



ELINA NÄRVÄNEN

Extending the Collective Consumption of Brands



ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

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for public discussion in the Auditorium Pinni B 1097 of the University,
Kanslerinrinne 1, Tampere,
on November 21st, 2013, at 12 o'clock.

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ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

University of Tampere, School of Management
Finland

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Cover design by
Mikko Reinikka

Acta Universitatis Tamperensis 1868
ISBN 978-951-44-9256-3 (print)
ISSN-L 1455-1616
ISSN 1455-1616

Acta Electronica Universitatis Tamperensis 1349
ISBN 978-951-44-9257-0 (pdf)
ISSN 1456-954X
<http://tampub.uta.fi>

Suomen Yliopistopaino Oy – Juvenes Print
Tampere 2013

To my family

Acknowledgements

Growing up, I never imagined myself as a researcher. I think my first dream occupation was to become a teacher or a singer. Recently I have realized that actually I am doing the very things I always loved to do. The main part of any researcher's work day goes to reading and writing, and anyone who knows me can prove that I truly enjoy both. In conducting the PhD research, I have tried to follow the advice of one of my favorite authors, Philip Pullman: "Read like a butterfly, write like a bee". Even though he is a literary author, I think the advice suits a PhD candidate just fine. Doing research is hard work but it can also be fun. In addition, my somewhat unorthodox journey from the Department of Language Studies to the School of Management and marketing has helped me acquire some key skills for conducting this PhD research. Yet, this thesis is not about individuals. It is about communities, and without the communities I belong to, this would not have been possible.

First of all, my thesis supervisor Professor Hannu Kuusela has been the key person to introduce me to the academic community in general and the marketing community at the School of Management in particular. About four years ago, he spotted my thirst for knowledge and the researcher in me, and took me under his wing. He has provided constant encouragement and support in countless ways throughout this process. In addition to his guidance and valuable feedback on the thesis, writing and publishing articles together has been a true learning process for me. Having somebody to fight the hardest battles with and rejoice from the greatest wins together has been wonderful.

I am thankful for Professors Christina Goulding and Kristina Heinonen, the pre-examiners of my dissertation, for their valuable comments in the final stages of the dissertation. Christina Goulding's research on consumption communities has inspired me throughout the process. I am particularly grateful to have as my opponent a core member of the research community where I myself would like to belong. Professor Pekka Tuominen has provided encouragement and feedback on the thesis draft throughout the process, even in the middle of the summer holiday when I was finishing the thesis, for which I am very grateful. I wish to thank Professors Evert Gummesson and Anu Valtonen for giving me feedback and encouragement already from my master's thesis onward. Also Professors P.K. Kannan and Melanie Wallendorf have given me valuable comments on the thesis. I

feel very lucky having been welcomed to the academic community by so many distinguished researchers.

The members of the marketing community at the School of Management have been an important source of support for me. Dr. Hannu Saarijärvi and Dr. Nina Mesiranta have been my personal mentors in the past years. I want to thank Dr. Hannu Saarijärvi for showing a great example and walking two steps ahead, clearing a path that has been easy to follow. I have truly enjoyed having him as a colleague and friend. Dr. Nina Mesiranta has encouraged me and shared my interests both in the academia and on our freetime. I am very grateful to have acquired a new, dear friend in her. Researchers Mika Yrjölä, Malla Mattila, Timo Rintamäki, Dr. Pekka Puustinen, Anna Heikkinen, Katja Karintaus and Dr. Ritva Höykinpuro have provided an amazing collegial environment, for which I am thankful. In doctoral courses and seminars, I have met wonderful people who have shared their thoughts and insights, giving much needed peer support. Thank you Terhi Väistö, Elina Riivari and Maria Pecoraro for sharing the journey with me. Finally, I treasure my friendship with Salla Williams. She has known me since the first day of university and is a true kindred spirit.

I am much obliged to the School of Management and Finnish Graduate School of Marketing (FINNMARK) for providing me with full time funding. It has enabled me to do the research effectively and on time. I would also like to thank Tampereen kauppayhdistyksen säätiö, Tampereen liikesivistyssäätiö, the Foundation for Economic Education, Tampereen Yliopiston Tukisäätiö, and Marcus Wallenberg foundation for their financial support. I also want to thank my informants and especially entrepreneurs Arto Huhtinen and Tuire Erkkilä from Reino & Aino Kotikenkä for giving me a great access to data and for inviting me to be part of their community network. Without their enthusiastic and open-minded attitude toward this research project, there would be no dissertation at all.

Finally, I want to express my deepest gratitude to my family. Mum, Dad and Grandma have always been supportive of my decisions and life choices. Thank you for lifting me up when I was down and celebrating even the smallest victories with me. My brother Arttu has always been one of my favourite persons. Thank you Arttu as well as my sister-in-law Martta for providing much needed diversion from work and for cheering me on. Most importantly, I want to thank my husband Tommi and our dog Vilppu who represent the most important community for me. Thank you for loving me and being there for me every day.

At my office, October 11, 2013.

Elina Närvänen

Abstract

Consumption and social life are intertwined. People join consumption collectives in order to feel connected and to share consumption practices and objects with others. Several concepts have been developed in consumer research to characterize collective consumption phenomena, such as subcultures of consumption, brand communities, and consumption tribes. However, differences between the concepts are often unclear, and each concept highlights some features while obscuring others. Regarding the collective consumption of brands, the literature has emphasized the commercial nature and hierarchical structure of brand communities, simultaneously overlooking other kinds of collectives. More research is thus needed to integrate the literature and to extend it. Specifically the heterogeneity and complexity of collective consumption needs to be recognized.

The purpose of this research is to extend the view of the collective consumption of brands. The purpose is divided into three interconnected research objectives that focus on building a categorization scheme for heterogeneous consumption collectives around one brand, analyzing their characteristics in detail as well as understanding their role in cultural brand revitalization. In particular, the findings yield insights on the interaction between consumption collectives and the revitalization of a brand that was disappearing from the market. Qualitative case study research was conducted on the Finnish footwear brand *Reino & Aino*. Research data was generated through multiple methods including interviews, observations, and gathering cultural data. The research process was iterative and based on abductive logic incorporating both inductive and deductive phases.

The conceptual framework for the study is built from the stream of literature on marketplace cultures and communities. This literature is integrated and critically evaluated in order to build a categorization scheme of heterogeneous consumption collectives around one brand with which to initially analyze the empirical data. Five different kinds of consumption collectives are identified: place-focused, brand-focused, activity-focused, idea-focused and social relations-focused collectives. They are also characterized as more or less integrated versus dispersed and the role of the brand is either more central or more peripheral in the consumption collective. A practice theoretical interpretive framework is used to further analyze the elements of practices within the consumption collectives. Practice theory focuses on the performative aspects of everyday social life. The analysis identifies

elements of practice including materials, meanings, and competences that intersect and form socially shared practices in consumption collectives. Finally, the research provides an interpretation of cultural brand revitalization where the heterogeneous consumption collectives are seen as important social sites that facilitate it.

The research contributes to consumer research first by integrating the literature on collective consumption, second by offering a new way of categorizing consumption collectives; and third, by yielding insights into the role of consumption collectives in cultural brand revitalization. The complexity and heterogeneity of collective consumption phenomena in the market are recognized. The research also has implications for marketing practitioners who wish to build and maintain the viability of their brands in the market. These implications help them to adopt a new supportive and encouraging role in relation to different consumption collectives.

KEYWORDS: collective consumption, consumption collectives, practice theory, Consumer Culture Theory, cultural brand revitalization

Tiivistelmä

Kuluttaminen ja sosiaalinen elämä ovat kietoutuneet tiiviisti yhteen. Kulutusyhteisöihin liitytään, koska ne luovat yhteenkuuluvuuden tunnetta ja mahdollistavat kulutuskäytänteiden ja -objektien jakamisen yhdessä muiden kanssa. Erot kulutuksen yhteisöllisyyttä kuvaavien käsitteiden, kuten kulutuksen alakulttuurien, brändiyhteisöjen ja kulutusheimojen välillä ovat kuitenkin epäselviä. Jokainen käsite korostaa joitakin piirteitä, mutta jättää toisia huomiotta. Erityisesti brändien yhteisölliseen kuluttamiseen liittyvä aiempi kirjallisuus on korostanut brändiyhteisöjen kaupallista luonnetta ja hierarkista rakennetta ja ohittanut muun kaltaiset yhteisömuodot. On siis olemassa selkeä tarve arvioida kriittisesti aiheeseen liittyvää kirjallisuutta ja laajentaa sen tarjoamaa rajoittunutta näkemystä. Yhteisöllisen kuluttamisen heterogeenisyyttä ja monimutkaisuutta tulisi ymmärtää huomattavasti syvällisemmin.

Tämä tutkimus rakentaa uuden näkökulman brändien yhteisölliseen kuluttamiseen. Kolmen toisiinsa kytkeytyvän tutkimustavoitteen avulla 1) luodaan luokitteluskeema yhden brändin ympärille syntyneille erilaisille kulutusyhteisöille, 2) analysoidaan erilaisten kulutusyhteisöjen piirteitä yksityiskohtaisesti, sekä 3) ymmärretään kulutusyhteisöjen roolia kulttuurisessa brändin elpymisessä. Tutkimustulokset jäsentävät kulutusyhteisöjen ja brändin vuorovaikutusta tilanteessa, jossa markkinoilta katoamassa oleva brändi saavutti yllättäen uuden suosion. Tutkimusstrategiana on laadullinen tapaustutkimus suomalaisesta Reino & Aino jalkinebrändistä. Tutkimusaineisto on luotu monimenetelmäisesti sisältäen haastatteluja, havainnointia ja kulttuurista aineistoa. Tutkimusprosessi oli luonteeltaan iteratiivinen ja perustui abduktiiviseen logiikkaan, joka sisältää sekä induktiivisia että deduktiivisia vaiheita.

Tutkimuksen käsitteellinen viitekehys rakentuu markkinakulttuurien ja yhteisöjen tutkimuksesta. Integroimalla ja kriittisesti arvioimalla aiempaa tietoa rakennetaan kulutusyhteisöjen kategorisointiskeema, jolla empiiristä aineistoa analysoidaan. Tutkimus tunnistaa viisi kulutusyhteisötyyppiä: paikkaan, brändiin, aktiviteettiin, ideaan ja sosiaalisiin suhteisiin fokusoituvat yhteisöt. Yhteisöjä tarkastellaan myös niiden rakenteen ja brändin roolin ulottuvuuksien avulla. Rakenteeltaan yhteisöt sijoittuvat akselille integroituneista hajanaisiin ja brändin rooli yhteisöissä vaihtelee keskeisestä toisarvoiseen. Tutkimuksessa hyödynnetään käytäntöteoreettista tulkinnan viitekehystä, jonka avulla analysoidaan

kulutusyhteisöjen käytäntöjen elementtejä. Käytäntöteoriassa huomio kiinnittyy arjen sosiaalisen elämän performatiivisuuteen. Analyysissä tunnistetaan käytänteiden elementtejä, eli materiaaleja, merkityksiä ja kompetensseja, jotka risteävät ja muodostavat sosiaalisesti jaettuun käytänteitä kulutusyhteisöissä. Tutkimus päättyy tulkintaan kulttuurisesta brändin elpymisestä. Tämän mahdollistavat heterogeeniset kulutusyhteisöt sosiaalisen toiminnan kenttänä.

Tutkimukseni kontribuutio koostuu kolmesta osasta. Ensin luon synteesin yhteisölliseen kuluttamiseen liittyvästä tiedosta, toiseksi rakennan uuden tavan luokitella kulutusyhteisöjä ja kolmanneksi syvennän ymmärrystä kulutusyhteisöjen roolista kulttuurisessa brändin elpymisessä. Tutkimukseni ansiosta kulutuksen yhteisöllisten ilmiöiden monimuotoisuus voidaan tunnistaa ja ottaa paremmin huomioon. Tutkimustuloksilla on myös merkitystä käytännön liike-elämälle. Yritykset, joiden tavoitteena on rakentaa ja ylläpitää brändin elinvoimaisuutta markkinoilla, voivat tutkimustani hyödyntäen omaksua uuden roolin kulutusyhteisöjen toiminnan mahdollistajina ja kannustavina tukijoina.

AVAINSANAT: yhteisöllinen kuluttaminen, kulutusyhteisöt, käytäntöteoria, kulutuskulttuuri, kulttuurinen brändin elpyminen

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PROLOGUE

This research journey started four years ago when I became aware of a most interesting phenomenon taking place in the market. Apparently in the absence of any marketing activity by the company, a brand that was hovering near extinction had suddenly grown enormously in popularity. From an old people's morning slipper, Reino & Aino had become something completely different. The buzz around the brand was not only visible in online forums, blogs and the print media but the sales were rapidly increasing and one could encounter the product in most peculiar situations. Young people wore the slippers when they went out with their friends and rock musicians wore them on their gigs. Sports enthusiasts and other hobby groups had started using the slippers together. People photographed themselves with their slippers, decorated them and put up pictures in Facebook groups. A book had been written about people's relationships and memories with this brand and it revealed the manifold contexts and practices related to the slippers from all over Finland. What could explain this phenomenon from a marketing point of view? What made all those consumers suddenly enthusiastic about this product that was sold on ordinary supermarket shelves, even though stores were continuously running out of slippers to sell? While around fifty thousand pairs had been sold in 2005, in 2010 the sales figures had increased over tenfold to over half a million pairs. The case of Reino & Aino thus presented a mystery or a riddle to be solved through research (Photo 1).



Photo 1. Pairs of Reino & Aino slippers in their traditional style (photo received from the company)

With an inquisitive mind and enthusiasm I went to explore everything that was happening around the phenomenon, generating data and familiarizing myself with theory at the same time. My approach was inductively oriented. I intended to discover something new instead of testing old theories (Yadav 2010; MacInnis 2011). In generating data, I tried to become immersed in the context, to go where things were happening and to get hold of everything and everyone related to this phenomenon. This resembles the methodology of inductive ethnography, where after the research is finished, the researcher should be able to claim to have “been there” (Geertz 1988). I also conducted theoretical sampling, where the emerging insights guide the researcher toward new locations and new informants (Goulding 2005).

As an example of my personal involvement, I even stopped people on the street who I noticed were wearing Reino & Aino slippers in order to interview them. Being socialized in the Finnish culture helped me to interpret my observations, giving me knowledge of the ways of thinking, symbolic systems and meanings related to what people were telling me. This pre-understanding, consisting of the researcher’s qualitative and subjective observations of the world, is considered to be helpful in achieving interpretations and understanding, provided that the research process is made transparent (Gummesson 2005). Thus, the initial approach resembled the methodology of grounded theory where the researcher

enters the field as soon as possible without preconceived concepts or theoretical frameworks (Goulding 2005). These kinds of approach allows the data to tell its own story, using theory in a sensitive way to inform the analysis rather than forcing the data to match a theoretical pattern (Goulding 2002). There is a difference, however, between a data-driven approach that is adopted in this thesis and a data-dominated approach. In the latter, there is a danger of excluding important dimensions of analysis that cannot be traced directly back to the data (Askegaard & Linnet 2011).

Furthermore, critics of the ethnographic over-reliance on data argue that there are actually no theory-free observations (Van Maanen 1988/2011). The researcher always makes the data speak through some interpretive framework (Moisander & Valtonen 2006). The data does not just tell its story on its own, however rich and thick it might be. In this process, many different theories may be suitable and offer explanations, but ultimately the researcher chooses which story to tell (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2000). The researcher's background and intuition play a key role here (Gummesson 2008). This orientation toward research is heavily inspired by hermeneutics where it is considered that "knowledge is not to be acquired in the usual, reasoning and rational way...not by laborious pondering, but rather at a stroke, whereby patterns in complex wholes are illuminated by a kind of mental flashlight, giving an immediate and complete overview" (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2000, 52).

Reviewing the relevant literature, it became clear that the existing theory is only beginning to reflect the complexity of today's markets. Writing my master's thesis at the time, I utilized my knowledge of concepts such as many-to-many marketing that is based on network theory (Gummesson 2008), the emerging service-dominant logic where the customer is viewed as a co-creator of value (e.g. Vargo & Lusch 2008) as well as perspectives from consumer research taking into account the active role of consumers as meaning-makers and contributors to marketplace dynamics (Arnould & Thompson 2005; Firat & Dholakia 2006). The various theoretical perspectives further complicated matters, but I found it imperative not to be overly guided by extant theory in order to avoid oversimplifying the phenomenon or omitting any important data or crucial observation from my search for answers (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2000, 46). The role of previous theory was thus to provide a well-grounded pre-understanding. It is also suggested that interpretive research should not be about trying to find a single theory to explain the truth, but instead encourage theoretical plurality (Firat & Venkatesh 1995). The master's thesis report (Leppälä 2010) finally explored all the different actors that I had encountered in the phenomenon, as well as the sociocultural meanings that they connected with this brand. The cultural meaning repertoires identified in the masters' thesis were 1) locality and nationality, 2) ethics and responsibility, 3)

empathy and caring, 4) humor and fun, 5) communities and subcultures, 6) brands and fashion, 7) uniqueness and individuality and 8) heroes and myths (Leppälä 2010).

One of these meaning repertoires, community, continued to interest me. It was somehow intertwined with all other repertoires and seemed the most prominent to characterize the phenomenon as a whole. Despite the fact that the media, other organizations, and celebrities were involved in the phenomenon, it was not through these actors that commercial success was attained. If consumers had not become enthusiastic and shown their devotion through purchasing and using the slippers in various ways, I doubted that the media would have shown any interest in what was happening. I had found examples in the literature of brands that had inspired similar consumer enthusiasm, but they were mostly very expensive lifestyle brands such as Harley Davidson or Apple, or counter-cultural brands like Pabst Blue Ribbon or Dr Martens. In my data, I saw a contradiction, because it was rare for the consumers to talk about brands or fandom in connection with the slippers. Instead, they were talking about how the brand enabled them to spend time together with the people they loved, to complement the activities that they were doing together, and to feel a sense of belonging. Whether it was to their family or the whole Finnish nation, the consumers were clearly looking for a connection to each other through wearing the slippers.

For the doctoral research, I decided to embark on a new journey of discovery to focus more on the collective consumption related to the Reino & Aino brand in different contexts. Supported by more data, this doctoral thesis allowed me to tell this story as an interpretation of what took place in the Reino & Aino phenomenon, although I do acknowledge that as such, it is just one of the possible explanations. Through this theoretical discussion, the thesis thereby contributes more widely to understanding the heterogeneity of collective consumption and the role of consumption collectives in marketplace dynamics. In other words, as the collectives adopt the brand to their activities, what does it mean for the brand? This narrative prologue is intended to increase the transparency of this research, showing the nature of the research process in whole as well as to promote the inductive approach (Van Maanen 1988/2011). I wanted to give the reader a similar sense of amazement and enthusiasm for the phenomenon that I have encountered as a researcher.

1 INTRODUCTION

Contemporary lifestyles . . . are no longer structured around a single pole. In a rather stochastic manner, they branch out from tremendously varied occurrences, experiences, and situations – all things that characterize affinity groups.

Michael Maffesoli in The Time of the Tribes (1996, 85)

1.1 Research phenomenon

Community has remained one of the key concepts in the social sciences since the beginning of the twentieth century and the beginning of modernization. In sociological debates, it has been staged as the opposite to impersonal, rational social contracts between individuals (e.g. Tönnies 1888/1957). On the one hand, it has been claimed that communities are doomed because individuals have become free from the chains of tradition, norms, and religion. On the other hand, it is suggested that people long for community relations characterized by warmth and empathy, reciprocity, longevity and well-being (Etzioni 1993; Putnam 2000). In these debates, markets have often been cast as the culprit for the degradation and downfall of communities. However, it is increasingly realized that markets and consumption may play a more complex role in the development of new forms of community (Cova 1997; Muñiz & O’Guinn 2001).

Communities have evolved from geographically bound, static communities where people stayed for their lifetime, usually based on a family, village or religious community. Today people can belong to fluid, unstable and shifting communities, where the only thing that keeps them together may be a shared interest, hobby, or a favorite brand. Thus, many community memberships have become volitional and elective. The relevance of consumption communities is also becoming clear for companies who find that their customers are influenced by their peers and interact in complex networks (Gummesson 2008).

Collective consumption is a relatively new area of inquiry within marketing and consumer research yet it has become an almost uncontested part of marketing knowledge since the 1990s (Schouten & McAlexander 1995; Muñiz & O’Guinn 2001; Thomas, Price & Schau 2013). Researchers have begun to acknowledge that studying collective actors instead of individual customers may provide important

customer insight and perspectives on current marketing phenomena (Epp & Price 2008; Kozinets, Hemetzberger & Schau 2008; Gummesson, Kuusela & Närvänen 2014). Studying consumers who interact with each other in their own life spheres, rather than in the company's sphere may yield important customer understanding for businesses (Heinonen, Strandvik & Voima 2013). From a marketing point of view, it is important to know what resources to contribute to consumption collectives and how. According to the Marketing Science Institute's research priorities for 2010–2012 (MSI 2012); more research is needed to improve firms' capabilities for collaboration in the complex and turbulent marketplace. Research should focus on the platforms, processes, systems, and tools that enable companies to collaborate with consumer communities and networks.

It has been argued that the Internet and especially social media have accelerated the emergence of different kinds of collectives of consumption (Kozinets 2001). Different concepts such as brand community, consumption tribe, or subculture of consumption have been introduced to refer to types of market-facing collectives where consumers meet and interact with each other, build shared identities and develop a unique culture. Shifting interest from the individual consumer toward consumption collectives has also brought new qualitative methodologies such as netnography and practice theory (Schau, Muñoz & Arnould 2009; Kozinets 2010). New concepts from co-creation to crowdsourcing and customer-to-customer (C2C) interaction have been suggested to depict the new marketing environment where everything functions on the basis of many-to-many (Gummesson 2008). It is increasingly acknowledged that consumers are influenced by the company they keep. Therefore it is imperative for consumer researchers to study the collectives with which consumers identify and to which they share a connection.

1.2 Core concepts

There has been an ongoing debate in the social sciences regarding how to define a community. It is generally agreed that community is something more than just sharing demographic or social categories such as gender or ethnicity, or a random group of people inhabiting the same area (Brint 2001; Bruhn 2005). Diverse criteria from members' affectual relations to a sense of individual and collective belonging resulting from a shared identity, common norms and values, and moral responsibility have been suggested as characterizing communities (e.g. Sarason 1974; Cohen 1985; McMillan & Chavis 1986). Even though the community concept can also refer simply to people who have something in common, the usual connotation still brings with it expectations of clear boundaries between insiders

and outsiders, committed members and continuity that comes from members' enduring participation.

Depending on whether community is defined from the point of view of members (the emic perspective) or as a social structure (the etic perspective), the concept may denote to different things. This has resulted in a complex and somewhat imprecise use of language describing phenomena. The situation is made even more complex when the phenomena of interest are shifting and changing, such as when communities start to emerge in the online world. The old markers of community are losing significance or at least changing their meaning. Marketing and consumer research fields have also been influenced by this, and there is no clear consensus on what a consumption community actually is.

For instance, the extent to which members feel a shared consciousness, have shared norms and rules and a status hierarchy have been established as features of a consumption community (Muñiz & O'Guinn 2001). Yet, if it is claimed that these features are essential, they set quite narrow limits to the empirical phenomena that are included. Because of the weight of the concept, labeling an empirical phenomenon as a community brings with it a burden of demonstrating the existence of sufficiently strong acknowledged markers of community. If researchers focus on identifying and describing these characteristics in different empirical contexts it may lead to research that is repetitive and theory-testing rather than being innovative and theory building.

In order to extend the view of collective consumption of brands in this thesis, I have chosen to use the concept of the consumption collective rather than community as the unit of analysis. The definition of a consumption collective used in this thesis is inspired by practice theory that emphasizes the collective and performative nature of human action (cf. Schau et al. 2009, Warde 2005). *Consumption collective in this thesis refers to a network of people sharing consumption practices and/or objects.* The key argument is that several heterogeneous consumption collectives related to one brand may exist simultaneously. This issue, the diversity of collectives under one brand, is also an aspect that has not yet been theoretically pursued in consumer research. By referring to collectives rather than communities, their nature is captured as more or less porous, with higher or lower boundaries. While community emphasizes the extent of individual and shared belonging, the concept of the consumption collective moves the focus closer to the shared practices that both constitute the collective and are constituted within it (Schatzki 1996; Giddens 1984). Collective consumption as an activity is a synonym for these practices in this thesis.

Following recent theory on consumption collectives (Thomas et al. 2013), no distinction is made in this thesis between whether the members of a consumption collective have a producer or customer role. Thus, the thesis views consumption

and production as intertwined activities and not as opposites (Firat & Dholakia 2006). Both private consumers and producers (traditionally defined as working within companies) may engage in consumption practices.

1.3 Problem setting

Although collective consumption has attracted research interest in recent years, the existing knowledge is fragmented and often concentrates on looking at collectives from the inside-out. The latter tendency can be partly explained by the popularity of the ethnographic methodology that has been employed to study collective consumption (e.g. Schouten & McAlexander 1995; Schau et al. 2009). In ethnographic studies, the focus is on the cultural patterns of a certain group of people. By participating intensively and for extended periods of time in natural settings, researchers have aimed to combine emic (native/insider) views with etic (theoretical/outsider) interpretations (Arnould & Wallendorf 1994). Ethnographic research produces a “thick description” (Geertz 1993/1973) of the culture, and this is often considered valuable in its own right, without being developed to a more generalizable theoretical level (Goulding 2003).

In extant literature, the characteristics, features, and practices of different kind of collectives are delineated, but they are rarely compared with one another at a more comprehensive theoretical level where their similarities and differences would become clear (cf. Canniford 2011; Goulding et al. 2013; Thomas et al. 2013). In addition, the heterogeneity and fragmentation involved in collective consumption is not duly acknowledged.

Collective consumption can be defined more broadly than as something taking place only within specific enclosed communities. This is because consumption in general is to a large extent social in nature. Some widely cited examples in the literature consider collective consumption in contexts that are marginal and somewhat exotic, such as river-rafting (Arnould & Price 1993), skydiving (Celsi, Rose & Leigh 1993), the Burning Man festival (Kozinets 2002), or Mountain Men (Belk & Costa 1998). Even though theory can be built from exceptional cases by going beyond taken-for-granted assumptions (Arnould, Price & Moisio 2006), this has had an influence on the kinds of phenomena that have been selected for research. Hence, to complement the study of extremes, there is still a need to extend the view and study collective consumption as a far more general phenomenon that is relevant to a broader spectrum of consumers and companies.

Furthermore, based on the research methodologies of ethnography and also existential phenomenology that have dominated previous research on collective consumption, the focus has been on the rich data and emic perspectives generated

in these contexts. Whether focusing on the “lived experience” of individual informants or the socially shared cultural and social patterns of behavior in groups, data has played a central role. Some recent commentaries in the field criticize this tendency (e.g. Moisander, Valtonen & Hirsto 2009) and argue that so far consumption communities have represented merely an “epistemological exotica” (Askegaard & Linnet 2011). Instead, they vote for more contextualized perspectives where the focus would not be on studying the pursuit of consumption collectives of shared social identity but rather on broader social processes involved in collective consumption (ibid.). This also means that something other than individual identity projects or the lived experience of consumers is adopted as the unit of analysis (Moisander et al. 2009). This research adopts the interpretive framework of practice theory which has a different philosophical grounding and is a step in this direction. It helps to analyze collectives as heterogeneous and multiple social sites where practices are enacted (cf. Schau et al. 2009; Thomas et al. 2013).

In relation to brands in particular, previous research has concentrated mainly on forms of collectives that are elective and based on bonding between consumers who share an interest in a brand or consumption activity and accordingly other kinds of consumption collectives have been overlooked (Kates 2002; Weinberger & Wallendorf 2012). For instance, a recent definition states that a consumption collective is a group of consumers who “self-select into a group that shares a commitment to a product class, brand, consumption activity or consumer-based ideology” (Thomas et al. 2011). However, this definition is still narrow because it starts from the consumers as self-selecting agents and assumes some pre-existing commitment to a consumption object before the consumption collective is formed. Consumption collectives where consumption objects are not as central and the level and orientation of commitment varies have not been studied thoroughly. The literature needs further extension to account for more complexity in the role of consumption objects in consumption collectives, and the different orientations of members.

The heterogeneity and complexity in collective consumption regarding members’ characteristics as well as their relationships with each other and several market actors, brands, companies and consumption objects has not been fully theorized (e.g. Ostberg 2007; Thomas et al. 2013). The literature on brand communities in particular has been focused on their commercial and mass-mediated nature (Muñiz & O’Guinn 2001). Several studies have focused on a sociopsychological view of how brand community members self-identify with other brand users and develop a shared social identity that reinforces their relation with the brand (e.g. Algesheimer et al. 2005; Bagozzi & Dholakia 2006).

Nevertheless, the way brands can become intertwined in other kinds of collectives requires more research (cf. Kates 2004; Weinberger & Wallendorf 2012). The recent emphasis on online communities (Bagozzi & Dholakia 2006; Kozinets, Hemetsberger & Schau 2008) tends to downplay more traditional and face-to-face collective consumption that is also still relevant. The role of consumption collectives also needs to be identified from a broader market perspective, since they influence marketplace dynamics and are major contributors to marketing today (Thomas et al. 2013). Collectives engage consumers in ways that are perceived as authentic and relevant, such as by increasing interest in the brand by word-of-mouth, organizing various kinds of events, or partnering with the media. From a company's point of view, this is significant also in terms of marketing costs and efficiency.

The empirical context for research should be selected on a theoretical basis; its potential to inspire and help generate new theory should be the overriding criteria (Arnould et al. 2006; Arnould & Thompson 2005). Thick description alone is not enough to build theory, but instead contexts should be used to encourage comparison, to give "texture and veracity" to the theory (Arnould et al. 2006, 107). The context of this research differs from previous research on collective consumption by focusing on a different kind of brand that was not established by the company and yet was revived successfully in the market. The brand is not a technologically sophisticated or expensive durable consumer good in a highly competitive marketplace (cf. Muñiz & O'Guinn 2001) but a mundane, common type of footwear. The research also adds an important variation by studying collective consumption of brands in a Scandinavian context while many examples in the literature concern American brands (for exceptions, see Cova & Pace 2006; Ostberg 2007). Most importantly, not all of the consumption collectives emerging around the brand are brand-focused, by which I mean that while many brand community studies assume the consumption object to be central in the collective, this thesis identifies consumption collectives where it plays a less important role, which leads to new theoretical insights and enhanced potential for contribution.

In summary, there is a clear gap in consumer research that this study aims to address. The collective consumption of brands is viewed too narrowly; first, because the possibility of different collectives operating under a single brand is not duly acknowledged; secondly, because the role of brands in consumption collectives may vary more than has been assumed in previous research and third, because the role of consumption collectives in marketplace dynamics is not fully understood. Outlining this gap reveals the research purpose.

The purpose of the research is to extend the view of the collective consumption of brands. To achieve this purpose, the research has three interrelated objectives:

- I. To build a categorization scheme for heterogeneous consumption collectives around one brand
- II. To analyze the characteristics of consumption collectives around one brand
- III. To understand the role of consumption collectives in cultural brand revitalization

The first research objective extends the view of collective consumption of brands by addressing the heterogeneity and complexity of collectives, as well as by offering a new way to categorize them. The research objective is approached through an iterative process of linking theory and empirical data from the case study research. An in-depth theoretical review of the existing concepts in the literature is conducted and it results in an integrative theoretical synthesis as well as a new categorization scheme for heterogeneous consumption collectives around one brand. This categorization scheme is inspired by the empirical case and linked to previous theory. It consists of three different aspects: the focus of the collective; the structure of the collective; and also the role of the brand within the collective. The scheme takes into account the complexity of collective consumption under one brand, providing a holistic view of the phenomenon. It also provides a simple tool to categorize different consumption collectives in the market, making it possible to analyze their diversity and heterogeneity.

The second research objective extends the view of collective consumption by analyzing the characteristics of heterogeneous consumption collectives around one brand. The categorization scheme is used as a tool to characterize the collectives. For each consumption collective identified, these characteristics are discussed in terms of focus, structure, and the role of the brand. Several examples from the data are presented to empirically illustrate the heterogeneous consumption collectives under one brand umbrella. Next, the elements of practice in the consumption collectives are identified and analyzed through the practice theoretical interpretive framework, focusing on the elements of materials, meanings, and competences.

The third research objective extends the view of collective consumption of brands by building understanding of the role of consumption collectives in cultural brand revitalization. By conceptualizing the consumption collectives as social sites for different consumption practices where the brand plays differing roles, the dynamic nature of collective consumption is duly acknowledged. As a result, the role of consumption collectives in marketplace dynamics will be more broadly understood. An interpretation is provided for the brand's cultural revitalization. Rather than a managerially planned and executed process, cultural brand

revitalization takes place in consumption collectives and through the brand becoming an integral part of their practices.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

The structure of the thesis is described in Figure 1. The thesis begins with the introduction chapter, including an introduction to the phenomenon of interest, defining the core concepts and delineating the purpose of the research and objectives as well as the structure of the thesis. Chapter two reviews the literature on community and collective consumption. The review provides the conceptual framework for the research by synthesizing and critically evaluating the body of previous literature that has studied similar phenomena. At the end of this chapter, a new categorization scheme is introduced that addresses the first research objective. The third chapter concentrates on the interpretive framework of the research which comes from practice theory, and discusses how the research was conducted. It starts by outlining the philosophical position adopted in the research and continues on to explicate practice theory in detail as well as discussing the research strategy, data generation and analysis conducted. Chapter four engages with the empirical data. Using the categorization scheme, it addresses the second research objective by analyzing the heterogeneous collectives around one brand. Chapter five addresses the third research objective, providing an interpretation of how the collectives contribute to cultural brand revitalization. Chapter six provides a summary and theoretical and managerial implications as well as further research directions.

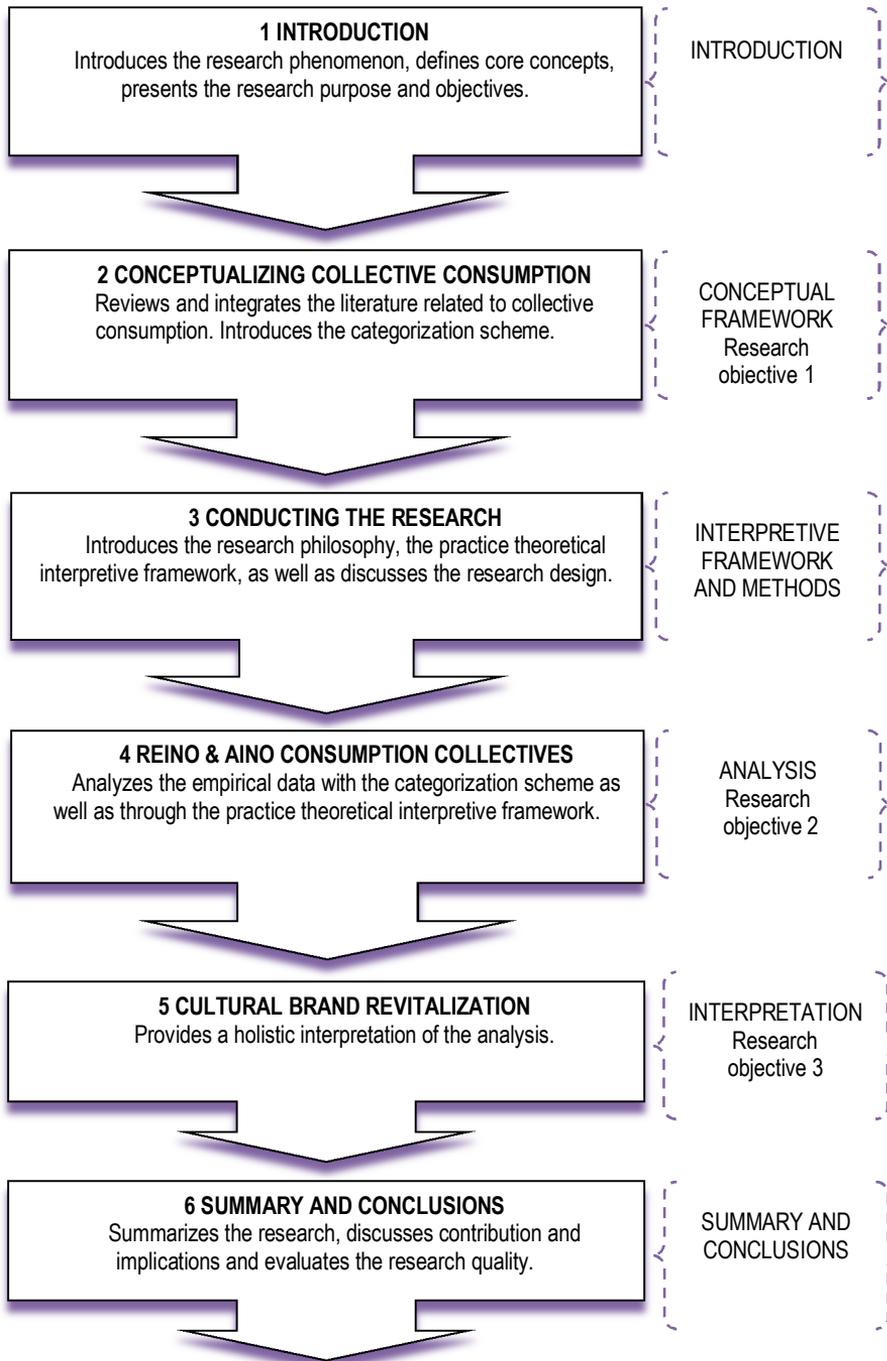


Figure 1. The structure of the thesis.

2 CONCEPTUALIZING COLLECTIVE CONSUMPTION

To extend the view of collective consumption of brands, one has to fully understand where the extant view is rooted. Even though this thesis focuses on collectives rather than communities, many features are shared between the two concepts. At the background of research on marketplace communities and cultures there is a much wider discussion on community that contextualizes this study. Community has a long history in various fields of social science, and has only more recently become recognized in marketing and consumer research. This chapter first traces the evolution of the concept of community in the social sciences. It highlights some key schools of thought and influences on how communities have been perceived in different times and by different fields.

Next, the chapter links community and consumption by providing a discussion of what consumption is about and how it relates to social life in general. Next, the chapter focuses on the study of marketplace cultures within the Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) literature, their definitions and characteristics. Finally, the chapter offers a critical synthesis of this literature and identifies areas that have been understudied. A novel categorization scheme for consumption collectives around one brand is presented that addresses the first research objective.

2.1 Evolution of the community concept

The concept of community is one of the oldest concepts in the social sciences. In its infancy, the concept was closely linked with discussions on the effects of modernization on society. Social changes taking place in the modern society such as urbanization, industrialization, the decline of religion, the rise of capitalism and the growth of science affected the development of sociology as a science (Ritzer 2008). Many classical sociologists were influenced by the Counter-Enlightenment movement that instead of emphasizing reason and the individual's rationality, argued for tradition, imagination, emotion and religion as necessary components of social life. In these discussions, community was defined as something that is in danger of disappearing in modern society, becoming replaced by other forms of social organization (Bauman 2001). At its most basic sense, community denotes to

people who have something in common (values, ways of life, shared goals) united by mutual relationships (Bruhn 2005).

2.1.1 Community in classical sociology

Tönnies (1888/1957) was one of the first sociologists to use the term community (*Gemeinschaft*) to refer to a pre-industrial or primitive social form of human relations. Community relations, according to him, were firstly based on blood-relations (kinship) and then on physical proximity (neighborhood) or intellectual proximity (friendship), but they were always ends in themselves. An ordinary human being “in the long run and for the average of cases – feels best and most cheerful if he is surrounded by his family and relatives” (Tönnies 1888/1957, 43). Further, community relations were based on the “natural will” of human beings, characterized by a shared understanding and mutual affirmation. For Tönnies, community relations were especially characteristic of the feudal or tribal forms of social organization, and therefore represented the “youth” of society (Loomis & McKinney 1957, 2–3).

On the contrary, the relations characteristic of modern society, representing the adulthood of society, are those of the *Gesellschaft*. By this concept, Tönnies refers to a social form where each individual is separated from one another and there is a tension between human beings because there is no natural basis for solidarity. Instead, each individual is self-interested, controls his own possessions and can exchange them with other individuals to gain value. Thus, all relations between human beings in the *Gesellschaft* are contractual (Tönnies 1888/1957, 71). Tönnies tends to accept Marx’s theory of capitalism and argues that in the *Gesellschaft*, capitalists and merchants (owners of money) are in power and those supplying labor are disadvantaged (*ibid.* 91–93).

Tönnies was by no means the only classical social theorist to suggest a dichotomy between the old, rural, neighbourly and affectual community as a direct opposite to the new modern, urban, individualistic, and rational society. Similarly, Durkheim (1893), a key French sociologist, defined the concepts of mechanic and organic solidarity. In a society characterized by mechanic solidarity, there are strong common beliefs and sentiments that make people homogeneous and simultaneously create a strong collective consciousness that regulates people’s behavior. On the other hand, in an organically solidary society, the division of labor stimulated by individualism and differentiation leads to a weaker collective consciousness, because people are heterogeneous in their values and moral (Loomis & McKinney 1957, 13). However, the Durkheimian urban society also enables greater freedom and choice for individuals (Bruhn 2005). Loomis and

McKinney also mention other classic sociologists' binary categories related to modern versus premodern societies as analogous to Tönnies' theory.

In the view of classical sociologists, community is in danger of extinction because of modernization. This view was carried onto the research of urban sociology by the Chicago school researchers such as Park, Firth and Redfield in the following decades. These urban sociologists believed that the urban environment with emphasis on commercialism, complex division of labor and large-scale bureaucracy caused major problems to traditional ways of life (Bruhn 2005, 33). In relation to that development, commerce and consumer culture have often been viewed in a negative light; as engines of individualization and materialism that replace the more positive, affectual ties of the community. The remnants of this discussion can be seen in the work of classic theorists (e.g. Marx 1867/1932; Veblen 1899/2000) as well as more recent approaches of critical theory (Adorno & Horkheimer 1944/2000) and postmodern cultural critique of consumer society (Jameson 1991; Lasn 1999; Klein 2000). Thus in a postmodern consumer society, the market is claimed to have conquered an ever-increasing part of our social life. As such, it is seen to influence also institutions, such as family and home that used to be strictly separated from the impersonal, monetizing transactions taking place between strangers in the market (Kozinets 2002, 22).

2.1.2 Community as a social construction

The concept of community in the classical texts and in much of urban sociology retained its inherent ontological status as a collective that exists independent of its members or their actions (Cohen 1985). This view inherently represents structuralism in its traditional sense, i.e. the structure of a community is seen to predetermine individual behavior. On the other hand, from the point of view of symbolic interaction and social constructionism (Berger & Luckmann 1966), community, like any other social structure, must be conceived of as being constructed from human interaction.

One of the founders of symbolic interactionism, Mead (1934/1952), claims that the organized community or social group is actually what gives the individual their unity of self. By adopting the attitudes of the "generalized other" in a social group, the individual develops a personality. In other words, community is needed in order to become a self. Further, Blumer (1969), in defining the principles of symbolic interactionism, states that human action (and interaction) is the basis of society. Society, then, exists and must be seen only in action. From this point of view, a community does not exist outside of its continuous reproduction by its members (Algesheimer & Gurău 2008). From the social constructionist

perspective, the symbolic boundaries of a community, i.e. how the community defines itself in relation to other communities is more important than the physical boundaries (e.g. kinship, neighborhood, locality ties) (Cohen 1985, 13). Cohen (ibid., 20) further argues that the communality within a community need not mean that the thoughts, ideas and behavior of members are uniform. Instead, the community provides shared forms (ways of behaving or practices) the content of which (meanings) varies among its members. In this way, individuality and communality are not mutually exclusive. A sense of community means that members themselves feel belongingness to the group, an emotional connection with the other members as well as a specific role within it (Bruhn 2005). For the individual, community memberships that allow them to feel valued, protected and safe, are the most meaningful and important (Sarason 1974).

As the focus started to shift away from defining the community as a form of social organization (e.g. Hillery 1955) toward concentrating on the sense of community felt by members (e.g. McMillan & Chavis 1986), researchers started to realize that a community need not be defined by its physical boundaries or face-to-face interaction. Anderson's (1983) concept of imagined community denotes to how a particular type of community, the nation state, is actually produced and reproduced, in other words, imagined by the people. He argues that with the development of books, novels and newspapers, united fields of communication were developed which allowed people to feel that they were experiencing the same events with other people in the same area. Thus, a national consciousness was developed.

This useful notion has later been adapted to the study of virtual communities where interaction between community members is largely free from the restrictions of time and space (e.g. Rheingold 1993; Kozinets 1997; 1999). Virtual communities are often characterized as communities of interest where the members share a passion or common interest but may not have anything else in common (cf. Heinonen 2011). However, they may also develop into more goal-oriented forms of community where the members begin to build a shared identity and purpose and to have stronger relations with each other (Heinonen 2011; Kozinets 1997). However, by relaxing the boundaries of community toward defining it based on people's subjective experience also creates difficulties for the concept. It becomes challenging to draw the boundaries of a community from the outside, because it depends on the experience of individuals at any given time.

Another more recent concept in the vein of social constructionist theories of community is the concept of community-of-practice. This concept has been introduced in the field of organizational learning (Wenger 1998; Cox 2005). Like other social constructionist views on community, it emphasizes the local and social construction of meaning (Cox 2005). The focus is on identity and the different

trajectories of people who become members. These members are heterogeneous and united by “mutually defining identities” (Cox 2005, 532). However, there are differences between uses of the concept (Cox 2005). Both the terms community and practice are not easy to define, and sometimes the concept denotes to more tightly knit and geographically collocated group that shares a craft or practice, at other times to a virtual loosely bound and informal group that coheres around a work process.

2.1.3 Community as networks

In the 1980s, the concept of community was re-evaluated due to the emergence of social network analysis and network theory. Wellman (1979; Wellman & Wortley 1990) and colleagues argued that in order to avoid the a priori confinement of community theory to the analysis of distinct groups and territorial units, a new conceptualization of the “community question” was in order. Viewing communality from a network point of view enabled one to look at the diverse and complex social networks of people. Wellman argued that community is not indeed lost but can even be liberated with the help of weak ties that tend to provide indirect access to a wide variety of resources than do stronger, more socially homogeneous ties (Granovetter 1973; Wellman 1979; Wellman & Wortley 1990).

Thus, today people belong to numerous networks in which there are both real-life and virtual interactions, and which provide different resources, intimacy, and other rewards for members (Bruhn 2005). Communities are volitional and loosely bound flexible networks. This perspective introduced resources into the community discussion and later gave birth to the studies on social capital (Coleman 1988; Putnam 2000). Social capital is defined as the value or resources gained from social networks and the “norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (Putnam 2000, 19). It has been argued that a great amount of social capital translates to benefits for health and well-being, reduced crime rates, increased democracy and safety, and economic prosperity (*ibid.*).

2.1.4 Community in postmodernism

Finally, as a consequence of cultural discourses on postmodernism within the academia in the 1990s, a new conceptualization of community has emerged, linking it with individuality. According to Featherstone (1991, 63), postmodernism denotes simultaneously to three things: 1) a change in the artistic, intellectual, and academic fields as they struggle over defining the canon 2) changes in the broader cultural

sphere in terms of modes of production, circulation and dissemination of symbolic goods involving changes in power-balances and interdependencies 3) changes in the everyday practices and experiences of different groups who “as a result of the first and second set of changes start to use regimes of signification in different ways and develop new means of orientation and identity structures”. This thesis mainly discusses postmodernism in the third aspect, as inflicting change in the everyday practices and experiences of groups toward redefined individuality and communality, which can also be called neo-tribalism (Maffesoli 1996).

There are basically two different positions taken toward the effects of postmodernism: the negative stance and the positive or liberating stance (Goulding, Shankar & Elliott 2002). In both, consumption and consumer culture have a significant role. It can be argued that our communal life is now intertwined with the marketplace and postmodernism has affected this development. Consumption is increasingly becoming the means through which individuals build their identity and the marketplace provides the resources and a context for such activities. Thus, consumer culture and marketing have a significant place in the postmodern debates (Jameson 1991; Brown 1993; Firat, Dholakia & Venkatesh 1995). As argued in the previous chapter, the “loss of community” was specifically a characteristic feature of the modern society. It was thought that the modern, urban environment detached people from their communal roots and bound them into contractual relationships. One of the core critiques of modernism by postmodernists is indeed its inherent individualism. Modernism is rooted in Cartesian philosophy that emphasizes reason and the search for objective truth, as well as Kantian philosophy of the uncontested position of the thinking subject as the center of the cognitive world (Firat & Venkatesh 1993).

In postmodernism, individuality and communality are both redefined. The individual subject becomes decentered, meaning that persons have multiple fragmented selves and roles depending on the context (Gabriel & Lang 1995). There is no longer a single, stable basis for identity, but instead, lack of commitment characterizes the postmodern subject. The human subject is no longer the cognitive, self-knowing, unified and independent agent as described in modernism. Instead, identities are culturally and historically conditioned and constructed through language. The negative stance to postmodernism claims that this fragmentation leads to a moral, social and identity crisis due to depthlessness and focus on surface reality (Jameson 1991). The more positive postmodernists claim that fragmentation can lead to liberation of the consumer by offering endless means through which the consumer can construct and express him or herself (Firat & Venkatesh 1995; Firat et al. 1995).

In postmodernity, it is acknowledged that the old forms of community are losing significance (Goulding et al. 2002). However, some postmodernists suggest

that there is a rise of new communal forms, such as neo-tribalism (Maffesoli 1996); neither fixed nor permanent forms of communality, held together by a certain ambiance or state of mind. It has also been argued that small communities formed on affective instead of contractual basis are the defining characteristic of the postmodern era where the self “can only find fulfillment in his relations with others” (Maffesoli 1996, 10). The tribes of today’s society are characterized no longer by kinship relations or identification with a certain place, but more by a shared lifestyle or taste preferences. In each tribe, the person plays a different role and these become pieces of their identity. Tribes are characterized by “fluidity, occasional gatherings and dispersal” (ibid., 76).

2.1.5 Summary of different understandings of community

The concept of community has been widely discussed in the social sciences from different angles (Table 1). Community has evolved from a geographically bound rural and archaic form of social organization toward being defined as more fluid and dependent on the members’ own definitions.

The classical sociologists were mostly interested in a macro view of how stable social structures are formed. The symbolic interactionists, on the other hand, shifted focus to the cognitive and phenomenological experience of community by individual members, created in social interaction. The identification of social capital provided a reinterpretation of the concept and identified linkages between the micro-level of social interaction and the meso-level of communities, organizations, and associations (Field 2003, 7). The introduction of social capital brought an instrumental view of communities where community relations were considered to be beneficial for members for various reasons. Postmodern theories finally conceptualized community as part of the identity play at the marketplace where consumers join ephemeral tribes.

Table 1. Understandings of community

Understanding of community	Discipline	Authors, time	Perspective
Rural community linked with physical or kinship bonds as opposed to modern society and urbanism.	Sociology	Tönnies 1888, Durkheim 1893, Simmel 1903, Weber 1930, the Chicago School of sociology 1920–1930 (Park, Burgess, Wirth, Redfield)	Community as a social structure.
A symbolically constructed system of values, norms and moral codes providing a sense of identity for members who are in social interaction.	Sociology and social psychology	Symbolic interactionists such as Mead (1934), Blumer (1969), Cooley (1909, 1902), Cohen (1985), Wenger (1998)	Community from the inside; features characterizing them and their members.
An imagined construction of a sense of community without geographical proximity.	Sociology and political theory, theory of virtual communities	Anderson (1983), Rheingold (1993), Kozinets (1999)	Community as an abstract social construction.
“A sense of community” is a psychological experience of belonging and identification with elements of mutual influence, integration, fulfillment of needs and a shared emotional connection.	Psychology	Sarason (1974), McMillan and Chavis (1986)	What community means from the point of view of an individual member.
Social relations within more or less densely knit networks where social capital is formed.	Sociology	Bourdieu (1977), Wellman (1979); Coleman (1988), Putnam (2000), Lin (2001)	Communities as instrumental for some other purpose.
An ephemeral tribe formed around totems that signal shared identity.	Cultural theories, postmodernism	Maffesoli (1996), Featherstone (1991), Firat & Venkatesh (1993)	Communities as momentary emotional experiences.

The perspective to community adopted in this thesis draws inspiration from postmodern understandings of community. Firstly, postmodernism brings an interest toward the micro-practices of consumers in their everyday life; the plurality and fragmentation related to consumption (Goulding 2003, 156). Thus, I strongly agree that people today long for community relations and a sense of belonging. As the power of institutions to determine identities has decreased, consumers acquire resources for their self-construction from elsewhere. One means with which to achieve this is consumption and it has become even more central because we live in a consumer society. Yet, individuality does not mean alienation or disintegration from community altogether. Rather, products and brands that offer “linking value” (Cova 1997), the ability for people to feel connected with one another through using these resources, are likely to succeed in the market. However, the argument about today’s communities being ephemeral, momentary tribes does not tell the whole story. There are still enduring social relations in more stable communities as well. A good example is that of the family (Epp & Price 2008).

This thesis supports the argument that relations within consumption collectives are loosely bound, flexible and intertwined. This causes complexity in trying to draw boundaries to where one collective starts and another ends. It is also why the core concept of this research is consumption collective rather than community. Rather than analyze the fragmented and heterogeneous experiences of community from a phenomenological point of view (e.g. Goulding et al. 2002), what is analyzed in the data are several fragmented and differentiated collectives that are united by their shared practices and consumption objects. Thus, the collectives are not analyzed from the individual members’ perspective or as stable social structures. The level of analysis is in between these levels.

2.2 Linking community and consumption

This chapter reviews the meaning of community for the field of consumption research. It is considered necessary in order to achieve the research purpose of extending the view of the collective consumption of brands, because brands are inherently linked with consumption and the market. Yet, it can also be argued that consumption is actually more than just a market-facing activity of purchasing or acquiring products and services. Rather, consumption can be seen as an important part of the social and everyday life. The stream of literature that has made this connection most visible is Consumer Culture Theory (CCT). Sociological interpretations of consumption are discussed in more detail before going on to the in-depth literature review of collective consumption in marketing and consumer research.

2.2.1 The social nature of consumption

Economic theory has traditionally shown little interest in consumption, because it has been viewed only as the opposite side of production; as expressed in the form of demand. Because marketing has been heavily influenced by economics, paying attention to consumer behavior long meant paying attention to the purchase process rather than taking into account the whole consumption cycle from acquisition to use and disposition (Arnould & Thompson 2005). Yet, with the emergence of consumer culture, it has become more and more evident that consumption is much more interesting and even consumer needs are actually culturally defined (Slater 1997; Sassatelli 2007).

There are several theories in the social sciences about the role of consumption in human societies. The assumption inherent in much of marketing theory has been that consumers buy the goods that best fulfill their needs. Consumers are believed to make comparisons between the presumed and real properties of a consumer good, and their current needs. It is only when there is a good fit between these two that they are likely to purchase the good, maximizing the use of their economic resources along the way. As argued by Ilmonen (2007), this theory has provided a most unproblematic theory of consumption in the social sciences and psychology. The basic explanatory factor has been that there is always some need that the consumer is trying to fulfill. As a critique to this perspective, it has been argued that consumption is not directly about fulfilling needs, because there are actually no universal needs. Needs are always social (Slater 1997). This means that even though we can say that we need to eat, sleep, drink, have physical shelter and rest, we have not yet said anything about human action. In order for these needs to be realized, a human being needs to channel them onto something; some specific wants or desires to fulfill these needs. These wants and desires are always historically changing and culturally defined. They reflect what the person values or how in general they think people should live in society. They are influenced by the individual's experiences, socialization processes (such as family, schooling, church) collective memory and the things that are available in the market (Ilmonen 2007). Thus, the decisions regarding preferences and tastes are also key in trying to understand consumption (Sassatelli 2007).

Consumption is then not about calculating and maximizing our resources in trying to fulfill our needs as traditional economic theory and the myth of the "homo economicus" suggests. Neither is it completely irrational or without any purpose. The first sociological explanations of consumption proposed that consumption is a classificatory act. Thorsten Veblen's (1899/2000) theory of the leisure class claimed that the higher social classes use consumption as the means to distinguish themselves from other classes. As the luxury items consumed started to

“trickle down” to the lower classes, the higher classes had to continuously pursue new ways of showing their status, giving consumption its dynamism. His theory has been criticized, because in today’s consumer society, trends also flow across social classes. Furthermore, Veblen assumes that the meanings of consumer goods would be the same once and for all. Yet, they tend to change based on the consumers’ age, gender and life experiences (Holt 1997; Sassatelli 2007). Thus, cultural meaning of consumption goods needs to be conceived as more complex and constituted from both public and private meanings (Richins 1994).

Later Pierre Bourdieu (1984) built his theory of distinction on similar type of arguments. He claimed that tastes are largely regulated by people’s upbringing and education (the “habitus”), and consumption provides a classificatory mechanism that upholds social hierarchies. Rather than those choices being consciously made, Bourdieu emphasized that they are embodied and internalized as dispositions. Yet, Bourdieu has also been criticized for not recognizing the agency of consumers enough and the possibility that there may be omnivorous consumption styles that do not merely replicate a hierarchical logic (Sassatelli 2007, 95).

Other theories of consumption have included viewing consumption as an arena of power and manipulation. These explanations emerged especially from a critical stance toward the influence of market in people’s lives. It was claimed that production actually determines people’s wants and people are mere puppets in system (e.g. Adorno & Horkheimer 1944/2000). The critical school’s explanation has been counteracted by arguing that consumers are not passive, but they actively participate in marketplace dynamics. Hence, consumers creatively respond to goods by interactive acts of consumption, or consumption practices, appropriating and reappropriating these marketplace resources (Sassatelli 2007). In particular, the subversive acts of consumption are likely to take place in collective contexts, such as subcultures.

In the 1970s, anthropologists provided another type of theory for consumption that centered on the realization that consumption did not only have meaning for Western, modern societies or ones where consumer culture is fully developed. Instead, goods and consumption had a significant role in pre-modern societies too (Douglas & Isherwood 1979/1996). This argument was supported by the idea of embeddedness: how the economy is always embedded with social relations (Polanyi 1944/2001). These theories abandoned the idea that consumption is merely about gaining status through displaying the appropriate items. Instead, consumption was explained as important in maintaining social relations. According to Douglas and Isherwood (1979/1996, vii), consumption goods were mediating materials that helped people in relating to each other. They continued to argue that the role of consumption and goods was also to help people make sense of the world in

general by offering “marking services” (ibid., xxii). In order to do this, all consumption goods got their meaning in a system, in relation to other goods.

Thus, consumption was viewed more like a language of its own. In this theory, the public use of goods became more interesting than private use, because goods were used in particular to make visible the cultural categories. Thus, by consuming we engage in cultural reproduction: we “sustain, evolve, defend, contest, imagine and reject culturally specific, meaningful ways of life (Slater 1997, 4)”. Grant McCracken’s (1986) model of meaning transfer in consumer culture is inspired by this theory. He claimed that advertising and fashion move meanings from the culturally constituted world into the goods which consumer then acquire and use. Through consumption rituals related to possession, exchange, maintenance and divestment, consumers engage in modifying and reworking those meanings. For this thesis, the anthropological notion about the public use of goods and their role in maintaining social relations is central. However, the argument about goods being the containers of meaning that consumers then absorb through rituals has been reconceptualized in practice theory. Meanings are not seen as static and contained within goods or objects, but dynamic and continuously produced through social practices (Reckwitz 2002; Warde 2005).

To counteract the depiction of consumption as language/text interpretation, practice theories have paid more attention to contexts of consumption and how institutions mediate our consumption practices, identities and interaction. They have attempted to replace the image of the consumer as mere interpreter of texts and communicator by that of an embodied subject who is situated within space and time (Sassatelli 2007, 108). Thus, consumption is not only expressive but also performative action.

In summary, what is central to the sociological and anthropological theories of consumption is the notion that consumption is much more than rational action or fulfilling needs. It is also more than buying goods in the market. More interesting are the manifold ways in which consumers appropriate and reappropriate the resources they acquire from the market. Also, consumption is very important in the maintenance, negotiation and development of social relations, which is one reason for why more interest should be focused on collective consumption.

2.2.2 Consumer Culture Theory

While community has continued to interest sociologists, the marketing and consumer research fields were very much oriented toward the individual consumer until the beginning of the 1990s. As part of the interpretive consumer research stream that began to take form in the 1980s, researchers started to use

methodologies that allowed them to pay more attention to the collective and social aspects of consumption (Arnould & Thompson 2005). Even though often the focus was still on the individual consumer; the consumers were increasingly situated within the broader sociocultural context. This stream of interpretive and cultural consumer research has much later gained the today well-known umbrella term of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT).

After Arnould & Thompson's review article in 2005 where this term was coined, there has been some discussion on the appropriateness of the CCT "academic brand name" (Arnould & Thompson 2007) to refer to all interpretive and cultural consumer research (Moisander, Peñaloza & Valtonen 2008). This concern came apparent partly due to the fact that Arnould and Thompson's article included research mainly published in the *Journal of Consumer Research* and to a large extent by North-American researchers. However, in the field of collective consumption in particular, the contribution of European researchers is foundational (e.g. Cova 1997; Goulding et al. 2002). It can also be emphasized that CCT is not a single theory but rather a plurality of theoretical perspectives and also a community of researchers interested in the cultural aspects of consumption (Arnould & Thompson 2007; Moisander, Peñaloza & Valtonen 2009). Originally intended partly as an institutionalizing move to help legitimize interpretive research, the CCT brand name has provided a concise framework to help position one's research. CCT has become shorthand for referring to a legitimate body of research that represents one of the three main specializations in consumer research together with Behavioral Decision Theory and Information Processing (MacInnis & Folkes 2010). In addition, one problem of using alternative labels such as interpretive consumer research or cultural consumer research is their ambiguity. It could be argued that all research is interpretive. Culture is also often misunderstood to refer to something much narrower than what CCT attempts to cover. In my use of the term CCT, I want to see it as referring to a broad spectrum of research and including a global community of researchers.

CCT is a family of theoretical perspectives connected with an interest in studying the way culture and the social reality are constituted in and through the market (Arnould & Thompson 2005; Moisander & Valtonen 2006). The starting assumption is that it is essential to study consumer culture because of its pervading influence on the ways of life, identities, practices and experiences of people today (Sassatelli 2007). Consumer culture itself denotes to "a social arrangement in which the relation between lived culture and social resources, between meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources on which they depend, is mediated through markets" (Slater 1997, 8). In other words, marketplace resources mediate our understanding of self and other people as well as help us categorize and orient to the world around us. In consumer culture, consumption has partly replaced

religion or citizenship as this kind of defining principle. For CCT, consumption is indeed much more than need satisfaction or rational behaviour. It is an integral part of the everyday life of consumers and driven by the need of consumers to continuously self-create themselves with marketplace resources. CCT researchers share the belief that consumers, producers and marketers alike are actively involved in the production of cultural meaning (Moisander & Valtonen 2006, 10).

CCT has worked as the springboard to studies on marketplace cultures where communities in consumption have been identified and analyzed. The study of marketplace cultures derives from the interest in the context of consumption rather than the inside of a consumers' mind as in the main rival approach of Behavioural Decision Theory. The context of consumption necessarily involves other people. The argument is that through participating in these collectives, consumers are able to "foster collective identifications grounded in shared beliefs, meanings, mythologies, rituals, social practices, and status systems" (Arnould & Thompson 2005, 874). Researchers within the marketplace cultures stream have been specifically interested in the cultural blueprints for action offered by consumption practices taking place within collectives (ibid.). They have also investigated how these collectives are constructed as special, distinctive, self-selected and transitional worlds of their own through the pursuit of similar consumption interests (e.g. Belk & Costa 1998; Kozinets 2002). For many of the studied collectives, consumption has provided a "raison d'être for forstering community, whether fleeting or permanent" (Joy & Li 2012, 150).

2.3 Previous research on marketplace cultures

It is hard to define a specific author or group of authors that started the research movement around collective consumption phenomena. The first influences might have come from the Consumer Behaviour Odyssey, which was a 1980s research project in the US intended to observe people not as individuals but as members of groups and communities. However, one strong influence was also the postmodern movement in the 1990s where consumers first started to be viewed as active, empowered producers of value and cultural meaning (Featherstone 1991; Firat & Venkatesh 1993; Firat et al. 1995). Later, these themes have been brought up in many other marketing discourses including the service-dominant logic, consumption experience, and collaborative innovation (Cova & Dalli 2009). Postmodernism also discussed the aesthetization of consumption and consumers' search for self-identity in the market. The critical stance claimed that this would alienate consumers and force them to participate in impersonal market relations. To this discussion, community emerged as the positive side. Thus, consumer

researchers awoke the somewhat romantic notion of community as a harmonious way of life, fostering human relationships even in impersonal, rationalistic capitalist societies. In a way, consumption communities represented the epitome of consumer empowerment. As argued more recently by Cova and Dalli (2009, 5): “Communities foster consumers’ strength and ability. Consumer resistance to marketing reaches an extreme when consumers congregate around a brand or activity”. While scholars published research around consumption tribes and subcultures already before the 2000s, the development of a more managerial concept in “brand community” finally caught the interest of researchers also in the broader marketing field.

Next, the different concepts introduced in the marketplace cultures stream of Consumer Culture Theory literature are reviewed and discussed, including subcultures of consumption, brand communities and consumption tribes. First, traditional communities in a consumption context are reviewed.

2.3.1 Traditional communities

With the Consumer Behaviour Odyssey project in the mid 1980s, consumer researchers entered new contexts and sites of consumption where people often consumed together and collectively. Examples included Belk, Sherry and Wallendorf’s study of the swap meet (1988), Wallendorf and Arnould’s (1991) study on the rituals of Thanksgiving in American families, and Sherry, Heisley and McGrath’s (1993) study of the farmers’ market. These examples are defined here as studies of traditional communities, because their activities are related to a specific geographical place, such as a village and often membership is stable and based on kinship and local relations. The collective consumption within these contexts is not overly commercial in nature, but consumption plays a role. Thus, they are the closest to a traditional community where the boundaries were very well defined and most often the community norms defined a person’s way of life holistically.

Belk and colleagues’ (1988) article of the swap meet is mainly a methodological paper, but it has some insights coming from the rich ethnographic description regarding collective consumption. For instance, they note the hierarchy of sellers in the swap meet that is recognized by sellers and buyers alike, as well as features of the shared culture such as a certain liminality and role fluidity, and sellers and buyers forming personal relationships with each other. All in all, they refer to the metaphor of family, because buyers and sellers come to the meet in small groups and engage in social interaction with each other.

Wallendorf and Arnould’s (1991) study of Thanksgiving pays attention to how consumption is used to negotiate who belongs to the family and what kind of roles

they have. Practices such as viewing photographs together and telling stories are described as part of the ritualistic consumption within a family. Co-opting and decommodifying products is considered as consumers' productive activity and part of creating family belongingness. Sherry and colleagues (1993) study the urban farmer's market and view it as a periodic community where certain member roles and relationships occur. For the residents in the area, the market is a communal symbol as well, giving them a sense of nostalgia and fulfilling a longing toward communal relations.

In summary, with the introduction of qualitative methodologies such as ethnography into consumer research, researchers started to realize the collective aspects of consumption. These were first analyzed in relation to instances and places where consumers interacted in relation to consumption. The tradition was later developed into studies of servicescapes (Sherry 1998) and the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore 1998). On the other hand, the interactions between consumers and producers in jointly producing the culture have been studied by Peñaloza (2001) who focused on the American rodeo and stock show as a place where consumers and producers together engaged in cultural meaning-making, as well as baseball consumption by Holt (1995), who emphasized the meaning of shared experience of socialization and play with other spectators.

The analysis of brandfests (McAlexander & Schouten 1998) and the Burning Man festival (Kozinets 2002) continued to pay attention to specific settings where consumers share consumption experiences and engage in cultural meaning-making. Kozinets (2002) theorized the Burning Man as a temporary hypercommunity, where consumers could experience localized and caring and sharing relations for a short period of time before the community dispersed again. More recently, Weinberger and Wallendorf (2012) refer to a more traditional community as they discuss intracommunity gift giving in New Orleans Mardi Gras celebrations. Their argument is that while collective consumption literature has paid increasing attention to communities where consumers choose to be members, other kinds of communities have been overlooked. Their definition of community denotes to a "broadly interdependent set of social relations in geographic, enduring, corporeal social contexts in which most of daily life is lived and a basic sense of moral obligation to others is foundational" (Weinberger & Wallendorf 2012, 82).

However, the stream of research that has mostly considered collective aspects of consumption developed into another direction, and introduced specific concepts to denote to the structural properties of consumption collectives based on bonding and shared consumption interests, such as subcultures of consumption, brand communities and consumption tribes.

2.3.2 Subcultures of consumption

In the early 1990s the concept of subcultures of consumption was introduced (Arnould & Price 1993; Celsi, Rose & Leigh 1993; Schouten & McAlexander 1995). This stream was influenced by studies of subcultures more generally in the fields of sociology and cultural studies. Deviant youth groups and gangs had already been studied in the Chicago School in the 1920s. Originally, the prefix sub in the word subculture meant that these groups were somehow problematic: they opposed the prevailing society and therefore posed a threat to social order (Kozinets 2001; DeBurgh-Woodman & Brace-Gowan 2007). However, it was the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies that really took an interest on the relationship between subcultures and style, including especially consumption styles (Hughes 2009; Goulding et al. 2002). Hebdige's (1979) study on the youth subcultures in Britain claimed that as youth subcultures invent new oppositional meanings to commodities, they can fracture and challenge the consensus and resist marginalization and the hegemony of dominant classes. Subcultural participation was thus linked with social class and strife between the dominant and subordinate groups in society, such as with the punk subculture (Fox 1987). However, with postmodern social theorizing, it was soon realized that subcultures were becoming sites for creativity and self-expression that were not restricted to a particular social class (Goulding et al. 2002). Subcultures started to be seen as connected with leisurely pursuits and participating in them no longer demanded withdrawal from mainstream society.

In the field of consumer research, the study of subcultures was first connected with strong consumer experiences. Even though Celsi and colleagues (1993) did not directly call the skydiving group a subculture, they already noted some characteristics and features that were later identified again and again by several other authors, such as a distinct social hierarchy of beginners, intermediates and experts, and shared rituals and practices, including a special language. They also identified that the reason people had started doing the sport was often related to maintaining social relations. As the skydivers progressed, gaining social recognition within the skydiving community was an important motive for continuing, and barriers of exit became quite high. The concept of "communitas" from Turner (1969) was also introduced to explain the feeling of community and belongingness that is created as people experience a liminal state together (see also Arnould & Price 1993). Celsi and colleagues hinted toward the idea that consumption communities differ from traditional communities because the feeling of community is created despite differences in the members' race, gender, age or social class. Later, this idea has been developed further to argue that within a subculture, there are differences between members' consumption practices and

preferred consumption meanings based on these elective affinities, such as race, gender, age, or sexuality (Kozinets 2001; Kates 2002).

Arnould and Price (1993) studied river rafting in their ethnography that focused on extraordinary experiences. They also used Turner's concept of *communitas* and shared rituals to explain what the river rafting consumers experienced. In both cases, skydiving and river rafting, the sense of community was created in face-to-face interaction as people engaged in the consumption activity together. In the case of Arnould and Price's study, the people's sense of community evolved during the couple of days they spent on the trip. They also note that community developed between people who came to the trip together (e.g. families, relatives) as well as between strangers and between the service providers and customers.

As argued above, subcultures have traditionally been characterized by their significant influence on the lifestyle of their members as well as their resistance to dominant hierarchies of control. As one of the first classic studies on collective consumption, Schouten and McAlexander's (1995) ethnography on the Harley-Davidson clubs introduced the concept of subculture of consumption. They defined a subculture of consumption as "a distinctive subgroup of society that self-selects on the basis of a shared commitment to a particular product class, brand, or consumption activity" (ibid. 43). Further, subcultures were characterized by an identifiable, hierarchical social structure, a unique ethos or set of shared beliefs and values, and unique jargons, rituals, and modes of symbolic expression. The social structure of the Harley-Davidson subculture consisted of a soft core and hard core of members with differing ranks based on their experience and membership length. However, Schouten and McAlexander (1995, 48–49) also identified several different subgroups that interpreted the ethos slightly differently. To outsiders, the groups looked similar but there were differences and members tended to gravitate toward the group that was most aligned with their interest or life situation, even though within the subgroups there was a lot of homogeneity. The groups also had different attitudes toward one another based on a hierarchy of authenticity. Later, a re-enquiry of the ethnography revealed, for instance, a feminist interpretation of the subcultural ethos (Martin, Schouten & McAlexander 2006).

Subcultures of consumption are generally characterized by high barriers of entry for both financial and social reasons. For instance, the Harley-Davidson ethos had a big influence on many areas of the members' lives and as the members' socialization process progressed, they had to invest a lot of resources into gaining status in the community. Schouten and McAlexander argued that a clever marketer can learn about the subculture to such extent that it is possible to support the socialization process and cultivate the commitment of existing members. The company in the Harley-Davidson case had a role in making the meanings related to the subculture more accessible to the wider public and was successful. However, it

was noted that the marketization of a subculture is also a threat to the subculture's authenticity and originality. After the first ethnography, the Harley Davidson case has provided a platform for further research related to collective consumption (e.g. Martin et al. 2006; Schouten, Martin & McAlexander 2007; Schembri 2009). The authors themselves later argued that the Harley Davidson subculture has evolved from a relatively monolithic homogeneous subculture toward a set of smaller microcultures or a complex brand community (Schouten et al. 2007, 69). This has largely been the result of growth and the market's participation in the subculture's involvement (cf. Goulding & Saren 2007).

Other consumption related subcultures that have been studied include the hip hop culture (Arthur 2006; Chalmers & Arthur 2008), sports including running, snowboarding, surfing, and skating (Donnelly & Young 1988; Chalmers 2006; Chalmers & Arthur 2008; DeBurgh-Woodman & Brace Gowan 2007; Quester, Beverland & Farrelly 2006; Beverland, Farrelly & Quester 2010), the gay subculture (Kates 2002; 2004), the X-files (Kozinets 1997), the Goth subculture (Goulding & Saren 2007; 2009), ravers (Goulding et al. 2002), Mexican immigrants (Peñaloza 1994), sports card collectors (Baker & Martin 2000), the Mountain Men (Belk & Costa 1998), and tattooing subculture (Bengtsson, Ostberg & Kjeldgaard 2005).

The subculture of consumption concept has been criticized firstly for being too vague, and betraying the nature of the original subculture concept, which denotes to a complete way-of-life, often deviant from the mainstream society (Hughes 2009). Not all subcultures are inherently about consumption and in their formation, cultural, historical, and social circumstances should be taken into account (De Burgh-Woodman & Brace-Gowan 2007). Also, a second type of critique has emerged that points out to the way social class, age, gender and other "elective affinities" influence people's consumption practices, causing a lot more fragmentation than what is suggested by the concept (Holt 1997; Kozinets 2001; Kates 2002). As a response to these critiques, some authors have reinterpreted the concept.

Kozinets in his study of "X-philes" (1997), fans of the science fiction tv-series X-files as well as in his study of Star Trek fans (2001) emphasized subcultures' relationship with the media and popular culture. Kozinets suggested that the subculture of consumption concept could be replaced with a broader term, culture of consumption. This concept covers an "interconnected system of commercially produced images, texts, and objects that particular groups use – through the construction of overlapping and even conflicting practices, identities and meanings – to make collective sense of their environments and to orient their members' experiences and lives" (Kozinets 2001, 68). In addition, Kozinets claimed that a culture of consumption is formed through the interplay of individuals, the subculture, the wider culture (related ideologies and practices of consumption) and

cultural producers (e.g. marketers, journalists, critics, academics...). Thus, a subculture does not exist in a silo but fuses cultural influences from many directions. Kozinets also importantly acknowledged that the practices of members may be different and even conflicting, which was a new contribution to research that had emphasized the similarities of members. Yet, he did not go forward in conceptualizing the different sub-collectives. Beverland et al. (2010) explored the construct of authenticity which appears in almost every study on consumption communities. They argued that members achieve authenticity by two means: through authenticating acts that stem from the individual's identity project as well as collective authoritative performances (see also Arnould & Price 2000). Members are motivated differently; some look for kinship whereas others want to affirm their sense of self. This causes heterogeneity in the values and consumption practices involved in pursuing subcultural authenticity.

Christina Goulding with her colleagues (Goulding & Saren 2007; 2009; Goulding et al. 2002) argued that in postmodern times, subcultures are characterized by their ability to allow people to construct and express identities. Thus, participating in subcultural activities is part of the postmodern fragmentation, pluralization and compartmentalization of identities and lifestyles (Goulding et al. 2002, 265; see also Firat & Venkatesh 1995). While a person may follow mainstream values and lead a conservative lifestyle during the weekdays, the same person may transgress social norms, take drugs, wear costumes and dance the night away in rave clubs during weekends. Thompson and Troester (2002) also followed the postmodern vein, yet they introduced a new concept, consumption microculture (see also Sirsi, Ward & Reingen 1996), to refer specifically to the construction of consumer values in a particular context of collectively shared meanings. Thus, microculture, like subculture, pulls together a dispersed set of meanings from the broader culture. These meanings can be accessed through the narratives that consumers tell about their experiences. In their study of the natural health microculture, Thompson and Troester viewed it as a flexible frame of reference that consumers use in their everyday lives.

Kates (2002; 2004) studied the gay subculture and agreed that subcultures offer their members ingredients for individualized identities. Instead of following a uniform "ethos," he argued that the members are much more heterogeneous and there is more variation in the practices, meanings and values than what is identified in the previous literature. Compared to leisure subcultures where participation can be sporadic and is usually elective, the gay subculture is also stigmatized in society and has a lot more enduring influence on many areas of the members' lives. Kates (2002) argued that subcultures do not mark their boundaries simply by uniform consumption practices and values, but these can also be contested and negotiated within the subculture.

Another issue that most of the articles studying subcultures of consumption address is the relation of the subculture to the market, marketization and commodification. Often, this relation is problematized or at least negotiated (e.g. Kozinets 2001; Bengtsson et al. 2005). By becoming marketized, subcultures lose their original connection with political and subversive meanings (DeBurgh Woodman & Brace-Gowan 2007). Commercialization also tends to be depicted as something profane, which is far from the magic and experience of sacredness that consumers allegedly look for in subcultural memberships (Belk & Costa 1998; Kozinets 2001). However, today's subcultures often go through a commodification process wherein consumers and marketers innovate and give form to new products and services to fulfill the subculture's needs. This commodification process also changes the meanings and symbolic resources central to the subculture (Goulding & Saren 2007). More research is still needed to fully understand the long term perspective of changing subcultures, for instance in terms of how marketization and the evolving nature of memberships affect the subculture.

The construct of authenticity has been suggested to explain the ambivalent relation of subcultures toward the market (Leigh, Peters & Shelton 2006; Quester et al. 2006; Beverland et al. 2010). Within a subculture, some brands are considered to have legitimacy in terms of supporting the subcultural ethos, meanings and practices whereas others do not (Kates 2004; Arthur 2006). The judgments of authenticity depend on the amount and structure of subcultural capital that the member has (Thornton 1995). Subcultural capital is the knowledge acquired in the socialization process of becoming a devoted member of the subculture (Ostberg 2007). It has been suggested that the consumers' stage in the socialization process or their amount of subcultural capital and their personal values affect the way they see marketization within the subculture. For instance, members who value freedom and are in the "hard core" have a very negative attitude toward commercialization whereas new members and those who look for social contacts may find it more acceptable (Quester et al. 2006).

In summary, subcultural collectives have the strongest tradition in marketplace cultures research, building on sociology and leaning on the pioneering ethnographic work in CCT. Gradually over the years, it has been realized that even though a subculture's members are united by many things, they also differ. Subcultures have become fragmented and postmodern (Goulding & Saren 2007). In addition to the subculture's ethos and set of values, the broader culture and mass media as well as the consumers' elective affinities based on e.g. age, gender, or social class have an influence on the collective consumption that takes place within the subculture. Constructs such as authenticity and the tensions with marketization as well as subcultural capital have been introduced. In general, however, the literature has focused on analyzing the subcultures from within, as

unique worlds of their own where consumers pursue their individual and collective identity projects.

2.3.3 Brand communities

The second major concept in the CCT marketplace cultures literature is the brand community (Muñiz & O'Guinn 2001; McAlexander, Schouten & Koenig 2002). This concept was originally based on the historian Boorstin's (1973) claim that consumers' usage of certain brands in America has created an unexpected sense of community. Boorstin was thus the first to offer a theory of collective consumption having an important social function: he explained that during the 20th century, the advertising industry in America brought immigrants the consolation they needed to replace their feelings of loss. Thus, brands provided reassuring narratives for this purpose. Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001) distinguished the brand community concept from subcultures of consumption by emphasizing that the core of the community is a particular brand. Thus, the commercial nature of the community is clear to the members of the community and they even embrace it (*ibid.*, 414). The relationship with the market is thus not as problematic as with subcultures of consumption. In fact, brand communities, according to Muñiz and O'Guinn, are one way for consumers to rebuild a sense of belonging in today's society. They also yield many benefits for their members, such as important information resources in addition to hedonistic and liberating experiences.

A brand community is a "specialized, non-geographically bound community based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand" (Muñiz & O'Guinn 2001, 412). Thus, the concept also emphasizes that communities are no longer place-bound. In fact, the only thing that is necessary to connect brand admirers with one another is a felt sense of belonging or "shared consciousness". Besides shared consciousness, brand communities have common rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility, i.e. obligation toward the community as a whole. Membership in brand communities is relatively stable and committed. The reasons and motivations for joining a brand community include the need to get reliable information about a product, to express commitment to a particular brand, to consume something together with others, and to use the brand symbolically (Ouwensloot & Odekerken-Schröder 2008).

The brand community concept has similarities with earlier studies. For instance, there is a distinct social hierarchy between beginners and more experienced members and an acculturation pattern similar to the socialization process found in subcultures of consumption. Brand communities operate on the basis of differentiation; it is almost as important for members to show which brands they

do not like as what they do like. This has been conceptualized as oppositional brand loyalty (Muñiz & Schau 2005; Schau & Muñiz 2006). It may sometimes lead to brand rivalry and outright flame wars between two opposing camps, such as car brands (Luedicke, Thompson & Giesler 2010; Ewing, Wagstaff & Powell 2013).

Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001, 415) suggested that brand communities are likely to emerge around brands that are publicly consumed, have a long history, a strong image and threatening competition. The product categories studied include cars and motorcycles (Muñiz & O'Guinn 2001; McAlexander et al. 2002; Brown, Kozinets & Sherry 2003; Algesheimer et al. 2005; Bagozzi & Dholakia 2006; Füller, Jawecki & Mühlbacher 2007; Ewing et al. 2013), computer electronics (Muñiz & O'Guinn 2001; Muñiz & Schau 2005; Schau & Muñiz 2006), rock bands (Schau et al. 2009; O'Guinn 1991), television series and movies (Brown et al. 2003; Schau & Muñiz 2004; Schau et al. 2009;), board games (Cova, Pace & Park 2007; Ouwersloot & Odekerken-Schröder 2008), and even convenience products (Cova & Pace 2006). The existence of brand related cultural capital is also evidenced; for instance, the members gain legitimacy through demonstrating that they appreciate the culture, history, rituals, traditions and symbols of the community.

This brand-related cultural capital is accumulated by participating in different practices (Schau et al. 2009). These practices include those related with social networking, impression management, community engagement and brand use (ibid.). In brand community practices, resources such as brand materials (e.g. logos, stories, and advertisements) are central. The members of the community are not passive recipients of these resources; they actively construct brand meaning and thereby the brand by negotiating meanings, rejecting some of them, and evaluating and using them to their own purposes (Muñiz & O'Guinn 2001). Participating in practices of social networking such as welcoming and empathizing as well as assisting others in brand use also adds to the social cohesion of the brand community and is proof of moral responsibility within the group. However, these practices all revolve around the brand and the members do not assist each other in other areas of their lives.

From the viewpoint of marketing theory, the brand community concept has been a very influential addition. Since the publication of Muñiz and O'Guinn's article, the concept has been increasingly adopted into use in marketing research with both qualitative and quantitative methods. In fact, the article has been the number one cited article in the *Journal of Consumer Research*. Antecedents to participating in brand communities identified include social intentions and social identity that consists of self-awareness of group membership, attachment and significance of that membership (Bagozzi & Dholakia 2006). Research has also illustrated how consumers can form such strong brand communities that they become comparable to religions or cults (Muñiz & Schau 2005; Belk & Tumbat

2005). Thus, for instance, the Apple Newton device brand community continued to thrive even when the company decided to abandon the brand and discontinue production. By invoking religious mythologies and meanings, the members kept the brand alive. On the other hand, brand communities can also be formed around convenience products that do not claim a lot of investments from consumers. Cova and Pace (2006) argued that the collective around a convenience product brand is not as much characterized by social relationships as by para-social relationships. In other words, it is more relevant for consumers to receive cultural resources from the community and produce them rather than engage in interactions with other members.

McAlexander and colleagues (2002) paid attention not only to consumer-to-consumer relationships that the brand community mediates, but also the relationships between company and consumer as well as the consumer's relationship with the product and the brand. It has been argued that a strong brand community provides several benefits to marketers; it is an effective information channel for members, it socializes newcomers into the brand culture leading to more engagement and it builds brand loyalty (Muñiz & O'Guinn 2001; Algesheimer et al. 2005). Furthermore, brand communities have been conceptualized as potential sources of innovation, because they have a lot of product-knowledge and willingness to engage (Franke & Shah 2003; Füller, Matzler & Hoppe 2008). Thus, a brand community is usually good news for a company, and wise marketers can even base their business strategy on supporting the community (Fournier & Lee 2009). However, there are also negative consequences involved. Because brand communities boost consumers' agency, they also empower their members to reject the marketing procedures of companies in case they feel that the brand is wrongly managed or represents unethical values. This notion has given inspiration to studies on anti-brand communities (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan 2010), counter-brand and alter-brand communities (Cova & White 2010). The anti-brand movement is more broadly motivated by consumers' resistance of capitalism, marketing and branding and a desire for emancipation (Kozinets 2002; Thompson & Arsel 2004; Hollenbeck & Zinkhan 2010). Also, the normative pressures that members face when they participate in communities are a downside that may discourage participation rather than encourage it (Algesheimer et al. 2005).

McAlexander and colleagues (2002) reflected upon the dimensions of space and time in relation to collective consumption. They argue that even though the brand community concept claims to be non-geographically bound, there are still instances when community members temporarily get together in a specific place, such as brandfests. On the other hand, some members may only participate in temporary gatherings and not feel that they belong in any brand community as such. Also, the

social contexts of the communities vary depending on whether the members meet face to face and how much they know about each other. Communities may be based on various commonalities from kinship ties to leisure pursuits. Multiple community memberships intersecting with one another are thus likely (McAlexander et al. 2002, 40). Yet, these authors do not pursue this line of argument further. They also depict the marketer's role in brandfests as significant. The marketer creates the context where participants engage in brand community practices such as storytelling. They emphasize the value of face-to-face interaction in concretizing brand values, enhancing commitments to the brand, to fellow consumers, and to the marketer compared to the weaker ties formed online (McAlexander & Schouten 1998; McAlexander et al. 2002). Furthermore, creating transcendent peak experiences also reinforces the brand community and facilitates brand loyalty (Schouten et al. 2007).

In summary, the brand community concept has spread most widely from Consumer Culture Theory to other fields of marketing study. It specifically refers to communities that are explicitly commercial and where the brand is in the center. Brand communities studied in the literature have been for the most part big North-American corporate brands that are heavily marketed and that require a big financial investment from the consumers. Consumers' relationship with the brand exists before they form relationships with each other in brand communities. Thus, the brand community revolves around shared interest toward the brand. The literature can be criticized for offering limited insights on collective consumption outside those criteria, including ones where the brand may play a less central role.

2.3.4 Consumption tribes

The third main concept within the collective consumption literature has been introduced by Cova (1997). Drawing from the postmodern sociologists Maffesoli (1996) and Bauman (1992), Cova suggests that consumption collectives can be more ephemeral in nature; forming on the basis of a shared emotional experience and the "desperate search for the social link". Maffesoli's (1996) tribal theory claims that in today's society, individuality and differentiation are not as important as sociality; being together, companionship and shared emotion. He argues that "contemporary lifestyles...are no longer structured around a single pole....they branch out from tremendously varied occurrences, experiences and situations – all things that characterize affinity groups" (Maffesoli 1996, 85). Hence, in contrast to Anderson's (1983) "imagined communities", for tribes, physical encounters that are characterized by repetitive rituals and shared emotional experiences are important.

In postmodern tribalism, there is a tendency for quasi-archaic values such as religiosity, a local sense of identification, syncretism, and group narcissism to re-emerge (Cova 1997; Cova & Cova 2002). Cova calls the postmodern collectives consumption tribes. The word community is avoided, because the concept is too much associated with the members having a common interest, place of residence, or occupation which is the way communities were defined in modernism (Cova & Cova 2002, 598). The tribe concept instead emphasizes the affectual and local nature of these collectives. Tribes differ from subcultures of consumption because their role in the consumers' everyday life is often smaller and they demand less commitment; thus they are more fluid and unstable: "They can rely neither on executive powers able to coerce their constituency into submission to the tribal rules...nor on the strength of neighborly bonds or the intensity of reciprocal exchange" (Cova 1997, 301). Thus, tribes by the original definition do not have the hierarchical social structure or a pattern of socialization that has been identified in brand communities and subcultures of consumption. One consumer can belong in several different tribes simultaneously. Yet, there are also similarities to the other collective consumption concepts; these include shared symbolic structures and rituals as well as forms of social recognition within the tribe (Moutinho, Dionisio & Leal 2007; Dionisio, Leal & Moutinho 2008).

However, in contrast to the tribe having a clearly identified ethos, it is usually characterized by active and entrepreneurial playing with marketplace resources (Cova, Kozinets & Shankar 2007). "The (re)construction or (re)possession of meanings through shared experiences and their enactment through rituals is the most potent form of maintaining tribal identity in our postmodern societies" (Cova & Cova 2002, 598). According to Cova (1997, 307), consumers are constantly looking for products and services, sites and symbols that provide them "linking value", something that helps them connect with other people and experience a sense of community. This linking value is, however, interpreted and experienced differently and is not inherent in the marketplace offerings as such. The structure of tribes is not stable or static; tribes are in constant movement and they emerge and die out quickly, because they only last as long as they are ritually enacted by their members (Bauman 1992). In this, tribes are reminiscent of communities of practice (Wenger 1999) that are constantly in process and where participation and membership are matters of continuous learning. Tribe members much like brand community and subculture members can differ in terms of the intensity of their participation. Often in addition to actual members, there is an even larger crowd of sympathizers or fans involved (Moutinho et al. 2007). This means that there are also members more at the margins of the tribe, sympathizing it but not contributing a lot of their own resources of time and money to the activities (Cova & Cova 2002).

Goulding, Shankar, and Canniford (2013) explore the perspective of tribal learning through engagement, imagination and alignment (Wenger 1999). Engagement means that members engage more and more with the community by letting go of their everyday selves and commitments as well as learning new skills and practices. Imagination means that the members learn to identify with others, forming a shared consciousness or identity along the way. Alignment means that individual activities become coordinated to work for the benefit of the group enabling collective action and moral responsibility. The community of practice framework accounts for the internal dynamics of the tribe and how consumers self-develop as members through participating in tribal activities. It comes close to the practice theoretical view of collective consumption adopted in this thesis, because it also emphasizes the active, engaged and situated nature of community participation. Belonging to a community means “doing” more than being. Yet, the learning perspective looks at collective consumption phenomena more from the perspective of members’ identity and the member socialization process while this thesis attempts to account for the elements of practice and how they constitute different collective practices in different contexts as well as how they influence the brand.

Examples of studies that explicitly call the studied phenomenon a consumption tribe include in-line skaters and snowboarders (Cova & Cova 2002), football fans (Dionisio et al. 2008), surfers (Moutinho et al. 2007, Goulding et al. 2013), the British Royal Family brand tribe (Otnes & Maclaran 2007), car cruisers (Brownlie et al. 2007), vinyl collectors (Mitchell & Imrie 2011), celebrity fans (Hamilton & Hewer 2010) and club goers (Goulding et al. 2013). Furthermore, tribal consumption has been analyzed by identifying its characteristics in the *Trainspotting* movie (Ryan, McLoughlin & Keating 2006) as well as the *Simpsons* television series (Cooper, McLoughlin & Keating 2005). Perhaps because of the flexibility of the tribe concept, it has been increasingly mixed up with the other collective consumption concepts. In addition, studies on tribes have focused both on tribes around leisure activities as well as brand-focused tribes. It has also recently been suggested that the tribe literature does not fully make use of Maffesoli’s theory, and that more could be done (O’Reilly 2012). For instance, the brand as a central totemic pole of a tribal consumption collective has not been explored because attention has been focused more on consumer-to-consumer relationships.

From the original emphasis on locality and face-to-face interaction, the consumption tribe concept has been extended toward the online environment where people form tribes that may never meet in the physical world. The phenomenon has been called e-tribalization (Kozinets 1999, De Valck 2007; Kozinets et al. 2008). Increasingly, it is argued that it is the online technologies that

really have the power to aggregate consumer tribes (Hamilton & Hewer 2010; Cova & White 2010). Similarly to other kinds of collective consumption, e-tribes enculturate their members into specific languages, practices, rituals and values; generate emotional involvement, empower their members, and generate religious sentiments. In other words, e-tribes generate both social and cultural value for their members (Mathwick, Wiertz & De Ruyter 2008).

However, in contrast to other types of collective consumption, e-tribes have been associated with an increased ability to use online technologies to engage their members in collective innovation (Füller et al. 2007, Berthon, Pitt, McCarthy & Kates 2007; Kozinets et al. 2008). In online consumption collectives, members engage in both negotiating their identity and developing the community together (Närvänen, Kartastenpää & Kuusela 2013). With Web 2.0, the emergence of communities that use the technology not only for cooperation with companies but for opposing and rebelling against them by forming counter-communities as well as competing against them by forming alter-communities has been realized (Cova & White 2010). Furthermore, the anonymity and reduced role obligations afforded by the online world have allowed consumers opportunity to find like-minded others, build social relationships and even cope with stigmatized identities without being in face-to-face interaction (Kozinets 2001; Närvänen, Saarijärvi & Simanainen 2013). Connecting the consumption tribe concept with the social media and online world has caused even further conceptual confusion, however, because these collectives are also theorized elsewhere as online or virtual communities. Different scientific disciplines have become interested in these phenomena. In this thesis, the vast and growing literature exclusively on online collective consumption is not discussed in detail. Instead, the online world is seen as part of collective consumption phenomena; one of the social sites where collective consumption may take place, but by no means the only one that is interesting.

It has been argued that because tribes are so hard to manage, it is very difficult to offer any managerial guidance, contrary to what has been offered for managing brand communities (Canniford 2011). Because of their fluid nature, identifying the spaces and sites (i.e. visible traces) where the tribe gathers as well as participates in emotional rituals together has been identified as one way to address them (Cova & Cova 2002). Working alongside tribes supports their value creating activities by providing platforms and stages for them and companies can also insert their offerings as “points of passage” that the tribe can use (Canniford 2011). Furthermore, identifying opinion leaders from the tribe and communicating with them is one option to address the tribe by companies (Mitchell & Imrie 2011).

In summary, the tribe concept has provided an alternative way to discuss forms of collective consumption that do not meet the criteria of subcultures or brand

communities. Yet, because of the flexibility of the concept, it has caused a lot of complexity and confusion in the broader field by becoming intertwined and synonymous with other concepts. In addition, it can be argued that despite the importance of e-tribalization today, more attention should still be focused on offline consumption collectives that can be more mundane but not insignificant from the point of view of branding and marketing. If the shifting and ephemeral nature of tribes is emphasized, other kinds of collective consumption taking place (even simultaneously or in parallel) in more stable collectives may become undermined.

2.4 Synthesizing the literature

In the previous chapters, the main contributions to collective consumption literature were reviewed and discussed. This chapter provides a critical synthesis of the literature and also points out the blind spots and gaps where more research is still needed.

Since collective consumption emerged as a vital part of the marketing and consumer research agenda, there has appeared confusion about the differences between concepts. The choice of concept has become somewhat arbitrary and a matter of preference, causing a lot of conceptual disorder. Many authors mix the concepts or offer unclear and vague definitions for them. The phenomena of interest can be characterized by a set of broader concepts such as tribal marketing, collective consumption, or the study of marketplace cultures (Arnould & Thompson 2005). There are also differing interpretations of the meaning of individual concepts. For instance, in a quantitative study about brand tribalism in soft drinks the authors measure tribalism through statements where the respondent is led to think about their circle of friends' consumption habits instead of more ephemeral shared emotional experiences or rituals (Veloutsou & Moutinho 2009).

After the publication of the consumption tribes book edited by Cova, Kozinets, and Shankar (2007), the tribe concept has begun to slightly dominate the field. However, with the profusion of articles that deal with collective consumption, it is no longer clear what is known and what still needs to be studied. At the moment, there exist only a few attempts at delineating the several concepts and differences between them (Canniford 2011; Goulding et al. 2013; Thomas et al. 2013).

Both Canniford (2011) and Goulding et al. (2013) review all of the three main concepts (brand community, subculture, and tribe) and choose to focus on consumption tribes. They argue that the tribe concept differs from the others especially in terms of ephemerality, fluidity and instability. Tribes do not preclude memberships from other kinds of communities; they do not necessarily respect any

core products or brands or have long-term commitments. Interpreting their article, the tribe concept seems to better describe the fluid nature of most collective consumption in the market, and also corresponds to recent understandings of community elsewhere in the social sciences. However, this thesis argues that not all collective consumption is transient and temporary, so the tribe concept emphasizes these features too strongly. In fact, when evaluating the extant knowledge critically, all of the previously introduced concepts illuminate some features of the phenomena yet obscure other features simultaneously. The brand community concept, for instance, highlights the commercial aspects of collective consumption but ignores the fact that brands are not always central. Thus, an extended view is still needed. Many contributions made in the literature tend to be theory testing rather than theory building in nature; emphasizing the socialization process, practices, symbolic systems and hierarchies within collectives of consumption in different contexts (e.g. Arthur 2006; Dionisio et al. 2008). My own summary based on the literature review is provided in Table 2. In order to highlight their differences, it discusses the concepts as ideal types. Therefore, it has been necessary to simplify and exaggerate their features to some extent. Empirical distinctions between different kinds of communities are not so clear cut, as can be seen from the confusion within the literature that tries to apply these concepts to real world phenomena.

Through an extensive literature review, Thomas et al. (2013) identify that consumption collectives differ in terms of nine dimensions: focus (consumption activity, brand or ideology), duration (short or long), appeal (limited or broad), access (low or high barriers of entry), dispersion (localized, dispersed or hybrid), marketplace orientation (collaborative, neutral or oppositional), structure of resource dependency (simple or complex), collective belonging (extent of *communitas*), and heterogeneity (homogeneous or heterogeneous roles, meanings and resources). In addition, they suggest that marketplace orientation, resource structure and heterogeneity are the dimensions that need more clarification. According to them, communities that are antagonistic to the market have been studied but those that are more in co-operation with the market have not been well understood. Their view of community includes an assemblage of diverse actors: consumers, producers and social and economic resources. They argue that heterogeneity is not necessarily a destabilizing factor in communities, but also contributes to community continuity when actors are dependent on each other's resources.

Table 2. The concepts within CCT for collective consumption

Concept/features	Traditional communities	Subcultures of consumption	Brand communities	Consumption tribes
Core characteristics	Geographically bound; no central power to maintain authority; based on kinship and locality; a person belongs in just one community at a time. A closed structure, stable membership, non-commercial	Centered on a consumption activity or lifestyle; typically adverse to mainstream culture and in favor of alternative lifestyles; marginality, shared ideology; non-commercial; a context for building identity; face-to-face meetings; relative stability of membership	Non-geographically bound; specialized around one brand; structured set of social relationships; commercial and brand-centric; mass-mediated; embracing meanings from popular culture; face-to-face meetings not obligatory	Ephemeral and fluid; simultaneous membership in many tribes; not necessarily brand-centric or commercial; held together by emotion or passion through shared experiences; occasional face-to-face meetings
Time period and conditions for appearance	Pre-modern times, place-bound	1900s: a protest against mainstream cultural meanings and values	1950s–2000s: formed around strong brands; rich and long history and threatening competition	Postmodern times: Reaction to the over-individuality of the modern society
Origin and creation of meaning	Meaning is totalizing and often based on religion and rituals	The subculture offers a unique ethos that guides members' identity construction and consumption practices	Meaning is socially negotiated within the community	Meaning is shifting, created within the tribal context through collective experiences
Homogeneity vs. heterogeneity	Reinforced homogeneity	Pressure for homogeneity in accepting the subcultural values. Members may form factions according to elective affinities	Homogeneity; members are socialized into shared perceptions, values and rituals; a sense of moral responsibility toward the specific community	May have heterogeneous members in terms of age, gender or social class, primarily linked by shared passion; capable of collective action
The role of the brand	No role	The brand may have a role but it must agree with the subcultural values	The brand has a highly significant and central role	If the tribe is organized around a brand, it may have a central role; else, its role may be smaller

Involvement and commitment	Fully involved and committed members	Strong commitment; a comprehensive lifestyle choice; high barriers of entry	Commitment in particular areas of consumption; moral commitment to socializing new members	Commitment may be strong but it is momentary and unstable; lasts only as long as the tribe engages in maintaining practices
Resources demanded	Economic, emotional and physical resources which are used independently of volition and continuously	Economic resources, significant amount of time, strong emotional commitment, cultural resources	Some economic resources; lesser amount of time, cultural resources; only a part of lifestyle	No economic resources necessary; voluntary and momentary use of time
Implications for companies	Companies can learn reciprocity and the importance of social relations by observing traditional contexts where both commercial and social creation of value is different than in mass markets	Little opportunity to participate if the subculture is anti-commercial or marginal; where the subculture takes advantage of commercial offerings, they need to be consistent with its ideology	Opportunity to increase brand loyalty and to deepen the company-customer relationship; use mavens; enrich the meaning and offer assistance; a threat that strong brand communities take control of the brand	Opportunity to give resources, sites and artifacts for creating and reinforcing the "social link"; difficulty identifying the tribe, its rituals and meeting places; danger of estranging consumers because the company is seen as infiltrator to the tribe
Examples from the literature	The farmer's market (Sherry, Heisley & McGrath 1993) , New Orleans ' geographic collective (Weinberger & Wallendorf 2012)	Harley-Davidson (Schouten & McAlexander 1995), rave subculture (Goulding et al. 2002), goth subculture (Goulding & Saren 2009)	Ford and Saab (Muñiz & O'Guinn 2001), Apple Newton (Muñiz & Schau 2005), Xena, tv-series, Sri Vectin Cosmetics (Schau et al. 2009)	Inline skaters (Cova & Cova 2002), surfers (Canniford & Shankar 2007), car cruisers (Brownlie et al. 2007)

While Thomas and colleagues (2013) concentrate on heterogeneity and resource structure in one activity based consumption collective (running), this thesis pays more attention to the marketplace orientation side of collective consumption. It focuses on the relation of the different collectives to the brand. Therefore, it provides an example of a positive and co-operative relation of collectives with the market. Hence, it brings important variation to the studies on consumption communities resisting the market (Kozinets 2002; Thompson & Coskuner-Balli 2007; Arsel & Thompson 2011). This stream of research often suggests that market co-optation causes negative and detrimental effects for communities because it means the “selling out” of the community values and culture to the powers of the market (Thomas et al. 2013). Yet, collective consumption can influence the market in other ways than those that are critical or antagonistic. Synergy effects may result from the company adopting a different role in relation to the collectives, such as enabling and co-operating with them rather than controlling and taking advantage of them.

Analyzing how collective brand consumption in all its heterogeneity influences marketplace dynamics is also an important move away from scrutinizing the internal aspects of collectives and relations between members. It focuses more on processes and interaction between a brand and the collectives rather than drilling in-depth into a single collective’s internal dynamics. Therefore, it provides an important contribution to the literature by enabling heterogeneity and complexity to be acknowledged. Yet, it also means that the detailed analysis of single collectives or their members is not possible in the same study. Understanding the values, rituals, and collective belonging within these collectives would require a different type of approach. Another critique toward the marketplace cultures literature is based on the question whether the forms of communities identified actually fulfill the criteria of community. For instance, can anyone who admires a brand be called a member of a consumption community as long as he or she feels similar to other admirers of the brand? This definition would start from the cognitive and experiential level of members and see whether they themselves feel connected with other brand users. Or does it require for participation in at least some brand community practices or following a shared set of norms and rituals in more structured settings online or offline? This definition starts more from the practices of members and what they are doing with less regard to how they feel about their membership. Goulding and colleagues’ (2012) focus on member’s learning processes most closely represents this latter definition, but still the community-of-practice literature that they use more often pays attention to members’ identities and socialization processes. The practice theoretical approach adopted in this thesis rather looks at the elements of practice that intersect to constitute collective practices and the way they influence the brand. Thereby, it

complements the learning perspective that starts more from the perspective of members.

Furthermore, are strong consumption communities united by a similar interest or passion and working actively to engage consumers just a marketer's dream? Based on the literature, it seems that sometimes the most active consumers may be found in collectives that are not commercial but critical or even antagonistic to the market (Kozinets 2002; Thompson & Coskuner-Balli 2007; Cova & White 2010). Hence, what is the role of consumption collectives in the bigger picture; both in the market as well as for consumers in their everyday lives? Furthermore, do people even always look for new social connections with so-called "like-minded" others in terms of consumption? Maybe it is rather that consumption is the means by which existing collectives reinforce their mutual bonds?

A related type of critique claims that distinguishing a clear boundary between in-groups and out-groups is not valid for all forms of collective consumption (Greenacre, Freeman & Donald 2013). The in-group and out-group perspective assumes that there exists something – a shared passion, a brand, an interest in a consumption activity – before the collective is formed. It also explains why there may be heterogeneity among the members without the collective suffering, because they only need be connected through this one thing (*ibid.*). However, not all consumption collectives operate this way: instead there might be a different kind of structure based on stronger and weaker social ties, forming a fuzzy network where people do not only gather and communicate around the one shared passion. In these consumption collectives, the passion or interest is developed after the social bonds are in place. The bonds may be stronger or weaker in nature. As an example of strong bonds, family consumption patterns have recently started to interest consumer researchers as one form of collective consumption (Epp & Price 2008; 2010a). Thus, this suggests that the temporal order of collective formation should be considered when analyzing collective consumption. This thesis builds on this view in analyzing the different kinds of collectives around the brand that have all formed differently and have different focus. Cova (1997, 302) hints at the fact that different forms of consumption collectives ranging from traditional to postmodern may exist and be experienced by the same person in their everyday life. However, this argument has not been theoretically pursued very thoroughly.

A further step from classifying the different kinds of collectives and their characteristics toward understanding the dynamics of collective consumption has also been initiated recently (Schau et al. 2009; Thomas et al. 2013). It has been suggested that while there do exist differences between consumption collectives, no collective is static and also develops over time (*cf.* Canniford 2011). How and why collectives evolve, change and perhaps cease to exist has not been fully studied. The spatial and temporal dimensions of collective consumption thus still

need more research. For instance, a subculture may become more tribal or develop toward a brand community as it is increasingly commoditized and marketized. This has taken place for instance around the brand Harley Davidson (Schouten et al. 2007; Goulding & Saren 2007). One study also discusses the effects of product discontinuation to the relevant brand community (Muñiz & Schau 2005), but this provides only a beginning. For instance, there is a lack of research discussing cases where the consumption object or brand becomes “poisoned” through becoming associated with particular social groups and meanings. There are well-known practical examples of this. One is the case of Burberry, where a high end luxury product became associated with a lower socio-economic group in Britain, who adopted the brand more in the form of counterfeits, alienating other consumer groups.

Increasingly, consumption collectives have been described as networks (Fournier & Lee 2009; Thomas et al. 2013; Greenacre et al. 2013). Thomas et al. (2013) focus on the somewhat neglected aspect of heterogeneity in collective consumption and extend collective consumption to encompass not only consumers but also producers and resources. With the help of actor-network theory, they identify both inanimate and animate actors, constituting an “interconnected network of heterogeneous actors whose experiences are shaped by the interplay between actors and informed by marketplace dynamics” (Thomas et al. 2013, 1011). The authors argue that because these actors are interdependent in terms of resources, they engage in aligning their interests. Thus, heterogeneity is not merely a destabilizing force. Because the actors need the access to the resources of others in order to achieve a sense of belonging to the community, they are dependent on each other and stay in the community even if there is heterogeneity and conflict.

Thomas and her colleagues (2013) provide an important contribution to the literature on collective consumption. Their classification scheme overcomes the fuzziness of existing concepts in the literature and allows for researchers to see heterogeneity better. However, they themselves place their analyzed community, which is the running community, in just one end of each dimension. They suggest that analyzing these clusters of properties that characterize a community is beneficial, even though admitting that the interplay of different dimensions may be even more fruitful theoretically.

This research builds the previous understanding on collective consumption by looking at the different collectives around one brand that have a different basis of identification and a different way of using the brand in their activities. Thus, under one brand umbrella, characteristics of collectives may vary and collectives may be overlapping, intertwined and layered. It also extends the understanding of collective consumption dynamics and relation to the market through analyzing the

collectives' role in revitalizing the brand. In this thesis, multiple different collectives with differing characteristics are identified.

2.5 Introducing the categorization scheme

Following from the critical review and integration of previous literature above, this chapter addresses the first research objective of the study by introducing a categorization scheme for heterogeneous consumption collectives around one brand. The categorization scheme helps to account for the complexity of consumption collectives around a single brand and therefore on its own part extends the knowledge of the collective consumption of brands, which is the overall purpose of the research.

The categorization scheme consists of three building blocks: the focus of a collective, the structure of a collective, and the role of brand within a collective (Figure 2). The categorization scheme is not directly based on previous literature but rather aims at overcoming the previous concepts used (subculture, brand community, tribe). In this way, the assumptions of previous literature are problematized (Alvesson & Sandberg 2013). By problematizing the assumptions of previous literature, it is possible to really create something new. Key assumptions from the previous literature that are problematized through the new categorization scheme include: "The consumption object always comes first when a consumption community is formed", "Consumption communities are either tightly or loosely structured; not both", and "The brand is always central in a brand related consumption community". These building blocks are discussed below in more detail.

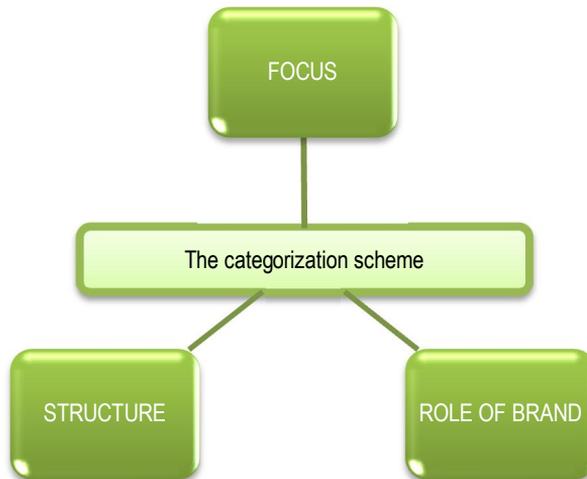


Figure 2. The categorization scheme.

Firstly, the categorization scheme determines the core of the collective to which all participants share a link. This is called the focus of the collective (Figure 3) even though it is acknowledged that collectives are intertwined, for instance in place-focused collectives there may be smaller groups connected by pre-existing social relations such as friendship or kinship. Thomas et al's (2013) dimension of focus recognizes only brand, consumption activity or ideology as the collective's focus. This thesis adds place, social relations and idea as the possible foci of consumption collectives. The categorization is based on profound understanding of the empirical data as well as reflecting it with the conceptual framework of the research. The focus categories are etic, meaning that they represent my own interpretation rather than the informants' perspectives. Ideologically focused consumption collectives (Thomas et al. 2013) were not relevant in the context of this research, but they can be included in idea-focused collectives in this categorization.



Figure 3. Illustrating the focus of collectives.

I argue that identifying the focus of consumption collectives is particularly relevant, before discussing any of their other characteristics. To fulfill the research purpose and extend the view of the collective consumption, I find it more helpful than categorizing them as consumption tribes, subcultures or brand communities. This is because collectives are heterogeneous and may have features of all of these concepts. For instance, the extent to which members feel moral responsibility toward one another (a feature of “brand communities” in the literature) is high in social relations-focused collectives, even though they are not commercial (another feature of “brand communities” in the literature). On the other hand, some brand-focused collectives can definitely be ephemeral (a feature of “tribes” in the literature) while not showing many entrepreneurial or playful characteristics (another feature of “tribes” in the literature).

Categorization based on focus provides a simplifying move to start discussing the collectives as sites for practices. Thus, each collective must be contextualized separately. In reflecting the category of focus with previous literature, one can identify collectives that are place-focused, such as the New Orleans gift-giving community (Weinberger & Wallendorf 2012) or the Mesa swap meet (Belk et al. 1988), brand-focused such as the Jeep brand community (McAlexander et al. 2002), idea-focused such as the natural health microculture (Thompson & Troester 2002), activity-focused such as the inline skating tribe (Cova & Cova 2002) or social relations-focused such as the families on holiday (Epp & Price 2008). Through the

empirical analysis conducted in this research, it can be argued that different collectives may also exist simultaneously under the same brand umbrella.

Another building block of the categorization scheme in addition to focus comes from analyzing the collective's structure – whether it is dispersed or integrated. As discussed above, the community literature has been gradually moving from understanding communities as more integrated toward seeing them as dispersed and flexible. However, I see the matter not as either/or but as both/and. Dispersed collectives are more likely to be characterized by less frequent meetings, shorter duration, less involvement, more heterogeneity, less hierarchy between members and easier access (cf. Thomas et al. 2013). They are also likely to have less shared values, norms and rituals contributing to a shared collective identity. An example of a relatively dispersed collective in the previous literature is the Nutella brand community that was more based on parasocial rather than personal relationships (Cova & Pace 2006) as well as the rave club community that was structurally unstable and ephemeral, dispersing quite easily (Goulding et al. 2002). However, it is important to note here that this dimension does not refer to the extent to which people feel belongingness or emotionally connected with each other, which can be high even though the collective is very temporary (ibid.). Analyzing the members' experience would point more to a phenomenological interpretation, which is not in the scope of this research.

Integrated collectives are likely to be characterized on the other hand by more frequent meetings, longer duration, more involvement, more homogeneity, more hierarchical structure and more difficult access (cf. Thomas et al. 2013). They are also likely to share values, norms, rituals that lead to a shared collective identity. Examples of very integrated collectives in the literature include the Harley Davidson clubs (Schouten & McAlexander 1995) as well as the Apple Newton brand community (Muñiz & Schau 2005). Figure 4 illustrates the different structures of dispersed and integrated collectives as a continuum. Discussing the structure of collectives in this manner helps to achieve the research purpose of extending the view of the collective consumption of brands. It pays attention to properties of collectives that have been identified in the literature but this time across a wide range of collectives simultaneously rather than in one single brand community, consumption tribe or subculture.

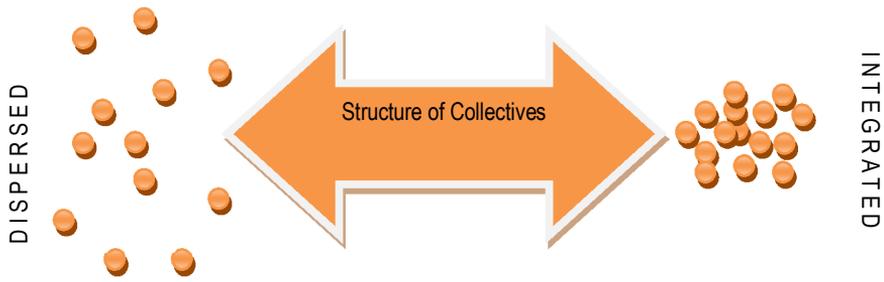


Figure 4. Illustrating the structure of collectives as dispersed or integrated.

Since this thesis does not focus on the internal dynamics of collectives, the decision has been made to simplify the analysis of structural properties by viewing the collectives on a continuum from dispersed to integrated. The collectives also cannot be positioned on a definite place on the continuum with some of them being totally dispersed and others totally integrated.

As a third building block of the categorization scheme, the collectives can also be analyzed in terms of how the brand appears to the collective, whether it has a central or peripheral role. Figure 5 illustrates this aspect.

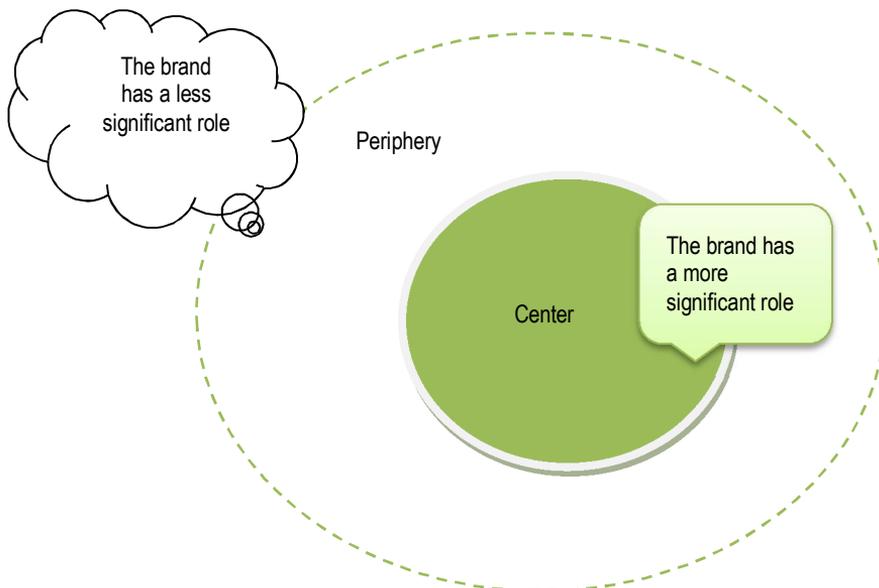


Figure 5. Illustrating the role of the brand in the collectives.

The central argument of the thesis is that the view on collective consumption of brands has been too narrow, because the brand has been viewed as the central core of the collective, organizing the social hierarchy of members (e.g. Muñiz & O'Guinn 2001; Schau et al. 2009). In the literature on consumer tribes brands do appear more peripheral as marketplace resources that can create linking value, but the tribe concept fails to account for more integrated and stable communities. The third building block of the categorization scheme therefore accounts for a more heterogeneous role for the brand within collectives, thereby helping to extend the view on collective consumption of brands.

Using these dimensions in the analysis of collectives does not result in a clear-cut typology of four collective types, but is meant only as a way to illustrate their heterogeneity and specifically how they use the brand in their activities. The practice theoretical interpretative framework also supports the empirical analysis, providing tools for interpreting it in greater detail.

3 CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH

This chapter specifies the interpretive framework and basic assumptions on which the research is based as well as describes how the research was conducted. By accepting the view that there are no theory-free observations and no way to get to the “truth”, it is necessary to outline the interpretive framework and methodological choices as explicitly as possible (Moisander & Valtonen 2006, 34). Theory and methodology are never disconnected or separate, but go together. A summary of all the methodological choices is illustrated by Figure 6.

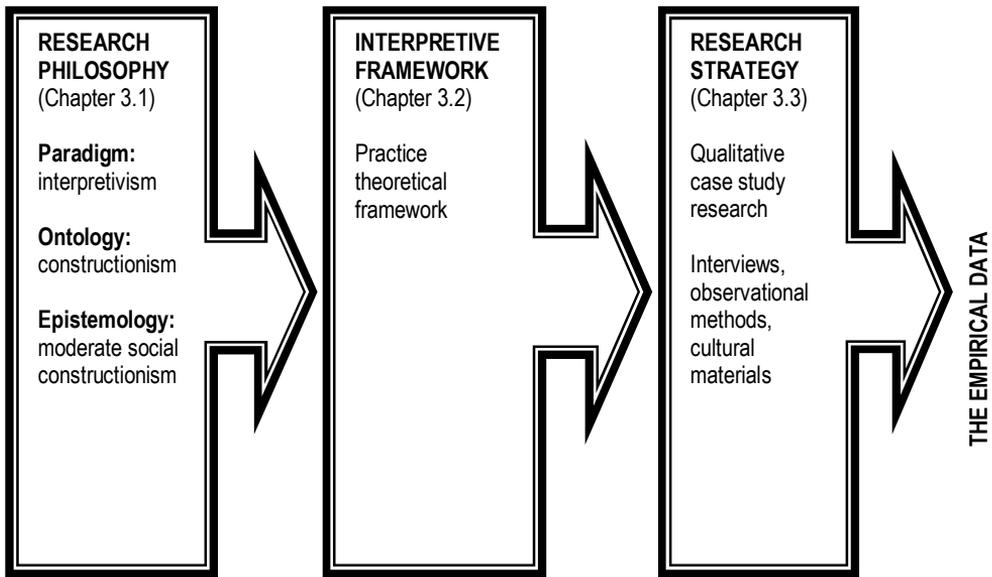


Figure 6. The research philosophical and methodological choices.

The aim of this research is to extend the view of collective consumption. The research is theory-building and situated within the context of discovery (Yadav 2010). Thus, the aim is not to find the one, accurate theory to explain the phenomenon, but rather the “construction and elaboration of new or revised concepts and frameworks that provide meaningful insights into the phenomena” (Moisander & Valtonen 2006, 39).

3.1 Research philosophy

Research philosophy is on the background of every research project, influencing the questions that are asked, the choices and decisions undertaken during the research process, as well as the overall rationale for the research (Carson, Gilmore, Perry & Groenhaug 2001). In order to make sense of the research philosophy, there are several different aspects that need to be taken into account. This chapter introduces first the paradigmatic choice of the research. Then two related issues are addressed from the point of view of the chosen paradigm. Firstly, the ontological issue or what is the nature of reality, and secondly, the epistemological issue or how knowledge about this reality can be acquired.

A paradigm can be defined as a shared worldview in science including all aspects of research from problem setting to feasible theories, methodologies and interpretations (Kuhn 1962). Paradigms are social constructions, because they reflect the values and interests of dominant groups (Ardnt 1985). While the Kuhnian concept of paradigm incommensurability means that rival paradigms cannot be translated into a common vocabulary, according to the principle of perspectivism, they can be seen as different windows to reality or “ways of tracking truth” (O’Shaughnessy 2010, 183). It can thus be argued that different paradigms can and do co-exist, and they can even mutually reinforce research results.

Even if multiple perspectives are accepted as equally good bases of new knowledge, the researcher is unable to generate new knowledge without attaching herself to at least one paradigm. Our knowledge is always concept-dependent and the use of concepts is regulated by a paradigm. In other words, it is not possible to view the world free of any perspective. This does not mean the acceptance of extreme relativism that denies the existence of any objective truth. Accumulating new knowledge from different perspectives allows for a richer portrait of reality as it is revealed to us.

This thesis adopts the interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivism is inspired by hermeneutics (Greek *hermeneuein*: to interpret). The general goal of interpretivism is to understand what is happening in a given context (Carson et al. 2001). It refutes the positivist stance that there is only one truth of reality that is best captured by the use of methods from the natural sciences. Instead, interpretive studies acknowledge different actors’ perspectives, researcher involvement and contextual understanding and interpretation of data (*ibid.*, 5). Interpretivism considers the researcher always as part of the research process and involved in it as the core research instrument. Knowledge of the world is always contested and open to change. Interpretivism is the paradigm that broadly characterizes the field of Consumer Culture Theory (Arnould & Thompson 2005) where this thesis is

conceptually positioned, thereby providing another rationale for the paradigmatic choice.

Interpretivism is based on the ontology of constructionism. It denotes to a belief that reality is socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann 1966; Burr 2003). Thus, the categories and classifications of reality are continuously reproduced instead of existing out there as such. Unlike realists and critical realists believe, constructionism posits that there are no objective observations of reality (Lincoln & Guba 2000). Constructionists are in some ways ontological agnostics. Rather than focusing on the question of whether or not an external reality exists, they are interested in how things are made to appear real, stable, and factual (Schwandt 2000, 197).

Epistemologically, the form of constructionism adopted in this thesis is that of weak or moderate constructionism (Longino 1990; Järvensivu & Törnroos 2010). Unlike strong forms of constructionism that consider all knowledge claims as relative and thus equally good, moderate constructionism accepts that there are specific local, personal, and community forms of knowledge (Järvensivu & Törnroos 2010). This epistemological viewpoint supports the chosen unit of analysis for the research. In contrary to methodological individualism, which takes the stance that social phenomena are totally reducible to the behavior of individuals, the thesis accepts methodological holism that acknowledges and focuses on social wholes (O'Shaughnessy 2010). Moderate constructionism accepts both observations and experiential data as valid data sources, but the vehicles by which they are analyzed are contextualized by background assumptions. The only way of guaranteeing good (objective) scientific inquiry is thus to submit one's work to intersubjective criticism (Longino 1990).

3.2 The practice theoretical interpretive framework

An interpretive framework is “a set of assumptions, ideas, and principles that define a particular, theoretically informed perspective and a set of appropriate practices for the process of interpretation, thus opening the data to particular interpretations” (Moisander & Valtonen 2006, 103). In this thesis, practice theory is adopted as the guiding interpretive framework.

Practice theory as such can be considered as both a theory or set of theories and a methodological approach, because it offers an account of social action that has implications for the way it is applied methodologically. Practice theory suggests certain ways and not others for handling data and giving it meaning. Rather than act as a ready-made pattern, however, it provides a framework that is open and flexible. Theory in this sense means something that enables understanding; a set of

explanatory concepts that offer a way of looking at the world (Silverman 1993; Bourdieu 1977). It is also accepted in this thesis that multiple theories may provide good insights to phenomena and there is a need for theoretical plurality to study consumption (Firat & Venkatesh 1995; Goulding 2003). However, in any type of research, the theories and methods used should be mutually compatible from the ontological and epistemological assumptions to the way analysis is conducted. Discussing practice theory in detail is considered necessary because like any interpretive framework, it cannot be used merely as a methodological tool without regard to its background assumptions, implications, and relationship to data.

3.2.1 Positioning practice theory within CCT approaches

Practice theory has not been created within consumer research or marketing fields, but it has definitely gained a strong foothold there in the past decade or so. Warde's (2005) article in the *Journal of Consumer Culture* provided an entry point for many other researchers to follow in applying practice theory to different phenomena. Special issues and conference sessions devoted to the use of practice theory have followed. While practice theory has also been applied in the service marketing sphere (e.g. Korkman 2006; Helkkula et al. 2012), most studies using it so far are positioned within consumer research.

For CCT, practice theories have provided important conceptual and methodological tools, yet it can be argued that interpretive consumer research has throughout its history been studying consumption practices (see Askegaard & Linnet 2009; Thompson, Arnould & Giesler 2013). Here, practice theory is discussed not as part of CCT (as a theory), but as one of possible interpretive frameworks that are frequently used in interpretive consumer research, alongside existential phenomenology, poststructuralism, semiotics, narrative approach and critical theory, for instance.

Together with other research conducted within the Consumer Culture Theory literature, practice theory shares a background in social theories that focus on symbolic structures of shared knowledge, i.e. meanings. This sets cultural (or interpretive) approaches apart from theories that emphasize rational and deliberate action (the *homo economicus*) and those that emphasize social structures (the *homo sociologicus*) (Reckwitz 2002; Sassatelli 2007). The basic ontological assumption is that social reality is not given, but must be continuously and actively constructed and interpreted by people (Berger & Luckmann 1986). Consumption is thus viewed as symbolic rather than calculative or rational action.

While research in CCT shares the ontological basis of constructionism, there are different epistemological approaches. Here only some of the key ones are discussed

in order to configure practice theory as an interpretive framework. The purpose of this discussion is not to dismiss the other approaches but rather to see how practice theory is different. Reckwitz's (2002) simplifying categorization of mentalist, textualist and practice theoretical approaches in cultural theory is used to discuss the differences.

Initially in the 1980s, cultural and interpretive approaches in consumer research were a reaction against the mainstream psychological information processing view of the consumer (Askegaard & Linnet 2011). The first CCT researchers focused on consumers as active meaning-makers and were interested in their lived experiences, utilizing mainly the epistemological approach of existential phenomenology. Existential phenomenology has been criticized for retaining the mentalist and individualistic assumptions of mainstream consumer research. In an existential-phenomenological study, the informants' subjective experiences are seen as the only valid source of data. Mentalist approaches focus on how symbolic structures of meaning influence behavior through mental processes (Reckwitz 2002). This is argued to be dismissive of the sociocultural context where action takes place and therefore to prioritize certain methodologies, such as in-depth interviews (Moisander et al. 2009; Askegaard & Linnet 2011; Helkkula et al. 2012). Furthermore, the portrait of the consumer from this perspective is often that of a free, reflexive and empowered agent who uses marketplace resources as ingredients for identity-projects (Firat & Venkatesh 1995). Existential phenomenological approaches have largely contributed to the research stream on consumer's identity projects (Arnould & Thompson 2005) while the marketplace cultures stream within CCT has been more influenced by anthropological traditions of naturalistic inquiry (e.g. Arnould & Wallendorf 1994). Yet, the approaches have also been criticized because they have focused on emic interpretations rather than contextualizing the research more broadly and becoming more theoretically informed (Askegaard & Linnet 2011).

The second approach that has been relevant in CCT research is that which Reckwitz (2002) calls culturalist textualism. In that approach, the social is situated outside individual people; in "texts", and the focus is on discourse and communication. This perspective comes from poststructuralism and semiotics in particular, as well as hermeneutics. Within CCT, approaches that have been using semiotic, structuralist, narrative, or poststructuralist interpretive frameworks can be broadly situated within the textualist perspective. The stream of research has also been influenced by postmodernism and critical theory. Askegaard and Linnet (2011) argue that these approaches have broadened the view to consider the ideological and structural contexts of consumption beyond the lived experience of consumers. Yet, they can also be criticized for focusing too much on the determining power of social structures over individual agency or for over-

emphasizing the textual and discursive instead of the performative, embodied and habitual (Reckwitz 2002).

Table 3. Differences between approaches in Consumer Culture Theory

Approach/ Properties	Mentalist/ Existential phenomenological	Textualist/ Semiotic/ poststructuralist	Practice theoretical
Background	Existential phenomenology, hermeneutics	Semiotics, structuralism, poststructuralism, critical theory	Poststructuralism, Bourdieu, Giddens, Schatzki
Origin of meaning	The consumer's subjective lived experiences	Sociocultural discourses, ideologies, institutional structures	Social practices
Exemplaries in CCT	Fournier 1998; Goulding et al. 2001	McCracken 1986; Holt 1997; Shankar et al. 2001; Luedicke et al. 2010; Thompson & Troester 2002; Thompson & Coskuner-Balli 2007	Holt 1995; Shove & Pantzar 2005; Schau et al. 2009

A summary of the differences between approaches is depicted in Table 3. Practice theory is set apart from other approaches by focusing on social practices: “meaning is carried by and established in social practices” (Schatzki 2002, 58). Thus, practice theory argues that social action is not merely expressive or rational, but rather performative (Sassatelli 2007, 108). Practice theories view the person as an embodied subject within some context, space and time, rather than merely a cognitive processor or a communicator and interpreter of texts. Thus, how people act is as much guided by what they do and feel as what they mean (Warde 2005, 132). Further, practices are what create wants and therefore direct consumption choices and preferences as well (Warde 2005). Practices replace culture, social structures, or individual intentions as the background explaining social action (Rouse 2007, 506). In CCT, practice theory is rather new as an explicit interpretive framework, even though many researchers have implicitly identified and analyzed various consumption practices particularly within the marketplace cultures stream of research (e.g. Kozinets 2001; Kates 2002).

3.2.2 Focusing on social practices

Practice theory has taken shape in the social sciences over the last couple of decades but especially in the 2000s as it has been conceptually clarified (Schatzki 2001; Reckwitz 2002; Warde 2005). The roots of practice theoretical thinking are in

the sociological theory of Bourdieu (1977; 1990) with the notion of the habitus and social practice as well as Giddens (1976; 1984) with his theory of structuration. Both Bourdieu and Giddens emphasized that social life is largely about routinized action. People do not consciously deliberate their actions even though they might frame them in terms of conscious purposes and intentions.

Bourdieu (1977) claimed that people have practical knowledge that allows them to act in social situations. This knowledge is based on their habitus; a system of durable, transposable dispositions. The habitus is largely defined by the person's upbringing and social class. The habitus coordinates people's practices and tends to reproduce the objective social structures which then again dialectically produce the habitus. Even though people are not willing or able to recognize it, the way they act is somewhat predictable based on their habitus and every time they act, they also reinforce it. The driving force behind action is, according to Bourdieu, the maximization of capital (cultural, economic, or social) in different social fields. Thus, for instance regarding consumption, the habitus defines people's tastes: people buy according to their taste which is largely similar to others with similar habitus, in an attempt to maximize their amount of capital. People are largely unconscious of the restraining power of the habitus and may experience consumption phenomenologically as the exercise of personal freedom and self-realization. Yet, people's actions are not mechanically dictated by their habitus, because their actions also always depend on the context and situation where people also improvise:

Through the habitus, the structure which has produced it governs practice, not by the processes of a mechanical determinism, but through the mediation of the orientations and limits it assigns to the habitus's operations of invention. (Bourdieu 1977, 95)

According to Schatzki (1996, 139), Bourdieu's theory is still too mechanical because it explains social action largely as a mechanical reproduction of the habitus. Although people may improvise, they are always conditioned by this mechanism as well as statistical conditions such as access to education.

The idea of the dialectic between social structures and social action is also prominent in Giddens' theory of structuration. He claimed that activities are shaped and enabled by structures of rules and meanings and these structures are simultaneously reproduced in the flow of human action (Shove, Pantzar & Watson 2012, 3). Thus, what should be studied are social practices that are ordered across space and time. For Giddens, people are mostly guided by these rules which are tacit and of which they are consciously unaware. Thus, as people follow the rules they maintain the practices concerned (Schatzki 1996).

The label of practice theory as such was introduced by Schatzki (1996; 2002) who built on the earlier theories. He argued, similarly to Bourdieu, that social action is governed by “practical intelligibility”. It is not the same as rationality or following norms, but instead specifies what the actor does next (Schatzki 2002, 75). Giddens’ calls this notion practical consciousness as the opposite to discursive consciousness which consists of explicit norms and rules that we are able to linguistically articulate. The particular practice that the actor is enacting determines to a large extent what makes sense for him or her to do next; certain actions and ends seem correct or acceptable. For instance, if I am enacting the practice of gardening, my practical intelligibility (consisting of tacit and learned bodily and mental skills and competences) might tell me to first mould the ground and then spread the seeds.

As practice theory has been adopted into use, there have emerged different ways of understanding practices from specific localized actions to long-term patterns of activity (Rouse 2007). Practice theories have made their way into diverse scientific disciplines including science studies, organization studies, anthropology, culture and design, environment and sustainability research, geography, health, history, and media (Halkier, Katz-Gerro & Martens 2011). Over the past decade, a practice theoretical framework has been adopted increasingly to the study of marketing and consumption (Warde 2005; Korkman 2006; Shove & Pantzar 2007; Schau et al. 2009; Truninger 2011; Gram-Hanssen 2011; Hargreaves 2011; Magaudda 2011; Helkkula et al. 2012; Närvänen, Saarijärvi & Simanainen 2013).

3.2.3 Core characteristics of practice theory

As explained above, all cultural or meaning-oriented approaches look for explanations in shared symbolic structures of knowledge, i.e. meanings. In practice theory, meanings are sought from analyzing social practices instead of the consumers’ self/identity or cultural discourses. However, analyzing practices is a holistic approach and does not mean merely analyzing observable acts. These acts must be analyzed within the contexts in which they are performed, including also the understandings and emotional engagements linked to them. The core characteristics of practice theory are delineated in Table 4 and discussed below.

Table 4. Characteristics of practice theory

Characteristic of practice theory	Explanation	Challenge for research
Multifaceted	Has multiple components and elements and attempts to explain social action holistically	Taking everything into account simultaneously
Focuses on routine	Pays attention to observable yet not deliberated and largely routine patterns of action	Identifying and interpreting these patterns correctly
Contextualized	Looks at practices in their socio-material and historical context	Determining the appropriate contexts
Dynamic and relational	Phenomena are always related to each other and co-constitute each other	Finding a starting point and choosing perspective
Anti-individualist	People are seen as carriers of practice; practices or their constituent elements are the unit of analysis	Moving away from individuals as units of analysis
Focuses on materiality	Material elements have a more important ontological status; they hold practices together and mediate human relations	Using appropriate methodologies to capture materiality

The first characteristic of practice theory is that it is multifaceted. Reckwitz's (2002, 250) definition of practice is widely quoted and it pays attention to both mental and bodily activities as well as the level of emotions and motivations:

A 'practice' (Praktik) is a routinized type of behavior which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge.

Warde (2005) has simplified these elements into understandings (knowledge and know-how of what to do), procedures (instructions, principles and rules of how to do), and engagements (emotional and normative orientations related to what and how to do) (Halkier & Jensen 2011, 105). For example, performing in a karaoke bar entails understandings (where, when, with whom), procedures (where to sign up, how to choose the song, where to stand, and where to read the lyrics) and engagements (having fun with friends, showing off your singing abilities). Thus, practices usually consist of both doings and sayings, and both discursive and

nondiscursive elements. Practices are thus more than just action or behaviour. They are rather contexts where action is carried out (Schatzki 2001).

The multifaceted nature, however, makes it challenging to apply practice theory as a framework. The researcher should ideally take into account multiple levels of analysis at the same time; 1) the observable level of actions and bodily movements, 2) the mental level of thoughts, motivations, and emotions as well as 3) the whole context of social action. Further, most practices are routine in nature, which means that they are often observable but to a large extent not deliberated. This makes it more difficult to get people to reflect about their own practices verbally. However, it does not mean that practices are the same as habits (Shove et al. 2012). Practices can and do change and evolve (Gram-Hanssen 2011). This happens for instance because practices can also be conceived of as patterns that can contain regular, occasional, rare and novel doings and sayings (Schatzki 2002, 74). In reality, it is difficult to take into account all of these aspects in a single research project. Depending on the level of analysis and perspective, some studies focus more on the perspective of individual members as practitioners, identifying their personal histories as carriers of the practice while other studies focus more on the context and elements of practices themselves and how they change on a longer time frame.

Schatzki calls this second way of viewing practice the “practice-as-coordinated-entity”. This means that practices are somewhat enduring patterns where certain elements co-exist as a coordinated whole. Thus, the practice of playing golf has an enduring set of understandings, skills and background knowledge that is retained by the people who play golf. Each instance of playing golf is itself a performance of this practice. A further distinction can also be made between dispersed practices and integrative practices (Schatzki 1996). Dispersed practices are more general in nature such as “explaining” or “following rules” which appear in different areas of everyday life. To engage in dispersive practices, people need to have collective understanding of how to do it and where to do it (Schatzki 1996; Warde 2005). The second type of practices are integrative practices which are more specialized into particular areas of life such as fishing practices or cooking practices, or playing golf. Integrative practices may then contain several dispersed practices. The practice-as-entity perspective has led some authors to focus not on the composition and reproduction of practices-as-performances, but rather how practices-as-entities evolve and change (Shove & Pantzar 2005; Shove et al. 2012).

The holistic nature of practice theory means that practices are always contextualized. Practices are caught within a certain context that determines and shapes them (Schatzki 2002, 62). Arrangements of different elements are configured into practices in specific socio-material and historical circumstances (Magaudda 2011, 19). Thus, practices have a history and a trajectory of development. Playing golf for instance can be traced back to the middle ages but

the rules and the sociocultural meaning of playing it has changed over time. For each performance of playing golf, the context is also different and players have differing histories as practitioners.

The challenge of contextualization in practice theory means how to draw lines between phenomena and its context as well as how to decide the appropriate contexts. From an epistemological view, it is not enough to look at the individual's personal or psychological context but the broader sociocultural context must be taken into account. This means that the researcher must move beyond what her informants say and rather contextualize with a broader sociocultural and historical perspective (Askegaard & Linnet 2011, 391). But how far and broad should one go to contextualize a practice? Because practices are also intertwined, it may be difficult to distinguish where a certain practice has emerged. Different types of data, particularly documents and archival data, may be needed to provide a temporal perspective. Stressing context also easily moves focus away from the practice itself. Contextualization is thus a balancing act between staying close to practices and analyzing them on a broader level.

Practice theory attempts to take into account complexity and dynamism. It conceptualizes dynamic movements between subjective and objective, mind and body, cognition and action, structure and agency, free will and determinism (Reckwitz 2002). Practice theory argues that it is never either or, but both at the same time. Relationality is also accepted as part of the social world; phenomena are always related to each other and co-constitute each other. Practices thus overlap and the same elements can belong in different practices. This also means that social regularities such as institutions and structures are always in the making through social action, which is itself conditioned by the social regularities that exist (Giddens 1984). It can be argued that practice theory takes into account a postmodern ontology that is plural and flexible without succumbing to epistemological relativism (Warde 2005, 132).

However, from a methodological viewpoint, taking into account complexity and relationality provides a challenge; how to distinguish relevant units of analysis when everything is connected and overlapping? In considering collective consumption phenomena, one could say that it is no longer the membership in groups of people that counts, but the participation in shared practices, because those practices constitute a sense of "we" (Schatzki 1996, 117). Someone is only a member of some unity when they engage in similar practices, but the boundaries of "we" are always unstable and shifting. Hence, from a practice theoretical viewpoint, collective consumption could be conceptualized more as "doing" than as "being".

Some researchers suggest that identifying three levels; the micro level of individuals, the meso level of collectivities as well as the macro level of structures might help to build understanding of the dynamics at play. To understand

individual behavior in consumption collectives, it is necessary to understand the collectives' structure and interaction, which then again structure the consumption patterns of individuals (Algesheimer & Gurau 2008). The determining of a starting point is necessary in order to grasp any empirical phenomena, even though one could in theory accept that everything is co-constituted and always "in the making". Thus, for this research, the consumption collectives are the starting point. Rather than stable structures, they are seen as the social sites or spaces opened up and sustained by practices. These sites are both dynamically constituted by and they constitute the practices that take place within them. Furthermore, elements of practice can move between practices and belong to many practices simultaneously.

Another core characteristic of practice theory is that it is anti-individualist. A person acts as the carrier of many practices which may or may not be related to one another (Reckwitz 2002). Individuals are thus at the intersection of many practices in their daily lives, acquiring items from different ones and forming patterns of consumption that are very unique. Thus, people form heterogeneous networks where they participate as practitioners at various points of their careers for instance as amateurs or professionals, innovators or conservatives. This is one explanation for the fragmentation of lifestyles today (Warde 2005, 144).

However, in practice theory, the focus is not on the individual carriers of practice, but on the practice itself. For instance, the mental activities such as motivations and emotions or what Schatzki (2002, 60) calls the teleoaffective structure that are part of practices are analyzed as elements of the practice instead of properties of the individual. It means that the goals and ends need not be conscious to the carrier of the practice. As people learn what a certain practice entails, they come to have a certain set of goals and purposes included in that practice. Thus, while practices are indeed learnt, the way learning takes place is through doing and embodied performance; not only through internalizing knowledge at the cognitive level. In other words, participating in the practice makes people feel certain mental and affective states. The nature of the states is, however, open-ended, because the practice can be carried out in various circumstances and because the "correct" way of enacting the practice may also be negotiated (Schatzki 2002, 83).

This is a radical ontological departure from approaches that start from the assumption that understandings, know-how, purposes and goals belong to the individual or are personal attributes (Shove et al. 2012, 7). In practice theory, all carriers of the same practice are likely to have similar mental and affective states even though they are not identical. And these mental and affective states only form a part of the practice, with understandings, practical knowledge and skills as well as structures of meaning and the material world playing an equally important role in the organization of a practice. Therefore, acquiring knowledge about the practice is

possible through other methods than the in-depth interview, such as observing people, participating in the practice oneself, or analyzing the material elements related to the practice. The challenge then in adopting practices as units of analysis becomes to move from the empirical data that may come from individual people (doings, sayings) to forms of data that describe both the action and its context (symbols, material elements, places etc.).

A further key point in practice theory is indeed that material elements, ‘things and their use’, are given a more important ontological status. They are central elements within the performance of a practice and have an important role in holding the practice together (Shove & Pantzar 2005, Gram-Hanssen 2011; Shove et al. 2012). The material aspect has entered practice theory from Science and Technology Studies (STS) where it is argued that non-human objects such as artifacts and technologies have agency and are involved in producing social life (e.g. Callon 1986; Latour 1987; Knorr-Cetina 1997).

Another stream influencing the materiality of practice theory is studies of material culture (Ilmonen 2004; Miller 2010). They argue that non-human objects have agency because they mediate our activities and relations between one another (Ilmonen 2004, 31). For instance a phone helps us to maintain social relationships. Schatzki (2002, xv) argues that practice theory is decidedly un-individualist and post-humanist in this aspect. It denies the humanist assumption that only people have the capacity to act as agents in social life. Things contribute to the patterning of our social world and also demand skills and knowledge from the people using them. For instance a mundane object such as a coffee maker entails mental activities in learning how to use it, bodily enactments and so on. At the same time, the coffee maker structures our use of time; for instance, having to wait for the coffee to be ready (Ilmonen 2004, 32). The challenge in taking account materiality is then about choosing relevant methodologies to capture the material aspects of a phenomenon. Table 5 illustrates some key definitions and central elements of practice by several different authors.

Table 5. Definitions and central elements of practice

Authors	Definition and central elements of practice
Schatzki 1996, 2001, 2002	A temporally evolving, open-ended set of doings and sayings linked by practical understandings, rules, teleoaffective structure and general understandings.
Reckwitz 2002	A routinized type of behavior which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge.
Warde 2005	Practices consist of the components of 1) understandings 2) procedures and 3) engagements.
Korkman 2006	More or less routinized actions, which are orchestrated by tools, know-how, images, physical space, and a subject who is carrying out the practice.
Gram- Hanssen 2011	A collection of sayings and doings performed by individuals but formed and sustained by collectively shared elements: 1) Know-how and embodied habits, 2) Institutionalized knowledge and explicit rules, 3) Engagements and 4) Technologies.
Shove, Pantzar & Watson 2012	Practices consist of elements that can be 1) materials (things, technologies, physical entities, stuff) 2) competences (skills, know-how, technique) or 3) meanings (symbolic meanings, ideas and aspirations) – practices emerge, persist, shift and disappear as connections between elements are made, sustained or broken.

Practice theory is rather new as an interpretive framework and there are differences between the definitions for a practice, most of them being characterized by multiple components. However, there are already some attempts to simplify the framework, and practice theory can be utilized in different ways. Next, these different approaches are examined in more detail.

3.2.4 Different usages of practice theory as a framework

Practice theory does not as such provide a set of tools that could be applied to empirical analysis. It is rather a sensitizing framework that “opens up a certain way of seeing and analyzing social phenomena” (Reckwitz 2002, 257). From the literature, there can also be identified different ways of using practice theory. First, there is a more mechanical way of identifying different practices and dissecting their content into understandings, procedures, and engagements. These approaches usually follow Reckwitz’s definition of practice and focus on the reproduction and stability of practices. Holt (1995) used practice theory to develop a typology of consumption practices in relation to baseball which has been very influential within consumer research. More recently, Schau et al. (2009) studied brand community practices with this scheme and identified a “physiology” of brand community practices consisting of understandings, procedures and engagements. The practices

they identified are categorized into social networking, impression management, community engagement, and brand use. These practices are common in several different brand communities, making them appear more as dispersed practices than integrative ones. The integrative practice that they are part of could be for instance participating in a brand community. As their analysis is focused on the practices of members as the unit of analysis, it brings more insight into the internal dynamics of brand communities rather than the external dynamics of communities' role in the market. By looking at elements that may travel between practices, my thesis utilizes practice theory differently from Schau et al. (2009).

Secondly, different from the mechanical approach, practice theory can be used to study the trajectories of different integrative practices, paying attention to how practices-as-entities emerge, evolve, change, and are sustained over time. Even though practices are collective and contain a particular set of elements intertwined together, practices also always contain a seed of change (Warde 2005; Feldman & Orlikowski 2011). This is largely because individual performances of the same practice may differ. People in different situations innovate, experiment and improvise. Another way in which change happens is because the elements within the practice may change and influences from other practices are integrated into the practice. As elements are integrated and links are made between them, practices emerge, are maintained and possibly also die out as those links are broken (Shove et al. 2012).

Shove and Pantzar's (2005) work on Nordic Walking is an example of the practices-as-entities approach. They argue that Nordic Walking emerged as a practice as the consequence of linking and integrating different already existing elements together. This also involves breaking other links that have previously existed. Thus, as walking with sticks was linked with the meanings of health and outdoorsy lifestyle, the association with frailty and infirmity was broken (Shove & Pantzar 2005, 48). Shove and Pantzar also discuss the way practices always evolve within some socio-cultural context. Thus, Nordic Walking had trouble in becoming accepted in Britain where there was no existing skiing culture and people had already been using trekking poles before. Differences in the context thus result in a different configuration of elements and linkages between them. Even though practices may be analyzed as entities, their existence depends on the people performing them as well as the context wherein they are enacted.

Another way of using practice theory has emerged recently which concentrates on the formation and making of markets (Kjellberg & Helgesson 2006; 2007; Azimont & Araujo 2007; 2010, Araujo 2007; Geiger et al. 2012). In this stream of research, practice theory is used to study how markets emerge as the result of shaping efforts by different parties according to particular templates. Different empirical studies that use practice theory are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6. Different usages of practice theory in previous research

Authors (year)	Usage of practice theory	Main findings	Approach
Holt (1995)	To develop a typology of consumption practices related to consuming baseball.	Consumption practices can be divided into integration, classification, experience or play.	Mechanical
Shove & Pantzar (2005)	To study the emergence of Nordic Walking as an integrative practice.	Practices emerge, are sustained and evolve as links are made and broken between different elements.	Trajectory
Hand et al. (2005)	To study the trajectory of showering as practice.	Practices entail material, conventional and temporal dimensions.	Trajectory
Korkman (2006)	To study the formation of customer value in practice within the context of cruise traveling.	Customer value is embedded in practices and is formed in a specific socio-material context.	Mechanical
Hand & Shove (2007)	To study the ways in which daily life revolves around the freezer.	Practices intersect and are coordinated with particular objects and devices that form nodes or junction points for practices.	Trajectory
Shove et al. (2007)	To study the recruitment and careers of practitioners into floorball and digital photography.	Practices are carried on, transformed and extended as people are recruited to become practitioners. Different careers enable changes in practices.	Trajectory
Watson & Shove (2008)	To study the dynamics of craft consumption.	Products and practices co-evolve. Consumer projects establish a framework within which practices are integrated and new skills and competences emerge.	Trajectory
Schau et al. (2009)	To introduce a physiology of practices which create value for a brand.	Practices create value, cultural and social capital and consumption opportunities.	Mechanical
Echeverri & Skålen (2011)	To study interactive value formation between public transport organizations' frontline employees and customers.	Service providers and consumers need to derive from congruent elements of practices in order to co-create value.	Mechanical

Alakärppä & Valtonen (2011)	To study the adoption and use of a bioactive innovation.	The acceptance of an innovation in the market is closely related with the acceptance of existing and emerging practices.	Trajectory
Gram-Hanssen (2011)	To study the role of new technology in changing consumer practices in the context of household energy consumption.	Practices can be reflexive or routinized; changes in one practice may affect other practices, because they may share the same elements.	Trajectory
Hargreaves (2011)	To study behavioural change in the context of workplaces becoming more environmental.	Causing changes in practices are the key to changing behavior, not affecting attitudes. Practices uphold social order, which is why changing them is difficult.	Trajectory
Araujo (2007); Kjellberg & Helgesson (2006); (2007); Azimont & Araujo (2007); (2010)	To study the emergence, formation and development of markets-as-practice.	There are differences between market, marketing and consumption practices. Market practices are what actually constitute markets.	Trajectory
Helkkula et al. (2012)	To study the value creating practices related to car-washing and compare them to customers' value experiences.	Value creating practices are observable, routinized patterns of action that are socially shared and for which the sociocultural setting is important.	Mechanical
McColl-Kennedy et al. (2012)	To study what customers do when they co-create value in health care contexts.	A typology of practice styles is identified and linked to quality of life.	Mechanical
Närvänen, Saarijärvi & Simanainen (2013)	To study consumers' online conversation practices related to convenience food.	Both positive and negative meanings are negotiated through oppositional practices.	Mechanical

As can be seen from the above discussion and table, practice theory is a manifold plurality of perspectives and conceptual tools that are not straightforward. It does not provide a ready-made pattern with which to analyze empirical data.

3.2.5 Implications of practice theory for this research

As argued by Moisander & Valtonen (2006), the role of theory in qualitative research is to provide perspectives and open up the data to new features. It is a “source of inspiration, a vehicle that helps to draw the observer’s attention to things that would otherwise pass unnoticed” (ibid., 105). Thus, practice theory as an interpretive framework has some key implications. The first “analytical affordance” is that it avoids privileging the individual consumer as an actor theoretically and methodologically.

In accordance with the theoretical focus of the research on collective consumption, practice theory supports a collective orientation and focuses on the social processes wherein consumption is embedded. According to practice theory, people who engage in a similar set of practices form a collective, where the boundaries are unstable and shifting (Schatzki 1996). Thus: “integrative practices...house contexts and situations in which people act” (ibid., 116). Participating in the collective also means participating in the practices and therefore the collective forms the context for the practices to emerge. Practices and collectives co-constitute one another.

Practice theory is a critique against hyperindividualism, and tends to emphasize that elements of practice including mental activities belong to the practice rather than the individual. This means that even though mental intentions, beliefs and desires are part of practices, it is more relevant to study and analyze how people behave and act rather than directly ask them (Hargreaves 2011). Because the focus is on practices rather than individuals, research should focus on how the mental elements of a practice become enacted in embodied performances. Practice theory encourages attention to publicly accessible performances rather than private mental events or states (Rouse 2007, 504). For this research, it suggests becoming familiar with what the consumption collectives actually do with the brand and product; how they use it in practice. It also means that while collective identity and identification may be psychologically and cognitively different for consumers joining consumption collectives, these are not interesting from the point of view of this thesis. The phenomenological approach would suit these types of research questions better (cf. Goulding 2005; Helkkula et al. 2012). However, it would be possible to use practice theory more from the point of view of individual members, concentrating on the process through which they start enacting the practices and thereby become socialized into the consumption collective (cf. Goulding et al. 2012). However, this is not the focus here, but instead to look at the elements of practice and their mutual interaction in the consumption collectives as well as the resulting influence on the brand. In other words, the analysis looks more at the

collectives' shared relationship with the brand rather than consumers' personal relationship with the brand, the collective or other members.

A further practice theoretical argument for observing what people do rather than just trust their verbal reports is that people do not to a great extent consciously deliberate their social actions. Instead, most of the time they act routinely based on a practical sense of what to do and how to do it. When asked, people may frame their actions in rational or intentional terms. This means, in Giddens' terms, that people draw things from their practical consciousness into their discursive consciousness (Hitchings 2011). Becoming conscious of one's own everyday practices is easier in situations where they become somehow strange or out-of-place. For example, for a Finnish person going out to have dinner around six o'clock is part of the normal routine. When that person goes abroad, for instance to France and goes to the restaurant at that time, he or she will soon find out that the restaurants are closed or at least very empty. This is the moment when the person may start to reflect about their own routines. This also provides a challenge for a researcher coming from similar sociocultural background as her informants and the cultural materials that are explored. It might be more difficult for the researcher well as the informants in to explicitly reflect upon the taken-for-granted sociocultural meanings and practices. However, the sociocultural background can also provide support for interpretations and give leverage to reflect upon what is learned on the field.

There have emerged some views emphasizing that only certain types of methodology are suitable for the study of practices. These would include observational and ethnographic methods in particular. Talking about people as merely "carriers" of practice (Reckwitz 2002) who, once they are recruited, just go with the flow, leads to the contention that interviewing them is a pointless method because they are not able to reflect upon their action. For instance, in making a comparison between practice theory and phenomenology, authors have suggested that both perspectives should be used to complement each other and to get a more complete view of behavior (Helkkula et al. 2012). However, as described above, people are not always subordinate to their practices, because they also innovate and integrate new elements into existing practices. This is how practice theory not only explains stability, but also change. Thus, people are able to talk about their practices and this is not in any contradiction with the practice theoretical assumptions (Hitchings 2011). Different methods complement one another, and because of the dynamic, multifaceted and complex nature of practices, using multiple methods might be a good way of accessing them.

Another reservation against the use of interview methods in practice theoretical research arises from the argument that by observing people, the researcher somehow gets a more direct access to action whereas interview data only provides

accounts about action (Halkier & Jensen 2011). However, according to social constructionism, there are no such things as pure observations. Observations are always entangled in interpretations, as are interview data. Both types of data generation methods produce social action, “enactments” of social life performed in different contexts.

Another “theoretical affordance” of practice theory in relation to other possible perspectives is that it pays attention to the dynamic and relational aspects in consumption (Halkier & Jensen 2011). Thus, it can be argued that the meaning of brands, for instance, is not static and stable, nor is it independent of the consumers of that brand. According to practice theoretical views, (brand) meaning is a continuous negotiated accomplishment that takes place in discursive and performative practices. Discursive means here that the focus is on signs and language that coordinate action and performative means that the focus is more on material and bodily enactments.

Thus, as Schatzki argues (1996, 130), it is not enough to account for how people talk about things at the discursive level. Things, people and events get their meanings through practices and practices contain elements that cannot be accessed directly through language. Yet, language has an important role as it pervades practices helping us to account for them. Language does not only mirror reality, but constructs it at the same time (Burr 2003). It is not possible to know what any brand means without knowing how brand meaning is constantly being performed by consumers or consumption collectives’ in their everyday lives and intersecting practices.

3.2.6 Using practice theory to analyze data

In recent practice theoretical studies, it is increasingly recommended that intersecting practices and the relations between different practices should be studied rather than just singling out individual practices (Hargreaves 2011; Gram-Hanssen 2011). Practices with their sometimes shared and evolving elements form a context for social action, “the site of the social” in Schatzki’s terms. The site of the social entails a mesh of practices and orders which are continuously evolving. It is characterized by openness, multiplicity and complexity (Schatzki 2002, xxi). These sites in the smaller scale and empirical sense can be for instance households or workplaces. In this research, the consumption collectives are perceived as such sites, where multiple practices co-exist, co-evolve, and interact.

Rather than identifying single practices, in this research elements of practices (meanings, materials, and competences) are the unit of analysis. By looking at intersections between elements rather than practices as distinct wholes, a more

dynamic perspective is enabled. This unleashes the potential to understand change (Shove et al. 2012), which in this case is essentially a process of transformation in which the brand becomes redefined in the market. Thus, it can be argued that there has occurred a change in how consumers use the brand in their practices; what kinds of practices are performed, and how elements from different practices are integrated around the brand. The focus moves from individual practices to consider the context of action. It allows for more breadth to consider complexity and heterogeneity of practices in consumption collectives not only within them (cf. Schau et al. 2009) but between and across different practices.

Shove et al. (2012, 23–24) have made a simplifying move to practice theory by focusing on three types of elements: competences (know-how, background knowledge and understanding), materials (objects, infrastructures, tools, hardware and the body) and meanings (the social and symbolic significance of participation at any one moment). This categorization overcomes some of the complicated nature of previous definitions that take into account mental and bodily activities as well as motivations and goals simultaneously. It helps the researcher to grasp empirical data from a practice theoretical framework without having to make too many compromises on the quality of interpretations.

The core argument of Shove et al. (2012, 14–15) is that people actively combine the elements of practice (competences, materials and meanings) and “practices emerge, persist, shift and disappear when connections between elements of these three types are made, sustained or broken”. The methodological implications of practice theory for this research are detailed in Table 7.

Table 7. Methodological implications of practice theory for this research

Characteristic of practice theory	Challenge for research	Choices made in this research
Multifaceted	Taking into account everything simultaneously	Focusing on different sites of the social (the collectives) and the elements of practice (materials, meanings, competences) and their relations
Focuses on routine	Identifying and interpreting routinized patterns of action correctly	Using multiple data sources; interviews, participant and non-participant observation, cultural materials
Contextualized	Determining the appropriate contexts	Each consumption collective is contextualized separately
Dynamic and relational	Finding a starting point and choosing perspective	The starting point is to identify consumption collectives as social sites
Anti-individualist	Moving on a higher level of abstraction	Analyzing collective actors and their practices
Focuses on materiality	Using appropriate methodologies to capture materiality	Using photos and field notes in the thesis to illustrate material aspects

To answer the challenge derived from practice theory’s focus on the routine, multiple data sources are used to identify and analyze elements of practices that form patterns of action i.e. collective practices. The analysis is also contextualized separately for each consumption collective. It is accepted that the practices and the collectives co-constitute one another, but the starting point is to identify the characteristics of collectives first and then move on to analyzing the elements of practice. To account for the material aspects emphasized in practice theory, this thesis takes advantage of detailed field notes and includes photographs as illustrations.

3.3 Research strategy

The central issue is whether the researcher is able to understand and describe the context of the social dynamics of the scene in question to such a degree as to make the context intelligible to the reader and to generate theory in relationship to that context (Dyer & Wilkins 1991, 616).

This chapter reviews the practical choices made in conducting the research. First, the overall strategy of qualitative case study research is discussed, followed by a depiction of the data generation methods as well as the data analysis. The research process in whole was characterized by an emergent research design (e.g. Carson et al. 2001). This means that the research design evolved throughout the process according to what was learned on the way. This type of process has also been called the hermeneutic helix (Gummesson 2005) where the researcher moves from pre-understanding to understanding and from parts to whole as an interactive process. In order to make the process transparent, I have discussed the choices made already before the doctoral research itself was started, because they had a great influence on the research questions, conceptual and interpretive frameworks as well as the methodological choices. Thus, the whole research process started from the master's thesis project in 2009 and the dataset was utilized also in the doctoral research.

3.3.1 Qualitative case study research

The research strategy for this thesis is qualitative case study research for in-depth examination and analysis. Qualitative case study research is flexible and holistic and therefore a good method for the study of complex, context-dependent empirical phenomena (Gummesson 2007, 229). Case study research focuses on “understanding the dynamics present within single settings” (Eisenhardt 1989, 534). Case study research has been criticized for yielding only anecdotal or descriptive evidence and therefore as an inadequate scientific method. However, case study research as such is not a methodology in the sense of answering the question of how something is studied. It does not contain particular pre-specified ontological and epistemological assumptions, but can be applied as a data generation method. Case study research answers the question of what is being studied (Stake 2005). It is particularly suited for theory generation rather than theory testing (Eisenhardt 1989).

To be able to generate theory with a case study research strategy, one must pay attention to the research philosophical and methodological questions separately. In

accordance with the research philosophy chosen for this research, the role of case study research is not to build a generalizable theory, but to understand a phenomenon in-depth (Dubois & Gadde 2002). Because it is argued that there is no single objective reality that can be captured through research, the aim is rather to “crystallize different aspects of reality” (Järvensivu & Törnroos 2010, 104). The goal is to be able to conduct analytical generalization, which means that the research develops concepts and frameworks that can be reflected with other cases (Lincoln & Guba 1985).

The first step in a case study research is to determine what constitutes a case (Carson et al. 2001). Selecting the case should be based on its potential to generate theory and therefore the case’s relevance rather than representativeness should be considered (Stake 2005). In this research, the empirical phenomenon itself was considered relevant and interesting both from a theoretical and practical perspective. The initial interest toward understanding this phenomenon in-depth as well as good access to many different types of data guided me toward a case study research strategy. Making a distinction between what is the case and what is its environment or context is important. As argued by Dyer and Wilkins (1991), the more cases one chooses to study, the less context one can take into account. However, in an interpretive study situated within the Consumer Culture Theory field, it is also important to enrich understanding of the case specifically through understanding its context (e.g. Askegaard & Linnet 2011). This is one reason for choosing just one case to analyze in-depth to capture its underlying dynamics. The case in question is the Reino & Aino brand that is discussed within its context: the different collectives that have emerged around it. The units of analysis are the different collectives themselves and the elements of practice within them. Stake (2005) distinguishes between intrinsic case studies that are undertaken to understand the particular case itself and instrumental ones where the case facilitates the understanding of something else. In this thesis, the case is used instrumentally. The interest is not in the particular phenomenon as such but on its broader theoretical, managerial and cultural implications. In representing the case study, the story of the case is told by the researcher by selecting and “teasing out” what she sees as the most important aspects in the case (Stake 2005).

What comes to the analytical position of the research, both inductive and deductive elements of reasoning were used. An inductive study begins with the data and the concepts and categories used are indigenous. This kind of approach is most often associated with grounded theory. However, no researcher is a blank canvas and even with a more data-driven approach, the researcher always brings her own experience, background and interests to the field of study. In deductive studies on the other hand, the researcher has an initial theoretical framework which she uses to test theory. This thesis adopts a combined approach that can also be

called abductive logic. Abductive reasoning forms a good fit with case study research as well as the moderate constructionist research philosophy (Dubois & Gadde 2002; Järvensivu & Törnroos 2010). In abductive research, inductive and deductive phases vary. As suggested by Stake (2005) the researcher is ever-reflective.

The research process started already when I was doing my master's thesis. The first phase of data generation was mostly inductive; familiarizing myself with the phenomenon and generating data from diverse sources without pre-defined research questions or theoretical frameworks. The findings and their interpretation in the master's thesis were initially largely data-driven. Like in a grounded theory approach, I followed the principles of theoretical sampling and engaged in constant comparison to build the emerging theory (Goulding 2002). However, to avoid methodological transgression, I have decided not to call my approach grounded theory. First of all, I did not conduct line-by-line analysis, or engage in other grounded theory procedures such as open and constant comparative coding. Rather, my approach, like most qualitative consumer research, was merely inspired by the principles and techniques introduced by grounded theory. These include documenting the research process into a diary and memos, using a wide variety of data sources, spending a lot of time in the field to allow for data saturation as well as giving initial primacy to what the data were telling me. For a beginning researcher, the possibly prolonged research process, the formulaic nature of coding procedures and the confusion between different ways of doing grounded theory (Goulding 2002) were also considered risky. This is why this methodology was not fully adopted for this thesis.

As a result of engaging with the data and research phenomenon already for one year before the doctoral research process, I was able to identify the most prominent aspects of the data for further inquiry. This guided me toward literature on communities which provided some sensitizing concepts (Blumer 1969; Patton 1990) with which to analyze and generate more data. While the first phase of data generation had mostly consisted of interviews, the conceptual framework related to communities directed me toward more data generation with observational methods. Before this, I had mainly been conducting individual interviews and generating cultural data. With the theoretical focus on communities, I realized that I needed to broaden my methods of data generation to observing how people behave and interact in relation to the brand, especially in different kinds of consumption collectives.

However, for the whole duration of the process, I wanted to account for the complexity and breadth of the phenomenon related to the Reino & Aino brand instead of focusing on just one collective or field site in depth. This decision was made because eventually I wanted to understand the phenomenon as a whole. The

research therefore does not fulfill all the requirements of pure ethnography (cf. Arnould & Wallendorf 1994). In the traditional sense, I did not immerse myself in the field for a prolonged period of time. Rather, I visited several different sites and conducted in-situ, contextualized observations for a shorter period of time to complement the other data generation methods. However, for the purposes of this project, this strategy was considered adequate to get an overall broad understanding of the heterogeneity of collectives around one brand. On the other hand, it is also difficult to define the appropriate “field” for the research, because the collective consumption related to the brand is fragmented and varies in space and time (Kozinets 2001; Moisander & Valtonen 2006). Also in accordance with the postmodern conceptualization of community, it cannot be assumed that collectives are always found in a specific location. Instead, more interesting are the ways in which these collectives are continuously produced through their members engaging in collective practices where elements of practice are combined and links are made between them. To analyze these elements, it is not enough to observe a certain setting, but to view them more broadly by analyzing media products, related websites and other cultural systems of meaning. Next, the data generation methods will be depicted in more detail.

3.3.2 Data generation

It is argued that case study research in particular should be characterized by triangulation of data in order to increase its credibility (Stake 2005, 446). The chosen research philosophy of moderate constructionism also believes in legitimate local and community forms of truth (Longino 1990). Thus, data triangulation is a valid demand for this research. To take into account as many of those forms of truth as possible, any type of research data that allows for increased understanding may be used in the case study (Gummesson 2001). The orientation to data and different methods is also influenced by the interpretive framework that is used to interpret the data (Moisander & Valtonen 2006; Belk, Fischer & Kozinets 2013). For a phenomenological study, in-depth interviews that are able to give insights on subjective lived experiences are preferred, whereas naturalistic inquiry and ethnography favor participant observation to be able to achieve the emic perspective and then combine it with an etic perspective coming from appropriate theory (Goulding 2005). Thus, the specific methods should be chosen according to the interpretive framework.

In this research, several types of data were considered appropriate and the orientation toward generating data was innovative and open. The practice theoretical interpretive framework, as discussed above, does not specify certain

data types. It is a holistic framework that attempts to account for routine, observable action as well as the understandings and engagements underlying this action, so multiple methods of data generation are often used. In identifying elements of practices, I follow the type of analysis (Shove & Pantzar 2005; Shove et al. 2012) that entails the usage of cultural knowledge also beyond the researcher's data such as historical information and sociocultural knowledge. In line with the research philosophy, one type of research data is not considered as more authentic than another.

For this research, the data generation started with interviews in the first phase and continued with observational methods combined with interviews and cultural materials. In addition, I kept a diary during the whole process, and wrote field notes that documented the sites and events that I visited. These reflective diaries also contain descriptions of informal and casual conversations related to the topic that I had throughout the research process with friends, acquaintances, colleagues and other people I met. During the research process I soon realized that my topic was interesting to many people especially in Finland and people were able to relate to it easily. Thus, in addition to the more formal research interviews and observations, my understandings of the phenomenon were greatly enriched by these more casual conversations taking place when I was not actually "in the field". Furthermore, my attitude toward interviewing informants was influenced by interpretivist epistemologies where it is considered that the interviewer and interviewee together produce the data and both are conditioned by their sociocultural context (Shankar et al. 2001; Moisander et al. 2009). Thus, the interviewees and I had been greatly exposed to the same media texts and popular culture, sharing the same sociocultural context. What the interviewees were discussing with me were thus not merely unique and subjective experiences but they were drawing from shared cultural categories and understandings that inform their behavior. This orientation toward interview data comes from philosophical hermeneutics, emphasizing the linguistic nature of our understanding and sharing the social constructionist ontology (Shankar et al. 2001).

Data triangulation was used in this research to reveal as many aspects of the phenomenon as possible, but not to validate any one perspective. Another important aspect of good case study research is researcher involvement: to get as close to the phenomenon under study as possible (Dyer & Wilkins 1991, 633). In accordance with the epistemological stance of the research, knowledge is socially constructed and by drawing from the experiential and contextual accounts, the researcher assists readers in constructing knowledge (Stake 2005, 454).

The data generation for this research was ongoing from the spring of 2009 to the spring of 2012. I visited the field numerous times by interviewing participants, observing their activities in natural settings, collecting cultural materials and

following the media. Figure 7 represents the main data generation phases in a timeline.

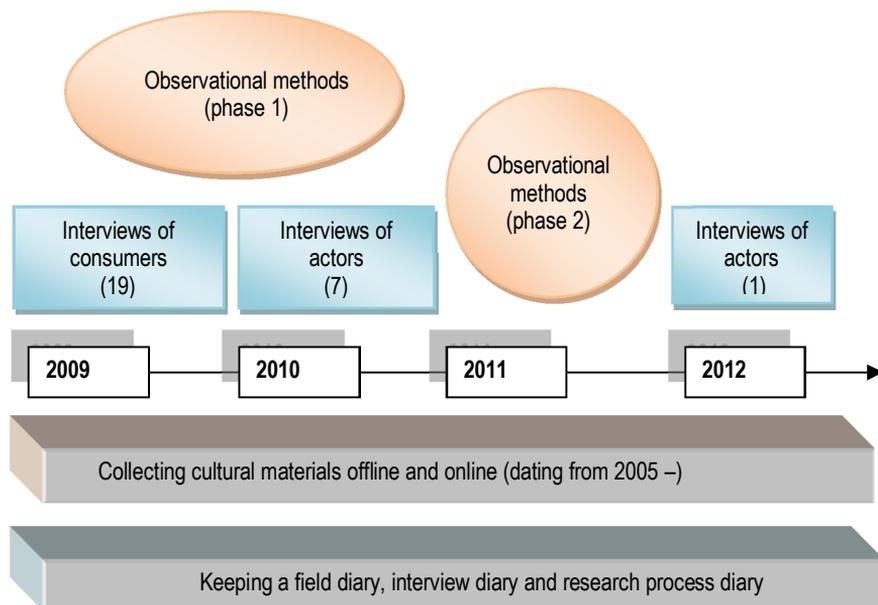


Figure 7. The data generation timeline.

The first phase of the research in 2009 consisted of interviewing individual Reino & Aino users. This data was used in my master's thesis extensively. In the doctoral thesis, it is used as a part of the larger dataset, also representing the experiential knowledge gained about the phenomenon overall. The 19 interviewees were selected based on purposive and theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Patton 1990). The initial criterion was that they were themselves users of the Reino & Aino slippers, but gradually new informants were selected to increase variation in the data. The interviewees were recruited using various techniques; university emailing lists (6 persons), a Facebook online fan group (3) my personal contacts (1), notice at the Reino & Aino retail store (2), observation sites (2), snowballing through previous interviewees (2) as well as simply recruiting people from the street, university café, or lecture (3). The interviewees' ages ranged from teenagers to pensioners. The interviews took place at my office or at the interviewees' homes or by phone (2) and email (1). Their duration ranged from 20 minutes to 1 hour (see Table 8). Interviewees got a movie ticket as an incentive for participating in the research. To ensure research ethics, their names were changed to pseudonyms.

These interviews were recorded with a tape-recorder and transcribed in their entirety.

Table 8. The first interview set (conducted in 2009)

Interviewee	Age category	Occupation	Recruited from	Interview location	Duration
Anne	35–44	Bank employee	Personal contact	My home	40 min
Arja	55–64	Author of books	Notice at the Reino & Aino store	My office	57 min
“Grandpa”	65–84	Pensioner	Observation site	Advertising agency	20 min
Hanna	25–34	Sales representative	From a lecture	My office	40 min
Helmi	15–24	University student	Email list	My office	30 min
Janne	35–54	Owner of company	Observation site	Advertising agency	28 min
Juha	25–34	Researcher	Snowballing technique	My office	43 min
Katariina	25–34	Researcher	Online fan group	By phone	45 min
Kiira	15–24	University student	Email list	My office	25 min
Kirsi	25–34	Researcher	Approached at the university café	My office	38 min
Kristiina	35–44	Office employee	Online fan group	By email	5 email messages
Leevi	15–24	High school student	Email list	My office	39 min
Malla	15–24	University student	Approached at university yard	My office	41 min
Matti	25–34	Mechanic	Online fan group	By phone	46 min
Mirja	25–34	Stay-home mum	Email list	Interviewee’s home	38 min
Pekka	15–24	University student	Email list	My office	35 min
Raisa	15–24	University student	From a lecture	My office	39 min
Ritva	55–64	Office employee	Notice at the Reino & Aino store	Interviewee’s workplace	56 min
Tero	15–24	University student	Email list	My office	38 min

The interviews were informal in nature and they were only structured by a list of broad topics that was modified from one interview to the other based on what I

learned during the process. The interviews started with broad, background questions and continued with more specific probes and detailed questions. To facilitate this interactive learning process, I kept an interview diary where I recorded my impressions of the interviews before and directly after I had conducted them. In the interviews, I mostly concentrated on how the informants used the slippers (when, with whom, and in what situations), what kind of a relationship they had with the brand (what feelings and emotions they had), what meanings they connected to the brand more broadly, how they felt about brand management, and the brand's appearance in the media. The interviews were not oriented toward exploring how using the brand facilitated the informants' social relationships, yet this dimension emerged as very important from the start, as can be seen from an extract from my research diary:

My interviewee talked a lot about the situations where he wears the Reino slippers such as with friends when they're on their free time. He said that merely wearing the slippers does not give a lot of information about your personality but instead where you use them and with whom is important.

Research diary, 14th Sept 2009

Insights from the interviews helped especially to analyze the more private collectives such as those based on pre-existing social relationships within families and friendship groups. It would have been very difficult to conduct observations in these more private collectives.

During the same time, observations were conducted at the Reino & Aino retail store (15 hours during several different days), at an old-age home, advertising agency, and teenagers' ice hockey practice (6 hours). In the retail store, I mostly stayed a passive observer and watched the customers as well as listened to their conversations. The observations that I made were recorded in the field notes. When I decided to interview some of the customers, I introduced myself to them and asked for their permission to be included in the research. At the other observation sites, the informants had been informed of my identity as a researcher beforehand. I also visited the events organized by the company. In addition, I took photos and recorded informal interviews and notes about the sites. In accordance with the research philosophy, observation as a method is viewed from a social constructionist viewpoint. Thus, it is not claimed that observations provide a more direct access to data because they are somehow unbiased and more objective than interviews (Halkier & Jensen 2011). Instead, observations are always conditioned by the researcher as an instrument: the researcher makes endless and continuous choices on what to pay attention to in the field as well as what to record. The resulting field notes always reflect a subjective interpretation of the data. The

observation conducted at this stage resulted in 24 pages of field notes. Observing consumption of the slippers in different settings helped me acknowledge that the use of the brand had changed from private to public and from individual to more collective contexts.

In 2010, the theoretical focus of the master's thesis moved away from the individual users' perspectives and experiences to trying to understand the phenomenon as a whole. My researcher's intuition had advised me that there was still more to learn and I was not satisfied with my data analysis yet. Thus, another set of interviews were conducted with actors related to the phenomenon including the owners of the company, a writer who had published a book on the phenomenon, Reino & Aino running contest representative, Reino football tournament representative as well as a local newspaper reporter and a museum curator. The selected interviewees were considered as key informants because they had an active role in the organization, collective or institution connected with the phenomenon. These interviews were approximately 1.5 hours long and took place in the interviewees' offices or through the phone (2). The phone interviews were conducted by phone due to practical reasons because the interviewees were geographically distant (see Table 9). These interviews were transcribed selectively based on the emerging theoretical interpretations.

Table 9. The second interview set (conducted in 2010)

Interviewee	Representative of	Location	Duration
Arto Huhtinen & Tuire Erkkilä	The company (entrepreneurs)	Company headquarters	64 min
Linda Huhtinen	The company (Reino store)	At the Reino store	75 min
Mikko Närhi	Author of Reino book	At interviewee's office	95 min
Pyterlahti representative	The Pyterlahti village committee	By phone	62 min
Mauno Huttunen	The Vesanto entrepreneurs	At a restaurant	52 min
Reporter	Lieksa newspaper	By phone	48 min
Museum representative	Vapriikki museum Reino exhibition	At the museum	38 min

These interviews helped to account for the complex interaction taking place in the market around the brand. As I argued in my master's thesis (Leppälä 2010), the brand had become a hub that connected different actors together as a network. These interviews were also helpful in creating access for further data generation

later in the research process, because I had already established friendly relations with key informants in the consumption collectives.

After finishing the master's thesis, I focused my attention on the repertoire of community and reviewed previous literature on that topic. In order to strengthen my data on the aspect of collective consumption, I realized that I needed to conduct more data generation especially on the collective consumption related to Reino & Aino. As a result, another round of observations took place in the consumer-organized events (3 days). Also several mini-interviews were conducted while observing. I also followed the websites and Facebook pages of these consumption collectives intensively before and after the events, which can be viewed as part of the ethnographic fieldwork (cf. Kozinets 2001). In these events, I engaged more as a participant observer, such as by participating myself in a Reino & Aino running contest. The field notes related to these observations amount to 30 pages of text as well as video and photos (190). Some of the photos are used in this thesis for descriptive purposes as well as to illuminate the material side of collective consumption. The fieldnotes were written during or immediately after the observations took place and they consisted of my own impressions and observations as well as emerging interpretations and theoretical clues. An extract from the fieldnotes describes one of the collectives' events:

As we arrive at the location we have a friendly welcome from the start. People are asking us who we are and welcoming us to the event, offering us some coffee and sandwiches. The location is a farmhouse yard where one can see some people with their Reino & Aino slippers on, running errands and preparing for the event. Plastic chairs have been organized in rows to one part of the area and there are a couple of stalls with decorations already set up for the event. One seems to have piles of the Reino & Aino slippers for sale. Old tractors are parked on one side of the area and they have Finnish flags attached to them. Finnish folk music is heard from the speakers. From people talking to each other in a casual manner, I get the impression that this event is a home-spun and small-scale event where everyone knows each other. Perhaps more so than in the other events I've visited.

Fieldnotes 13th Aug 2011

During 2011 and 2012 I also continued to follow my initial orientation to be as involved in the phenomenon as possible. I participated in company-organized events where I also wrote field notes and recorded them in my research diary. In 2012, one additional interview was conducted with the organizer and representative of Reino-rock, another consumer-led event. Table 10 summarizes the data generated during the doctoral research process to complement the previous data sets.

Table 10. The dataset generated in 2011–2012

Data type	Location	Duration/amount of data
Observational methods	Vesanto village – Reino football tournament & Pyterlahti village – Reino & Aino roadrunning contest	3 days in the summer of 2011; 30 pages of field notes containing notes of ad hoc interviews, 190 photos + web page data
Observational methods	Company organized events: Reino-bandy tournament; celebration of Reino's 80-old journey; end celebration of the Reino summer truck tour	3 days during 2011–2012; 10 pages of fieldnotes; photos
Interview with representative of a consumption collective (Reino Rock)	My office	1 hour

Simultaneously with generating the interviews and observational data, I collected cultural materials of the Reino & Aino phenomenon from newspapers and magazines as well as from the online world. These materials date back to the year 2005 even though I started the research in 2009. It was possible to gather these materials through using newspapers' and discussion boards' online archives. These materials helped me to contextualize the phenomenon more broadly in its sociocultural context and to see the ways in which the brand related practices evolved in the market. The quantity of these materials amounts to a folder containing tens of newspaper articles published online and offline, dozens of blog posts, approximately 300 online discussion board messages, and about two hundred photos taken by me as well as collected from online sources.

In addition, the company has published three books of their story; the Reino book (Reino –lämpimiä jalkoja ja ajatuksia / “Warm feet and thoughts”) that was edited by Mikko Närhi was published in 2007; the celebration book for the slipper in 2010 (Reinovuosi 2010 / “The Reino Year 2010”) and a book about the brand story (Reino – tohvelisankarista brändiksi / “Reino – From Slipper Hero to Brand”) in 2011. These written materials have provided supporting data for the interviews conducted. They have not been systematically coded, but instead I have used them selectively to support my interpretations. Table 11 summarizes the dataset and reflects upon the role of each type of data in the doctoral thesis.

Table 11. Summary of the dataset

Type of data	Role of data	Description of data
In-depth interviews	Accounts for the practices in more private collectives (especially social relations-focused ones) and the meaning elements related to the brand.	28 interviews, approx. 21 h of recorded material
Ad hoc and informal interviews	Accounts for the heterogeneity of collectives, illuminates the place-focused collectives' practices as well as provides support for other data.	Several interviews related to observations, their duration ranging from 5 to 30 minutes
Field notes and observations	Helps in providing a rich contextualized description of the sites, in staying close to the data as well as in developing the theoretical insights along the way.	54 pages
Cultural materials	Enables the sociocultural contextualization of the phenomena more broadly.	Online and offline articles, photos, advertisements, leaflets, the Reino books
Online discussion board and fan group data	Accounts for the practices in brand-focused collectives in particular.	Blog posts, discussion board messages, Facebook fan group data
Research diary	Helps to reflect upon the whole research process and to see how the theoretical insights emerged.	Around 100 pages written in black notebooks as well as word files on the computer
Photos	Helps to illustrate and describe especially material elements of collectives, and visualize the empirical data.	Around 300 photos taken by me as well as collected from online sources

In the empirical analysis, verbatim quotations from the data as well as photos are used to illustrate aspects of the data and to discuss the findings in a detailed manner.

3.3.3 Data analysis and interpretation

In qualitative research, the process of data analysis and interpretation is not separate from the generation of data. Instead, these processes are intertwined (Gummesson 2005). However, for the sake of clarity, this chapter discusses how the analysis and interpretation phases were conducted for the thesis.

The qualitative data analysis and interpretation process can be described as a riddle-solving activity (Alasuutari 1995). The goal is to be able to form a coherent and holistic interpretation for the data through the chosen interpretive framework.

Analysis and interpretation form two different phases where the data is first dissected, organized, and sorted into meaningful categories in the analysis phase and then given meaning in the interpretation phase (Spiggle 1994; Belk et al. 2013). In practice, these phases are often intertwined.

In cultural research, the data analysis is not purely inductive or data-driven. Instead, the researcher needs to move between the data and the world around it, interpreting the historical and sociocultural context in which data are produced and analyzed (Holt & Thompson 2004; Moisander & Valtonen 2006; Askegaard & Linnet 2011). In this research, the units of analysis are the collectives as well as elements of practice within them. The analysis thus focuses on collective behavior and shared cultural meanings and practices. Similarly to market-oriented ethnography, the focus is to “explicate patterns of action that are cultural/social rather than cognitive” (Arnould & Wallendorf 1994, 485). Analysis is about “sorting out the structures of signification” (Geertz 1993/1973, 11).

As explained above, most of the data was generated without the interpretive framework of practice theory or the conceptual framework of collective consumption in mind. Initially, the data from the interviews and field notes was categorized emically into themes that the interviewees themselves brought up. However, during the research process and as a result of realizing the important emic category of community and belongingness, the idea of distinguishing different collectives within the network of actors around Reino & Aino emerged. In the first stage of the analysis process for the doctoral research, I asked the data questions such as “Where do consumers use the product? Who are they using it with?” Through categorizing the different contexts where the product was used, I realized that many of those contexts related to collective consumption. By familiarizing myself with the literature on collective consumption, I used the sensitizing concepts of brand community, consumption tribe, and subculture of consumption to look at the data and used the technique of constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss 1967) to see whether there are similarities or differences. Some of the collectives in the data did not seem to match these pre-defined categories. As a result of the theoretical review and comparison with the data, the new categorization scheme for heterogeneous consumption collectives around one brand was constructed.

With the help of this scheme, I started to analyze the collectives in more detail, dissecting their characteristics and comparing them with one another (within-case analysis). This stage of analysis produced the characterization of different collectives by their focus, structure and role of brand. Thus, in this stage, I analyzed the data by applying etic (researcher’s) categories to it rather than emic (drawing from the data itself) categories.

At this stage of the process, I had become familiar with practice theory and it seemed to provide good support for the analysis. It focused on collective units of analysis and allowed me to concentrate specifically on what people were doing with the brand in consumption collectives. A practice theoretical interpretive framework was used to analyze how the brand is integrated within the collectives' practices. I realized that the practices that have helped to revitalize the brand were not necessarily brand-related at all. To do this, I moved to a more analytical level and took some distance from the data. At this stage, the data was not re-coded in a systematic manner, but instead I went to explore it with the framework of materials, meanings, and competences (Shove et al. 2012) in mind and looked for those elements specifically. Having familiarized myself with the data already earlier, this more deductive process was considered fruitful to develop my ideas further. Rather than the categories emerging from the data, this process was reminiscent of literary criticism; approaching the data from top-down with a certain interpretive framework rather than bottom-up (Brown, McDonagh & Shultz II, 2014). The analysis was thus more theoretically informed rather than purely data-driven (Moisander & Valtonen 2006). At this stage, it became necessary also to contextualize the collectives more broadly to see how the brand fits into, changes and adapts existing practices as well as generates new practices.

The focus on branding in connection with the case was not a clear choice from the beginning. In addition to the fact that I myself did not think I was studying branding, the interviewees did not very readily bring up the aspect that Reino & Aino is a brand, and if asked, they seemed to resent it because of the commercial connotations to do with branding. Most fruitful discussions about the role of Reino & Aino in their daily lives emerged when the brand concept was not brought up at all. In other words, they did not consider Reino & Aino as first and foremost a brand but a cultural icon surrounded by rich narratives and consumers' grassroots activities rather than marketing management. I suspect that this is largely to do with the mainstream branding tradition that has popularized a certain type of language about brands where brands are the property of companies, used to make empty marketing promises and superficial claims about their products. It may also be because brands are social institutions that are connected with large, impersonal, multinational corporates. Thereby, they represent the antithesis of community; the monetized transactions of the market (cf. Kozinets 2002). As suggested by Bengtsson and Ostberg (2006, 90), consumers may not understand brands similarly to researchers, and furthermore, their response may reflect a politically correct way of talking about brands. In the branding textbooks, for instance, examples of brands include large multinational brands such as Coca-Cola or Harley Davidson. There is an implicit suggestion that these types of brands are the ones that are important to consumers. Going even further, there is the assumption that

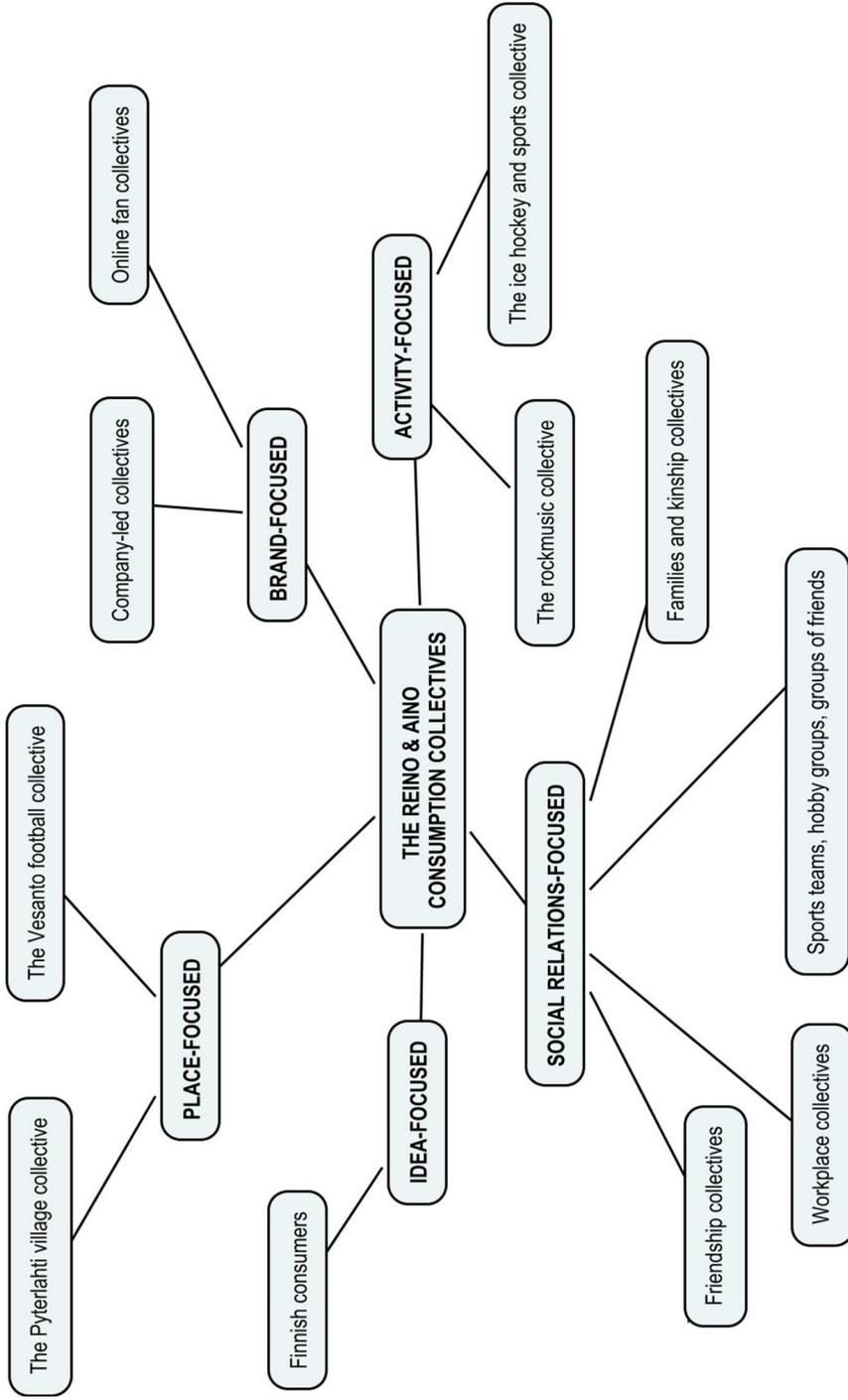
consumers eventually consider brands as important to begin with. It may be that brands considered as very insignificant by researchers may be very significant for consumers, even though they do not use the same vocabulary. However, gradually during the research process I became aware of a more cultural perspective to branding and this shifted my mindset to actually see how my research could contribute in its own way to radically alter the managerial perspective to branding. In this way, Reino & Aino has proved to be a brand that is multi-authored, dynamic and largely built by consumption collectives where it has attained a high level of cultural legitimacy (Kates 2004).

The analysis and interpretation of the data are constructed in the following manner in this thesis. Firstly, the characteristics of the collectives based on the categorization scheme as well as the elements of practice within each collective are discussed. This is where the meaningful patterns are identified from the data (Belk et al. 2013). Then, these meaningful patterns are related to a coherent interpretation in order to understand something about the phenomenon under study. The goal of interpretation is to cause some shift, change or expansion of the horizon or frame of reference of the interpreter (Moisander & Valtonen 2006). This shift in understanding is described through discussing cultural brand revitalization in light of the findings of this research.

4 THE REINO & AINO CONSUMPTION COLLECTIVES

This chapter provides the analysis of the empirical data through identifying different consumption collectives and analyzing the elements of practice that both constitute and are constituted within them. The categorization scheme is used to analyze the collectives based on their focus, structure and role of brand. By categorizing and analyzing the collectives in the data, the chapter provides insights to address the second research objective. The data has been divided into categories based on the focus of the consumption collective. This is to enable the heterogeneity and complexity of consumption collectives around one brand to be fully analyzed and recognized. The categories are: place-focused, brand-focused, activity-focused, idea-focused, and social-relations focused (Figure 8).

Figure 8. The Reino & Aino consumption collectives



Each of the identified consumption collectives is contextualized and discussed in terms of its structural properties in relation to whether the collective is more integrated or dispersive as well as what is the role of the brand for the collective: central or peripheral. Within each category, the collectives identified in the empirical data are discussed in more detail. These collectives are unique to the empirical case, but the categories themselves are analytically generalizable to other contexts. Each subchapter ends with a figure delineating the elements of practice in the collectives (competences, materials and meanings). Meanings refer to the social and symbolic significance of participation in practices. Materials consist of objects, infrastructures, tools, hardware and the body. Competences refer to know-how, background knowledge and understanding (Shove et al. 2012, 23–24). The order of discussing the collectives starts from those where the brand plays a more central role and moves on toward those collectives where it is more peripheral, but still has a relevant function in the collectives' practices. The variety of collectives shows the fragmented and heterogeneous nature of collective consumption around one brand.

4.1 Place-focused collectives

Representing relatively stable, place-bound collective consumption, the brand has become the symbol of local collectives of small villages in Finland. What mostly characterizes these collectives is the shared link to the place where the collective meets and interacts. These collectives are more integrated in nature, because their members meet frequently and their membership in the collective is enduring. Access to the collectives is also relatively difficult, because it requires residence in the village or at least some connection to the village through friends or relatives. Thus, the collectives are not elective in the sense that most consumption collectives analyzed in the literature are (Weinberger & Wallendorf 2012).

Place-focused collectives are characterized rather by the daily encounters in everyday life that villagers have, and a sense of basic moral obligation coming from neighborhood and multiple intertwined social relations. Thus, the people are not just members of consumption collectives together; they may be colleagues, neighbors, classmates, or members of the same parish, for instance. The heterogeneity of the collective does not only come from different relationships with the consumption object or brand as characterized by brand-related cultural capital or knowledge. Rather, the members are of different ages, genders, lifestyles, occupations and social classes. Yet, the brand is in a central role, because it has become an essential resource for their shared activities together.

In the community literature, a rural village was considered the ideal context for true community where clear boundaries could be drawn between members and non-members based on strong sense of shared identity, norms and values and a shared purpose. Yet it is also argued that there are no such ideal communities in the modern, let alone postmodern society where people are mobilized and identities are constructed at the intersection of a variety of groups, networks and associations (Day 2006). On the other hand, the erosion of neighborly socialization and civic engagement has been a concern after Putnam's (2000) book where he claimed that social capital is declining particularly for this reason. It is all the more interesting then to see in the data two examples of village collectives that have adopted the brand as their symbol.

The first collective is in the Pyterlahti village where a Reino & Aino running contest is organized, together with other themed events every year. The second is in the Vesanto village where the Reino football tournament is organized. The collectives have not been formed solely around the brand and unlike brand communities they are not overly commercial in nature (Muñiz & O'Guinn 2001). These collectives are thus more like activity-based communities of practice than norm-based communities of interest (Brint 2001). This means that they share the enjoyment of an activity and there is less pressure to conform to shared norms and values. However, there is a great focus on face-to-face interaction, integrative rituals, and a relatively high level of member participation (Brint 2001).

4.1.1 The Pyterlahti village collective

The village of Pyterlahti is part of the municipality of Virolahti in the South Eastern part of Finland. Pyterlahti is one of several villages in the municipality and has some two hundred inhabitants. Before organizing the first Reino & Aino roadrunning contest, the Pyterlahti village already had a vibrant committee that organized different activities and cultivated a sense of belonging. These practices were related to cultural discourses about maintaining the viability of living in the countryside. In Finland, village committees have a history from the 1970s when the importance of developing the countryside was first realized as people were increasingly moving to urban areas (Kumpulainen 2012). However, their role is changing and becoming more important also as providers of services for inhabitants because of the structural change taking place in Finnish society. As state-provided services are gradually centralized to urban areas, people still want to live in the countryside. Yet, sparsely populated areas are not attractive for private service providers and village committees are taking on more responsibilities (ibid.). As the practical and economic meaning of local social relations decreases, the

symbolic and cultural meaning of village communities is emphasized. Thus, it is specifically the cultural activities that are in a key role in constructing an active village identity (Kumpulainen 2012, 13).

Around the year 2000, there was a local project in Virolahti for reviving the village spirit in the municipality, supported by initiatives at the regional level. Many village committees were established and have since taken an active role in improving their inhabitants' satisfaction and quality of life (*Virolahti.fi*). The Pyterlahti cultural village committee was founded in 1999 and according to the village's website, aims at both organizing different events and activities for the villagers as well as influencing decision-making at the municipality (*Pyterlahti.net*). For instance, the committee has made petitions and appeals to the municipality for streetlights for the main road and for school transportations for the local children. Examples of events that the committee organizes for villagers include rummage sales in the summer, bus trips to different parts of Finland, sports events for the whole family including skiing and rowing as well as a Christmas porridge party. An important part of the committee is also organizing different work parties, "talkoot", where villagers work voluntarily to improve their living environment, e.g. renovating the sauna in the village museum for everyone's use in 2005.

The Reino & Aino brand has become one facilitator for belongingness; something pleasant, positive and sympathetic to use as the village symbol. The village representatives remember some of their villagers using the Reino & Aino slippers in their daily life and the idea came up in 2006 to use them in a humorous contest. Since 2007, the contest has taken place every year and the number of participants has increased, while most of them remain villagers and their friends and relatives. The footwear used is the Reino & Aino slippers. The competitors compete in several divisions which have changed over the years. The first divisions included junior runners, individual runners (divided according to shoe type Aino or Reino and shoe size), team runners and participants with Nordic Walking sticks. The year 2009 introduced competitive and fitness divisions.

As argued by Shove et al. (2012) elements that are the building-blocks of practices travel and circulate from one practice to another by becoming linked in various different ways. The practice of the running contest did not emerge in a vacuum. It was rooted in existing competences, materials and meanings of organizing village events. For instance, in 2007 when the first roadrunning contest was organized, the village had organized the 28th village skiing contest in the winter. It was a similar, fun and relaxed event for the whole family where everyone gets to participate. The local women's club (Marttakerho) offered everyone hot berry juice and cinnamon rolls and there was also a tradition of electing the villager of the year. The symbolic significance of maintaining the village spirit and sense of belonging is similarly important in the Reino & Aino running contest.

Reino and Aino depict the good communal spirit of Finnish people, like us Pyterlahti villagers, a Finnish sense of solidarity, and a will to do things for the benefit of the place where one is from. That is why Aino and Reino are important in our activities.

Pyterlahti village committee member in Närbi, (2007, 139)

Meanings associated with the brand such as Finnish nationality and culture were linked with the Pyterlahti village spirit, providing the brand legitimacy to be used in the villagers' activities (Kates 2004).

The contest is also portrayed as an opposite to mass events in the same way as living in the countryside is opposed to living in the city. Meanings of nostalgia (Holbrook 1993; Goulding 2001) can be connected to the countryside, because many Finnish people belong to the generational cohorts that in their youth or childhood experienced their family's move to the city. In general, nostalgia is a preference for something from the past. Around the same time that the Reino & Aino became newly popular, also other nostalgic or retro brands have started to appear interesting for consumers in the global and local markets. This trend has caused many companies to re-introduce old designs or retro models of their products (Brown et al. 2003). According to Loveland, Smeester and Mandel (2010), nostalgic consumption is associated with the need to belong. Thus, not only do people consume nostalgic products in order to feel belongingness, nostalgic products are found to increase feelings of belongingness as well. Thus, taking this argument further, when a brand has nostalgic meanings connected with it, it may lend itself more easily to collective consumption. However, for each country, community and person, nostalgic products are differently contextualized. One form of nostalgia connected with the Reino & Aino particularly in place-focused collectives is thus the collective nostalgia related to the countryside. Finland was one of the countries where urbanization took place rather late in the 1950s and 60s. The organizers want to emphasize this countryside nostalgia also in the props of the running contest, such as old-fashioned tractors being brought to the location.

People have also told us not to expand the event, because now it stays kind of warm in spirit, and intimate in a way. So it is kind of homey when it's not such a great mass event.

Pyterlahti village committee member

This meaning element of nostalgia toward the countryside and old times in general is also an element of brand meaning related to Reino & Aino elsewhere in the data, such as the in-depth interviews. In the interviews, it becomes an element of

personal nostalgia as well, because people relate the brand to their personal experiences and connections with their loved ones. Particularly interviewees of the big cohorts born right after the Finnish Winter War and Continuation War in the late 1930s and early 1940s connected the slippers with meanings of nostalgia, because the older generations used to wear the slippers when “re-building the country”:

They are so Finnish, homely and have the countryside spirit; something from the fifties. I think that when the men came from war many had frostbitten feet and it was difficult for them to wear any shoes so I suppose the Reinos were good.

Arja, consumer interviews

The slippers are still popular among veterans at nursing homes (*interview data and field notes from the Reino store and nursing home*). Thus, there is a broader social and symbolic significance to participating in the Reino & Aino running contest that is related to preserving something genuine and authentic.

In a similar manner, the running contest organizers combined other elements of existing practices and added new ones. Material elements that were transmitted from previous practices included offering something to eat and drink for the participants who get a glass of berry juice when they cross the finish line. The contest also utilizes the milk cottages that are material elements symbolizing the village. Contestants run the distance of 1440,4 meters (1575.2 yards) between two milk cottages that are important for the village symbolically even though they are no longer in their traditional use. In the old days, farmers took the milk to these cottages for trucks to pick up and distribute to consumers. Milk cottages were also popular meeting places. The milk cottages together with the village sauna provide tangible landmarks that represent the village and provide physical sense of place when there are no longer many other buildings in shared use.

One of the milk cottages is decorated with newspaper clippings about the village and during the summer, a café is opened by a small group of villagers called the “Milk Cottage Company”. The café is open only occasionally on summer Sundays and any profits go to maintaining the milk cottages. Competences that were transmitted from existing practices included skills and knowledge to organize similar types of events: the village committee has a couple of active members who, together with their family members, take main responsibility for the practical arrangements.

In addition to meanings related to countryside spirit and nostalgia, meanings are also coming from Finnish culture. For instance, organizing a humorous contest that resembles a sport yet has some bizarre elements derives from well-known Finnish “wife-carrying contest”. Similar contests are organized around the country

in e.g. swamp football, bootthrowing, or mobile phone throwing. The meanings related to the contest thus include humor and having fun:

Our principle is that everyone should be having fun and nobody should be too burdened by the arrangements...It [the competition] is relaxed, and fair. There is no need to be deadly serious about something. Instead it is about straightforward countryside spirit, something genuine.

Pyterlabti village committee member

The funny and humorous spirit of the contest is emphasized by many things such as a man dressed in a rabbit costume driving an old motorbike alongside the runners, cheering them on. A separate division for teams has also been part of the contest from the beginning and costumes and props are used by participants. These are a big part of the event. Teams invent creative ideas for how to dress themselves. For instance, in the 2011 contest, one team that consisted of a family (a woman, her adult daughters and their husbands and children) were dressed as an Egyptian queen and her servants who carried her in a sedan chair. The teams also invent playful things to do while the contest is ongoing:

We always have a break in the middle, after 800 meters. We spread a blanket on the road and have some refreshments...

PinkDevils team in the running contest

These props and costumes as well as the related practices are very much in contradiction with regular sports where uniforms and other gear are usually made for the purpose of improving the performance. Carrying somebody in a sedan chair or stopping to have refreshments in the middle of the contest transgress and invert the rules and know-how related to sports. This creates a humorous tension of meaning that is emphasized by wearing the Reino & Aino slippers which fall off the feet easily when running. Learning not to trip or lose a slipper while running is an embodied skill that must be acquired and learned by participants as part of the practice (*Research diary from the running contest*).

While inverting some meanings, the contest also carries other meanings from Finnish sports culture. Finnish flags are flying attached to old tractors that take the contestants onboard a platform to the start line of the contest (Photo 2). The Finnish national anthem is sung by all contestants in the beginning of the event.



Photo 2. Moving to the start line of Reino & Aino Running contest (Researcher's photo)

As elements move between practices, they are unpackaged and repackaged, which causes changes (Shove et al. 2012). Thus, from official sports context, the practice of checking and validating everyone's equipment is unpackaged and becomes repackaged as part of the humorous connotations of the Reino and Aino running contest when a "Slipper Inspector" is introduced to the practice. The Slipper Inspector is dressed in a special costume and has a decorated stall of his own at the event where he goes through different procedures of measuring and checking the slippers in order to confirm their authenticity (Photo 3).



Photo 3. The Slipper Inspector in his stall (researcher's photo)

According to the rules of the contest, everyone must wear genuine Reino or Aino slippers and any kind of customizing or revamping of the slippers is forbidden. The inspection ritual is an important part of the event as well as emphasizing the meaning of the brand:

It is a performance of its own, the inspection. There is a sense of fun and playfulness as people are queuing for it....I guess it is related to supporting Finland and the Finnish origin of the slippers. So that you cannot have just any kind of things cobbled together and made in any European country or China for that matter, because they are ours. We want it to be a Finnish thing, a traditional thing.

Pyterlabti committee member

Even though the practice of slipper inspection is not designed for branding purposes, it has a very relevant role in terms of how the brand is represented in the practices of the village collective. It attests to the cultural legitimacy of the brand for this collective. The villagers have designed a procedure where the authenticity of the brand is valued and publicly acknowledged. They engage all participants in an 'authenticating act' that increases the brand's authenticity (Beverland et al. 2010).

As a consequence of organizing the Reino & Aino running contest, the village has since adopted the brand more broadly as their village symbol. The village committee gives each newborn villager baby a pair of slippers as a welcoming gift. These ritual events are also reported in the village's website (Photo 4).



Photo 4. The Pyterlahti collective giving a newborn their own pair of Reinos (20.3.2011, Pyterlahti village's webpage, published with permission)

What is important in this ritual is not that the babies are welcomed to a brand community (cf. Schau et al. 2009), but the brand is rather used as a prop or resource to symbolize their initiation to the village collective.

Different sub-collectives have also formed within the broader collective. For instance, the Pyterlahti villagers have also established a motoring club, El Reinos in 2010. The purpose of this club is to promote old traditions of motorcycles, tractors, milk cottages and especially Reinos as part of their driving gear. During the summer of 2011, the first Reino golf was organized at a nearby golf club. Thus, the Reino theme is gradually spreading; seeding other practices (Schau et al. 2009) and giving form to sub-collectives in the village and nearby. On the other hand, the practices have been reported in the media and in the Reino book in relation to the Reino & Aino brand. The brand is thereby becoming associated with humorous

sports events as well as countryside spirit, village charm and nostalgia. This makes it possible for other actors and collectives to re-make these associations, mobilizing the brand to become part of other similar practices as well.

While the village collective has organized its Reino & Aino themed events, there has also emerged interaction between the collective and the company. The village committee received an invitation from the company to visit their factory in Lieksa and there was a summer bus trip organized there in 2009. The villagers were taken on a tour around the factory and given discount for their purchases. The trip was photographed and documented in the village's website as well:

[After the factory visit] in addition to the slippers people had on their feet, there were around 80 new pairs of slippers in the bus, together with wellingtons and other Reino and Aino materials. We can surely say that based on the amount of slippers, we in Pyterlahti are ready to defend our World Champion status in the Reino & Aino Roadrunning contest in the future....In the evening party, we had a Reino & Aino fashion show and danced till dawn.

Pyterlahti village web pages

The documentation of the visit as well as incorporating the brand to other continuing rituals and practices within the village emphasizes the permanent nature of the brand as a symbol of the village collective. The village committee intends to organize the roadrunning contest every year to the distant future. To interact with the collective and appreciate their efforts, the company has donated Reino & Aino products to be given as prizes in the contest. The organizing committee members have been frequent guests in company-organized events such as the celebration of Reino & Aino brand's 80-year long journey as well as the Reino & Aino ice-bandy tournament.

4.1.2 The Vesanto football collective

Vesanto is a municipality in the very center of Finland that has around 2.5 thousand inhabitants and is mostly rural countryside. The first Reino football tournament (Reiska World Championship/MM) was organized there in 2007 and the event is growing each year. The event is described in the following way on its website:

Reiska MM football has established itself as one of the most fun summer events in the region! It is no wonder that many groups of friends that have participated eagerly await this highlight of the year...During the event, the small but vibrant Vesanto municipality becomes almost like another place entirely! Colorful, joyous

and cheerful teams and a large crowd of spectators bring life and bustle to the streets! About a thousand players and a crowd three times that size create an unbelievably good atmosphere at this event famous for being well organized! People from Savo [the region] are known for their jovial nature and good company.

The Vesanto football tournament's web pages

Like in Pyterlahti, the event thus plays a big role in maintaining local forms of belongingness, but the organizers of the football tournament market their event more actively to outsiders as well. The orientation is more toward making the event a touristic attraction or a “liminal space” (Arnould & Price 1993), where the whole village is transformed to “another place entirely” where consumers may experience something out of the ordinary.

These days when you meet people, they always have someone, a sister or a brother, a friend or relative who has participated...but in Helsinki many people do not yet know about it...People have heard on the grapevine and that's how it has spread.

Mauno, tournament organizer

The Reino & Aino brand has thus become part of the marketing of the locality to tourists. The materials, meanings and competences related to organizing touristic events are part of the practice (Shove et al. 2012). Unlike in Pyterlahti, there was no similar tradition of organizing village events in Vesanto. Rather, the practice was from the beginning oriented more toward visitors as well as locals. Regarding competences, the main responsibility for organizing the event lies with the local entrepreneurs' association and more than fifty volunteers participate in the arrangements. The background understandings are related to entrepreneurship, as illustrated for instance through the official titles and responsibilities of organizers (head of finances, head of security etc.). The organizers also perceived that these entrepreneurial competences have certainly helped them develop the contest (*interview data from the Reino football tournament 2011*). Thus, the tournament is quite professionally organized, even though everyone works voluntarily.

Originally, the idea for organizing the contest came from a local taxi driver Mauno who was known for wearing Reinos everywhere. At the time of the interview, he had between five and ten pairs at home; for instance a fine pair to use with a suit in official occasions and a worn pair to use when driving a tractor. Mauno used to play football with his children wearing the slippers even though it turned out to be difficult because the footwear would fly off his feet easily. For the tournament, Mauno has been a key person and many participants who come to the tournament are familiar with the story of how “one local taxi-driver had a crazy

idea” (*fieldnotes from the Reino football tournament 2011*). He explains that partly because of the tournament, more and more people have started using the slippers:

When I started using Reinos many years ago, you would only see old people wear them and not outside at all...Now when I go to play floorball and look under the bench in the dressing room, I can see almost every other person has them so people have adopted them partly because of this tournament. Many who say that they haven't worn Reinos before and then they get them as a gift, it won't take long before they go and do shopping wearing them....

Mauno, tournament organizer

Thus, Mauno leveraged upon his own practices to develop a collective communal practice. A single individual's creativity and innovation caused changes in the practices of others (Shove et al. 2012). In developing the idea, Mauno's entrepreneurial spirit was important and his will to do something for the locality's benefit. Now the municipality uses the event to market itself to potential inhabitants (Photo 5). Similarly to the Pyterlahti collective, the symbolic significance of promoting countryside versus urban living is at the background:

For a small municipality where people are constantly moving away ...I remember thinking even before there was any idea of the Reiska MM that the Vesanto week [a week of tourism events that was organized every summer] should be abandoned entirely and something new should be developed. And that's how it started, I had thought about the event for many years.

Mauno, tournament organizer

In an interview, Mauno remembered that he had even said to the municipal manager of Vesanto that he will be making Vesanto famous with Reinos. He reported that the manager had at the time laughed at the idea, but has since had to take back his reaction when visiting the tournament.

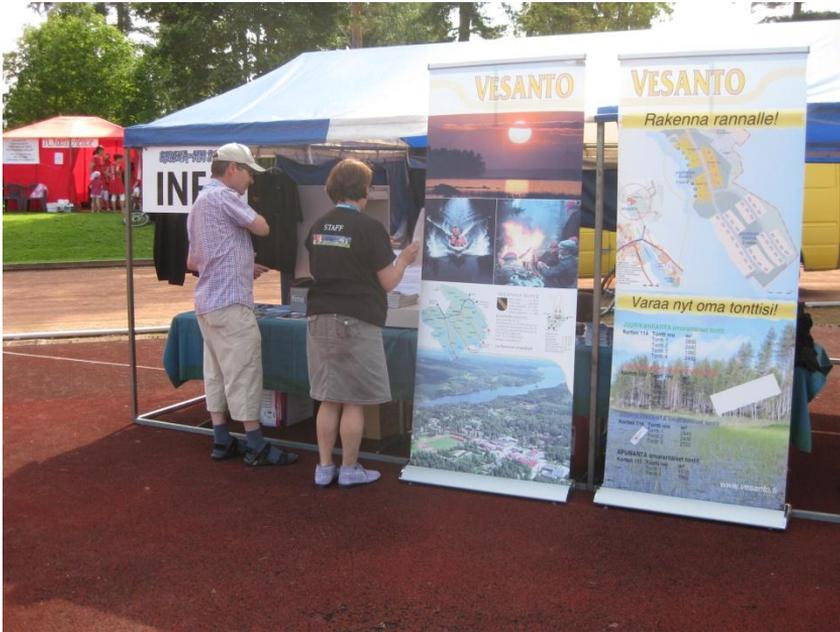


Photo 5. Vesanto municipality promoting itself in the Reino football tournament (Researcher's photo)

Together with the local entrepreneurs' association, Mauno started to develop his idea. He portrays himself as a local hero with persistence and belief in his idea:

When I first brought the idea to them, I got quite negative feedback and a lot of questions. It took about a year before I could get the antagonists to believe in this...and now they are at the forefront of organizing it, those who were the most critical.

Mauno, tournament organizer

Meanings of entrepreneurial creativity and even foolhardiness underlie the collective's practices. At the same time, some of the organizing committee members also talked about entrepreneurial sacrifice as so much of their time goes to organizing the event and as they are devoted "heart and soul" to it (*Interview of Antti, tournament organizer*). Thus, the social and symbolic significance of the event is increased from becoming linked with entrepreneurship.

Another member of the organizing team commented that in a small village, communality can both slow down and speed up new things. Often people are at first opposed to new ideas, but then when it is accepted, everyone wants to be involved somehow (*Interview data from the Reino tournament 2011*). This is probably

why the organizers have not had any trouble getting volunteers to work in the tournament during the past years:

Now they're proud that it's our thing. It was here that this was invented; it was us who invented it.

Antti, tournament organizer

Mauno thinks that his idea has partly promoted a healthy lifestyle in the locality as well, further increasing the social and symbolic significance of the event for the village:

I feel that there's been an increase in the amount people exercise. The teams already practice in the spring before the tournament, so I believe my idea has made a difference. That also makes me happy.

Mauno, tournament organizer

At first, the tournament only had four teams and it was more about testing the rules and what it is like to play the game. The next year, the number of teams increased to thirteen and they patented the name of the event as the World Championship Tournament of Reino football. The practice was thus influenced by elements related to sports culture in general. While it has grown, the contest also introduced official football referees and official rules. These elements of competence and know-how reinforce the link to regular sports. Competences acquired from regular football fields are also utilized by the players, and some of them play football as their hobby. To counteract these elements, the game is played with a children's light football that does not always go in the intended direction, causing unexpected and humorous moments. This is also to avoid injuries on the field as the footwear is slippery on a grass field. There is thus a delicate balance between the humorous and funny elements and the serious and competitive elements. The organizers told me that there are always some arguments and heated emotions involved even though the rules also emphasize the relaxed nature of the game.

It was clearly evident that as the tournament proceeds toward the end, only the teams that are more competitive are left and the nature of the games change a little from having fun toward aiming for the win (*fieldnotes from the Reino football tournament 2011*). There have also been some changes to the practice due to the incompatibility of different teams in the same tournament. These changes are made in collaboration with the teams:

Last year we lodged a complaint that amateurs have to play against professionals, and they changed the rules.

Kaeno-Aenot team in the tournament

This quote shows that in the collective there is heterogeneity of interests that need to be aligned in order for the collective to thrive (Thomas et al. 2013; Goulding et al. 2013). These alignments are made in the collective largely through changing the elements of practice to accommodate different interests. Besides the tensions related to the rules and referees, there are also some tensions about the nature of the event, which is on the one hand meant for the whole family yet the adult teams also use alcohol and partying is part of the event. The organizers tried to relieve this tension by introducing a children's tournament on a separate day before the main event. The alcohol drinking is also restricted to a specific area of the field.

Some participants also criticize the commercial aspects of the tournament on its website guestbook. Food and Reino slippers are for sale in the event and the organizers also collect a participation fee from the teams:

Message: Greed is a sickness that has struck the organizers of the tournament. Joviality is gone for good. Congratulations for ruining a good event.

Guest book message on the tournament's website

This negative feedback illustrates that by no means are all collective practices equally embraced by everyone in the collective, and there are some negotiations taking place of which meanings, competences and materials are appropriate and which should be discarded (Kates 2002; De Valck 2007). Here the guestbook data serves an important function also for this research, because I did not observe the dissatisfaction of some participants at the event itself. Mostly the website guestbook is, however, filled with thanks:

On Friday there was a jovial and nice atmosphere. Teams were bursting with energy. There was no rush and the day was nice, meeting new people. I cannot but wonder how cheerful and friendly the organizers were, thanks for that joy and friendliness. Our first visit to Vesanto will be remembered. THANKS!

Thank you everyone for a nice tournament spirit and successful arrangements! FC Keski-ketterät [team name] says thanks; our own placing improved so we cannot but be satisfied! Now we look toward next summer when we plan to participate again and perhaps aim for an even better placing!

Guest book messages on the tournament's website

The guestbook has in some respects become a venue for people to give thanks to the organizing team and therefore it is an important virtual extension to the collective that to a large extent only meets once a year in the tournament (Kozinets 2001). Together with the Facebook page of the tournament, it serves a structuring and integrating function within the collective.

In some respects, the football tournament is reminiscent of the Pyterlahti running contest. Both practices are drawing from the meanings and practices related to the Wife Carrying contest:

People have asked me about whether we should have foreign teams and there is now a little bit of interest in Estonia. Several Estonian teams already participate in the Wife Carrying contest, which also started as a similar small and local event and now they have thousands of visitors... From our point of view, it would be good if the company exported the slippers so people abroad would know about it and we would get foreign teams.

Manno, tournament organizer

Aligning their interests with that of the company, the organizers wish for international brand awareness to be developed so that their event would also benefit. On the organizers' side, the meaning element of competition is also part of the collective practices as they want to compete against other summer events and touristic attractions. This could also be observed at the event when the commentator stated to the audience that it was superior to much bigger and well-known events taking place simultaneously in Finland (*Field notes from Reino football tournament 2011*). Competing for participants can also be connected with the entrepreneurial spirit of the contest.

Regarding material elements, humour and funny costumes are also part of the football event. Teams emphasize their sense of belonging and togetherness by dressing similarly, for instance as French maids or by incorporating out-of-place elements in their costumes, such as long underpants, pink wigs or such. The teams camp around the playing field and there are a lot of colorful tents and banners set up as well. Some teams also make a grand entrance to the field by singing or marching in formation. In the field notes, I pay a lot of attention to these "entrances". The intention of teams is to get the commentator to say something about the team and to get the audience's attention:

[I noticed that you had a grand entrance coming here; music and something like a show?]

Yeah and we will be giving more of that. Last year we also got a lot of microphone time from the commentator.

[Is that an intentional aim?]

Yeah, here you can play a role that you don't have in your mundane life.

Lissut team in the tournament.

As examples of material props and infrastructure, one team had their own yellow bus that had the team's name painted on it and another had a small transportable sauna with them (Photos 6 and 7).



Photos 6. and 7. Teams at the Reino football tournament (Researcher's photos)

The teams are also sponsored by various companies that pay for their costumes and props. Acquiring sponsors is another competence element coming from the sports context, repackaged in a carnivalesque manner. For instance, a local women's team has been selling a "goody bag" of products from their sponsor, a local erotic store. Many teams have posters displayed near their tents where the names of the sponsors are written (*Fieldnotes from the tournament*). Thus, even though

it is a sports event, the practice is also very much like a carnival and the participants even invest heavily in these elements:

I heard from one team that they have about 2000 euros as their budget for costumes and other things.

Mauno, tournament organizer

In addition to the carnivalesque materials that participants have, the organizers have also introduced a partying event that takes place in the evening between the two days of the tournament.

In interviewing the organizers, the intention of expanding and marketing the event is evident. They are proud to talk about how far teams are coming to play in the tournament. Also, getting sponsors and selling them advertising space in the event is part of the arrangements, requiring entrepreneurial competences and established social networks:

There are sponsors who give money...well there's of course the municipality of Vesanto that gives us the space for free without rent but the others, some give products and some money but they have advertisements at the event and during the event they will be advertised over the PA....Most of them are local, like this gas station owner is the president of the entrepreneurs' association and the owner of the grocery store is a board member.

Mauno, tournament organizer

Regarding material elements, the contest area itself illustrates the more commercial infrastructure of the collective with many stalls selling food and the sponsors' advertisements and banners surrounding the field area. The organizers freely discuss the commercial aspects of the event but also emphasize that most of the sponsors are local entrepreneurs, emphasizing the local meanings of the collective. In extending the event, the organizing committee has also made it more professional, acquiring marketing competences by recruiting new people, for instance:

Now that we have a marketing guy in the organizing team we will expand this and approach some bigger companies as well...That's why we got this person who has organized beach volley tournaments for four times in Finland's association of volley ball. He is a professional so he as a totally different perspective.

Mauno, tournament organizer

Even though the organizing committee is gradually bringing more professional meanings and competences to the collective, their perspective differs from that of the participants slightly. Many of the contestants and audience are locals, and for them, the event is firstly a communal gathering:

There's always a good vibe here, jovial and nice. And there's a lot of people here we know or are friends with, and you can meet them here once a year. Most of the people are from around here, even though they're not necessarily playing in a team. Having fun is the most important thing and also meeting people you know.

Lissut team in the tournament

For instance, even though there were almost a hundred different teams in the football tournament in 2011, most of them were the same local ones that had participated in previous tournaments. This emphasizes that the relationships in the collective are mainly established beforehand and they use the collective practices to reinforce these relationships. According to the organizers, some teams are very involved and committed to participating every year:

There are these teams that keep asking us well in advance when we start to sign up teams for the next year. They say that they wouldn't miss it for the world. So it is very important for them to be able to come.

Mauno, tournament organizer

New friends are also made on the playing field. Based on interviewing participant teams at the site, they report that what they like about the event is how strangers can become friends in a short time. The teams share a sense of 'communitas' as evidenced also in the literature (Arnould & Price 1993):

All these other teams, they just come and chat with us and you can go chat with them and have fun together. In our first game, we were just hugging the other guys and the games have a good atmosphere too even though we play to win.

Young men's football team at the tournament

In Finnish culture, it is not very common for strangers to approach and hug each other and even rarer is it for men to do so. In this case, the teams had a big age difference as well with the other team consisting of middle-aged men. This tendency for social levelling identified also for the club goes in another study (Goulding et al. 2013) is again reminiscent of the carnival where regular social

norms are transgressed, men who are strangers to one another can even hug each other in the tournament, something that is otherwise a taboo in Finnish culture.

The feeling of belongingness is layered in the event: it is experienced as something taking place between the teams as well as within them. Many teams consist of groups of friends or co-workers, members of the same regular football team and so on. For them, it is a chance to do something fun together and escape the mundane:

We have this group of friends and since 2007 we have participated every winter in an ice-fishing contest and every summer we do something else. Last year we went to the Strawberry Festival...The point is that whoever comes up with a wacky idea, the wackier the better...At this age, it is nice to be able to play a little, to go a little crazy. We would not be wearing this stuff [the costumes] in our daily lives. It's like having another personality or role so that you don't have to be your normal self.

Pink Ladies team in the tournament

The co-operation between the Reino football tournament organizers and the company has been close. From the beginning when Mauno came up with the idea, he has perceived that the company has had a positive attitude.

I did not have to persuade them or anything, but I just told them about it and the first year we also came to Tampere to visit them. It has been easy for us to go forward because the manufacturer of the footwear has been fully with us...In the beginning, I asked whether we should make a contract but they just said that they believe in a man's word here in Tampere. . . I have to say they have given us what we've agreed and promised...They have reported about us on their website and on the other hand, we have a link to them. The co-operation has been seamless and I am satisfied.

Mauno, tournament organizer

Besides sponsoring the event and giving publicity to it, the company has had their own team playing in the tournament several times, including the entrepreneur himself. The arrival of this team, Pispalan Tohvelisankarit as it is called, has been notified by the tournament organizers. The team gets special attention from the commentator while they are playing. The entrepreneur Arto Huhtinen also gets to greet the audience through the microphone. However, the company's role is more like an honored guest than anything else. As a sponsor, they are one among many. Even the stall selling Reino & Aino slippers is owned by the local grocery store owner rather than the manufacturer.

However, there has also been some tension regarding the use of the trademark. The organizers had an idea to make caps from the Reino fabric to be sold at the event, but after negotiations with the company, they could only give them as prizes and to the volunteers who worked at the event. Instead, the committee designed t-shirts to be sold at the event. The company has had to balance between giving the organizers freedom and controlling the use of their brand. Nevertheless, the practice of the football tournament also reinforces brand authenticity:

They have to be genuine. We do not approve of those copies, whatever Sauli slippers or others there are. They have to be manufactured by the Reino & Aino company. Before the tournament and also during it we keep checking them to be sure that they haven't been modified in any way.

Mauno, tournament organizer

Thus, consumption collectives and the company are dependent on each other for important resources, making it necessary to align their interests (Thomas et al. 2013). However, unlike in the Pyterlahti village collective's running contest, I did not observe any of this inspection or checking taking place at the football tournament, which may mean that it is not in such a great role there. Also, it could be that I missed it because I did not myself play football. Nevertheless, in Pyterlahti the inspection of brand authenticity was in a much more central role within the event. Like the Pyterlahti village, gradually over the years Vesanto has also started to become associated with the Reino & Aino brand, and the organizers themselves think that they have an impact on the commercial success of the brand:

I think for the company, it is the best kind of marketing there is. Our relations with them are co-operative but not very tight. They are one sponsor among others and have given us a lot of freedom in how we want to do this. They have also helped us get performers for the evening party as well.

Antti, tournament organizer

Our event helps the marketing perhaps. Our local K-market store-owner currently has every size and type of Reinos and last weekend he was building a separate shelf section for them. I'm sure no K-market has a similar selection of Reinos as there is in Vesanto.

Mauno, tournament organizer

Later during 2011 when I visited the tournament, the K-market already had a separate "Reino store" in a room (*Fieldnotes from the tournament*). Thus, it can be

argued that practices related to the football tournament are in an important role in increasing brand use at the locality (Schau et al. 2009). Also, similarly to Pyterlahti place-focused collective, the Reino & Aino brand theme is starting to spread to other practices. During the last couple of years, the football tournament organizers have also organized Reino themed cruises in the Baltic Sea for the players and their teams.

The Reino & Aino company also founded a new sewing factory at Vesanto in 2011. One of the key volunteers in the organizing committee of the tournament Antti Tulila reported (*Interview data from the football tournament*) that the idea was born as the active organizers of the Reino & Aino tournament were visiting Tampere to see the Pispalan Tohvelisankarit team practice. After the game, they were sitting in the sauna together and talking about the increased sales of the slippers and how the company needs to increase their production capacity. Then the idea of situating a factory in Vesanto came up. What started as a mere joke would become a serious pursuit as the tournament organizers took the idea back to their municipality management with the entrepreneurs' permission.

The social networks already in place because of the Reino & Aino tournament as well as the interest toward the brand in the locality were partly what attracted the company to locate the factory there. The municipality also benefited from this decision and actively showed support by building new facilities for the factory. The local entrepreneurs' association was in a key role, pushing the municipality civil servants to hasten things and informing the manufacturer about the situation. Also, the Reino & Aino tournament in the summer of 2010 was important, because it offered the entrepreneurs a chance to familiarize themselves with the municipality and its people.

The practice of the football tournament therefore set in motion an important event where the municipality got employment for its inhabitants. For the Reino & Aino brand, this meant being associated with efforts to promote the countryside and provide employment in Finland instead of moving production to cheaper countries. It was a way for them to reward the collective for doing so much for their brand. As the brand was already strongly associated with Finnish culture, this strengthened these associations and added sympathy toward the brand owner especially around the Vesanto area but also elsewhere. The issue also got a lot of positive media attention in the area. The data shows this meaning element of corporate social responsibility and promoting the countryside also elsewhere, for instance in consumer blogs:

I bought the slippers for myself as a mother's day gift. They are still manufactured in Finland, near the Russian border. This part of the country has been in infrastructural crisis lately. So this is as ethical a gift can be!

A blogger's post on 8th May 2008

4.1.3 Summary of place-focused collectives

Both the Pyterlahti and Vesanto communities base the practices related to Reino & Aino on promoting their locality and communal spirit. The brand is not important per se, but the function it has in their collective practices. Brandfests have been theorized in previous literature as events where the marketer creates and controls events in which consumers' attitudes toward the brand are shaped (McAlexander & Schouten 1998, 380). Like brandfests, the events organized by consumption collectives enable participants escape their everyday life and have extraordinary experiences with a sense of community, fantasy and imagination (cf. Goulding et al. 2002). It has been suggested that the spirit of the festival may help in generating postmodern sensibilities of community, despite its ephemeral and momentary nature (Kozinets 2002). However, the place-focused collectives are more enduring than a tribe or postmodern subculture depicted in the literature that are ephemeral and disperse when the experience is over. Also, for the members of these collectives, their consumer role or relationship with the brand is not the most central when they use Reino & Aino. Instead, the roles of active citizens and villagers in the case of Pyterlahti or sports enthusiasts, innovators and entrepreneurs in the case of Vesanto are more relevant. Brand meanings such as being made-in-Finland and representing Finnish culture and tradition are adopted and used for reinforcing the pursuit of local belongingness. Some meanings, like being associated with the elderly and immobile people and used only indoors, are on the other hand turned upside down.

In the case of Pyterlahti, the practice of Reino & Aino roadrunning contest is very much tied to previously existing similar events and directed at reinforcing the villagers' sense of belonging together. As analyzed above, the brand is a symbolic resource for this collective that is also spreading from the running contest to other practices. The appropriation of the brand in consumers' practices has thus resulted in the brand reconfiguring the whole village as a Reino village; the slipper becoming their "national footwear". In the Vesanto collective, the tournament is more directed at tourists and outsiders, even if it also functions as a yearly get-together for the inhabitants. While the Pyterlahti event is totally grassroots and home-spun in nature, the Vesanto event is more entrepreneurial and resembles regular sports events.

Both events are characterized by humour and having fun that are reminiscent of the carnival. As theorized by Bakhtin (1984), the carnival is a folk tradition around the world based on suspending existing social hierarchies, norms and prohibitions and transgressing limits: “Carnival laughter is the laughter of all people...it is universal in scope; it is directed at all and everyone, including the carnival’s participants...it is ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives. Such is the laughter of the carnival” (Bakhtin 1984, 12). Elements of carnival such as humour, costumes, excess of alcohol (in the case of Vesanto football), aversion to formal authority and pretense (Belk & Costa 1998) are clearly involved in the Reino & Aino themed events at local communities. Firstly, people are allowed to take on roles they would not have in their ordinary lives and to behave in ways that would not be acceptable in normal social life such as engage in playful behavior. This can be seen for instance in the importance of costumes and team paraphernalia. The innovative ideas for team costumes and humorous practices related to participating in the contest also provide support of the playful and entrepreneurial nature of collective consumption (Cova et al. 2007; Goulding et al. 2012). In the brand Reino & Aino, there is also a sense of transgressing social hierarchies, because it is not associated with any particular socio-economic status. Thus, like in the carnival, putting the Reino slippers on makes you renounce your regular role in society and enter a playful state.

In our society and age, there are no longer many occasions where the carnival takes over daily lives. Examples of these include the U.S Halloween, New Year’s celebrations, Mardi Gras in New Orleans or the carnivals in Brazil. In Finland, Mayday and Midsummers’ celebrations may be additional examples. One reason for the increasing popularity of these events may thus be the need for people to experience the tension-relieving carnival more often (Belk 1990). Turning the use of the slippers from indoors old people’s morning slipper to be used outdoors in carnivalesque sports adds ambivalence and interest to the brand meaning and practices. These practices bring playfulness and humor into existing brand meanings of communality, Finnish culture and nostalgia. The dialectic between the collective practices and the brand results in the transformation of both. Yet, this transformation is even more important for the brand. The issue is not so much what the Pyterlahti or Vesanto collectives would do or be without the Reino & Aino brand. However, for the brand and particularly its revitalization these collectives’ practices become essential and indispensable.



Figure 9. Summary of place-focused collectives' materials, meanings and competences.

Figure 9 shows the interaction between the elements of practice in place-focused collectives. First, regarding meanings, brand meanings of nationality and craftsmanship are united with village spirit, countryside living, carnival, sports culture, entrepreneurship and communality. Second, materials that are important in the collective practices include costumes and other gear of participants in the events to which the slippers are adopted as an important part, as well as material elements depicting countryside nostalgia and Finnish nationality (tractors, milk cottages, and Finnish flags) as well as the carnival (such as alcohol and market stalls). Documenting their activities is also an important material part of the collective practices. Rather than consumers documenting their brand use

individually (Schau et al. 2009) the collectives document their shared stories and events more or less related to the brand. In Pyterlahti's case, the village milk cottage is decorated with newspaper clippings about the village and in addition they have a website. In Vesanto's case, the football collective also has a Facebook and webpage.

Third, competences related to championing village spirit as well as marketing the locality are included in collective practices that give a new flavor to the brand as well. Knowing how to organize humorous events is one thing, but the Finnish work party culture and volunteering is also a big part of the collective practices. Nobody gets paid for working there, which further emphasizes the non-commercial nature of these activities and gives some of that positive aura to the brand. The participants also develop bodily skills related to how to best utilize the slipper in doing the particular sport. As the rules forbid the participants from continuing after one of their slippers falls off, running in a way that best prevents this from happening is one example of such acquired skill. Ritualized practices and know-how such as gift-giving or checking the authenticity of participants' slippers represent important collective competences. One important competence in the carnivalesque events is also know-how related to relaxing social hierarchies and norms – e.g. through using costumes and props and becoming more open to interaction with strangers.

4.2 Brand-focused collectives

Among the many collectives related to the Reino & Aino, there are also some where the brand has a very central role. These collectives have been established around the brand either by consumers or by the company. As argued by Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001) in their initial article about brand communities, they are non-geographically bound, mass-mediated and commercial in nature. This establishes a contrast to the place-focused and social relations-focused collectives. The brand-focused collectives are based on relations between brand enthusiasts and, if applicable, the company (cf. Thomas et al. 2013). However, unlike Muñiz and O'Guinn suggested they are not very stable or structured in the case of Reino & Aino. Thus, the collectives are more dispersed than integrated in nature. The collectives may last only for a short period of time and do not demand a lot from their members. There are not many community markers such as moral responsibility toward other brand users or shared rituals and norms involved. Accessing them is relatively easy. Heterogeneity exists, but it does not provide a challenge for the collectives, because they are more about maintaining brand relationships rather than social relationships with other consumers.

4.2.1 Company-led collectives

Based on the success that the Reino & Aino brand has achieved lately, the company has started to found collectives of their own. These collectives have a loose structure and they are not place-bound. The company and its employees thereby participate themselves as actors in collective consumption (Thomas et al. 2013). The marketing of Reino & Aino that has been implemented over the last couple of years is largely based on these activities and events rather than advertising campaigns. When the entrepreneurs bought the trademark, they soon came up with the idea of taking the slippers to new contexts and do small-budget viral marketing. The aim was to get people to recognize the brand and invite them to use it. For instance, the entrepreneurs' daughter, at the time a teenager, took a stall full of the slippers to youth rock festivals with her friends in 2007. At the time, Reinos were still associated mainly with elderly people:

Now it feels strange that it [the Reino & Aino brand] was so unknown at the time. People were wondering what on earth we were doing at a rock festival. But I remember that almost nobody walked by without stopping at our stall and they had a lot of stories to tell us. I believe that was the point where they started to become popular among young people. Newspapers reported about us and the festival website as well. We sold quite a lot of slippers but it was the visibility that was more important I think.

Linda, Reino store representative

At the time, the marketing of Reino & Aino was done on a very small budget. There was a belief in the idea of fashions and fads spreading like a virus, especially among young people (Gladwell 2000). To boost this viral marketing, the company introduced new elements in materials: new colors that they believed would attract a wider popularity:

As soon as somebody wears them to school, it starts spreading rapidly. The effect of the grapevine is significant with the young...but the fact that we had new colors on offer was also important. If it was only the brown Reino, it would perhaps not have become so popular...and we encouraged women to wear the Reinos too, because you cannot wear Ainos in the winter outside.

Linda, Reino store representative

I think it was the extensions that invited young people to adopt it. When the pink Reino started to roll out, I think that it caused the popularity of the brown one to grow with young people.

Tuire, entrepreneur of Reino & Aino

It can be argued that the company's attention to the material elements needed in novel consumer practices was important at this stage. They noticed that people had started wearing the Reino slippers in unconventional contexts and situations and started to develop more variety in the models by introducing new colors. In this way, the Reino & Aino brand extensions were similar to Dr. Martens brand which was extended to include several colours, patterns and designs after it had been adopted by youth subcultures, especially the mods, and become trendy. Contributing to the interplay of elements in consumer practices in this way resulted in a rapid spreading of the new practices. For instance, women started to use the Reino slipper that was previously viewed as a male model because of its brown color and the male name. Many of my female interviewees were indeed using the Reino slipper rather than the Aino which was seen as impractical and old-fashioned. Bringing out the new models also made consumers aware that the Reino slipper could look like something else than the traditional model. Thus, people started increasingly to customize their slippers with decorations. In my data, there is an instance of a mother customizing slippers for her daughter (*fieldnotes from the advertising agency*) as well as a group of coworkers customizing slippers for their mutual friend who was going to have a baby (Närhi 2007, p. 74). Competences in the form of know-how and background understanding to customize the slippers were adopted from crafts hobbies. Through these practices, the Reino slipper was used to maintain social relationships as well, increasing the social and symbolic significance of the brand.

The fact that there was a lot of media attention also helped to spread the practice of wearing Reinos and Ainos to a far greater audience than the youth that participated in the festivals. The same kind of approach has been utilized and employed in a greater scale over the last few years as it has turned out to be a success. Media has reported extensively about the company's success story and thus helped to reinforce the positive brand meanings (Leppälä 2010). The company has also supported the brand becoming iconized in the culture through documenting their success story in several publications such as the "Reino – tohvelisankarista brändiksi" book (2011) and the celebratory book for the brand "Reinovuosi 2010" (2010).

The company got a lot of ideas and feedback from their potential customers by approaching them in their own context. One of the key consumer competences then has been to safeguard the brand and communicate their thoughts and feelings

to the company. The entrepreneurs of the company report that they get a lot of feedback sent to them by customers who even safeguard the brand's authenticity.

We get calls almost on a daily basis. Often it is to thank us, or to tell us how good they have found the slippers. But then they say that "I have this and that kind of idea and this color would be nice..." People call us and say that they've had a party where everyone wore Reinos...or send photos from their travels when they are for instance in New York wearing Reinos and a suit

The users, they monitor these things. They often call us saying that "Are you aware that in this and that store, they sell copies of Reino & Aino? They report it to us and they report it to the media.

Tuire and Arto, entrepreneurs of Reino & Aino

The way consumers have shared their practices and insights with the company has influenced product development and marketing of the slippers to a great extent. The company has thus been able to imitate and learn from the practices of their customers. Rather than defy or escape the market (Kozinets 2002; Muñiz & Schau 2005), the loyal users and their collectives are acting as champions in the market, on the side of the company, against fake and inauthentic attempts to steal the brand.

Emerging from the marketing approach that concentrated on events where consumers already are, the company today has their own customer club, "Reinoklubi". Established in 2010, the club has a website and a Youtube channel. Members of the club get personal discounts at the retail outlet and information about the brand as well as invitations to events organized by the company. These events have included touring Finnish summer festivals with a Reino truck where people could come and see the newest models and make short video greetings or be photographed with celebrities. Figure 10 contains a screenshot of one video where a consumer, incidentally called Reino, telling a story about his wife's Reino slippers to the camera. This video was published at the Reino & Aino youtube channel.



Figure 10. A consumers' video message at the Reino truck video bar.

The ReinoAino Youtube channel, representing a material element of infrastructure for the company led collective, has altogether almost a thousand video clips about the truck tour as well as other events organized by the company. In this way, it provides an interesting extension of the mainly offline operated brand collective to the online world as well. The truck tour then continued the company's innovative approach of going where their customers are already spending their time:

The Reino truck starts its summer tour from Keskustori [central city market] in Tampere on the second of May at 2pm. "Our purpose is to go where the real Ainos and Reinos are: the many events taking place during the Finnish summer. We are on the stage for over a hundred days during the summer. You can meet us at rock-festivals, a maritime festival, a tango festival, a summer theatre, the Kitee fair or even the marketplace in Mänttä," the entrepreneur Arto Huhtinen and the host Jone Nikula report." The full size truck is decorated in the Reino style. The equipment includes a stage, sound system, a video corner, equipment for photographing and an old style motorbike. You can expect music, contests, a lot of activities and other pleasant things.

Media briefing sent to my email by Arto Huhtinen on 28th April 2011

Through this initiative, the company was able to link the brand with even more consumption collectives and practices, for instance those of tango and theatre enthusiasts. In addition to being present where the consumers actually spend their time, the tour was meant to publicize the company's charity co-operation with Women's Bank (Naisten pankki), an organization that helps women in the developing countries to set up their own businesses. A special slipper designed for this organization was sold at the truck. The second sponsor for the truck tour was the Association for Finnish Work. This association governs the use of the Finnish Key Flag symbol, among other things. It is the logo that companies can use to signal that their products are manufactured in Finland. The association's values explain that for them "Finnishness is culture, a brand, being proud of one's country, Finnish perseverance "sisu" and positive madness" (www.avainlippu.fi/en/association-finnish-work). These meanings are related to the Reino & Aino brand as well. The third sponsor for the truck was the Finnish Ice Hockey Association. Coincidentally, the Finland's ice hockey team won the world championship in the same spring and the newly designed Reino/Finland ice hockey sneakers were a huge hit. Connecting these elements has been a central way to reinforce the brand's legitimacy and has added authenticity to what would have otherwise been perceived as just a marketing stunt.

The company has also co-operated with various other actors such as a restaurant chain to introduce Reino themed evenings of music and good food (*reimoklubi.fi*). In addition, the company has organized smaller events for their most devoted fans and stakeholders. I have been an invited guest in several events including Reino brand's 80th birthday, the ending party of Reino truck tour and opening party of Reino factory outlet store. A Valentine's Day pub night with Reino theme was organized in February 2010. Participants included business partners, representatives from charity organizations that had co-operated with the company, the entrepreneurs' personal friends and families as well as representatives from the customer-led grassroots collectives such as the football and road running events. The event was reported also in the media:

It is Sunday night...[a well-known Finnish rock band vocalist] is singing about love. The profits from the recording go to war veterans and children in hospitals. [A well-known minister of the Orthodox Church] is talking about grace and friendship. [A charity organization] is presenting the slippers, the purchasing of which helps women in developing countries to get a business loan. We are not, however, in a church. We are in a pub. It is the celebration of Reino & Aino's 80-year-long journey.

Local newspaper article in 2010

The media and their continuing interest toward Reino & Aino have had a big role in producing and disseminating favorable brand meanings such as empathy, friendship and charity. In the recent years, the activities organized by the company have also been influenced by the consumption collectives' practices. For instance, in 2011, the company organized the first "Reiska-bandy" World Championship [Reiska-höntsy] in Tampere that was very much like the Vesanto Reiska World Championship, except that the game itself was different. Teams of players wearing the Reino slippers played with ice hockey sticks and rubber ball. The rules of the game were almost copied from the Vesanto event, including the necessity of playing with genuine Reino or Aino slippers (*www.reiskahontsy.fi*). The first tournament in 2011 was organized based on invitation only. The teams included the company's various partners such as Women's Bank, two radio stations, HC Reinot [a men's amateur hockey team that has played together since the 1990s], Pispalan Tohvelisankarit [the team put together by the entrepreneur, and El Reinos [the Pyterlahti motorbike club]. The organizers of the Reino football tournament from Vesanto were also playing as invited special guests. All of the profits from the event went to charity.

Thereby, the company has attempted to create a network among those who help to market the brand. What unites them has been the shared emotional engagement of doing charity under the brand name. The boundaries between members and non-members have been more clearly defined in this collective because the events for stakeholders have been available only for a limited number of people. Thus, there has been an expectation of reciprocity in offering mutual support; the company has provided exclusive social events for those people and organizations who have somehow contributed to the marketing of their brand. In the company-led collectives, the members are not necessarily bound together by any other type of bonds except those that connect them to the brand. Members are not expected to participate very actively. However, because the firm itself is a small family business, the entrepreneurs' own social networks have played a big role generally in bringing together different stakeholders related to the brand.

4.2.2 Online fan collectives

While most of the activities and practices around the Reino & Aino brand take place offline, there are also collectives online. In Facebook, consumers are discussing the brand and posting their own photos to several fan groups that are brand centric yet established by the consumers themselves. This differentiates these groups from company-managed fan pages where companies communicate with consumers. It has been recently shown that embedded brand communities

may emerge within social networks online and that they may have shared consciousness of kind, as well as shared rituals and moral responsibility, which are the features of brand communities (Zaglia 2013). However, these collectives are heterogeneous in terms of members' multilevel interactions and the strength of their perceived membership.

The online groups in Facebook identified in the data include "Reinot", and "Pink Reinos" and groups that have emerged and died out including "Ainos and Reinos rock", "Reinos on 24/7" and "Reino owners from Niemisjärvi" (*Reinovuosi book 2010, 17*). The most active of these is the Reinot group which has almost forty thousand "likes" on Facebook since 2008 when it was established. The group is used mainly for sharing stories about how much people like the slippers, how they use them and where. The practice of storytelling is prominent. Many consumers report having several pairs of Reinos for different kinds of uses and purposes:

My uncle Reino was married to an Aino and both had good slippers. Both slippers are outstanding examples of their species.

A man's post in the Reinot Facebook group 25.11.2010

Here's how I manage: basicReinos at home, beachReinos at the summer house, IlvesReinos as I am an Ilves fan [a local ice hockey club] and then there's Dad's heirloomReinos.

A man's post in the Reinot Facebook group 9.7.2010

The way users categorize their Reino & Aino slippers link the slippers with various different practices in their everyday lives. The slippers become part of these practices, an integral element of enacting the practice. The members of the group also post pictures of their Reino & Aino slippers in different activities including ice-fishing, cooking, shopping and traveling. There have been photos of a person wearing the slippers in front of the Arc of Triumph in Paris and the Grand Canyon in the USA, for instance. These photos are part of the dataset, but they are private, which is why they are not published in this thesis.

Practices of gift-giving and wearing the Reinos in all kinds of situations are well-documented in the Facebook group. The posts are short, and sometimes people just report that they have bought Reino slippers, with no comments coming from other members.

I have never managed to buy any present more pleasing than Reinos for anyone, the recipient of my present does not even wear any other type of footwear anymore.

A woman's post in the Reinos Facebook group 23.10.2010

I wear Reiska [a nickname for Reino] slippers throughout the year; I always have two different sizes the other I can wear with woolen socks. When I go to do grocery shopping and anywhere I go, I wear Reiskat (Reinos).

A man's post in the Reinos Facebook group 19.10.2010

The practice of inheriting the slippers from a loved one, something that also came up in the observational data from the factory outlet store as well as in the interviews was also documented in the Facebook group. It is an important part of how people first come to use the slippers:

I have inherited small size brown Reinos from my small-footed father who was called Reino.

A woman's post in the Reinos Facebook group 14.7.2010

I inherited brown ones from Granny-Helmi 90 years-old, they are wonderful and a warm memory ☺

A woman's post in the Reinos Facebook group 9.7.2010

Thus, the consumers clearly connect meanings of personal nostalgia to wearing the slippers. In fact, it has been argued in the literature on nostalgic products that they often accentuate feelings of belongingness with close loved ones, enabling consumers to relive memories of these relationships (Loveland et al., 2010). Oppositional brand loyalty (Muñiz & Schau 2001; Schau & Muñiz 2005) is also involved and emphasizing brand meanings. Guarding the authenticity is seen as important. The Finnish manufacturing is an essential thing for the members:

Reinos or Ainos are very warm outside as well and not slippery at all. If you wear the Crocs, you'll tumble as soon as you go get wood or take the dog on a walk, but if you wear Reinos or Ainos, you can do it in style. ☺

A woman's post in the Reinos Facebook group 14.2.2009

Here you can see [a photo of a dog who is lying sleeping on a bench with her head in-between the two Reino slippers] Finnish Reinos giving a good sleep to a Finnish lapphund Bella on a Finnish bench that has been hand-crafted in Finland in the

1940s. If it was the cheap Sauli copies made using child slave labor, our Bella wouldn't have even gone near the bench. Is there a more Finnish photo than this?

A man's post in the Reinot Facebook group 1.12.2012

Like company-managed fan pages, consumers use the online groups to communicate their ideas and opinions to the company (Zaglia 2013). However, this is also an extension from their offline activities, because the entrepreneurs also report in several interviews how they get weekly feedback in the form of email and letters from their customers.

Please promise to tell me well in advance if the manufacturing of Reinos is moved outside of FINLAND!!!! or any other stupidity. So that I have enough time to buy as many size 45 pairs of Reinos to last for the rest of my life. The earlier threat of ending the manufacturing and moving it to the Czech Republic or whatever was a shock enough for one generation to experience. I wish profitability and success to the manufacturers and employees. Remember not to stress! If you need to, put Reinos on and it will calm you down incredibly well.

A man's post in the Reinot Facebook group 5.3.2010

In contrast to products that require a lot of knowledge and expertise to use, such as camera equipment, the consumers do not seem to share guidance or assist each other in brand use through the online collectives. The collectives are not very interactive in terms of discussion between members, but instead they work more as storytelling platforms where brand related cultural capital is demonstrated (Schau et al. 2009) and as ways to communicate concerns to brand management. This suggests that in fact the online dimension of collective consumption is not very strong for Reino & Aino and most of the collectives are characterized rather by face-to-face meetings and interactions. On the other hand, the online platforms such as Facebook have offered the chance for offline collectives such as the place-focused collectives to communicate with each other using the new medium.

4.2.3 Summary of brand-focused collectives

Even though they are a minority, brand-focused collectives are not insignificant for the phenomenon. In particular, they have enabled more interaction between the company and the consumers compared to less brand-focused ones. Through supporting and sponsoring the activities of active consumption collectives such as those in Pyterlahti and Vesanto, the company has been granted a rather passive role. By founding collectives of their own, the company has been able to generate

more practices around their brand that emphasize the positive brand meanings. The brand's role has been more in the forefront in these activities, even if actually selling the slippers has not been the first priority. Rather, the visibility gained through event-based and viral marketing has been crucial. Co-operation with charity organizations and other actors such as the Association for Finnish Work has helped the company to authenticate brand meanings and generate legitimacy. Thus, it has not only been the company unidirectionally sending messages to consumers about promoting Finnish work, for instance. Instead, concrete actions have been taken to assure consumers that the brand really stands for the meanings associated with it. Taking broader social responsibility in addition to offering cultural resources is something consumers look for in brands today (Holt 2002; 2004).

Some of the activities initiated by the company build on those of the collectives that have another focus than the brand. Thus, the competences, materials and meanings related to organizing events around the brand have been moving from the direction of the consumers toward the company. Consumers have been the innovators and the company has imitated them.

The company has attempted to retain active interaction with the consumers by approaching them where they already spend their time and learning from them that way. They have also shown gratitude and reciprocity for consumers by inviting them to participate in their own events. For the company, marketing competences have included understanding viral marketing and how to benefit from media attention as well as how to leverage public relations. Their approach has not, however, been to build a community from scratch and manage it on their own terms. Instead, they have taken their brand to where the consumers already are spending time with each other and where they enact different kinds of consumption practices. Thus, as in the case of the other collectives, the brand has become a symbolic resource in different pre-existing events and activities.

In addition to the company-led brand-focused collectives, there is also active online interaction between consumers in Facebook fan groups. These groups are characterized by sharing brand stories and personal experiences as well as demonstrating oppositional brand loyalty. Consumers also document their practices related to using the brand such as inheriting slippers from relatives, using different pairs for different purposes.



Figure 11. Summary of brand-focused collectives' materials, meanings, and competences.

Figure 11 illustrates the meanings, materials, and competences related to brand-focused collectives. In addition to the meanings involved already in the place-focused collectives (such as strong emphasis on Finnish nationality), the brand-focused collectives add meanings related to fandom and youth culture as the presence of celebrities (musicians and athletes etc.) has been very visible in the company's events. There are also meanings related to corporate social responsibility in the form of doing charity within the company-led collective. Meanings related to viral marketing have included the courage to go beyond traditional marketing techniques and interact with the consumers in their everyday lives. On the consumers' side, in the online fangroups, meanings related to

personal stories and experiences as well as traveling were more in the focus. Regarding materials, the marketing materials such as the retro packaging of the slippers as well as the fabrics and models themselves are emphasized. The Reino stall at the rock festivals and the Reino truck have been important material hubs for the collective's gatherings. Making videos, photos and documentation about the events has also resulted in material proof of the collectives' practices. Regarding competences, for the company-led collectives, leveraging media and viral marketing skills have been important, as well as the entrepreneurs' personal skills in building effective social networks around them. It has also required openness to feedback, learning to imitate consumers and to learn from them. For the online collectives' members, skills in using Facebook and engaging in storytelling have been used to participate in the practices.

4.3 Activity-focused collectives

Activity-focused collectives emerged from the data in connection to lifestyle-related pursuits and activities where the Reino & Aino slipper was used. In these collectives, as in consumption tribes, the "link is more important than the thing" (Cova 1997). They share experiences and emotions, which is the tool of creating and preserving the collective (Cova et al. 2007). Yet activity-focused collectives identified in the data differ from other collectives, because they exhibit the loosest possible structure and may not share any common norms, values, integrative rituals or practices outside of their occasional gatherings. Thus, they are dispersed rather than integrated in nature. The intense emotional experience of togetherness is more important (Goulding et al. 2002). The role of the brand may also vary, but it is more often on the periphery of the culture around the consumption activity or lifestyle or may co-occur with other brands (Ostberg 2007; Goulding et al. 2013). Thus, the expectations of participation, reciprocity and involvement are also more related to the activity and not to the brand as such. Accessing these collectives can be heterogeneous as well depending on the roles that consumers have within them.

4.3.1 The ice hockey and sports collective

The first activity-focused collective related to the Reino & Aino brand consists of people interested in ice hockey and other sports. Ice hockey is very popular in Finland and it can even be argued that it is our national sport. This is evident from the amount of spectators that watch it from television. Ice hockey enthusiasts and especially young athletes are accustomed to wearing the slippers when watching ice

hockey games or attending their own team's workouts and games. The practice of wearing Reinos when watching ice hockey is documented for instance in the media. In one article of Vancouver Olympic Games 2010, there was a photo of three male fans of the Finnish team, drinking beer from their Reino slippers, wearing blue-and-white outfits and facepaints.

Besides wearing the Reinos, the photo showed how consumers come up with innovative elements to existing practices; combining beer drinking and the Reino slipper in this case. This practice also links together the comfortable footwear and the emotionally intense tribal experiences of watching the game. The Reinos have become part of the fan costumes and rituals that ice hockey fans employ. Materials related to these practices include wearing the team jerseys, caps or other pieces of clothing, carrying flags or putting on facepaint. The Reino slippers have become an additional element.

In addition, there is an amateur ice hockey team called HC Reinot that has been playing together since the 1990. They have adopted the brand name and meaning as part of their team's name and spirit:

HC Reinot aims at playing enjoyable gentleman-like hockey; hockey that the members of the team enjoy playing. Like the manager Momo Koso says: In the Reinos it is enough if everyone does their best. The player must also have some Reino-spirit; they have to be able to laugh in the changing room and why not also in the rink. But this does not mean taking it too easy. We will always do our best but with a smiling face. Hockey is a nice hobby.

HC Reinot captain, interviewed in Reinovuosi book (2010, 84)

For this collective that is also based on friendship ties, the brand's meaning elements are important and the brand thus functions as a symbolic resource that is used to represent the team's playing attitude and spirit. Yet, the competence and material aspect of actually wearing Reinos is not a big part of their activities together. Instead, each player is nicknamed as Reino, and the members also spend their time together outside the hockey rink, for instance playing golf or attending a harness race, not necessarily wearing the slippers at all (Närhi 2007, 110).

The practicality of the slippers and their warmth are the reasons why youngster hockey players like to wear them. Wearing the slippers is simple and easy and you they give the person wearing them a relaxed style as opposed to following the fancies and fads of fashion.

I use them everywhere; at school and here at ice hockey workouts...everyone in my class has a pair of Reinos. At first, my father had a pair and then I got mine.

A teenage boy at an ice hockey team's practice session

[How come do you wear the Reinos?]

They are so warm and easy to put on...I imagine that a fancy pants who always wears high heels for instance, would not wear them.

A teenage girl at an ice hockey team's practice session

Wearing Reinos together at the workout or when traveling to games by bus creates a sense of belonging and reinforces the team spirit. It links the brand with several practices related to the focal activity or hobby. The parents of some teams have also adopted the Reinos. One mother reported that wearing the Reino slippers while watching their children play hockey has become common practice among the mothers who spend their time on the side of the ice hockey rink and is something that creates a sense of belonging (*Fieldnotes from the nursing home, 8.10.2009*).

The company has succeeded in leveraging upon their connection to the ice hockey collectives and has launched slippers specifically for the fans of local ice hockey clubs in co-operation with the clubs. The idea for this brand extension actually came from a local ice hockey fan, who asked the company for a pair of slippers decorated in the team's colors. This one pair was first made only as a joke, but as the person started to wear their slippers in the company of other fans, they became interested in where they could get a pair of their own. The practice thus spread from the improvisation within the practice of one consumer to many others. The company then decided to develop the idea further and launched a completely new design. A newspaper article from a local newspaper in 2009 reported:

Tappara [a local ice hockey club] Reinos are becoming the hit of this Christmas. In Tappara's fan shop at Tampere there has been an active past few weeks. Everyone is asking for Reinos. Tappara people have become slipper heroes! The enormous demand has surpassed expectations to such extent that the producer has not been able to make enough Tappara Reinos. Besides Tappara's fan shop...the Tappara Reinos are for sale also at the Reino store that operates in the Finlayson area of Tampere

Kaupparehti magazine 18.12.2009

This quotation also illustrates the free marketing communication by the media given to the company throughout the past years when the brand has become revitalized, even informing readers about the locations where they can buy the slippers for themselves.

The company also has also launched slippers and sneakers with the Reino fabric for Finland's ice hockey team, Leijona-Reinot (Lion Reinos), which connects and creates links between the two collectives: the idea-focused collective related to Finnish nationality and the activity-focused ice hockey collective. What enables the linkages is the strong meaning association of Finnish nationality that both ice hockey and the Reino & Aino brand have. Part of the profit from these slippers goes to promoting junior ice hockey in Finland, which enhances the image of the company as a moral and caring market actor. The launch of the Lion-Reinos was also promoted by the media and so far they have been the most successful of the co-branding slippers that the company has launched.

4.3.2 The rock music collective

Another activity-focused collective related to the brand can be associated with Finnish rock music. The connection has been brought forward especially by celebrities that have reportedly worn Reinos. The relations between members in these collectives can be characterized as parasocial relationships (Cova & Pace 2006), where fans of the musicians know a lot about and feel connected to their idols. In contrast to regular celebrity enhancement deals, the company has not paid anything to these celebrities to act as their spokespeople. Juice Leskinen, a Finnish poet and musician as well as Kari Tapio, a Finnish country-singer are both "first generation" Reino users that have already passed away. In Närhi's Reino book (2007), Kari Tapio reports having five pairs of Reino slippers at home.

'In addition, I have ensured that everyone in my family's four generations has Reinos to use all the time', says Kari Tapio. 'Reinos are the best shoes I have ever worn. They are comfortable in your feet because they don't pinch. I can remember Reinos from my childhood because my father used to have the ones with buckles on them. I also have a similar pair now because a couple of my longtime fans took a pair of Reinos to the shoemaker's, had them add the buckles and gave them to me as a gift.'

Närhi 2007, 34

Documenting and sharing his own practices that are very similar to any other Reino user's practices and memories brings the singer close to his fans and makes

them part of the same consumption collective related to the brand. In his lifetime, Kari Tapio spoke for Reinos several times in the media, including also a suggestion that every musician should wear Reinos (Kari Tapio, Radio interview 2009). In addition, he gave a pair of Reinos as a gift to a younger generation rocker, Ville Valo who is the lead singer in a well-known Finnish rock band HIM. Juice Leskinen, on the other hand, promised his last pair of Reino slippers to a younger generation musician Juri Lindemann in his will before he died. In this way, the meanings of Reino slippers were associated with strong emotional ties and a need to preserve the inheritance of Finnish rock music from one generation to another.

In the fan collectives of these rockers, their idols can be seen as opinion leaders who are influential in spreading brand use (Mitchell & Imrie 2011). In addition, the gift-giving practices between musicians can be considered as having a broader function than solidifying interpersonal relationships – they are collective gifting rituals that symbolize the transfer of cultural values from a generation of a subculture to another (cf. Weinberger & Wallendorf 2012).

Juice Leskinen was one of the most prominent singer-songwriters of all time in Finland, releasing nearly thirty albums and writing song lyrics for many other Finnish artists. Many of his songs have become all-time classics and he has also gained a lot of posthumous recognition. He was well known for wearing Reinos and he had a large collection of books. After his death in 2006, the books were going to be sold separately even though he had wished for the whole library to be donated to Viola-home; a nursing home for the elderly and disabled. In 2009, the entrepreneurs of Reino & Aino got wind of the library's coming fate and offered to buy it from the heirs of Leskinen in order to donate it to the Viola-home in 2010 (Photo 10).

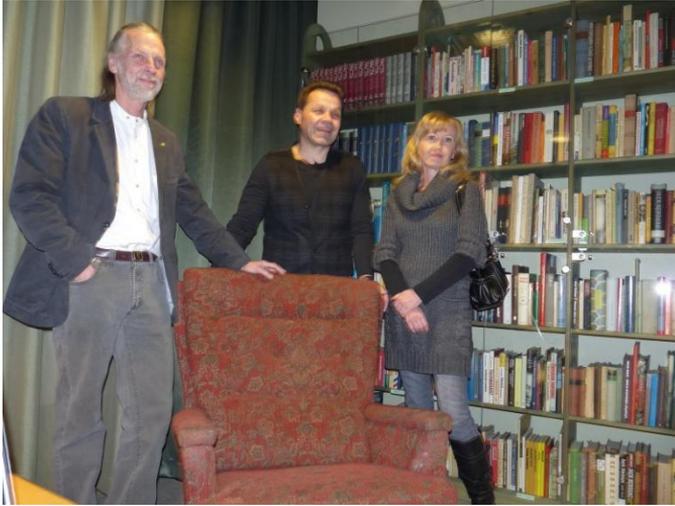


Photo 8. Donation of Juice's library to Viola home (photo in Tamperelainen local newspaper's website 24.2.2011, published with permission)

The entrepreneur Arto Huhtinen himself is a big fan of literature and books. This act of charity was largely reported in the media, providing the company with a lot of positive feedback and publicity. An article in a local newspaper reported "Juice's books found a home" (31.10.2009) and a blogger wrote:

Let it be made clear from the start that yours truly does not have and has never had any kind of commercial relationship with the company that manufactures slippers called Reino. All the country was anxious (me included) about the destiny of Juice Leskinen's library during the past week. The media discussion almost reached editorials, when concerned citizens and culture politicians grabbed the scandal. The same reporters that think paying taxes is not enough to discharge corporate responsibility (and it is not enough also in my opinion) look the other way when their wishes are fulfilled. Where are their thanks to the slipper factory? I know that tomorrow I will go to the store and buy Reinos: at least one pair. I will tell the cashier and all people walking by that I bought the slippers because the factory saved Juice's library.

Blog entry on 24.4.2009

By purchasing the library, the company connected with Juice Leskinen's admirers and other musicians as well as their fans in an unconventional way. They also partly redefined the meaning of corporate responsibility. A business acting altruistically without any direct commercial benefit created powerful emotions in consumers. One family interviewed at the Reino retail store reported this act of charity as the

reason why they have started to buy Reino slippers as gifts to their friends and relatives (*Field notes at the store 15.10.2010*). The fact that this act was clearly related to preserving the Finnish cultural inheritance rather than just any act of benevolence is important for linking meaning elements together. Both Reinos and Juice Leskinen can be argued to represent Finnish cultural icons.

Besides the first generation Reino users, there are also some younger rock musicians that have adopted the role of brand ambassadors. One of these is Jonne Aaron, lead singer and teenage idol of the Finnish glam rock band Negative. He has reportedly been wearing Reino slippers and after co-operating with the company, designed a pair of slippers for his band. He has also been a frequent guest in the company's events. At the same time the Negative Reinos were launched, another Finnish icon, singer Katri-Helena launched her own Aino slippers. Katri-Helena is one of the most popular singers in Finland and has been performing since the 1960s. She is popular especially among middle-aged and older generation of consumers. The launching of these two new slipper models was heavily reported in the media and the two seemingly incompatible artists performed together in several events. By connecting contradictory artists the company addressed different consumers and formed new links of meaning between the different fan collectives. The collectives' connection with Reinos has been formed through imitating their idols who have reported that they also wear them. The celebrities have acted as ambassadors of the brand within their fan collectives. The collectives that form around idols are on-the-spot communities that do not require a lot of involvement or commitment from their members. Instead, they provide transient bonds between members (Bauman 2000; 2001).

4.2.4 Summary of activity-focused collectives

In tribal collective consumption, people are “desperately searching for the social link” (Cova 1997), meaning that the social relations and emotional experiences enabled by products and services are more important than marketplace offerings in themselves. The brand's role is also peripheral in the activity-focused collectives identified within the Reino & Aino phenomenon. In the same way as place-focused and social relations-focused collectives, the slipper functions as a symbolic resource. Yet for the activity-focused collectives, the Reino & Aino slipper is often one element among many. For the ice hockey enthusiast, it can be an important part of their game watching costume. For the young athlete, it can be practical and warm to wear when you are not wearing the skates. For the fan of a rock band, wearing the slipper enables stronger identification with one's idol and other fans. The relevance of the brand is related to style and it could be replaced by another

element quite easily. Thus, the consumption collectives do not have a particularly deep relationship with the brand. Membership of the collective is also very loose, consisting of both practitioners such as people playing ice hockey themselves, and of supporters and sympathizers (Cova & Cova 2002). However, the company has succeeded in leveraging the weak links through introducing slippers that are specially designed for a particular team or band. This reinforces the connections between the brand and the fan collective. The company has also connected with the collectives in unconventional ways, such as by doing charity for the particular causes that are in their interests.

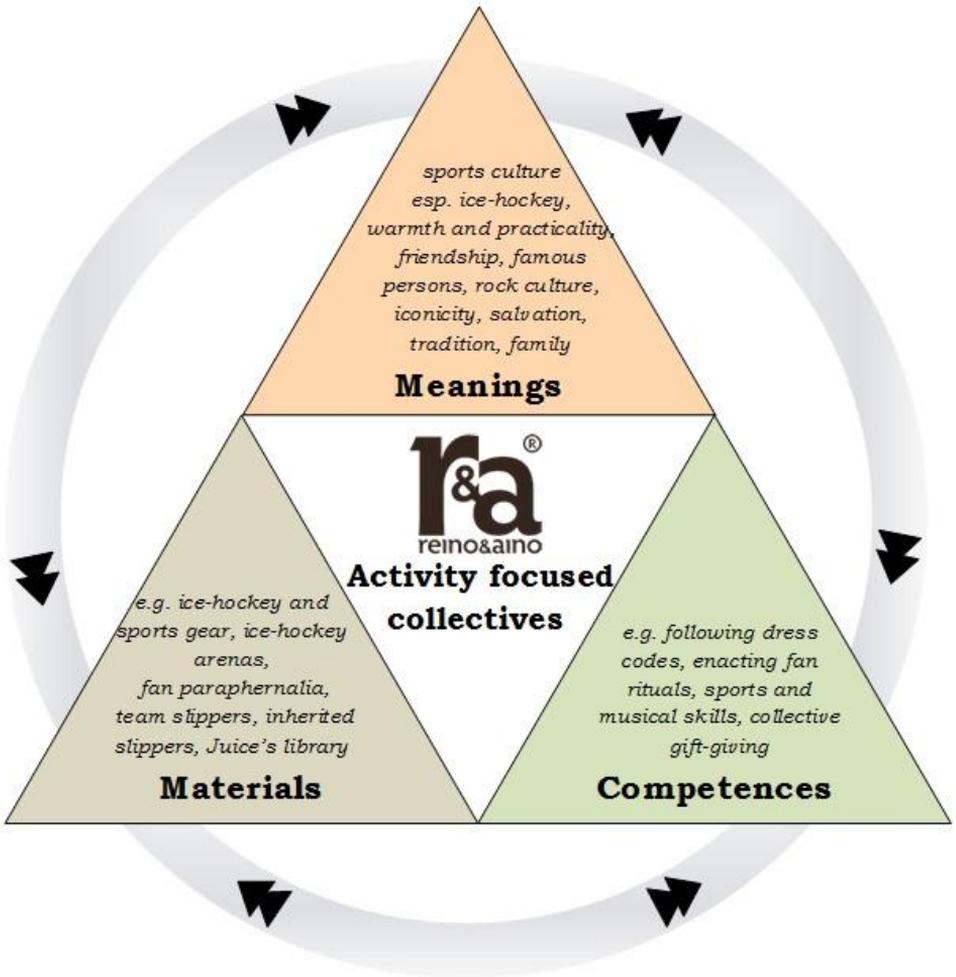


Figure 12. Summary of activity-focused collectives' materials, meanings, and competences.

Figure 12 illustrates the combination of meanings, materials, and competences related to activity-focused collectives' practices. Meanings include those related to sports' culture. They are also related to the practicality and warmth represented by the slipper, providing a necessary practical use in workouts and in the drafty ice hockey arenas. From the rock music collective, meanings related to well-known Reino users are important. In addition, the association with salvation comes forth both from the company's act of charity in salvaging Juice's library, but also from the musicians' way of transmitting their legacy on to another generation with the help of the slippers. Materials related to these collectives' practices include the ice hockey and sports gear to which Reinos are added as an element, as well as specifically made team slippers, and inherited slippers in the case of musicians. Juice Leskinen's library was a material object that represented the already deceased idol's legacy that was important to his fans and that the company managed to salvage, reinforcing the connection between Juice and the Reino slipper even further. Competences related to these collective practices include following appropriate dress codes as well as enacting fan rituals, such as wearing the Finnish flag colors. Naturally competences related to actually playing the sports or the musical instruments are also included. Finally, collective gift-giving is important for the collectives as was shown with the increased sales of the team slippers before Christmas and also in the practices of musicians giving the slippers to each other.

4.4 Idea-focused collectives: The imagined national collective

The Reino & Aino brand is a national icon. Therefore, it can be argued that it supports the imagined community of Finnish nationality in its own way (Anderson 1983). Like novels, newspapers and other cultural products, brands can mobilize national consciousness (Cayla & Eckhardt 2008). Previous research within the cultural branding paradigm has studied the way marketing and advertising has utilized national imagery to build iconic brands, whether contributing to national (Holt 2004) or transnational identities (Cayla & Eckhardt 2008).

In the Reino & Aino case, the company has remained more passive in managing the brand, but the aspect of creating an imagined community around nationality can still be identified from the data. By purchasing and using the Reino & Aino slippers, one is buying into an iconic, almost stereotypical and mythical sense of Finnish culture:

I could easily imagine taking [the Reino & Aino slippers] somewhere to a foreign country as a present to someone. Something that embodies Finland. Like if you

needed to have something bigger than rye bread or chocolate or salmiac. I think these would be very appropriate too.

Katariina (consumer interviews)

The nature of the national collective is more dispersed than integrated and the role of the brand is more peripheral, amongst other stereotypical cultural icons and products. The collective is mainly imagined; the members are not in face-to-face contact with one another; they are not expected to participate in any shared activities around the brand and there are usually no integrative rituals through which the collective's norms and beliefs would be reinforced (Brint 2001). In this respect, the imagined national collective differs significantly from some other collectives based on ideas such as the ideological collective of Burning Man (Kozinets 2002). In Burning Man, the collective was developed around the idea of consumer emancipation through intense face-to-face contact lasting for a week in the desert and then dismantling again.

The integrative rituals, norms and beliefs relevant for the national collective are related to the cultural construction of national identity where using Reinos might be one element among others. Access to the collective depends on the national identity of the consumer. However, compared to other dispersed collectives, such as online fan groups, the imagined national collective is more enduring, because nationality continues to be an important identity dimension for consumers. However, the vices of community such as enforced conformity or constraints for individual behavior are irrelevant. Instead, a single user's sense of identification and belongingness in the national collective is important.

Shared cultural memory related to nationality is still important in the social patterning of consumption (Holt 1997; Peñaloza 2001; Luedicke et al. 2010). Patriotic meanings related to Reino & Aino are created through their long traditions in Finnish homes for over 80 years, the domestic production facilities that are exceptional in the manufacturing sector today, and the brand's associations with Finnish war veterans who fought for the country's independence. This creates a mythical story behind the brand in the Finnish culture. As argued by consumer culture theorists (Holt 2002; 2004; Thompson 2004; Kozinets & Handelman 2004; Arsel & Thompson 2011), marketplace myths assure consumers at times of stress and anxiety in the constantly shifting culture (Brown et al. 2014). The Reino & Aino brand draws strength from the anxiety caused by globalization when companies are increasingly outsourcing their production to cheap labor countries. This provides an ideological opportunity (Holt & Cameron 2010, 186) for brands that offer reassurance of the value of Finnish work, craftsmanship and entrepreneurship.

You cannot have just anything cobbled together and made in any European country, or China for that matter, because they are ours. We want it to be a Finnish thing, a traditional thing.

Pyterlahti village committee member

In contrast to Asian brands studied by Cayla and Eckhardt (2008), the orientation of Reino & Aino is not to create multicultural mosaics that are able to cross national boundaries but specifically to boost the national imagery of Finland for Finnish consumers. Yet, this has not been merely the company's pursuit, but consumers also want to emphasize the brand as belonging to the nation by emphasizing that the quality of the slippers is the result of being manufactured in Finland and being "made for the Finnish feet" (*Kiira, consumer interviews*).

Both entrepreneurs of Reino & Aino report Finnishness as one of their core values. The decision to buy the trademark from the parent company was partly made because the entrepreneurs had worked in the parent company. Arto Huhtinen, had been the factory manager and Tuire Erkkilä the product development manager. Both had been obligated to implement strategic decisions that they did not appreciate:

The company was in trouble. During the past 15 years it had only had a few profitable years, as capital investors maintained the business. In spite of our objections, the production was gradually outsourced, and they also aimed at selling the brand. They wanted to do the outsourcing in secret since from 1973 they manufactured the Kontio boots that were a very blue-and-white [Finnish] brand, that was heavily associated with being Finnish. We had to participate in the outsourcing process even though we did not believe in the solution long term and it was not true to our values. But the decision-making power was out of our hands.

The entrepreneurs in Reino – tobvelisankarista brändiksi book (2011, 18)

By constructing the story of the company as based on personal values rather than profit motives, the entrepreneurs position the company more in the sphere of the moral economy rather than the market economy (Luedicke et al. 2010; Weinberger & Wallendorf 2012). Thereby, it adds authenticity to the brand meaning as well. The idea of buying the business from the parent company meant that Huhtinen and Erkkilä were able to get a hold of the decision-making power and one of the first strategic decisions they made was moving the manufacturing of the slippers back to Finland. Their will to promote Finnish work was thus one of the main reasons for starting the new business and provided them with courage to take a big financial risk, as well as gave them a lot of media attention. The brand is also associated with famous Finnish people held in high esteem:

It is wonderful that the most Finnish company of all acquires the library of the most Finnish poet, composer and performer of all in order to donate it to public use. There is something overtly Finnish, so monumentally Finnish about it – and that's why it is so wonderful.

Comment in a blog post 24.4.2009

I remember how significant it felt to see this honorable general [Adolf Ernrooth, the figurehead for Finnish veterans] in his dignified attire with badges of honor, homely Reino slippers on his feet. Then, I believe, those people who were there actually felt that he was truly their own general.

Consumer story in Närbi (2007, 59)

Consumers report a sense of shared ownership related to the brand as part of the nation's cultural heritage. The iconic status of the brand was reinforced for instance through a museum exhibition related to the product's 75th birthday in Tampere (25.5.2008–28.2.2010). This exhibition detailed the history of the Reino & Aino slippers, legitimating their iconic meaning and significance. The Finnish foreign minister of the time gave a speech in the Reino museum exhibition opening, quoting the slipper as a key symbol of Finnish nationality:

In the United States, the same year [1932, first year when Reinos were produced] gave birth to two American embodiments: The Mars bar and the Zippo lighter. They are both quite good products but they are not Reinos. Reinos are an honest embodiment of Finland, the genuine core of what it is to be Finnish

Alexander Stubb, the Foreign Minister in his speech, 24.5.2008, quoted on the web page of Reino & Aino

By putting on an exhibition of the slippers, their status as a cultural icon was further enhanced. The museum did not view their participation as part of a branding campaign, however, but instead as offering support more generally to things that are held in esteem. Thereby the Reino became a symbol of Finnish entrepreneurship in general:

Naturally when a museum puts on an exhibition of anything, it is always considered as significant afterwards. For instance, if there is a product or an object that we put on display, its value increases immediately afterwards, for instance in the antiques market. But we haven't perceived it as a negative thing, because we want to support Finnish entrepreneurship and Finnish industry.

Museum representative

This ideological meaning element is set as opposing purely commercial motives in business. The museum exhibition representative thereby resolves the tension between cultural value and commerciality. It yields a sense of moral responsibility to the Reino & Aino. Similarly, a charity organization representative that I interviewed legitimized their co-operation with the company through a shared philanthropic desire to help and support other people instead of merely increasing the sales:

The starting point [for the company] is not to aim to increase popularity. It starts from realizing that the war veterans needed these shoes in their working prime and the slippers have been part of the rebuilding of our country. So this is thanks to them as well

Representative of a charity organization

Thus, like Luedicke and colleagues (2010) suggest for the Hummer brand, the Reino & Aino brand may act as resource for consumers' moralistic identity work where they defend core Finnish values through consuming the slippers. Finland is a young nation, having declared its independence from Russia only in the beginning of the twentieth century. Thus, rituals, symbols and practices that boost national belongingness are still important to Finnish consumers, maybe to a greater extent than to consumers elsewhere in the Western world. Members of the imagined national collective use the brand to describe what it is to be Finnish. This aspect is well illustrated in the interview of one of the key informants, a reporter who had written a book about the phenomenon:

All of us Finnish people, we like to be hillbillies. We enjoy such moments of leisure when we go to our summer house and light the fire in the fireplace, the midsummer bonfire, the sauna...they are such simple, hillbilly activities and we enjoy them enormously. All of us Finnish people. You can always get a small pinch of that hillbilly factor when you wear Reinos. They have some of that nice and simple ideology.

The Reino book editor

The interviewee smooths the differences and exaggerates the similarities of what it is to be Finnish and using the slippers as a symbol for that. A disjuncture can then be identified if one looks at the data from the online discussion boards, where it is debated whether the hillbilly image is positive for Finland:

The French and Russian women would tear their hair out if they saw somebody wearing those [Reino & Aino slippers]. It is no wonder that Finnish people are seen as a hillbilly nation.

Comment in an online discussion board

Thus, the brand is also used as a platform to negotiate the meanings of Finnish nationality in positive and negative tones.

Many interviewees respected the brand for being actually made in Finland from design to production and for embodying the culture. One email interviewee was living in South America and reported that the practice of using the slippers made her feel she had a piece of Finland with her, feeling a connection with her home country in that way (*Kristiina, consumer interviews*). Consumers also post pictures of themselves to the Facebook groups in which they are wearing the slippers while travelling abroad; taking a piece of Finland with them wherever they go. The Finnishness of the brand and the company has also been one of the key stories in the media where the entrepreneurs have been portrayed as heroic:

In 2004, the slipper markets were controlled by cheap import slippers. The first thing [the entrepreneurs] did was to hire 15 unemployed persons and move the production of Reino & Aino back to Finland.

Talouselämä magazine, 5.3.2010

The entrepreneurs themselves argue that the media attention for Reino & Aino is rooted in their decision to move production back to Finland and to promote Finnish work. In fact, many such stories appeared in the media that would have been labeled as advertorials yet the company did not pay for the publicity.

Emphasizing nationality through brand meaning be a strong formula for success such as American Mountain Dew drink or Mexican Corona beer have shown (Holt 2004). These brands have achieved their success by conducting clever culturally resonant marketing campaigns. According to the yearly report by a leading journal for marketing practitioners in the country, Finnish people continue to value Finnish brands the highest. This is interesting, because it has been argued that the value of many global brands is based on their ability to provide a sense of living in a global village (Holt, Quelch & Taylor 2004). It would suggest that there is a tendency for consumers to aspire for global and national identities at the same time. On the other side of the equation is the criticism toward especially multinational companies (e.g. Klein 2000), which causes tension between whether companies should emphasize global, national, or regional imagery in branding. The

downside to emphasizing national consciousness is that the brand meaning is considered exclusive to Finnish people:

I think it's fun that it would be marketed to foreign countries as a Finnish thing, but I'm not sure whether they would understand it. It might look just like grandma and grandpa slippers to all foreigners.

Hanna (consumer interviews)

To distinguish the case from other brands studied before, the Reino & Aino brand has become a resource for the imagined national collective to a large extent without active branding maneuvers by the company. Instead of marketing campaigns, their actions such as bringing production facilities back to Finland or supporting Finnish charities have had more impact.

Each time a Finnish company sells its production to a foreign party; it raises a lot of media attention and negative public opinion. The Reino & Aino company's support for Finnish work and employment has also been acknowledged by the state. In 2011, one of the entrepreneurs got an invitation to attend the president's Independence Day reception. The reception is an important institution of the Finnish culture and watching the reception from the television is a traditional way of spending Independence Day in Finland. The entrepreneur thinks that the invite came because of the company's success in difficult times for the Finnish economy:

We are seen as profoundly Finnish as a company. Despite the economic downturn over the recent couple of years, we have been able to offer more jobs all the time.

The entrepreneur Arto Huhtinen quoted in Tamperelainen newspaper 4.12.2011

For the imagined national collective, the brand's role is to be part of the social construction of a sense of nation. It is perceived as one element in the repertoire of stereotypical elements of Finnishness, including the war history, sauna and midsummer bonfire, salmiac, rye bread, and famous Finnish people. Everyday use of the slippers is set in the bigger frame of being Finnish. In the imagined national collectives use, the Reino & Aino is not so much a brand but a symbol of Finland, part of the cultural heritage and shared national memory.

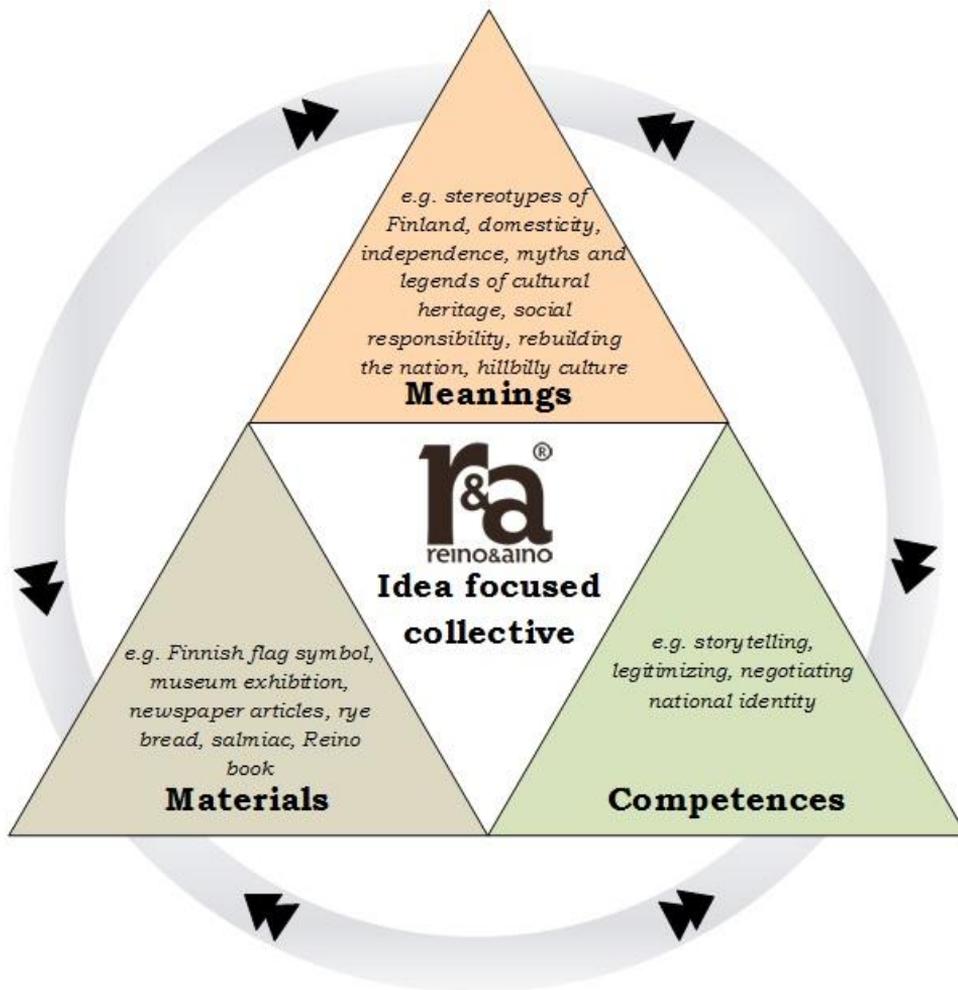


Figure 13. Summary of idea-focused collectives' materials, meanings and competences.

Figure 13 illustrates meanings, materials and competences related to the imagined national collective's practices. Meanings include those related to constructing a national identity, such as stereotypical sense of Finnishness, domestic production and Finnish work, the fight for independence and the Reino & Aino slippers' role in helping veterans to rebuild the country after wars. A certain sense of shared social responsibility for the nation as a whole and respect for the previous generations comes with this. Yet, there are also some contradictory meanings related to belittling and dismissing the Reino & Aino as part of Finnish hillbilly culture rather than representing a sense of style. Materials related to this collective include the symbol of the Finnish flag which is also inserted in the slippers, as well

as connecting them with other typical Finnish items and products. The museum exhibition and the Reino book have both concretized the slippers as a representative cultural icon, materializing the myths and stories around the brand as well as legitimizing them. In fact, competences are also related to these acts that help make the connection between Reino & Aino and Finnish national identity more apparent and visible.

4.5 Social relations-focused collectives

In the literature on collective consumption, the brand, consumption offering, or activity is often seen as the social glue that creates bonds between consumers and unites them. However, it can be argued that social relations that pre-exist brand use can also help in facilitating collective consumption. Because the pre-existing social bonds are already strong and often continuous and lasting, they might carry the consumption practices even more effectively than tribal or momentary experiences of community where people do not know each other. This is the case for example with family consumption practices as already discussed in the literature (Arnould & Wallendorf 1991; Epp & Price 2008). Relations with loved ones are also found to be emphasized through consuming nostalgic products (Loveland et al. 2010). In the case of Reino & Aino, there are different kinds of social relations-focused collectives that have adopted the brand as their symbol. These include families, groups of friends, and workplace collectives. They are the most integrated from the collectives analyzed from the case study data, because they are based on enduring relations, high barriers of entry and more moral obligation and reciprocity than the others.

The structure of families and kinship based collectives is relatively fixed and the boundaries are clear; each family or circle of friends forms a separate collective of its own. There are strong expectations of involvement, reciprocity of support, frequency of participation, and shared norms and values, even though these are not related to the brand. The Reino & Aino brand instead functions as a symbolic resource for these communities which can be used to reinforce belongingness or to negotiate family identity. The brand's role is peripheral; if it were removed, the collective would still be there. The collective members do not necessarily have a lot of brand-related knowledge; in fact, they may not even know about the brand extensions or marketing events organized by the company. Instead, the social practices related to brand use are used to identify with the collective. These social practices are meaningful to everyone who belongs, and only to them (Cohen 1985; Day 2006). In other words, identifying with the broad brand community of Reino & Aino users may be totally irrelevant. The rich meanings of inter-generational

continuity, warmth and care associated with the slipper facilitate the already existing social ties.

4.5.1 Families and kinship collectives

The Reino & Aino can function as something that connects the different generations or family members together. Each family using the slippers thus forms a small consumption collective of its own. While observing customers at the retail outlet, I noticed that families often came to the store together to purchase a pair for everyone. Most consumers I interviewed were purchasing the slippers for a family member: both children purchasing for their parents and parents for their children. The slipper is also a very popular gift for Mother's day and Father's day. Thus, it is related to rituals and practices of gift giving within the family. The slippers can also work as part of a ritual related to negotiating family identity between parents and children (Epp & Price 2008). Similarly, for one young female interviewee, the slippers were an important symbol for her relationship with her boyfriend:

As my boyfriend also has his own [pair of slippers], it creates a sense of belonging together and also some romantic feelings attached to it [laughing]...we have been making fun of it that we will be wearing them together even when we are an old couple in the retirement home.

Kiira, consumer interviews

For this consumer, wearing Reinos was a way to show affection to her boyfriend from whom she had received her own pair as a gift. She combined the meanings of old age with her image of a lasting relationship to picture herself together with him even at the old-age home. Another interviewee and her husband had received a pair of Reinos and Ainos as a wedding present. The Reino & Aino slipper is therefore connected with the important institution of marriage, reinforcing traditional and romantic notions and adding to the social and symbolic significance of wearing the slippers together with one's spouse. This connection is facilitated by the mere names of the slippers, Reino, a Finnish male name, and Aino, a Finnish female name. Originally, the designs of the slippers have also represented masculine (brown, simple) and feminine (red, more decorated) characteristics. Today, the Reino slipper has become more popular among women too.

An example of negotiating relational family identities with the help of the slippers was detailed in the field notes from the retail outlet. A middle-aged woman was buying the slippers for her daughter who was studying abroad. Sending her

daughter a pair of Reino slippers enabled the mother to show her affection and care as well as remind her daughter about her home country (*field notes at the retail store 2.10.2009*). Another of my informants had received the slippers from her mother before her high school matriculation exams. As the daughter wore the slippers while she was taking the exams, she felt that it was a way for her mother to really support her:

[What do you think she meant by giving you the slippers?]

She wanted to take care of me. So that I would feel well and so that I would be able to have confidence in myself.

Raisa, consumer interviews

Due to the brand's long history, similar slippers have been worn by different generations and by wearing them, younger members of the family can show respect for their elders and experience feelings of nostalgia:

I find it nice that I have the same shoes as my grandpa has been wearing so maybe it is one thing that connects us, wearing Reinos.

Pekka, consumer interviews

For many middle-aged consumers, the Reinos symbolize their parents or relatives who have perhaps already passed away. One of my interviewees had bought a pair of pink Reino slippers during the Pink Ribbon campaign for breast cancer research to honor the memory of her mother who had died of breast cancer. The slippers work as an emotional container of fond memories that can be accessed through wearing the Reinos, increasing the legitimacy of the brand. Another interviewee uses the slippers to create a bond with her childhood and her father:

The memories connected with my father. They are warm. I remember when we did all kinds of chores together in the evening, making bath whisks. We would bring all the ingredients to the kitchen and I got to use the knife already from a young age. Sitting beside him as he was making the whisks. And I was really proud. He had Reinos on.

Ritva, consumer interviews

In this practice of reminiscing, the interviewees' own use of Reinos is not so significant, but the way the previous users wore them and the special connection that enabled for her. Hereby, the brand meanings become symbolic resources in

storytelling and reminiscing peculiar memories about loved ones that used to wear the Reino & Aino slippers:

I remember when I was a child and my grandmother lived with us. She always had her old spinster cousin visiting. Her name was Helmi and she was really thin; she always had a black gown and the kind of thick, brown stockings that must have been 50 deniers and then she had really thin legs; just like sticks, and then the Ainos. I found her really cool. She had one single black purse where she had a wallet, lots of handkerchiefs which were bundled there and then a men's old pocket watch where she would check the time. So I thought she was an awesome gal. There's my first relationship to Ainos.

Anne, consumer interviews

To this informant, the memories of her grandmothers' old maid cousin were concretized through the Aino slipper. The Reino book author Närhi reported to me in an interview that when he was collecting people's stories in 2007 about Reinos and Ainos, he got tens of stories from all around Finland through all types of media. The stories contain funny incidents where people have worn the slippers outside of their traditional context, such as in a sports' contest, in a formal occasion (e.g. graduation ceremony, wedding), on the theatre stage, in a barn dance, living or traveling abroad and so on (Närhi 2007).

We tell stories about our relatives and older relatives and the stories are the ones that are really special somehow. There is a certain edge to them. Somebody had a funny way of speaking, someone could do amazing things and then they had Reinos on...It was astonishing how common stories, even boring stories that repeated the same things were sent to us. The approach was similar.

The Reino book author

I also felt the same kind of narrative quality about consumers' experiences with the brand every time I shared my research topic with someone new. Thus, there is clearly a practice of storytelling with recurrent patterns related to the Reino & Aino slippers that consumers have established before the brand was marketed in any way. The company, on the other hand, has benefited from this practice and supported it. The stories were initially collected and documented in the Reino book and more recently in the company's Youtube channel videos.

In addition to wearing a similar pair, some users have actually inherited the slippers from their loved ones. The field notes detail a case in which a middle-aged woman had started using the Aino slippers after inheriting her grandmother's pair (*Fieldnotes at the retail outlet 5.9.2009*). The heirloom status means that the slippers

are imbued with the personality of the people who have worn them and the social order and family unity is reinforced as the items are transmitted from one generation to the next (Curasi, Price & Arnould 2004).

Families also have adopted the slippers into their shared practices, as detailed by one of my informants who reported that the Reino & Aino slippers bring memories from her childhood at the family's summer house:

Everyone has always been wearing Reinos and Ainos there. It brings such warm memories to mind...digging the flower bed and wreaking havoc in my mum's allotments, heating the sauna and just running around. Everyone, Mum, Dad and Granny used to wear Reinos. There used to be a pile of Reinos and Ainos and everyone would just wear whatever pair fit them.

Malla, consumer interviews

The family's communal use of the slippers further enhanced mutual belongingness, since it did not matter who's Reinos or Ainos the family members were wearing. I encountered the practice of borrowing family members' slippers also elsewhere in the data.

I have two sons and as it turns out, they happily grab my Reinos for themselves after I've used them.

Mauno, football tournament organizer

Particularly children borrowing their parents' slippers and then receiving a pair of their own is common based on the observations and interviews. Other family collectives use the slippers for humorous pranks, such as hiding each other's slippers or wrapping only one slipper in the gift paper for Christmas. Thus, similarly to the place-focused collectives, families also draw from the humorous meanings of the brand.

The children's sizes were among the first brand extensions that the company introduced in 2006 and they were quickly sold out. This encouraged the company to develop new models, colours and new packaging. Thereby, the company supported this emerging practice of creating family belongingness through material elements as well as building on the meanings of inter-generational transfer. Gradually, consumers had more choice to develop family identities; the women in the family could wear the pink Reinos or the traditional Ainos and the men could choose from the traditional brown Reinos or a new color. Even babies got their own small Reino slippers in 2008. The launch of the "First step" Reinos was documented in the media and the company soon heard about a pair of twins born

nearby Tampere. The parents of these twins had given them the names Aino and Reino, and as soon as the company found out, they wanted to donate the first pair to them. This was then consequently reported in the local newspaper as a fun and sympathetic story. The First step slippers became a huge success:

The success of First Step Reinos and Ainos was clear when the whole year's production was sold out from the factory directly to the stores. Before even the first pair had been delivered, it was predicted that the biggest user group in that year was Finnish babies under one year old. There were 60 000 babies born that year and 30 000 pairs of Reinos were sold.

Arto, entrepreneur, quoted in Reino: Tobvelisankarista brändiksi book (2011, 44).

In addition to the Reino & Aino company benefiting, other companies have also leveraged family collectives as Reino & Aino users. A Finnish cruise line for instance had a marketing campaign promoting cruises for grandparents and grandchildren where the advertisement featured an adults' pair of Reinos and Ainos together with childrens' sized slippers.

4.5.2 Groups of friends and workplace collectives

Besides families using the brand, the Reino & Aino have also been adopted by friendship groups. One practice is to use them to symbolize life transitions in integrative rituals such as retiring from work life or becoming a parent:

Our circle of friends has made it a habit for years now to give Reinos to someone turning 30. And if not sooner, at least when a man becomes a father, he gets a pair of Reinos

Online discussion board message

For middle-aged consumers, the Reino & Aino are still very strongly associated with aging and therefore the slippers are still a common present for someone retiring from work. Recently, a Finnish politician, when asked whether he is going to resign from the political party's leadership commented that he is not going to put on Reinos just yet. This was a figure of speech denoting to retirement. Also, in news stories that report about elderly people or pensions for instance, photos of Reino & Aino slippers are often used.

The strong associations with family and kinship have also been leveraged and extended to workplace communities. One observational site in the research was an

advertising agency where the owners wanted to create a sense of home and belongingness by purchasing each employee a pair of Reino & Aino slippers (Photo 9).



Photo 9. A shelf containing the employees' slippers at the advertising agency (Researcher's photo)

The owner of the advertising agency explained that they use brand meanings to connect the ideology of family caring to their business culture. While the advertising business field is usually known for harsh competition, long working-hours and making as much money as possible, the meanings of the Reino & Aino brand represent the opposite.

We always aim at creating a sense of family because family is quite a good community. There is not a better model for a company than a family. A family will stand up for each other and fight for the right things.

Advertising agency owner

Material elements connected with this ideology besides the slippers included employing a “grandpa”, a pensioner willing to work part-time for the company, to cook home-made meals at the office as well as the office itself being located in an

old building. The advertising agency's family ideology can be argued to influence positively the company image besides creating a certain type of internal business culture. Thus, the practices of giving, receiving and wearing workplace Reino & Aino slippers became part of the marketing of this company. It was adopted as an element to complement their business culture both internally and externally.

In the Reino book, Närhi reports about several small clubs that have adopted the Reino & Aino as their symbol. These groups have emerged from existing friendship ties and practices where the slippers have co-occurred with other elements:

The idea for the Reiska-club was invented when we were always borrowing our friends' slippers at the summer cottage. We thought that everyone should have their own pair of Reinos...The rules of the club only include wearing Reinos, because we don't need rules to have laid-back fun. The members of the club come from different parts of Finland. You can become a member if you are recommended by someone already in the club.

Reiska club member in Närhi (2007, 121–122)

As explained by this quote, the clubs are quite introvert and they are not meant to include just anyone based on their usage of Reinos. Instead, inclusion in the pre-existing social network of the members is the criteria. Yet the Reino club for instance has made a membership card for each member, making fun of official clubs. These material elements help to establish practices around them such as welcoming new members by giving them a membership card of their own. The collectives are not very structured or organized and they do not have any other purpose than to spend time together. There is a sense of moral responsibility but it is not related to the brand as such.

Here at Vehmaa, we thought of organizing a group that could come together in good spirit. It does not have any other purpose. We would meet together with our families and children, chat and do whatever activities we could think of. We help each other in any way we can, tells the chairman of Reino society, Matti Laine.

(Närhi 2007, 135)

Vehmaa Reino society has also invented new competence elements of using the Reino slipper as a bottle stand or as a funny cap. In addition, they have used Reinos to go fishing together, or have a photo competition or visit the local amateur theatre. The birthdays of the club members have also been special occasions to get together and have fun (Närhi 2007, 135). The humorous aspect

and jovial attitude related to the Reinos is used by these groups as well. Mikko Närhi points out in his book:

The clubs are not like non-profit making organizations usually are, following some principles to act on behalf of some issue. Instead the club functions for the benefit of the internal spirit and the members who belong in it. And there are many of these clubs that are just united through Reino.

The Reino book editor

Organizing different kinds of activities and events characterizes the Reino collectives based on existing friendship ties as well. One family's teenage children came up with the idea of organizing their own small-scale rock festival, naming it the Reino rock. This event was organized for the first time in 2007 and it has been organized every summer since. The idea of the organizers, sisters and brothers, was to get together with all of their friends who had moved out of their home town to study or work elsewhere. They asked for their parents' permission to have the event in their parents' backyard. The organizer of the event explains how the idea was born:

I myself like to go to summer events...and I had been thinking that it would be nice to have one in our yard. And then we thought of inviting our friends and playing some music there. Wearing Reinos made it a little bit more special.

Riina, Reino Rock organizer

One of the organizers of the Reino rock reported that in 2007, the Reino brand was not yet very well known and she wondered whether she had heard about it from somewhere. There was no existing tradition of wearing the slippers in her family, for instance. However, she herself explained that she likes things that represent Finnish nationality and that is perhaps why she liked the Reino slippers. Yet the event was not about the Reino brand as a focus:

It was not about the brand. It was more about meeting our friends.

Riina, Reino Rock organizer

After the first event was organized, the siblings got a lot of positive feedback from their friends and the event started growing. Gradually, organizing the event became more professional and the siblings had to start planning it well in advance. Thus, the event was influenced by rock festivals that the organizers themselves had

attended (Photo 10). However, the event is still not open to mass audiences, because the organizers are doing it for their own and their friends' behalf.



Photo 10. The Reino Rock stage 2011 (Photo by Antti Laitila, published with permission)

Over the years, the siblings started to ask bands that they knew to play a gig at the event and they started to develop more professional sound systems and practical arrangements.

As more and more people got to know about the event and came to it, we noticed that the Reino brand was also developing. We noticed it but we have not focused on it too much at any point. The music and the getting together of people who have moved away to study or work elsewhere has been the point.

Riina, Reino Rock organizer

Even though the collective was formed on the basis of existing social relations, it has expanded and now some of the people who attend are only acquaintances of the organizers. While the organizers still know everyone who comes, there are also elements that are similar to other public events, such as selling t-shirts specially made with the event's logo, and selling tickets to cover the expenses of organizing it. The event has also provided many starting bands a forum to play for a bigger audience.

Now it has turned around so that the bands contact us and tell us that they would like to come and play there...My circle of friends has been connected through music as our hobby. We listen to music together and go to festivals and gigs.

Riina, Reino Rock organizer

The brand's role in the collective has been reinforced throughout the years and the organizer tells me that especially during the last couple of years, almost everyone has had a pair of Reinos on. The dresscode is advertised on the webpages of the event which have also become more professional over the years. Yet, unlike in the place-bound collectives, the Reino rock collective does not care to make sure that everyone is wearing authentic models.

Some people wear those cheap copies, Sauli slippers or whatever they're called. We haven't been too strict about it, because originally, the event has not been attached to Reinos but to meeting one another and spending time together. The Reino is a loose framework for it. Reinos are sympathetic, as is our event. And they represent Finland and the countryside... not forgetting our roots.

Riina, Reino Rock organizer

The brand is thus a symbol that unites the members and something nice to wear while attending the event. The spirit of the event is about having fun and letting loose (Photo 11). Part of this is for instance the practices of going to the sauna and swim in the river nearby, which have become significant parts of the event.

People are always in very good mood. For instance last year we had this hay war when people just started showering each other in hay and it was such a lot of fun. We had it this year as well. It is like the fireworks of having fun. People are together and partying and having fun.

Riina, Reino Rock organizer



Photo 11. The hay war at Reino Rock 2011 (Photo by Jaakko Saaranen, published with permission)

The organizer explains that while wearing Reinos was not a shared practice in her family before the first Reino Rock, it has gradually started to become a symbol of their family as well. Organizing the event has strengthened family relations because the members have to have a lot of contact with one another in order to be able to organize it every year. The Reino rock collective has also been in contact with the Reino & Aino company and they have sponsored the event by giving materials like slippers as prizes in a lottery.

It surprised me how enthusiastic they [the company] were when we contacted them. I noticed that they have this rock attitude in how they want the Reinos to appear, in what kind of events. You could think that the slipper is an old folks' shoe but clearly this Arto Huhtinen [the entrepreneur] is a rock kind of guy and he was very enthusiastic and very interested. And they themselves organize these events with rock artists and we have also been invited.

Riina, Reino Rock organizer

Despite not admitting that their event is part of the branding of Reino & Aino, the organizers of the event are proud of their idea, evoking meanings of competition and exclusivity:

It's good that we were the first to adopt the Reinos in this type of event, before anyone else. Because even as a name, Reino Rock is fun.

Riina, Reino Rock organizer

This statement seems to suggest that as more and more consumption collectives find the symbolic potential of the Reino & Aino brand, they might even have to compete against one another in using this resource. Yet, the collectives do not seem to have any linkages to one another. People do not go around and visit Reino themed events, for instance.

I got interested [in the other events] when you mentioned them. But I haven't even thought about the linkages before. I cannot say whether ours is different, because we have developed it on our own.

Riina, Reino Rock organizer

The apparent ignorance of consumption collectives of each other points at the practices being very localized and specific to each collective. Also, it further supports the argument for the differentiated role of the Reino & Aino brand in heterogeneous collectives.

4.5.3 Summary of social relations-focused collectives

For the social relations-focused collectives, the Reino & Aino is a theme or a symbolic prop to use in their collective practices. The brand “tags along” without dominating or steering those practices too much. The collectives have found brand meanings suitable for their own purposes. By wearing the slippers together, the collectives mark the boundaries of the collective and express brand meanings such as joviality and humor, empathy and Finnishness. For some family collectives, the brand functions as a nostalgic repository of memories of loved ones. The slippers become part of storytelling practices wherein memories and anecdotes are retained. The aim is not to increase the amount of members in the collective but to sustain relations between the members. Even though the brand is not in the focus in these collectives, it is still important for them as something that connects the members and allows for different kinds of activities and events to be organized on the grounds of getting together. Once something has been adopted as their symbol, collectives are unlikely to change it into something else, which is why the brand does continue to have a role in the collectives. In some cases, such as in the case of Reino rock, the brand's increasing visibility and popularity has meant that its role

has also increased in the collective. There has emerged a dialectic relationship between branding by Reino & Aino and the collective's practices; both have influenced the other.

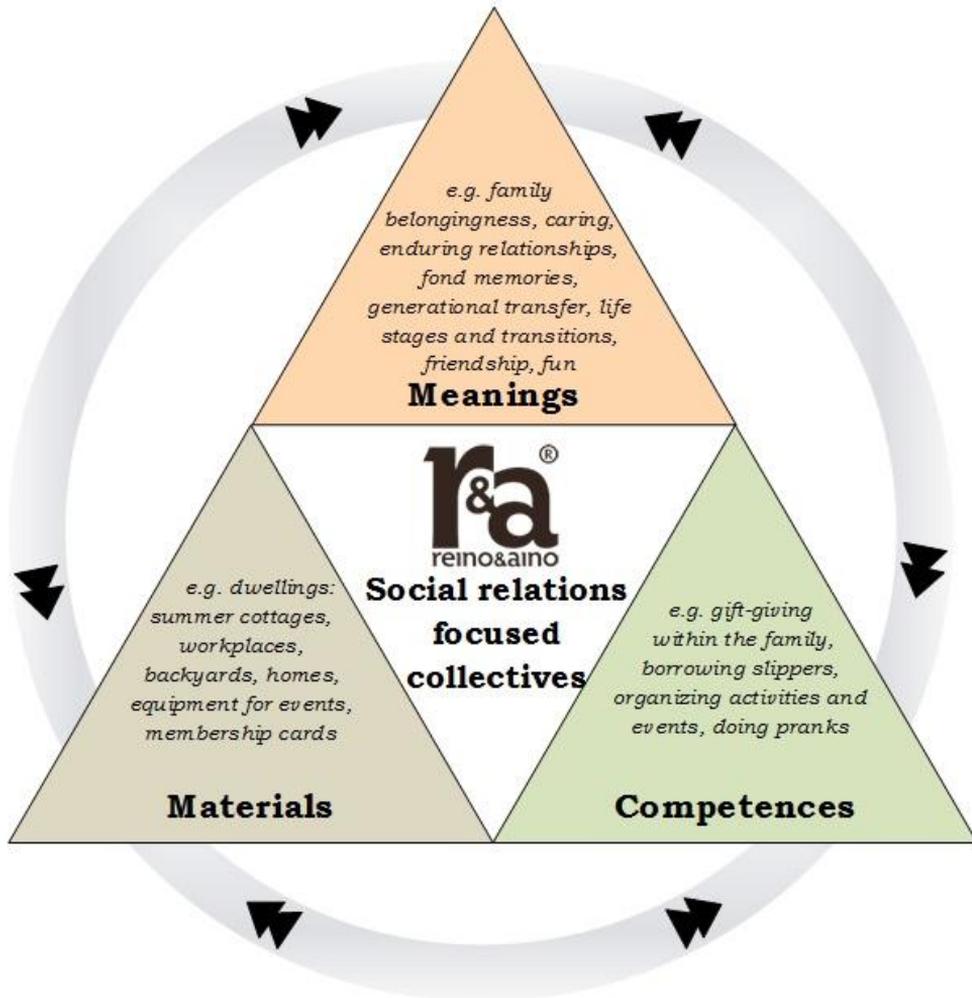


Figure 14. Summary of social relations-focused collectives' materials, meanings and competences.

Figure 14 illustrates the materials, meanings, and competences related to social relations-focused collectives. The collectives are very different, which makes the elements also vary extensively, yet the meanings are all related to reinforcing the group belongingness, caring for each other in enduring relationships. The slippers are also related to memorizing specific relatives or relations with them. Different

life stages from birth to retirement are also meaningfully related to slipper usage, and connected with rites of passage such as becoming a father. Yet, also meanings of fun and humour are simultaneously included. Material elements include specifically the places where the slippers are used by the families or friendship groups, as well as the equipment related to what they do together. In the case of small unofficial clubs, there are also membership cards and other artifacts to denote to the unity of the group, besides wearing Reino & Aino slippers. Competences have included especially gift-giving within families, borrowing one another's slippers as well as organizing all kinds of fun events and activities for the group.

5 CULTURAL BRAND REVITALIZATION

Interpretation occurs as a gestalt shift and represents a synthetic, holistic, and illuminating grasp of meaning, as in deciphering a code (Spiggle 1994, 497).

In the empirical analysis, many heterogeneous consumption collectives with different foci were found emerging around the same brand, Reino & Aino. The collectives also differed in terms of their structure. Some of them were more integrated ones, where there were generally higher barriers of entry, more frequent participation and involvement. Some were more dispersed, entailing heterogeneity of orientations and roles, temporariness and easier access. Not nearly all of them had the brand in a central role, but it functioned as an important symbolic resource for various purposes ranging from promoting a municipality to reinforcing family belonging. This chapter provides an interpretation based on the empirical analysis. By taking another step in theorizing, I will provide insights to address the research purpose of extending the view of the collective consumption of brands.

5.1 Interpretation as puzzle solving

Interpretation is about asking what something means; about grasping the sense of something (Spiggle 1994, 492). In interpretation, the essence of the phenomenon is captured (Alasuutari 1995, 150). Interpretation is also about challenging the taken-for-granted views on reality and offering something different; showing something in a new light (Moisander & Valtonen 2006). A key characteristic of good qualitative research is indeed that it urges changes in the status quo and leads to revisions in previous understandings.

While interpreting the empirical data, there were multiple times that I asked myself: what am I building a theory of? What is the essence of this phenomenon? This process of generating why questions on the way is described as an important part of solving the mystery in research, and it is often only as the result of in-depth engagement with the data and relevant theory that provides revelations for the researcher (Alasuutari 1995, 134). Case study research is also considered a good way to build new theory because it is embedded in rich empirical data and because the case is specifically chosen for its revelatory or unusual nature (Eisenhardt 1989).

Starting from collective consumption and the heterogeneous collectives that had emerged around the Reino & Aino brand, I began to ask questions about what it all means. How can my analysis of different collectives and the ways in which the brand is integrated within the elements of practice help in understanding something more general? Through delineating the research gap in the collective consumption literature, I noted that the literature is missing theorizing on heterogeneity as well as how collective consumption relates to marketplace dynamics. Part of marketplace dynamics is the creation, maintenance, and possible death of brands. Besides offering insights on the heterogeneity of collectives under the same brand, the Reino & Aino case provides important insights on brand revitalization. Furthermore, the revitalization of the brand has taken place mainly through the heterogeneous consumption collectives, so these key outputs of the research are linked. Practice theory on its own part helped me to analyze changes in the brand through identifying the linkages made and broken between elements as the brand was integrated into the heterogeneous consumption collectives' practices.

Providing this interpretation means that I go a step forward from merely describing the phenomenon or delineating categories that can help in understanding it. Qualitative research should go beyond describing phenomena and aim for making the researched phenomena intelligible; to help make sense of complex things – to provide plausible explanations that are grounded in rigorous yet creative interpretations (Moisander & Valtonen 2006; Belk et al. 2013). Explanations in this sense are not provided through identifying causal relationships and generalizability is not the goal. Instead the explanation is always a local one, meaning that is coherent, logical and grounded in data. It is a contextualized explanation which is evaluated based on its relevance rather than representativeness (Alasuutari 1995).

I argue that the brand Reino & Aino that was dormant for many decades became revitalized in the market through becoming integrated into the practices of different heterogeneous consumption collectives. In the following, I first contextualize this localized explanation with previous research and then explicate it in more detail.

5.2 Brand death and revitalization in the literature

What fundamentally awoke the research interest toward the Reino & Aino phenomenon was that despite no traditional branding or marketing effort, the brand had become popular again. Before going into the explanation provided through my analysis, how would traditional branding theory try to explain this?

Previous literature on brand revitalization is based on managerial and marketing management based views of branding. There, a brand is seen as a cognitive structure of associations within the mind of the consumer, differentiating it from other brands and helping the consumer make a choice (see Keller & Lehmann 2006 for an overview of the marketing management based branding literature). The four key assumptions inherent in the marketing management literature include that branding is exclusively in the company's hands, that the brand essence, identity or DNA should remain stable, and that there is a clear difference between the company as brand author and consumers as the audience (Csaba & Bengtsson, 2006).

Literature that concentrates specifically on brand revitalization is scarce and mostly published in managerially oriented publications for practitioners rather than top academic journals. It posits that a brand may die out because it becomes irrelevant for consumers. This may happen due to changes in its environment, consumer preferences or competition. But since building new brands is considered expensive, the marketing management oriented literature claims that the firm should try to prevent brand death. The strategies suggested include; e.g. repositioning the brand through changing its associations, packaging or the target market, or through introducing brand extensions and using heavy advertising campaigns (Aaker 1991; Munthre, Bick & Abratt 2006). The firms are seen as in complete control of the brand, and through using concrete tools, they are able to renew and revitalize brands (Palmer 1999; Bellman 2005). For instance, Wansink (1997, 53) suggests that "with astute management, their appeal can shine for new generations of users". Groucutt's (2006, 102) belief is that the brand's adaptation to its surrounding environment is "largely in the hands of brand managers, their team and the company as a whole". Consumers are granted a very passive role of the target of marketing communications. They are viewed as information processors and are at best, part of the micro environment of a brand. As another limitation, most studies use merely company-oriented data; interviews and surveys of brand managers, advertising agencies and other experts (e.g. Lehu 2004; Thomas & Kohli 2009).

Lehu (2004) suggests that possible strategies for brand revitalization depend on whether the cause of aging is the offer, the target or the communication of the brand. This yields possible remedies such as renewing, extending or completing the offering, modifying or enlarging the target market or intensifying or changing the communications. Wansink and Gilmore (1999) acknowledge that it is in particular the new uses of products that can revitalize a brand; for instance using vinegar for cleaning windows. One example of a successful revitalization by company's brand management is that of the Lucozade drink which was repositioned from a drink for the ill and recovering to a drink for the fit and athletic. However, this is a very

manager-oriented perspective where the company is seen as the initiator of these new practices through targeting heavy users in their marketing research.

A study specifically dealing with brand death argues that brands, like any social and economic systems, are susceptible to failure (Ewing, Jevons & Khalil 2009). In other words, brands have a definite life-cycle, which results in their ultimate death. Unlike some writers, Ewing and colleagues do not blame brand mismanagement, but see that brand death is caused by demand-side changes; in other words, changes in consumers' preferences. Their explanation for brand death entails that as more and more consumers are able to purchase and own the brand, its' symbolic value for previous buyers diminishes. Thus, they explain that the brand's symbolic utility decreases in the long run. As such, managers can only revitalize the brand for a limited amount of times before it dies away. As a different point of view, research on heritage brands (Urde, Greysier & Balmer 2007; Hudson 2011) suggests that the older the brand, the more symbolic value it has because of the richness of its history and ability to awake a sense of nostalgia (Holbrook 1993; Goulding 2001). Indeed, nostalgia was one of the core meanings identified in the data. Nostalgia was evident both at the level of collectives such as nostalgia toward a place or a time gone by, and at the level of individuals through their memories of loved ones. The cultural nostalgia related to Reino & Aino is also intertwined with Finnish history and popular culture through key persons such as artists and musicians. Nostalgia has been associated with the need to belong (Loveland et al. 2010) and therefore it can be assumed that these meanings have further accelerated the adoption of the brand into collective consumption. However, in previous research the focus is on what the company can do to leverage the heritage of the brand.

In fact, there is yet little research on brands that have been revitalized by consumers. Most often, they are stories of a fast adoption process by influential endorsers and opinion-leaders, spreading the brand use like a virus. These phenomena are thereby also called viral marketing/branding or buzz marketing (Holt 2004). In these approaches, it is considered that consumers are the ones who give meaning to brands and thus develop its value, while companies stay back (Wipperfurth 2005). Viral marketing can be criticized for its short-term impact, leading consumers to rapidly adopt and rapidly discard brands in a cycle of fashion. The most famous example is the Hush Puppies footwear brand as introduced by Malcolm Gladwell (2000). Beverland and Ewing (2005) discuss Dunlop Volley shoe brand in Australia that was originally favored by athletes but became obsolete due to losing the competition to Nike and Adidas. In the 1990s, teenagers re-adopted the brand as part of the underground rave or music scene. The company made a decision not to co-opt the image of cool and mass-market the product, which could have led to loss of credibility. Later, when the teenagers moved on to

other brands, the leverage was then used to market the product to a wider target market. This approach is still very marketer-oriented. Further, to remain alive, brands need more than the fashion appeal that fades quickly as fashion-conscious consumers move on to other brands.

Moving away from a managerial perspective, a more plausible literature stream to look for explanations is the cultural perspective to branding, where the context and role of the brand in everyday life is better taken into account (Fournier 1998; Allen, Fournier & Miller 2008). While the marketing management perspective tries to dissect complex phenomena into small, manageable pieces such as attributes and associations, the cultural branding perspective attempts to connect the parts into a more abstract and complex whole: "In the search of meaning, context is everything; in the search of information, context is noise" (Allen et al. 2008, 784). Cultural scholars argue that a contested and complex brand which is open to many meanings that may even contradict is more attractive to consumers (Saltzer-Mörling & Strannegård 2004; Berthon, Pitt & Campbell 2009; Brown & Patterson 2010). Therefore, brands should be seen as liquid and constantly changing objects that consumers define and redefine within their practices (see Lury 2004).

Within cultural branding literature, attention has for a long time been on brand meanings and brands as signs that are consumed as aesthetic expressions (Salzer-Mörling & Strannegård 2004). The more critical way to perceive this is that the commercial brandscape of signs has begun to dominate the social and cultural world (Klein 2000). From a marketing management perspective, brands are economic assets, as part of a company's equity that contributes to value creation for the company. This has been criticized because consumers are the ones giving meaning to brands and therefore companies cannot be the only story-tellers in the branded world (Salzer-Mörling & Strannegård 2004; Diamond et al. 2009). Lately, Diamond and colleagues (2009) have described brands as systems or *gestalts*, which are multidimensional and where meanings are in continuous reciprocal interplay.

Cultural branding literature has produced some important insights for brand revitalization. For instance, Brown et al. (2003), focus on consumers' perceptions of retro brands. Four different characteristics associated with retro brands are identified: brand allegory (story), brand arcadia (idealized community), brand aura (essence) and brand antinomy (paradox). Brown et al. (2003) argue that in order for a brand to be successfully revitalized, it should be able to arouse memories and stories in consumers' minds, it should inspire a longing for community, have something enduring and also contradictory aspects. The brand should also be amenable to technological and symbolic updates in order for consumers to retain their interest in the brand in a long run. The study shows the heterogeneity of meanings that consumers can attach to brands, and how important it is to view

consumers as co-creators of brand meaning. It is not only marketer-produced meanings that consumers draw upon, but the sources are diverse from the media to history and other consumers. Reino & Aino seems to fulfill the criteria for successful brand revitalization, because it has the ability to awaken memories and stories, inspires a longing for community and has both enduring and contradictory aspects. However, in this case, the revitalization has not been a planned, controlled and strategic move by the company but more an emergent market phenomenon taking place within and through consumption collectives.

As another example, Muñiz & Schau (2005) hint at brand revitalization as they discuss the Apple Newton handheld computer and how the brand community maintained the brand even though it had been discontinued by the company. Their account, however, concentrates on how users infuse the brand with religious meanings through storytelling and other discursive practices within the brand community. Even though storytelling is certainly part of the Reino & Aino phenomenon too, which can be seen in the online fan collectives in particular, my analysis also highlighted the enacted bodily performances with the slippers in addition to discursive meaning-making practices. In conclusion, the cultural branding literature has yielded important insights, but it has mainly looked for explanations for brand revitalization in the communicative and symbolic aspects of consumption; representing textualist theories of consumption (Reckwitz 2002).

Shifting attention from brand meanings and their use in consumers' personal or collective identity projects, this thesis moves instead toward a practice theoretical conceptualization of brand revitalization. As explained elsewhere in the thesis, practice theory, on its own part, is a reaction against too much emphasis on the symbolical and communicative aspects of consumption and focuses more on performances and routines (Gram-Hanssen 2011). In practice theory, meanings are only one element among others. Accordingly, what become interesting are not brand meanings as such, but the ways in which brands are used and their meanings realized in forms of consumption (Arvidsson 2005). This means that brands offer a platform for the productive activities of consumers (Lury 2004). They are not merely seen as semiotic resources in consumers' identity projects, but as playing integral part in the accomplishment of everyday life (Watson & Shove 2008).

Rather than referring to single products, brands refer to the contexts of consumption around them. The practice theoretical view also implies that brands cannot exist without being enacted: i.e. brands only become brands as consumers use them in their practices. The practices can be more or less programmed by companies' marketing activities which suggest certain ways of using the brand and not others. From a more critical perspective, this suggests that consumers are led to enact and reproduce company-programmed ways of consuming the brand. However, because of consumers' productive capacities and unanticipated ways of

using brands, they can never be wholly dictated nor imposed on them. Brand management, then, is about “enabling or empowering the freedom of consumers so that it is likely to evolve in particular directions” (Arvidsson 2005, 244). In addition, companies represent only one actor and they can merely be suggesting new meanings and ways of using the brand. In accordance with practice theory, whether people then adopt these suggested meanings and uses is a question of changing their practices rather than attitudes or preferences (Hargreaves 2011). In the case of this research, it was the consumption collectives’ practices that determined the brand instead of marketing management.

5.3 A cultural interpretation of brand revitalization

The propositions inherent in a cultural interpretation of brand revitalization are described below. The first proposition suggests that (1.) the process of brand revitalization takes place through changes in different dispersed and integrative practices in consumption collectives’ everyday lives. Along the lines of practice theory, it is assumed that the route to people adopting certain consumption objects, products or brands and becoming attached to them is in changing their practices (Magaudda 2011; Shove et al. 2012). An example of this from another context is the introduction of new technologies such as the iPod and their influence on the social practices surrounding music listening practices (Magaudda 2011). As new elements are introduced, the related practices evolve and change and the objects and materials are again co-shaped by the evolving practices.

Rather than a process of adopting a new technology (Magaudda 2011; Gram-Hanssen 2011), the Reino & Aino case is about the revitalization of a brand. A brand that was partly forgotten but still existing in the culture as a repository of meaning and as a material product was revitalized through the practices of consumption collectives. More specifically, the second proposition suggests that (2.) the brand becomes revitalized as both pre-existing and new elements of materials, meanings and competences are linked in consumption collectives and other links are broken. The Reino & Aino brand thus became embedded in the practices of consumption collectives and started to mediate relationships between them. On the other hand, by becoming embedded in these practices, the practices on their turn started to shape the brand in different directions. The process was co-constituting in nature (Giddens 1984). Gradually the brand started to change and new material elements such as brand extensions to different colors emerged as the company interacted with consumption collectives and imitated their practices.

Based on the findings of this research, the third proposition suggests that (3.) for cultural brand revitalization, the more diverse practices are penetrated by the

brand, the better. In other words, as people start to use products in their everyday lives and intersecting practices, they become more attached to them as well. This means that the object begins to have a more significant role in mediating several different activities and relationships in the collective (Knorr-Cetina 1997; Hand & Shove 2007; Epp & Price 2010b). The empirical analysis supported this interpretation; once adopted, the Reino & Aino as a symbolic resource started to spread and seed new practices in the collectives. This happened because different practices shared some of the same elements (Gram-Hanssen 2011). For instance, in the Pyterlahti place-focused collective, a Reino themed motorcycle club had been established and other events with the same theme had started to emerge.

Importantly, the elements that are linked in the consumption collectives do not only come from the market but can be infused from other areas of consumers' lives. Taking the product to new places and contexts such as from indoor use to outdoors; from private use to public use and from individual to collective situations has meant that more and more consumption practices have become linked with the brand. It also means that the brand is no longer connected with merely one specific practice, but with many diverse practices. The object itself, which is the slipper, does not belong in a particular practice but moves in between and across practices (Magaudda 2011). The object becomes a junction point for several different practices (Hand & Shove 2007). This often also increased brand use, because as my informants told me, they had several pairs to be used in different practices.

Unlike brand communities that emerge around a certain highly specific products such as cars or motorcycles that suggest the respective integrative practice of driving, one can enact several different kinds of integrative practices with a pair of slippers from running at a humorous contest to partying in a rock concert with friends. The object itself thereby becomes fluid, and it means that the object also starts to generate more practices. Examples discussed in the analysis include ritualized gift-giving practices, sports practices, promotional practices in companies and organizations as well as practices of constructing national identity. New linkages have been formed between existing elements in the collectives' practices and elements more closely related to the brand. The brand has thereby acquired a more relevant role in the social sites where people interact. The collectives have also broken previous meaning linkages of the brand such as senility and old age, associated with specific ways of using the slippers such as indoors and in private. By breaking these linkages and making new ones such as humorous uses and meanings, and adding material elements from the carnival, the brand has been redefined. Yet, also the existing brand meanings in the culture such as being connected with Finnish history, nostalgia for the countryside, and the preceding generations have helped the brand to become embedded in various practices. This

cultural legitimacy (Kates 2004) of the brand has therefore worked as a springboard for the diversity of practices that have been related to it in the consumption collectives.

It can be questioned whether some brands are more susceptible to being adopted to practices than others. How well the product “submits” itself to the collectives’ practices depends on the product (Ilmonen 2004, 42). In the case of the slipper, it is very easy to learn to use and incorporate into various practices, when compared to for instance the use of complex camera equipment. This means that the consumption collectives’ have easily adopted it to their use. Many interviewees emphasized that the reason they are using the slipper is their warmth and practicality. Yet, at the same time the observational data reveals how the product inspires people to invent humorous contests and let go of their social inhibitions. The spectrum of use is very extensive. The material properties of the product itself have contributed to more people finding it suitable for their use. It provides an easily approachable, easily wearable, relatively inexpensive and common slipper that can be incorporated in different ways. To join a consumption collective, it has not required a lot of investment to expensive products, equipment or tools. It has merely required slipping on a pair of common footwear. Unlike in brand communities where social hierarchies are formed on the basis of brand related cultural capital, knowledge of how to use the brand correctly and professionally, the collective consumption of the slippers has entailed more freedom and less high barriers of entry.

It could even be proposed that collective consumption, viewed from a broad perspective, can have a bigger influence for spreading product use in product categories that have lower barriers of entry for consumers. Coupland’s (2005) ethnography on kitchen pantries and the ways in which consumers make brands invisible is one example of how the role of brands in everyday practices has been studied. She claims that unlike high-involvement brands that are central to consumers’ identity projects and that often inspire brand communities, mundane brands do not explicitly carry meaning to the consumer yet they become a central part of their routine household system. If the practices remain unchanged and are reproduced through every performance of the practice, it can be difficult for the brand to be switched to another, because the consumers might not even consciously reflect about it. Thus, what is implied is that consumers do not necessarily think of themselves and their lives in terms of brands or brand relationships, even though they do interact with brands. Brand choice could thus be explained not in terms of how well the brand suits the consumer’s sense of self or identity, but in terms of how well it fits their everyday practices. In Reino & Aino’s case, the low barrier of entry has also been a symbolic one. In contrast to brands that appeal to a particular social class or lifestyle, the Reino & Aino has

been founded on values and meanings that are shared by many, such as Finnish national identity and valuing tradition. The brand has in this way overcome the taste differences coming from age or social class, for instance.

However, despite the fact that the brand has found its way into several different consumer practices, the revitalization has also required out-of-the ordinary practices to emerge. On the other hand, the material properties of the slippers themselves have provided potential for innovative and unorthodox practices of wearing it. This type of footwear suggests that it should be worn only indoors, because its properties are not very well suited for doing sports outside. The slippers fall off the feet easily when people are in motion and in addition, the sole is made of rubber, making it slippery. Learning how to run with the slippers is a practiceable and embodied skill. However, it is particularly these properties that make the slipper such an important resource in innovative practices: it is impractical and hence humorous when used “inappropriately”; to some people it is ugly and hence to others it is something special. When worn by everyone together, it creates equality and sense of belonging in the same manner as team outfits or uniforms do. The interpretation given here highlights the material and face-to-face dimensions of collective consumption. Despite the trend to study digital and immaterial consumption practices, materiality plays an important role in creating, maintaining, and stabilizing consumption practices (cf. Magaudda 2011).

It is also argued that the brand could not have been revitalized without the consumption collectives. Hence, the fourth proposition suggests that (4.) consumption collectives provide important platforms for innovative practices to emerge and spread. They operate as conduits through which new practices flow, because there is a density of links between members that enable the practices to develop (Shove et al. 2012, 67). Consumption collectives provide the “site of the social” (Schatzki 2002; 1996). In the collectives, a mesh of elements interacts to form consumption practices where the brand plays different roles. For the revitalization of the Reino & Aino brand, becoming part of collectively enacted practices in consumption collectives has been important.

As argued by Ilmonen (2004, 43), new uses of the product must first be revealed to the public and it is a risky step because other people evaluate the person based on their notion and skills of using the good. In the best case, however, the practices are adopted as a fresh cultural innovation and a social resource. In order for goods to become more than commodities, people need to have engaged with them actively and the consumption collectives have offered a way to do so. Theory developed on communities-of-practice (Wenger 1998) would describe this as a process of learning, where through participation in practices, people become legitimate members of communities and contribute to the maintenance of the community (cf. also Goulding et al. 2012). This research

provides a complementing perspective. It shows not only one community-of-practice but rather a network of multiple collectives where practices are enacted (Brown and Duguid 2001). By analyzing the elements of practice, the focus is moved closer to understanding change in the brand rather than change in the consumption collective members' identities.

In fact, in the case of Reino & Aino, the collectives have been particularly heterogeneous with more or less porous boundaries, offering a wide variety of possibilities to engage actively in consuming the brand. This provides one way of explaining why there have emerged so many different contexts, uses and meanings related to the brand. In contrast to brand communities with clear social hierarchies between amateurs and experienced members as well as a high moral responsibility toward socializing new members, such openness and space for improvisation in practices would not necessarily be encouraged. This suggests that heterogeneous consumption collectives should be perceived as platforms for different consumption practices to emerge and develop.

Furthermore, in order for the Reino & Aino slipper to have become a totem, a material and symbolic resource for the consumption collectives, it has needed the active involvement of people who have adopted it into their practices. These active consumers have included strong personalities, such as the inventor of Reino & Aino football tournament who, despite the initial opposition of his idea, was determined to implement it or the funny aunts and beloved grandfathers whose legacies people are continuing by wearing the slippers. Similarly, the author of the Reino book that made collecting the brand stories a personal quest has influenced the spread of different practices by documenting them and getting people to share them more widely. The entrepreneurs themselves have provided important seeds for new practices to emerge such as by doing charity and thereby connecting brand use with social responsibility as well as documenting consumers' stories and experiences. These key people have acted as ambassadors for the brand in their respective collectives.

In practice theory, individuals are seen to be situated at the intersections of different practices (Warde 2005; Gram-Hanssen 2011). Thus, as individuals coordinate their everyday lives and different practices, they improvise and cause changes in the practices they enact. However, in order for the new practices, such as wearing the slippers at pubs, to spread, it has required for a larger crowd of consumers to become inspired from the practices of the few. Here, the influence of consumption collectives and the "desperate search for the social link" (Maffesoli 1996; Cova 1997) has been essential. For instance, the out-of-the ordinary practices have benefited from being associated with elements of humor and carnival, where people have been able to let go of their ordinary roles and routines by slipping on a pair of slippers and a funny costume. Moreover, the brand has become a social

resource for the collectives. Accordingly, proposition five suggests that (5.) for cultural brand revitalization, collective brand relationships are more important than individual brand relationships.

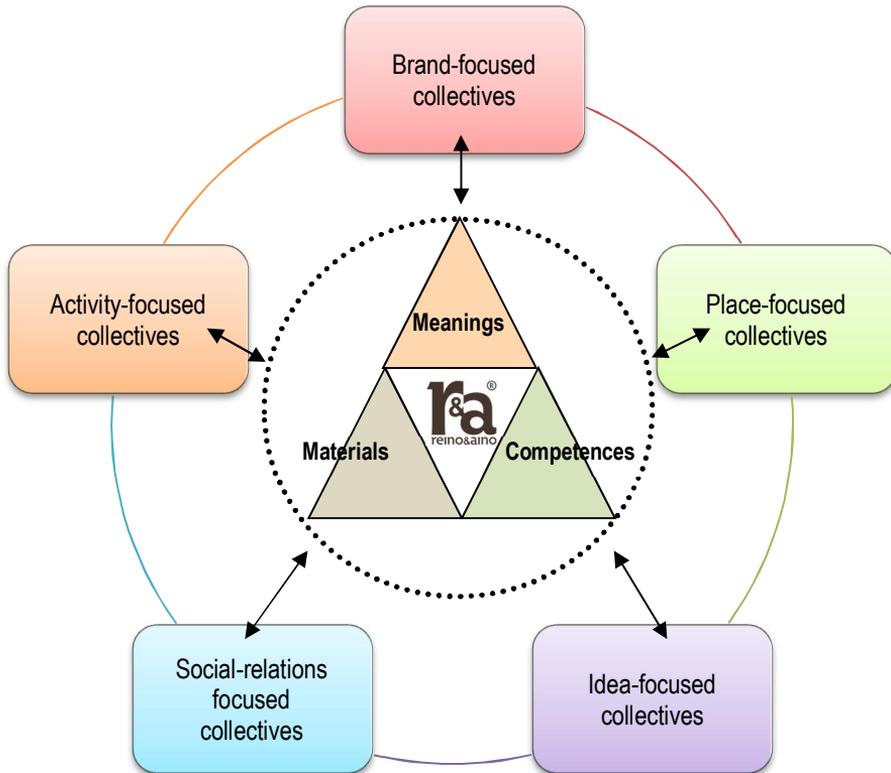


Figure 15. Summary of the cultural brand revitalization in consumption collectives.

To conclude, in the cultural brand revitalization of Reino & Aino, the brand has been integrated into the practices of consumption collectives. Consumption collectives have provided important and essential social platforms for the creation, maintenance and reproduction of practices related to the brand. They have provided density for practices to spread, but also a loose enough structure for innovation and improvisation to take place within practices. This has resulted in a co-constituting process of reconfiguration where elements of practice in the collectives, consisting of meanings, materials and competences have become linked and recombined in various ways.

This process, on the other hand, has inflicted changes on the brand (Figure 15). The brand has become surrounded by a new aura which is no longer tied to a particular context or a single practice, but a plurality of practices in different

contexts. Moreover, this aura does not merely consist of meanings, but the meanings come alive in the collective practices of consumers. The brand is thus a constantly shifting, dynamic entity that at any given point in time contains reflections of the meanings, materials and competences related to it in different contexts where the slippers are used. It is not merely a symbol denoting to a company or a product, even though this is still one of its aspects. Neither is the brand merely a sociocultural repository of meaning, because the material aspects related to the product continuously suggest new ways of using it, yielding new meanings and new linkages between elements.

6 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I will provide a summary of the research process and discuss the theoretical and managerial contributions of the findings. This is followed by an evaluation of the research quality as well as directions for further research.

6.1 Summary of the research

The purpose of the research was to extend the view of the collective consumption of brands. To achieve this purpose, the research had three interrelated objectives:

- I To build a categorization scheme for heterogeneous consumption collectives around one brand
- II To analyze the characteristics of consumption collectives around one brand
- III To understand the role of consumption collectives in cultural brand revitalization

The conceptual background of the research was built on studies of communities and collective consumption mainly within the CCT literature related to marketplace cultures. This literature was reviewed and the different previous categories: traditional community, subculture of consumption, brand community, and consumption tribe were analytically distinguished and compared as well as critically evaluated. For this research, the concept of consumption collective rather than community was chosen in order to account for more heterogeneity and to accommodate the practice theoretical interpretive framework. A consumption collective was defined as a network of people sharing consumption practices and/or objects and collective consumption was defined as the activities taking place within these networks.

My research philosophy was based on the interpretivist paradigm with constructionist ontology. The epistemological stance was moderate social constructionism and the orientation to methodology was holistic rather than individual, meaning that the level of analysis stayed on the level of collectives rather than individual consumers. Units of analysis were the consumption

collectives as well as elements of practices that both constitute and are constituted within them. The interpretive framework for the research was based on practice theory.

The research strategy was in-depth qualitative case study research where the research process was iterative in nature. Initially, I generated data with an inductive approach through interviews and observational methods as well as by collecting cultural materials. The initial interpretations guided the research process toward collective consumption and I started to generate more data with the method of participant observation. In the next stage, the data generation and interpretation were more theoretically driven where I compared concepts from previous literature with the data. As a whole, the research process could be categorized as representing an abductive logic where both inductive and deductive phases are included.

Altogether, data generation for this research lasted for four years. It took place at various different sites including the collectives' events, the Reino & Aino retail store, company organized events and other sites where the collective consumption of the brand could be observed both offline and online. Both formal and more ad hoc interviews were also conducted. I attempted to live within the phenomenon as wholly as possible for the duration of the research process, participating intensively and attempting to get a holistic understanding. The overall aim was not to lose any of the complexity and richness of the phenomenon and therefore the decision was made not to focus on a single brand-related consumption collective but to try and see the heterogeneity and differing characteristics of many different ones.

To address the first research objective, a novel categorization scheme for heterogeneous consumption collectives around one brand was introduced. This scheme was constructed as the result of interplay between previous theory and the empirical data. It was based on identifying the collective's focus, the structure (integrated or dispersed) and the role of the brand (central or peripheral). Possible foci included a place, a brand, a consumption activity, an idea or social relationships. Summary of the categorization scheme is presented in Table 12.

Table 12. Summary of the categorization scheme

Feature/Explanation	Definition	Implications
Focus	What is the most important core for the collective	Everyone in the collective shares a connection to this core whether a place, a brand, an activity, an idea, or social relationships
Structure	Frequency of participation, barriers of entry, access, heterogeneity/homogeneity	Collectives vary from integrated to dispersed in terms of many different aspects related to structure
Role of brand	How is the brand positioned within the collective	The brand may play differing roles within the collectives depending on whether it is more or less significant; in the center or peripheral

This categorization scheme was introduced as an alternative to viewing the consumption collectives through existing concepts in the literature (i.e. brand community, consumption tribe or subculture of consumption). In contrast to classifying consumption collectives using the previous categories, it was considered more useful to describe their complexity and heterogeneous nature through these three features. The categorization scheme helps to problematize some of the assumptions of previous research in the field. It recognizes first that there may simultaneously be different kinds of consumption collectives under one brand, second, that the brand may play different roles and be more or less central and third, that not all consumption collectives are focused on the brand.

The second research objective was addressed by analyzing the characteristics of the consumption collectives within the empirical data. Using the categorization scheme, consumption collectives identified from the empirical data included place-focused, brand-focused, activity-focused, idea-focused and social relations-focused collectives. The collectives were viewed as the social sites for consumers' practices that consisted of materials, meanings, and competences. It was considered imperative to contextualize each of these social sites separately, because they had differing characteristics which influenced the activities that were taking place within them. Using the practice theoretical interpretive framework resulted in summarizing the elements for each collective to see how the brand was intertwined in their practices. How the brand appeared and was used in each collective was found to vary, resulting in a plurality of elements connected with the brand. From within the five categories, different collectives were identified in the empirical data that formed a network-like structure. These are summarized in Table 13.

Table 13. Summary of identified collectives around Reino & Aino

CATEGORY	COLLECTIVES IDENTIFIED	FEATURES
Place-focused	The Pyterlahti village collective, the Vesanto football collective	More integrated, brand has a central role
Brand- focused	Company-led collectives, online fan collectives	More dispersed, brand has a central role
Activity-focused	The ice hockey and sports collective, the rock music collective	More dispersed, brand has a peripheral role
Idea- focused	The imagined national collective	More dispersed, brand has a peripheral role
Social relations-focused	Families, friendship groups, workplace collectives	More integrated, brand has a peripheral role

Finally, the third research objective was addressed through interpreting the case study research findings as cultural brand revitalization. This allowed me to reflect upon the meaning of heterogeneous consumption collectives and their practices for market dynamics and in particular, the brand. This offered one plausible solution to solve the mystery of the case. The interpretation can be summarized into five key propositions (Belk et al. 2013) delineated in Figure 16.

1. The process of cultural brand revitalization takes place through changes in different dispersed and integrative practices in consumption collectives' everyday lives.
2. The brand becomes revitalized as elements of meanings, materials and competences are linked in consumption collectives and as other links are broken.
3. For cultural brand revitalization, the more diverse practices are penetrated by the brand, the better.
4. Consumption collectives provide important platforms for innovative practices to emerge and spread.
5. For cultural brand revitalization, collective brand relationships are more important than individual brand relationships.

Figure 16. Propositions of cultural brand revitalization.

The propositions provide a very different outlook to theories on brand revitalization that have been scarce and mostly managerially oriented. Based on these propositions, it can also be argued that the more open and flexible the brand

is in terms of allowing for different kinds of uses and meanings, the better. The brand thus becomes a platform for consumers' activities, submitting itself to various practices in different contexts. For the brand itself, it means a mesh of different things and linkages being formed. Active involvement by a few innovative people helps the process where the practices gradually spread and the brand comes to adopt a more significant role in the collectives.

6.2 Theoretical contribution

This research was situated in the context of discovery rather than in the context of justification (MacInnis 2011; Yadav 2010). The context of discovery means the generation of new ideas, new constructs and creative synthesis of existing ideas. Merely spotting a research gap that exists is not argued to be enough for a contribution, particularly when generating new theory, because it may be that the issue is simply uninteresting or irrelevant (Ladik & Stewart 2008). The main purpose of the research was to extend the view of the collective consumption of brands. It was argued that this is a necessary and relevant pursuit, because the existing concepts describing collective consumption phenomena are too partial, limited, and overlapping. As a result of some of the assumptions made in previous literature, the heterogeneity and complexity of consumption collectives around one brand has not been adequately understood.

The research mainly concentrated on making a theoretical contribution. As argued by McGrath and Brinberg (1983), it is impossible for any research to contribute equally to all the domains of methodology, empirical world and theory. Therefore, research is always about making compromises. In my research, the theoretical and empirical domains were highlighted without neglecting methodological rigour. Case study research data was used rather instrumentally to build the theoretical arguments (Stake 2005).

According to MacInnis (2011), there are several ways in which scientific studies can make a conceptual contribution. This research contributes firstly by differentiating; seeing types of things and how they are different. The metaphor for this strategy is the magnifying glass. This thesis recognizes complexity and multiplicity of brand related consumption collectives in the market and introduces a new way to categorize them. The thesis also contributes by using the strategy of revising; seeing what has been identified in a different way. The metaphor for this strategy is the kaleidoscope, which changes the view as it is turned. Revising entails "revealing and questioning the validity of hidden or explicit assumptions, foundational premises, or tenets in the extant view" (MacInnis 2011, 144). This is done by problematizing the assumptions of extant literature (Alvesson & Sandberg

2013) and by applying a different interpretive framework to the data (Arnould et al. 2006; Moisander & Valtonen 2006). Next, the specific theoretical contributions of the research are discussed.

The more active role of consumers in the marketplace has been theorized by several researchers in the past decades. In consumer research, one of the core literature streams has been focused on consumption communities. It has focused on the motivations of consumers to participate, their shared identity projects and the benefits communities yield for their members, as well as the structural characteristics of different communities. Communities have been viewed as unique worlds of their own and research has attempted to depict and analyze their internal dynamics as thoroughly as possible. Individual and collective belongingness have been emphasized through different concepts that have provided helpful ideas about how consumers form and sustain relations with each other in consumption collectives. Yet, this stream has not paid adequate attention to the heterogeneity of these collectives. It has emphasized the elective and volitional nature of consumption communities as communities of interest focused on the brand, consumption object or activity. Other kinds of collectives sharing consumption practices and objects have been under researched. Thus, previous literature has had a narrow conceptualization of collective consumption especially in relation to brands. In addition, the fuzziness of the concepts has resulted in overlap and confusion, which means that new ways to categorize consumption collectives that integrate the previous literature are needed.

The first theoretical contribution of this thesis has been to distinguish analytically between the previous concepts in the collective consumption literature. This was done through reviewing the relevant literature and focusing on the differences between the concepts. Based on a critical literature review, a meta-level analysis was introduced to provide a new outlook in how consumption collectives can be identified and analyzed. The second theoretical contribution of the thesis was to provide a new way to categorize the variety of different consumption collectives. A new categorization scheme for heterogeneous consumption collectives around one brand was introduced that starts from defining the focus on the collective and goes on to analyze the structure of collectives as integrated or dispersed as well as the role of the brand as more central or peripheral.

This categorization scheme extends the role of brands in collective consumption. It allows for the heterogeneity of members, their orientations, the collectives' practices, and the role of the brand for different consumption collectives. Previous literature has not to a full extent recognized that brands may play a role in collectives that are not based on bonding between like-minded enthusiasts. This thesis has introduced a broader view of collective consumption, arguing that families, workplace communities and village committees may be

considered as part of collective brand consumption and they may play a significant role within the network of actors around the brand. Similarly, producers may also be part of consumption collectives while they share the same consumption practices and/or objects. Thus, making the distinction between producers and consumers in trying to understand complex market phenomena is becoming increasingly difficult. In some collectives, consumers may play a leading role whereas in others the producers may take a more active position. Producers do not need to host consumption collectives to participate in them, either. Also, the research does not view the collectives as mutually exclusive, but instead sees them as intertwined, layered and embedded. Thus, within a place-focused collective there may be collectives focused on social relations simultaneously. This finding also contributes to understanding the heterogeneity of collective consumption better.

Thirdly, the research contributes by showing how different collectives' practices transform the brand and thereby market development. This is done through questioning the assumption that the brand by definition has a central role. By introducing a practice theoretical interpretive framework to studying the consumption collectives, the focus moves to how the brand becomes intertwined in various practices within the collectives, many of which exist before any link with the brand is formed. Some of the collective practices are more directly related to the brand than others. This emphasizes the fact that the consumption object is not always central in collective consumption. Consumption collectives may pre-exist and only later adopt a brand as one of their important resources. Furthermore, it enables a more dynamic view of consumption practices in relation to brands. It views collective consumption as a set of dynamic activities where changes are happening constantly and where brand meaning and the brand's role evolves. This finding supports the argument that consumption collectives should be studied in relation to the market. It is not necessarily so that consumers attempt to escape or defy markets through joining communities. They may also support the market in various ways. Even though it is not possible to distinguish clear cause and effect relations, the practice theoretical interpretive framework has provided a credible explanation for the case phenomenon where brand revitalization has been achieved within and through consumption collectives.

Fourthly, the research contributes to practice theoretical accounts of consumption because it does not concentrate on identifying consumption practices, but goes directly to analyzing the elements these practices consist of and how the brand is intertwined within them. This enables a more dynamic view of collective practices related to brands. The research continues the discussion started by other researchers on the fit between practice theory and consumption communities (Schau et al. 2009). Yet, it does not analyze brand community practices but more broadly the practices related to collective brand consumption.

Compared to brand community practices that contribute to the stability and reproduction of certain ways of using the brand by offering templates of action, my account focuses more on changes taking place in the brand as both pre-existing and new elements are linked and other links are broken in consumption collectives. As a result, a mesh of materials, meanings and competences are identified that interact and contribute to how the brand appears at any given moment. These elements move from one practice to another and also cross from one consumption collective to another. Practice theoretical insights can thus be used also to explain processes of change and innovation in the market in addition to illuminating how practices are routinely sustained and reproduced by consumers.

Fifthly, the research yields additional insights for theories on cultural branding. Previous literature especially within cultural branding literature has moved the focus from brand managers toward the plurality of actors that contribute to creating and developing brands. Yet, this stream has been focusing more on the communicative and symbolic aspects of consumption; how brand meaning is co-created by several storytellers in the market. This thesis contributes to this literature stream by offering a practice theoretical interpretation to complement the view. Based on the findings, brands can be seen as enacted in practice. They are given their form not only by meaning-making activities at the discursive level, but through embodied and material social practices in different contexts. Consumers' innovative practices extend brand use and brand meaning and form unexpected linkages that encourage more people to join and use the brand as a platform. The brand is thus a constantly shifting, dynamic entity that at any given point in time contains reflections of the meanings, materials and competences related to it in different contexts.

6.3 Managerial implications

The core managerial implication for this thesis is that collective consumption is heterogeneous and multifaceted. Rather than merely being members of consumption collectives, consumers are actively engaged in enacting and performing different practices, linking elements together and breaking the links again. Hence, collective consumption is more about dynamic doing than it is about static being. Thus, companies should not have a too narrow lens on what they consider relevant consumption collectives for their products. Collective consumption could be viewed as a broader activity than that which takes place in brand communities or consumption tribes only. Knowing about the different ways in which brands may play a role in heterogeneous consumption collectives is

important. It helps companies to distinguish between collectives where the brand is central and those where it plays a less significant role.

In case there is a more integrated consumption collective where the brand plays a central role, the company may be more welcome to participate and contribute resources. These collectives may invite and welcome the company and even adopt the meanings and practices suggested to them. As asserted in the brand community literature, these consumption collectives provide many insightful opportunities to benefit from. Companies can provide financial or material resources for collective activities, invite consumption collectives to participate in product development or plan for brand-related events. Yet, it can be argued this type of consumption collective is also very rare, because it requires so much commitment from members.

In the case of more dispersed consumption collectives, going where consumers already spend their time and investing in things that are important and relevant for them other than the brand itself may provide better opportunities for companies. Viewing the brand more as a context or platform of consumption where many other things in addition to a single brand gain relevance is the key to understanding how to approach these collectives. Supporting social belongingness between consumers may mean for instance allowing the option for different groups and collectives to customize the product for their own use or linking the product with gift-giving activities. The company may also initiate co-operation with appropriate charity organizations or other third sector actors that are related to these collectives.

In order for the brand to become adopted by as many consumption collectives as possible, the company may cultivate cultural meaning linkages between different phenomena in an unexpected manner. This builds on the practice theoretical interpretation of detaching the brand from a single practice and inserting it into as many practices and social sites as possible. Taking the product outside of its common contexts of use and meaning associations may provide a new interface for some collective to adopt it as their symbolic resource. A lot can be learned by imitating what the consumption collectives are doing with the brand. More attention indeed should be paid on what consumers do with the brand rather than what they think about it. Since consumer practices spread through few more innovative people and collectives, giving them control and freedom to play with the brand may turn out to be profitable also commercially. Practices also create new consumption opportunities by providing templates for action (Schau et al. 2009): thus, it is necessary to encourage consumers to improvise.

One important aspect of this thesis is thus the idea of control in terms of branding. Based on the implications of this research, companies may be in a more successful path if they let go of their brand and view it more as an open-source

platform for consumers. The key to get people to use products is not in persuading them through clever marketing campaigns, but through incorporating the brand into their everyday practices. This is not something the company can do on its own. The company can merely encourage and facilitate these processes. Strategies for doing this may include documenting the consumption collectives' activities, giving them credit and rewarding them through support. Within the consumption collectives' activities, there are diverse ways in which the brand is used which means that no one way should be preferred or suggested by the company. A company need not be totally passive, but can adapt to and interact with the collectives as long as it does not dominate or steer their activities. As argued in this thesis, the distinction between the roles of consumers and producers is not clear-cut in consumption collectives. Beside consumers, also producers can enact consumption practices. This gives producers the opportunity to relax the organizational boundaries and perceive themselves as members of networked consumption collectives as well as their consumers as playing an important part in the company.

Since the brand only exists through being enacted in practice, paying more attention to use contexts and practices is recommended. Facilitating new uses and offering resources for them is essential in encouraging the rapid spreading of these practices within collectives of consumption. Gradually, these new practices give rise to the formation of completely new markets because practices allow for new consumption opportunities where resources are required.

6.4 Evaluating the research quality

After any research process, it is imperative to conduct an evaluation of the research quality. Criteria such as validity and reliability are not suitable for judging the quality of qualitative research which is situated in the context of discovery. The research philosophy was interpretive and based on moderate constructionist ontology. The criteria most often used to evaluate this kind of research are Denzin and Lincoln's (2005): trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, and conformability. They emphasize the social construction of knowledge which means that research is always embedded with values and there is no objectively defined truth. Thus, qualitative research cannot be judged by the criteria of generalizability or replicability, for instance.

Moisander and Valtonen (2006) suggest that cultural consumer research should not be evaluated mechanically based on some strict, normative criteria. The researcher should build their own perspective of the research quality based on her interpretive framework and the research philosophy that she submits to. Finally, it

is the scientific community that evaluates whether the research has value (Longino 1990). Because this research is positioned within consumer research, I have decided to use Spiggle's (1994, 500) criteria instead. In her influential article about qualitative analysis and interpretation, Spiggle suggests the following criteria: usefulness, innovation, integration, resonance and adequacy.

6.4.1 Usefulness and innovation

In discussing the usefulness of the research, questions such as does the work aid in furthering inquiry, or can the findings be applied or transferred to other research settings, contexts and domains, are asked (Spiggle 1994, 500). Usefulness means that the research findings are relevant to other researchers in the field. Recently, increasing interest has been directed toward collective actors in the market. Positioning this research in that vibrant stream of literature means that the usefulness of this research is increased. The topic is related to themes that many researchers are interested in.

Without merely repeating what has already been said, the research has value for others working with collective consumption phenomena. It provides a new categorization scheme (focus, structure and role of brand) for analyzing heterogeneous consumption collectives around one brand. In addition, the practice theoretical reading of data enables researchers to extend their view of what can be included in collective consumption. The thesis also brings new insights to how consumption collectives influence markets by showing their role in brand revitalization. The insights can be transferred to other contexts and domains, especially within the broad field of collective consumption.

Innovation means that the research provides a new perspective or outlook into something (Spiggle 1994, 501). This outlook needs to be fresh and creative. This criterion has been fulfilled in this research by focusing on a case that differs from the previous examples in the literature. It comes from a small country in Northern Europe and is a commodity product that is relatively inexpensive and approachable. This makes it different from previous examples such as car brands, computers or high risk leisure activities. Innovation is also sought from abandoning the existing concepts and lexicon and introducing new ones. Based on the findings, it can be argued that collective brand consumption does not take place merely within distinct communities.

6.4.2 Integration and resonance

The criterion of integration means whether the research achieves a synthesis or a holistic framework that goes beyond identifying common themes in the data. A unifying idea should be found that integrates the research. In this research, one of the core contributions was providing integration of previous research that has been fragmented. In order to find opportunities for future research it is first necessary to identify gaps in the existing literature. In terms of finding an integrated, unifying idea, cultural brand revitalization is brought forward as a result of the empirical analysis and as a way to solve the mystery presented by the case. Theoretical propositions are developed that can be applied to other similar phenomena as well. Therefore, it fulfills the criterion of resonance, which means that the work should be evocative and sensitizing and enrich understandings of similar phenomena. By presenting the research already during the process in several international research conferences and doctoral workshops, I have given the research community an opportunity to evaluate the resonance of the research.

6.4.3 Adequacy

Adequacy means that the interpretations of the research are sufficiently grounded in the data to make the reader believe in them (Spiggle 1994, 501). To assure adequacy, the thesis has emphasized transparency in describing the research process. The thesis started with a narrative about the research journey and how the researcher has made the choices of what to focus on. The interpretation was offered as a plausible one, based on the long engagement with the empirical data. The procedures of engaging with the data were described in detail in the methodology chapter as well. The use of multiple data sources contributed to the richness of interpretations, and quotations from the empirical material were used in the thesis to illustrate links between the data and analysis as well as interpretations. According to the moderate constructionist epistemology, triangulation of data does not aim at producing a fuller or more “true” representation of the phenomenon. Instead, it provides several perspectives to the heterogeneous collective realities around the phenomenon (Moisander & Valtonen 2006). All data sources were considered as equally able to provide insights for the phenomenon and they provide the interpretation richness and depth. They also help to contextualize the analysis. Photos and extracts from cultural materials are included in the thesis. Visualizing interesting and relevant aspects of the the data provides the reader much more credibility toward the research than merely the researcher’s narrative

could provide. Adequate data access was ensured by a long-term engagement with the research phenomenon.

6.5 Further research directions

This research has provided an integrative perspective to the literature on collective consumption and particularly as it relates to branding. The identification of different collectives was connected to previous literature as well as the empirical case phenomenon and data generated for this research. Yet, it may still be possible to find consumption collectives that do not fit into any of the five foci suggested here (place, brand, activity, idea, social relations). For instance, the brand Reino & Aino was perceived to transgress the compartmentalization and heterogeneity based on social categories such as gender, age and social class identified in previous research (e.g. Kozinets 2001; Kates 2002). These mechanisms of socialization affect the patterns of consumption and regulate tastes through lifestyles (Bourdieu 1974; Holt 1997). In this thesis, the focus was on the shared consumption object, the Reino & Aino brand. The focus of analysis stayed on the level of collectives rather than analyzing the lifestyles of consumers. Collectives based on a shared social identification were not particularly prominent in the data. This does not mean that they could not exist under the same brand umbrella (cf. Schouten et al. 2007). Thus, by broadening the outlook on collective consumption, this research has provided an initial attempt to categorize its diversity and heterogeneity. Future research could explore this even further and try to find more sub-categories below these.

Furthermore, as consumption collectives are becoming more and more diverse with some of them being more integrated and others more dispersed, it would be interesting to conduct research on how members move in-between them. Thus, it could be argued that each consumer forms a network hub from which memberships to different collectives are sustained and developed through participation in different collective practices (Wellman 1979). Thus, collective consumption is more about actively doing membership practices in different collectives than just being a member. Consumers can be simultaneously members of a family collective and participate in an online fan group as well as meet like-minded consumers in brandfests, for instance. How these memberships evolve and how consumers move from one collective to another, making and breaking linkages between elements of practice would be a fruitful and interesting path to take in future research. This approach could take the customer ecosystem as a central unit of analysis, paying attention to their changing and dynamic life patterns (cf. Heinonen et al. 2013). Using network theory and quantitative network

modeling could provide one option to conduct this type of research. Another option would be to explore the perspective of learning in connection to adopting different practices in communal contexts (cf. Goulding et al. 2013). Research on communities-of-practice within organization studies has explored the way people belong simultaneously to many communities and the challenges it causes to their identities (Wenger 1998). These insights could be utilized more in further research to address the trajectories of consumers' participation in different consumption collectives. Such analysis could develop further concepts like boundary practices and brokering (Wenger 1998) between different consumption collectives, how elements are copied, adapted, and borrowed between consumption collectives, how alliances are formed between consumption collectives and how the diversity of collectives and different practices is managed.

In drawing from practice theory, the research has touched upon the role of materiality in collective brand consumption. It was suggested that the material properties of products mean that they are easier or more difficult to become adopted by consumption collectives as part of their practices. In contrast to expensive lifestyle products such as motorcycles or computers, products encountered more frequently as part of the everyday life may be easier to adopt and thereby more likely to become resources in collective consumption. It suggests that the extent to which a product submits itself to collective consumption practices matters in terms of understanding brands' role in collective consumption. This aspect could be studied even further and see whether certain product types are used in certain collectives for instance.

Practice theory has lately been fruitfully applied to studies of consumption. It has provided a counterpoint to cultural theory focusing on discourse and meaning by paying more attention to embodied practices. Thereby it has paid attention to the routine aspects of consumption. Much of our consumption activities are not reflective or intentional, but part of habituated behavior, enacting familiar patterns. Further research needs to be conducted on how consumption practices evolve and cause changes in marketplace dynamics over time. These theories may better explain phenomena such as market formation, product and brand lifecycles and consumption trends. They may also explain an aspect of collective consumption that has not been adequately understood before which is how do consumption collectives evolve and change over time (cf. Schouten et al. 2007; Goulding & Saren 2007). Practice theory may help to provide insights on how interactions between elements of practice as links between them are made and broken contribute to these processes of change. However, it also means that more challenging methodologies are needed that take into account the passing of time and the multiple influences on elements of practice.

Finally, the interest toward studying the Reino & Aino phenomenon was inspired by the fact that without apparently any marketing effort, the brand had been revitalized in the market. The Reino & Aino phenomenon was embedded in a sociocultural context where the history of the brand played a significant role. The revitalization process required there to be something to revitalize in the first place. In the future, it would be interesting to study these phenomena more from the point of view of companies. For instance, research could focus on studying how companies can enhance the chances that their brands and products become adopted by the market and consumption collectives. Also, the way brands' roles evolve in consumption collectives through the influence of companies participating in them is a relevant direction for further inquiry. Balancing the growth and profit motivations of business with other actors' interests is important in building socioculturally legitimate and resonant brands.

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