a-b988-30e35e5d662a>.

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35 MERRIAM-WEBSTER: *Button*. [online]. [2021-05-04]. Available at: <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/button>>.

36 COLLINS DICTIONARY: *Definition of Button*. [online]. [2021-05-20]. Available at: <<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/button>>.

The performance of social buttons on *Letgo* cannot be accounted for the aforementioned enabling and facilitation process, *per se*. In fact, it goes hand-in-hand with specific user behaviour. As signaled out below, second-handers engage *Letgo*’s buttonised structure with a digital needs – least effort – fulfillment motive, which can be further set out at this point by calling up the framework the “Lazy User Model”. The “Lazy User Model” is regarded as an overarching tenet that premises on the ‘principle of least effort’. Applying this postulate to interactive design usage, Collan and Tétard suggest fulfilling specified digital wants (i.e., user needs) users tend to opt for the informational structure, which requires of them the least effort, or action in a given context. In this connection, among the structures digitally available, users favourably adopt or utilise the interactive tool by taking its money-saving, time-saving or energy-saving (physical, mental work) quality into account – with none of it necessarily carrying equal weight.³⁷ Resounding lazy user behaviour, users when asked state: “[b]uttons stand out as the dudical thing on *Letgo*” (Participant 6). As the “heaps better” (Participant 12) resource is available, this tiny software is embraced by Letgoers on the grounds of its capacity to save on time and energy. Participants express:

*“I use buttons to quick-reply messages; with no real trouble indeed! Writing takes some lengthy effort. How can I say, if I use buttons, it takes me seconds to keep things up even in the midst of what I do daily. Or, let us say that the moment I am basically on the go. They are banausic tools. Buttons stand out as the dudical thing on *Letgo*. I gave them a go all because it saves time and energy when you work your way up.”* (Participant 6)

“I could also write to them to find out if their product is still on sale or in good condition. (...) But buttons, no doubt that they are heaps better! It feels like they cut out for me. I can buy and sell without bothering to type a single word. It is prompt on point!” (Participant 12)

*“Buttons are like a short-cut lifeline, to name. For example, when I talk, shoot a glance at stuff or simply shop on *Letgo*, it is on your fingertips. (...) You do not need to type and type for minutes. When you negotiate a deal, you do not bay at the moon! It is a click or two, three; it is no big deal, no hustle whatsoever! *Letgo* is like the market on your fingertips. In fact, at the same time it gives you the freedom, the ability to shop even on the go.”* (Participant 7)

For participants, buttons are simply convenient means readily available to them. They are time-efficient digital tools, even making ubiquitous second-hand commodity exchange possible. Social buttons save on energy, for they eliminate the need to type and retype in responding to a product query or a price offer on *Letgo*. They ease up communicative tasks that normally require Letgoers to invest a substantial amount of time and energy into cycles of type and retype.

Fulfillment of digital needs with the least effort motive among Letgoers is well in place, as far as the ‘peer damper’ goes. ‘Peer damper’, as we stated, implies a particular form of digital noise, notably induced by lowballers or users posturing as if out of pocket on *Letgo*. Causing impermanent distortions in transaction-goaled peer contexts, ‘peer damper’ responsively feeds into one-click way of hacking efforts by clickees – this also suggests how buttons are made-do as a digital antidote on *Letgo*. Participants state:

“I am purely speaking from the experience. I observed buttons save quite a time. They are user-friendly, energy efficient. You can respond to fellow shoppers quickly and easily. It is like a short-cut feature. Plus, it is the tool if you want to do away with the crazy traffic by those lowballers. (...) Every time, they come up with super low bids. (...) What I will tell you now is even worse: if you do not act, they press on the stupid negotiation. Luckily, buttons are available to help. I mean, not just businesswise. They do the job by helping you to easily fend these bugs off in a snap.” (Participant 13)

37 See: COLLAN, M., TÉTARD, F.: Lazy User Model: Solution Selection and Discussion about Switching. In COSTS, H., SALMELA, E., SELL, A. (eds.): *Nordic Contributions in IS Research. Lecture Notes in Business Information Processing*. Berlin : Springer, 2011, p. 56-68.

“One can write in order to reach out and stay connected, if need be. It is the mainstream way on social media. Buttons are, in a way, state-of-the-art. To me, they are well alpha plus compared to hand-typing. Buttons, all the more, allow me to chat and shop economically. It is also economical in the sense that it helps me to manage the oddity on Letgo in a less energy-intensive manner. What I mean is: people sometimes make you waste your breath, give you a real headache. They have the cash, I mean not the lowballers. These people think that they can legitimately make ridiculously low bids. They are after tricks! Buttons are my economical armour. (...) I suppose they are also the tool to easily get rid of these trickster rich. They keep coming around, and I keep shooting them away. Each day is almost the same.” (Participant 10)

Users tap into social buttons as an easy, time-efficient filtering apparatus to tackle peer noise. Distractive as it can be, peer noise apparently generates disruptions on the material exchange due to the unreasonable or deceptive quality of offers. Over against this peer-generated damper, clickees conveniently make-do with social buttons on just about a daily basis, resulting in transient forced-halts in the second-hand commerce process on *Letgo*. In relation to the digital noise and its circumvention, making-do with the social buttons, peer damper can be said to attest to a distinct form of “cyberostracism”, that “*is characterized specifically as the lack of communication or social cues*”,³⁸ or as the lack of sufficient feedback among users,³⁹ introduces the state of one’s neglect or exclusion by peers or a community in the social web.⁴⁰ Uncharacteristically, in our case cyberostracism notably comes into view in the very presence of intra-user hapticity (i.e. buttonised communication). Dissimilar to its prevalent conceptualisations in the field, cyberostracism in *Letgo* digital marketplace emerges out of the presence, not the lack. Users’ making-do with social buttons to eschew the peer noise on *Letgo* suggest us an instantiation of cyberostracism, which is specifically mobilised in the presence of communication. Seeing the light of day through the prosocial buttonised structure, users make-do with haptic tools to avert peer damper.

5 Social Buttons and the Alienated User

By its very nature, buttonised peer transactions on *Letgo* are haptic – they are bound to a mere click, a gentle flip, thus release of movement by fingertips; the user agency that, above all, helps in the organisation of second-hand commerce. Yet, on a level, it is non-agential, as users do not know about the inner conduction; the underpinning; *modus operandi* of their own buttonised marketplace activity on *Letgo*. Also lacking the control of the overall buttonised working, they emphasise that they are simply clickers sending haptic signals to the machine. Participants tell:

“Buttons are ok, they are fine. Well, how can I say, you know, it is bit of a thing for the dumb and slow-witted, strictly speaking. (...) I also need to write, message people to seal a deal. Using buttons is pretty easy, not that hard to master for me. (...) I am not going to lie to you about one thing: I do not know about its essentials – how it works and such stuff.” (Participant 3)

“I cannot clearly know or second-guess how in essence buttons operate on Letgo. I can only assume that it may happen in a way that I call ‘push-activate’. When I push or instruct, it understands I want it to do something for me. I do push-activate work. It is indeed I do the thing. It is clear that upon my push, it activates and initiates things on the screen. The bottom line is: after my click on the mouse, things are dealt with.” (Participant 9)

38 HAYES, R. et al.: When Nobody “Likes” You: Perceived Ostracism through Paralinguistic Digital Affordances within Social Media. In *Social Media + Society*, 2018, Vol. 4, No. 3, p. 1-12.

39 See, for example: GALBAVÁ, S. et al.: Cyberostracism: Emotional and Behavioral Consequences in Social Media Interactions. In *Comunicar*, 2020, Vol. 29, No. 67, p. 9-19.

40 See: WILLIAMS, K. et al.: Cyberostracism: Effects of Being Ignored over the Internet. In *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2000, Vol. 79, No. 5, p. 748-762.

“I know how it works. I hope you do not find my explanation superficial. Anyways, as you can see on the menu, there are some icons, emoji-like things for you to use. By the way, I did not know it is called a ‘social button’ – not joking! Anyways, let us consider for a moment that you are hitting ‘Is it negotiable?’ button. The system, Letgo sends this message for you; you only push the button. Then, it is directly sent to the seller. Seller instantly gets this message and sends, can send you a reply in the same manner. (...) Now, you talk about the price, manage the deal process. As for the algorithm, I can hardly describe how it performs.” (Participant 11)

Through direct, hands-on experience users obviously come to know and control their automated, clickable marketplace activity. But such cognisance is apparently partial: it is devoid of the knowledge and autonomous control of the algorithmic performance that lies behind the one-click process of peer transaction. This conduction on *Letgo* is fundamentally associated with the back-end working – thus unfolding along the lines of a code logic, namely the HTML or ‘computational language’. It is, so to speak, a ‘black box’ property, a machinic construct, which subtly acts to help in the completion of day-to-day user tasks. Given its secretiveness, purporting “*whose inner functioning cannot be known – at least not by observation, since the blackness of the box obscures vision*”,⁴¹ algorithmic operation behind the buttonised peer activity is impenetrable by Letgoers. It is distant, sealed off and therefore, it shuns human agency; meaningful user participation. Maneuvering in the presence of such hermetic conduction, second-handers are alienated from the technology; from the buttonised contraption they use on an everyday basis. For that reason, they apparently become disengaged from doing, making, making-do, but, in essence, merely ‘delegate’ the algorithmic device.⁴² Even though the users can organise the marketplace activity in the medium of the social buttons on *Letgo* in a self-determining fashion – autonomously initiating, maintaining second-hand transactions, they find themselves (to be positioned) as mere clickers, pressers in the buttonised process. Merely doing their share of digital tasks, Letgoers do nothing but send haptic signals to a subtly acting non-human agent of which the conduction is beyond their grasp. Without exploiting their cognitive, practical capacity in the buttonised usage process – thus without true engagement, Letgoers simply keep dabbling at the machinic agent to spark and maintain commodity exchange thereby, only “*behaving mechanically in service to the machine*”,⁴³ in service to the algorithmic logic/construct.

6 Conclusion

Being in place for just about a decade, social buttons fundamentally denote a digital, communicative affordance the tiny software users (might) come to exploit in the social web. It is manifest that these software artifacts are commonly operable in the webosphere from juggernaut social media platforms to second-hand consumer-to-consumer commerce sites, such as *Letgo*. Prior research on the *Like* and *Share* buttons pays scant attention to the remaining social button variants, which are brought into play by users on a day-to-day basis in the social web. Addressing this lack of attention, this study seeks to contribute to our understanding of online buttonised usage phenomenon by analysing the usage of social buttons on *Letgo* consumer-to-consumer online marketplace. Drawing on qualitative interviews and online participant observation, our findings show that social buttons on *Letgo* support users to mere-click product/price queries (i.e., endemic ways of peer interaction), which potentially leads to second-hand commodity exchange. Such clickable peer interactivity is embraced by Letgoers mainly in that they are time-efficient tools, even making ubiquitous second-hand material exchange possible. Temporarily eliminating the need to type and retype, the social buttons enable users to respond to product or price queries with less effort. In other words, capitalising on the buttonised structure, Letgoers become relieved of a substantial amount of time and energy investable into imminent orthographic cycles in the digital marketplace.

41 PASQUALE, F.: *The Black Box Society: The Secret Algorithms That Control Money and Information*. Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 2015, p. 43.

42 See: PLOTNICK, R.: Force, Flatness and Touch without Feeling: Thinking Historically about Haptics and Buttons. In *New Media & Society*, 2017, Vol. 19, No. 10, p. 1632-1652.

43 See: PLOTNICK, R.: Force, Flatness and Touch without Feeling: Thinking Historically about Haptics and Buttons. In *New Media & Society*, 2017, Vol. 19, No. 10, p. 1632-1652.

The one-click way of convenient transacting necessarily lays the conditions for specific user behaviour. Resounding the “Lazy User Model”, Letgoers reveal they utilise social buttons on the grounds for its time and energy-friendly features as far as their marketplace interactivity and the peer-damper are concerned. While being empowered to expend minimal amounts of time and energy in their interactions, users through a mere click can afford to tackle peer disturbance, which is typically brought about by lowballers or users posturing as if out of pocket on *Letgo*. Finally, as well as relying on buttonised tools, users can self-determinedly initiate and maintain second-hand commerce online. However, in this participation, the user agency on *Letgo* ceases to exist. Letgoers are clueless about the digital operational logic and the underpinning behind their buttonised action – besides, they completely lack control of such working. Sending haptic signals to a digital object, not doing, making or making-do but solely pressing hence, users become alienated from the technology they use day-to-day. In such a process, they find themselves delegated to the algorithmic conduction, in service to the machine.

In accordance with the previous studies,⁴⁴ this article indicates that social buttons, akin to other social button variants mainly operable across social networking sites, are tactual, short-cut software components, which facilitate the one-click method of peer interactivity. In contrast to earlier work on the *Like* and/or *Share* buttons,⁴⁵ this study deals with the buttonised usage phenomena in the particular context of online second-hand marketplace activity. In this sense, we attempted to give room for a distinct axis of analysis of the buttonised user agency phenomena. Drawing on users’ everyday lived experiences, in this study we presented an analysis of the peer-generated digital activity corridor taking shape in the medium of social buttons on *Letgo*. As well as seeking to provide a nuanced knowledge of such user agency, we also argued that button-propelled agential processes are made-done by users in the wake of ‘peer damper’, the digital disturbance inflicted by lowballers or users posing as if out of pocket on *Letgo*. Unlike the recent studies, which largely portray buttonised agency as a non-contradictory process,⁴⁶ our findings helped us surface the fact that buttonised peer interactivity is a far from being a friction-free techno-social phenomena. Finally, as opposed to existing studies, which one-sidedly suggest that buttonised user agency is empowering and promotes self-sufficiency, thus fostering dealienation,⁴⁷ this research makes a case that such an agential process is alienating, since users are merely delegated the task of sending haptic signals to algorithmic performance. These findings are of significance, as they have not been previously described.

Theoretical discussions made in this study aim to reflect on the social buttons, by examining the usage process of second-handers on *Letgo*. The buttonised usage phenomenon can only be animated in the medium of social buttons, with each adequate to the respective conduction of user tasks. It makes this contemporary socio-technical reality a notably pliable phenomenon, with associated contingencies. Thus, it is futile to proffer a single comprehensive analysis on the buttonised usage phenomenon. Apparently, more research will need to be carried out to take stock of the nuances of the relationship between the buttonised structure and online user behaviour. Such scholarly attempts will provide us with a more in-depth knowledge of the buttonised usage phenomenon, which in no way can be unmoored from the multiplex fabric of the digital, social web.

Notwithstanding these limitations, this study contributes to the existing literature on the social buttons in two ways. Firstly, contrary to existing literature, which mainly articulates salient ways of social buttons

usage, this study brings out the alternative manifestations of buttonised user participation, by laying out how users repurpose and employ social buttons to tackle communicative noise induced by fellow users. This revelation is important, as it helps us to identify the frictional nature of buttonised inter-subjective activity. Secondly, the findings surface out the alienatory aspect of buttonised usage, by making the case that buttonised user engagement implies a mere delegation to machinic conduction. This concluding remark is important, as it allows us to get a grasp on the dialectical nature of human-computer interaction (i.e., agency-non-agency) in the wake of a haptic webosphere.

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