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Motives For and Against Participating: a Hermeneutical Study of Media Participation in Norway and Ireland, 2005-2006

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Tensions of motivation

Consumer vs. citizen motives for media participation in Norway and Ireland

For the book “The ‘Social’ Media User”, ECREA and Intellect. Note from the editors: “Please make also sure that you sufficiently explain and discuss the paradigmatic frame of your approach before exemplifying it with empirical case studies. This is the added value of the book”. This means that we should start with theory.

Intro (1 p)

Theoretical discussion (5 p)

Comparative national background (3 p)

Method (2 p)

Analysis (14 p)

Conclusion (1 p)

Literature (4 p)

There is a tension between consumer and citizen motives for participating in media and the internet. The first is oriented to personal gain and self-fulfillment, while the second is oriented to long-term collective goals of a political nature. People are in the process of adopting these motives to the social media and their participatory requirements, and tensions run high.

This chapter discusses two forms of motivation; enjoyment and engagement, and we define them normatively to inform our empirical analysis of reasoning by consenting adults in Dublin, Ireland (2006) and Bergen, Norway (2005). We asked 64 people about their participation in the various media at their disposal, and in analysing the transcriptions we categorized their statements into a continuum of motives from positive to negative. We believe that this continuum can be used as an analytical tool for developments in social media like Twitter and Facebook.

The paradigmatic frame of this chapter is British cultural studies and ethnomethodology in the vein of Garfinkel. We will use results from our comparative qualitative study to argue that people are rational actors who are fully capable of giving reasons for their choices. Their

Tensions of participation

choices may be dismaying for the political idologue, since they overwhelmingly choose to be entertained rather than to seek political influence through their media participation, but we seek to understand whether these reasons make sense from the perspective of the informants. If so, they are all excused, while the interactive structure of the media comes into critical limelight.

This chapter embraces the normative tradition of audience theory promoting the importance and significance of *citizen participation* in dialogic media of communication. The public value of *cooperation* is at the heart of this chapter. The project specifically focuses on experiences and opinions among *urban citizens* in Bergen and Dublin. Urban citizens have easy access to media infrastructures like cable TV, broadband and 3G mobile networks, and they have rich opportunities to engage in cultural and political events.

Theoretical discussion

Arguably there are two main tendencies regarding audience research in the 2000s; the cultural studies tradition which has critical socially responsible ethos, and the administrative tradition which has a neutral and pragmatic ethos. When studying explicit reasons the first will tend to explain them according to larger ideological tendencies, while the second will tend to explain them as rational choices by well informed agents. It is important to bear in mind this distinction when discussing what ‘motivation’ should mean in relation to audience participation.

Let’s begin with the administrative tradition. When reviewing the literature about participation, it seems that there are relatively few reception studies, and many production and text studies. REFERENCES. This probably reflects the financial resources of the media industry. Much current research takes for granted a market-driven media industry where the entertainment dimension of participation is more well-developed and a safe card (DEUZE?, ENLI, ERDAL, STEENSEN). Another strand of research takes very seriously the political dimension (Ross 2005; Polat 2005). Active involvement in media communication – from its most mundane form to more serious levels of engagement in participatory media - is mostly thought of as a good thing. (FREEDMAN, SIAPERA, MIYASE CHRISTENSEN). Even more optimistically, there are contemporary constructs of the audience as empowered citizens inspiring an apparently revitalised public sphere, bouyed by the democratic possibilities of new social media (JENKINS, SHIRKY, RHINEGOLD).

Tensions of participation

PRESENT BRITISH CULTURAL STUDIES

Theoretically, we are interested in terms of societal engagement that are quite fundamental to any nation, and that are unlikely to change in a matter of 5-10 years without a war. This includes individual-opportunist motives (Elster, Goffman), communicative-social motives (Habermas, Scannell, Skjervheim), and political motives (Adorno, etc). These types of motivation don't disappear over time, and we can project them into the social media that seem to dominate in the 2010s.

One way of limiting the discussion is by focusing on the fact that qualitative research of our type deals with explicit reasoning by informants, while the more immediate sense of engaging in the world (Merleau-Ponty) which sometimes is pleasurable and sometimes marked by resistance and difficulty, is not really investigated. We study reflection and not perception.

Regarding the reflexive motives for participating, several traditions can be applied fruitfully.

- 1) Individual-opportunist. People's motivation to satisfy needs (uses and gratifications), people's motivation to present ourselves to others (Mead, Goffman, Horton and Wohl).
- 2) Communicative-social. Habermas, Scannell, Skjervheim.
- 3) Political. Adorno, Hall, etc.

EXPAND!

Comparative national background

To what extent is it plausible to say that private enjoyment is more influential in making people participate than political engagement? What do the facts on the ground in Norway and Ireland tell us. Historically, Norway and Ireland have quite different cultures of public participation, and we will take a look at them as 1) national political cultures and 2) national media landscape.

We could make two tables where we collect basic facts about politics and media/entertainment in Norway and Ireland. Do you agree?

Tensions of participation

1) *National political cultures.* Norway is a protestant, social democratic welfare state with a strong culture of political awareness and individualism, but very little public participation even in the late 20th century. Ireland is a Catholic conservative welfare state with an equally strong culture of political awareness but less individualist and more collectivist, and with a much stronger tradition of public participation in local radio, etc. Norway did not have the same traumatic liberation from Sweden in 1905 as the Republic of Ireland did from the UK in 1921. These are subtle and interesting differences in cultural context.

Table 1: Elementary political facts about Norway and Ireland.

	Norway	Ireland
Liberation	1905	1916 (or 1921?)
Female franchise	1913	1922
Population (2010)	4,9 million	4,5 million
Expanse	385.000 square kilometres	70.200 square kilometres
World War I	Neutral	Part of Commonwealth
World War II	Occupied by Germany	Neutral
EU	No to EU in 1972 and 1994	Yes to EU in 1973

What in the history of nation states can tell us something about political engagement and recreation? Ireland has had intense activism for hundreds of years, Boycott 1880 (see Irish History, p. 63). Norway has had a fierce sense of independence among farmers and fishermen.

2. *National technology landscape.* Regarding media landscape the media industries in the two countries are approximately of the same size, with a relatively homogenous audience where local differences are more pronounced (and less harmful) than national division. Both countries have a healthy number of local and regional media, which secures a relatively representative public sphere.

Our material dates from 2005 and 2006. Six-seven years is a short time when it comes to noticing substantial change in the three core motivations (individual, communicative, political). However, six-seven years is actually a *long* time when it comes to noticing changes in design and content of mobile phones, internet applications and other technologies that

Tensions of participation

facilitate interactivity and public participation. Our project presumes that there is an increased quantity of public participation all across Europe due to digitalization since the mid 1990s, and that indeed it is continuously on the rise. The iPhone and iPad, Android software, XX, have been introduced. And since 2005 social media like Facebook, Twitter have contributed to a widespread adoption of new media habits. The rapid diffusion of new online, mobile and networked technologies, especially the internet, is unprecedented in the history of technology (Rice 2006). Over 75% of young people use the internet across the EU27, rising to over 90% in the Scandinavian countries (Eurobarometer 2008). Comscore reported that nearly 20% of the Irish use social networking sites every day (Bebo had 709,000 and Facebook 627,000 users respectively) in 2009. We study the mid-2000 mood of participation, which predates the present and must have been a factor in shaping the present conditions. In 2005 contact with broadcasting stations was the dominant form, while nowadays it is arguably contact through social networking media.

Among our 64 informants there was a clear majority of younger internet users and older radio users, while TV dominated in the evening among all age groups. This goes for Dublin and Bergen alike. It conforms to the presumption that young people will adopt hi-tech media habits quite easily, while older people rely on their established diet of paper newspapers and public service broadcasting. REFERENCE. It implies that young people adopt contact technologies while older people do not.

The internet and mobile phone/SMS are contact technologies in that you can take the initiative to communicate through them, and exchange messages with mass media outlets as well as private individuals. They were both new in the 1990s, at least to the general public. Interestingly even use of internet among informants in Norway and Ireland.

v100Land * v201Bruker du internett Crosstabulation

Count

		v201Bruker du internett		Total
		Ja	Nei	
v100Land	Norge	29	3	32
	Irland	29	3	32
Total		58	6	64

Tensions of participation

Almost the same use of SMS in the two countries.

v100Land * v201Sender du tekstmeldinger Crosstabulation

Count

		V201Sender du tekstmeldinger		Total
		Ja	Nei	
v100Land	Norge	30	2	32
	Irland	29	3	32
Total		59	5	64

Is this similarity interesting? Maybe it is a sign of approximately the same level of wealth and industrial resources in the two countries, and media being the hottest thing around. Ireland and Norway are not really similar to each other, they are similar to a global development trait of high technology penetration.

Profiles? Perhaps a description of younger age groups in B and D which are similar, while the older age groups are different in B and D because of greater wealth among older people in B. What does it say about the media history of 1970s, 1980s and 1990s?

Method

In the form of a comparative qualitative study of audience engagement, we interviewed a total of 64 people, 32 in Norway and 32 in Ireland, during 2005 and 2006. Informants completed the same questionnaire, and researchers followed the same interview guide in both countries. We asked them about various types of enjoyment connected with participation in radio, television and web formats, while also asking them about more challenging forms of participation related to the role of citizen and voter.

We used semi-structured interviews to research the diverse forms of participation in contemporary media: SMS to radio and tv stations, participation in talk radio, reality programs and talent shows on TV, and all kinds of interaction on websites, including blog posts, photo and video uploading, and the cultivation of personal profiles and social

Tensions of participation

relationships on Facebook, Twitter, etc. What gain does all this participation have in people's lives? We focus on two features; political awareness and self-awareness.

In addition to semi-structured interviews the project also used a detailed questionnaire about social background, cultural preferences and media habits, and the responses will be coded in SPSS and analysed statistically. Informants completed the same questionnaire, and researchers followed the same interview guide in both countries. We asked them about various types of enjoyment connected with participation in radio and television, while also asking them about more challenging forms of participation related to the role of citizen and voter.

Our comparative qualitative analysis doesn't allow us to generalize, but it is safe to say that people are good at giving reasons. We reached the point of saturation regarding plausible reasons for participating or not, because all informants gave several reasons for their choices.

INSERT FROM ARTICLE TO POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

Analysis

We have organised categories of motivation, aggregating statements that fit together. This is a method known best in quantitative analysis (REFERENCES). We will use this list of categories to gauge what our informants really think about cooperation through the media. Cooperation is the issue at the heart of this chapter.

I made the analysis for Norway several years ago. I could now supply it with quotes from the Irish material. I could do this during the summer vacation if you agree. But do you think that approximately the same types of answers would be found if we analysed the Irish material rigorously, or would there be significant differences?

Table 3: Categories of motivation for and against participation. Based on question 3: Should people become more active in the public sphere? Yes or no question, with justifications prompted by the interviewer.

Yes, for personal reasons	Description
Yes, if I don't have to spend money on it	Economic

Tensions of participation

Yes, if I can win prizes	Economic
Yes, I like to compete and display knowledge	Psychological self-interest
Yes, if I become agitated	Psychological well-being
Yes, since it is easier to participate now than it was before. 0 quotes	Physical convenience

No, for personal reasons	Description
No, I would be too shy.	Uncomfortableness
No, I simply don't bother to	Energy waste
No, I don't want to spend my time like this	Time
No, it's too expensive	Economic
No, it wouldn't give me a valuable experience	No enjoyment

No, for communicative-social reasons	Description
No, because it would interfere with my job role	Sanctions, inhabilitet
No, because people who do it are stupid	Contempt
No, because so many are doing it that there's no need for me to take part	Avoiding responsibility
No, I won't be treated with civility	Distrust of social practices in media

Yes, for communicative-social reasons	Description
Yes, because I could do it better	Competitiveness
Yes, if somebody I know is already participating	Bonds with friends/family
Yes, if I cheer for a person, group or team	Fan or supporter culture
Yes, because it is valuable to hear amateurs too, and not only professionals	Identifies with other people who are like themselves
Yes, if media participation were a more common and respected activity	Respectability

Yes, for political reasons	Description
Yes, if I have the opportunity to voice an informed statement	Aid the public
Yes, when I'm engaged in my surroundings	Take a stand
Yes, because it might make me more well-informed and resourceful	Learning to become a better citizen
Yes, because it is every citizen's right	Right to speak up
Yes, because it is every citizen's duty	It's an obligation
Yes, because it would have worked well	Optimism

Tensions of participation

No, for political reasons	Description
No, people must be allowed to do what they want.	Liberal rights
No, because the media content should be as professional as possible.	Expertise
No, because I'm not sufficiently competent	Incompetence in the face of expertise
No, because it wouldn't change things anyway.	Nihilism
No, I don't believe in the formats/genres	Considered criticism

Conclusion (unfinished)

We found that our informants expressed a tension between wanting to participate in entertaining and fun contexts, while hesitating to participate in politically oriented formats. This tension between media kicks and refusals seemed to stimulate a feeling of guilt among our informants, and there was widespread rationalizing of their lack of participation in the serious formats.

Participation in the media can be quite enjoyable. It seems that the desire to experience this emotion runs deeper than motivations like 'I might win a prize'. There was something resembling a 'kick' or "high", and it appeared at a less conscious level than the political experiences.

The tension found in 2005 helps us to make a hypothesis for the future. We hypothesize that the availability of social networking media on the internet has strengthened the previous tendencies of participation, and thereby influenced the majority of our informants to seek personal gain from social media, while political participation is less interesting to them. The financial crisis and its implications for the daily life of our informants are unlikely to make a significant difference, because their critique of the mass media are as relevant as ever, and they are unlikely to try to influence their quality of life through the mass media. It remains to be seen what social media will offer.

Literature

- 1) Factual presentations about Norway and Ireland.
- 2) Research about participation.
- 3) Theoretical heavyweights.