

## THOUGHT PIECE

### The phenomenon of participating: From apart to win, to playing a part

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#### ABSTRACT

**Purpose** To better understand behaviour in increasingly online social networks from a marketing perspective, we propose transcending the notion of an exchange market and so adopt an alternative participatory, communal conceptualisation. This is centred on participation in co-creating value to improve the conditions of the social commons. The focus on participating highlights that more is going on than product-for-money exchange.

**Design/methodology/approach** The discussion of the phenomenon of participating considers finite and infinite games, gifting, part-taking, and customer participation.

**Findings** The concept of *creative economy* is founded in the collaboration paradigm and suggests an economy of contribution that is not fully explained by monetised exchange between buyer and seller.

**Implications** Observable and familiar examples are identified, and we conclude with some implications for marketing practice that might motivate further scholarship.

**Keywords** Collaborative production, Distributed value co-creation, Economy of contribution, Creative commons, Performative participation, Online collaboration

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## TRANSCENDING MONETISED EXCHANGE

On any other day you can run 42 kilometres anywhere, without paying. But on a certain day thousands of people are willing to exchange money for a ticket to run among many others in a prescribed place and time. Data from North America show that during the past decade marathon ticket sales have increased by 70%. It's even common that marathon tickets are sold-out months before the race, and the more runners there are, the faster the tickets sell. Getting a starting number in any of the World Marathon Majors - Tokyo, Boston, London, Berlin, Chicago, New York - is considered by many to be as hard as running the race. In Chicago, the ticket demand was so strong in 2013 that their booking system crashed. Why are people so eager to buy something that they can get for free?

One explanation for buying a marathon ticket could be a runner's urge to win a race. Analysing runner statistics shows, however, that the average time to conquer these 42 kilometres was way over four hours, whereas winners barely break the two hours mark. A more reasonable explanation might be that people are buying a ticket to participate - to meet and identify with other runners, challenge themselves and others, and engage in discussions before, during and after a race. Buying a ticket is not a discrete transaction but rather a vehicle to enable participating.

Participation can, for instance, be seen in a large group of active runners on different online marathon forums. They upload their own running data in order to give and receive advice from other runners, get inspired by looking at other runners' statistics, and start conversations with other runners and connected business actors. Not only do runners interact with other runners, but business actors also take part in the dialogue, both online and offline. These business actors range from those clearly related businesses, such as marathon race organisers, running shoes and apparel manufacturers, and hardware and software tech-companies monitoring and analysing runner statistics, to others that are not so obvious, such as travel agencies who specialise in selling marathon packages including flights, hotel, and a starting number (for example, [www.runnersworld.com](http://www.runnersworld.com) and [www.runningusa.org](http://www.runningusa.org)).

Is the marathon situation unique in today's society, or is it a sign that exchange in today's economy is in many cases only a means for the chance to participate? If participation is the source of value co-created, then what is the nature (essence) of this value? Observable collaboration practices of 'participation' beyond involvement and activity exhibit purpose and contribution of capabilities and unpaid labour, producing relationship capital and structural capital. We are interested in how and why people participate in groups to contribute use-driven collaborative resource reconfiguration. This 'doing something' may be seen as a democratic right in an open web in the 'digital culture' that is increasingly a 'participatory culture' and a 'collaborative culture' and, according to Shirky (2009), enables and encourages "*ridiculously easy collaboration*". So (why) do we need firms?

Orthodox economic transactional theory centred on money-value profiting doesn't explain such proactive non-monetary contributing behaviour in social groups. Rather than 'market practice', we wonder if the general practice is a market, or more a commons with collaboration as the driver, in the process constructing 'collaborative improvement' in the group, rather than 'competitive advantage' in the market? Mainstream economics assumes that utility maximisation (profit) is the motivator - how does this explain many 'open source' projects including Linux and Wikipedia? What keeps the network (alternative to the market) operating? This appears to be not

a will to monetised exchange, but a will to participate in what is largely social for the pleasure of the activity, without expectation of or demand for immediate reciprocity.

A truth taken for granted in mainstream marketing is that economic exchange is at its core. An important marketing theorist went even further and defined marketing as exchange (Bagozzi, 1975). Exchange is also found in the AMA's 2007 re-definition of marketing, as well as in the Service-Dominant Logic's Foundational Premise 1 which states that "*Service is the fundamental basis of exchange*" (Vargo & Lusch, 2006). Even though the Service-Dominant Logic here points out the processual aspects of exchange in that "*service is exchanged for service*", there is giving and receiving inherent in the concept, suggesting a finite game. However, it is not generally recognised, as Bagozzi's sociological understanding makes clear, that 'exchange' is not a simple process of giving and receiving goods or services. He talks about restricted, generalised, and complex exchanges. He argues that exchanges are not a mere transfer of ownership or right to use products and services for money, but events that are embedded in social relationships. Infiniteness is implied in his idea of *complex circular exchange*. He focuses on the symbolic aspect, meaning-creation that is closely related to the processes of participation. We wish to develop an appreciation of the significance of recognising the phenomenon of participating and the distinction from exchanging.

Business research in general, and more specifically marketing science, has customarily applied a lot of attention to answering the question of how to be the best in a finite game, hence delivering pre-packaged value bundles to customers in an exchange (see Porter, 1998). In the current orthodox view, the firm is a corporate entity with ownership and management separated, and the firm is the marketer doing the marketing. All others are customers, suppliers, competitors, or regulators outside the firm in the 'environment'. Much of business - in the mass market - is conducted among strangers at a distance. The aim, then, for a firm, is to collect that perfect bundle of idiosyncratic resources inside the firm's boundaries (Wernerfelt, 1984) which creates a sustainable competitive advantage (Barney, 1991) in its value delivery. Guided by Coase's (1937) notions on the nature of the firm, the competition winner is then the firm that can most effectively minimise its costs associated with preparing and consummating a market exchange. This firm-centric view implicates instrumental sellers acting on passive buyers, and it also implicates each offering as in itself unique. The logic of being a winner of a single finite exchange game is also evident in micro-economically-founded research involving consumers, based on the notion of the 'economic man' (Brockway, 1995; Mill, 1844) and the marketing mix (Borden, 1964; Kotler & Keller, 2011). Hence, at the heart of the marketing exchange concept is the notion of a finite game with winners and losers, ideally mutual (in that each faces the possibility of winning or losing), all with a focus on value maximisation for each party in each discrete exchange episode.

Yet, exchange cannot solely explain the huge-scale expansion and persistence of businesses such as Facebook, YouTube, LEGO (Mindstorm series), and Google (Android operating system). On one hand, these are all concrete cases of users acting as resource integrators who exchange their knowledge and skills with the company as well as with other users. On the other hand, exchange is a currency for something more, and that is being able to participate. As an example, people have already spent over 700 billion minutes per month on Facebook (Facebook Newsroom, 2014). To be able to participate, resource integrators need to contribute, which puts the focus on an on-going infinite game, rather than something being exchanged to conclude a

finite game. Hence, focusing on participating is to recognise the social phenomenon of people doing something together, and thereby realising value-in-use collaboratively.

Thus, this conceptual article will explain the need for the mainstream marketing mind-set to re-orient from exchange as its theoretical centre, to instead put focus on participation as the foundation for both markets and marketing in the broadest sense. We argue that resource integrators' participation in an infinite game is what forms and shapes both markets and marketing. Hence, to paraphrase Vargo and Lusch's Foundational Premise 1, "*Participation is the fundamental basis of service*", just as social interaction is a base-level concept of the 'marketing system' (Varey, 2008) and social organisation in general. This begs the question, why would someone be more interested to participate in value co-creating activities than in being a passive receiver of bundles of value produced by others in exchange for money? To be able to answer such a question we need to focus on the motives for participating, and thus propose three possible explanations. People derive pleasure in doing this because dialogue, interaction, and doing something together is at the heart of human nature. Also, it is closely aligned with Maslow's 'self-realisation' (Maslow, 1943, 1968). According to Etzioni (1988), a moral utility (other than economic utility) is derived when one follows a moral imperative. Giving and receiving gifts and contributing to 'common projects' maximises the moral utility. And, markets are spaces of power struggle (Bagozzi, 1975; Parsons & Smelser, 1956). Participation is one of the means of restoring the power balance that is often usurped by overly-influential market actors.

The concept 'market' explains the separation of producer and consumer (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Modernist thinkers assumed production and consumption to be separated, each representing predominantly value-creating and value-destroying activities respectively (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995). In fact, separation is necessary when one thinks of a market as a locus of exchange where firms act autonomously in creating and delivering value. When there is no separation or discrete one-or-the-other role and the firm isn't the driver of activity, then some re-thinking of core concepts is necessary.

It is crucial to appreciate the conditions within which markets operate. In the closed system understanding, control is sought through constructed dependency - firms run markets and customers are their resources. Did proximity and participation in producing for use get submerged by the avalanche of advertising campaigns driven by psychological analysis of 'consumer' behaviour and the prospect of social engineering? Certainly, since the 1960s we have lived through a veritable 'big bang' expansion of the market universe in the heat of broadcast 'media'. Yet, the Internet condenses and contracts our sense of distance, counteracting the intensification of otherness of those at a distance, and re-establishes proximity as a platform for engagement. In a connected society, the sense of *agora* and togetherness supersedes market apartness in the age of 'we-ness' (Glaser, 2007; Mainwaring, 2011; Mittelstaedt, Kilbourne, & Mittelstaedt, 2006). An open system understanding recognises the emergence of trust, reputation, and collaboration through acknowledgement of interdependency and common interests. When the means of wealth-making is assumed to be competition, then separation is inevitable, and markets arise when producer and user are disconnected (no longer physically co-located) and marketing becomes a distribution function. But the connections made by marketing actions are among separates, and hence communication and relationships come to the fore to bridge between 'us' in the firm and 'them' in the market outside the firm. Product exchange is the purpose of a 'produce - distribute - receive - use' pipeline in which the user is assumed to be passive receptor and destroyer ('consumer') of value to be acquired in competition

(Firat & Venkatesh, 1995). Moreover, the institutional foundations of modern society in the form of a Dominant Social Paradigm motivated the idea that consumption (of wealth) is the certain route to attaining greater happiness (Kilbourne et al., 2009; Kilbourne, McDonagh, & Prothero 1997). Hence, happiness, and thereby, quality-of-life, was not seen to be something that people could attain acting together, but as a value that is maximised in competition. This view put people in direct, head-to-head, win or lose, competition, for both physical and symbolic resources in the form of 'values' that supposedly would imbue happiness.

If, however, the provisioning system consists of everyone with needs who can contribute, and is motivated by a reward (i.e., operates for gain-making/gain-sharing), then connecting is the norm, and collaborative/collective/inclusive is the mode of working and connection is fundamental. The gift culture, of course, remains strong, despite the industrialisation of society into market-based divisions of property ownership, buyers and sellers, money, information, etc. In this alternative 'open system' view, the firm dissolves and it is personal interaction within a social group that comes into focus. There is only 'we', and participation is more than involvement and co-ordinated activity - practical democracy is founded on agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). This agency can be understood as the ability to productively deploy resources. This form of social organisation is not so dependent on ownership and money - much is not consumed, but experienced, enhanced - used, but not used up. The system is enriched - information is improved - and there is learning, as illustrated in the open source movement. Many university lecturers assume that learning is seen as a chore by students; maybe it is a general social primary motivator for certain behaviour, i.e., participation (Gladwell, 2001). 'Improvement co-creation' is active, collaborative production for use: participation is a pre-requisite, the other is a partner, not resource, in the 'we' community process of the infinite game. In exploring the meanings of the words 'partner' and 'participating' we find nouns such as partaking (part-taker) and share.

Zuboff and Maxmin (2002) explain the societal changes that have put support-seeking citizens to the fore, such that commercial firms are increasingly out of alignment with needs and expectations if they don't adopt a supportive role. We observe the instances of firms operating businesses that support citizen participation, moving from 'company' to 'companion', even 'shareholder', as well as the verbs assemble, co-operate, join. The shift in the definition of the role can be observed in businesses that are increasingly defining 'marketing' as customer advocacy (Urban, 2005). Also, there is an increasing call to adopt alternative notions, such as stakeholder, that recognises the role, importance, and impact of broader groups of citizens who are not (necessarily) customers (Laczniak & Murphy, 2012).

## PARTICIPATING

We can characterise the backdrop for contemporary marketing as a participatory culture (Deuze, 2008; Gulbrandsen & Just, 2011; Jenkins, 2006a, b; Larabie, 2011) and a participatory online culture among 'producers' (Bruns, 2008). Participation is engagement shaped by cultural and social protocols in the creation and circulation of cultural content such as possessions and other valuable supportive resources (Jenkins, 2006 a, b). The distinction of participation in a firm or market is not salient, rather in marketing value co-creation is the expression of this movement.

### *Playing finite and infinite games*

Marketing is still generally understood, in principles and in practices, as a game to be won. Key principles of orthodox marketing are exchange, competition/advantage/strategy/positioning, satisfaction/solution, growth, control, return-on-investment - the hallmarks of a finite game.

This is a firm-centric view that implicates instrumental sellers acting on buyers. An alternative explanation (recognising the US marketing management stance and the differing Nordic social system perspective) understands the social phenomenon of people doing together. Fiske (1991, 1992) explains basic modes of social participation through interaction in four relational models that are expressions of implicit cognitive schema: market pricing, authority ranking, equality matching, and communal sharing (see also Blois & Ryan, 2012). The firm exists to operate the market pricing model in which rational calculations of value-in-exchange are made in competition motivated by own value maximisation. Both seller and buyer are thought of as competing for resource benefits. In the authority ranking model, a criterion-based hierarchy characterises relationships, which usually exhibit power asymmetry and mutual obligations. Again, provider and customer relations are often of this type, at least in the seller's mind-set. The equality-matching model recognises an even balance in give and take, whilst communal sharing is characterised by equivalence classes, the members of which have something in common and mutual altruism frequently arises.

Another way of distinguishing means and ends is possible in the distinction between finite game and infinite game (Collins & Murphy, 2009, 2010; Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 1997). Understood as applied industrial price-based economics, marketing resembles a finite game. Companies play to win against opposition, with barriers to entry to the game, using fixed rules to judge who wins and who loses. Relationship Marketing (as distinct from Product Marketing) more resembles an infinite game in which the aim is not to win but to keep playing for rewards for all parties. Collins and Murphy (2010) observe that "*This grass roots ethos of an infinite game inherently recognises the decentralisation of power, and each individual's ability to co-create the experience, and value, for themselves and others*" (p. 349). Peer-to-peer communication is highly valued and producers see users as powerful partners able to mobilise and engage in an ongoing brand value partnership. The product comes into existence more in use than when manufactured.

In the infinite game, emphasis is put on evolving an inclusive process of partnering activity (development) (see, for example, Ballantyne, Frow, Varey, & Payne, 2010), not on exclusive exploitative competing and completing (growth as expansion). Benefit from an infinite game is accrued by those who play; in rock music this is known as 'jamming', and in jazz it is 'improvising', each is highly empathetic and co-operative. This inspires thinking differently about markets and marketing; the infinite game (of active connected citizens) creates the market. What is valued is the experience of being in the game and community, and recognition for contributing (identity), perhaps also outcomes along the way. Such a pattern indicates that a specific type of value (that is not individually realised) is accrued from within the very experiences of value co-creation. This pattern might be related to the way people derive moral utility - the sense of affirmation that one has positively and constructively contributed to something that is shared with others (Etzioni, 1988). Instead of individual identity projects, one can talk about 'common value projects' that are continuously generated, maintained, and developed.

Goffman (1972) in his research on human behaviour found fundamental elements in why actors continue to interact/participate. This analysis has been statistically tested in, and the characteristics are manifested in, an online setting (Nambisan & Baron, 2009). These elements are clearly linked to an infinite game, like jamming, rather than to short-term gains through market transactions. First, Goffman considered, all involved actors need to know who participates in the interaction. Taken into today's economy, where those who participate in an infinite game can be geographically widespread, physical presence might not be the only way to distinguish who is party to interacting. Instead, different proxies are used, such as brands, and avatars and nicknames in most online forums. Secondly, those participating need to have at least some common grounds for interaction. As in the marathon running example, only those who have an interest in running participate, but as the example shows, that includes running-shoe manufacturers as well as first-time runners. Third, actors must have ways to observe each other to know how to participate. This creates 'rules of the game' through humanly-devised schemas, norms, and regulations that enable and constrain behaviour and make the participation meaningful and somewhat predictable (North, 1990; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991; Scott, 2014). As shared norms, regulations, understandings, and know-how evolve within communities of participation (Schau, Muniz & Arnould, 2009), the moral imperative to follow principles and practices in the emerging fields of participation becomes ever stronger. Hence, there is a value to be derived from this process: participants get a chance to acquire unique feelings of affirmation associated with living up to commitments stipulated by shared practices, principles, and norms.

### *Part-taking*

The anthropological understanding of participation in a community highlights togetherness and fellowship in social networking practices such as welcoming, empathising, and governing (Schau et al., 2009). Such 'we' activity is motivated by the possibility of learning best practices, learning solutions to common problems, finding compatible partners, and the excitement of group experiences. In an activity-based community, 'we' can join, share, take part, connect, engage, contribute, and benefit (Middleton, 2012).

Participation implies *partaking* in and influencing processes, decisions, and activities – the act of taking a part or sharing in the common activities of a group. Benefits include inclusion, reciprocal support, companionship, self-expression, access to information, and voice. Highly significant is recognition of the value of contribution to a communal project operating on self-governance, arising from collective thinking, social learning, and deliberative dialogue, and beyond, in shared intelligence. Such participation is correlated with extraversion/sociability as participation is an active, contributive association in interest groups and affectionate groups, suggesting that introverts may be disadvantaged and seek indirect interaction. There is a tendency to seek goals that enhance subjective well-being (Sheldon, Arndt, & Houser-Marko, 2003), and participation in group activity enhances subjective well-being through the physiology of feeling good, of being social, and of belonging.

### *Customer/citizen participation*

Customer participation is concerned with a degree of involvement in producing service offerings (Dabholkar, 1990), involving participation in the firm's managerial decisions and work, the market, value co-creation, and production and consumption.

In Service-Dominant Logic terms, participation is in resource re-configuration and use. Participating in co-creation suggests spontaneous division of labour and multiple personal motivations and intrinsic rewards, with voluntary contribution motivated by interest free, meaningful contribution. The incentive is attention, and use and contribution doesn't have to be equal in realising a rewarded investment. Perhaps co-creation itself is valued, or co-created outcome is valued, or even just collaborative action.

There is increasing acknowledgment that customers are active participants in processes of value co-creation, and further, that some firms intentionally (strategically) support citizens' value-creating activities (see, for example, Grönroos & Gummerus, 2014; Grönroos & Voima, 2013) to ensure desirable conditions in the process and/or the outcome. From a societal or social perspective, we wonder if people are participating in peer group activities as an alternative to buying from corporate sellers. Instead of buying in and into the corporate market, a growing number of citizens are looking to 'join in' with fellow citizens to do things for themselves, rather than doing 'business'. For some, this is a moral stance in that participation is a right and a responsibility (Etzioni, 1988).

### *Gifting*

Prior to industrialisation (and the finite game of the firm and marketing management), society operated a gift economy in which trade only existed among community members (friends). The industrial market links strangers through transactions - trade is inherently competitive, assuming parties are and wish to remain strangers to each other (today a virtue!). Thus, the Relationship Marketing 'paradigm shift' remains largely locked in non-relational values (Heinberg, 2011). For a discussion of receiving as a virtue outside of the neoliberal notion of market of sellers and buyers see Owen (2010). In the gift economy perspective, help and sharing are gifts which are exchanged (Rheingold, 1993).

Anthropologists understand that a gift culture is a mode of exchange in which valuable objects and services are regularly given without any explicit agreement for immediate or future rewards. Such voluntary and recurring gift exchange circulates and redistributes wealth throughout a community, and helps to build societal ties and obligations. Whereas, in a market economy, valuable objects and services are explicitly exchanged for money or some other commodity; in a barter economy social norms and customs govern gift exchange. Traditional societies dominated by gift exchange were small and geographically remote from each other. As states formed to regulate trade and commerce within their boundaries, market exchange came to dominate. Yet, the practice of gift exchange continues to play an important role in modern society (Belk, 1988). Science and scholarship can be thought of as gift economies, and the emergence and expansion of the Internet has supported a resurgence of the gift economy, especially in the technology sector, where it is common for engineers, scientists and software developers to create open-source software projects which allow free re-use and enrichment of software and knowledge. File-sharing, the commons, and open access are all forms of gifting.

### *Creative economy*

Taking a political economy viewpoint, it is increasingly evident that over recent decades, a creative economy has been emerging as the Internet has evolved. This is moving society beyond the consumerist mind-set to an 'economy of contribution'

(Stiegler, 2010, 2011). The logic of overconsumption is being overridden by enthusiasts contributing work as amateurs and professionals interacting in online communities. The contradiction of the finite marketing logic is that firms must compete to satisfy the needs of customers through innovation for growth-derived profits, yet if needs were satisfied, much business would go out of business. Thus, consumer capitalism is organised to artificially produce desires for things not needed and even harmful. Citizens in the guise of consumers have become addicted to consume ever more, not for needs, but for desires. Modes of living are proscribed by brands, resulting in the loss to society of social relationships, and capabilities and knowledge for an own life of the citizen.

We are experiencing a transitional phase in society, expressed by concerns for corporate social responsibility, consumer protection, anti-consumption, and sustainability. In the creative economy, there is no separation or functional opposition of producing and consuming actors. Value is not all monetisable, and valuation includes the non-monetary, including reciprocal obligations. It is recognised that contemporaneous *public*, *gift*, and *contribution* economies operate as economies of existence, as well as the *market* economy of subsistence. A general economy of collective creative action is being supported by dialogical collaborative cultural technologies to mobilise resources and productive service agreed deliberately for social development in the commons. Social value is being created in selflessness (see Brown, 2010; Hawken, 2008; Senge, Smith, Kruschwitz, Laur, & Schley, 2010; Sisodia, Wolfe, & Sheth, 2007; Steffen, 2006, for examples).

The commons can be thought of as that part of society outside of the state and the market (Barnes, 2006; Bollier & Helfrich, 2014; Grant, 2010; Large, 2010; Lessig, 2001; Rifkin, 2014). It is a meeting place open to participation in collective action towards public good, and the natural assets and cultural endowments, including science, art, and the Internet of collective resources. Robertson (1989) defines 'The Commons' as common resources that have value due to Nature and the activities and demands of society as a whole, and not the efforts of individual people or organisations.

So, what is the purpose of the firm? For two centuries, and especially during the mid-latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the firm has been a way to organise production to sell things for profit, characterised by private ownership and using natural assets, including using public assets, for private profit. More recently recognised is that when resource- and energy-using organisations are too expensive and wasteful, low-cost peer-production is a desirable alternative, especially when society judges corporate production to be immoral and against human rights in exploiting the habitat and labour for maximisation of investor returns.

In the networked society, corporates have a different role, not as provider and user-on-behalf-of-customer, but as supporter. When provisioning is firm-driven, co-creation is allowed (as a change in market operation) to hear the voice of the customer (Griffin & Hauser, 1993). But shifting a part of the work to be done by companies onto consumers (e.g., self-checkout in supermarkets, mass customisation practices) is not 'participation'. Such an approach is still company-centric, as the company is still in firm control of how consumers create value-driven experiences. A citizen-driven community, on the other hand, arises outside the exchange market, in support-seeking, buying and using on the firm-provided platform, when otherwise inaccessible resources are needed. In such contexts, smart firms see themselves as facilitators and collaborators. The supply of products would be linked to facilitating consumer experiences (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Hence, as in the case of

Apple, the firm must co-create common platforms for participation (e.g., iOS, iTunes) within which products (e.g., iPad) become devices that facilitate desired experiences.

The commons is characterised by collective action, co-operation, and fairness in provisioning, on citizens' own terms, for example in collaborative consumption, sharing, etc. The corporate firm's role in peer-production/social production is to provide the platform infrastructure that enables and facilitates participation such that use benefits and maintenance are free of charge to the public. Examples include 'in-the-cloud' file storage, Wikipedia and Ancestry.com where use expands and improves the usefulness. The firm may also be a contributor of inputs and support resources.

## PICTURING PEOPLE PARTICIPATING

Participating to contribute in an infinite game of inventing and realising value collaboratively in online communities, brand communities, social networks, and corporate social networks, has been enabled by the world-wide 'web', for example in eBay, Netflix, Wikipedia, and the Open Source movement. Leadbeater (2008) has many stories of everyday experience as examples of participation, including Wikipedia, Twitter, and eBay. People are participating in the associational activity of self-governing creative communities to share and to get recognition for their contributions, and collaborative co-ordination is the way of organising for collectively producing outputs inter-subjectively valued by participants as outcomes. They are 'creative consumers' supported by firms who serve them for reward (see Gladwell, 2001, and Mainwaring, 2011, for more examples). Connection is the core condition, there is no separation, and exchange is a special case of social network behaviour, becoming ubiquitously enabled by networked information and communication technology. Examples show contributory participation in anticipation of beneficial return in a 'we' mentality of 'I get what I want by helping you to get what you want'. This has been termed 'performative participation' (Lessig, 2008; Ritzer, Dean, & Jurgenson, 2012; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010).

The advent of the Internet brings with it the need to understand online communication as not simply communication online, but as inherently processual and collaborative - an ongoing process determined by willingness to participate and ability to invite collaboration. Online communication *is* processual collaboration among unknown, often exaggerated, staged selves (or digital representations of people), and inherently negotiable in placeless proximity and facilitating participation (Gulbrandsen & Just, 2011). Persons can interact directly with the few whilst interacting indirectly with the many. In the collaborative paradigm, communication is not the transmission of content from an independent sender to a passive spectator receiver. Communicating is a collaborative and creative process that is collective, recursive and emergent meaning formation in open-ended continuous co-creative interacting.

This 'we' mentality can be found in a variety of businesses today. The obvious link can be found in (democratising) user-driven innovations (von Hippel, 2005) and Google's Android platform, Apache's server, and the Linux operating system. They all rely heavily on their user community for participation to innovate and for maintenance of their offerings. A related but slightly different industry is computer gaming. Users often directly or indirectly help the company by their participation. It is common that 'gamers' are participating online with other gamers in a 'massively

multiplayer online role-playing game' (MMORPG). The game is dependent on persons playing. Users might also help the company by co-creating new innovative offerings in designated online communities. This duality within the gaming industry is colourfully illustrated: *"I love these games. It's great to get tips and so on about the games, but it's also cool to be a part of a community with similar interests to me. I've learned a lot about history since coming here, I've taught a bit too, and I've also realized my interests aren't really as obscure and unusual as I had thought. Actually, the forum is a fairly big part of my life now"* [quoted from a participant in a netnographic study by one of the authors, unpublished at the time of writing.

The 'we' mentality can also be found in other businesses. Famously, LEGO was almost on the verge of bankruptcy but by fluke started to involve their consumers and is now flourishing. Today, user innovation products like LEGO Mindstorm and communities like Adult Fans of Lego (AFOL) have helped the company to get back on track. Participation is also the foundation for crowdfunding platforms such as Kickstarter and the information gathering base for a company like Ancestry.com, which is basically a forum for people who want to find their ancestors. Kickstarter is an intermediary, helping connect people who want to find funding for pre-defined projects such as the recording of a new music album, and fans eager to experience the outcome and be part of such a project. Ancestry.com is dependent on users who input data about their heritage to build their family tree. The more refined the data that people put in the system, the easier it becomes to find extended family roots. The phenomenon of participation can also be seen on social media and auction platforms; Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn or Craigslist are nothing without the ongoing infinite game of individuals uploading, interacting, commenting, and sometimes exchanging resources. The phenomenon of content curation, for example Scoop.it!, is entirely operated on a firm-provided support platform on which users compile interest-based digital magazines by uploading and re-posting articles and comments. According to Middleton (2012), Pinterest is the fastest growing social media website ever, even exceeding the growth rate of Facebook. The reported 70 million users (mid 2013) personally categorise, organise, and annotate digital content they find so they can share it with others by 'pinning' it to an online 'notice board' and re-pinning to others. This is a highly functional discovery network that directly influences purchase choices as a shopping companion. Howard Forums was founded to enable users to interact with each other to solve technical problems with mobile phones (Shirky, 2009). The quality of circulating information is so good, according to Shirky, that mobile phone company engineers refer their customers to it for answers to tricky questions. Meetup was established to support connecting together people with affinity of interests and proximity - it had convening power once the number of Internet users was substantial. Latent groups can be identified and connected together, thereby creating social capital in the form of bonding within clusters of people and bridging between clusters.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR AND OF 'SOVI-ABLE' BUSINESS

This discussion of participating in the creative commons and the distinction from exchanging in the market is profoundly significant for the field of marketing because of the changing salience and role of the firm, and thus managerial marketing. We consider implications for marketing practice and research agendas of large-scale

collaborative production outside of the market and the firm. In commons-based peer production systems, the distinction of firm and market are at least in question, if not undermined (Benkler, 2006). This raises questions not only of marketing efficacy or reach, but also moral dimensions to economic concerns that are not well addressed within the confines of market economism.

Firstly, in commercial terms, a participatory culture has implications for branding, relationship marketing, selling, and marketing communications, especially advertising. In a market of independence, distribution substitutes for 'relationship', therefore marketing communication is monological and persuasive. In a community of interdependence, connection is vital, and increasingly supported in social media. Participation is manifested through social business. Business models are becoming more social as firms adapt to the emerging social reality and adopt social media to strategically increase their capability to trade socially. Businesses are moving to a new model of engagement that emphasises and supports participation and collaboration in an increasingly social world (Kadirov & Varey, 2013; Varey, 2011).

The fundamental problem for which the finite game of profit-making marketing, often expressed as 'taking product to market', is a partial, flawed, and now outmoded, solution is provisioning for a good society of equitable well-being. The transcendent solution is an infinite game of 'economising' and 'societing' (Badot, Bucci, & Cova, 2007), that is, provisioning for social outcomes to satisfy needs and enhance well-being with prudent mobilisation of resources and productive service.

Secondly, when the firm is a platform provider for peer production, marketing will have a reputation and relationship focus as what is sold is service and assurance of capability to support, requiring replacement of the outmoded campaign mindset with real-time adaptive customer engagement. One challenging effect of non-monetised value creation on firms will be the loss of business, as citizens are able to opt out of the market. Searls (2012), for example, documents the rise of vendor relationship management as the counterpart and complement to customer relationship management. A rather different business model - and role for business - is necessary when facilitating interactions among stakeholders, sometimes, and increasingly, outside the market. What would be the form of the firm that does this? What would be the relationship with customers who don't pay money to the firm?

Marketing has the disciplinary principles, techniques, and tools, but profit-making exchange is not a proscribing prescription. Economism translates all life into profit-making cultivation of desire and/or ignores the whole person or dominates and overruns the civic life. Consumption is not the end, since in participating, resources are not depleted and value extracted. Contribution inputs enhance the conditions of participants.

How far might this go? We imagine a rethink of the nature and purpose of the firm. The currently pervasive (dominating) conception is of the market as a competitive arena of separate firms and consumers, each buying and selling to maximise utility. The firm is a domesticated non-market form of organisation to control money-making resources. Who is in the firm (one of us) and who is in the firm's environment - at a distance (one of them), and what kind of 'trans-actions' occur are presently dictated by firm-centric values. We envision a societal understanding of marketing in the service of citizens, and community-based system improvement. Consumer communities are 'domesticated' quasi-markets with special character (see Arndt, 1979): information is directly managed, there is no competition, and buyer and seller roles are not distinct but undifferentiated.

Some questions remain. How will disparities in capabilities necessary to participate (resources, skills, connections, etc.) create imbalance and undermine constructive collaboration? How do introverts respond to disadvantage? What is the cost of sharing and of competing? What is the cost of corporate appropriation of participation (platform)? This is, of course, not purely or simply an economic question. Participating citizens exert political and ethical force. In the workplace, participatory management has been debated for decades since McGregor's "*human side of enterprise*" (McGregor, 1960; Varey, 2002). Could it be the continued rise of *corporatism* (as a society becomes organised in major interest groups subordinated to the state which represent and control members, Wiarda, 1996) and *corporatocracy* (in which the economic and political system is controlled by corporations and/or corporate interests run by the power elite (Phelps, 2013; Sachs, 2012) since the latter part of the 20th Century? Why is it taking so long to democratise and rehumanise the general economy? How will owners, managers, and marketers respond (Varey & Pirson, 2014)? Can society afford to leave this in the hands of actors playing to win as 'marketing' expands beyond the 'market', for example in social marketing and political marketing?

Is participation saleable for the exploitation of non-paying customers as participatory culture is appropriated for corporate use (Deuze, 2008)? Is participation a necessary alternative to the commercial market, deriving non-monetised value in the form of system improvement service contribution, as well as endorsement, goodwill, and reputation? Future prospects are back to the future - what will marketing be like by the middle of this century? We see the beginnings of a trend in cultural evolution towards open community, and markets as special cases of corporately-supported societal improvement tools. Marketing will be of the people, for the people, and by the people - democratised by use of the Internet as a participatory, contributive infrastructure for publishing knowledge for personal creativity and work shared.

We envisage commercial relationship management beyond the technological 'toolkit' form of marketing in thrall to an exploitative economic system. Social production opens the possibility of participating in the commons for provisioning, and thus opting out of that part of the market that thrives on competitiveness, selfishness, and egocentrism, and uses up and destroys habitat as a commodity for a guarded elite. Provisioning of, for, and by the people - good business - will support this democratic multi-faceted economy.

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