

**“The fact is just that people
are finally realizing what it’s about”**

Analyzing the changing work practices of communication professionals

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Abstract

This research focuses on analyzing the changes that the shift towards a so-called participatory culture has brought into the work practices of communication professionals. Technological developments have resulted into increased availability and overwhelming amount of information as the number of communication channels has multiplied, and changed the way in which audiences participate and create content. While thinking of the magnitude and speed of the transformations in the media landscape, it is interesting to analyze how communication professionals are dealing with these changes. The theoretical framework of this research provides a broad overview of the field and gives some concrete examples of the shift towards participatory culture. The chosen method for this research is in-depth interviews, as the aim is to analyze the perceptions of communication professionals in greater depth.

It was discovered that even though the essence of the profession remains the same, the shift towards participatory culture has indeed changed not only the way the professionals approach their work but also some concrete work practices. As the amount of third parties such as social media influencers and the time spent on working with owned media has increased, professionals are working less with traditional media. Therefore, greater amount of content than ever before is produced in communication agencies and departments. Due to these changes communication professionals are able to have direct contact with their audiences, which together with the increased participation from the audience, has led to leaving the sender-perspective behind and adapting a more user-focused perspective. Therefore, creating dialogue, facilitating peer-to-peer discussions and forming of communities and aiming to be part of the communication rather than the sender of information has become important when working as a communicator. Because of the increased produsage and creation of user-generated content, the control that professionals used to have over the messages and content that was published has decreased, and therefore, flexibility, adaptability and improvisation skills have become valuable assets when working as a communication professional in the fast-moving landscape characterized by wide variety of communication channels. This research advocates that in order to be a successful communicator in this landscape, flexibility and improvisation together with the ability to have a more holistic perspective and be included in decision-making processes are important skills to master.

Keywords: participatory culture, work practices of communication professionals, attention economy, micro-celebrity, structural change

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Table of Contents

1. Keeping up with the ever-changing media landscape	4
1.1 From working with audiences to working with participants	5
1.2 Using the past to make sense of the present	6
1.3 The new role of publics.....	8
1.4 Exploring the implications of the participatory culture.....	10
1.6 The expectations and the structure of the research	11
2. Attracting attention in a dynamic environment	13
2.1 Micro-celebrities in an attention economy	13
2.2 From two-step flow to the networked era	16
2.3 Different perspectives of participatory culture – an opportunity, a threat or both?	16
2.4 When “video killed the radio star” and later developments	18
2.5 Conclusion.....	21
3. Methodology	22
3.1 Qualitative research method and sampling plan	22
3.3 Operationalization and data collection	24
3.4 Thematic analysis	25
3.5 Credibility, transferability and trustworthiness of the research.....	28
3.6 Conclusion.....	29
4. Transforming work practices	30
4.1 Finding new strategies and avoiding “the fear of missing out”	31
4.2 Changing practices in communication agencies	33
4.3 Direct contact and dialogue with critical audiences	36
4.4 Relationship with empowered producers – democracy or illusion?	39
4.5 Utilizing user-generated content and learning to let go	42
4.6 From user-generated content to being a social media influencer	44
4.6.1 Thoughts about influencers.....	45
4.6.2 Practical work with influencers	46
4.7 Taking a step back	49
5. Conclusion.....	52
5.1 Limitations	53
5.2 Recommendations for future research.....	54
References.....	56
Appendix 1	59

1. Keeping up with the ever-changing media landscape

The lamps are different, but the light is the same (Rumi, 13th century).

The work of public relation and communication professionals is often characterized by constant changes and dynamic and turbulent landscape. It is easy to agree with this description while thinking of the rapid technological developments during the past decade and how that has affected the ways in which we communicate. Not only is there more choices of how to communicate, but also the access to information, different channels and platforms as well as the ability to communicate fast and efficiently have changed the terms and conditions of professional communication.

International Association of Business Communicators (2018) defines the global standard of the communication profession as follows: “Communication professionals represent the voice of an organization as it interacts with customers, clients, employees, partners, shareholders, competitors and the community. The communication professional brings the organization to life with a brand voice that aligns its verbal, visual and digital messages and activities with its mission and vision. By clarifying the brand, communication professionals also help ensure the organization runs efficiently and effectively.” In practice, these professionals develop communication strategies that are based on research, they use various communication channels, methods and tools to communicate with a range of audiences, they create and edit content and they decide the time, place and channel of communication and also how to assess the outcomes of their work (International Association of Business Communicators, 2018). Communication professionals do not only work within the communication industry in for example PR, advertising and communication agencies but also in specialized departments in various types and sizes of organizations who are active within various industries. Communication is a vital part of a functioning organization, no matter in which industry it is active on. While thinking of the enormous magnitude and speed of the changes in the media landscape, it is clear that these changes have had and continue to have an impact on the work practices of communication professionals (Tindall & Hutchins, 2016). There are more ways to communicate than ever – with audiences who have shorter attention span, less time and more messages targeted towards them than ever. This research focuses on analyzing the impacts that this changing landscape has had on the work practices of public relations and communication professionals (from now on referred to as communication professionals or communicators).

1.1 From working with audiences to working with participants

The goal of various communication efforts is no longer to simply inform audiences but to communicate and create dialogue with more and more fragmented audiences. After the relatively direct one-way communication media, such as radio and television, have been accompanied by internet and social media, the communication environments have become more complex and characterized by immediacy and access. Every single new user who enters the current media landscape is also a potential producer (Bruns, 2008) which means that more amateurs than ever are now in the position that used to belong to the publicists. Groups that were formerly described only as audiences are now also participants who do not expect to simply receive message but rather have environments where they can communicate with each other. As Castells (2007) argues, a new kind of media space has emerged around the process of so-called mass self-communication. This new media space is characterized by horizontal, interactive communication networks that enable the users to be connected. Due to increased Internet and mobile communication and broadband capacity, users have started to form their own version of mass communication with for example text messages, vlogs, social platforms and podcasts (Castells, 2007). Consumers no longer only talk back to different organizations but they also talk to each other. As engaged audiences form their own communities around things that interest them and the circulation of content is more extensive than ever before, community management as a part of organizations' communication efforts has increased in importance significantly during the past years. This is reflected globally for example as multiple communication practitioners list community management as a job title or skill, and the topic is widely discussed in various articles, websites and conferences (Tindall & Hutchins, 2016). Although having and valuing relationships and two-way communication with publics is nothing new as it has always been a central function of public relations and communication, community management via social media efforts provides a different perspective to reinforcing the ties with publics (Tindall & Hutchins, 2016). Earlier studies of brand communities or offline community management do not quite manage to cover this area or are strongly focused on marketing or cultural studies (Tindall & Hutchins, 2016). Therefore, more research covering the latest evolvments to answer the apparent interest towards the topic within the industry is required. Even though the new forms of public participation are widely acknowledged, they are not thoroughly researched in academia in relation to the work practices of communicators who are often in interaction with the publics (Tindall & Hutchins, 2016).

The whole practice of communication is transforming as news are read through mobile apps, YouTube is replacing traditional TV in popularity, professionals are increasingly going from working with analog material and journalists to working with online environments and social media influencers, information moves across the world in a split second and

everything is constantly “on”. The professionals’ own view of their work in the changing landscape has not been thoroughly researched, especially not in Northern European context. How do communicators perceive the audiences and their participation? Which aspects of their work have changed due to the changing communication environments and channels, and which have not? Are the professionals keeping up with the changes? In order to make the most of this media landscape, it might mean leaving the old work practices and ways of thinking behind and embracing change. This research focuses on the perspective of communication professionals and how various changing factors from social media, user-generated content and brand communities to the speed, availability, spreading and overflow of information have affected their work practices. When it comes to earlier research on publics, a typical and quite significant limitation is that the aim of the research is often to find a solution to a problem, such as a PR crisis or conflict. This enforces the persistent idea of public relations and communication practice as reactive rather than proactive (Tindall & Hutchins, 2016). Therefore, the aim in this research is to avoid the abovementioned approach, as a solely reactive style is irreparably old-fashioned and most certainly insufficient in the current media landscape, and to cover all aspects of the topic comprehensively. As the changing role of communication professionals is often discussed on various websites, workshops and events, also new and fresh research on the topic is constantly relevant to keep up with the reality.

1.2 Using the past to make sense of the present

In order to understand the current media landscape, for example the social media influencer phenomenon, and how it has evolved from the traditional forms of communication such as two-step flow theory (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), taking a look in the past is necessary. As communication professionals aim to interact with diverse actors, it is essential part of the profession to know how to communicate with different publics and actors in order to influence them and reach the desired effects of communication. The act of influencing people through other people, for instance, has long traditions in being part of the work practices of communication professionals. The renowned two-step-flow theory, introduced already in 1955 by Paul Lazarsfeld and Elihu Katz, states that instead of reaching the audiences directly, mass media reaches so-called opinion leaders first. The opinion leaders then convey the information, often with their own interpretation, to audiences whom they have influence over.

Another example of a traditional and powerful form of influencing that is related to opinion leaders and has changed over time is word of mouth (WOM). Nowadays a new form of WOM, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), is seen as an extremely influential communication tool (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). Even though the original concept of opinion

leadership focused mainly on interpersonal communication, the core idea of using opinion leaders as influencers in order to reach larger audiences still exists. The intermingling of traditional and new media has however challenged the concept of opinion leadership (Schäfer & Taddicken, 2015). The importance of interpersonal communication is not forgotten, but nowadays a diverse range of different channels of communication are accessible, which has led to development and evolvement of the original opinion leadership concept (Schäfer & Taddicken, 2015). For example, currently social media influencers or so-called micro-celebrities (Marwick, 2015a) can become powerful opinion leaders as they are often capable of starting wide spreading eWOM or WOM, which is also reflected in the work practices of many communication agencies that have become specialized solely on influencer marketing and work as a contact point between their clients and various micro-celebrities. Therefore, even though social media influencers might be a current buzz-word, it actually follows the logic of a communication theory that was first introduced over 50 years ago. This shows that even though the essence of the communication profession might remain the same over time, different forms of communication, such as WOM, are constantly transforming due to new platforms, channels and communication environments – and the full impact of innovations such as mobile phones or laptops still remains to be seen in the future. It is however hard to deny that new media, especially social media, has had an impact on the traditional work practices of communication professionals (Tindall & Hutchins, 2016). A research conducted by Zerfass, Vercic and Wiesenberg (2016) focused on reviewing the status of media relations and how communication professionals' work practices have changed when it comes to interacting with mass media in an European context. The results of the study showed that a strong shift from working with mass media to working increasingly with owned media could be identified. The discovered new content practices include, for instance, that communication professionals interact mostly with the mass media for internal reasons, such as monitoring public opinion or evaluating media coverage, while using mass media in order to influence different stakeholders is less common (Zerfass et al. 2016). Nevertheless, a gap between how important the new media relations practices were considered to be and how largely these practices were actually applied could be identified. These findings show that the communication profession is constantly developing, and changing the ways of working is necessary in order to adapt to the surrounding environment.

Some experts have stated that the changing landscape will eventually redefine the purpose and practice of communication profession, and that the future of public relations and communication will be something totally different from its past (Tindall & Hutchins, 2016). New areas such as community engagement are emerging as a consequence of participatory culture online (Tindall & Hutchins, 2016). As the highly-engaged audiences are growing in importance the duties and organizational roles of communication professionals change.

Traditional ways of working, for example creating analog campaigns and maintaining good relationships with the contacts on a media list are no longer sufficient when it comes to engaging and motivating the audiences who live in constant information overflow. The emphasis of online communication has increased and it has brought along not only new responsibilities for communication professionals to build, encourage and manage online brand communities but also more complicated job to establish and support the relationships that are generated by engaged publics (Tindall & Hutchins, 2016).

1.3 The new role of publics

The rise and spread of Internet has not only provided publics with overwhelming amount of information but also with new kind of freedom. As Castells (2007) points out, in our current networked society the media constitute the social space where power relations are constantly shaped and decided. For instance, during the past decade, social media has changed the power relations between companies and society. There has been a shift towards consumers gaining more power and influence over brands as consumers have taken on a more active role and they are able to share their feelings, create communities and also provide feedback to companies (Kaul & Chaudhri, 2017). In the current media landscape, counter-power exists as people are able to challenge society's institutionalized power relations (Castells, 2007), which has led to for instance flattening hierarchies between consumers and established media industries, that have traditionally had strong influence in the society (Deuze, 2007). Publics are nowadays highly-engaged, the traditional conception of "the public" has drastically changed (Tindall & Hutchins, 2016) and a new culture where the line between producers and consumers has become increasingly blurry has emerged. A natural outcome of this era of mass self-communication and participation is the increased amount of content created by users. User-generated content can be defined as content that "comes from regular people who voluntarily contribute data, information, or media that then appears before others in a useful or entertaining way" (Krumm, Davies and Narayanaswami (2008, p. 10). This content that is produced by users can for example be seen on Instagram, where people can easily post a photo of themselves with a branded product. This type of content is often seen as authentic by other users as it comes directly from the users themselves and is often seen as a good way to engage audiences (Krumm et al., 2008). Therefore, many companies try to encourage the user-generated content. For example Starbucks launches #RedCupContest every December to encourage their customers to post photos of their coffees in order to have a chance to win a gift card. The point of the campaign to create buzz around their beverages and holiday-themed red cups (Bernazzani, 2017). To imply the increased engagement and participation of the publics, this culture has been called *participatory culture*. Jenkins (2008, p. 331) defines participatory culture as culture "in which

fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content". Online communities in social media are characterized by participatory culture, which means that users are increasingly and more actively participating in the construction and co-creation of meaning, communication and messages (Tindall & Hutchins, 2016), which is yet again changing the role and work practices of communication professionals.

The new communication capabilities of general public should nevertheless not be only seen as a change towards a better and a more democratic world, as there are many issues associated with the change. For instance, businesses have been quick to react and provide a response to the emergence of more empowered customers. By using different tools, such as social media influencers, to convey the messages, companies aim to remain authentic, appear trustworthy and still have a strong influence over the consumers. Critical views of participation highlight the fact that user activities are confronted and often attempted to be implemented into new revenue models, and the underlying power structures between the traditional roles of users and producers are not challenged (Schäfer, 2011). However, it is clear that the media industry is undergoing a shift from *creating* content to *supporting* user-generated content increasingly (Schäfer, 2011). To describe this change, Axel Bruns (2008) introduced a concept called "produsage" to point out that the emergence of participatory culture does not only mean new forms of content production but constant construction and addition of knowledge and art by collaborative communities. As the roles of consumers and users are mixed with the roles of creators and producers so-called produsers are born (Bruns, 2008). Such produsage has implications on various areas of the society. For this thesis, I will focus on the changed roles of traditional publics and the shifting media landscape as it entails new challenges and opportunities for communication professionals. In order to explore this topic further, the following research questions and the sub questions will be answered:

In which ways, if any, has the shift towards participatory culture changed the work practices of communication professionals, in their own view?

Sub questions:

How do communication professionals perceive the changes related to the emergence of user-generated content and produsage in the media landscape?

Which aspects of their work have been affected by such changes and which have not?

By answering these questions, interesting insights and findings regarding the impacts of the abovementioned cultural shift can be gained.

1.4 Exploring the implications of the participatory culture

Due to the increased communicating power of consumers, the availability of information and the mobile access to interactive communication networks, a clear trend of increased participation, so-called participatory culture, prevails among users. As Jenkins, Ito and boyd (2016) point out, participatory culture is currently a widely used term in both popular and scholarly contexts. Therefore, the concept should be researched further in order for it to avoid losing its meaning (Jenkins et al., 2016). Major part of the previous research is however focusing strongly on the changing role of the consumers (Jenkins, 2014a; Hutchinson, 2016; Marwick 2015a) or other professions such as journalism (Witschge & Nygren, 2009) meanwhile the changing work practices of the communication professionals have received less attention. Additionally, the relationship between producers and consumers and amateurs and professionals has been discussed in the previous research (Jenkins, 2014b; Bruns, 2008). In Jenkins' (2014b) opinion, the growing influence of customers is met by corporate producers who try to both manage and manipulate these influential consumer groups. This research shifts the focus to communication professionals' perspective in order to explore the implications of the culture shift from a new aspect and opposing perspective. As Jenkins (2014b, p. 275) states, "the reality is shifting underneath our feet", expanding participation triggers further change and new research is needed constantly as the circumstances change.

Bruns (2008) argues that the evolvments towards greater user-led content creation have brought along a significant paradigm shift and the new environments have profound impact on social, economic and legal practices and aspects, the media and democratic society itself. Therefore, by exploring this topic further, new ways for meaningful participation that actually enhance the democratic values and improve the position of the general public indecision making in different areas of society can be suggested. If the publics are aware of the ways in which their participation can be meaningful, they will be able to use their position more efficiently. Moreover, transparency when it comes to influencing publics can be increased if the publics understand how they are being influenced.

In their book "Public Relations and Participatory Culture: Fandom, Social Media and Community Engagement" consisting of different essays, Tindall and Hutchins (2016) explore the engaged publics and the increasing significance of online communication and online communities in the field of media and public relations. They state that the new, more active and engaged publics "have significant power in the relationship dynamic between the message, the communicator, and the larger audience" (Tindall & Hutchins, 2016, p. 9).

According to them, the participatory culture has forced the public relations professionals to redefine media outlets, journalists, influencers and publics. They also note that participatory culture is expanding and changing rapidly which increases the need of critical academic analysis. This complex and new mixed media ecology deserves further analysis and therefore, this research aims to provide fresh insights in the current situation when it comes to the ever-changing work practices of communication professionals.

Different functions such as engaging with publics, managing brand communities and crisis and reputation management that belong to communication professionals' work practices are related to the constantly changing surrounding culture (Tindall & Hutchins, 2016). The structural shift has led into growing competition and a need to reconsider work practices within the field of media and communication (UK Trade & Investment & Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012). It is typical that when the media landscape is changing, new amateurs who are threatening the professionals are born (Schäfer, 2011). When it comes to the shift towards participatory culture, new and powerful actors have entered the media landscape. For instance, the aforementioned electronic word-of-mouth that spreads quickly on social media platforms is often initiated by social media influencers (Kreis & Gottschalk, 2015). Social media influencers are skillful content creators; their recommendations and opinions are often seen as authentic by their followers. According to Forbes (Ward, 2017), 70% of teenage YouTube subscribers rely on influencer opinions more than traditional celebrities. Therefore, using these influences as opinion leaders in the spirit of the two-step flow theory (Lazarsfeld & Katz, 1955) is a very effective way to reach audiences. With such a large reach of engaged audiences also word-of-mouth is likely to spread rapidly. These results show that new developments indeed have had impacts in the communication profession, and there has most likely been multiple new impacts during the recent years. The most beneficial research in this area is mutually-beneficial, meaning that in its usefulness it aims to bridge the gap between the scholarly and practical worlds of public relations and communication (Tindall & Hutchins, 2016). Therefore, this research aims to add value to both academia and practice by including both worlds in the analysis.

1.6 The expectations and the structure of the research

The aim of this research is to understand in which ways the rise of participatory culture manifests itself when it comes to the work practices of communication professionals and relate the findings to larger patterns in the field. Analyzing participatory culture and its implications in the media landscape in general and the ways in which the industry professionals perceive it in particular will contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the current cultural shift in the communication industry. Evaluating how communication professionals perceive the change, and various new channels, platforms, actors and

behavior related to it, is a way to disassemble the concept of participatory culture in order to analyze its different components and their impact in the surrounding environment in depth.

In the next chapter, the field of media and communication will be reviewed and developments from two-step flow to electronic word-of-mouth and the rise of micro-celebrities will be presented and analyzed in order to get a broader idea of the changing nature of the field. An example of an incident related to micro-celebrities will be used as an anchor throughout the chapter in order to give a more feasible idea of the changes. Thereafter, the concept of participatory culture will be discussed in detail from both optimistic and critical perspectives to gain comprehensive understanding of the potential origins and implications of the structural change in the work practices of communicators. This will be helpful later while analyzing the findings of this study. Specifically, in sub-section “When ‘video killed the radio star’ and later developments”, the chapter highlights how appearance of new actors who challenge or replace the old ones or transformation and intermingling of different actors is not a new phenomenon in the field of media and communication, and the recent emergence of new actors should be understood against this background. The concepts of micro-celebrities and precariat will be discussed in order to facilitate the analysis of the role and status of various new actors in the field. The blurred lines between amateurs and professionals, and communication professionals’ perceptions of this, will be examined more in depth with the help of concepts such as produsage and user-generated content.

The research design will be introduced in the third chapter. Since the aim of this research is to analyze the implications that participatory culture has on the work practices of communication professionals, in-depth interviews with the professionals were conducted. Through operationalizing the abovementioned theoretical concepts in a fluent interview guide (which will be explained in detail in the third chapter) relevant data was gathered in an efficient manner. Completing a thorough and well-structured analysis facilitated the discovery and identification of relevant findings and interesting patterns in the material. Moreover, the credibility, transferability and trustworthiness of the research will be discussed in this chapter.

The fourth chapter presents the results of the research together with interpretations of the findings. The ways in which communication professionals perceive that the shift towards participatory culture has changed their work practices will be presented based on the different components related to the shift: from the role of publics, user-generated content and produsage to the concept of influencing and influencers, and best practices. After presenting the findings related to these components, larger conclusion regarding the implications of the cultural shift and professional ways to deal with the change will be drawn. The fifth chapter provides a conclusion that aims to answer the research question and the sub question comprehensively and in a clear manner based on the findings discussed in the previous chapter.

2. Attracting attention in a dynamic environment

This chapter begins with an example of an incident that is a result of the rapidly changing media landscape and troubles in keeping up with it. Thereafter, an overview of a few chosen theories related to the evolvments in the field of media and communication is presented in order to understand the origins, different dimensions and consequences of the structural change that digital technologies and new media have brought. This broad review will later be utilized while analyzing the data, putting the work practices of communication professionals in a context and answering the research question.

2.1 Micro-celebrities in an attention economy

A few months ago a private conflict between a micro-celebrity and a hotel owner became very public as Paul Stenson, owner of the White Moose Café and Charleville Lodge in Dublin decided to publish a screenshot of an email he received from social media influencer Elle Darby. Darby is a YouTuber who has over 100 000 followers on social media and mainly focuses on beauty, lifestyle and fitness. In the now infamous email, Darby requested to stay five nights at the hotel in exchange for social media coverage. Instead of responding to Darby in private, Stenson responded to the email on the White Moose Café Facebook page, judging the whole request strictly and telling Darby to “pay her way like everyone else”. This led to negative comments on Darby’s social media channels, to which she replied with a video where she describes her work as social media influencer. She highlighted her status as a young entrepreneur, saying social media marketing can be a great option for advertising and denying that there was anything wrong with her request. This led to a backlash at The White Moose Café Facebook page, which led to Stenson banning all bloggers from his business (Ritschel, 2018). This example illustrates well the conflicts that can happen between various actors in the media landscape, how fast and broad the reactions are and how more research is needed in order to understand this type of conflicts in depth. As these types of conflicts are in their essence related to communication, it is particularly interesting to analyze how communication professionals react to the new challenges and opportunities that have not traditionally been a part of communication profession.

To study the origins of the abovementioned example further, the structural changes that have led to the situation need to be understood first. It is commonly known that celebrities are often used as opinion leaders and sources that can start to spread powerful word-of-mouth or electronic-word-of-mouth (Moran & Muzellec, 2017). Celebrity endorsements are used in various contexts such as in marketing different products or brands, or promoting politicians or health campaigns, and even hotels (Knoll & Matthes,

2017). The emergence of a vast amount of small-scale celebrities – often referred to as micro-celebrities – such as bloggers, Instagrammers and YouTubers like Elle Darby is a recent trend that might not yet be so well-known or recognized by everyone. According to Chandler and Munday (2016, p. 83), micro-celebrities are “individuals with a public persona which becomes rapidly well known to a group of dedicated followers on an online social medium through their use of that medium, which typically involves conscious self-branding”. Research has shown that the micro-celebrities create an illusion of friendship with their fans and therefore also have a strong influence over these audiences (Marwick, 2015b). Therefore, they also challenge the position of traditional celebrities. Due to social media technologies the definition of celebrity has changed from something that a person is rather into something that a person does (Marwick, 2015b). This new type of celebrity is created by individuals across social networks who learn a set of practices and self-presentation techniques from other individuals. Therefore, the whole concept of celebrity has changed in the social media age: celebrity “is a range of techniques and strategies that can be performed by anyone with a mobile device, tablet, or laptop” (Marwick, 2015b, p. 334). The audiences of micro-celebrities are often formed as fan bases, and the popularity is kept on going by continuing fan management, and the very self-conscious and carefully planned self-presentation is made for others to consume (Marwick, 2015b). Thus, micro-celebrity should not be seen as merely small-scale version of celebrity: the set of practices micro-celebrities use are drawn from celebrity culture but used by “common people” to lift their online attention and popularity (Marwick, 2015b).

When it comes to working with micro-celebrities, marketing and communication professionals often have a different approach compared to working with traditional celebrities. As an example, instead of paying a lot of money for celebrity endorsement, communication professionals can with the help of micro-celebrities potentially get large attention from engaged audiences with less money. This is exactly the exchange that Darby offered to Stenson unsuccessfully. Even though micro-celebrities are sometimes ignored by mainstream media, they often have enough fans in order to support themselves through their creative work online (Marwick, 2015b). Micro-celebrities are in fact more independent than ever as they do not need recognition from traditional media in order to establish and gather their fan bases, due to extended use of social media (Khamis, Ang & Welling, 2017). While micro-celebrities might work with different advertises and use their online profile to reach large audiences, they can practice self-branding without having to have any contact with the “already powerful” or traditional gatekeepers (Khamis et al., 2017, p.198). This creates interesting tensions, unforeseen issues and changes in the work practices in the field of media and communication.

While living in an era of constant information overload, audiences are continuously choosing the topics that are worth their interest from large amounts of information. In order to attract people's attention in this constant noise, products, brands and messages must stand out. Therefore, researchers as well as marketing personnel have begun to say that we live in "attention economy", where a huge number of communicators compete on multiple different platforms and channels in order to gain the attention of preoccupied, isolated and privatized audiences (Khamis, Ang & Welling, 2017). In attention economy, if something or somebody has the capacity to attract "eyeballs", it is valuable (Marwick, 2015a). These starting points have been ideal for the rise of micro-celebrities, who, often by using self-branding tools, develop a unique public image for commercial gain or cultural capital (Khamis et al., 2017). By posting selfies, branding herself with attractive visual content, the previously mentioned lifestyle vlogger Elle Darby, for instance, managed to attract and maintain the attention of over 100 000 followers.

Micro-celebrities can be seen as a product of participatory culture, where consumption has become participation, as people use cultural material to create content. Micro-celebrities have gone one step further and use themselves as the material for content creation (Marwick, 2015b). One key to receiving the attention that micro-celebrities are after is being authentic and micro-celebrities work hard in order to keep the interaction with their followers going to uplift their popularity (Marwick, 2015b). Because of the "always-on" style of social media, those who wish to become famous are constantly and continuously sharing their daily lives. Furthermore, the way in which attention economy allows to measure success in forms of number of followers or "likes" also encourages the constant hype to collect and attract an audience with tireless streams of content (Marwick, 2015b). Therefore, the starting points for communication professionals' work have drastically changed as a constant battle for attention is on-going not only between different companies and brands but also individuals who desire to attract attention for their personal satisfaction. These individuals are not afraid to take on persistent, ongoing and often economically fruitless labor in order to uplift their popularity, which creates an interesting prevailing working mentality in the attention economy. Furthermore, micro-celebrities are not afraid to be personal and expose their intimate emotions. As this is the competition that communication professionals are currently facing while they aim to attract the attention of their target groups, it can be assumed that their traditional work practices need to be reconsidered in order to keep up. Although attention economy might be an established reality for many advertisers (Khamis et al., 2017), it still keeps creating controversies and challenges for actors and professionals in the media landscape. When considering the surrounding landscape it makes sense to assign value to micro-celebrities like Elle Darby, as they are capable of attracting attention, even though this was not the perspective of the hotel owner.

2.2 From two-step flow to the networked era

While looking back at the time before attention economy, it can be seen that the phenomenon of using opinion leaders or influencers is not new as the two-step flow of communication theory was elaborated already in 1955 by Katz and Lazarsfeld. The theory suggests that instead of being influenced directly by media, people are often influenced by opinion leaders. These opinion leaders function as a channel to reach mass audiences (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). Opinion leader can be defined as a person who is capable of influencing the decisions that others make (Flynn, Goldsmith & Eastman, 1996). Although the original concept of two-step flow was introduced several decades ago, the core idea of influencing larger groups of people through opinion leaders still exists. So even though the case of Elle Darby is very recent, the practice of using opinion leaders to influence audiences is nothing new or scandalous in itself. The context and environment of communication has changed but the theory has been applied for instance in a social media context (Choi, 2015).

Furthermore, one concept that is closely related to two-step flow theory is a communication form called “word of mouth” (WOM), which is also one of the oldest ways of transferring information (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) have defined WOM as an exchange that happens between consumers and at the same time shapes and changes their attitudes and behaviour toward a certain topic. WOM is said to have such a powerful influence on consumers due to its high reliability and credibility because the information often comes from a close and familiar network (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). Nowadays, in the era of Web 2.0, a new form of WOM has emerged: electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). Due to new technologies, the Internet and social media, opinion leaders and micro-celebrities are able to rapidly influence large audiences with eWOM (Lawry, 2013). The source reliability with eWOM, however, is not as high as with traditional WOM (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). The transformation from traditional WOM to eWOM has also reduced the interpersonal aspect of communication of opinions. Nevertheless, both WOM and eWOM are considered to be powerful tools when it comes to influencing audiences and therefore, communication professionals are interested in these tools.

2.3 Different perspectives of participatory culture – an opportunity, a threat or both?

The aforementioned evolvments have happened together with a larger cultural change. Over the past decades, the communication capacities of an increasing percentage of the general public has enlarged, which has shifted an unprecedented large amount of control over the production and dissemination of media to the public (Jenkins, 2014a). This change in the media landscape has been called a change towards a “participatory culture” (Jenkins, 2014b). The concept “participatory culture” was first introduced by Henry Jenkins in 1992 (Jenkins, Ito and boyd, 2016).

Many scholars have seen the emergence of participatory culture optimistically as a step towards a more democratic society (Jenkins, 2014b). Participatory culture has for instance been seen as creating platforms for young people to engage in social activism to change the world for better (Jenkins, 2014a). Researchers have aimed to explore the ways in which new forms of grassroots communication and collaboration can be enabled (Jenkins, 2014b). Participatory culture has impacts on different aspects of society. Hence, the discourses about participation have both deepened and diversified over the years (Jenkins, 2014b). Different industries from health and education to management and entertainment are experiencing the participatory culture. In the arts, many experiments with participatory design projects or different ways of crowdsourcing have been done by famous artists (Jenkins, 2014b). Citizen journalism in form of blogs, podcasting, Twitter or video-blogging is entering the domain of traditional journalism. When it comes to professional journalism, Witschge and Nygren (2009) argue that the new media technologies and economic changes have unsettled the existing professional status and work practices of journalists, which has also removed the professional control that journalists used to have. As all citizens can now access massive amount of information online and also have tools to publish information by themselves, journalists' privileged status in relation to audiences has changed. Even though journalists might still have easier access to sources than for instance micro-celebrities do, nowadays sources can form their own communication channels without the support or use of any established media institutions or newsrooms. Therefore, multi-skilling and consideration of the technological and economic aspects is needed from the journalists who used to focus more on the journalistic value of their work. Witschge and Nygren (2009) argue also that the increased diversity and fragmentation in the media landscape make it harder to define journalism as a profession and they question whether in the middle of all the changes journalists are in fact in control of their own work anymore. Same question could be asked when considering communication professionals' work in the current environment characterized by participation.

The example of how professional journalism has changed due to the shift towards participatory culture shows that the shift should not be purely seen from an optimistic point of view. Schäfer (2011) highlights more critical sides of participation and has a very different view of the participatory culture than Jenkins and colleagues (2016). As Schäfer (2011), points out, the field of media is constantly changing; new media revolutions come and go. Schäfer (2011) argues that being enthusiastic about the greater participation of the users is rather unbalanced and slightly hasty since it is often ignored that underlying power structures are not automatically reconfigured even though the users seemingly have more freedom. It is important to emphasize that not everyone has the opportunity to participate and the new communication capabilities of the general public are confronted with various corporate

strategies which aim to contain and commodify the general aspiration to participate (Jenkins, 2014b). For instance, in the beauty industry social media is seen as an important marketing channel as the influence that a friend's recommendation has on individuals' purchasing decision can be easily enhanced with a good social media strategy (Marrin, 2011). Ultimately, participation is about power. Therefore, it is also essential to nuance the core concept of participation, otherwise it risks to lose any real meaning (Jenkins et al., 2016). Currently, participatory culture is a buzzword that is used in various context in both media industries and in the academic field. Therefore, Jenkins et al. (2016) emphasize that the main purpose of research regarding participation should focus on developing opportunities of *meaningful* participation and commercialization of participation should be avoided. In their explorative study focusing on the strategic planning of the activities conducted on social media by communication professionals, Charest, Bouffard and Zajmovic (2016) discovered that meanwhile organizations are increasingly investing in refining their social media practices and community management strategies they still have a lot to improve in order to create a two-way communication with their audiences. Even though companies might encourage the users to participate, the participation becomes quickly meaningless if the input from the users is not actively integrated in the work practices of the companies.

According to Schäfer (2011), with each media revolution the promise of social progress and potential changes in the power structures that are associated with technological development are highlighted over and over again. Nevertheless, corporations do not disappear but adapt, and new businesses develop to take control over cultural production (Schäfer, 2011). In order to highlight how the very different participants and practices are mixed together Schäfer (2011) calls the cultural shift "a bastard culture". The incident with Darby and the hotel owner is a case in point of how the seemingly more democratic environment is actually not established. If Darby would have been presenting a big media house or a TV-channel, the hotel owner's approach would most likely have been different. The underlying, established power structures are indeed hard to shake by micro-celebrities or other participants who lack institutional support or clear value in the eyes of those who are not familiar with the currency of attention economy.

2.4 When "video killed the radio star" and later developments

Corporations have reacted to participatory culture in various ways but mostly they are interested in finding ways to benefit from consumers' willingness to participate (Jenkins, 2014a). The relationships between producers and consumers are getting increasingly complex (Jenkins, 2014a). Axel Bruns (2008) has presented the concept of *produsage* to describe the increasing user-led content creation environments. User-led content creation happens in various and diverse environments from open source to multiplayer online games

which makes the whole notion of content *production* a bit simplified as the production often actually happens together with usage; therefore, *produsage* is a more accurate concept. The concept *produsage* aims to avoid some systematic problems that typically occur while converting the ideas of content production from industrial age into an informational age with completely different social software and Web 2.0 environment (Bruns, 2008). As *produsage* is increasing, a shift in the media industry, from the role as content creator to platform provider for users to have social interactions and generate content by themselves, is underway (Schäfer, 2011). Bruns (2008) argues that these evolutions have brought along a significant paradigm shift and the new environments have profound impact on social, economic and legal practices and aspects, the media and democratic society itself.

Bruns (2008) also highlights the paradigm shift away from industrial production towards a post-industrial or informational production, meaning that ideas are produced in participatory environment, which blurs the boundaries between producers and consumers even further. In the diverse online environment, all participants can be users but also producers of information and knowledge. In short, participants are *producers* (Bruns, 2008). Instead of simply producing content, the producers actually constantly build and extend existing content collaboratively. What is typical for the shift towards the user-led content creation is that besides a few dedicated producers or teams of producers, the content is generated by wider-based, broad community of participants (Bruns, 2008). A producer can have various roles and move smoothly between them: from a participant to a leader and user of content. Furthermore, producers can be either professionals or amateurs. Therefore, it is not strange that communication professionals aim to respond to these kind of broad structural changes with for example practicing new tactics such as community management in order to respond to the active producers and be part of the process of creation. The traditional idea of a product has changed into an unfinished creation that can constantly be developed further and the engagement of producers draws more from merit than ownership (Bruns, 2008), which is an important aspect to take into consideration while working with producers.

Besides the positive or objective observation of producers, also critical voices have been raised. Andrew Keen highlights the negative side of user generated content in his book "The Cult of the Amateur" (2007). He argues, that producers taking over the work from professionals damages the quality of the cultural products such as movies, news and music. Keen (2007) takes support from history in his critical view of so-called "wisdom of crowd" and argues that the crowds replacing experts can have disastrous consequences. For instance, in an online environment where popularity is preferred over reliability misinformation and rumours can spread easily. Furthermore, in professions such as journalism, the traditional aim is to report as truthfully as possible whereas for example bloggers are often subjectively

biased. Hierarchies that have been the traditional basis of the connection between media industry and consumers are flattening (Deuze, 2007). This shows that the blurred lines between producers and consumers leads to blurred lines between amateurs and professionals.

Even though increased participation and socio-political progress are seen as some of the inspiring promises of new technologies, it would be naive to think that the development has solely pure and idealistic values, that aim to achieve social progress, democratic participation and access, behind it (Schäfer, 2011). For example, besides the idealistic desires, giving the future users a possibility to improve the ways in which labor objectives are achieved was one of the key drivers behind the expansion of the computer into a mass medium (Schäfer, 2011). This is also reflected for example in the gaming industry, where computer game modification, or so-called “modding”, often done by the players is an essential part of gaming culture and also significant value creator for the games industry (Kücklich, 2005). Modders themselves, nevertheless, seldom manage to turn their modding into employment which gives modding a precarious status as a type of unpaid labour (Kücklich, 2005). In line with this example, the dark side of participatory culture, especially in the media industry, has led to increase of digital labour that often impacts the livelihood of the workers negatively with prolonged insecure employment and unsafe environment (Graham, Hjorth & Lehdonvirta, 2017). From this point of view, Darby can be seen as a freelance travel and lifestyle journalist or reviewer, yet one who lacks the institutional support of an established media organization. Her actions towards the hotel can therefore be read as a re-negotiation of existing power structures within media-business-reviewer triad. This phenomenon can be tied back to a larger phenomenon in the society: the rise of a new social class called the precariat (Standing, 2011). Globalization that the digital technologies have prompted has led to construction of a global market economy (Standing, 2011). Precariat, a new social class born from this change is constantly growing due to growing number of unstable jobs. The problem of the precariat is larger than just short-term contracts, zero-hour contracts or crowd labor: the lack of security and occupational identity leads to existential insecurity. The work of the precariat is often not recognized or compensated which leads to the precariat being exploited (Standing, 2011). Therefore, exploring the relationship between amateurs and professionals in the context of this research can lead to interesting findings that can even reflect of the changes happening on a larger level in the society. The new, emerging social class shakes the traditional hierarchies as the precariat challenges the elite. Traits of this can already be seen for example in the aforementioned emergence of micro-celebrities who are often unknown and underpaid but still threatening the traditional celebrities. It is interesting to see, how the emergence of the precariat manifests itself when it comes to the work practices of communication professionals.

2.5 Conclusion

In order to answer the research question and analyse the current situation, it is good to understand the developments that have happened in the field before. Therefore, including an overview of how the practice of influencing audiences has changed over the years provides concrete tools to analyse the data of this research. Integrating the background of how the practice of influencing people through other people has changed over time with the theories and concepts related to the emergence of participatory culture gives this research a broad theoretical base that will be beneficial while analysing the data and results later on. Furthermore, analysing the possible changes in the work practices of communication professionals adds to previous understanding of the progress of participatory culture and provides a new angle to it.

As there are so many different voices and opinions in the academic field regarding participation, taking them along in the course of this research will highlight interesting dynamics in the material and facilitate a deeper and more critical analysis. The case of Elle Darby proves that the power structures are complex, changes in paradigms do not happen overnight and there is always a downside of seemingly advanced developments. In the following chapter the method of this research will be presented.

3. Methodology

In this chapter the methodology of this research will be described in detail. First, the research design and sampling plan will be presented. Thereafter the operationalization of the research question, data collection and analysis together with credibility of the research will be discussed.

3.1 Qualitative research method and sampling plan

This research applies the qualitative method since the aim is to collect data that needs to be understood in depth in order to answer the research question (Babbie, 2014). The qualitative field research leads into observations that cannot be easily reduced to numbers. By applying a qualitative method, a more comprehensive image and deeper and fuller understanding of the analyzed phenomenon can be developed (Babbie, 2014). Some dimensions of attitudes and behavior, which can be important in determining the perceptions of the communication professionals, could be lost with some other method. One benefit of a qualitative research is that the perceptions of the people can be discussed within a natural setting, compared to somewhat artificial setting of a survey or an experiment (Babbie, 2014).

As a sampling method nonprobability sampling method called snowball sampling was used in order to reach the people who represent the target population (Babbie, 2014). In reaching out to the potential interviewees I utilized my personal network to find contact information of suitable participants. After having confirmed a few interviews, some of the interviewees who had agreed to participate were then asked to recommend some other professional who could be a potential participant. In this way, more candidates who fit the sample could be found and contacted and the amount of interviewees kept growing. Since the aim of this research is to gain more depth than representativeness, this sampling method is fitting (Babbie, 2014). All the interviewees were contacted via e-mail or LinkedIn. The e-mail included only a short introduction to the topic of the research, but as the research is partly exploratory, any concrete topic lists were not shared with the interviewees. A significant amount of the sent e-mails and messages never received a reply and quite many requests were denied due to reasons such as time constraints. However, the sample kept growing until 10 interviews were conducted.

In order to answer the research question as comprehensively as possible, a total of 10 in-depth interviews were conducted with communication professionals from two different countries: The Netherlands and Sweden. Conducting the interviews in two different countries, even though the countries are culturally quite similar, increases the validity of the results. With the help of qualitative in-depth interviews, it is possible to map out the interviewees' attitudes, thoughts and perceptions about the topic. The aim is to dive deep

into the discussion and therefore conducting in-depth interviews is the most suitable method for this type of research. Focus groups were not considered beneficial since in this case the group dynamic was not important because all the people were interviewed as individuals in their professional role (Kvale, 2007). The interviewees are communication professionals, since they can be considered to have enough knowledge and expertise about the changes and work practices in the current media landscape. Three of the interviewees were male and seven female, they all represent different age groups and also the years they have worked with communication vary as is shown in the table (Table 1) below.

Interviewee	~ years working with communication	Country
Ton	18	The Netherlands
Laura	15	The Netherlands
Talitha	10	The Netherlands
Shelly	10	The Netherlands
Astrid	40	Sweden
Linda	25	Sweden
Juan	17	Sweden
Mari	6,5	Sweden
Anna	4	Sweden
David	3	Sweden

Table 1 Participants' information

The 10 interviews resulted into over 120 pages of transcripts and were considered to be a sufficient amount as the collected data was rich and the cases meaningful since patterns that could be tied back to the theoretical starting points of the research emerged during the interviews. This also made it possible to discover relevant aspects in the data and find a valid answer the research question. The potential interviewees were contacted from March to May and the interviews were conducted during April and May. During the last weeks of May I received e-mails from three people I had contacted earlier, offering to participate in the research, but due to the very late timing of the replies I decided to prioritize the analysis of existing material over collecting more data. As Crang and Cook (2007) point out, it is hard to resist the temptation to stay in the field and collect more and more data when the other option is to return to your desk and start organizing and analyzing the data. However, at one point a decision needs to be made because the longer time spent on the

field means the less time to analyze and write (Crang & Cook, 2007). Therefore, I chose to keep the sample size in 10 interviews and spend more time on the analysis. The interviewees were very diverse, many of the interviews went straight to the point relatively quickly and multiple topics were covered thoroughly so that patterns could be identified. Hence, a point of saturation was reached.

3.3 Operationalization and data collection

The theoretical concepts of this research are operationalized in a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix 1). The interview guide consists of five different question categories: Demographic questions, Introductory questions, Changes in the industry, publics & different channels, User-generated content, participation & influencing and Future & wrap-up. The questions are based on different concepts presented in the theoretical framework. Too complex theoretical concepts are however avoided in order to keep the discussion natural for the interviewees. As the interview guide is semi-structured, the aim of the questions was to prompt discussion. Therefore, the questions are relatively open and not too detailed. The goal is to avoid making assumptions or asking leading questions. Potential probes, that can facilitate deepening the discussion and addressing relevant issues, are also presented in the interview guide. In my opinion, the structure of the interview guide was good and the interviews had a flow.

The aim of the introductory questions was to set boundaries and the tone for the interview. Asking a bit more personal questions in the beginning can help to establish a rapport and prepare for more in-depth discussion for the upcoming concepts. A logical structure is created as one question category ends in a topic that is connected to the first topic of the next category. It was good to discuss about the more personal topics as an introduction because many of the examples used during the discussion of the more theoretical topics related back to the things that had been mentioned during the introduction. Furthermore, as the introduction guide is semi-structured, my purpose was to use it as an inspiration and keep the structure of the interview open so that if interesting topics surfaced I had a chance to catch them. This turned out to be a successful strategy and sometimes the questions I improvised during the interview resulted into very interesting discussions related to the topic. Throughout the interview, based on the answers of the interviewees, the discussion was directed towards relevant topics as I kept the research question and the theoretical starting points on mind constantly, even though they were not directly revealed to the interviewees.

In the question category “Changes in the industry, publics & different channels” the aim was to explore more in-depth how the field of media and communication has changed when it comes to the role of publics, new actors and platforms and how this is reflected in the

work of communication professionals. Some of the questions, such as “typical working day” are related back to earlier questions in order to make the interviewee reflect their answers more in depth. The question category “User-generated content, participation & influencing” aimed to explore these concepts thoroughly and also to provide an answer to the sub question of this research. The last category “Future & wrap-up” aimed to end the interview with a light note by having a short discussion of the future prospects and also by giving the interviewees an opportunity to add something to their earlier answers or reflect over the interview in general.

In order to ensure a high quality of research the steps that were taken in gathering and analyzing the data were carefully planned and executed. All of the interviews were conducted during April and May 2018 and the interviews lasted from 35 minutes to an hour, which was considered to be a sufficient time to discuss all the topics of the interview guide in depth. The aim was to keep the interviews rich in meaning and avoid idle chatter (Kvale, 2007) and this goal was reached. As it is vital to establish a rapport – an open and trusting relationship – between the researcher and the interviewee in an interview situation different strategies to do it were considered. First, it is important to avoid any kind of judgement and communicate to the interviewees that the purpose is to understand them and their point of view (Babbie, 2014). As I was the one conducting the interviews, I was also genuinely interested in their replies, which facilitated establishing rapport. The goal was to establish a relaxed atmosphere where I as a researcher could act more as a listener and the interviewee as a talker (Babbie, 2014) which worked out well in most of the interviews.

3.4 Thematic analysis

After conducting the interviews, all of them were transcribed one by one, which resulted into over 120 pages of transcripts. Thereafter, a thematic qualitative text analysis was done with the material. Thematic qualitative text analysis is an established, proven and well-tested method of analysis (Kuckartz, 2013). Classical text analysis is based on building categories and then analyzing the data according to these categories (Kuckartz, 2013), and this was the approach applied in this research as well.

There are various methods that can be applied when it comes to deciding how to construct categories; it can be done either inductively based on the data or deductively using an underlying theoretical framework (Kuckartz, 2013). It is however rare that a completely inductive or a completely deductive approach would be taken. Commonly, a multi-stage process of categorizing and coding is applied (Kuckartz, 2013). This was also the case in this research. One of the key advantages of thematic analysis is its flexibility, suitability to large amount of data and the focus on creating categories that go beyond individual experiences (Kuckartz, 2013). However, the flexibility of the analysis can also be seen as a disadvantage

when it comes to the reliability of the analysis. The figure below (Kuckartz, 2013) shows the thematic qualitative text analysis process and structure that was used to conduct the analysis of all the transcripts. This process of analysis is particularly fitting for analyzing interviews (Kuckartz, 2013).

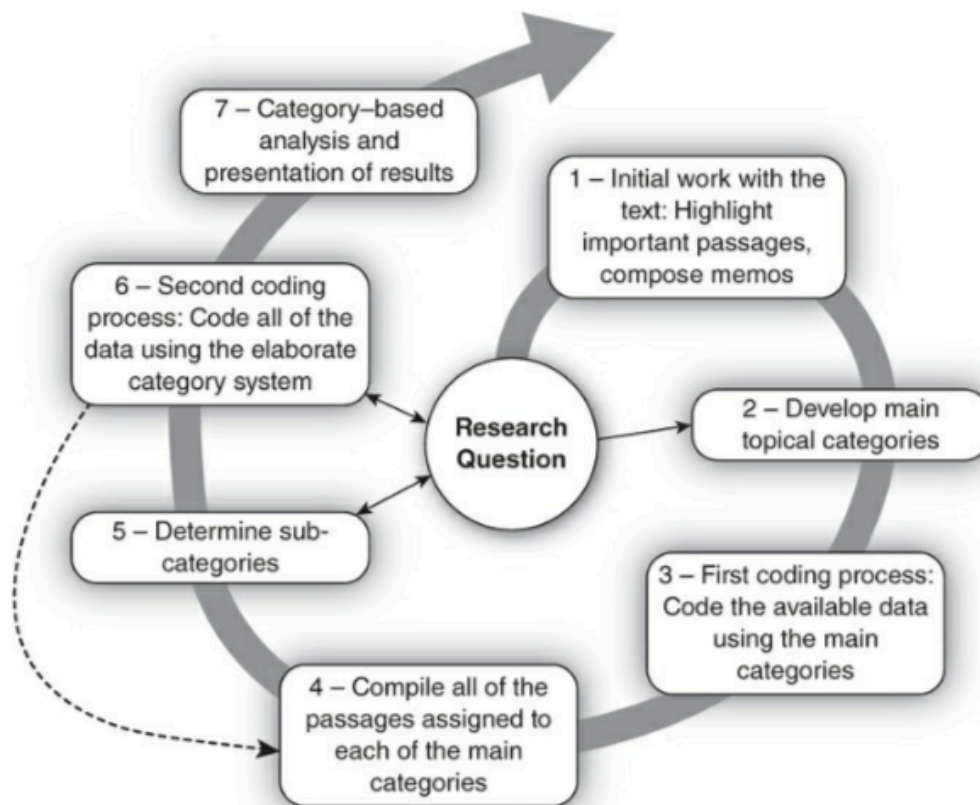


Figure 1 Thematic qualitative text analysis process: Detailed description (Kuckartz, 2013, p. 72)

The analysis began with reading through the transcripts, taking notes and highlighting important parts in the text. According to Kuckartz (2013, p.73) “the main topics can usually be derived directly from the research question and have often already impacted the way in which data was collected”. Therefore, at this stage the material was coded relatively roughly, and main categories were established based on the categories that were used in the interview guide, concepts related to the theory of the research and first impressions gained and patterns seen during the transcription and reading of the material. Similar approach as in grounded theory was taken, and notes regarding new topics were written in the margins of the text. Everything that seemed somewhat relevant was recorded in order to better understand the distinction between random topics and relevant topics (Kuckartz, 2013). This was done in order to avoid potential overlook of important pieces of data in case they would happen to be outside the expected or developed categories due to the small number of them found in the material (Kuckartz, 2013). The number of main categories is often rather small

and controllable (Kuckartz, 2013). A total of 9 main categories were created. The categories were called “Co-operation & outsourcing to/with other agencies”, “Working with influencers”, “Characteristics of audiences”, “Professionals’ work practices (then & now)”, “(User-generated) content”, “Role of communicator & communication”, “Communication tools”, “Strategic improvisation & flexibility” and “What has remained the same”. Also unexpected topics, including “Role of communicator & communication” and “Strategic improvisation & flexibility” were discovered through careful reading of the material. After reading through the whole material again in order to check whether the main categories are relevant and can be applied to the data, some adjustments in the categories were made. For example the category “Communication tools” and “Strategic improvisation & flexibility”, and “Co-operation & outsourcing to/with other agencies” were merged together with the category “Professionals’ work practices” and a new main category “Characteristics of the landscape” was created, resulting in to a total of 7 main categories that were used in further analysis.

The next step was to code the material section-by-section using the main categories. Fitting text passages were assigned to the different main categories. To facilitate the analysis, I wrote down detailed and precise descriptions under each main category to keep the content of the categories clear throughout the analysis. This was helpful, while deciding which main categories were the best fit for various text passages. One limitation to the reliability of the analysis is the fact that I was the only researcher. In order to compensate for this limitation, I consulted friends and colleagues from the field about the analysis, showed the categories and text passages to them and asked them to determine whether the logic of it made sense. Furthermore, I asked some of them to code some parts of the material in the main categories that I had created, based on the descriptions written under the categories, in order to see whether they would independently code the material in the same way as I had. This test turned out to be successful and they assigned the text passages to same main categories as I had initially assigned them. For instance the following text passage: “All these third parties changed over the years, you know it's not only the traditional media anymore but I think we're now also moving to, we're creating our own platforms so we don't want to be depended on all third parties anymore because you never know what happens” was categorized under the theme “Characteristics of the landscape” by my colleagues, as I had initially categorized it. This example shows that the distinction between the themes “Characteristics of the landscape” and “Professionals’ work practices” was clear. Explaining the analysis process and the categories to my peers helped also me personally to be more certain of the content and meaning of each category.

After coding the material in the based on the main categories all the text passages were organized under respective main categories. This was done on Microsoft Word documents. To further facilitate the analysis, all the different main categories and text

passages belonging to them were color-coded with different colors. Thereafter, all the material was printed out and the determining of sub-categories began. First, the sub-categories were written on the margin of the paper next to relevant text passages. Thereafter the parts of the text passages were cut out of the paper and organized in the subcategories manually in order to be able to visually see the material and determine whether the thought sub-categories made sense. As the main categories were by definition relatively general, it was important to create sub-categories to further differentiate various patterns in the material. First, a choice was made between which categories needed some further differentiation and which ones did not. The main categories that had only received a few text passages were not considered complex enough to create sub-categories. OR As the number of main categories was relatively small, all the categories had many text passages and therefore it was considered relevant to create sub-categories to each main category. For instance, the main category "Working with influencers" received sub-categories called "Peer influence", "Definitions", "Celebrity status", "Influencer agencies & market place" and "Balancing co-operation & match-making". For the sake of completeness, an extra sub-category called "Other" was included in all the categories (Kuckartz, 2013). The number of sub-categories was kept quite small, as the research was conducted with relatively few respondents and it would not make sense to establish a large number of sub-categories (Kuckartz, 2013). After defining the sub-categories I proceeded to code the data second time in order to assign the collected text passages within the main categories to the recently created sub-categories. All these different sub-categories were later compared and contrasted while structuring the analysis chapter, with the aim to give the analysis sophistication, complexity and explanatory power (Kuckartz, 2013). Finally, the categories were used in structuring the analysis and presenting the results.

All the categories represented the patterns seen in the material, that will say when the same topics were highlighted in multiple different interviews it was considered to be an important finding. The best and most descriptive quotes were chosen to represent each category in the actual analysis as it would have been unnecessary and not helpful to list all the quotes related to the same topic in the analysis chapter.

3.5 Credibility, transferability and trustworthiness of the research

As the credibility of a qualitative research depends on the researcher's ability and efforts (Golafshani, 2003) I was as prepared as possible before conducting the interviews. As a researcher, I am aware of the challenges in conducting expert interviews when it comes to the power structures and for example confronting the interviewees statements, but with my careful preparation and solid knowledge about the topic, these challenges could be

encountered (Kvale, 2007). The interviews were conducted face-to-face which gives the advantage of using social cues in the situation and also getting more spontaneous answers from the respondents. The possible negative interviewer effects were minimized by using a semi-structured interview protocol and by the fact that I as the interviewer was aware of these effects (Opdenakker, 2006). Moreover, in order to ensure the interviews would be successful I practiced them beforehand and also use the “25 strategies to an outstanding interview”, including for example using probes, persisting and starting off on a strong note, that Hermanowicz (2002) describes. Also a pilot interview was conducted and analyzed before moving on with the interviews. The questions in a semi-structured interview guide are formulated in a way that is not leading towards a certain answer. Different probes were used in order to get longer answers from the interviewees. If something interesting came up or something was misunderstood during the interview, I attempted to clarify the meanings and verify my own interpretations of the answers (Kvale, 2007).

Furthermore, in order to conduct the interviews in an ethical manner, all the interviewees were offered a chance to be anonymous and the possible consequences of the research for the interviews were considered (Kvale, 2007). Nevertheless, even though the possibility was offered to them, none of the interviewees wished to be fully anonymous and therefore their first names are used in order to structure the presentation of the data collected during the interviews. When it comes to transcribing, I was loyal to the oral statements of the interviewees. All the interviews happened after obtaining the interviewees informed consent to take part in the research (Kvale, 2007). The chosen method and way of analysis provide a strong ground for this research, as the partly explorative and inductive style gives the opportunity to discover interesting findings that might not have been identified if for instance fully established analyzing categories would have been used. Interview as a method is a powerful tool for collecting more narrative data and examining people’s perceptions in greater depth (Kvale, 2007).

3.6 Conclusion

To summarize, a total of 10 in-depth interviewees were conducted with communication professionals in two different countries. A high quality of research was ensured with careful planning and execution of the interviews and transparency of the research design. A thematic analysis was chosen as it is suitable for analyzing this type of material. With careful documentation of the steps taken during the analysis the reliability of the research could be increased.

In the following chapter the research questions will be answered through an in-depth analysis and discussion of the gathered data.

4. Transforming work practices

I have to change to stay the same (Willem de Kooning, 1953).

As Tindall and Hutchins (2016) pointed out, the work practices of communication professionals are constantly changing. This became very apparent while collecting the material for this research. For instance, Juan (~17 years in profession, April 27, 2018), describes the field as follows: “When I started working, yes, I had a mobile phone and I had a computer, but I didn’t have my email on my phone and there was no social media, the landscape has changed tremendously and everything moves so much faster and you have to have your eyes everywhere”. David (~3 years in profession, April 24, 2018) describes the changing field as both “inspiring but also in some ways anxiety-provoking”. The interviewee feels that the changes in the field are sometimes very fast, an example of this is how some media and communication related education programs in universities become old-fashioned during the few years that it takes to complete the program. “It is quite a clear sign that things change extremely fast. And I find it inspiring because it is a challenge, but it also means that you can never really relax and trust the skills you have but you must chase new knowledge constantly and it can also be a bit tiresome” (David, ~3 years in profession, April 24, 2018).

The relatively high-paced changes have also brought along an explosive amount of information that moves and spreads faster and is more accessible and available to people than ever before. Astrid (~40 years in profession, April 20, 2018) describes working with such a large amount of information with a metaphor: “We are drowning in a sea of information, and the sea is so large and deep that we indeed must have good floating tools so we do not drown in it”. This chapter is about exploring those floating tools. First, the impact of increased amount and availability of information will be discussed shortly, after which some challenges that the structural change has brought along will be reviewed and a presentation of concrete changes in the ways of working within communication agencies and departments will be given. Thereafter, the characteristics of audiences and professionals’ thoughts on communicating with them in the dynamic media landscape will be examined, together with an analysis of the professionals’ relationship with empowered producers. Subsequently, user-generated content and its implication will be studied. Lastly, an in-depth analysis will be dedicated to social media influencers and work practices related to them. Finally, general thoughts of the nature of communication profession will be summarized in a short discussion.

4.1 Finding new strategies and avoiding “the fear of missing out”

Interacting with different types of audiences is an essential part of the work of communication professionals (International Association of Business Communicators, 2018). Therefore, it is interesting to analyze the characteristics and behavior of these audiences who live in constant information overflow, and how these have affected the work practices of communication professionals. Ton (~18 years in profession, April 05, 2018) thinks that “technology has facilitated the needs of people to get an answer right away”. It is true that technological advancements are behind the developments that have led to the born of the current “always-on” attention economy we are living in (Marwick, 2015b). As the style of online environments is to stay up-to-date 24/7 and the information is always just a few clicks away, it also creates a need to receive a reply or find an answer directly.

The increased availability of information affects the communication environment. Talitha (~10 years in profession, April 06, 2018) analyses: “The information, such as reviews, are more available. We are more and more attached to our telephone so googling for a review or reading a recommendation is becoming easier now that we have internet on our cellphones”. Nowadays the communication happens very fast and very close to people – there is no need to wait for a newspaper to your home address but everything happens in a few moments. The consequences of this can be seen in the work practices of communication professionals as the availability and speed of information has had an impact on for example the ways of working with traditional media. Instead of trying to get their stories out solely in traditional media, communication professionals have started to utilize different strategies to reach their goals. When asked about relationship to traditional media, Linda (~25 years in profession, April 23, 2018) says that it is not very common anymore that communication agencies maintain relationships with journalists or call to media for their clients. In her opinion, the reason behind this is mainly the fact that traditional media is often too slow and things just happen faster today. The feeling of immediacy is constantly there and the messages must often be very short, so for example the format of press release is not very effective. Furthermore, the importance of traditional media has decreased since it is not anymore the only way to communicate with the audiences or different target groups. “I think you have to find different ways today, maybe you have an indirect strategy to reach the media. So maybe not directly but via influencers or via your target group, more than before when you called the media or sent them a release. Today very few companies write press releases actually. ... So basically you work with your messages in more channels and you try to make the media see what you do in different channels so that they can act on that. But you don’t produce things directly for the media today, or we don’t really in the same way as we did before anyhow” (Linda, ~25 years in profession, April 23, 2018). This change in the way of working with traditional media is connected to the changes that have happened in the

professional status of journalism (Witschge, & Nygren 2009). In the current media landscape nothing can be taken for granted, not even a well-established status, as traditional roles disappear and the importance of new actors increases. The definition of professional journalism has become ambiguous as the importance of traditional media has decreased and therefore, it makes sense that communication professionals are reacting to this change and working less with traditional media. This type of structural change is however not a unique or completely new trend: as Schäfer (2011) pointed out, media revolutions come and go constantly and instead of disappearing companies adapt to the changes by implementing new working strategies, as was described by Linda above.

Even though majority of the interviewees are very positive of the changing practices and are – at least seemingly – adapting to them, naturally some of these evolutions and transformations can be hard to process. Therefore it is predictable that some “lagging behind” and sticking to old ideas can be detected while working with communication. Mari (~6,5 years in profession, April 27, 2018) says “In the beginning of my career social media was still up and coming, not as established as it is now, and there was a lot of testing and trying out different things without knowing how they would work. Now we have literally gone from working with physical materials to working online and now it is quite clear what type of channel you choose based on what you want to communicate. ... But you still see in some cases how the same content is put on all different channels without even thinking or acknowledging the multiple affordances of various channels”. Anna (~4 years in profession, April 24, 2018) has a similar experience: “For example, sometimes I have been writing a social media strategy for a company, and then started to think ‘what is it exactly that I am doing here, what is this company and what is their goal?’ It goes so wrong if you hire a consultant to answer these questions. Then the company has a problem, since they don’t know why they are on social media in the first place. There is no deeper thought behind it but it is most often a result of the ‘fear of missing out’-effect”. This kind of “fear of missing out” - effect is a very clear sign that the jump to digital environment has been relatively fast and radical compared to how the profession was a decade ago. Acknowledging the importance of a new approach but not really knowing how to work with it in practice creates a similar gap as the gap identified by Zerfass and colleagues (2016) between how important something is considered to be and how well it actually is applied in the work practices. Another example is given by Anna (~4 years in profession, April 24, 2018): “Just in general, many of the things that are produced are not adjusted to the digital environment. ... I see it sometimes that the pitch is done for a poster, then when it is accepted people all of a sudden realize that they actually need something for social media also. And in those cases neither the content, the format nor the idea behind it is fitting for social media. It is never going to be good if you start from printed material and then end up adjusting it to the digital environment. ... Not

everybody understands that you really need to decide and analyze why you are in the social media in the first place. It is sometimes hard to convince people that in order to see the effects, you have to start from the other end. If you are going to do a digital campaign you are going to need to have that mindset from the beginning. I have seen it so many times and it is really frustrating that there are agencies that are very talented but just have not really realized this. But I think it is getting better all the time now”.

While the essence and ultimate goal of the communicators’ work practices might remain the same, it seems to be “a must” to fully understand the dynamics of online environment in order to keep up with the transformations in a successful way. Therefore, doing something just for the sake of doing it is not a good way to go. Although the online environment is characterized by immediacy and on-going work, it does not mean that the decision to work with it should be done hastily. Juan (~17 years in profession, April 27, 2018) explains his perspective: “I think what’s difficult is that you have to not only analyze everything that’s coming in but also decide where you want to be [when it comes to the various communication channels]. And sometimes I think less is more. I don’t think everyone should be everywhere if you don’t have the resources. Just do one thing, and do it well. And if you have resources then take it to the next step. I mean, I think a lot of organizations and companies and agencies all think they need to be everywhere all the time, and you can’t be. Create quality content and limit the distribution if you don’t have the possibility to put resources because everything takes time. And I think a lot of people don’t think about it, people who don’t work with communication but employ people who work with communication don’t really understand that things take time”. Although things might go viral in a split second and information spreads faster than ever before, it is important to keep in mind that reaching large communication goals still takes time.

4.2 Changing practices in communication agencies

Besides the changing work practices when it comes to traditional media, formats and channels, also the structure of communication agencies has changed. Linda (~25 years in profession, April 23, 2018) describes the change like this: “Our sector is changing so you have a few really big companies and they are full service companies. They have also strategic competence and can work as consulting advisor. But then also you have the smaller companies, operative production companies. They can be really cheap, but they can be really niched, they have a specialty that can be quite narrow but also deep”. As the environment requires everyone to create more content, many agencies have nowadays their own studios as they are trying to respond to the demand: “I have a lot of projects now regarding films, movies, so we do that, we do also photography, we do everything” (Linda, ~25 years in profession, April 23, 2018). Furthermore, new expert roles are constantly

created in order to offer the best possible service to clients: “You can have like experts on influencers for one thing, but also cooperation with media platforms in building stories. Because nowadays there are more media houses than news magazines, so you have contact with media houses and discuss with them ‘Okay what's your goal, our goal is this, our customer's goal is this and your goal is that, how can we together build a strategy so that we can help each other’. You need content for that, we need to send out this message, to build up that strategy together with the media houses. That is a new role and that is a competence. And also of course the way you work with stories and drama is a new way to be able to build catching stories. And working with not only words but with of course movies and mixing the media formats. I think like 15 years ago you wouldn't find people working with movies on the PR department, the press department. But now you have to” (Linda, ~25 years in profession, April 23, 2018).

Due to these requirements to have the competence to offer a broad selection of services, the lines between different types of agencies have become blurred: “Sometimes advertising agencies are doing more PR and PR agencies are doing almost commercial kind of stuff. So you see a shift between what to expect from different agencies and also how they collaborate together that changed over the years. Sometimes it's still hard for the clients to know what to expect from the agencies because they're not all used to that change, it's much broader than what they used to ask us for” (Shelly, ~10 years in profession, April 17, 2018). In addition to the blurred boundaries, also the co-operation between different types of agencies has increased: “We work with other consultancy bureaus for example when it comes to producing websites, we can do the architecture but we don't build it. So we buy people who build it. And also ... we can do the plan for a campaign but we don't really buy the media space, so we have a bureau for that. So we work with other agencies” (Linda, ~25 years in profession, April 23, 2018).

Linda describes the reason behind these changes: “I think the difference is that you need to have a lot more people that together can offer the full competence needed to find the right channels, to find the right people, to have the balance between bought media and earned media. ... To build that according to the strategy. You need a lot more skills and competences, more people today. ... So what's changed [is] that people need to cooperate more in order to build up this picture in the social media. Before one [person] could do that, now I don't think one can do that, no”. The increase in the number of communication channels has led to an increase in the number of people working with these channels, which is logical. As Bruns (2008) pointed out, the producers build and extend content collaboratively often in wider-based, broad communities of participants. As the user-generated content is created by a number of participants, it is no wonder that a number of professionals is needed to meet this participation. In order to fit in the prevalent participatory

culture, it is highly important to create content that fits in the various different channels. The increased creation of content has shifted the focus of the work practices from traditional press to online environments and owned media. "I now spend more time on my computer and I use a lot more digital media while when I started we were completely focused on traditional press. Then most of my work was about maintaining relationships with journalists, just traditional journalists and the publishers of traditional media were really big companies, so back then it was quite important to have a good relationship with them. While now even journalists freelance and what I experience right now is that except for really depending on journalists and what is written in the press we make a lot of media ourselves. Your website plays a lot bigger role and your social media accounts for example play a bigger role, so I think we took control a lot. And the owned media, especially websites and social media, is way more important right now" (Talitha, ~10 years in profession, April 06, 2018). This development is interesting since the communication professionals dealing with the changing landscape by creating more their own content creates the need for more specialized skills and competences but it also means, on the other hand, that the importance of for instance journalists decreases. The constantly changing attention economy with its fragmented channels and audiences and "always-on" nature creates an unstable environment that is ideal for example for freelancing or short contracts. This type of environment speeds up the growth of the precariat (Standing, 2011).

On top of being active on social media platforms, it is also emphasized that creating more own, independent content is important: "I think creating your own content [is important] and not depending on rented media such as Facebook because you never know if it's going to stop. And really creating nice content platforms where you have nice information for your consumer. ... First it was really pushing but then hopefully it becomes more pulling, the journalists are interested maybe in something and they go to your content platform to see if there are nice stories, that would be nice if we can, that's something for the future. But I think this could change" (Shelly, ~10 years in profession, April 17, 2018). As all the third parties are changing over the years it has become more interesting for companies and brands to create their own platforms, so that the dependence of the third parties would decrease. Shelly gives an example of a brand that has been successful in this: "Redbull is a very nice example, they are creating so much cool content. They have their own platform, TV-channel, own series, they have everything ... and I think that is really what we have to do in the future, really creating our own content that is interesting for people to read and see... It is about the experience". This is a great example of how established companies take a step into the participatory culture. For instance Redbull is not selling only a can of energy drink, but the actual product is as Bruns (2008) described, an unfinished creation that can constantly be developed further together with the producers around the brand. By creating its own content,

Redbull also lowers the gap for consumers to contribute with their own content. This kind of co-creation of content is a dance of ideas between the creators and users and the line between professionals and amateurs is indeed blurred as the companies find new ways to invite their consumers to participate.

4.3 Direct contact and dialogue with critical audiences

One major difference to the past is the fact that due to the decreased importance of third parties, there is more and more direct contact between the communicators and the audiences. Due to these changes in the media landscape the relationship between communication professionals and their audiences has changed. As a communicator it is important to meet the audiences in the environments where they are. "We stay more in touch with the audience directly. Right now especially with social media you can have the conversation directly with your target group. More and more" (Talitha, ~10 years in profession, April 06, 2018). The impact of this change will be analyzed further in the next sub-section together with an analysis of how the changing media landscape has affected the audiences. The access and availability of information poses different types of challenges for communication professionals, as the information enables the audiences to do more research and therefore be more critical. Talitha (~10 years in profession, April 06, 2018) analyses: "The audience is very much more critical than it was, than what it used to be. I think previously we were often influenced by what an agency or company tells us, like for example we believed what was on the newspaper and we believed what was in the commercials. While right now all the consumers do a lot of research". The huge flow of information has made it possible for people to really become experts in topics that interest them since it is easy to find out more about those topics. Furthermore, the possibility to research and find information about topics relevant to an individual can create a need to do so. The informed consumers are also more likely to demand more not only from the information they get and find but also from the products or services they consume. Anna (~4 years in profession, April 24, 2018) summarizes this: "I think that the amount of information has changed our behavior. We are no longer satisfied with 'I don't really know' but we actually can google and find answers in a few seconds". Mari (~6,5 years in profession, April 27, 2018) is along the same lines: "Now that we receive so much information and influence from all directions I feel that people are quite alert and aware, so that they feel that they can make their own decisions".

Indeed, the amount of information and communication channels has multiplied, and it has largely led to audiences being more critical, aware and demanding. However, the overabundance of information has also other consequences as described by Juan (~17 years in profession, April 27, 2018): "I think the challenge though is that everyone is just overwhelmed with information all the time, and one thing we notice in our profession is that

people are getting lazy. You know where people would one time look at a film that was ten minutes long now they only want one minute. You have to catch someone's attention in social media in three seconds or you lost. And I don't think it was like that before, I think our attention span was longer. But I also think everyone is just bombarded with images and texts and emojis and films, you know everything is happening. You really don't want to see all of that so you find what you want to see and then you watch that. So you have to stick out". David (~3 years in profession, April 24, 2018) concretizes the change that has happened with a comparison: "There is a big noise all the time. I mean, if you look at the development, how we used to have two channels on a black-and-white TV and a few radio channels and now we have thousands of apps in our cellphone and all of them have some social purpose, you should be on Tinder, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, then you have thousands of TV-channels and plenty of magazines. There are unbelievably many channels of communication, but there is also a lot of one-way communication [in those channels] and therefore, I think, as some sort of a counter-reaction to all this companies are actually starting to want to give something back. Because the content that stands out is the content that gives something back and encourages the users to interact". It is clear that sticking out in the tremendous amount of communication has become a challenge. It is logical as a communicator to try to create more personal interactions that do not feel overwhelming between the company and the consumers. Astrid (~40 years in profession, April 20, 2018) compares this new way of thinking to how it was in the past: "Earlier the way of thinking was that the larger the size of posters and the amount of announcements in newspapers the better. Now it is actually completely the opposite. We must help ... the ones we are communicating with to communicate with us in a way that does not feel overwhelming".

As Marwick (2015b) pointed out, in attention economy value is attached to things that can "attract eyeballs" and attention itself is a valuable resource. If the same logic of micro-celebrities' success is applied, it would make sense to say that in order for communication to attract attention, it has to be authentic, direct, interactive and on-going (Marwick, 2015b). Therefore, the possibility to have direct contact with these critical audiences is valuable and should be utilized by communication professionals. This has not gone unnoticed by the professionals as a great number of the interviewees addressed the change that has happened in understanding what the profession is all about. For example Astrid (~40 years in profession, April 20, 2018) described it like this: "The fact that we now use the word *communication* in this industry is actually quite eloquent, because we have been talking about *information* before. ... If we think back 20-30 years, we could see that if someone, a company or an institution, had something to say they had one message that would be sent out to the public. Today we don't talk like that. ... This change indicates that it is no longer about someone conveying a message to someone else. It is about having a dialogue". The

opportunity to have direct contact with audiences increases the possibility to create dialogue and therefore interaction with the audiences. “I think the fact is just that people are finally realizing what it’s about, it’s not just about pumping out information, it’s having a dialogue. And I think that’s what’s important. I think so many people forget that communication is about dialogue. So it’s not just about me talking to you, it’s about you talking to me. And me listening. And then you have to implement that in your work as well” (Juan, ~17 years in profession, April 27, 2018).

Based on these observations, communication professionals seem to be on board with the change towards a participatory culture. They are open for the opportunity of audiences participating in form of a dialogue and they aim to “invite consumers to actively participate in creation and circulation of new content”, as Jenkins (2008, p. 331) defines it. According to Charest and colleagues’ (2016) findings, however, communication professionals still have work to do in order to create a two-way communication with their audiences. It is apparent that the communication professionals interviewed for this research have an aspiration to enhance real two-way communication and make the participation of their audiences meaningful. Instead of being informers who create messages to be delivered to all the audiences via one channel as one-way communication, professionals have switched the perspective to focus more on *communicating with* the users. They aim to facilitate the creation of content and be part of the community rather than a sender of a message.

Another example of the communicators aiming to include the users and value their participation is that many agencies and companies have new communication related roles, where the main aim is to manage to include the participating consumers and their input into the work practices. Mari (~6,5 years in profession, April 27, 2018) explains how she has observed this change: “I feel that it has been more one-way information before, where people are just receiving the information, and now it is more dialogue. Like if you think five years back, there was no such role as a community manager. Now many companies take care of their own small communities and try to create dialogue and interaction with the consumers. So the gap between companies and consumers gets a bit smaller”. This way of thinking is in line with Deuze’s (2007) suggestion that the hierarchies between established companies and consumers are flattening as consumers have more influence in the society.

Furthermore, this does not purely happen in online environments, but the importance of having a face-to-face dialogue in offline environment should not be forgotten. Linda (~25 years in profession, April 23, 2018) says: “I think dialogue will be more and more important, as in face-to-face meetings. ... It’s more exclusive and when you really, really want a change and when you’re skilled at finding those who can make the difference, it’s cost-efficient to invest in face-to-face dialogue with them”. As the two-step flow theory suggests, convincing an opinion leader is a powerful way to spread a message, and the original version of the

theory focused on interpersonal communication (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). Therefore, it is valuable to invest time in face-to-face meetings and dialogue with these kind of opinion leaders, as it might feel more personal and unique than online communication in the current landscape where everyone is online.

In order to create dialogue it is vital to understand the characteristics of the audiences and individuals in-depth, for example what appeals to them, via which channels they can be reached, where do they spend their time and who do they talk with. It is important to “switch the perspective from thinking of what you want to send out to thinking of what the public is receptive to and what’s important to them” (Astrid, ~40 years in profession, April 20, 2018). Astrid also argues that doing this is much more difficult nowadays than what it was 20-30 years ago. Audiences are significantly more fragmented nowadays (Tindall & Hutchins, 2016) and therefore it requires more research to analyze these target groups. Anna (~4 years in profession, April 24, 2018) describes the change that has happened in the target group analysis concretely: “Sometimes you meet people who have been in the industry for a long time and they are still sitting with print materials and have maybe not really understood how complex people are nowadays. For audiences are more and more complex and they are not part of the same target groups anymore in the same way as they used to be. But now the consumers are part of various target groups and maybe they want to be stimulated with different messages depending on which target group they feel like fitting in for a day or what they are looking for at that moment. So people are definitely more complex and dynamic. I think target group analyses have received a totally different meaning than what they used to have”. In order to communicate successfully with the audiences in the current landscape it is important to understand the complexity of the landscape and how it has affected the audiences. The opportunity to have direct contact with the audiences should be utilized, as including the audiences in an engaging dialogue where their input is appreciated is really what working with communication is about. In the next sub-section the focus will be on the relationship between communication professionals and consumers.

4.4 Relationship with empowered producers – democracy or illusion?

An interesting change that the new technologies and channels have brought along is the fact that it is easier for people to make their voice heard. Astrid (~40 years in profession, April 20, 2018) makes a comparison to the past: “The publicist used to be the editorial staff of a newspaper or news media in general and there was an editor-in-chief who had an important responsibility to decide what to publish. ... Now we do not have publicists in the same sense anymore because individuals are also able to publish content”. In the current media landscape every user is also a potential producer. As Bruns (2008) argued, producer is a mix of consumer, user, creator and producer. This of course has a lot of consequences

for the communication profession. Participating audiences are quick to catch on things and spread the word, in good and bad: “When you do something good they can help you spread that but when you do something bad they can help you spread that too” (Juan, ~17 years in profession, April 27, 2018). The increased participation of consumers has led to optimistic discussions of taking steps towards a more democratic society (Jenkins, 2014b). Consumers can actually affect companies. An example of this is given by Anna (~4 years in profession, April 24, 2018): “The consumers have high demands. For example, in the fast-moving consumer goods market, there are a lot more demands when it comes to certain products, like the whole definition of what you are allowed to call vegetarian or vegan in your marketing has changed completely. So the consumers are more familiar and information savvy about everything and they have more demands”. For example, creating platforms for audiences to interact on and get together behind similar ideas can be seen as a step towards a more democratic society (Jenkins, 2014b). Another interviewee, David (~3 years in profession, April 24, 2018) agrees with this: “I think consumers have more power when it comes to for example commenting on something that a company is doing. If there is for example a campaign that you dislike you can just go on the Facebook page and leave a comment. Then if you get a lot of likes and other support the company must meet your claim in some way. So in that way it is more democratic”.

Nevertheless, the criticism towards this optimistic view should be kept in mind, as the growing influence of customers is constantly met by professionals who try to both manage and manipulate the influential consumer groups (Jenkins, 2014b). David (~3 years in profession, April 24, 2018), even though he agrees that consumers have more power, is however slightly critical towards the optimistic view of the landscape getting more democratic: “But at the same time even though the platform can be democratic those who own the platform, like for example Facebook, they are the ones who have power over setting the agenda, for example by regulating what is shown on your feed and what you are going to see. So in that way maybe the consumers have more power over the society but less power over themselves, because often things that we are supposed to see are served to us”. This is what Schäfer (2011) pointed out in his criticism that named the participatory culture “bastard culture”: corporations do not disappear but adapt and find new ways to gain control over cultural production. Indeed, based on the interviews it does not seem like communication professionals would be negative towards the change towards a participatory culture. On the contrary, majority of them are discussing about the changes in a very laid-back way, which does not give the impression they are losing control. As the environment requires open-mindedness towards participation, it does not take a long time for companies to get organized and start managing this participation. The motivations behind this managing can however be discussed. As Schäfer (2011) argues, it would be naïve to think that companies

encourage and acknowledge participation and dialogue solely based on idealistic and pure values with the goal of achieving social progress and more democratic society.

Astrid (~40 years in profession, April 20, 2018) also says that we are leaving the knowledge-based society behind and currently living in a post-truth society. Post-truth society is characterized by communication that is based on emotion rather than facts (Keyes, 2004). Now that people can freely publish everything, it has become increasingly harder to distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources. Post-truth era is especially visible in politics, as populist parties with agendas that appeal to emotions are gaining popularity (Keyes, 2004). According to Keen's (2007) criticism, when the amateurs take over the work practices of professionals when it comes to cultural products, such as spreading news and other information, the quality of these products is damaged. The change towards post-truth society could be seen as a consequence of the lack of professionalism and increase of subjective bias (Keen, 2007) when it comes to communication. Astrid (~40 years in profession, April 20, 2018) also points out that in order for communication to be effective in this post-truth society it is important that the communication is fast, short and emotional or touching in some way. The interviewee mentions Donald Trump as a good example of how successful this sort of communication can be in the modern society. However, the interviewee emphasizes that using a moral compass is of high importance while acting as a communicator and should also be used while considering how successful something is.

Finally, Talitha (~10 years in profession, April 06, 2018) makes an interesting observation of how the power structures are being challenged: "The consumer is way more powerful because they research and they are critical. And I think that will become more and more. ... Somehow we all become influencers in a way". Indeed, people have a possibility to spread their opinions and in that way try to influence others. In the current landscape, where everyone can publish their ideas, it is easier to get a lot of people behind an idea, and therefore challenge for example powerful companies. In their turn, companies respond with adapting to the surroundings and try to be a step ahead by aiming to manage these communities that are built online. However, as showed in the discussion of direct contact and dialogue above, companies also aim to listen to the consumers more. The enthusiasm of consumers to participate can be seen in the increased amount of content that people are creating. This user-generated content (UGC) is a result of everybody being able to take part in discussions that interest them. Companies responses to this have been varying, but mostly welcoming and interested in finding ways to benefit from UGC. In the next sub-section the concept of user-generated content and communication professionals' perceptions of it will be discussed further.

4.5 Utilizing user-generated content and learning to let go

Ton (~18 years in profession, April 05, 2018) describes UGC like this: “User-generated content makes you focus more on the real content of the service or product and the experience. Make that great and then the communication and the user-generated content will bring the brand alive”. The benefits of UGC have not gone unnoticed by the professionals. Majority of the interviewees have a positive attitude towards UGC and even try to encourage the creation of it with their work. For instance, Shelly (~10 years in profession, April 17, 2018), says: “For a few clients what we do is really encourage also the audiences to share their stories or to create. Besides, it happens anyway, and you can always encourage it or be very active when it happens, it’s quite important”. The increased amount of UGC has an effect on the work practices of communication professionals, according to Talitha (~10 years in profession, April 06, 2018): “I think [UGC affects] in two ways: monitoring everything, the conversation going on online takes a lot of time, and it is also a challenge to utilize it in a positive way and to utilize it to reach what you get from this content”. However, as the content creation happens anyway, it is in many cases more beneficial to take the time and use it instead of ignoring it. As Schäfer (2011) argued, it seems like media industry is going from creating content towards supporting user-generated content.

Talitha gives a concrete example of how to encourage UGC: “Like a very simple example, for a jewelry brand we created a card given with every purchase, in every web order this little card is attached. It is just to encourage them to share a photo while wearing the jewelry”. Anna (~4 years in profession, April 24, 2018) summarizes the use of UGC by companies with an example: “For instance, people are making their own Ikea furniture and posting it on Facebook or Instagram. So in a way you create your own image and your own content in your own channels, so you as a consumer become almost like a company and then the question is how can a company, like for example Ikea, benefit from it. Now they have launched “Your own Ikea” where they share suggestions and tips on how you can re-design you Ikea furniture by yourself. That’s a good example of how to make something out of the stuff that users create. ... If you as a company dare to let go a little you can actually win quite a lot on it. It is like cheap labor, then you can just do your own part and start to market it”. It seems like UGC is something that is already taken for granted when working with communication. It is clear, that it is not possible or even desirable to stop the creation of it – on the contrary, encouraging and using it in different ways can be very beneficial as Shelly (~10 years in profession, April 17, 2018) puts it: “It is of course great and authentic if your users are creating the content for you because that is actually, yeah, if you reach that then that’s really nice for a brand. If they love your brand so much to create their own content around it”. Therefore, the professionals seem to live in co-existence with producers peacefully (Bruns, 2008). However, as Schäfer (2011) pointed out, the dark side of

participatory culture is the increase of cheap digital labor where producers are exploited as their work is seen as cheap and unprofessional.

The increased participation means that the control over what is being said is partly out of the hands of the professionals: “You cannot really control the content, because it’s their content, they create it and hopefully there will be a nice story that you can use. But you cannot control people ... and I don’t think you want to control it. But you can control your own message so that’s something you have to focus on and make it as fun as possible so they will feel sympathetic and have a good feeling and that can influence them finally in what they are going to say and do” (Shelly, ~10 years in profession, April 17, 2018). As Jenkins (2014b) states, because of the enlarged communication capacities of general public, a large amount of control has shifted from media professionals to public. Many of the interviewees seem to be dealing with this “loss of control” well and it does not seem to be a big issue: “That’s also an important role for us to explain to the customer that no, you have to trust that your message, your content, you cannot control it, you have to let it go. We have the key, we know what effect we want and we know the key message but how it is conveyed and how it is developed we have to let go of” (Linda, ~25 years in profession, April 23, 2018). But some of the professionals do admit that it can be difficult: “That’s the thing with social media, you cannot control everything that is being said. ... I think that the whole industry just needs to let go a little. Like, maybe you had a thought about how this is going to go, but it could actually turn out to be better if those who you communicate with think in a different way. But of course it is difficult” (Anna, ~4 years in profession, April 24, 2018). Nevertheless, the fact is that whether you try to control UGC or not, it is happening anyway, so it is necessary to adapt: “Today the brand is built to I would say 80 % by people discussing your company and your brand. You cannot control that in social media or in this communication landscape we’re in. You could, like 15 years ago you could control like print and advertising and everything. But today you cannot, so you’ll have to work in another way” (Linda, ~25 years in profession, April 23, 2018).

As the landscape is changing so fast one important quality of a communication professional is to learn how to adapt. “I think one challenge is that you have to learn to be flexible and really listen to the public and then adapt quickly” (Mari, ~6,5 years in profession, April 27, 2018). The increased participation and information that spreads quickly has resulted into a situation, where unexpected things can happen at any time, they can escalate into real crisis or disappear as fast as they appeared. It is important to be able to react to these situations quickly. Even though communication profession is often associated with strategy and planning (International Association of Business Communicators, 2018), it has become increasingly important to let go a little and improvise. “In communication we need to leave room to improvise, because often those are the things that really catch people’s attention. ...

[For example] last year Balenciaga, the fashion house, came out with this really big blue bag that looked exactly like the blue bag you get at Ikea, so Ikea was really quick to pick up on that and they hushed out 'You can get it with this money in Ikea'. So it is leaving [some] room, I mean, having a plan, having a strategy but leaving openings so you can improvise. So I like that idea, 'strategic improvisation', you are still being strategist but you're improvising, I like that. Sometimes it's good not to have a plan that is just set in stone. ... I actually like improvising because I think that gives the best results. Identify something and hit on it" (Juan, ~17 years in profession, April 27, 2018). Strategic improvisation is a term coined by Jesper Falkheimer and Katarina Gentzel Sanberg (2018). According to them, strategic improvisation is a contemporary concept and a valuable approach for communication professionals and they define it as "a situational interpretation within a given framework (Falkheimer & Gentzel Sanberg, 2018, p. 4). The aim of strategic improvisation is to work more efficiently by combining structure and planning with creative actions. In the communication landscape characterized by speed and "always-on" traits this type of approach can be very beneficial.

In the following sub-section the analysis is narrowed down and the focus will be on social media influencers and work practices related to them will be explored further.

4.6 From user-generated content to being a social media influencer

One interesting thing related to the audiences that was mentioned during various interviews is the fact that peer-influence is more important in the networked communication environment than ever before. "The audience have changed the way they communicate with peers. When you're finding out whether or not you like a company you ask your peers: 'Do you know this company? Do you trust them? What are your experiences?' You go to discussion forums on the Internet where people share the experiences and that will be your first impression of the company. Not the company's own communication" (Linda, ~25 years in profession, April 23, 2018). This relates back to the word-of-mouth and e-word-of-mouth theories. As WOM is one of the oldest ways of transforming information (Huete-Alcocer, 2017), it is interesting to see how it still is so relevant in a completely different environment. Since the era of one-way communication media, internet and social media are supporting the spreading of peer-influence more than any media ever before. "Now consumers are really influenced by word-of-mouth or stories told by other consumers, for example reviews play a way bigger role than what they used to. And also, we research a lot before purchasing a product or before booking a hotel or any reservation, we check reviews, we ask others how their experience was. And I think that is something that from the past started happening more and more during a few years" (Talitha, ~10 years in profession, April 06, 2018). Due to peer-influence being such a strong influencing factor in today's communication environment,

communication professionals are finding ways to work with this phenomenon. One way to facilitate peer-influence in a way that would feel authentic to the consumers is working with social media influencers, micro-celebrities. Micro-celebrities are the experts of user-generated content. “I saw that there was a lot of opportunities in working with influencers especially in travel industry. We saw that online influencers such as Instagrammers and bloggers were huge influencers in our target group and helped a lot with our brand’s identity, but also in terms of sales” (Talitha, ~10 years in profession, April 06, 2018). Working with influencers is a way to melt in the communication landscape and reach out to audiences on a more personal level. As the two-step flow theory suggest, people are more easily influenced by opinion leaders (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). Therefore, working with influencers is a way to be proactive in spreading for example reviews and other information that the critical consumers search online. “So for some clients we really focus on reviews, for example influencers are also very important because we want to hear positive experiences from others. And one way you can just be inactive and wait for those reviews to happen or you can facilitate customers to leave a review, but on the other hand we can be proactive and collect those authentic experiences and reviews by inviting people with a big audience for example” (Talitha, ~10 years in profession, April 06, 2018).

4.6.1 Thoughts about influencers

When asking for the reason why the professionals think that influencer marketing is so popular now, Anna (~4 years in profession, April 24, 2018) says: “I think influencer marketing works well because you filter so much information constantly that it is more likely that you let through information that feels relevant to you or you can identify with in one way or another”. Talitha (~10 years in profession, April 06, 2018) experiences that it is currently a trend: “Right now it’s [working with influencers] almost like panicking, like ‘we need to do something with it right now’. But I think that when everyone will have some more experience with it – there are also a lot of new influencers nowadays and some of them are fake and some of them are real and some of them are relevant and others are not – I think the buzzword will be stabilized and it will become a solid, stable part of the strategies in the future”.

As mentioned above, opinion leaders are not a new phenomenon. This is something that many of the professionals also pointed out. “There has always been influencers. Brands have always used some person that people can relate to, like Björn Borg. ... I think the current form of influencers is a trend of a trend” (Anna, ~4 years in profession, April 24, 2018). Juan (~17 years in profession, April 27, 2018) was also along the same lines: “I’m not really sure what I think about the term influencers. I think we’ve always had influencers, it’s not like a new thing, I mean you know fifty years ago Elisabeth Taylor could wear a perfume

and then everyone wanted that perfume. I think it's the way it's communicated. They found a new platform. And plus influencers, it's almost, they weren't famous before, it's through their work on social media that they become famous so it is a little different. But I don't think it's new in a way that when you see someone you like has something then you want it too. That's the way we work". The latter comment also touches upon the theory of micro-celebrities and how they actually are after attention on the cost of hard labor (Marwick, 2015b). Even though the idea of using micro-celebrities as opinion leaders similar to the idea of using celebrities as opinion leaders it is something different. As the example of the incident with social media influencer Elle Darby and the hotel owner showed, social media influencers are often not recognized or acknowledged as real professionals and their work is not automatically valued in the same way as the fame of celebrities often is. Therefore, it is interesting to analyze how communication professionals see the work relationship with influencers. For instance, Mari (~6,5 years in profession, April 27, 2018) says "I've been thinking of this, of what actually makes you a good communicator, like you don't anymore need an education for that. Like the questions of who is allowed to do what and why. And why would someone else be better, like for example when it comes to writing, why would someone who has many followers be better than I am with my education and experience? What is actually important...", which shows that this topic is something that communication professionals have on mind. When analyzing micro-celebrities, it is often hard to put a finger on what exactly is the reason behind their popularity (Marwick, 2015b). In attention economy, traditional skills when it comes to for example writing are not necessarily as valued as they have been before, since the key to success is to be able to attract attention more than anything else (Marwick, 2015b) and therefore the skills needed for that are not as straightforward as they used to be. As Witschge and Nygren (2009) study on professional journalism showed, it is not easy to define journalism as a profession anymore. In a similar way, it is hard to define the communication profession clearly, in particular when it comes to the unclear boundaries between professionals and amateurs who both produce and use content.

4.6.2 Practical work with influencers

Talitha (~10 years in profession, April 06, 2018) explains how the concrete work with influencers often begins: "Most of the time clients come to me with the challenge, for example, they want more guests to their hotel and I will contact the influencers for them. ... Nowadays one of my challenges is to maintain relationships with those influencers, right now they become more and more popular so they have a lot more requests and a lot more agencies reaching out to them, so my goal is to maintain a relationship with a few, or at least have a few that I love to work with so that I reach out to them. Sometimes I also use some

tools. I use one of the systems like a marketplace for influencers, and influencers are able to pitch to a particular client and that's a really fast and effective way to find influencers that match your brand and to reach an agreement in terms of for example payment". An example of such a tool is called TIM (The Influencer Movement) (figure 2).

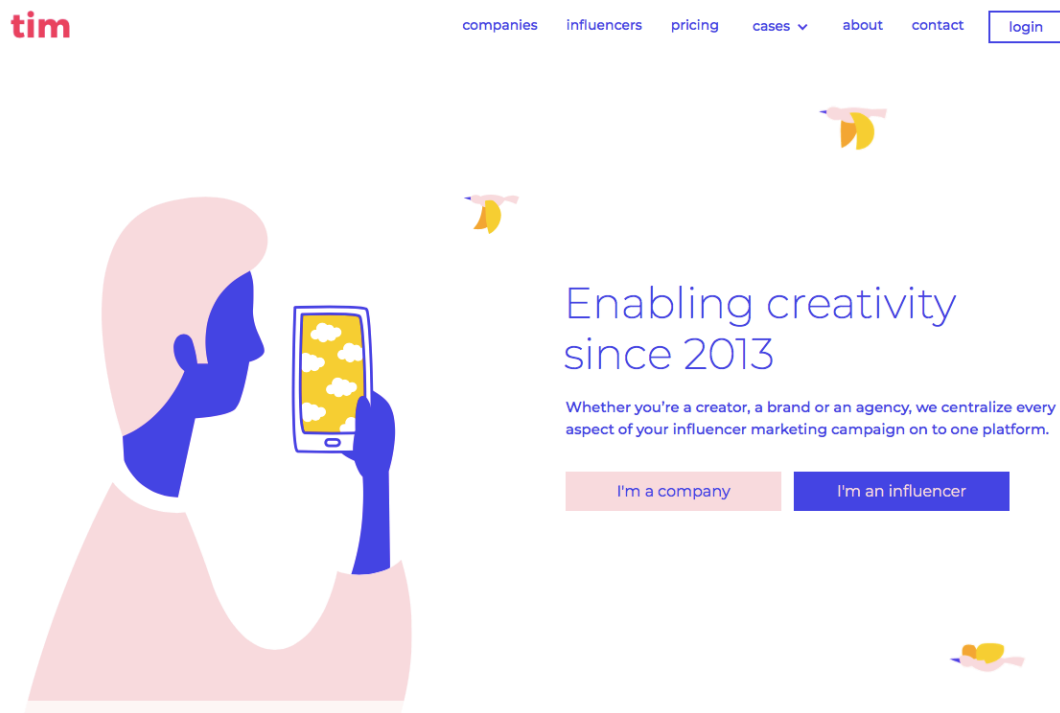


Figure 2. Landing page of TIM website

This tool provides quite a simple way for brands or agencies to post a campaign with some basic information such as goals, budgets and targets. Influencers who are connected to the platform can then pitch themselves to that campaign by submitting a proposal including details such as their style and pricing. The agency or brand can make a selection among the proposals and a deal is done without any further negotiation. This saves time when it comes to finding relevant influencers (Talitha, ~10 years in profession, April 06, 2018). Besides these kind of tools there are also influencer marketing agencies “who are working on behalf of influencer, like an agent of the influencer”, Talitha explains and continues: “But we always work for clients and depending on the needs and also on the budget we either stay in touch with journalists on behalf of the client and/or with the influencers. So we try to tell the story of our client either via traditional tactics and with influencers”. Reinforced with these kind of platforms and agencies solely focused on influencers it seems like micro-celebrities are slowly establishing themselves and becoming a part of the media mix of multiple companies. Another professional, Shelly (~10 years in profession, April 17, 2018) also sometimes uses platforms while working with influencers: “If we use a platform then it is paid but if we use our

direct influencer contacts then it could be non-paid as well. So then it's really focusing on our own relationship with them and if they like the product or not." She also talks about an event her agency organized for influencers, but for that event they contacted influencers by themselves. "We didn't use an agency because we really were focusing on certain types of influencers, it was really beauty influencers that we were looking for, so for us it was important to select them by ourselves because with the platform we don't know who is going to apply for it and now we had it more under control. And also because it's a long-term collaboration so it is important to do that on personal basis, so we didn't use any agency for that." Potentially, these types of organized platforms and ways of working could prevent the social media influencers becoming a part of precariat (Standing, 2011) as they are increasingly compensated for their work and a long-term collaboration is something desirable. This thought is reinforced by Talitha (~10 years in profession, April 06, 2018): "My goal is to be friends with the influencer actually. The only way to work is when we have a win-win situation and when the influencer and my client are happy". However, this does not seem to be something that is taken for granted yet, as it still depends on the situation: "In the best case it is a partnership, because in the best case you don't just do one quick thing and then it's over. You work together with a brand for a long time, in that case I would say it's a partnership. But if you just do one thing, just one time, one-stop-shop, then it's not a partnership" (Linda, ~25 years in profession, April 23, 2018). Even though many of the professionals mention that when they for instance work with influencers they prefer long-term contracts over one-time deals and aim to create a win-win situation, these preferences and aims do not seem to be based on the concern over the influencers' status but more on the best way to do the work successfully. Therefore, when it comes to the work practices of communication professionals, the current environment does not seem to provide a lot of support or stable base for the precariat.

Authenticity is a vital component of influencer marketing. One way to try to ensure the authenticity when it comes to the content produced by the influencers it is also very important that the influencer and the brand they are working with is a match. Talitha (~10 years in profession, April 06, 2018) explains: "I don't reach my goals when I pay an influencer to post about a brand when the brand doesn't match the influencer at all". The communication professionals often do not want to influence the content that influencer create too much: "Sometimes it's just a bargain deal; influencer gets just products or like a hotel room or a dinner in return, or sometimes they actually get money and then I have of course more leverage to have demands or have conditions for the content but on the other hand you don't want to tell the influencer exactly what to post because then it won't be that authentic or won't feel that natural for the audience of the influencer" (~10 years in profession, April 06, 2018). A question regarding the degree of authenticity of the information can however be

raised as influencers are more and more frequently paid for advertising different products. Shelly (~10 years in profession, April 17, 2018) says: “Of course we always believe that they should write it how they are and also to be authentic but of course we want to bring a certain message to consumers so we do brief them about that”. There seems to be a fine line between controlling the content and letting the influencers have their own voice and freedom to create the content. If the content that influencers are creating is perceived as user-generated content, Schäfer’s (2011) criticism about corporations adapting and developing to take control over cultural production is partly accurate. Schäfer (2011) points out that media revolutions come and go but the underlying power structures are seldom challenged even though there is always a fuzz about it during the revolution. Instead of users freely producing and using content online, companies are constantly present with their own, not necessarily so pure and idealistic goals in mind.

Nevertheless, many of the professionals say that their goal is to have a partnership with the influencers. “I always name it partnership because it should be a win-win. I want as much from the influencer as the influencer wants from me as a company or brand. It’s not just like simple advertising. As I work on behalf of the brand I only have advantage of the review of the influencer when the experience or the product was reviewed positively. But also when the relationship with the influencer is very good it instantly helps with good content. But on the same time influencers only exist by good content, so it is like a balance between what I want from them and the freedom I give them to make authentic content” (Talitha, ~10 years in profession, April 06, 2018). Based on the fact that the professionals emphasize the right of the influencer to create their own authentic content it could also be argued that this way of creating content together with producers is more democratic than the content created by the companies themselves.

In the next sub-section the focus will be on more general findings regarding the perception of communicators’ work and the nature and essence of the work practices.

4.7 Taking a step back

The abovementioned change from information to communication goes beyond the discussion with the audiences; the importance of different type of communication should not be forgotten. When it comes to building a brand or an image, everything surrounding the brand, from the platforms and messages to the physical building and employees are components of this work. “It is increasingly about delivering a great experience. ... It used to be maybe only communication, today it’s about great service design, product design, it’s about the facilities and the people around the brand. The brand is more a holistic framework”, Ton (~18 years in profession, April 05, 2018) explains and continues: “Like 10 years ago when we talked about branding we talked only about communication. Today we try to talk

about that because that's what we're hired to do, but we are addressing the whole leadership of the brand, which to me is one of the most valuable aspects of building a brand and not only communication but also people, the employer branding and also the building and the environment around the brand". This thought relates to a more general pattern discovered during the interviews; it was interesting to see that instead of diving deep in all these different changes happening in the ever-changing media landscape it is actually more valuable to take a step back and look at the work with communication from a higher, strategic and managerial perspective. Linda (~25 years in profession, April 23, 2018) describes this change: "The communication landscape and all the different media platforms demand more specialized competence but also more strategic and more going towards the management competence".

When working as a communication professional in the field that is quite complex and constantly transforming a more holistic perspective is needed. It is important to include communication competence in decision-making process in all types of organizations. "I think it is really important, especially if you work with public relations and things like that, to be involved in the process when people are deciding things. Because if you come in in the beginning and be like 'you know this is not such a good idea because people are going to react like this', instead of letting people do things and then the reaction comes. Be a part of the decision making process and bring you communication expertise into the decision-making process. That's what I would say is really important. And I think everyone who works with communication needs to fight and have the courage to say 'I should be part of this process because I have the expertise, I know how people are going to react or not react'. And I think that's across the borders, no matter if you work for a charity or a big bank or smaller association, you need to be part of the decision-making process" (Juan, ~17 years in profession, April 27, 2018). Astrid (~40 years in profession, April 20, 2018), who has a long experience of working with leadership and communication summarizes: "Leadership and communication are so close to each other that it is impossible to separate them. ... This is something that everybody has not realized yet: in every single organization, regardless what they are working with, they should have someone who is working as the Director of Communication. Not a Communication Manager, but actually a Director".

However complex and detail-focused the field can at times be, taking a step back and having a more holistic perspective is an essential part of professional communication. More so even because the essence of the profession has remained the same even throughout the big evolutions: "As a matter of fact, maybe only the technology is the changing part ... In the solutions in essence really nothing has changed. The stuff we make used to be posters or advertisements, the stuff that we make today is stories, films, websites and it's online, so the part that really changed is the media and means. ... It's about a great story well-told still" (Ton, ~18 years in profession, April 05, 2018). Making newsworthy stories and getting them

out of the company to third parties or audiences has been the basic idea of PR always (Shelly, ~10 years in profession, April 17, 2018). Lastly, Talitha (~10 years in profession, April 06, 2018) concludes: "I think the main strategy always stays the same because the challenge is always to communicate a story in a language your target group speaks, in short. So that will never change, only the way in which you can reach your target group really changed". Therefore, communication professionals do often have the core competencies required in the profession and the essence of the work remains the same even though the landscape is ever-changing.

5. Conclusion

In this dissertation I have outlined the implications of the shift towards participatory culture on the work practices of communication professionals. It is clear that those work practices changed in many ways. Professionals are working less with traditional media and increasingly with other third parties, such as social media influencers, and owned media, such as their own social media platforms or websites, which has also led to increased creation of content by communication professionals. Due to this and the emergence of producers, communication professionals are able to have direct contact with their audiences, which increases the importance of having a dialogue. A sender-perspective has been left behind as the concept of “informing” has become “communicating”. A more user-focused perspective has been taken and there are new roles such as community managers to take care and respond to these active producers who form communities around topics that interest them. In the environment, where peer-influence is very important, it is necessary for communication professionals to facilitate peer-to-peer discussions and aim to be a natural part of the users’ activities. Because of the emerged produsage and creation of user-generated content, the control that professionals used to have over the messages and content that was published has decreased, and therefore, flexibility, adaptability and improvisation skills have become valuable assets when working as a communication professional in the fast-moving landscape characterized by wide variety of communication channels.

Overall, adapting to changes seems to be part of being a professional communicator as majority of the interviewees discussed these changes in a seemingly relaxed way. Many of them also highlighted the fact that the essence of the profession has remained the same and the changes concern in fact mainly the increased amount of channels and third parties. Maybe that is the reason behind why communication professionals – at least seemingly – are adapting well to the changes in the landscape. It is not necessary to keep up with every single new trend as long as the essence is there and the communicators have the ability to be flexible and improvise. Furthermore, many of the professionals emphasized that a more holistic, strategic perspective is required while working with communication in this landscape. Having understanding for the management practices, being included in decision-making and advising the leaders helps to control the bigger picture and also be constantly prepared and have the capacity to deal with various conditions and situations that might escalate due to the changing landscape. Based on these findings, it can be reasonable to have a careful approach to optimistic ideas of the participatory culture resulting into a more democratic society (Jenkins, 2014b). As Schäfer (2011) pointed out, media revolutions come and go, and it still remains to be seen whether the underlying power structures can be shaken. Even

though more active and somewhat democratic participation is a fact, changes do not happen overnight and the essence and familiar structures are hard to turn around.

The theoretical framework of this research consisted of theories related to micro-celebrities and attention economy and the emergence of so-called participatory culture and its implications. These theories were completed with a few older communication theories such as two-step-flow and word-of-mouth in order to give a better review of the field. The theoretical framework was considered suitable as it provided a stable background for the analysis and helped to create interesting discussion based on findings in the material. Including both critical and optimistic viewpoints of participatory culture in the theory enabled a more in-depth analysis of the findings as they could be evaluated from both perspectives. Moreover, using micro-celebrities and theory related to them as a sort of an anchor throughout the theoretical framework provided a more feasible approach and concrete idea of the nature of the changes in the field. Therefore, a more concrete idea of the changing practices could be given in the analysis while focusing on the social media influencers.

5.1 Limitations

One limitation of this type of a qualitative research is the subjective nature of the analysis of data. As I am the only researcher there is a risk of personal bias. Considering that the thematic analysis and coding of the material was based on my opinion and I am of course familiar with the idea of the research and the theoretical starting-points and have an idea of what the outcome could be, there is a risk that some important parts of the material would be overseen and regarded as non-relevant if they are not in line with my original idea. I tried to avoid these biases by asking the opinion of my peers from time to time and taking notes of all the patterns and findings in the material, even if they would first seem irrelevant. In this way, some categories with unexpected content were established during the analysis and therefore I consider this limitation being very small. The research was carried out with transparency and consistency when it comes to how the interviews and the analysis were concluded, among other things a research diary over all the decisions that were made was kept and the research process was documented carefully. Therefore, this research and its findings are considered to be trustworthy and credible.

The number of participants could have ideally been a few more to even further ensure the validity of the identified themes and patterns. However, due to time constraints I chose to put more time on the actual analysis. This decision was made due to the fact that the material gathered during these 10 interviews was considered to be rich and sufficient for further analysis. The sample was diverse as various age groups, genders, nationalities, work experiences and current positions were represented. Consequently, many different aspects of the changing work practices were lifted up during the interviews. The interviews resulted

into over 120 pages of transcripts, which proved to be very comprehensive material and repetitive patterns could be identified. Therefore, it can be said that saturation was reached.

Furthermore, it could be seen as a limitation that all the participants are Northern European. This cultural background could influence the outcomes of the research. By including participants who represent different cultural backgrounds, more dimensions could have been found in the material or the outcomes could have been different. However, that is maybe an idea for future research.

5.2 Recommendations for future research

In connection to this study, it would be interesting to do a comparative study that would include the other side, the producers, in order to see how they experience the shift towards participatory culture. For example, discussing with micro-celebrities who co-operate with communication professionals could provide an interesting perspective to which degree do they consider their content-creation being authentic and “free”, and how do they experience working with communication professionals. This type of study could provide starting-points for more developed discussions about the implications that participatory culture has for democracy and the empowerment of users.

Furthermore, an interesting idea would be to create a survey based on the topics and findings discussed in this paper. Taking a quantitative approach and distributing a survey to a larger sample could verify the findings of this research or result into a more comprehensive idea of the more concrete work practices in this relatively large and complex industry.

One interesting discovery, that did not receive full attention in this research, is how the co-operation between different communication agencies and the role of these agencies is changing. Many of the interviewees highlighted the fact that their agencies are now providing completely different services than they did some years ago. In addition, many agencies seem to be co-operating with other agencies. Some of the interviewees pointed out that for example the line between PR agencies and advertising agencies has become blurry, and therefore many customers do not know what they can expect from a certain type of agency. It would be interesting to look further into these changes within the agencies, how their work practices are merging and also how the co-operation between different agencies works.

Furthermore, with regards to the recommended more management-focused and holistic perspective that communication professionals should take, it would be interesting to research how the management of different types of companies view communication professionals and how do they evaluate the value of having a person working as a Head of Communication.

Lastly, doing the research in different context, such as North American or Asian could result into complete different findings, which could result into better understanding of the

cultural bias that this research might contain. Overall, as mentioned throughout the whole paper, the field is rapidly developing and new research is constantly needed.

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Appendix 1

Interview guide

Demographic questions

Introduce yourself; your name and age?

What is your professional background and current profession? How long have you been in the PR and communication industry?

Introductory questions

- What is your role in this PR/communication agency/department?
- Who do you mainly work with (*colleagues, clients, influencers, journalists...*)?
- How does your typical working day look like?
- Why did you choose to work with PR and communication?
- What do you think is challenging or inspiring in this industry?
- Media and communication industry is often described as a fast-changing and dynamic industry, what do you think about that?
- "This might be a bit deep question", but if you had to summarize in for example one sentence, what would you say is the core purpose of your work? Probe: *So you told me that... Does it mean that...?*

Changes in the industry, publics & different channels

- You described earlier how your typical working day looks like, if you compare that description to how a typical working day was in the beginning of your career, has your daily work changed? How?
- Are there any new actors you did not work with back then but you do now? If so, who and how do you work with them now?
- Are there any new platforms you did not work with back then but you do now? If so, which platforms and how do you utilize them? Probe: *When you say... Do you mean...?*
- Traditionally, the PR and communication practice aims to influence different types of audiences and people...
 - o What is the role of publics, in your opinion, when it comes to PR and communication? Probe: *Why does that matter?*

- Has this role changed? If so, how? And what do you think motivated this change? Probe: *Can you give me an example?*
- Has that affected your work? If so, how? Probe: *Tell me more about that.*
- What do you think are the most important tools to reach these publics? Probe: *Have you always thought this way?*

User-generated content, participation & influencing

- Nowadays, there is a lot more user-generated content than before, for example in form of different platforms and blogs. How do you perceive user-generated content? Probe: *What motivated your response?*
 - Has the emerge of this type of content changed the PR profession in any way? Probe: *How has your perception changed over time? What motivated this change?*
- In your opinion, do you think there has been any change in the ways people participate nowadays? What do you think about that? Probe: *You said... Do you mean that...? Have you always felt this way?*
 - What kind of influence do the publics have over your work practices? Has it always been the same? Probe: *How? Why? Tell me more.*
- What is the role of opinion leaders in your field? Probe: *What do you mean by...?*
 - Who do you think are opinion leaders? Probe: *Can you give me an example? Do you think you would have replied similarly a few years ago?*
- Influencing” and “influencers” are currently well-known buzzwords, but how would you define influencing? Probe: *Do you mean that *paraphrasing the answer in order to confirm what the interviewee means*...?*
- Are you familiar with the term “micro-celebrities”? **If not, I will explain the term** Do you work with different micro-celebrities and influencers? If so, how?
 - What do you think about them? How is it working with them? Probe: *Why is that important?*
 - In your opinion, does this phenomenon of micro-celebrities and social media influencers change the work practices in the PR and communication industry? How? Probe: *How do you feel about that? How do others respond to that?*
- How does the emerge of these new actors in the media landscape manifest itself in your daily work? Probe: *Can you give me an example?*

Future & wrap-up

- How do you think all these changes we have discussed will continue to evolve in the future? Probe: *Say what you mean by ...?*

- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Other possible probes to be used depending on the answers: *silence*, *“aha”*, *nodding*, *“What do you mean by that?”*, *“How do you mean?”*, *“Why does that matter?”*, *Could you elaborate a bit further on this?”*, *“What motivated your response?”*