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Participation and Sharing Economy: The Spanish Case of #Compartirmola

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Abstract: Sharing economy, collaborative consumption or Participation Economy is changing our economy the way we know it. The tipping point at this moment is the fact that the Internet is giving us the chance to build this new economy under scalable and massive models. This paper is focused on a case study about a Spanish online movement called #compartirmola (“sharing is cool”), which is analyzed to identify forty collaborative initiatives from Spanish companies. The mixed quantitative and qualitative method of this research will be useful to describe the actions that were utilized to give it visibility. The film was launched on December 2014, in Madrid. Our focus was to analyze the actions of online dissemination of this film, as well as the synergies between business models (as crowdfunding) and viral strategies within social networks. Finally, we interviewed one of the producers of the film. This study will help us to understand the social experience which is narrowly connected to the new models of Sharing Economy or Participation Economy offered by some companies (Cabify, Tutellus, Uber...), as well as the roles of social networks for disseminating the main messages and goals, such as crowdfunding, online visibility or lobbying. This is a preprint version of the paper.

Keywords: Sharing Economy, Social Media, Entrepreneurship, Buzz Marketing

1. Introduction

As Bryan Walsh underlined a few years ago (Clarke, 2012), we are witnessing a new generation of citizens, and “they are pioneering a form of collaborative consumption: renting, lending and even sharing goods instead of buying them”. There is no doubt about Internet is changing in so many ways how users gather information (Pérez-Latre et al. 2011). And within these ways, sharing is a key element. This innovative spirit of collaborative consumption can be found in startups like Brooklyn-based SnapGoods, which helps people to rent their goods via the Internet or Airbnb, this last one even people to rent their homes to travelers. Collaborative consumption is just a buzzword or as Botsman and Rogers (2011) said, “it is a new win-win way of life”? Maybe the technological advances are leading new forms of collaborative consumption, but this change of mind hasn’t just happened to consumers, it is happening to companies too. In another way, many authors are focusing on the roles of companies in this phenomenon which traditionally had always been studied. As Meelen and Frenken (2015) said: “it is ambiguous where the sharing economy begins and where it ends. Because sharing has a positive and progressive connotation, more and more companies claim that they are part of the sharing economy”. Although research in new media consumption has been focused mainly in user-generated content (Thurman, 2008; Singer et al. 2011), this paper underlines the phenomenon of user-distributed content.

Under this perspective, we can find specific spheres where the corporative strategies around the participation of publics were analyzed, such as media companies, journalism and cultural industries (Noguera et al. 2013), but we have to move forward toward recent studies to find specialized works focused on the fact of sharing. And when this fact is designed and promoted from the company –and not from the consumer- the chosen concept has been “economy of participation”, which is defined as a cluster of companies and economic activities where “the product is not finished or even it does not exist without the active participation of the publics” (Noguera et al. 2014). Usually, the kind of consumer who is identified as the target of this new economy is the prosumer, term coined by Toffler (1980) and revisited by Ritzer (2010), but from the point of view of this new economy of participation, the real target is everyone, every single consumer, because this model is not focused on any kind of elitist consumer model, but the public in a broad sense.

Anyway, and following the prosumer profile, we can find the middle point with the notion of “produsage” (Bruns, 2008), which is dealing with borderlines of production and circulation of content, and it is the kind of problem that we face when we are talking about economies of participation: What does the product mean and what is out of the product? In other words, it is harder to identify the experience around any kind of product (linking, liking, tweeting, re-tweeting... and SHARING) as something that does not own to the product itself. We can identify this as the social experience of the product. Firstly and from this point of view, what economies of participation are underlining is the growing importance of designing the social experience of any kind of product.

Secondly, one of the goals of this social experience is to get contact and fluid communication with specific audience communities of your company, as this flow of communication can become in a valuable source of feedback and even of economic advantages (Napoli, 2010), because a company which is listening to their audiences is creating a dynamics where problems and opportunities are detected earlier.

Under this perspective, what we have noticed in the film and all the social activities related to #compartirmola is that the social experience designed by a cluster of companies are arrowly connected to economies of sharing and, because of that, we could identify them as a kind of Spanish lobby focused on promoting the culture and economies of sharing. But it is not all about publishing, but even more about filtering and selecting.

In order to describe their strategies, concepts such as “social curation” (Villi, 2012) will be relevants because of the need of filtering and selecting the most valuable pieces of content from the huge –in best of cases- amount of User-Generated Content (Krumm et al. 2008) and User-Distributed Content (Napoli, 2009). An intensive and selective dissemination of information among strategical actors –even the internal ones- of any organization is a key factor of success in economies of sharing (Styhre, 2002). This dissemination cannot be a simple replication of same content, but a transmedia extension of the same narrative universe (Jenkins, 2010), in order to take advantage of a kind of new consumption which is characterized by networked audience communities that are connected by different online platforms (Marshall, 2004), and they are looking for different content in each one.

2. Material and Methods

The hashtag #compartirmola means something like “sharing is cool” and it was a movie recorded collaboratively among all participants in 2014. A film where there was not director but connectors, and where there is a personal, fun and social approach to phenomenon of collaborative consumption, initiatives and platforms operating in Spain under the sharing economy umbrella. By other side, Spain is a country with a highly relevant percentage of users using social networks as a source for news consumption on the Web (Nielsen and Schroeder, 2014) and this could bring to us the opportunity to check if this film would become a viral phenomenon or just one more piece of shared content on the Internet.

As researchers we were interested in analyzing the impact of the communication actions of the project. We understand communication actions as all individual tasks through which starts up a communication strategy (Pérez, 2001). And we focused on them and not on the overall communication strategy of this project due to the inability we have had to obtain data that would allow us to unravel all the elements of the communication plan, such as objectives, the target to which it is addressed, the proposed budget, timing, etc.

As we pointed out, the main tool within the actions of #compartirmola has been the collaborative documentary launched on December 2014, in Madrid. There are also a website, a Twitter, a Facebook and a Google+ account, and a course in the online education

platform Tutellus. The video appears in YouTube because one user (Pablo F. Iglesias) uploaded it, not the producers.

In short, we aim to analyze the #compartirmola brand visibility on the web. As Marhuenda and Nicolas (2012) indicated the presence "is about brand awareness, understanding awareness by the market existence of the brand". We have chosen a mixed methodology, because it will address quantitative data that allow us to study the degree of exposure in social media online communication activities developed by this brand. This methodological framework will be complemented by an in-depth interview, semi-structured and conducted by telephone with Hector Castillo (promoter of the project).

Specifically, within the quantitative section, our focus was on the data from the four main social networks used in Spain: Facebook, Youtube, Twitter and Google + (IAB, 2014). In this way, we covered the fundamental spectra in the current virtual social environments: the web quintessential social networking (Facebook), the appeal of audiovisual format Youtube, simplicity and speed of microblogging Twitter and potential of all integrated services Google+. To analyze Facebook, Twitter and Google+ we used the analysis tools Tweet Binder, Topsy, Keyhole, Klout and the public statistics showed in Facebook, YouTube and G+. We executed a search for hashtags and profiles created for the occasion by the promoters of the project: #compartirmola, #revolucioncolaborativa, CompartirMola La Película (Facebook) and CompartirMola (G+). The temporal scope of the search was limited to the months of November and December 2014 and January and February 2015. That was prior to the premiere of the documentary month and two months after that, enough time to study the actions of going viral and brand visibility. While with Youtube we proceeded with a search for all channels that have posted the video of the documentary #Compartirmola and write down the number of accumulated reproductions.

Finally, these results added to the total number of students registered in the Massive Open Online Course launched by Tutellus, one of the promoters of the idea platform. Along with the number of attendees to the projections in cinemas and coworking centers.

For the qualitative part, we had relied on a semi-structured interview with a series of questions frame, opentype, giving an opportunity to receive more nuanced responses, and letting go intertwining important issues that appear. The first research questions are the following ones:

1. Who drives the project? What was the initial idea? Who is leading?
2. Was there a planned communication campaign? Who makes the strategy of the campaign?
3. Regarding the communication campaign. How far can you provide us data (traffic, viewings, impacts, mentions, KPIs, etc.)?

And during the interview we asked also these questions:

1. What difficulties have you found to carry out the project?
2. Have you had to change your initial idea of spreading it?
3. Have you added any tool with which not initially were counting trying to going viral?
4. Which are your expectations after the premiere of the movie?

The interview was conducted by telephone on November 17th (2014).

3. Results

As we can see in Figure 1, the data obtained about dissemination were 12.000 tweets and retweets. 2,285 views in one YouTube channel (Pablo F. Iglesias) and 199 in Alfa-Zulú's channel. 430 users in Tutellus (Spanish platform where the user can find a copy of the film and all the videos recorded by the companies). And 2.100.000 impacts according to Tweet Binder, Topsy, Keyhole and Google Analytics. 1.334 likes in Facebook and 621 viewed in Google +. A post by Spanish influencer prof. Enrique Dans had 10.769 visualizations, 218 shares in Facebook and 89 '+1' in Google Plus.

Also a 15 minutes interview in Spanish national television RTVE La2 (2014) could be measurable as a part of the success of the project. In December 2014 the film had a premiere in a theater with 195 people and a simultaneous show in coworking spaces along the country with 1.500 people attending.

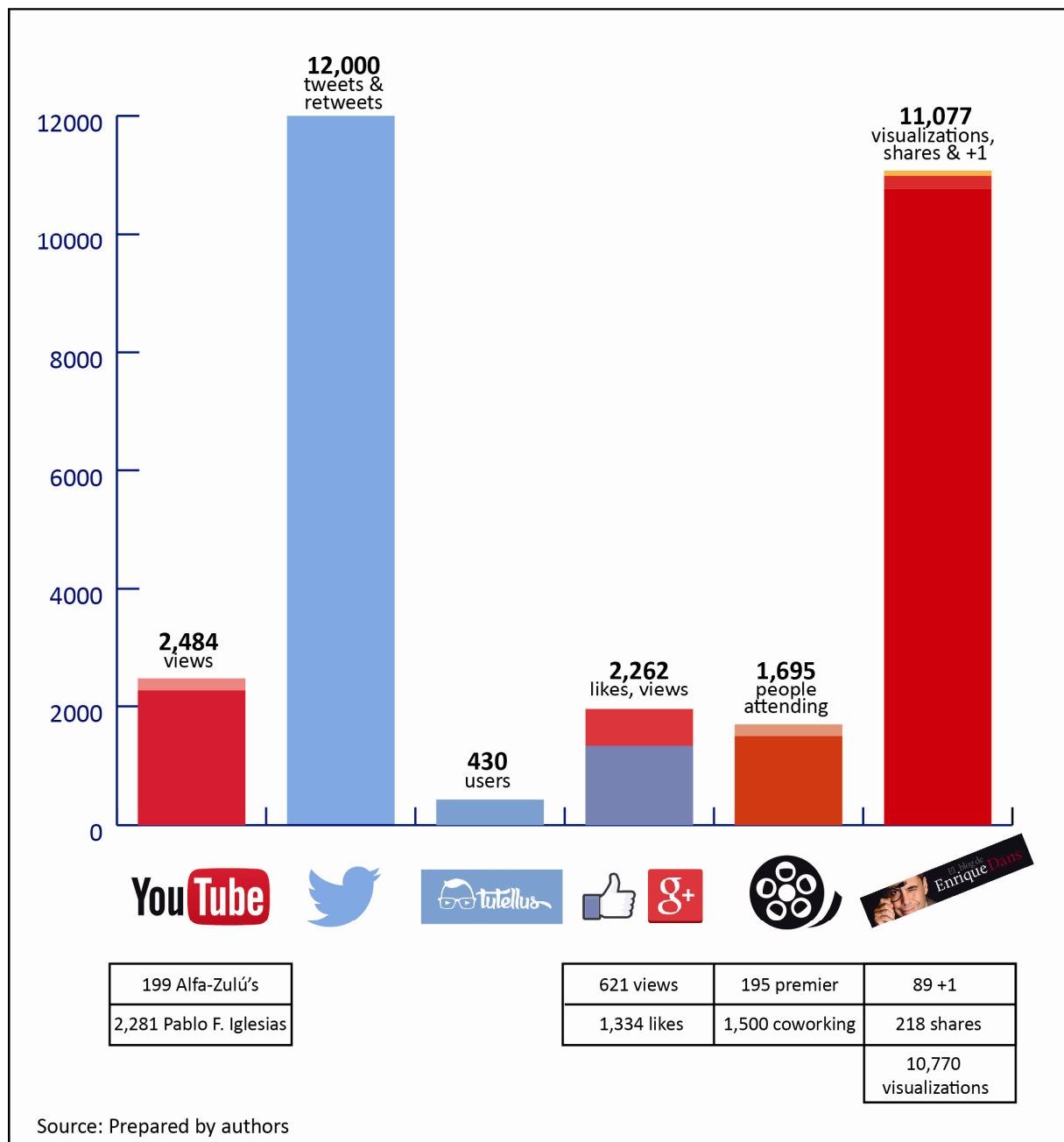


Figure 1: Dissemination data

4. Conclusion

This study helped us to understand the social experience which is narrowly connected to the new models of Economy of Participation offered by some companies as well as the roles of social networks for dissemination of main messages and goals, such as crowdfunding or online visibility. When we started the project we thought the impact of it would be widespread in society, but the data demonstrate even when sharing economy is a fast-growing phenomenon and usually appears in every media of almost every country, this film (#compartirmola) did not have high audience ratings.

#CompartirMola was an idea of Miguel Caballero, Héctor Castillo from Tutellus team transformed into a film by Enrique de Álzaga of Alfa-Zulú. They interviewed five experts: Enrique Dans, Javier Creus, Albert Cañigüeral, Juan Galiardo and Ileana Izverniceanu. And there were 40 startups and companies in it: Cabify, Social Car, Uber, Joinup Taxi, Bluemove, Wesmartpark (car sharing); Meetmeals and Chicfy (food sharing); Mytwinplace and Airbnb (home sharing); Home Exchange (e-cohousing); Suop, Minube, Uolala, Leetchi, Sherpandipity, Timerepublik, The Back Packer Web, Gudog, Fiindr, Obsso, Bliive, Trip4Real, Regalamos.es, Cronnection, COCO Agenda and Spacebee (experiences and services); Ticketea and Ticketbis (ticketing); Ulule, WeSwap and Moniefy (crowdfunding platforms); Coworking Spain, Freeland Madrid, Mob Makers of Barcelona (coworking); Mingles, Etece, Furnit-U and Tutellus (education); Domenico di Siena (shareable cities); Twomuchrs and AXA (companies and markets).

In this paper we did not analyze if the companies or startups are really part of the sharing economy, but as Cuevas (2014) says: "While you can still experience the sharing economy with Airbnb, chances are high you may end up just renting a vacation apartment from a professional. And just using your car to provide transportation services is not sharing your car. Many taxi drivers own their cars while also use them as their personal vehicles and, obviously, we don't call that sharing. While Uber could in the future become an actual sharing economy app, where you'll use your phone to pick up some riders on your way to work and share the cost, the truth is that today they are probably just using the sharing economy umbrella to protect themselves against regulators and the taxi lobby ... If you are selling your app under the "sharing economy" label then you better make sure people are actually sharing something and not using your product just to make money".

This project has enabled participants to meet people with the same interests, create synergies with others, exchange knowledge and thrive in their personal and professional life, and, sure, access to products and services directly from the producer, saving intermediaries. And it could be a real seed to become an association or a lobby. In fact, last December 10th was presented Sharing España, a group of companies based on P2P and collaborative models.

This group, Sharing España is driven and comprised by 24 companies of various profiles and business models that have joined in order to promote and inform about the benefits of collaborative economy and business models "peer to peer" in the country. Companies are Airbnb, AlterKeys, Avancar, Blablacar, Bluemove, Cabify, ChicFy, Comunitae, Eatwith, Etece, Erasmus, Gigoing, MangoPay, MyFixpert, Only Apartments, Rentalia, Respiro, Sharing Academy, Sherpandipity, Social Car, Suop, Traity, Trip4Real and WeSmartPark.

According to its promoters collaborative economy is a sector that is growing at a fast pace in Spain, which is becoming one of the European markets where most business initiatives related to the economic sphere are emerging. In fact, about 400 companies in Spain are linked to the collaborative economy currently and it is expected that this number will continue growing, as many startups that now begin their activity on this type of model. Indeed, one of

the priorities for this group is to analyze and promote brand studies to know the real impact of this sector in the Spanish economy and society.

Sharing Spain consider absolutely "necessary to be proactive in explaining that the activities covered collaborative economy are an opportunity for economic development and a transition to a more sustainable growth model that allows greater participation of citizens and it is a priority for them to generate a cross-sectorial dialogue with all stakeholders, showing how people can produce and be entrepreneurs and explain that new, more informed consumers may also have an offer based on efficient access and not the acquisition of certain goods which are sometimes underutilized. This will have the support of the Spanish Association of Digital Economy (Adigital)" (CincoDias.com, 2015). There are associations with similar objectives that already exist in other countries in Europe and in the US, such as UkShare.co (UK), ShareNL (Holland), New York CoNYC or San Francisco Bay Share.

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