

Competing by participation – A winning marketing tool¹

Nóra Nyirő²

Tamás Csordás

Dóra Horváth

Institute of Marketing and Media, Corvinus University of Budapest, Hungary

UDC 659.11 : 316.775.4 : 004.738.5

Summary: In the new media and communications context audiences are more empowered than ever to make their voices heard. Audiences, consumers are actively influencing the marketing activities of firms and brands. In the new dominant logic of marketing, firms are constrained to engage in complex processes of exchange with their consumers. To be able to keep up with the competition and media noise, it is crucial for companies to involve their audiences, potential consumers. Consumer participation in this context does not end with special attention for the brand, as companies turned to electronic word-of-mouth and other interactive messages concerning the company. Consumers themselves not only create advertisements and broadcast them in favour of or against organizations, they also create new products via a number of co-creative procedures and they are pushing the organizations to launch new pricing models. Therefore the scope of user-generated content is rather diverse from a marketing perspective. By generating an overview of the participation phenomenon in marketing and marketing communications literature, this article endeavours to reconcile the related taxonomy used in the business and marketing literature by an extended summary and explanation of the key terms. This will allow us to conclude that the most important central theme of the very diverse literature of audience participation lies in the fact that it is inspired, facilitated, established or maintained by the participating corporation as a core element. As such, participating corporations manage to extract a source of additional satisfaction and thus an added value that in a long term can be transformed into a competitive advantage.

Keywords: participating audiences, user-generated content, marketing value

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² nora.nyiro@uni-corvinus.hu

1. Introduction: The marketing response to new challenges – an urge for participation

Marketing language frequently uses the shorter term “audience” when referring to the target audience of a brand, a product, a service, etc. In the traditional business setting marketers, companies, organizations create the marketing messages, advertisements for their target audiences, in order to persuade, remind or attract them. Briefly put, the world of marketing communications worked in the same way as the general communication flows: the organization controlled the messages, created the content and the audiences consumed them. Regarding advertisements and promotional messages, a common belief is that people do not appreciate them, and that everyone is trying to avoid them. However, in the present media context, users, audiences, consumers themselves do create advertisements and broadcast them in favor of (or against) a brand, company or organization.

Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) argue that market value is increasingly co-created by both the firm and the consumer. These two authors highlight that this new consumer role is noticeable and apparent in a number of ways. The new consumers have better, larger and quicker access to information and these knowledgeable consumers can make more informed decisions and influence the decisions of other consumers more strongly. They have a global view about firms, technologies, prices etc. as well as about other consumers’ actions and reactions. The traditional barriers disappear in the network society and the thematic consumer communities are revolutionizing emerging markets and transforming established ones. The power of consumer communities stems from their independence from the firm; consumer networking inverts the classic mass type of marketing communication, making it interactive and democratic. Consumers may experiment with products and develop new ones thanks to the platform the internet is providing them with. Activism changes as well, as consumers are able to better discriminate when making buying decisions and experiences by emboldening each other to act and speak out. Firms are no longer autonomous product designers, producers and marketing messengers, of a business necessity, they are led to resort to interaction with consumers for co-creation (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004).

At the same time, new media and communications platforms offer a far broader potential for cooperation between engaged consumers and firms than ever. Complex processes of creative exchange can be initiated between the two parties, during which individuals become ever more empowered in relation to

the firms, while they should ‘only’ be their consumers. The emergent “service-dominant” logic of marketing criticizes, not without avail, the traditional marketing paradigm of viewing buyers as passive consumers and advocates to include buyers in the value creation process by involving them in the logics of value creation by asserting that the consumer is always a co-creator of value (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). One example of this change is Time Magazine’s 2006 December issue, the front page celebrating “YOU” as the person of the year. The millions of people participating in social network platforms and creating content (Grossman, 2006) are strong indicators of the turnaround in the logic of successful marketing thought.

To understand the participation phenomenon and its importance for marketing and business scholarship and practices we have to start from the understanding of participation and related notions and concepts in connection with marketing and business studies. The aim of this article is first and foremost to identify and reconcile key terms in marketing communications literature related to consumer–firm exchanges using new media and communications platforms. After having examined the cluster of participatory concepts used in marketing in the first part, we will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of participatory practices in the second part of our article.

2. The concept of participation in marketing

2.1 Activity-focused notions of participation

We can identify a wide range of concepts that encircle audience “participation” in marketing or marketing-related (e.g. consumer behaviour, marketing communications or management) literature. This cluster of participatory notions includes very different concepts that differ at the level of participation required (e.g. involvement, prosumer), whether they focus on the process (contribution, co-creation, collective buying) and how the output of the process of participation is seen (user-generated content, consumer-generated advertisements, viewer-created content, e-word of mouth). All of these notions imply a (power) relation with audiences, which can be seen as the defining component of the phenomenon of participation. In Figure 1 we summarize the most frequently used notions relating to the participation phenomenon. The activity-focused taxonomy emphasizes the activity of the consumer or the active role of

the consumer while the output-focused taxonomy concentrates on the result of the audiences' or consumers' participation.

Figure 1: Notions of participation in the marketing literature

Activity-focused notions	Output-focused notions
involvement engagement participation presumption produsage co-creation co-creative labour consumer empowerment crowdsourcing contribution	user generated content consumer generated advertisement self-generated advertisements DIY advertising viewer created content e-word of mouth user-led innovation

Notions of participation in the marketing literature show different points of the company–consumer encounter interface, all fulfilled through mutual communication and resulting in a valuable outcome whether this concerns information, new ideas or sharing experience. In the next sections we introduce the participation-related notions one by one, emphasizing the differences and specificities of the concepts.

First we discuss the core concepts providing insights and approaches of participation, based on consumers' action and their role as actors. Following that, we discuss the activity-focused notions in the marketing literature related to consumer participation and then the output-focused notions resulting from the preceding activities.

Involvement

Kotler et al. (2009: 255) define consumer involvement as “the level of engagement and active processing the consumer undertakes in responding to a marketing stimulus”. Marketing literature differentiates products and buying decisions as being high or low involvement, and states that high involvement consumers are more likely to process large amounts of cognitive information (Greenwald and Leavitt, 1994). Other consumer researchers consider that the essential characteristic of involvement is the level of personal relevance (Celsi and Olson, 1988). Involvement is first of all linked to the buying pro-

cess and marketers are exhorted to use different marketing strategies in case of low and high involvement products. In marketing communications literature, involvement can be defined as the importance people attach to a product or buying decision, the extent to which one has to think it over and the level of perceived risk associated with an inadequate brand choice (De Pelsmacker et al., 2007: 70). Consumer research examines more deeply the involvement phenomenon in marketing. Most agree that involvement refers to consumers' subjective perception of the personal relevance of an object activity or situation, and they emphasize that involvement is a psychological state experienced by a consumer in a given situation (Peter and Olson, 1990: 85). Of course it is important to recognize that people may be involved in many ways. In summary, the term involvement in marketing is related to the consumer–product relationship resulting in felt involvement, which is influenced by intrinsic self-relevance (consumer and product characteristics) and situational self-relevance (situational context and product characteristics) (Peter and Olson, 1990: 88).

Engagement

Schultz (2007) redefines marketing as constructive engagement and emphasize the importance of a macro-level focus providing the possibility of constructive engagement (both political and managerial) ending in long term benefits, win-win outcomes and enhanced marketing systems. The theory and subsequent policy of constructive engagement argues for pro-social interactions among individuals, groups, firms, communities, and/or countries that are enmeshed in polarized and frequently intractable or destructive conflicts. In a constructive engagement, negotiation, cooperation, and exchange are important components, contrasted with control, consumption and authority.

Marketing communications play an essential role in fostering engagement by providing “the means by which brands and organizations are presented to their audiences. The goal is to stimulate a dialogue that will, ideally, lead to succession of purchase. Complete engagement.” (Fill, 2005: 9). It also means that marketing communications are an audience-centred activity (Fill, 2005). Other marketing researchers argue for developing a grounded understanding of consumers, considering consumer behaviour with engagement as a necessity when developing consumer relationships (CRM) that allow for an ideological disposition to interactive engagement and learning (Mitussis et al., 2006).

Of course new media and the internet as a platform have distinctive capabilities for customer engagement, including interactivity, enhanced reach,

persistence, speed, and flexibility (Sawhney et al., 2005) and provide a unique opportunity for organizations to use these capabilities to engage customers in collaborative co-creation processes. We can see that the engagement concept includes macro and micro level perspectives as well, and that it has a clear process and activity focus from the side of the firm resulting in a special company-consumer relationship and purchase. This is different from involvement which is an intrinsic psychological feature proper to each consumer.

Participation

From a marketing point of view, the concept of consumer participation itself has also been used. In this context it is defined as “the degree to which the customer is involved in producing and delivering the service” (Dabholkar, 1990: 484). Extending this construct, Meuter and Bitner (1998, cited in Bendapudi and Leone, 2003) distinguish among three types of service production: firm production, joint production, and customer production. Firm production is a situation in which the product is produced entirely by the firm and its employees, with no participation by the customer. Joint production is a situation in which both the customer and the firm’s contact employees interact and participate in the production. Customer production is a situation in which the product is produced entirely by the customer, with no participation by the firm or its employees. Bendapudi and Leone (2003) provide a chronological review of the literature on customer participation in production which shows that participation in production has already appeared in the marketing literature as early as 1979. It seems that consumer participation is attributed mainly positive aspects, though a number of studies also imply that it can be a double-edged sword for firms (e.g. Chan et al., 2010). Consumer participation can enhance customers’ economic value attainment and strengthen the relational bond between customers and employees and may increase the stress level of them. The notion of participation in marketing and business literature highlights participation in production processes. However audience or consumer participation may have a wider scope even from a marketing point of view, including brand value building through participatory practices, generating participation through communication, as well as building loyalty through participation.

One must note that the concepts of involvement, engagement and participation are highly interrelated. The marketing literature often resorts to using one in order to define the other. The main difference, as we endeavoured to outline, is on the focus and nature of the activity involved. Thus while engagement

has a process and activity focus which stems from a calculated effort of the firm, involvement is more consumer-related and can be one effect of a firm's engagement activity. A high level of consumer involvement will eventually affect the mode of consumer participation which thus acts as a measure of success for a firm's engagement activity.

Prosumption

The goal of marketers and companies is to sell their products and services to people rather than performing these services for themselves (McKnight, 1977), which generates a clear contradiction between marketing and the producing consumer phenomenon. This shifting role of consumers to producers, facilitated by electronic technology, had already been predicted in 1972 by McLuhan and Nevitt (1972: 4). The term "prosumer", a portmanteau formed by contracting either the word "professional" or "producer" with the word "consumer", was introduced by Toffler (1980). Through the new do-it-yourself pregnancy kit in the early 1970s, the rapid diffusion of self-service solutions (ranging from self-help movements, to self-service fuel pumps, self-service supermarkets, electronic banking etc.), the third-wave consumer became independent and had higher levels of control over their consumption. Toffler (1980) suggested a future economy in which "leisure time" is redefined as "unpaid work": people will never hold a full-time job, but spend extensive time "producing" their own goods and services with immensely enhanced self-helping technologies. He envisioned a do-it-yourself economy where the number of consumers declines as everyone produces more and more things (products) for themselves. This concept was provocative enough to attract the attention from other authors, including Philip Kotler (1986). First of all, Kotler criticizes the empirical evidence used by Toffler and adds that if Toffler is right then marketers will face a highly frustrating future. In addition, Kotler (1986) states that prosumption activities will have to have four main characteristics: high cost saving, requiring minimal skill, consuming little time and effort, and yielding high personal satisfaction (e.g. house painting). Marketers have to focus on those products and services which do not meet these requirements (e.g. car repairing). Modern computers will allow people to take part more in designing products as well. Kotler (1986) proposes to look for opportunities in order to facilitate prosumption activities like creating better tools for prosumers and simplifying the products.

We agree with Kotler that very few people will opt for 100 percent prosumption as they will be more attracted by the hedonist, easier living lifestyle

provided by growing economies and subsequent welfare. But more importantly in this context, Kotler (1986: 512) identifies two clear types of prosumers: the Avid Hobbyist “who fill their leisure time with one or a few dominant hobbies” and the Archprosumer “who practice a lifestyle of ‘voluntary simplicity’ that is closer to nature and produce many things themselves”. He concludes that marketers should not protect the exchange but facilitate the pursuit of human satisfaction and emphasizes that Toffler’s raised some worthwhile issues for marketers to consider. Even though Kotler analyzed the notion of “prosumer” as it was used by Toffler, we argue that prosumerism may have different levels ranging from Toffler’s view of producing as many products and services as possible, to participating in the production flow as a consumer, and being part of producing for others as well.

Xie et al. (2008) provide a theoretical model of consumers as co-creators of value through empirical research supporting presumption. According to their definition, presumption consists of “value creation activities undertaken by the consumer that result in the production of products they eventually consume and that become their consumption experiences.” (Xie et al., 2008: 110). This definition is consistent with the notion of “value co-creation” (Lusch and Vargo, 2006: 284), but wider than Dalbhokar’s (1990) notion of participation, and more in line with Meuter and Bitner (1998, cited in Bendapudi and Leone, 2003).

Produser

Bruns (2009) says that Toffler’s image of the prosumer (1980) still has considerable influence on our understanding of the collaborative processes of content creation. He states that Toffler’s prosumer is “clearly not the self-motivated creative originator and developer of new content”. According to Bruns (2009), the terms “production” and “consumption” do not correspond well with the creative and collaborative participation of consumers: “In the user communities participating in such forms of content creation, roles as consumers and users have long begun to be inextricably interwoven with those as producer and creator: users are always already also able to be producers of the shared information collection, regardless of whether they are aware of that fact – they have taken on a new, hybrid role which may be best described as that of a produser” (Bruns, 2008). In his produsage model, Bruns (2008) stresses that the traditional production – distribution – consumption models include the notion of prosumer as well, whilst maintaining the traditional industrial value chain. In contrast, in postindustrial or informational economic models the production of

ideas takes place in a collaborative, participatory environment, breaking down the boundaries between producers and consumers. This new context enables all participants to be users as well as producers of information and knowledge – frequently in a hybrid role where usage is necessarily also productive and participants become producers. The outputs of produsage processes are not discrete products but rather quickly developing and growing revisions of exciting content (e.g. Wikipedia).

Contribution

User-contribution systems consist of active and passive types of possible contribution, providing various types of user input that are valuable for others. Active contribution covers audience or user participation in content creation and social networking. Consumer contributions have clear advantages at the level of cost, scalability and competitive advantage (Cook, 2008). The contribution concept of Cook (2008) is in line with Schultz’s (2007) concept of win-win results of marketing collective engagement. The motives behind contribution may be that it is a practical solution providing immediate reward (e.g. access to extra services), social rewards (being part of community of common interest), reputation, self-expression or altruism. In Figure 2 we give a summary of consumer and corporate benefits of contribution in different processes. We can see that consumer contribution in different company processes results in better information, entertainment, personalization or sense of ownership on the consumer side, while the company gains as well through improved satisfaction, increased loyalty, awareness, engagement or through potential cost effectiveness.

Figure 2: Consumer (user) and company benefits through contribution

	Consumer service	Marketing	Human resources	Capital investment	Design & Development	Production
Consumers	Immediate better information	Info & entertainment, sense of community	Empowerment	Fine tuned, personalized services	Recognition, sense of ownership	Entertainment, sense of ownership
Company	Improved customer satisfaction	Increased awareness and loyalty	Employee engagement	Reduced cost of capital, revenue from subscription service	Reduced costs	Inexpensive talents, huge advertising value

Source: own summary based on Cook (2008)

Co-creation

Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2002) mention a connection of co-creation between consumers and companies, and we have seen that Lusch and Vargo (2006) also use co-creation of value when defining the basics of new marketing logic. In this consumer-centric view the consumer is an integral part of the value creation system. The consumer may influence where, when, and how value is generated; they need not to respect industry boundaries in the search for value; they can compete with companies for value extraction; and multiple points of exchange can be identified where the consumer and the company can co-create value. Payne et al. (2008) make no distinction between participation in production or co-production (see Bendapudi and Leone, 2003) and co-creation (Lusch and Vargo, 2006). They propose the usage of the latter term and concept.

Van Dijck and Nieborg (2009) argue that the concept of co-creation and other contemporary notions have to be introduced into mainstream economic discourse while one ought to put aside the undifferentiated concepts of users and platforms. They claim that rather than defending or attacking the cult(ure) of participation, mass creativity or co-creation, one needs to approach the socio-economic implications of these emerging trends in a more critical way (van Dijck and Nieborg, 2009).

Co-creative labor

Consumers' participation has a clear labor aspect as they ensure free (or very cheap) labor for firms, as Terranova (2000) states in her article "Free Labour: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy". She argues that there are tensions and contradictions around participation as being pleurably embraced and at the same time often shamelessly exploited. The Time article mentioned earlier also mentions that these activities position creative consumers as "working for nothing and beating the pros at their own game" (Grossman, 2006). Others argue that we have to carefully consider this topic, how work or labour terms are reshaped and negotiated within the context of emerging co-creative relationship for mutual benefit by participants themselves (both professional and non-professional, commercial and non-commercial) (Banks and Deuze, 2009). We may also cite the notions *playbour* which also describes the phenomenon of merging free time, entertainment activities (play) and work (Kücklich, 2005) as well as *game labour* or *fun production* (Humphreys et al., 2005). These new

forms of cooperation and participation of the consumers provide a new source of labor for the firm (not only for profit-oriented companies but also for the public, NGO and other non-profit institutions). These concepts provide an understanding of the participation concept from a workflow and labor point of view and thus clearly identify the importance of participation in human resource management as well.

Crowdsourcing

Crowdsourcing relates to labor as well, being a novel form of outsourcing which is well-known and frequently used business solution to solve non-core competence-related functions of firms. Non-vital, non-regular business functions or one-off tasks, traditionally performed by an employee, and later outsourced to a contracted business partner can today be offered to an undefined, large group of people or community (a “crowd”), usually in response to an open call (Howe, 2006). Crowdsourcing is a process where companies outsource a work for a generally online community and offer payment for anyone within the crowd who completes the task the best and fastest. Crowdsourcing thus accentuates the mass participation aspect so that “the crowd” appears as a participatory agent.

The potential for the future use of crowdsourcing in marketing was identified in three areas: product development, advertising and promotion, and market research (Whitla, 2009) while Alberts et al. (2010) argue that crowdsourcing is a potential and relevant marketing research tool, however agencies and advertisers have to use it carefully. Brabham (2008) identifies the user-generated advertisement as a typical form of crowdsourcing.

Consumer empowerment

The literature on consumer empowerment puts the emphasis on consumers’ efforts to regain control of their consumption processes from suppliers. Suppliers may achieve success by trying hard to empower consumers through researching and providing what consumers want. It is claimed here that consumers feel empowered when they are able to enjoy the consumption process. In this view buying is not a simple process of obtaining products but also experience and enjoyment. Providing an agreeable marketing environment and relevant information may be a factor of success due to subsequent consumer

satisfaction and empowerment (Wright et al., 2006). Some results indicate that consumer empowerment can be understood as voting by consumption. This approach views consumption as an ethical/political domain where participating consumers characterize their consumption as empowering. However, it provokes some tension between consumer power and sustainable living (Shaw et al., 2006). This interpretation of consumer empowerment was provided by Shankar et al. (2006) who question the liberal view of consumers' empowerment and argue that choice is the product of disciplinary power and that more and more choice can lead to choice paralysis. Foucault's concept of the technology of the self allows for a more sophisticated understanding of the fluidity of power relationships between producers and consumers (Shankar et al., 2006). A technology-oriented view and strategy is launched when consumer empowerment is reflected in the development of information-based consumer-centric marketing strategies that seek to enable but also control delegation. These kinds of marketing strategies are enhancing the familiarity and use of information technology by consumers, underlining the uncontrolled nature of the consumer empowerment process (Pires et al., 2006).

We have seen that the consumer empowerment concept stresses the control aspect of consumer participation and reveals the significance of handing over control into the hands of consumers. Consumer empowerment talks about a conscious, active and control-loving consumer who is able to and wants to use the control and power s/he has gained in the consumption process.

All notions of participation indicate that there is an exchange between the company and its consumers or audiences, which is expected to result in some beneficial outcomes that could be a product, an idea or a message. In our point of view these notions are not different, but all focus on different aspects of the interaction and exchange, whether it is located at the level of the consumer or on that of the market, or whether it focusses on the production or consumption process, or on the level or amount of contribution made by and expected from the audience.

In Figure 3 we give a summary of the used terms and their major focal points in relation to processes and outcomes involved, as they were discussed before.

Figure 3: Activity-focused notions of participation and their scope

Notion	Process / Activity	Result
Involvement	Consumer interest, motivation	Successful choice
Engagement	Conversation / communication / interaction between company and consumer	Successful exchange
Participation	Production (company and consumer together; consumer alone)	Product relational bond
Prosumption	Production by the consumer	Producer consumer corporate facilitation
Prodsusage	Productive usage	Continuously developing content and meaning
Contribution	(Corporate) input transformation (by audiences)	Rewards (immediate, social, reputation, self expression)
Co-creative labor	Working roughly for free	Mutual benefits for company and consumer
Co-creation	Integrated corporate and consumer creation of value	Mutual values
Consumer empowerment	Consumption process controlled by consumers	Consumption as empowering enjoyment, experience
Crowdsourcing	Community creation for corporate call	Content created by community

2.2 Output-focused notions of participation

The output-focused concepts of participation highlight the result or achievement of participation. In these cases it is not the role or the action of consumers (or the audience) which relates to the concept of participation, but the output achieved by them.

User-generated content (UGC)

UGC stands for user-generated content, and in the majority of cases deploys digital media technologies. Content created by users can correspond to every traditional type of content, including content accessible via professional media services (text, image, audio and audiovisual content). UGC is generally located in the public domain or under a “Creative Commons” license, which offer content creators a simple set of standardized ways “to grant copyright permissions to their creative work” (Creative Commons, n.d.)

User-generated content is ubiquitous in e-media and e-marketing, and its rapid growth contributed to creating some of the most successful digital brands, like YouTube or Wikipedia. Audiences are more and more becoming used to consuming content that is generated by “ordinary”, non-professional, or amateur people, even more when some UGC starts to resemble professionally produced content. Despite UGC’s extraordinary growth, advertisers and advertising agencies still remain hesitant to venture into this unproven context. Their concerns stem from a fear of intruding on a “consumer” environment, a lack of understanding of UGC users and their behaviour, and a lack of control over the context in which their advertising gets exhibited (Clark, 2007 cited by Krishnamurthy and Dou, 2008). The emerging quantity and consumption of UGC forces academic and market research to provide implications for advertisers through a comprehensive analysis of their business models and the interactions among key stakeholders (Krishnamurthy and Dou, 2008).

Figure 4: Typology of UGC classification and examples

		Psychological Motivation for Engaging in UGC Creation			
		Rational		Emotional	
		Knowledge Sharing	Advocacy	Social connections	Self-Expression
Platform base	Group	Wikis (e.g. Wikipedia)	Issue-centric communities (e.g. Rachel Ray Sucks community)	Multiplayer online games (e.g. Socio Town)	Virtual presences (e.g. Second Life)
	Individual	Blogs by experts (e.g. askanexpert blog.com)	Consumer reviews (e.g. Epinion)	Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook)	Consumer creative inventions (e.g. Jumpcut)

Source: Krishnamurthy and Dou, 2008

Regarding the motivations for creating UGC, the positive attitude towards UGC and consumption of UGC were found to have relevant explanatory power (Daugherty et al., 2008). User generated content clearly focuses on the content output of consumers' participatory production, while it includes all types of content independently from the goal and motives of content creation or the form of the content (text, image, film, etc.).

Consumer-generated advertisement (CGA)

Consumer-generated advertisements can vary from modifying elements of a company's advertising material (e.g. by distorting the meaning, the imagery, etc.) through uploading original variations on a theme of a company's advertising material (e.g. humorous, subvert variations called spoofs [i.e. the practice of subvertising]) to proposing original materials in order to, for example, close a gap in a company's advertising campaign.

Berthon et al. (2008: 7) define consumer-generated advertisements as "any publicly disseminated, consumer-generated advertising messages whose subject is a collectively recognized brand". They base their notion on two main determinant factors: subjects and disseminations. They argue that even though consumers may create ads about almost anything (themselves, their families, their friends, etc.) consumer-generated advertisements have to be specifically targeted at collectively recognized brands. The nature of a brand as an asset makes the issue of consumer-generated brand ads so critical. The dissemination is crucial as CGA may affect a brand only if it is collectively disseminated through some form of media. Figure 5 provides a typology of CGA based on one hand on the relationship towards the official brand message (i.e. whether it is assonant or dissonant with it), and on the other, on whether it addresses the brand in question in a negative or positive way.

Figure 5: Types of consumer-generated advertisements

		Underlying message about brand	
		Negative	Positive
Nominal relationship to official brand message	Assonant	Subversive (the surface text is in accord with the official brand message, but the subtext of the ad is clearly negative, often use parody to subvert and undermine the dominant brand message)	Concordant (surface text and subtext are in accord; nominal text of the ad is in agreement with that of the brand message, underlying subtext or message is positive in attitude towards the brand)
	Dissonant	Contrarian (clearly off-message and implicitly negative towards the brand, undermine, question, or attach a contrarian meaning to the brand message)	Incongruous (the surface message is dissonant with that of the official brand message, the underlying text is generally positive towards the brand)

Source: own illustration based on Berthon et al., 2008: 14

It is critical for advertisers not only to understand and follow CGA but also to do so with any feedback on consumer-generated advertising appearing in the form of ad-hoc comments and discussions on content-hosting sites (Campbell et al., 2011). A lampoon of a brand’s ad might as well be categorized as “concordant” when the message is not necessarily negative and deteriorating, and both the audience and the responding firm might wink and nod, the firm accepting a criticism and carrying on with their own brand building. In case the consumer-generated material is inevitably deteriorating to the firm (i.e. anti-branding), which occurrence is more likely in the case of well renowned brands (Krishnamurthy and Kucuk, 2009), then the firm should classify it as “subversive” and respond accordingly. “Contrarian” and “incongruous” types of CGA are less of a direct threat to the firm in the sense that although the message conveyed is not in accordance with the official communication and messages of the firm, it cannot be directly retraced to and tallied with by the audience and therefore follows a route on its own as an advertising or anti-advertising message.

The term self-generated advertisement is used by Shimp et al. (2007) in their article examining campaigns which asked consumers to write personal testimonials about their brand-related experiences. Their research shows that

these testimonials positively affect consumers' evaluative judgments, but as the testimonials are motivated by external rewards, participants tend to exaggerate their statements.

The term consumer- or self-generated advertisement describes a specific subtype of user-generated content when involved consumers (not simple users) create specific communication materials (advertisements) related to and talking about a brand or product. However, the message and the relation with the brand is not unequivocally positive and depends on the quality of involvement the creator of the given content has with the brand in question.

Viewer-created content

Audience-created content has a long tradition in the Western media landscape, for example, in the USA with the network of public access television, in France with its long history of community (or 'associative') media, or in Germany with its open channels. Also in a more business-oriented context, channels exist that make use of viewer-created content and/or involve the audiences more directly in their programming structure. Current TV was launched in the USA in 2005 and is a well-know example of a viewer-created content-based (VC2) television channel (see <http://current.com/>). 30 percent of the programs of the independent television channel aired on the web are produced by the consumers or viewers, who are mainly 18-34 years old. The programming is based on short video clip type of content and the channel is paying for the consumers if the content produced by them gets broadcasted terrestrial as well. In addition, consumers may also participate in the programming structure: based on the majority-wins principle they can vote for the programs (Jenei, 2008). For these reasons, channels (be they online and/or offline) resorting to viewer-created content can also be understood as a subtype of user-generated content.

E-word-of-mouth

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) communication refers to (positive or negative) statements that are made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which are made available to a large number of people and institutions via the internet (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). eWOM can be understood as the extension of traditional interpersonal communication into the new generation of cyberspace. It quickly moved into the spotlight of

marketing and consumer research, specifically focusing on how eWOM influences adoption, buying and consumption (Cheung et al., 2008). EWOM, as part of marketing communication strategies, became a critical tool which takes the target audience and the message creation into consideration (Phelps et al., 2004). Indeed, electronic word-of-mouth present on virtual social media platforms (e.g. discussion boards, user comments of product reviews, news feeds of social networking sites), is similar to traditional commercial sources of information (i.e. in-store information, brochures, etc.) in that they are both impersonal. The difference is that virtual information sources have the advantage of being non-commercial (Jepsen, 2006). E-word of mouth and online consumer recommendation systems form a part of user-generated content as well.

User-led innovation

User-led, user-initiated or user-driven innovation is a phenomenon first observed and described in the 1970s by von Hippel (1978). User-led innovations have a large influence on creative industries (e.g. game industry), where users are highly involved contributors (Humphreys et al., 2005) and participate in content production as well (Bruns, 2008). User-led innovation begins when one or more users of some good recognize a new set of design possibilities – a so-called “design space” – and begin to explore it (Baldwin et al., 2006: 1291). User-led innovation emphasizes the users’ participation in the development and initiation of innovations so their participatory role in designing innovations has to be noted. A specific type of these innovations is *participatory design* where the people destined to use the computer system play a critical role in its development and design process. In this context participation stands in contrast to the culture of specialists and experts (Schuler and Namioka, 1993).

In Figure 6 we show how output-related notions of participation relate and differ, highlighting what corporate consequences, in other words what marketing results, they might bring.

Figure 6: Output-focused notions of participation and their scope

Notion	Output	Result
User-generated content	Text, images, audio or audio-visual content	Less influence and control of businesses, emerging new business models
Consumer-generated advertisement	Amateur advertisements	Advertising messages out of the control of the brand
Viewer-created content	Amateur television content or participation in selection	Cheaper video content, higher viewer satisfaction
E-Word-of-mouth	Electronic recommendation of consumers	Influence on adoption, consumer decision making and buying
User-led innovation	More suitable and consumer oriented innovations	Quicker, cheaper and more consumer suitable innovations

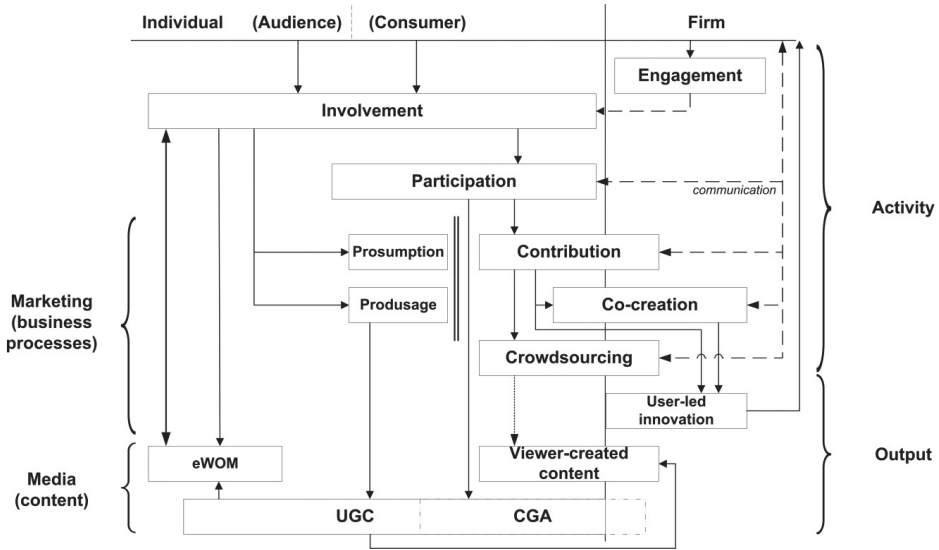
All output-focused elements of participation lead to the conclusion that not only consumers are more than ever empowered to participate at different levels in firms' business processes, but firms are also offered additional grounds for value extraction. A firm that is aware of the available processes for motivating its consumers to participate in a process of mutual creation of value, with all the opportunities and threats involved (see Figure 6), might substantially extract added value and competitive advantage from the situation. Value is created through participation, and in its every manifestation it brings competitive advantages and considerable market value.

2.3 Cluster of participatory notions in marketing

One aim of our article was to give an overview of how these frequently used notions relate, contradict or overlap by differentiating and connecting all the related taxonomy of participation, without adding new concepts to the list. Figure 7 shows the cluster of participatory notions as defined in the preceding part of the article. Our figure represents the complexity and overlap of the different notions. At the same time our summary suggests two dimensions for structuring the participatory cluster. One suggested dimension of study is from the side of the *subjects* of participation: individuals (themselves divided into sometimes overlapping, other times differing roles of audience and consumer) or the firm itself. The other dimension is the *approach* of participation that is either the activity or the output. Overlaps are still present in this model: the notions of

involvement and participation overlap in terms of their subjects while engagement is a complementary notion and uses the corporate perspective.

Figure 7: Relating notions of participation



Source: own illustration

3. Creating market value via participation

3.1 Indirect value

Word-of-mouth marketing is the most important indirect means of creating business value. While searching information, online participatory media sites as forums or blogs replace more and more the traditional information search (e.g. via sales personnel or brochures), although reference groups are still important sources of information (Jepsen, 2006). Therefore online media offer a double incentive for companies to turn to. First, as we mentioned before, eWOM has the advantage of being non-commercial. Product information is largely present on online discussion boards and blogs through largely anonymous participants' discussions and subjective product reviews. Reference groups as another decisive element in consumers' purchase decisions are to be found on social media sites where they share product and brand information under their own name.

It is important for companies to study the cases and contexts where communities generate positive messages related to the company in order to avoid the opposite (Chung and Darke, 2006). Trying to influence opinion leaders' networks and sources of electronic word-of-mouth is all the more important as these subjective pieces of information about a firm's products and services have a direct effect on the other members of the audience (potential consumers) that might generate a level of involvement towards the firm or its products.

3.2 Direct value

At the same time new media offer much broader opportunities for media and non-media firms to (financially) profit from participating audiences. The emerging possibility for audience participation has brought great challenges for media companies. First, data collected by observing registered online users' activities can allow content providers to customize their services even more, in order to better suit and serve users' obvious needs and thus create a market advantage by better serving their clients. As seen in the definitions of the different concepts related to the types of user-generated content, viewer-created content appeared as a source of competitive advantage: "If you can't beat them, join them". As a considerable part of user-generated content uses elements of legacy material, their creators are often on the verge of copyright infringement. Instead of prosecuting creative users for utilizing unauthorized sources, the content industry ought to include participating audiences in their business model.

For non-media firms the facilitated access of a large and diverse number of users and the possibility to integrate them virtually in one space can contribute to solving given business and marketing problems. Crowdsourcing (Howe, 2006) is a possible and quick complement to internal research and development for gaining leads in problems that are judged unsolvable. Moreover, active audiences and supposed consumers that take part in the creation of user- or consumer-generated content are a priceless base of customer information and a source of marketable ideas. Moreover, while businesses' core model stands upon profitability, individual creators of user-generated content do not necessarily follow a market logic. From a predominantly pecuniary goal (i.e. principal or additional source of remuneration) through various combined stances, they can contribute for mere intrinsic interest (Füller, 2007), enjoyment and self-promotion (Berthon et al., 2008) or recognition (e.g. by the other members of a community, by given people, by a prospected potential employer, etc.) as an expected remuneration.

From this varying set of goals, businesses can set up a viable business model: “The main challenge of virtual consumer integration may be to create a compelling innovation experience” (Füller, 2005: 645). This can include providing a community-based, shared set of tools for people in search of recognition or additional revenues to publish the results of their creativity and a surface with the possibility for others to use (e.g. istockphoto.com, or Apple’s AppStore).

3.3 Threats and problems

As much as an online brand community can offer positive business externalities to a firm, as much malevolent user manifestations can harm their business activities³. Consumers are technologically enabled to express their discontent over the internet with very little effort. This, combined with the propensity of human beings to more easily notice and voice negative experiences, makes the internet a facilitator in developing anti-branding, i.e. the systematic brand image erosion of more renowned brands (Krishnamurthy and Kucuk, 2009) through anti-fan imagery, spoof videos, and websites. This activity can be personal (e.g. via one’s Facebook message wall) or impersonal (e.g. under an unidentifiable nickname or by spreading an unsigned comic image of the given brand). In the lack of a possibility of personal and/or face-to-face interaction for the firm, an anonymous and impersonal user contribution to brand-related negative content is hardly under the control of the company and can do a lot of harm to a brand. In contrast, a direct complaint to the retailer (i.e. “voice response”), an expression of discontent to family and acquaintances (i.e. “personal response”) and a complaint to higher authority (i.e. “third party response”) are in most cases less visible and thus harm the brand less.

Managing participation at any level or in any process of the organization will lead to a need for more capacity, more working hours, and more resources from the company side. This implies from an economic point of view that participation may have a cost increasing effect at a certain level and/or for a period of implementation and adaptation. As companies and organizations are bounded by short-term cost efficiency, the participation phenomenon might have a limited reception through its short term effects on costs.

Well-designed spaces suitable for audience participation may create a very authentic positive brand image, however, the phenomenon of participation, in any form, requires that audiences be active. However it is likely that not everyone is willing to contribute, therefore in a participatory space active audiences’

³ The threats and problems related to consumer participation at the democratic level are beyond the scope of this article.

views will be overrepresented. Another but related threat is the articulation of the whole audience as homogenous regarding their attitudes towards participation. Consumers and audience members may have different feelings and attitudes towards participation: the “lead user” type of consumers will be expected to be the first to react to a new advertising campaign or generate the highest number of comments on the firm’s social network page. At the same time there are other consumers who do not want or do not have the time, capacity, skill or access to share their opinion, to become a participant actor. More active consumers and audience members might also suppress the voice of the less active or even passive (even though potentially more numerous) part of the audience. This phenomenon may launch a new type of marketing myopia, where companies may lose sight of what their consumers want even while listening to their (participating) audiences. The notion of marketing myopia was introduced by Lewitt (1960). According to him, companies focusing on products rather than consumers would pave the way for a business to fail, as it is a short-sighted mindset leading complacency and a loss of sight of what the customers want. In this new communications setting this implies that a company (or any organization) have to bear in mind that the active audience does not necessarily represent their whole consumer audience.

4. Conclusion

In today’s oversupply of brands, products, services and information, those who are able to involve their audiences win their audiences’ choice. Participation in communication means understanding; participation in the generation of new ideas means commitment; participation in usage means winning and meeting the preferences of the consumers.

The notion of participation is not new in marketing communication, sales promotion and direct marketing applications have required active audience participation for decades, so do the classical media by asking for viewers’ opinion. However, the emergence of web 2.0 and the integration of the internet and classical media shed new light on the notion of participation

From a marketing perspective, it is not the question of involving potential audiences, consumers at the point of planning, production, communication, as the major source of marketing success lies in fact in finding a *form of participation that is in accordance with product and brand concept, that is in line with previous communication messages and is beneficial enough for the audience to contribute to*. If the company is able to establish a favourable space, the company-consumer interaction will result not only in mutual benefits, but also will be

worthwhile for the media to further broadcast about, therefore providing extra media coverage and value. As a result, classical marketing concepts are to be enriched with the notion of the participating consumer. Those market actors who are able to provide inspiring and motivating spaces for contributing audiences will have a structural advantage to become market leaders. At the same time participation cannot be considered as a “magic wand” of future marketers. It has its disadvantages and threats as participation is not the ‘right’ way towards each and every consumer, as they may have different attitudes towards participatory actions. Also participation may affect higher costs for companies through higher needs in human resources, data mining capacity and more complex management challenges.

This article has also attempted to show the diversity of concepts that circulate in the participatory cluster. The main strategy to structure the phenomenon of participation that is proposed in this article is to use an activity and output perspective, while furthermore differentiating it according to its audiences: users / consumers and firms. If we look at the activity-focused notions of involvement, engagement, participation, contribution, co-creative labor, co-creation, consumer empowerment and crowdsourcing, we find processes where *mutually beneficial activities occur but are placed at different stages of the value creation process*. Involvement relates to consumer motivation, engagement means mutual conversation, contribution means intervention in the business process itself at some point by the consumer, etc. Overall, each notion captures one moment of the mutual value creation process. Similarly, output-based notions pinpoint valuable contributions – ideally for both the company and the consumers. These creations mainly are: texts, images, videos, commercials and products. This might suggest that both activity- and output-based notions of participation may be reconsidered, simplified and unified in the future. However, this richness of applied notions underlines the topical importance of the participation phenomenon, which in its current form identifies numerous relevant dimensions of participation for future research.

Companies who are very successful in involving their audiences are often successful in many aspects; they use traditional marketing and marketing communications planning logics that have been improved by creating opportunities for participation by meeting consumers on the internet, creating collaborative tools, engaging consumers in product development and testing, triggering conversations. We believe that the notion of participation is an inevitable marketing tool for any corporate player in any market place.

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