

PROVOKED FOR COLLABORATION

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ABSTRACT

What we know about the usefulness of art for corporations is largely based upon empirical studies of arts for business that investigate how arts can be implied in organizational development (Darsø 2004; Schiuma 2011; Pässilä 2012).

Previous research in arts on business context indicates that deploying arts in business enhances the organization's competence in corporate value creation. To date there has been little agreement on what role art-activism plays in the research field of arts for business. Therefore, this qualitative case study consists of 4 to 6 Finnish art-activist performances and documentary film in social media during 2011–2016. A qualitative case study approach was chosen to identify the complexities of the phenomenon. To complement the in-person semi-structured interviews with the artists and target corporations, a survey of the targets' reactions in digital media platforms such as news, articles, press releases and webpages will be analyzed. In this paper, I attempt to show that activist art aims for collaboration with its target. Therefore art-activism should be concerned as a knowledge asset in corporation's innovation process. The paper sheds new light on the research on arts for business by demonstrating art-activism as an invitation for corporations to participate in solving problems that concern consumers globally.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the contemporary practices of art-activism against corporations in Finland in order to be able to contextualize art-activism for corporations.

Contextualising signifies that the research object, art-activism, is positioned historically or thematically in a context that promotes understanding it and contributes dialogue (Palin 1998, p. 115-116). Research questions examine the practices twofold:

- I. artist's motives, intention and definition of success
- II. reception in social media discussions and target corporations

I have worked closely with artists and corporations for many years. My passion as a researcher is to find out why the corporations that are targets for art-activism more likely stay silent, decline the critical message, drop a lawsuit or stonewall the artist's initiative than elaborate the provocation with the artist. Prior to undertaking the research to the reception in target corporations and social media the intentions of the artists need to be investigated. This paper concentrates on analyzing the data collection of artists' motives and intentions for activism.

Recent studies suggest (Darsø 2004; ed. Lehtikoinen 2016; Pässilä 2012; Schiuma 2011) that deploying art in organization's practises can renew the company culture and performance. For instance, Lotte Darsø (2004) at Copenhagen Business School and Professor of Innovation Management Giovanni Schiuma (2011) have evaluated and conceptualized the potential of arts in business. Their models capture the value of artistic capabilities and make propositions for businesses to apply arts in different contexts of development, emphasizing the constructive interaction between the artist and the business in question. However, art-activism has not received that much attention in the business-orientated research. Regarding terminology¹, art-activism, artistic provocation, activism even radical art or critical art are used in the context of combining art and activism. In this research, the terms that are aimed to describe this phenomenon are art-activism and artistic

¹ Merriam-Webster defines activism as "a doctrine or practice that emphasizes direct vigorous action especially in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue" and provocation to be "an action that causes someone to become angry or begin to do something".

provocation as they are readily understandable and refer to action. My research revolves in the discourses of art, media and business aiming to model the role of art-activism as a medium for businesses to understand the conflict and learn from it. Social media is of interest as a platform for artistic initiatives because it offers a global meeting place and allows interaction.

LITERATURE AND THEORY

The technological development facilitated the rise of new media platforms in 1990's. Before the notion "New Media" was adopted distributing critical art in graffiti, murals, newsletters and publications in late 1960s awakened television news and newspapers in the United States. This inspired artist, activist Lucy R. Lippard call critical art as "journalization of art" (1984/1994, p. 356-357). One could say, that posters, graffiti and murals were the mediums of art-activism of that period and led critical art to larger public knowledge by the mainstream media.

Existing research recognizes activism in New Media concentrate largely to people's concerns of overwhelming global economy. Professor Joss Hands writes in his book *@ Is For Activism* (2011, p.142) that the movement against expanding globalization "is the first great movement of the internet age". Professor of Media Studies Leah A. Lievrouw link the roots of art-activism mainly to Dada and Situationism in the means of critique of capitalism and mainstream culture that uses current media technologies (Lievrouw 2011, p. 28-32). A common prevalent view is, that pop culture which rose in publicity after World War II by Andy Warhol at a time when mainstream media expanded, activated artists to criticize consumer culture and corporate power.

Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and artist Hans Haacke (1994) highlighted media, in the turning point of digitalization in 1990s, as a platform that empowers the message of activist art. Accordingly, they claimed that critical art is not only to raise the audience's interest but also to accomplish action. Bourdieu and Haacke saw media, speaking of the press, as a powerful messenger and a platform for discussions (p. 35-37). Lucy R. Lippard described (1984/1994), that art-activism can be recognized and defined through its methods. For her art-activism presented a creative process that demands a communication and distribution strategy. She conceded that the art activists aim to synthesize or catalyze actions by combining practices, theories, art traditions and media. Lippard observed a strategic lack in the post production phase, "artists lose control" (p. 343-347) as she puts it, and begin with a new project.

Her notion of artist losing control is a crucial point to evaluate what is the goal for one's activist art. According to Lippard, political art presents itself by commenting and analyzing, instead activist art is socially involved and works with its audience in which the driver of activism derives from its use-value to a

particular community. Lippard further claimed, that activist artists see art as medium for a stimulating dialogue and its practices as a facilitator for new symbols (p.343). Lippard gathers her wits of the impressiveness of art-activism saying that "the power of art is curtailed unless it is understood in the broadest sense and accepted as a possibility by everyone" (p.342).

There is hardly any evidence that activist art targeted to corporations generates collaborative change in its target. The kind of "ignorance" that is around activist art in corporations may exist due to lack of understanding art and art as a statement in the Internet, outside the traditional art institutions. John Dewey (1934/2005 p.4) observed even in 1930s that people tend to think that art is "real" when it is experienced in museums and galleries. That notion associates to George Dickie's institutional art theory (cited in Eldridge 2009, p.173) which claims that art is defined in the established practices by the art world and art institutions. However, activist artists of today perform outside the traditional art institutions in order to attract the audience they aim for by utilizing the current media platforms.

Trebor Scholz believed that information based tactical media projects have caused hardly any effect on the change they attempt to strive (2011, p. 356-363). Despite of the fact that the artistic provocations can be found after its execution in digital media, the fuss around it seems to diminish in days. Scholtz put emphasis on the importance of social skills in tactical media projects in age of "social Web" in 2011. He and Geert Lovink had focused on the aspect of cooperation in 2007. Their conclusion was that social movements begin outside of Web and online communication practices. Hence, they consider that "artists set up cultural contexts to which others contribute" and that technology and social media platforms can empower the message (2007, p. 18-23). Accordingly Lievrouw (2011, p. 14-16, 69) predicts that activist art and modern popular movements are in most cases temporary comments that have a need of strategies.

DATA AND METHODS

A qualitative case-study approach was chosen in order to allow a deeper insight to the artist's intentions and practices. The data collection consists of 3 semi-structured artist interviews and one video performance. For the purpose of analysing the artist's willingness and capability for collaboration with the target three themes were set. Firstly, the artist's motivation to execute activism, get inspired and choose the target were discussed. Secondly, the intention of the executed activist performance and thirdly, the definition of success were asked. The criteria for selecting the subjects were as follows:

- i. artist or artist group that lives in Finland
- ii. art-activism delivered in social media
- iii. target of activism being a corporation.

To complement the data collection a video performance approach is used to gain understanding of an activist performance challenging the corporation's ethics in food production. The video material includes clips of the activist performance by Food Liberation Army (FLA) led by Finnish artist Jani Leinonen against McDonald's. The videos were launched in YouTube in 2011.



Figure 1: The FLA's activist performance exploited McDonald's brand images by creating new meanings and inviting the company's employees to join FLA.

EVALUATION OF DATA

Eligible artists who matched the selection criteria were identified by my own knowledge of Finnish art-activism in social media in the 21st century.

When inviting the participants the purpose of the research was explained in an email. Semi-structured in-person interviews were conducted with three artists. In case of an artistic group interviews were planned to hold privately one person at a time. Unexpectedly one interviewee had invited her producer to attend the discussion. The producer's comments were not analysed. Prior to commencing the interviews the themes were sent by email to each interviewee a week before meeting. In the beginning of an interview I asked for a motivation for follow-up interviews in case the analysis leads to new questions. The themes for the interview were as follows:

- I. Motive: Why are you an artist, do you consider yourself as an activist, what inspires you, how you choose your target
- II. Intention: What is your goal as an artist, what is your intention with the specific activist performance
- III. Definition of Success: What is the point you consider you have succeeded with the provocation, do you measure it, what do you do after the provocation, are you willing to collaborate with the target
- IV. Social Media and Media: Do you make a communication strategy, do you have a pro-active relationship with media, do you follow Social Media conversation, do you participate in it, do you follow what is discussed in media of your provocation

This paper deals with the 2 first themes analysing the motives and intentions regarding the questions: why are you an artist, do you consider yourself as an activist, what is your goal as an artist and what is your intention with the specific activist performance.

In an attempt to make each interviewee feel as comfortable as possible all themes and questions were discussed according to interviewees answers. The order changed in each case. The data was recorded on a digital audio recorder and transcribed using a professional transcriber. Recordings and transcriptions are saved in the researcher's personal computer and external hard drive which is stored in researcher's premises. Each artist agreed to participate for further interviews and allowed to publish their names in accordance with this doctoral study. The comments by subjects in this paper are anonymous.

Once the transcriptions were ready, the data was read 2 times and coded by colours relating to each theme. The colour-coded answers were drawn together with signals A, B and C in order to secure the anonymity of each comment. The principals of this research base on norms by EU Code of Ethics for Socio-Economic Research which strongly suggest to follow the ethics of science, laws of copyright and privacy protection and to avoid any kind of harm to parties of the research (Kuula 2006, p. 238).

Art-activism tends to break habits and norms, often times the law as well. The participants, in the context of this study, will not be urged to any actions that may harm them or effect their contribution to this research.

RESULTS

This first set of questions aimed to search evidence of artists' motives and intentions for collaboration with its target.

When the participants were asked about the motive for art and activism in all cases the informants reported that

- i. they are motivated to do things that they are interested in
- ii. they want to utilize their artistic capabilities to make an impact.

As one interviewee put this:

01 C: Taide vaikuttamisen keinona... on ollut alusta asti.
 =Art as a way of making an impact has been my motive from the start.

When asked about the intention as an artist and one's activism, all informants commented that traditional art institutions fail to reach the "ordinary people" only reaching the art enthusiasts. A common opinion of the intention for art-activism amongst interviewees was that art which is communicated by museums and galleries does not spread enough nor courage people out of their comfort zone for actions for a better world.

For the informants this seems to mean that art is not available for all as in their opinion it should be. The comment below illustrates the insight:

02 A: Mä olin tosi turhautunu näihin niin kun vanhoihin medioihin, maalauksiin ja veistoksiin ja jotenkin gallerioihin ja koin ettei sitä kautta sitte saanut sit tietoo jotenkin niin kun leviää sillä lailla kuin mä olisin halunnu.

=I was really frustrated with these like traditional art mediums such as paintings and sculptures and galleries and felt like I couldn't get my message through as I would've liked.

One interviewee argued that the reception of activism can be dismissive by the media and the audience if it is identified to an artist. For example, one participant said:

03 A: ...miks mä oikeestaan tein ton anonymina... ettei se näyttäis taiteelta... on olemas hirveen iso joukko ihmisiä, jotka suhtautuu taiteeseen niin ennakkoluuloisesti, et heti kun ne kuulee, et se on taidetta tai jossain kulttuurisivuilla lukee jotain ni sit ei niit kiinnosta pätkääkään. Mut siin kävi just silleen, että sit kun se paljastu, et se onkin taidetta tai taitelijan tekemä, niin sithän se lässähti se kotimaisen median kiinnostus täysin.

=...the reason why I made it anonymous... so it wouldn't look like art... there is a huge crowd of people so prejudiced towards art who lose their interest immediately when they hear something is art or if they see something written on the culture pages. And that's exactly what happened: the domestic media completely ran out of interest when they found out it was art and created by an artist.

One could say that the intention behind activism seems to be the person's sensitivity and on the other hand courage to take actions in problems that touch the whole universe. Utilizing artistic capabilities in order to facilitate actions was expressed in all answers: One interviewee commented that:

04 B: ... näkee asioit ja ilmiöitä ympärillään ja sit haluaa tarttua niihin...provokaatio on se työväline..taito innostaa ihmisiä ja saada heitä mence oman mukavuusalueensa ulkopuolelle.

=...seeing things and phenomena around you and wanting to seize them... provocation is the tool... the ability to inspire people and take them outside their comfort zone.

Some suggested that concrete goals must be set for each provocation in order to improve the status quo that is being challenged when discussed intentions of activism. Other responses to this question included making one's living and getting to international art field and find international businesses for collaboration. The Finnish art scene was considered to be too narrow. The participants on the whole commented being open for collaboration with corporations.

Surprisingly concerns were expressed about the critic from the art field itself against the interviewees who acts as an artist and entrepreneur.

05 C: ...myyntitapaaminen taidekentällä se on lähtökohtaisesti saatanasta.. ihan kun joku yritysmaailma olis niin kun itsessään paha...

=...sales meetings in the art field are the Devil himself I would say – as if the business world itself was evil in a way...

Two interviewees regarded that their way of life is a statement – a provocation to the art field.

This study has found that the motive for being an artist made no significant difference to intention of one's activism. To step in flaws, engage people and facilitate actions in order to improve position of the target were clearly expressed. Therefore, analysis of the data concerning the artists' insights into definition of success and social media relations is required to conceptualize the capabilities and strategies for practices that artist should consider in order to execute impactful and collaborative art that intends for improvement.

DISCUSSION

The present paper was designed to determine the activist-artists' willingness for collaboration. Very little was found in the literature on the question of implementing art-activism in corporation's innovation or organizational development processes (Darsø 2004; ed. Lehtikoinen 2016; Pässilä 2012; Schiuma 2011). Likewise artistic interventions aim for change in the levels of organizational infrastructure or personal development in organization (Darsø 2004; Schiuma 2011), (art) activism aims for social, political or cultural change (Bourdieu & Haacke 1994; Hands 2011; Liewrow 2011; Lippard 1984; Scholz 2007). Taken together, it seems that both artistic interventions and art-activism pursue to improve the status quo.

The first step of the study concentrates on analysing the artist's motivation and intention as an artist and activist. In this paper, it was hypothesized that activist artists aim for collaboration with their target in order to improve the status quo of a target. A qualitative case study approach was chosen to gain a detailed understanding of the complexity of the phenomenon that touches art, business and social media. Semi-structured in-person interviews with three activist artists were used to help understand the artist's insight into provocative performance against a corporation. To complement the data collection activist social media video performance by group Food Liberation Army (FLA) led by artist Jani Leinonen was used as an example.

The current study found three themes from the analysis. Firstly, it emerged that all of the informants saw themselves as personalities who want to use their artistic capabilities to make concrete actions for a better world. It was expressed in all cases that activism is a way of one's artistic presence.

Secondly, it was found that all informants aimed to involve people in the provocation in order to improve the situation of the target. It was not clearly discussed in which part of the life cycle of the provocation involvement was planned or would have suited the best.

Thirdly, an unexpected critical outcome to traditional art institutions was exposed. All informants suggested that museums and galleries are unable to reach the audience art-activists aim for (“ordinary people”) and that they have no influence in activating people for actions..

Somewhat surprising outcome was found without any relating questions. At first, traditional art institutions were criticized as a platform of spreading the artists’ message. It would be worth to ponder the content of communication and marketing strategies the institutions have. Art-activism related to corporations today is mainly presented in social media. Several researchers have shown that media (Bourdieu & Haacke 1994; Lippard 1984/1994) and social media (Hands 2011; Lievrow 2011; Lovink & Scholtz 2007) empower the message of art-activism.

These results agree with the findings of Haacke and Bourdieu (1994) and Lippard (1984/1994), who propose that activist art aims to catalyze action and that activist art should be available for everyone. The results also confirm the association between art-activism and social media (Hands 2011; Lievrow 2011), the latter representing an achievable platform for everyone.

Secondly, even more unexpected finding was the critique from the art field to artist-entrepreneurs who were considered provoking the concept of art when collaborating with businesses. I myself have been blamed by some artists for attempting to subdue arts for business and violate the autonomy of arts with my doctoral research. There are a number of cross-sectional studies which suggest that art-activism stems from criticizing the global economy (Haacke & Scholz 1994; Hands 2011; Lievrow 2011). The justification to regard business in a negative light by some artists may base on their frustration for the overwhelming power of the economy in the modern society.

In the new global economy activism in general has become a central issue for communicating human concerns. The crucial question is whether this “noise” reaches the target and challenges corporations to develop participatory working models with artists. All informants criticized art institutions for their incapability to reach the ordinary people. In addition it was claimed by one informant that the media and audience lose their interest if there is an artist behind the provocation. Assumingly my study needs to tackle with questions concerning the definition of art, where and how it is perceived as well as what kind of conflicts may occur regarding the reception in traditional art institutions versus social media. According to John Dewey (1934/2005) people in general regard “art” real

when it is experienced in traditional spaces for art such as museums and galleries. On the other hand Richard Eldridge (2009) based his conclusions on George Dickie’s institutional art theory claiming that art is identified by the art world and art institutions which itself has established the practices for art. A second round of questions with the activist artists will touch these two viewpoints as the main platform for their art-activism is social media. How the audience and the target corporation perceive the provocation and is “art” a burden in activism is expected to reveal in further data collection of the study.

So far, however, there has been some news and discussions of corporations who seem to hear the apprehensive citizens’ voices which have made the businesses make some initiatives. For example “Black Friday” the shopping rush which has spread from North America to Finland gave rise to opposed behavior at some Finnish businesses. The fashion brand Makia closed their online and flagship stores for Black Friday commenting that the consumer behavior should get towards sustainability, yet adding that their statement has no ideological background. Fashion brand Globe Hope informed that their brand unconditionally resigns from promoting for Black Friday sales for ethical reasons. (Markkinointi&Mainonta 2017.) How the businesses in question were inspired to their actions was not presented nor the fact whether activism or art-activism have played any role in businesses’ decision making.

I have not yet been able to establish the theoretical framework to my study due to many potential aspects of it. The upcoming analysis of present and new data collection will obviously affect which theories to reflect on.

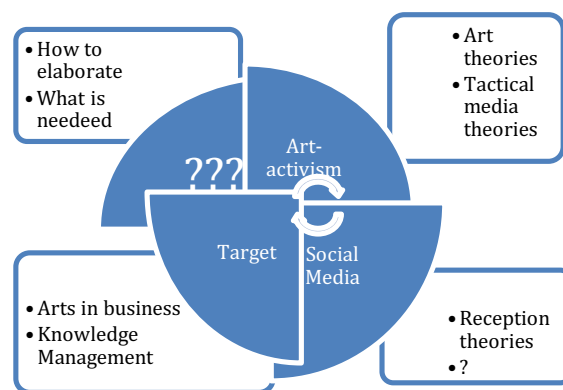


Figure 2: Complexity of theory approach

It should be noted that the data collection of this paper has been limited to 3 artists in Finland. I would like to point out that the findings are restricted to first round of interviews focusing on two themes of four. Yet to come is the analysis of the artists’ insights into the definition of success and the usage of social media and media. Accordingly analysis of the video performance by the Food Liberation Army (FLA) will complement this paper as an example of the cases.

Semi-structured questionnaire was chosen to enhance the discussions but surprisingly that caused problems in analysis phase as the discussions expanded and struggled from one theme to another. A more accurate set of questions also partly more structured may have produced more detailed answers.

However, with a small sample size, caution must be applied, as the findings might not cover the whole truth behind the artists' motive and intention. Further analysis of data collection concerning definition of success and the practises with social media is required in order to develop a full picture of the activist artists' willingness and capabilities for collaboration with corporations.

In summary, it can be concluded that the motive and intention for an artist is to accomplish a mission that would impact and influence people for actions. This observation may support the hypothesis that activist artists aim for a change in its target and are motivated for collaboration. It seems that strategies and communicative skills are needed if one strives for change in its target as suggested by Lippard (1984/1994), Lievrouw (2011), Lovink & Scholz (2011). A systematic understanding of how art-activism contributes to business development is still lacking.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My sincere acknowledgements to Professor Lily Diaz-Kommonen at the faculty of New Media at Aalto University who has patiently supported my academic initiatives. My research advisors Ph.D Sanna T. Lehtinen and Ph.D Anne Pässilä have played the most important role encouraging me to take the first steps in empirical studies. I warmly thank artists and entrepreneurs Arto Halonen Art Films production AFP Oy, Marita Liulia Medeia Oy and Niina Nurminen ArtSense Oy for their time enlightening me to get a wider picture of the art-activism scene. Finally I want to thank my daughter M.A. Siiri Salonen who has transcribed the data, translated the comments and given valuable tips in academic writing.

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