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Outside the comfort zone: participation and advertising

Abstract

The intersection of participation and advertising can be considered one of the more difficult areas for participatory research, as it cannot benefit from the luxury of taken-for-grantedness that, for instance, political participation has. Research into this intersection exists but has not always used strongly developed theoretical frameworks on participatory intensities. This text is grounded in extensive theoretical reflections about participation, using the so-called political studies approach towards participation, which defines participation as the redistribution of power in formal and informal decision-making processes. Moreover, also the distinction between participation *in* and participation *through* is used, in order to analyse a series of examples from the field of professional advertising and subvertising. The text points, on the one hand, to the emphasis on interaction and minimalist participation in the subfield of professional advertising, and, on the other hand, to the more developed participatory intensities outside this subfield, when, for instance, activists make use of the repertoires of advertising to participate in other societal fields.

Keywords

Participation; interaction; power redistribution; professional advertising; activism

Fuera de la zona de confort: participación y publicidad

Resumen

El cruce entre la participación y la publicidad puede considerarse una de las áreas más difíciles para la investigación participativa, ya que no puede beneficiarse del lujo de ser tomada como segura que, por ejemplo, tiene la participación política. La investigación sobre esta intersección existe, pero no siempre ha utilizado marcos teóricos fuertemente desarrollados sobre intensidades participativas. Este texto se basa en extensas reflexiones teóricas

sobre la participación, utilizando el llamado enfoque de los estudios políticos hacia la participación, que la define como la redistribución del poder en los procesos formales e informales de toma de decisiones. Además, también se utiliza la distinción entre participación y el uso de la participación, para analizar una serie de ejemplos del campo de la publicidad profesional y la *subvertising*. El texto señala, por un lado, el énfasis en la interacción y la participación minimalista en el subcampo de la publicidad profesional y, por otro lado, a las intensidades participativas más desarrolladas fuera de este subcampo, cuando, por ejemplo, los activistas hacen uso de los repertorios de publicidad para participar en otros campos sociales.

Palabras clave

Participación; interacción; redistribución de poder; publicidad profesional; activismo

Introduction

Virtually every academic discipline and field contains research into participatory processes, sometimes more developed and at the centre stage, sometimes more confined to the academic outskirts of that discipline (or field). Academic discussions about participation are – to a large extent – situated in, and about, societal domains where participation is expected, and where it is considered highly desirable, as in, for instance, the field of politics (Milbrath, 1965). In other cases, the existence of these discussions (and the participatory practices themselves) might surprise – at least at first sight – as is the case with, for instance, patient participation (Guadagnoli & Ward, 1998; Longtin et al., 2010). One way of understanding these differences in attention and expectation is to focus on the presence, degree and societal legitimacy of structural power imbalances that characterise a particular social field. For instance, (the study of) participation in total institutions (Goffman, 1961), such as prisons or mental asylums might surprise more than (the study of) participation in representative democracy. The latter might even appear to some as a tautological idea, while the former might be interpreted as something that ranges from unlikely to unthinkable (even if it does exist[1]).

The luxury of having participation taken for granted in some fields, and not in others, renders it necessary to study participation also in areas

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[1] There is, for instance, the activism of the so-called psychiatric survivors movement, driven by key texts such as Chamberlin's (1978) On our own.

that are outside the comfort zone, while, at the same time, a firm eye needs to be kept on the problems with participation inside the comfort zone. Contextualised by this dynamic of taken-for-grantedness and ignorance, this text aims to discuss the relationship between advertising and participation, which implies the recognition that (consumer) participation in advertising is possible, moving away from questions about its existence, and towards questions *how* it exists, in other words, questions about the participatory intensities that we can find in the field of advertising. This, in turn, also requires a more developed theorisation of participation than is common in the intersection of participation and advertising, not accepting at face value the exuberant claims from the industry, that uses the rhetoric of participation rather freely, nor the hyper-critical voices that consider participation irreconcilable with, and inconceivable within, the field of advertising. Through an in-depth theoretical discussion, combined with the analysis of a series of examples from the field of advertising, this text aims to contribute to a better understanding of the articulation of advertising and participation, even if it remains a bit outside our comfort zone.

APPROACHES TO PARTICIPATION[2]

The literature on participation, including media and participation, has produced many different positions (see, e.g., Jenkins & Carpentier, 2013 and Allen et al., 2014, for two fairly recent media-related debates). Arguably, two main approaches to participation can be distinguished in these debates: a sociological approach and a political (studies) approach[3] (see also Lepik, 2013). The sociological approach defines participation as taking part in particular social processes, a definition which casts a very wide net. In this approach, participation includes many (if not all) types of human interaction, in combination with interactions with texts and technologies. Power is not excluded from this approach but remains one of the many secondary concepts to support it. One example of how participation is defined in this approach, is Melucci's (1989, p. 174) definition, when he says that participation has a double meaning: "it means both taking part, that is, acting so as to promote the interests and the needs of an actor as well as belonging to a system, identifying with the 'general interests' of the community". In one of

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[2] This part has been published before, in Carpentier (2016).

[3] These two labels refer to the dominant use of participation in these academic fields. This does not imply that this dominant use is exclusive, and that these fields are homogeneous. The political studies approach towards participation will be abbreviated as the political approach, for reasons of brevity.

the afore-mentioned debates, we can also find an example of this approach, voiced by one of the authors:

> the critique of participation sounds a bit like disappointment about its unfulfilled promises, but those were flawed from the beginning. I tried to develop a pragmatic understanding of participation. The scholar's personal hopes for democratic progress or power balance should not be a part of it. I treat participation more as a technical term, a modus operandus, free of political connotation. Participation simply describes how users in one way or another contribute to or participate in using a service or a platform. I refuse any normative connotation of participation. (Schäfer, quoted in Allen et al., 2014, p. 1142)

The sociological approach results, for instance, in labelling consumption as participatory, because consumers are taking part in a consumption culture and are exercising consumer choices (Lury, 2011, p. 12). An interesting example that taps into a more artistic approach – to reflect and critique consumption culture by replicating the logo of a famous soft drink brand – is Consume Cool, by Gordon Holden. At the same time, this project uses a definition of participation that is well-aligned to the sociological approach, as the below-rendered project description demonstrates.

> Consume Cool is a project started by Gordon Holden with an all-too-familiar soft drink logo's font plastered over several objects and images. The works or, perhaps, products blur the line between art and the act of consumption within a hyper-capitalist framework. Its cheeky description proclaims Consume Cool to be anything and everything, yet through this amorphous image it, like the brands and consumerism it pokes fun at, becomes superficial and almost nothing at all. Consume Cool, however, does not deny participating in consumption and, instead, fully acknowledges it through art, which brings forward a personal investigation in our interactions and participatory nature with consumer capitol and branding. (Holden, 2017)

We also find this broad definition of participation in other fields, for instance, for doing sports, as exemplified by Delaney and Madigan's (2009) frequent use of the participation concept in their introduction into the sociology of sports. And we can find a similar approach in what is labelled cultural participation, where participation is defined as individual art (or cultural) exposure, attendance or access, in some cases complemented by

individual art (or cultural) creation. As Vander Stichle and Laermans (2006, p. 48) describe it: "in principle, cultural participation behaviour encompasses both public and private receptive practices, as well as active and interactive forms of cultural participation". In practice, this implies that the concept of participation is used for attending a concert or visiting a museum.

Within media studies, the sociological approach can, for instance, be found in how Carey (2009, p. 15) defines the ritual model of communication in *Communication as culture*, as the "representation of shared beliefs", where togetherness is created and maintained, without disregarding the many contending forces that characterise the social. For Carey (2009, p. 15), the ritual model of communication is explicitly linked to notions of "'sharing', 'participation', 'association', 'fellowship' and the 'possession of a common faith'", where people are (made) part of a culture through their ritualistic participation in that very same culture. (Mass) Media, such as newspapers (used by Carey as an example), play a crucial role by inviting readers to participate in a cultural configuration, interpelating them – to use an Althusserian concept – to become part of society by offering them subject positions or, as Carey puts it, social roles, with which they can identify (or dis-identify):

> under a ritual view, then, news is not information but drama. It does not describe the world but portrays an arena of dramatic forces and action; it exists solely in historical time; and it invites our participation on the basis of our assuming, often vicariously, social roles within it. (Carey, 2009, p. 21)

This type of ritual participation[4] again defines participation as taking (and becoming) part, through a series of interactions, with – in Carey's case – media texts. Others have also used the ritual participation concept (and the sociological approach to participation it entails), in relationship to media (Dayan and Katz, 2009, p. 120; Real, 1996), festivals (Roemer, 2007) and the arts (Braddock, 2009).

In contrast, the political approach produces a much more restrictive definition of participation, which refers to the equalisation of power

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[4] Interestingly, Carey (2009) does not use the concept of ritual participation in *Communication as culture*. He does use "ritual of participation" (2009, p. 177), which refers to a very different process; namely, the emptying of the signifier participation as an elitist strategy. This use of the participation concept, mainly to be found in chapter seven of *Communication as culture* ("The history of the future", co-authored with John J. Quirk), is much more aligned with the political approach towards participation.

inequalities in particular decision-making processes (see Carpentier, 2011; Carpentier, Dahlgren & Pasquali, 2014). Participation then becomes defined as the equalisation of power relations between privileged and non-privileged actors in formal or informal decision-making processes.

For instance, in the field of democratic theory, Pateman's (1970) *Participation and democratic theory* is highly instrumental in showing the significance of power in defining participation, and can be seen as a key illustration of the political approach towards participation. The two definitions of participation that she introduces are those of partial and full participation. Partial participation is defined by Pateman as "a process in which two or more parties influence each other in the making of decisions but the final power to decide rests with one party only" (1970, p. 70), while full participation is seen as "a process where each individual member of a decision-making body has equal power to determine the outcome of decisions" (1970, p. 71). Also in the field of urban planning, Arnstein (1969, p. 216) in her seminal article "A ladder of citizen participation" links participation explicitly to power, saying "that citizen participation is a categorical term for citizen power".

The political approach also allows emphasising that participation is an object of struggle, and that different ideological projects (and their proponents) defend different participatory intensities[5]. More minimalist versions of participation tend to protect the power positions of privileged (elite) actors, to the detriment of non-privileged (non-elite) actors, without totally excluding the latter. In contrast, more maximalist versions of participation strive for a full equilibrium between all actors (which protects the non-privileged actors).

The more restrictive use of the notion of participation in the political approach necessitates more clearer demarcation of participation towards a series of related concepts that are, in the sociological approach, often used interchangeably. One key concept is engagement[6], which Dahlgren (2013, p. 25) defines as the "subjective disposition that motivates [the] realization [of participation]", in order to distinguish it from participation. In earlier work, Dahlgren (2009) argues that the feeling of being invited, committed and/or empowered, but also the positive inclination towards the political (and the social), are crucial components of engagement. In his civic cultures

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[5] One complication is that the concept of participation itself is part of these power struggles, which renders it highly contingent. The signification of participation is part of a "politics of definition" (Fierlbeck, 1998, p. 177), since its specific articulation shifts depending on the ideological framework that makes use of it.

[6] Despite its importance, this will not be used in this text in order not to complicate things too much.

circuit, Dahlgren also emphasises (apart from more materialist elements like practices and spaces) the importance of knowledge, trust, identities and values for (enhancing) engagement. Engagement is thus different from participation (in the political approach) as engagement refers to the creation, or existence, of a social connection of individuals or groups with a broader political community, which is aimed at protecting or improving it.

Other related, but still distinct, concepts are access and interaction. In earlier work, I have argued that access refers to the establishment of presence, and interaction to the creation of socio-communicative relations (Carpentier, 2011, pp. 130-131). As a concept, access is very much part of everyday language, which makes clear definitions rather rare. At the same time, access – as a concept – is used in a wide variety of (academic) fields, which we can use to deepen our understanding of this concept. One area where access is often used is geography, when the access to specific spaces and places is thematised. More historical (spatial) analyses deal with access to land, and the enclosure of the common fields (Neeson, 1996), while more contemporary analyses add a focus on the access to other resources such as food (Morton, Bitto, Oakland & Sand, 2008) and water (Wegerich & Warner, 2004). The importance of presence for defining access can also be illustrated through a series of media studies examples: in the case of the digital divide discourse, the focus is, for instance, placed on the access to (online) media technologies, which in turn allows people to access media content. In both cases, access implies achieving presence (to technology or media content). Access also features in the more traditional media feedback discussions, where it has yet another meaning. Here, access implies gaining a presence within media organisations, which generates the opportunity for people to have their voices heard (in providing feedback).

A second concept that needs to be distinguished from participation is interaction. If we look at the work of Argentinean philosopher Bunge (1977, p. 259), we can find the treacherously simple and general definition of interaction "two different things x and y interact if each acts upon the other", combined with the following postulate: "every thing acts on, and is acted upon by, other things". Interaction also has a long history in sociological theory, where it often refers to the establishment of socio-communicative relationships. An example can be found in Giddens's (2006, p. 1034) definition of social interaction in the glossary of *Sociology*, where he defines social interaction as "any form of social encounter between individuals". A more explicit foregrounding of the socio-communicative can be found in Sharma's (1996, p. 359) argument that the "two basic conditions of social

interaction" are "social contact and communication". While the social dimension of the definition of interaction can be found in concepts like contact, encounter and reciprocity (but also [social] regulation), the communicative dimension is referred to by concepts such as response, meaning and communication itself.

Moving into the realm of advertising

When moving to the discussions on participation and advertising, the obvious choice would be to stick to the sociological approach towards participation. But this comes at a high cost because there is a considerable loss of critical opportunities when the distinction between interaction and participation is abandoned. This is one of the main advantages of the political (studies) approach towards participation: by distinguishing it from interaction, we can focus on how power is redistributed through participatory processes, and to what degree we can find an equalisation of these power relations among the involved actors.

Moreover, there is a need to zoom in on particular participatory processes, and to avoid broad-sweeping statements about particular societal fields as wholes. Participatory processes are highly complicated, and dependant on the particular power dynamics that characterise (and define) them. Different processes, such as participation in the creation of ads or participation in the management of an advertising company (e.g., as a co-operative), bring about very different opportunities for, and intensities of, participation. Moreover, different types of actor groups can be involved in participatory processes, bringing in different levels of privilege and different social identities. Actors that are, for instance, owners of advertising companies, or expert-marketeers, find themselves often (but not always) in different (power) positions towards ordinary consumers. And, the multitude of decisions that together make up a participatory process – which is, after all, a process of co-decision making – also brings in its own dynamics, with some types of decisions being part of more horizontal structures, while other decisions remain locked in a more hierarchical decision-making structure, reducing the participatory intensities. This complexity is one of the reasons why earlier, ladder-based approaches (Arnstein, 1969) encountered difficulties in dealing with contradictory subprocesses (that have different participatory intensities) or with changes over time, for instance triggered by negotiations between the different actors involved in participatory processes (see Carpentier, 2016).

Despite of these complexities and nuances, there is arguably no so-cietal field where participation cannot be organised, even if in some cases the sedimented power imbalances are difficult to alter. Advertising, because of its embeddedness in capitalist economies, does not lend itself easily to structural power reconfigurations, but – at least theoretically – (maximalist) participation remains a possibility. Still, especially in the 1990s and early 2000s, there was a strong upsurge of (industry) publications that herald-ed a new (participatory) era for advertising, riding on the wave of digital media technologies. Deuze's (2005) article "Towards professional partici-patory storytelling in journalism and advertising" nicely analyses this opti-mistic phase, for instance, citing the business book *The cluetrain manifesto* (Locke, et al., 2000): "companies that don't realize their markets are now networked person-to-person, getting smarter as a result and deeply joined in conversation are missing their best opportunity". Another example is Auletta's (2005) analysis in "The new pitch: do ads still work?":

> in many ways, the advertising business in the early twenty-first century would be unrecognizable to the generation that once thrived on Madison Avenue. The traditional as-sumption, as Keith Reinhard says, was that advertisers chose the time and place of a "one-way show-and-tell" ad. The consumer was a captive audience. (Nyirő et al., 2011)

show the impressive vocabulary that has been mobilised to conceptualise this "new" relationship between companies and consumers. In their article, they distinguish between activity-focused notions and output-focused no-tions, where the latter, amongst other concepts, consists out of consumer generated advertisement, self-generated advertisements, DIY advertising, viewer created content, e-word of mouth and user-led innovation. Even if the operationalisation of these concepts needs to be scrutinized, the mere existence of these terms is an indication of the importance of the rhetoric of participation in relation to advertising.

Interaction, participation and advertising

Arguably, underneath the conceptual diversity and the optimism about digital-media-driven participation in advertising, there is more em-phasis on engagement than on participation. An interesting example is the Think with Google (2014) report entitled *Brand engagement in the par-ticipation age*, which focuses on the development of online engagement

strategies (and not on participatory strategies). For instance, under the heading "inspire engagement, win fans", the first sentence is: "marketers can inspire consumers to engage and become dedicated fans by aligning brand advertising with consumer passions across a wide array of channels".

This ambition is translated in the dominance of a range of practices that can be labelled interactive advertising, even if these interactions between the (potential) consumers and the product and/or media environment are sometimes referred to as "participatory". One example of such this kind of interactive advertising is the film[7] produced in 2012 by/for television cook Jamie Oliver for his YouTube channel. In this film, clicking on one of the ingredients in front of him, triggers another of the film's fragment being played. These fragments consist mostly out of slapstick-like interactions with the food ingredients, but there are also opportunities to slap Jamie Oliver in his face or to hit him in the crotch. However amusing slapstick comedy might be for some (the film has almost 450.000 views), when we use the political (studies) definition of participation, this does not qualify as participation. Support for this evaluation can be found in discussions on the differences between interactive and participatory film. Ben-Shaul (2008, p. 7) defines an interactive film as "audio-visual texts that strives, through the use of cinematic strategies, to offer the interactor an option to change at predetermined points the course of action by shifting to other predetermined options", which fits this Jamie Oliver film quite nicely. In contrast, participatory film is defined as situations where "the filmmaker acknowledges his entry upon the world of his subjects and yet asks them to imprint directly upon the film their own culture" (Macdougall, 1985, pp. 282-283)

Also the basic principles of viral marketing and viral advertising exemplify this focus on interaction. Eckler and Rodgers (2010) define viral marketing as the application of "traditional word-of-mouth (WOM) marketing to the online environment", but immediately point to the confusion that surrounds the concept and its definition(s). They refer to Golan and Zaidner, (2008, p. 961 quoted in Eckler & Rodgers, 2010) who define viral marketing as "a broad array of online WOM strategies designed to encourage both online and peer-to-peer communication about a brand, product or service". Viral advertising is, in turn, deemed a subset of viral marketing, defined as "unpaid peer-to-peer communication of provocative content originating from an identified sponsor using the Internet to persuade or influence an audience to pass along the content to others" (Porter & Golan, 2006, p. 29). In their discussion of what "provocative content" means,

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[7] Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=usPV2cXhxpo.

Porter and Golan (2006, p. 31) then refer to "violent and sexually charged content presented in a humorous context without overt branding". But what is important here is that these definitions of viral marketing and viral advertising place the advertiser (or marketeer) firmly in control. They "encourage" communication or "persuade (…) an audience to pass along content", while this content originates from "an identified sponsor". Audience members do have the agency to pass on messages or not, but this situation simultaneously and structurally limits their capabilities to engage in decisions related to the ad content, production process and even distribution process. This in turn renders participation not an appropriate term here, at least not in the definition used in the political (studies) approach.

Still, audience members do have the capacity to talk back, and to co-construct an interpretative context that impacts on the viral advertising content. From this slightly broader perspective, ordinary consumers have an opportunity to participate in the (public) interpretation of, or public debate about, advertising content, even if the multiplicity of critical (and noncritical) voices still tends to imply that the participatory intensity remains minimalist. One example is an AT&T tweet, released in September 2013, with an unmarked smartphone held up in front of the New York skyline, with on the screen two beams of light, indicating where the twin towers used to be[8]. The responses were overall negative, accusing AT&T of conflating tribute and advertising, generating a message that was considered to be too commercial. AT&T then quickly, still on the same day, released an apology, stating: "we apologize to anyone who felt our post was in poor taste. The image was solely meant to pay respect to those affected by the 9/11 tragedy"[9]. Also, in later communication, the AT&T CEO, Randall Stephenson, apologised, stating that: "it is a day that should never be forgotten and never, ever commercialized"[10]. Examples like these illustrate that even if the production and distribution of advertising are often interactive and not participatory, the responses can trigger participatory moments.

Moreover, some advertising activities have a degree of participation, albeit it is often minimalist. This is because the participatory opportunities are strongly framed by the politics of the brand, the pre-set objectives of the advertisers and the framework (and interface) in which the consumers are invited and permitted to manoeuvre. For instance, the Art of the Trench

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[8] Retrieved from https://www.nbcnews.com/businessmain/t-apologizes-tweeting-9-11-ad-8C11131490.

[9] See link footnote 8.

[10] See link footnote 8.

campaign, aimed at promoting Burberry's trench coat, used a standalone social media platform to allow for – what Business Today journalist Katie Tobias (2013) called – "two levels of participation":

> customers could upload photos of themselves in their Burberry trenches, and customers and "aspirationals" alike could comment on them, "like", and share the photos via Facebook, email, Twitter, or Delicious. Users could also sort photos by trench type, colour, gender of the user, weather, popularity, and the where the photo originated (user submitted, Sartorialist, fashion), and click-through to the Burberry site to make a purchase.

The current Art of the Trench Tumblr page still includes the promise of participation in the key slogan: "art of the Trench is a living document of the trench coat and the people who wear it. The project is a collaboration between you, Burberry and some of the world's leading image makers"[11].

As Roth and Kimani's work (2014) illustrates, many of these initiatives function through the logics of crowdsourcing and are structured through the mechanism of the contest. Roth and Kimani distinguish between different types of contests, namely idea contests, call for pitches, simple contests and stage-based contests (Roth & Kimani, 2014, p. 188). One of the consequences of the implementation of the contest model is that consumer participation often ends up being more minimalist, as the contest sets the eligibility and selection criteria and the jury controls the final decision. One example is the Frito-Lay's "Crash the Super Bowl" contest (see Berthon et al., 2008, p. 18; Roth & Kimani, 2014, p. 180). In these yearly contests, which ran between 2006 and 2016[12], consumers were invited to produce an ad for the Frito-Lay brand of flavoured tortilla chips, Doritos. Participants received online support, and in some cases, support was also provided by company staff (Bhalla, 2011, p. 82). The selection was partially based on peer voting, and partially decided upon by Frito-Lay (Bhalla, 2011, p. 83). The ad of one (or more) winner(s) was then broadcast during the Super Bowl, the championship game of the National Football League in the USA, and in the later editions, the winner(s) also received prize money. Roth and Kimani (2014, p. 180) describe how these early campaigns (including Crash the Super Bowl):

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[11] Retrieved from http://burberry.tumblr.com/.

[12] The 2007/8 edition was an exception, as it focussed on the production of a song (and not an add), and in the 2010/1 edition, Doritos was combined with Pepsi Max (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crash_the_Super_Bowl, for an overview, and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q1IRVcPOXyY, for the ads of all finalists).

were more PR stunts than ways to produce video content to be used for actual advertising. Campaigns were backed by massive budgets to promote video contests beforehand, to manage and handle brand reputation during, and to communicate and air the winners after the contests.

And in some cases, the promise of (minimalist) participation – whether it was implicit or explicit – through the contest model is not kept. One (in)famous example is the co-called Boaty McBoatface controversy. The Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) launched in 2016 the Name Our Ship campaign, inviting people to suggest names for the NERC's new 200 million GBP polar research vessel. One name, "Boaty McBoatface", submitted by former BBC host James Hand, turned out be very popular, gathering more than 124.000 votes. Other popular names, out of a total of 7.034 entries, were "Poppy-Mai", the first name of the then 15-month-old Poppy-Mai Barnard, who had been diagnosed with a very aggressive cancer (close to 40.000 votes), "Henry Worsley", the name of an explorer that had died early 2016 during a solo and unaided crossing of the Antarctic (over 15.000 votes), "David Attenborough", the name of a documentary film maker and former BBC senior manager (over 11.000 votes) and "Its bloody cold here" (over 10.000 votes).[13] The communication about the decision-making entitlements was far from clear, with, for instance, a logo prominently featuring "Name Our Ship" and a twitter handle (#NameOurShip) that – rather obviously – included the same call. But when people submitted a proposed name, the submission form included the following sentence, which gently suggested that NERC would keep control over the decision: "please complete the form below in order to submit your name suggestion. Once the form has been submitted, NERC will review your submission and let you know if your suggestion has made it onto the #NameOurShip campaign"[14]. Later, the NERC issued a statement that "according to its competition rules it would have the final say on any name"[15]. After the British science minister, Jo Johnson, expressed a preference for "a name that lasts longer than a social media news cycle and reflects the serious nature of the science"[16], "RSS Sir David Attenborough" was chosen as the ship's name, while the name of

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[13] Retrieved from https://nameourship.nerc.ac.uk/entries.html (offline).

[14] Retrieved from https://nameourship.nerc.ac.uk/submit-a-name.html (offline).

[15] Retrieved from https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-36064659

[16] Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/apr/18/boaty-mcboatface-may-not-be-name-of-new-polar-research-vessel

"Boaty McBoatface" went to one of the autonomous underwater vehicles.[17] Phillips and Milner (2017, p. 164) describe how this decision provoked considerable protest, nicely captured by Guardian commentator Stuart Heritage: "admittedly, calling a boat Boaty McBoatface was a bad idea, voted for by idiots. But it was our bad idea. It was the British character writ large, and this cruel government killed it"[18].

Using advertising's language and spaces

The previous part focussed on advertising companies, but arguably, the field of advertising stretches out beyond the activities of advertising companies. Here, it is important to stress that participation is always located in one or more particular fields, but that there is a difference between *participation in* and *participation through* a field (see Carpentier, 2016). Sometimes participatory processes allow for participation in the field in which the process is embedded. For instance, participation in a community media production process is a form of participation in the media field itself. But in other cases, we are faced with trans-field participation, when activities related to (a process situated in) one field, allow for participation in another field[19]. Being part of a public debate about labour rights on a social media platform, for instance, is a process that entails (minimalist) participation in the fields of politics and labour, more than that it does so in the field of media, as there is little shared control over the infrastructure of the social media platform itself, and over the setting of the public debate in the sub-platform (e.g., a Facebook group). Prisoner participation in community radio production, as, for instance, organised by the British Prison Radio Association[20] is a process (partially) situated in total institutions that do not allow for participation, but through these activities, prisoners still participate in the field of media and (self-) representation.

This argument can be used to think about participation *in* the field of advertising by non-traditional actors (moving beyond advertising

[17] Retrieved from https://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/2016/05/06/boatymcboatface-to-live-on-as-yellow-submarine-science-minister/.

[18] Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/apr/19/boaty-mcboatface-tyrants-have-crushed-the-peoples-will.

[19] Of course, overlaps do occur. For instance, participation in the media field, by participating in the production of a community radio show about labour rights, also allows for participation in the field of politics and labour. Here, we can find participation in a field, that allows for participation through this field. But we can also have, for instance, interactions in one field through which participation in another field is generated.

[20] Available at https://prison.radio/

companies), but also about participation in other fields, *through* activities in the field of advertising. Berthon et al.'s (2008; see also Nyirő et al., 2011) model uses the label of consumer-generated ads and distinguishes between four types: subversive, contrarian, concordant and incongruous. The differences between these types depend on their assonant/dissonant underlying relation with the brand, and on their underlying message about the brand. They also argue that there are different ways that companies respond to these consumer-generated ads; they can repel, disapprove, facilitate and applaud. Partially, this model overlaps with what has been discussed earlier, when it relates to situations where advertisers integrate (minimalist) consumer participation in their activities. But Berthon et al.'s model also allows emphasising that non-professional advertisers can deploy activities in the field of advertising, sometimes creating ads that are tributary towards a brand, in other cases producing ads that are critical towards it. Arguably, we need to add one more category, namely the indifference towards the brand, where non-professional advertisers use particular brands (and participate *in* the field of advertising) to generate meanings relevant to fields outside the field of advertising (participating *through* the field of advertising).

Even if the categories of non-professional and professional advertiser are hybrid, and the relationship with the brand is often complicated, some non-professional ads talk more to the field of advertising than others. One example is MCP – Collision Prevent[21], a fictional ad directed by Tobias Haase, who was then a student at the Film Academy Baden-Württemberg, in Germany. In MCP, a Mercedes car, fitted with an emergency breaking system, is seen driving through the Austrian countryside, and the village of Braunau am Inn, Adolf Hitler's birthplace. At first, the car (automatically) breaks for two little girls, playing on the road, but then kills the young Adolf Hitler. In the last shot, we can see his body, in the shape of a swastika; the slogan "Erkennt Gefahren, bevor Sie entstehen" [Recognizes danger before it occurs] frames the child's death as desirable. The film won the First Steps Award 2013 but remained highly controversial. As a result of negotiations with the Mercedes-Benz company, different disclaimers were added (Haase in Füller, 2013), with "Not authorized" appearing repeatedly. At the beginning and at the end of the film, the sentence "Non-authorized spot! No affiliation with Mercedes-Benz / Daimler AG" is screened, in English and in German. As MCP is a final assignment from a film school, its relationship with the advertising industry is ambivalent, but it remains an example of the possibility of more intense forms of participation in the field of advertising,

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[21] See https://vimeo.com/72718945

without having any participation in an advertising company (keeping in mind that understandable lack of enthusiasm from the side of Mercedes-Benz).

In many other cases, the advertising language and spaces are used to organise participation in different fields. Melo (2018) discusses the example of the work of Brandalism, a group of climate activists, at COP21[22], where they reclaimed advertising spaces to protest the lack of progress in the climate change negotiations. As a collaboration between "100 parisians and 80 artists from the global north and south", Brandalism "installed 600 subvertisements in ad spaces across Paris the day before the COP21 Climate Talks were due to begin"[23]. One example was a green-coloured poster, reminiscent of laundry detergent advertising, prominently featuring the text "Green Wash", with at the bottom the smaller text: "for cleaning up dirty profits"[24]. This poster is one of the many examples where Brandalism used the language and spaces of advertising to develop a critique on the politics of climate change, thus participating in the fields of climate politics (and in the field of advertising, but to a much lesser extent).

The tactics of subvertising and spoofing ads are often considered to be part of culture jamming. In his seminal essay "Culture Jamming: Hacking, Slashing and Sniping in the Empire of Signs", Dery (1993) labels subvertising, or "the production and dissemination of anti-ads that deflect Madison Avenue's attempts to turn the consumer's attention in a given direction", an "ubiquitous form of jamming". He explicitly mentions Adbusters, the Vancouver-based "international collective of artists, designers, poets, punks, writers, directors, musicians, philosophers, drop outs, and wild hearts"[25], who have a long tradition in subvertising, taking aim at, for instance, the fashion, alcohol and pharmaceutical industries. Also Jenkins (2016, p. 2) emphasises the importance of this collective, when he writes:

> the protest movements of the early 1990s embraced a DIY aesthetic, inspired the indie media movement, and employed culture jamming as a way of 'blocking the flow' of concentrated media. Adbusters, a key culture jamming organization, begat Occupy, but Occupy pushed beyond their rhetorical practices.

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[22] The United Nations 21st "Conference of Parties" (COP) to the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) took place in Paris, France, from 30 November to 12 December 2015.

[23] Retrieved from http://brandalism.ch/projects/cop21-climate-talks/

[24] Retrieved from http://brandalism.ch/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Eyesaw_bourget-1.jpg

[25] Retrievd from http://www.adbusters.org/about/

One of their classic spoofs, targeting Prozac (and the overuse of anti-depressants) also referred to laundry detergent ads, with a woman embracing a box of Prozac (described as "Mood brightener" for a "new improved life!"), combined with the slogan "Wash your blues away!"[26], again demonstrating the focus on participation through the field of advertising, in the field of politics and medicine.

Conclusion

When moving outside the comfort zones of participatory research, in order to focus on the intersection of participation and advertising, a complicated narrative unfolds. Participatory practices clearly exist in advertising, but the more maximalist versions are mostly located outside the realm of professional advertising. One could argue that, especially with the more restrictive definition of participation being used here – focusing on the redistribution of power in formal and informal decision-making processes, not much is left of the high-pitched enthusiastic voices that claim that participation has a strong position in professional advertising. Often, in this (important) subfield of advertising, interaction seems to prevail over participation, and engagement over empowerment. If there is participation, then it tends towards the minimalist versions of participation, still strongly privileging the power positions of professional advertisers. Of course, interaction and engagement are *an sich* important for our societies, and processes that stimulate them should be valued. And, interaction and engagement are not only important in their own right, but they are – as argued elsewhere (Carpentier, 2016) – also conditions of possibility for participation. Still, even when they are necessary conditions, they are not sufficient conditions for participation, and it remains striking how absent (maximalist) participation is in professional advertising.

When (normatively) evaluating these low participatory intensities in professional advertising, there are two problem areas that need to be mentioned. One is the possible instrumentalisation of participant-consumers, which occurs when their participation ceases being a goal in its own end, and becomes exclusively driven by the profit motive of the professional advertisers. The leverages of power remain often – in interactive and even in minimalist-participatory scenarios – in the hands of professional advertisers, which increases the risk of consumer instrumentalisation. Moreover,

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[26] Retrieved from https://adbusters.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/adbusters_prozac_0.jpg.

the frequent usages of the signifier participation, even when there hardly is any redistribution of power, can be seen as contributing to these (risks of) instrumentalisation, as it enhances a regime of governmentality (Foucault, 1991) where participant-consumers (are led to) believe that they are participating, while their actions might be more about freely surrendering to invisible forms of governing and compliance. The second (and related) problem area is the free labour on which consumer participation is often built. Of course, free labour can be seen as a gift, driven by the pleasures of altruism and creation, but in situations where the absence of reciprocity becomes structural, exploitation – at least potentially – enters the stage. Moreover, following Cova and Dalli's (2009, p. 327) argumentation in the field of marketing, there is a risk of "double exploitation", where the absence of remuneration is combined with higher consumption prices. Of course, this does not mean that these problems and risks always and necessarily materialise, but the development of more safeguards, for instance, by extending – what Corus and Ozanne (2014) have called – participatory corporate social responsibility to the intersection of participation and advertising, would contribute to alleviating these risks.

All this does not mean that more intense versions of participation do not exist in the field of advertising. Interestingly, and paradoxically: The world of professional advertising may have been successful in policing the subfield constituted by its companies, but it has not managed to fence off the world of advertising in its entirety. Consumers have not waited for advertising companies to open their gates; instead, advertising is more and more used by consumers, citizens and activists to serve their own purposes. Sometimes, these consumer-generated ads pay homage to particular brands and companies, but in other cases these ads are activist interventions, taking aim at these very same brands and companies. And in other cases, activists serve themselves of the formal repertoires of advertising to communicate very different issues, and mockingly use the field of advertising to participate in other societal fields. In the end, these detours have indeed resulted in a democratisation of the field of advertising, despite of the apparent reluctance of professional advertising companies to engage in, and experiment with, more in-depth forms of (maximalist) participation.

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