

Managing consumption communities

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Companies are increasingly searching for ways to manage consumption communities. However, previous studies on consumption communities suggest that managing them is difficult, if not impossible. This article addresses this paradox and builds on recent conceptualisations of consumption communities as networks. By building on theory about network management functions, we discuss how companies can actually manage consumption communities without authoritarian and hierarchical control. Using three case studies of heterogeneous consumption communities, a footwear brand, a sports lifestyle community and a tableware and glassware design brand, the article identifies eight consumption community management activities. The article makes a theoretical contribution to the literature on consumption communities by introducing a network management perspective. In addition, it offers valuable practical guidance for managers who wish to manage consumption communities at the strategic level and as an essential part of their customer-related management processes.

Keywords: consumption community; community management; community governance; network management

Introduction

Consumption communities hold increasing strategic relevance for marketers. Members of consumption communities are exceptionally involved and engaged with the brand (McAlexander, Schouten & Koenig, 2002; Algesheimer, Dholakia & Hermann, 2005). They are also loyal and hence act as a buffer in situations of product or service failures, or against competitors with technically superior offerings (Hur, Ahn & Kim, 2011). Interacting with consumption communities often results in companies adopting a more consumer-oriented approach (Jang, Olfman, Ko, Koh & Kim, 2008). However, to create competitive advantage through consumption communities, marketers must be able to manage them. Previous literature has suggested that consumption community management is particularly challenging because these communities are self-directed networks consisting of somewhat equal, autonomous actors (Cova & Cova, 2002; Muñiz & Schau, 2011). They shun authoritarian control (Fournier & Lee, 2009) and thus cannot be managed through traditional,

hierarchy-based means (Canniford, 2011). This results in an interesting paradox: how to manage something that cannot be managed.

The purpose of this article is to identify and dissect consumption community management activities. Management activities can be generally defined as the employment of different resources (human, physical, capital, etc.) to serve the purposes of the organisation (Amit & Zott, 2010); they are considered central ingredients of organisational strategy (Moorman & Day, 2016). This paper argues that consumption communities can be managed as long as the management activities employed are not authoritarian or hierarchical but rather are concentrated on facilitating and nurturing the network.

Literature review

Defining the consumption community as a network of value creation

In this study, a consumption community is defined as a “network of people that co-creates value by interacting and consuming something together repetitively” (Närvänen, Gummesson & Kuusela, 2014, p. 545). There are various reasons why consumption communities may be seen as networks. In the abstract sense, a network can be described as a set of nodes (e.g., people, organisations) in relationships with other nodes. The network metaphor has been argued to adequately describe the nature of social life, in general, and communities, in particular (Granovetter, 1973; Wellman, 1979). Today, people belong to numerous networks consisting of both virtual and real-life interactions; these provide different resources, relationships, and other rewards for members (Bruhn, 2005). Therefore, communities can be seen as volitional and loosely bound flexible networks. The consumption community literature has also begun to emphasise that consumption communities are fragmented, heterogeneous and dispersed networks whose members are engaged in various interactions and resource exchanges, as well as value-creating activities (Fournier & Lee, 2009; Schau et al., 2009; Thomas et al., 2013; Greenacre et al., 2013; Närvänen et al., 2014). In many aspects, these networks

are reminiscent of interorganisational networks. However, so far, researchers have not used interorganisational network theory to analyse consumption communities. To address questions of community management, this could, however, be a theoretically rewarding direction.

In considering consumption communities as networks of value creation, it is necessary to define the concept of value. Value can be defined as the “perceived benefits minus perceived sacrifices that went into producing the benefits” (Järvensivu & Möller, 2009, p. 657; Zeithaml, 1988; for a detailed discussion on perceived value see Salem Khalifa, 2004). Consumption communities can be viewed as sites for direct value creation for the members (Schau et al., 2009). The nature of value, however, is subjective, relativistic, and dependent on community members’ perceptions (Holbrook, 1999). Value is inherently dependent on what community members see as meaningful for themselves or for the community as a whole.

Benefits that members gain from participating in consumption communities range from functional benefits related to information and instrumental value (e.g., learning) to social and psychological benefits (e.g., emotional support) and hedonic benefits (Agrawal & Ramachandran, 2017; Dholakia et al., 2004). There are also costs related to community membership. These include conflict-related costs (Husemann, Ladstaetter & Luedicke, 2015; Närvänen, Kartastenpää & Kuusela, 2013), as well as normative pressure and costs related to competing priorities (Agrawal & Ramachandran, 2017, Algesheimer et al., 2005). The value created through a consumption community for the supplier is more indirect and may be understood as the ratio of what they invest in community management to what they gain in return. Gains may include savings in marketing costs, improved image and intensified communication with loyal and engaged customers (McAlexander et al., 2002; Algesheimer et al., 2005). In this study, we take the value creation potential of consumption communities as a starting point, because as discussed above, this is widely supported by previous research. However, the objective of the present study is not to measure the extent to which the

community management activities we identify actually result in perceived value. We have positioned the study in the context of discovery (Yadav, 2010). Hence, the study aims rather to conceptualize consumption community management activities and create a basis for further inquiry on the topic.

The supplier's role in the consumption community

All consumption communities are more focussed on customer-to-customer than supplier-customer interactions, which has implications for community management. The term supplier refers to the actor that aims to promote the community in order to benefit from it commercially. This can be an organisation, a private person or a group of individuals; the supplier can also be a founder and/or maintainer of the consumption community. If the supplier is an organisation such as a for-profit company, there is most often a certain person or team responsible for community management. The supplier frequently, though not always, provides platforms for community interaction (Canniford, 2011; Goulding, Shankar & Canniford, 2013).

Table 1 summarises the role of the supplier in managing consumption communities as suggested by previous research.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE-

Numerous studies identify the difficulties and challenges of managing consumption communities. For instance, Fournier and Lee (2009) state that “of and by the people, communities defy managerial control” (p. 110). They argue controlling consumption communities is almost impossible because they are not assets or resources owned by suppliers. Some communities led by consumers may be unwilling to let suppliers adopt an authoritative role. Cova and Cova (2002) stress that collective consumption in social networks shifts power and control from the company to the market and consumers. Jang et al. (2008) likewise state that if suppliers are too enthusiastic to sponsor the community, community members may become less spontaneous and less active because they lack

power. Most previous studies focus on community members' perspectives and use empirical data generated from members themselves. Research is needed regarding the organisational strategies that contribute to managing communities, including relevant roles and responsibilities within the organisation (Wirtz et al., 2013).

To identify consumption community management activities, we build on metatheory of network management. From a management perspective, networks differ from other types of organised social and economic activity such as markets or hierarchies. Networks can be viewed as independently governed (Järvensivu & Möller, 2009) by relationships based on trust and reputation rather than contracts or authority. Järvensivu and Möller (2009) have suggested that managing networks is about structuring the existing network and facilitating cooperation. They identify four different management functions: framing, activating, mobilising and synthesising. Our study builds on these four functions that are defined and discussed further in the empirical section.

Methodology

Illustrative case studies have been used in management research to illuminate the relevant characteristics of a research phenomenon (Rubalcaba et al. 2012; Saarijärvi, Grönroos & Kuusela, 2014). The following cases for this research were selected using purposive sampling to allow for heterogeneity: 1. a hybrid of consumer- and supplier-led sub-communities (Reino & Aino) 2. an online lifestyle community (Tikis) and 3. a supplier-led brand community (MyIittala). The cases are used in this research as resources and inspiration for developing theoretical ideas about management activities (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007). The authors of this article have observed the development of the second case (R&A) for seven years and the other communities for three years.

In order to generate insights for the illustrative case studies presented here, a multi-method approach was used, which included interviews, observations and the use of secondary data, including company and community websites and social media platforms. Primarily, interviews with CEOs

(cases 1 and 2), sales directors (cases 2 and 3) and owners (cases 1 and 3) were conducted. The total length of interview material was around five hours. Data analysis was conducted in two stages: first, there was a more data-driven phase where the researchers read the transcribed interviews and familiarised themselves with the websites, online communities and other secondary materials about the three cases. This data-driven analysis phase was conducted according to the general principles of analysing qualitative data – by categorising and abstracting the different activities that suppliers employed (Spiggle, 1994). At this stage, twelve different activities were identified. In the second stage of analysis, we used more theory-driven analysis to integrate the activities within the theoretical framework, and finally, consolidated the findings into eight activities under the four network management functions. Below, we briefly introduce the cases.

Reino & Aino footwear brand (Case 1)

The Reino & Aino footwear company produces branded household slippers, which are the core of a network of consumption communities ranging from sports clubs to several local small-group brand communities and a supplier-managed loyal customer club. The first consumption communities around the slipper brand were formed by loyal customers. Many activities of the consumer-led community involve a high degree of face-to-face interaction and hence are characterised by strong ties between members (Agrawal & Ramachandran, 2017). The company has actively engaged with consumption communities since 2005.

Tikis sport lifestyle community (Case 2)

Tikis is a lifestyle community that advocates a healthy and athletic lifestyle by motivating people with inspiring content and events. The community operates on a supplier-owned online platform where interaction between members mainly takes place. Hence, the community is characterised by weaker social ties between members who are connected by their identification with a sporty lifestyle. Tikis can hence be defined as a large-group consumption community (Agrawal &

Ramachandran, 2017). Consumption community management is core to Tikis, which was established in 2014.

MyIittala tableware and cookware design brand community (Case 3)

Iittala is a Finnish tableware and cookware design brand belonging to the Fiskars Group. It is an iconic brand that has a rich heritage and represents timeless Finnish design. MyIittala is the brand community, which operates on supplier-led online platforms (Facebook and Instagram), as well as through a loyal customer club for registered members. MyIittala is an example of a supplier-led large-group consumption community characterised by members' identification with the brand (Agrawal & Ramachandran, 2017). The MyIittala concept was originally set up as a traditional customer relationship management program focussed on special discounts, monetary rewards and personalised marketing communications for members. However, consumption community management has been a distinctive part of the renewed MyIittala concept since 2009.

Community management activities

Below, we introduce eight management activities that suppliers can implement to manage consumption communities. These are presented in Table 2 and discussed below.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Framing

Framing consists of “establishing and influencing rules for the network and altering perceptions of network participants” with goal-setting as part of this function (Järvensivu & Möller, 2009, 658). In the context of consumption community management, we posit that there are two key management activities related to framing: *Establishing a shared purpose* and *Aligning interests (of suppliers and consumers)*.

Framing: Establishing a shared purpose

Shared community values are one of the most essential features of any consumption community (Husemann, 2012; Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001). Value creation in a network does not require completely unified goals and values, but a certain level of shared purpose is needed (Järvensivu & Möller, 2009). In the context of consumption community management, suppliers' goals are ultimately related to gaining competitive advantage. However, this is irrelevant to community members who are looking for other types of value, like social ties, learning benefits or just fun and enjoyment. From the suppliers' point of view, establishing strong company values that align with community values is important. Without a clear understanding of the underlying values, a supplier's actions could easily become inconsistent and fragmented.

For instance, at Reino & Aino, domesticity is the core value. The supplier is determined to maintain the national origin of the Reino & Aino brand because many consumers regard domesticity as the reason for their commitment to the brand and the communities around it. The founders' passion for sports and well-being is a driving force for Tikis. Hence, the suppliers want to encourage and motivate people who share the same pursuits. For Mylittala, the shared value is enduring and timeless design that lasts for generations. The interviewees agreed that values need to be company-wide and actualised in everything that they do, from production to marketing and community management, including selecting partners to work with.

Framing: Aligning interests

In network governance, framing is also about influencing participating actors' perceptions about the network and its purpose. Aligning the interests of the supplier and consumers is an important way to accomplish this in the context of consumption community management. Just like any other marketplace construction, consumption communities are not free from economic influences. In fact, they often operate between two conflicting pressures: simultaneously trying to alienate themselves

from the marketplace and getting in closer touch with it (Muñiz & Schau, 2011; Schau et al., 2009). According to Husemann (2012), profit-making by companies is often allowed to the extent that it helps to reach the community's goals. For example, in the case of Tikis, the interviewees perceived that as long as their actions endorse a healthy lifestyle and are related to sport they will most likely be seen as acceptable in the eyes of community members.

Even though suppliers' commercial objectives were generally perceived to be accepted by the consumers in our three cases, there appeared to be a very fine line between admissible and reprehensible supplier behaviour. Consumers are easily irritated by suppliers' excessive pushing of commercial content because it decreases the symbolic and social value that community members experience (Schau et al. 2009). Several interviewees emphasised that if consumers feel the company is trying too hard to profit from community members, community commitment and engagement would significantly suffer. Downplaying economic interests was perceived as a positive approach in community management. This does not mean fooling consumers into believing there is no commercial motive but instead showing them the company is not driven merely by profit.

Suppliers aim to enable free participation and organise free-of-charge events that balance their economic objectives with support for the community. In addition to free access and registration, Tikis, for instance, restricts business-related content to 10 percent of all website content.

While suppliers' economic interests are often downplayed in the context of consumption communities, consumers' interests are more open and visible. Tikis offers discount codes to its Facebook and Instagram followers for dietary supplements from partnering firms, and Iittala has special prices for MyIittala members. Hence, community members' functional and economic benefits may also be taken into account as part of community management.

Activating

The network governance function of activating can be defined as “identifying participants for and structuring the network” (Järvensivu & Möller, 2009, p. 658). Järvensivu & Möller (2009) suggest consumption community networks are necessarily emergent structures because there is no shared consciously set strategic intent. Suppliers’ and consumers’ reasons for participating in the network are divergent, but the network may still create value for both parties. The activating function can be concretised into two management activities: *Inviting consumers* and *Structuring the network*.

Activating: Inviting consumers

Inviting consumers into the network, and achieving a strong presence in consumers’ lives, is achieved by providing platforms for community members to gather together. Community members need a location where they can share their opinions, ideas and passions. Providing a stage for consumers to perform and interact is one way of inviting consumers, because it facilitates participation (Canniford, 2011; Muñoz & Schau, 2011), and they can utilise the supplier’s resources instead of their own. As Muñoz and Schau (2011) suggest, “you can’t have a community without a place to commune and interact” (p. 212). Jahn and Kunz (2012, p. 353) state that online fan pages have the potential to measurably improve the customer-brand relationship. Furthermore, to facilitate information sharing and interaction, Boon, Pitt and Salehi-Sangari (2015) suggest that suppliers should build interactive platforms, allow members to form smaller groups around shared interests, reward members, and provide an example by sharing themselves.

To invite consumers, the case suppliers use various social media services. Multiple interaction channels not only help reach customers more easily but also enable versatile and wide-ranging content provision. For Iittala, different channels have distinct purposes: Instagram is seen to best enable

customer involvement and highlight consumers' perspectives, while Facebook is seen to most efficiently permit direct communication between the supplier and customer.

Jahn and Kunz (2012) argue that if the supplier "is not (inter)active" community sites will not be successful because consumers are likely to lose interest and abandon them (p. 354). Regular interaction not only helps to maintain the interest of existing community members, it also attracts new members. Offline events are another important way of maintaining closeness to communities, as emphasised by the Reino & Aino case. The supplier has organised several events including ice-hockey tournaments and charity events as well as participated in music festivals to showcase the products and listen to community members' stories. Facilitating face-to-face meetings amongst community members and with suppliers intensifies social ties and creates different kinds of experiences.

Activating: Structuring the network

Recent literature recognises that consumption communities are composed of diverse autonomous actors (Schouten, Martin & McAlexander, 2011; Thomas et al., 2013). Members' objectives are heterogenous, as are the types of value they are looking for from community participation. Consumers' conceptions of community membership and commitment, or even consumption as a whole, often differ (Beverland, Farrelly & Quester, 2010; Thomas et al., 2013). Hence, segmentation based on demographic or geographical factors is ineffective (Thomas et al., 2013).

Diversity has to be taken into consideration when aiming to stimulate community activity. At Reino & Aino, recognition of community member heterogeneity resulted in the extension of the product range from two simple models to a range of slippers in different sizes and customisable colours and motifs, e.g., for a sports team or a company. Taking the heterogeneity of consumers into

account not only increased their brand sales, but it has also expanded the community membership to allow more and diverse people to participate (Närvänen & Goulding, 2016).

Even though Tikis considers all members to sharing an interest in a healthy and athletic lifestyle, this community includes people with very different backgrounds and demographics. Tikis is not a sport-specific community, which is why it interests enthusiasts of many kinds of sports from football players to gymnasts. The community also includes sports fans of all ages and backgrounds ranging from beginners to experts. This is an example where follower diversity guides content production. The aim of the supplier is to provide versatile material in order to satisfy as many followers as possible. Tikis, therefore, ensures rich, diverse content by hiring content providers with various interests.

Mobilising

The network governance function of mobilising can be defined as building commitment among actors (Järvensivu & Möller 2009, p. 659). Emergent networks require negotiation and adaptation due to their heterogeneity. In the context of consumption community management, this function is concretised in the following management activities: *Motivating consumer participation* and *Enabling consumer participation*.

Mobilising: Motivating consumer participation

Jang et al. (2008) argue that information quality plays an important role in increasing community commitment among consumers. Jahn and Kunz (2012, p. 354) also emphasise that brand fan pages must deliver interesting and entertaining content. Possible means of content production include exclusive content, sweepstakes, online events and contests. Valuable content may be functional (e.g., for learning and information), emotional (e.g., for social support) or hedonic (e.g., for fun and entertainment). This is exemplified by Tikis, which aims to provide many kinds of benefits

to its community members. Its content creation team consists of 10 people who upload new articles and videos to the Tikis webpage nearly every day.

Consumption communities provide a unique opportunity for suppliers to get involved in close, fruitful conversation with consumers, keeping in mind the consumer's empowered role (Canniford, 2011). Interaction is one of the major value drivers in consumption communities, which is why suppliers should support it as much as possible (Jahn & Kunz, 2012, p. 354). The interviewed suppliers all strongly believe that open communication plays a key role in mobilising consumers in consumption communities. In network governance, as well, micro-level interactive activities are posited as a key way to manage an extensive and emergent network that cannot be managed at the network level (Järvensivu & Möller, 2009, p. 659).

Mobilising: Enabling consumer participation

Numerous studies have argued that consumers possess enormous potential to contribute to community content creation in online environments (see e.g., Cova & Pace, 2006; Gummesson et al., 2014; Muñiz & Schau, 2007; Muñiz & Schau, 2011; Schau et al., 2009; Schau & Muñiz, 2006). Frequently, the supplier only provides a platform and a trigger to a conversation that consumers then continue between themselves. Ensuring good content that triggers sharing and further conversation is then key to mobilising consumers.

Co-creation can and should also be made possible for consumers offline. Many events that brought visibility to Reino & Aino were organised solely by consumers. These ranged from sports events to barn dances. The company has provided resources such as awards that help promote events and hence the consumers do not have to use their own resources. Moreover, Iittala has arranged unusual and extraordinary consumer competitions. In spring 2014 MyIittala members were asked to share their memories related to a glass vase designed by Alvar Aalto in 1936. The vase is well-known

among Finnish consumers, and the competition allowed personal memories related to the brand to be shared within the community. Furthermore, Iittala has held flea markets where members of the community could sell second-hand tableware and interior décor items.

The interviewed suppliers agreed that too much possessiveness over the brand or community symbols and ideology can easily suppress communal activity and consumers' participation.

Synthesizing

The network governance function of synthesising can be defined as “creating conditions for productive interaction while preventing, minimizing and removing obstacles to cooperation” (Järvensivu & Möller, 2009, p. 658). In the context of consumption community management, this can be concretised through the management activities of *Maintaining rituals and traditions* and *Ensuring strategic importance*.

Synthesising: Maintaining rituals and traditions

One of the three core community commonalities presented by Muñiz and O'Quinn (2001) is the existence of shared rituals and traditions. These can be built around common consumption experiences related to a brand through which a community recreates and distributes meaning within and beyond the community boundaries (Goulding & Shankar, 2011). Shared rituals and traditions form the culture of the community, are central to symbolic value creation and are therefore crucial for the survival of the community (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001). A study of online social production systems and their governance (Aaltonen and Lanzara, 2015) identified the transformation of repetitive rituals into governance mechanisms. Our case suppliers aim to maintain rituals by repeating events that were previously successful and popular among community members. They continue to develop these events together with community members. For instance, in the Reino & Aino case, the supplier has co-organised events with consumption communities and offered to help in case there are any

problems or obstacles that hinder the community from implementing their own events. In addition, the suppliers organise a wide range of daily and weekly activities. At Iittala, these include a weekly consumer photo review in which some of the photos tagged with the brand's hashtag are selected for publication in the company's profile.

Synthesising: Ensuring strategic importance

Another way to assure community continuity is to *ensure the community's strategic importance*. As Fournier and Lee (2009, p. 106) put it, managing consumption community should not be seen just as an element of a company's marketing strategy but as a focal part of a firm's overall business strategy. Managing communities requires sufficient resources, expertise and organisation-wide commitment (Wirtz et al., 2013). According to our interviewees, communication needs to be open, and objectives need to be clear, whether the goal is to attain creative resources from the community, support a culture change, improve brand image and customer relations, increase sales or all of the above.

In all three companies consumption communities have clearly become significant strategic resources, as recommended in the existing literature (see e.g., Goulding et al., 2013). Accordingly, the firms are fiercely committed to retaining and developing community-oriented thinking. For instance, at Iittala, community management is seen as a far-reaching, business-guiding choice that determines the company's position in the market. Iittala does not wish to compete on price but instead offers other kinds of value to its customers, thus developing competitive advantage by building a community. For all of the case suppliers, outsourcing community management is not an option because they have a strong sense of responsibility toward and interest in these communities. Furthermore, outsourcing could result in a loss of perceived authenticity.

Discussion

This paper has challenged the notion presented by much of previous research that consumption communities cannot be managed. By analysing consumption community management activities conducted by three real-life suppliers, we provide an alternative perspective that builds on theory of network management. Our findings therefore offer eight community management activities that form a framework through which consumption communities can be managed. This framework is presented in Figure 1.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

This study contributes to consumption community research which has recognised consumption communities as networks but has not focussed on their management. We question the assumption that consumption communities cannot be managed and argue that suppliers benefit from actively engaging with them. As long as management is not delivered as hierarchical but rather as a means of framing, activating, mobilising and synthesising, even emergent and disperse community networks can be managed.

This study also makes a theoretical contribution to the studies on network management by introducing a new area—that of consumption communities (Ladik & Stewart, 2008). To complement the meta-theoretical focus of the network management functions identified by Järvensivu and Möller (2009), our study identifies eight management activities through which suppliers may engage with consumption communities. Hence, we also develop mid-level theory on network management that consolidates Järvensivu and Möller's (2009) network management functions in a relevant, new empirical context.

The findings have several managerial implications. Because consumption communities are central to modern commerce, all business managers either directly or indirectly deal with them in

their work. Therefore, our findings are valuable to managers in various sectors and industries, especially those who wish to be more proactive in community management. The identified activities will help managers plan and evaluate their community management practices, from setting objectives to practical implementation and continuous development. Because community management activities are experimental and creative in nature, these activities will ensure suppliers can better respond to market changes. The identified actions for consumption community management will reduce the risk of failure by indicating what suppliers should and should not do. Furthermore, our framework facilitates shifting consumption community management from the tactical to the strategic level because it helps suppliers engage customers over the long term, hence, creating competitive advantage.

Future research should focus on investigating the management activities further and measuring the value that is created for each party as a result of the management activities. However, we suggest that different types of communities may require different activity emphasis. For instance, *activating* and *mobilising* activities are more important in supplier-led communities where consumers may need a subtle push to participate in value creation. In more consumer-led communities, *framing* may be more important to ensure that the supplier's interests and purpose are not in conflict with those of the community. Any type of consumption community will benefit from *synthesising* activities because they ensure the survival of the community in the long term. In summary, through the identified management activities, suppliers can adapt the means, content and resources of community management in a way that fits both the supplier's and community members' goals.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, we suggest four directions for future research. The first is to focus on the governance structures of communities (e.g., market, hierarchy, clan, as suggested by Sibai et al., 2015) and the suitability of different community management activities to different governance

structures. While the community management activities identified in this study may be more suited to clan-type governance structures (which are based on shared identity and communal interactions), how do the activities change in market-type governance such as in a peer-to-peer online auction site?

Second, previous research has identified that communities that have stronger ties between members are more likely to experience conflict (Husemann et al., 2015). Hence, this results in different requirements for community management from the point of view of suppliers. We suspect that where there are weaker ties, suppliers may be more able to manage the community than where the community has strong internal governance mechanisms in place.

The third possibility for future research is to focus on the marketing competences for community management (Aaltonen and Lanzara, 2015; Moorman & Day, 2016). In order to achieve the level of strategic importance suggested in our study, companies need to take communities seriously and invest in the competences required to manage them. We argue that community management competences should be seen as a strategic priority in consumer markets in the future. These competences could be related to leveraging the social capital formed through trusting relations with consumption communities.

Fourth, we suggest that community management could be studied as an extension of the market orientation literature that has largely focussed on outside-in thinking (Feng, Morgan & Rego, 2015; Jaworski & Kohli, 1993). Communities may provide a way to learn in much more detail about the daily lives of customers, including their ways of thinking and acting. They may provide the supplier an opportunity to learn the language of consumers and interact with them in genuine and legitimate ways.

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Table 1. The role of the supplier in consumption community management.

<i>Source</i>	<i>The role of the supplier</i>
<i>Quinton, 2013</i>	<p>“A supporting facilitator” (p. 923)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Making the brand “glue” that links consumers
<i>Canniford, 2011</i>	<p>A fosterer and nurturer of the empowered consumer (p. 603)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Co-producing linking value - Participating in symbiotic dialogue - Providing platforms and pathways for consumers to assemble
<i>Fournier & Lee, 2009</i>	<p>“A supporting facilitator” (p. 109)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facilitating and supporting positive conditions for the community to thrive - Providing the brand as a hub through which consumers interact/access services
<i>Schau et al., 2009</i>	<p>An encourager of co-creation (p. 41)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enabling and advocating the realisation of various value-creating practices (related to social networking, impression management, community engagement and brand use)
<i>Jang et al., 2008</i>	<p>An opportunity provider (p. 75)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providing physical places and financial support for offline activities - Cooperating with consumers
<i>Cova & Pace, 2006</i>	<p>“A non-intrusive enabler” (p. 1087)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fostering consumers’ personal expressions of brand meaning

Table 2. Summary of consumption community management

<i>Network management function</i>	<i>Consumption community management activity</i>	<i>Data quotation</i>
FRAMING	Establishing a shared purpose	<p>“We should aim to communicate in all our medias that our products are made to last and that they are not only for this moment or just a one transient trend among others.” (MyIittala)</p> <p>“These past years we have been working hard to follow these values. [...] When we bought the Reino & Aino brand we for example made the decision to move the production back to Finland because one of our core values is being Finnish.” (Reino & Aino)</p>
	Aligning interests of supplier and consumers	<p>“We have aimed at 90 per cent of so called good content that has nothing to do with commercial matters [...] if the proportion of commercial vs. other content is for instance fifty-fifty, the number of our readers would surely decrease.”(Tikis)</p> <p>“After all, our company does a lot; there is something happening every day. We are rather active to organize these events, during the past ten years there have been hundreds of different kinds of happenings.” (Reino & Aino)</p>
ACTIVATING	Inviting consumers	<p>“During the tour, there were lots of activities like live music and the opportunity to make your own videos. [...] Our products were sold there too but it played a minor role. The most important thing was to gather people together and to get visibility while cruising along the roads. [...]The Reino brand has been prominently in the spotlight. We have enjoyed a lot of media attention considering that we are a small company.” (Reino & Aino)</p> <p>“Our main media is Tikis’ own web page, to which Facebook, Instagram and Youtube are supporting channels. [...] From the very beginning we have had scarce resources, which means we have always had to use our creativity and to get so called free promotion through consumers. [...] When you come to think of it, we haven’t done any paid marketing in Facebook during the last six months.” (Tikis)</p>
	Structuring the network	<p>“Naturally, we have a lot of people with different ages. We have plenty of really young people from fourteen to seventeen-year-olds and then up to over 18 and twenty-something. But there are also some ‘iron grandpas’ who comment on our postings. [...] The unifying factor is that everybody is interested in healthy life and nutrition.” (Tikis)</p> <p>“We want to respond to the customer in his or her own way. To some people you can reply in much more casual manner while others you have to address formally so that it [communication] is more conservative.” (MyIittala)</p>

MOBILISING

Motivating consumer participation

“The basic thing is that when the person is actively involved, they learn things and find inspiration. I mean that our articles and our content actually enriches them somehow.” (Tikis)

“We believe in open dialogue. For example in Facebook we respond to consumers’ inquiries openly on our Facebook wall so that everyone can see the conversations.” (Mylittala)

Enabling consumer participation

“We had this project a while ago where people told their memories and stories about Reinos and then those narratives were collected and published. [...] To us cooperating with communities around Reino & Aino has been easy, but I think that if a firm is overprotective of their brand, it is much harder. [...] We are really open to all propositions coming from the consumers. When they propose something, some kind of event or cooperation, our response is almost always a categorical yes.” (Reino & Aino)

“It has been very nice to see that so many people have sent us messages telling about their complete make-overs and results they have achieved. It is always nice to share those stories, which again motivate others.” (Tikis)

SYNTHESISING

Maintaining rituals and traditions

“Mylittala vintage [a consumer-to-consumer sales event] was a great event and succeeded very well. We are really satisfied with it. [...] This year we will organise it again and do it even better than last year. It is supposed to become an annually repeated event, which is always arranged at the same time of the year during Design weeks in the autumn.” (Mylittala)

“If they [the consumers organising the event] called us that they could not get a band to play in the event next year and therefore could not organize it, of course we would help them to find one.” (Reino & Aino)

Ensuring strategic importance

“The way we could screw this thing up is if we gave control over Tikis to a third party. I mean that someone else could try to take advantage of our community if we do not decide our content ourselves. Therefore it’s damn important and related to many things that we retain the content provision in our own hands. This means that if we start to outsource, we lose.” (Tikis)

“We did not want to compete on price. That meant that we needed to offer the consumer some reason for why she or he would like to buy from us. We wanted to offer them something more: that was the reason why we started developing the community in the first place. [...] Mylittala offers us a direct link to the customer.” (Mylittala)

Figure 1. A framework for consumption community management from the supplier perspective

