

UNIVERSITY OF TAMPERE

School of Management

MANAGING CONSUMPTION COMMUNITIES

The Supplier Perspective

Marketing

Master's thesis

19.10.2015

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ABSTRACT

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Title:

MANAGING CONSUMPTION
COMMUNITIES – The Supplier Perspective

Master's thesis:

87 pages, 6 appendix pages

Date:

October 2015

Key words:

Consumption communities, community
management, supplier perspective

Communal consumption has lately received abundant research attention. Nevertheless, consumption community management has not been studied very widely in the discipline of marketing. In particular, there are very few community management studies that examine the phenomenon from the perspective of the community supplier. Because the present study adopts this scantily studied perspective, it employs an abductive research approach. In order to give much emphasis on the empirical data, the researcher did not use any specific preselected theoretical framework to classify the findings. However, existing consumption community literature was broadly examined to create preliminary understanding, to provide theoretical background information and to support the researcher's interpretation.

The previous community management theory often underlines how difficult, if not impossible, it is to control communities consisting of autonomous actors. Despite this, suppliers cannot settle for the role of a passive onlooker. Since consumption communities can provide substantial commercial and even strategic benefits to suppliers, suppliers must find alternative ways to manage those communities. Therefore, this study aims to specify the role of the supplier in the consumption community as well as analyze how the consumption communities can actually be managed. In this study, consumption communities are seen as heterogeneous social networks that express communality in manifold ways. Altogether five representatives of three successful community suppliers were interviewed. In addition to the depth interviews, a post-review seminar was organized to enrich the empirical data. In the post-review seminar six experts of community management discussed the findings of the analysis in order to verify and enhance researcher's interpretation.

Based on the major findings, a framework for consumption community management from the supplier perspective was created. First, the framework summarizes the role of the supplier. Both previous literature and the empirical findings indicate that in the consumption community the role of the supplier is above all a facilitator. This research indicates that the supplier that operates in this facilitative role can manage consumption communities by implementing twelve actions that can be further divided into six action categories. Due to its data driven nature the formed framework provides both theoretical contribution and managerial implications.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Tampereen yliopisto

Johtamiskorkeakoulu, markkinointi

Tekijä:

KOIVISTO, PAULIINA

Tutkielman nimi:

MANAGING CONSUMPTION

COMMUNITIES – The Supplier Perspective

Pro gradu -tutkielma:

87 sivua, 6 liitesivua

Aika:

Lokakuu 2015

Avainsanat:

Kulutusyhteisöt, yhteisöjen johtaminen,
markkinoijanäkökulma

Yhteisölliseen kuluttamiseen on erityisesti viime vuosikymmeninä kohdistunut runsaasti tutkimuksellista huomiota. Tästä huolimatta kulutusyhteisöjen johtamista on markkinoinnin tieteenalan piirissä tutkittu vielä verrattain vähän, etenkin yhteisöä kaupallisen edun nimissä markkinoivan tarjoajan näkökulmasta. Koska tutkimustietoa yhteisöjen johtamisesta on kyseisestä tarkastelukulmasta olemassa verrattain niukasti, hyödynnettiin tutkimuksessa vahvasti abduktiivista lähestymistapaa. Aineistolle pyrittiin jättämään runsaasti tilaa puhua, minkä vuoksi sitä ei refleктоitu yksittäistä, ennalta valittua teoreettista viitekehystä vasten. Olemassa olevaa kulutusyhteisökirjallisuutta käytettiin sen sijaan laajasti hyödyksi esiyymmärryksen luomisen, tutkimuksen teoreettisen taustoittamisen sekä tutkijan tulkintojen tukemisen vaiheissa.

Vaikka yhteisöjen johtamista käsittelevä akateeminen kirjallisuus onkin usein keskittynyt korostamaan autonomisista toimijoista koostuvien yhteisöjen kontrolloimisen mahdollisuutta, on silti selvää, etteivät markkinoijat voi jäädä yhteisöllisen kuluttamisen ilmiössä vain passiivisiksi sivustakatsojiksi. Koska kulutusyhteisöt voivat tuottaa merkittävää kaupallista hyötyä markkinoijilleen, tulee markkinoijien löytää vaihtoehtoisia tapoja johtaa niitä. Tämä tutkimus keskittyykin erittelemään tarjoajan roolia kulutusyhteisössä sekä sitä, miten tarjoaja voi kulutusyhteisöä johtaa. Tässä tutkimuksessa kulutusyhteisöt nähdään moninaisina yhteisöllistä toimintaa ilmentävinä sosiaalisina verkostoina. Tutkimusta varten haastateltiin kaikkiaan viittä kulutusyhteisöjen johtamisen ammattilaista, jotka edustivat kolmen aktiivisen kulutusyhteisön tarjoajia. Syvähaastattelujen pohjalta tehdyn teema-analyysin tueksi järjestettiin jälkiarviointiseminaari, jossa aineistoa rikastutettiin ja tutkijan tulkintoja verifioitiin asiantuntijapaneelin voimin.

Tutkimuslöydökset muodostavat viitekehysten kulutusyhteisöjen johtamiselle markkinoijan näkökulmasta. Tutkimustulosten perusteella markkinoijan rooli kulutusyhteisössä on ennen kaikkea fasilitoiva. Tutkimustulosten perusteella voidaan todeta, että fasilitoijan roolissa toimiva markkinoija voi johtaa kulutusyhteisöjä toteuttamalla 12 johtamistoimenpidettä, jotka jakautuvat kuuteen toimenpidekategoriaan. Luotu viitekehys on hyvin aineistolähtöinen, ja sillä onkin kontribuutioarvoa niin markkinointiteorian kuin käytännön implikaatioidenkin näkökulmasta.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Nowadays, many of the phenomena that revolutionize the marketplace originate from the operation of some other actor than the supplier. This necessarily requires a change in the mindset of the supplier: instead of just being innovative within the organizational boundaries in order to produce something new *to* the market, the supplier also has to be able to adapt to changes originating *from* the market (Gummesson, Kuusela & Närvänen 2014, 231). Because the surroundings of business are influenced by initiatives of more actors than earlier, they are also changing faster than ever before. Detecting the changes in the operating environment readily and adapting to them quickly have consequently become increasingly important success factors for suppliers. To conclude, a firm's ability to adjust itself to extrinsic changes can be seen as a significant source of a competitive advantage in the new turbulent business environment (Reeves & Deimler 2011).

1.1.1 Role-recasting between the supplier and the consumer

One of the major extrinsic changes that calls for suppliers' adaptation is the empowerment of consumers. Consumers are adopting a more powerful and active role in the market in 2010s (Gummesson et al. 2014). Due to this more active role consumers are also becoming more conscious and demanding (Woodruff 1997, 139). The solid development of information technology together with the progressively growing awareness of consumers has led to the emergence of new forms of customer interaction. The importance of customer-to-customer (C2C) interplay has continuously increased, as online platforms have made connecting with people with the same interests more and more effortless (Gummesson et al. 2014; Muñoz & Schau 2011). Getting information from other consumers to support consumption-related decision-making has gained an increasing role in the market; Trusov, Bucklin and Pauwels (2009) have pointed out that information coming from a peer consumer is perceived more authentic, objective and

convincing than the information provided by the producer or the seller. Therefore, it is obvious that the supplier does not dominate the marketplace anymore.

Consumers' empowerment does not only cover the consumption-related information-sharing. It extends deeper into the process of value-creation (Grönroos 2012) that can be seen as a core purpose of all economic exchange (Vargo, Maglio & Akaka 2008). Consumers are nowadays not merely objects to *whom* the suppliers produce their goods and services, but participating actors who are closely involved in resource integration and value creation (Carù & Cova 2015; Gummesson et al. 2014; Payne, Storbacka & Frow 2008; Vargo & Lusch 2008). Consumers do not form just a passive, receiving audience. Instead, since their role has so substantially evolved, they can more accurately be described as "active players" (Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2000, 80; see also Payne et al. 2008, 84). Consumers as active players have intrinsic willingness to participate in the market process. This readiness can manifest itself in various ways, some of which are more beneficial to the supplier than others. At times, seen from the supplier perspective, the consumers' willingness to participate takes unfavorable and critical forms, for instance when it manifests itself in actions such as boycotts. On the other hand, in the ideal situation, consumer participation leads to fruitful cooperation that produces value to all parties involved (Cova and Dalli 2009). Consumer empowerment is thus by no means only a threat, as it also offers a wealth of new opportunities for the suppliers to develop their business (Gummesson et al. 2014; Payne et al. 2008; Vargo & Lusch 2008). In the same manner as technological development facilitates interplay between customers, it naturally also provides new opportunities for interaction between the consumer and the supplier (Gummesson et al. 2014, 231).

Gummesson et al. (2014) use the concept of *role recasting* when referring to the position change driven by the empowerment of consumers. By recasting they refer to a situation in which "suppliers and customers are assigned, or voluntarily adopt new sets of responsibilities, behaviours, obligations, beliefs and norms to follow, creating value for themselves and each other in the process" (p. 228). This adoption of novel approaches, practices and behavioral patterns is so fundamental, that it entirely re-determines the positions of the consumer and the supplier. One concrete manifestation of the changing roles of the supplier and the consumer is the increased importance of consumption communities. Communities are embodiments and outcomes of this new role allocation, as they transfer power more and more from the supplier to the consumer.

1.1.2 Managing communities of empowered consumers

Previous literature indicates that suppliers can benefit in numerous and diverse ways from consumption communities. The advantages include for instance savings in marketing costs, increased customer loyalty, improved image and intensified communication with consumers. Community-integrated consumers are often exceptionally involved and engaged customers, who spread the positive brand message also to other consumers (McAlexander, Schouten & Koeing 2002). In addition, community members are usually less prone to switch the brand when facing product or service failures, or even competitors with technically superior offerings. Hence, consumption communities can also significantly increase brand loyalty (Hur, Ahn & Kim 2011). By increasing consumers' commitment to the community, the supplier can then improve its own financial performance. A positive impact on the bottom line can be explained with increased word-of-mouth marketing and the adaptation of a generally more consumer-oriented approach (Jang, Olfman, Ko, Koh & Kim 2008).

However, to be able to achieve these above mentioned benefits, suppliers must know how to deal with communities. Consumption communities can, no doubt, form a strategic competitive advantage to the supplier (Goulding, Shankar & Canniford 2013), but only if they are appropriately treated and deliberately managed. However, community management is particularly challenging as consumption communities are rather self-directed networks consisting of somewhat equal, autonomous actors (Cova & Cova 2002; Fournier & Lee 2009; Muñiz & Schau 2011). Consumption communities shun authoritarian control (Fournier & Lee 2009) and thus cannot be managed through traditional, hierarchy-based means (Canniford 2011). Consequently, to achieve those manifold advantages consumption communities can offer, suppliers must find other, novel ways to manage the communities of empowered consumers. To conclude, by managing their communities with an open and light touch suppliers can build strong customer loyalty, increase marketing efficiency and enhance their brand (Fournier & Lee 2009, 106). Hence the fundamental aim of the present study is to explore with what actions this more facilitative management can be executed.

1.1.3 The relevancy of consumption community management research

Every other year the Marketing Science Institute (MSI) publishes a list of the most focal and urgent research topics in the marketing discipline for the next two years. The list provides valuable information about which areas have the greatest need for further research according to the consideration of business operators. The most topical research priorities for the years 2014–2016 include a number of themes that highlight the importance of consumption community management study: *Understanding customers and the customer experience* is named as the first “tier 1 priority” (Marketing Science Institute 2015), making it an overriding research priority in the field of marketing. Gathering understanding about consumption community management provides managers with tools to more appropriately deal with the communities, and as a result improves the consumer experience. Consumption community management research also meets the needs of two “tier 3 priorities”, *establishing optimal social contracts with customers* and *recognizing differences in consumers and customers* (Marketing Science Institute 2015). Consumption communities exactly offer new ways to build social contracts with customers. Investigating their management can therefore add to the answers of the related question, such as how the modern, more demanding and conscious customer should be treated and how mutually beneficial relations with customers can be created. Recent consumption community research strongly emphasizes the heterogeneity of consumers within the communities, which is why studying consumption community management also contributes to acknowledging and respecting the differences in consumers and customers.

As the MSI’s research priorities indicate, both the academic community and the operators of practical business life have even more clearly begun to understand how significantly consumption communities modify today’s market. Consumption communities are nowadays indeed one of the most popular research themes among marketing, and with a good reason. Consumption communities are “revolutionizing emerging markets and transforming established ones” (Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004, 4). As consumption communities shape the market and in effect also inevitably modify scientific thinking regarding consumer behavior, investigating consumption community management from the supplier perspective is admittedly relevant.

1.2 Research problem

The aim of the study is to analyze how the supplier can manage consumption communities from which it aims to benefit commercially. In consequence the phenomenon of communal consumption and consumption communities is observed exclusively from the supplier perspective. The present study will seek to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the role of the supplier in the consumption community?
2. How can the supplier manage the consumption community?

Analyzing the nature of the supplier's role in the community will provide preliminary understanding needed to comprehend why the consumption communities can be managed in the way as discovered. Dissecting the role of the supplier will therefore clarify the background conditions for community management. In turn, identifying how the supplier can manage consumption communities provides deep understanding of how consumption communities should be dealt with in practice.

In the present discussion, the phenomenon of communal consumption will be approached in a slightly distinctive way. This study focuses solely on the supplier perspective, leaving other viewpoints, such as those of the consumers, out of the review. In addition, instead of conforming to the entrenched categorization of consumption communities, consumption communities are viewed as social networks in which the communality and collective action can appear in various ways. However, a fundamental presumption of this study is that despite the diversity of consumption communities the efficient behavior of the supplier can be determined similarly. More specifically, the assumption is that despite the heterogeneous nature of consumption communities the role of the supplier is similar. Moreover, it is presumed that all consumption communities can be managed in like manner as long as the supplier pursues commercial benefit from the community.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

In what follows, the structure of the thesis will be presented. First, chapter one introduces the research topic by opening up the changing roles of the consumer and the supplier and indicating how this role-recasting manifests itself as consumption communities and how it affects the management of these communities. Second, it is pointed out that the consumption community management research is ranked high in relevance on the Marketing Science Institute priorities scale. Next the research problem and the research questions of this study are determined. Finally the most essential exclusions and underlying assumptions of the present study are disclosed.

In chapter two the theoretical background of consumption communities and their management in particular is explored in the light of previous research. Prior studies enabled the researcher to gain vitally important preliminary understanding of the research phenomenon. Chapter two not only conceptualizes consumption community and its management but also establishes the theoretical settings of consumption communities. The aim of chapter two is to position this study in the field of consumption community research and to justify the choices made by the researcher by reflecting the existing community literature.

Chapter three introduces the methodological choices of this study. To begin with, it deals with the qualitative research method and the research philosophy of moderate constructionism employed. After that, the focus is on the abductive, data-driven approach of this thesis as well as on the data generation and analysis methods. Next, the procedure of post-review seminar used to verify and enrich the findings of the study is explained. Lastly, chapter three describes the communities whose suppliers' representatives were interviewed.

Chapter four forms the empirical, interpretive part of the study. The supplier perspective in consumption community management is addressed by analyzing first the role of the supplier in a consumption community and then the actions the supplier implements to manage the community. The analysis presented in chapter four is based on the researcher's interpretation, which is supported by existing literature. At the end of chapter four, a framework summarizing the results of the analysis will be presented. The fact that chapter four is relatively extensive in comparison with the theoretical part can be justified

by the use of the abductive research approach in which much emphasis is placed on the empirical data and the researcher's interpretation. After careful consideration, this particular structure was chosen since it highlights the significance of the empirical data and allows the data to speak for themselves.

Chapter five is titled as discussion. It starts with a summary of the study and also presents the major outcome and conclusions of the research. After dissecting the contributive value of the study, the research quality is assessed with the aid of Spiggle's (1994) criterion. Finally, the limitations and future research directions are presented.

2 CONSUMPTION COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT

2.1 The phenomenon of communal consumption

The term consuming refers to the acquisition, usage or consumption, and in many cases also the disposal of a consumption object (MacInnis & Folkes 2010, 905). The consumption object can be almost anything; a product, a service or even a certain activity or ideology. Communal consumption has long attracted scientific interest. Scientists have studied the consumption of a certain commodity, brand or product category as a focal part of a commonly experienced celebration, ritual or tradition (Muñiz & O'Guinn 2001, 414). Rapid technological development has boosted digitalization and consumers' awareness. Consequently, communal consumption has grown more and more important. At present, people have access to a constantly widening range of private and public choices. Consuming is no longer regarded as a necessary evil. Instead, many people find consuming a pleasurable free time activity.

Due to the rising standard of living and quickly growing purchase potential consumers are able to invest more money, time and effort into consumption targets through which they can generate hedonistic and social value to themselves (Rintamäki, Kanto, Kuusela & Spence 2006). The consumer of the third millennium often places more value on the social bonds and identities that consumption forms than on the object of the consumption itself (Cova & Cova 2002, 595). This means that consumers' preferences and needs are bound to change. Accordingly, present-day suppliers who wish to attract consumers' attention should focus on creating social value for the consumers instead of enhancing utilitarian value (Rintamäki, Kanto, Kuusela & Spence 2006, 20).

Today consuming forms a prominent and significant part of the social lives of many human beings (Gummesson et al. 2014, 231). People base their societal identity more and more on their consumptive role (Wirtz, den Ambtman, Bloemer, Horváth, Ramaseshan, van de Klundert, Canli & Kandampully 2013, 223). Individuals are more and more independent but at the same time increasingly more alone and therefore in desperate need for communality and togetherness (Cova 1997, 299). This great desire for cohesion,

fellowship and belonging provides a myriad of possibilities for business players, not least for suppliers. By advocating, enabling and facilitating the communal aspects of consumption, suppliers respond to consumers' growing need for communal spirit. By doing so, suppliers can achieve sustainable, superior competitive advantages.

As pointed out in several studies in the past decades consumption communities are not seen as utterly tumultuous and disordered, but as comprehensible entities that indicate consistency (Canniford 2011, 593). Consumption communities are nowadays generally recognized as vital elements of the 2010s' marketing environment. Accumulating understanding of them can thus provide useful understanding that can be put into practice (Canniford 2011, 591-593). Previous literature thus strongly supports the view that if suppliers are able to harness communal consumption to support their own interests and objectives, they benefit from the situation commercially. One of the most effective ways to do that is to deliberately and systematically manage the consumption communities that center on the supplier's business and offering. Through cooperation and communication with consumers suppliers can direct the development of consumption communities to their own advantage (Goulding et al. 2013).

2.1.1 The complex conceptualization of communal consumption constructs

In former times the word *community* simply referred to a rural location (Muñiz & O'Guinn 2001, 413) or to a small, homogenous group of people bounded by family ties and emotional bonds (Tönnies 1887 in Thomas, Price & Schau 2013, 1011). Later its definition extended far beyond its original, primal meaning; the word community was started to be used to describe mutual understanding of a shared identity (Muñiz & O'Guinn 2001, 413). Nowadays community is a central construct of social thinking (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001, 412), and also an increasingly important element of modern markets. Muñiz & O'Guinn (2001) list three key commonalities that define a community: the sense of belonging, shared rituals and traditions, and moral responsibility. At the present time, these criteria of identifying communities are considered inadequate. Currently, consumption communities are often seen as heterogeneous social networks that express communality in more manifold and diverse ways (Närvänen et al. 2014; Thomas et al. 2013).

Recent studies acknowledge the stable role communal consumption constructs have in marketing (Cova & Pace 2006, 1088). Yet, researchers are in dispute over the exact conceptualization of consumption communities in marketing theory. There is no consensus amongst researchers on how to refer to the social constructs people form around consumption. A large variety of concepts has been suggested, including brand communities, consumption subcultures, consumer tribes, consumption collectives and consumer communities. Despite the fact that all these concepts have their subtle nuances, using them concurrently or in an overlapping manner makes creating macro level understanding of such groupings extremely difficult (Thomas et al. 2013, 1012). Moreover, marketing researchers often make a clear distinction between communities operating in online and offline environments. Consequently, also the concepts of traditional communities, online communities, virtual communities and imagined communities have been introduced (Kozinets 1999), which has complicated the conceptualization even further.

Previous research typically categorizes consumption communities into three main subclasses, namely consumption subcultures, brand communities and consumption tribes (Canniford 2011; Cova & Cova 2002; Hur et al. 2011; Kurikko & Tuominen 2012; Muñiz & O'Guinn 2001; Schouten & McAlexander 1995; Weijo, Hietanen & Mattila 2014). This typology has, however, recently been strongly criticized (Canniford 2011, 603–604; Närvänen et al. 2014, 546–547; Thomas et al. 2013, 1010–1012). For instance Canniford (2011, 603) claims that this tripartite categorization is not applicable in all situations. He points out that even though each consumption community category has its own theoretical groundings, the categories are partly overlapping each other. Canniford emphasizes consumers' different interest and commitment levels as well as the dynamic, changing nature of consumption communities, and consequently states that the widely used typology is not static, distinct nor timeless.

Likewise, Närvänen and colleagues (2014) express their disapproval of the entrenched typology of consumption communities. They state that existing literature identifies four types of consumption communities; in addition to the three categories mentioned above it yields traditional communities. However, Närvänen and colleagues think this four-category classification pays too little attention to the heterogeneity, interrelatedness and instability of consumer communities. Thomas and colleagues (2013) similarly call for terminology that better and more clearly than before acknowledges the heterogeneity of

consumption centered communities. Thomas et al. (2013, 1012) note that the distinction between subcultures, brand communities and consumption tribes is not completely unambiguous. Hence, it is difficult, if not impossible, to generate congruent theoretical understanding of consumption communities as a whole.

Consequently, instead of using terminology derived from the traditional categorization, Närvänen et al. (2014), as well as Närvänen (2013), use the more general concept of *consumption collective*. According to them this hypernym can be subdivided into brand, activity, social relations, idea or place focused collectives. Thomas and colleagues (2013) also use a broader concept that covers all consumption centered assemblages. Instead of the aforementioned term of consumption collective they use the notion of *consumption community*, which they define in the following manner: “Consumption communities are comprised of consumers who share a commitment to a product class, brand, activity, or consumption ideology” (p. 1012). Based on their extensive literature review of approximately 100 consumption community related academic articles Thomas et al. (2013) state that consumption communities can theoretically be classified by assessing how they vary in certain dimensions. These ten dimensions are focus, duration, appeal, access, dispersion, marketplace orientation, structure of resource dependency, collective belonging and heterogeneity.

Forcing unique communities into strict topology-based categories is a procedure that has the disadvantage of oversimplifying the complex reality. Since the entrenched typology of consumption subcultures, brand communities and consumption tribes is nowadays so strongly called into question, it is not used to categorize the communities in the present study. Instead, the researcher uses a more general conceptualization that leaves room for diversity.

Unifying the terminology around collective consumption better acknowledges the heterogeneity and dynamicity of consumption communities. This is another reason why the more comprehensive notion of consumption community is used when referring to the consumption centered communities in the present discussion. *The consumption community* has become a well-established concept in the recent marketing literature supported not only by Thomas et al. (2013) but also by several other scholars. (see e.g. Cova 1997; Husemann 2012; Moraes, Carrigan & Szmigin 2012; Närvänen et al. 2013; Weijo et al. 2014). This is the primary reason why exactly this collocation is employed

in the present study instead of less established terms such as the before mentioned consumption collective. Moreover, the concept of the consumption community is found accurate as it “privileges consumers’ roles in communities but also implicitly acknowledges the role of producers, brands, products, and other resources” (Thomas et al. 2013, 1012). By contrast, using for example the term consumer community could be interpreted as misleading, since it underrates the involvement of other actors than consumers in such communities.

2.1.2 Network perspective to consumption communities

Recent studies considering collective consumption affirm that within many consumption communities there is actually evidence of emergence and existence of separate groups instead of one uniform and cohesive cluster. Even though these distinguishable groupings are interlinked via their connection to the same brand, ideology or activity, they are still somehow distinct. According to the most recent research also the heterogeneity of consumption communities has too often been ignored or at least underweighted in previous studies. In this context heterogeneity does not refer only to the dissimilarity of the people within one community, but also to the non-uniformity and high degree of diversity between separate communities in the network they form (Kates 2004; Närvänen et al. 2014; Thomas et al. 2013).

In response to these grievances, Närvänen and colleagues (2014) as well as Thomas and colleagues (2013) have presented a network perspective to collective consumption. They state that in order to respect the fragmentation and heterogeneousness of consumption communities enough, communities should actually be considered as collective consumption webs. These webs in turn consist of relationships between autonomous actors. Understanding consumption communities as networks better addresses the dynamic and complex nature of the communities deriving from their unsettled boundaries, manifold interactions and flat hierarchy. Thus, rather than speaking about one single, uniform community it is in many cases more appropriate to see consumption communities as networks which are formed by several collectives with different main focuses (Närvänen 2013; Närvänen et al. 2014). Närvänen and colleagues’ (2014, 545)

define consumption collective as a network formed by people, who create value through repetitive interaction and recurrent collective consumption.

The network perspective to community has a long history in science. For decades, the network approach to communities has been recognized in sociology (Granovetter 1973; Oliver 1988; Wellman 1979). This is why it is only natural that it is nowadays also employed in marketing research. Even though the network approach has only recently been more strongly emphasized in marketing research, it has emerged on a smaller scale in previous literature. For instance Kozinets (2002) talks about consumption *webs*, as well as Canniford (2011), who uses the word *network* repeatedly when describing consumer tribes. Because of the long historical roots of the network thinking and its popularity among marketing scholars today, the network perspective to consumption communities is adopted in this study.

As the network perspective to consumption communities concentrates on collaborative webs formed by the individuals, institutions, and resources (Thomas et al. 2013, 1027), it does not distinguish between communities operating in online or offline contexts. The perspective focuses on dependent social and economic resource exchanges and social relations between heterogeneous actors (Thomas et al. 2013; 1017) but does not set limits to where this exchange and bonding takes place. Consequently, in this thesis *the term consumption community is used when referring to a network of people sharing consumption practices and/or objects* (definition given by Närvänen 2013, 23), *regardless of whether the interaction takes place in online or/and offline context*. As this definition covers many kinds of consumption communities, a wide range of community research is used to provide the theoretical background to the present study. This means that in the boundaries of the researcher's preliminary understanding, previous literature focusing explicitly on consumption subcultures, brand communities, consumption tribes and other collective consumption constructs has all been used to explain the theoretical premises and conceptual connections of this study.

2.3 The role of the supplier in the consumption community

A supplier can be generally defined as “a party that supplies goods or services” (Business Dictionary 2013). In the marketing literature the term supplier has often been used when

referring to an actor that provides something, for instance physical resources, service facilities, memorable experiences or platforms for value creation (see Gummesson et al. 2014, 236), in return for investment of most typically money, but also time and effort of some other actor. In this study the term supplier refers to the actor that aims to promote the community in order to benefit from it commercially. The supplier can be an organization or correspondingly a private person or a group of individuals, and it can usually be characterized as a founder and/or a maintainer of the consumption community. If the supplier is an organization, such as a for-profit company, there is most often a certain person or a team responsible for the community management. The supplier frequently, even though not always, provides platforms for community interaction (Canniford 2011; Goulding et al. 2013) and in those situations usually has administrative power on these sites.

In order to understand how the supplier can manage consumption communities it is essential to comprehend what the role of the supplier is in relation to the community members. As the existing theory indicates, the roles of the supplier and the customer have changed substantially in recent decades (Gummesson et al. 2014; Payne et al. 2008; Quinton 2013). This naturally has a great impact on the position the supplier adopts within the consumption community. Närvänen and colleagues' (2014) investigation on consumption communities discloses that the role of the supplier is neither stable nor unaltered. They state that the suppliers can at times take the leading role, whereas on other occasions the most effective mode of operation for them is to stay in the background and simply observe how consumers lead the collective.

In the previous consumption community research the role of the supplier in the consumption community has often been determined as a supporter and enabler. The researcher's summary of previous literature reviewing the supplier's role is presented in Table 1. As Table 1 indicates, both Quinton (2013) and Fournier and Lee (2009) use the phrase "supporting facilitator" to describe the role of the supplier in the consumption community. Quinton (2013) emphasizes how the supplier should focus on exploring opportunities to make its brand the "glue" that connects consumers and keeps them together. Similarly, Fournier and Lee (2009) present that an effective supplier strategy would be to provide the supplier's brand as a hub that the consumers use to interact or access the offering. Correspondingly, Canniford (2011) sees that the appropriate role of the supplier is to be a fosterer and nurturer of the extended consumer role. Canniford also

accentuates the supplier's role in the production of linking value and states that the supplier should enter into symbiotic dialogue with consumers and provide platforms and paths for consumers to gather together.

Table 1. Literature review: The role of the supplier in the consumption community

<i>Source</i>	<i>The role of the supplier</i>
<i>Quinton 2013</i>	“A supporting facilitator” (p. 923) - Making the brand “glue” that links consumers
<i>Canniford 2011</i>	A fosterer and nurturer of the empowered consumer role (p. 603) - Co-producing the linking value - Participating symbiotic dialogue - Providing platforms and pathways for consumers to assemble
<i>Fournier & Lee 2009</i>	“A supporting facilitator” (p. 109) - Providing the brand as a hub through which consumers interact/access services
<i>Schau et al. 2009</i>	An encourager of co-creation (p. 41) - Enabling and advocating the realization of various value-creating practices
<i>Jang et al. 2008</i>	An opportunity provider (p. 75) - Providing physical places and financial support for offline activities - Cooperating with consumers
<i>Cova & Pace 2006</i>	“A non-intrusive enabler” (p. 1087) - Fostering consumers' personal expressions of the brand meaning

Schau et al. (2009) respectively argue that the most important role of the supplier is to enable and foster the realization of the following twelve value creating practices: welcoming, empathizing, governing, evangelizing, justifying, staking, milestoneing, badging, documenting, grooming, customizing and commoditizing. In their view, the marketer should strive to provide materials and opportunities for as many practices as possible, because practice diversity advances the market. Jang et al. (2008) see that the role of the supplier is to be an opportunity provider that supports the community's

activities by offering gathering places or financial assistance. They also state that the supplier could invite community members to visit their premises and to involve them in brand management and value-creation. In turn, Cova & Pace (2006) state that “the company’s role here is to facilitate this on-site self-exhibition by remaining as non-intrusive as possible” (p. 1101), referring to consumers’ practice of producing brand-related content in virtual environment.

As this literature review indicates, the role of the supplier is described to some extent similarly in many previous studies. Even though there are slight differences in the supplier’s tasks and responsibilities, the overall role is characterized almost identically. To conclude, the existing literature supports the view that adapting a facilitative and supportive role is the most appropriate and effective approach for the supplier. This facilitative role means that the supplier should focus on enabling actions and consumer empowerment.

2.4 The concept of management in the context of consumption communities

Previous studies of consumption communities point out that it is challenging to govern consumption communities, because they are so autonomous and self-directed by nature. Many researchers conversant with the consumption community investigation have emphasized how difficult it is to control and master these communities (see e.g. Cova & Cova 2002; Fournier & Lee 2009; Schau, Muñiz & Arnould 2009). For instance Fournier and Lee (2009, 110) pointedly state that “of and by the people, communities defy managerial control”. According to them consumption communities are not assets or resources owned by suppliers, which is why control over them is a pure fallacy. Also Cova and Cova (2002) support the idea of communities resisting managerial control and the authoritarian role of the supplier. They stress that collective consumption taking place in social networks shifts power and control from the company to the market and consumers. Jang et al. (2008) likewise state that if suppliers are too enthusiastic to sponsor the community, community members may get less spontaneous and less active because they do not have the initiative.

However, Fournier and Lee (2009) emphasize that the transition of comprehensive control away from the supplier does not mean that suppliers lose all responsibility. As pointed out earlier, communal consumption is an increasingly important consumption pattern and form of consumer behavior. Therefore the issue of how to manage communal activities has become focal in both academic and practical discussion. Suppliers, with potential benefits in mind, should eagerly aim to contribute to the establishment of consumption communities. What should encourage suppliers even more is the example of suppliers that have achieved success in the markets through consumption communities. Hence, settling to an onlooker's role is clearly not an option for the supplier.

As consumer communities are relatively self-governing consumer groupings that escape from managerial authority or even offer opposition to authoritarian control (Cova & Pace 2006; Goulding et al. 2013; Kozinets 2002), the supplier must find other ways than policing to deal with them. According to Fournier and Lee (2009, 111) effective marketers contribute to a community's content creation by facilitating and supporting the emergence of favorable circumstances for the community to grow and thrive. Fournier and Lee go on to state that suppliers can build efficient and successful consumption communities by applying a design philosophy that replaces control with an equilibrium of structure and flexibility. They think that instead of aiming to control the community, the supplier should rather be directed by it. Similarly, Schau et al. (2009, 40) argue that delegating control to consumers enhances their commitment and boosts brand equity. This is why companies should make it possible for consumers to implement practices that create value within consumption communities.

Also Cova and Cova (2002) support the view that suppliers should adopt a new perspective on influencing consumption communities. They believe that modern consumers increasingly oppose market logics and corporate interests. For that reason, members of consumption communities should be treated as equal partners in both commercial and non-commercial functions. This approach enables suppliers to break down barriers between society and marketplace and benefit from the consumers' competences and experiences which serve common community interests. In order to build and maintain strong consumption communities suppliers must therefore understand members' personal and social needs and to do everything possible to support their self-motivated engagement to the community (Fournier & Lee 2009, 106). Abandoning obsolete and outdated modes of operations and replacing them with novel consumer-

oriented approaches can therefore help suppliers to produce added value to their companies. Relinquishing control and changing the focus from dominating to building equal partnerships with consumers will take the business forward.

Management is generally understood as planning, organizing, leading and controlling (Tsoukas 1994). Some of these traditional management functions can only be implemented if hierarchical power relations exist; for instance outright controlling is not usually possible in a context where activities are based purely on trust and cooperation between equal actors. These concepts are very well established and rooted in the field of management, which is why some scholars go as far as to claim that management can consist of these concepts only and reject all alternatives. Consequently, many scholars argue that facilitative activity aiming at influence other actors' perceptions and behavior is "networking" rather than "management" (Järvensivu & Möller 2009, 657).

However, for example Järvensivu and Möller (2009, 657) declare that from the business management's point of view the actual management operations remain the same in all governance types. They state that it does not make a difference whether the influencing power is achieved through trust-based negotiation (as it is in consumption communities) or respectively through given authority (as it is in for example traditional hierarchical organizations), because eventually in both situations the ultimate goal of all influencing activity is value-creation. In essence, managing is all about the organization of value creation that happens through interaction of various actors, resources and activities (Håkansson & Snehota 1995; Järvensivu & Möller 2009, 657; Parolini 1999).

There are also many community studies that support the idea that facilitative and enabling operation can be called management in the context of consumption communities. For instance Cova and Pace (2006) use the word management in their work on a brand community of convenience products. Similarly, also both Fournier and Lee (2009) and Boon, Pitt and Salehi-Sangari (2015) talk about management when referring to the supplier's facilitative activity in the community. Likewise, Sibai, de Valck, Farrell and Rudd (2015) employ the concept of management in the community context and even present a framework for community management. Also Canniford (2011) favors the usage of the word management in the context of consumption communities. Even though the words "foster", "facilitate" and "seed" are in constant use in his study focusing on consumer tribes, the work is still titled as "How to *manage* consumer tribes". Canniford

states that “tribes cannot be managed through traditional means” (p. 603), yet it does not mean that consumption communities could not be led at all. It just indicates that in the context of low-hierarchical communities, the concept of management is used to refer to non-conventional, facilitative actions. As Canniford’s citation declares, in the context of consumption communities management cannot be understood conventionally as authoritarian power manifestations, but if hierarchy and control are excluded from the definition of the term management, it may be used in connection with consumption communities. Due to these arguments, in this thesis the word *management* is used when referring to the actions through which the supplier aims to influence, foster and promote the community.

2.5 Supplier’s means to manage consumption communities

Previous studies have intensely examined for instance the social practices taking place in consumption communities (Dinhopl, Gretzel & Whelan 2015; Närvänen et al. 2013; Schau et al. 2009) and the features of various marketplace communities (Cova & Pace 2006; Muñiz & O’Guinn 2001; Schau & Muñiz 2006). However, the issue of community management has not received as much research attention as it deserves. As mentioned, the prior consumption community management research mainly focused on emphasizing the challenging nature of this management instead of examining how the supplier can actually, for example through some concrete managerial actions, manage the community.

Nonetheless, some rare scholars have strived to answer the thought-provoking question regarding the practical community management. For example Goulding and colleagues (2013) as well as Canniford (2011) have recently studied the subject. However, their focus has been merely on consumption tribes. Yet much less research work has been done on consumption communities that lack the features of tribes, namely those of multiplicity, playfulness, temporariness and entrepreneurialism, as defined by Goulding et al. (2013, 815–816).

Also Sibai et al. (2015) have dwelled into the theme of community management by presenting a social-control based framework for community management. They identify several moderation practices executed during interactions through which specific goals of functions can be achieved. They also classify these practices according to different

governance structures (these being market, hierarchy, and clan) and different purposes (interaction initiation, maintenance, and termination). However, their work focuses on online communities of consumption and thus excludes consumption communities operating also or solely in offline environment. Moreover, Sibai and colleagues strongly concentrate on conceptualization. They identify important areas of future research instead of concentrating solely on producing concrete practical contribution. In addition, even though the article written by Sibai et al. (2015) also offers managerial implications, it does not examine the phenomenon of community management exclusively from the supplier's point of view.

Boon et al. (2015) have studied information sharing management in the context of consumption communities. However, they have dealt only with online communities and marketplaces. Hence they leave offline communities and hybrid communities (that operate in both online and offline environments) out from their research scope. This is a substantial limitation because many communities that operate mainly in online context still have at least some hybrid features and operations and thus cannot be categorized as pure online communities (Thomas et al. 2013).

As this brief literature review indicates, the supplier perspective has clearly been neglected in previous research. Therefore there is inadequate understanding of how the suppliers actually aim to manage the communities. This leads to the conclusion that research on the supplier approach to consumption community management is urgently needed on a theoretical as well as on a pragmatic level.

3 CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH

3.1 Research method and philosophy

This study is purely qualitative in nature. Even though there are scholars who find that quantitative methods are the only way to “take marketing from art to science” by providing exact facts instead of reasoned assumptions (Saunders 1999, 85), the significance of qualitative research within the marketing discipline is widely recognized. As Gummesson (2005, 310) states “quantitative methods cannot achieve scientific excellence without a clear awareness of their qualitative dependency”. Hence, to make marketing a relevant and respected field of study to all stakeholders, also cognitive and emotional abilities have to be utilized in research.

Qualitative researches, as well as quantitative research designs, include several views based on different ontological, epistemological and methodological premises. These diverse views can be positioned on a continuum whose opposite ends are realism and relativism (Järvensivu & Törnroos 2010, 100). This thesis adopts the moderate constructionism approach, which is located close to the relativism end on this continuum, but includes certain realism features as well. Hence, the ontological premise prevailing in this study is that the reality may exist, at least to the extent that local, occasional truth claims can apply. Correspondingly the epistemological presumption is that it is possible to gather understanding of these local truths by creating community-based knowledge (Järvensivu & Törnroos 2010, 101). The aim of the research is thus to generate new and useful knowledge that takes into account several perspectives of the truth (Easton 2002; Järvensivu & Törnroos 2010; Lincoln & Guba 2000). According to this approach the research should endeavor finding local, socially constructed forms of truth that are produced and strengthened via interaction taking place in various communities. This particular philosophy of science is espoused in this study because Järvensivu and Törnroos (2010, 100) argue that moderate constructionism better acknowledges “the multiple constructed, community-bounded realities” that all qualitative studies inevitably deal with” compared to for example strictly realist and relativist approaches. Another

reason for supporting this particular research philosophy is, that in the view of moderate constructionism the research process can be described abductive (Järvensivu & Törnroos 2010), which is also the case in this study (the abductive research approach will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3.2.).

In moderate constructionism the role of the researcher is significant. The researcher is seen as a human actor with his or her own mindset and schemas. As the data are created in a constructivist process in which the researcher interacts with the informants, the researcher inevitably contributes to the formation of the data. Therefore it is more accurate to refer to data generation instead of data collection. The moderate constructionism approach also acknowledges that in addition to empirical observations also interpretation made by the researcher is unavoidably bounded by subjectivity. Moreover, when also the informants are bounded by their personal emotions, opinions and views, the research process can never be nor never even seeks to be fully free from subjectivity (Järvensivu and Törnroos 2010, 100).

3.3 The abductive reserach approach

According to Järvensivu and Törnroos (2010) abduction is a suitable research process for studies that rely on moderate constructionism. The abductive research approach includes elements of both induction and deduction. In a deductive research process the focus is on theory testing as predetermined hypotheses are tried out empirically. In turn, inductive research focuses on theory generation as new theory is derived solely from empirical data without any connections to the existing theory. The abductive logic follows deduction in a sense that it acknowledges and exploits the existing theory. On the other hand, it leaves plenty of space to data-driven theory generation and thus also draws from the inductive research approach.

The researcher using abductive research logic incessantly alternates between various research activities instead of implementing research phases strictly in a chronological, progressive order. This means that for example analysis and interpretation are often carried out at least partly simultaneously. The researcher advocating abduction also swimmingly shifts from empirical data to theory and back again in order to generate

dialogue between these two assets. Thus, the abductive approach results in a deeper understanding of the studied phenomenon on both theoretical and empirical levels (Dubois & Gadde 2002).

This study applies the abductive research logic because the researcher wanted to put much emphasis on the empirical data in order to give a lot of room for themes emerging from the self-generated material. Due to the scarcity of research in the area of consumption community management from the supplier perspective, the researcher did not want to commit to any specific model or framework before generating and analyzing the empirical data. Even though any predetermined hypotheses or framework were not tested, the existing theory was strongly present when interpreting the self-generated material; the researcher used the existing theory to acquire sufficient background information about the collective consumption phenomenon before conducting the interviews. The researcher's reflections were also supported or at least explained in relation to prior research. The aim of this familiarization was to be more prepared to pay attention to the most significant and meaningful themes that aroused from the empirical material.

3.3 Data generation and analysis

Data generation

The primary data generation method used in this study is the depth interview, which together with observation also forms the core data collection methods in qualitative research in general. In the depth interview the aim is not just to survey the informant's knowledge on a superficial level, but to gather deep understanding of a certain topic or behavior, which is why it was chosen here. Therefore depth interviews are typically fairly long-lasting occasions, with durations of normally approximately an hour or even slightly longer (Belk, Fischer & Kozinets 2013, 31).

The researcher considered it necessary to prepare some questions in advance in order to make sure that themes that in the literature review proved essential were dealt with in the interviews. The communities in question were rather dissimilar in regard to their main focus, general nature and stage of development, which is why the researcher saw it necessary to customize the interview questions separately to suit each one of the

interviewed supplier representatives. However, despite the question customization, the question frame was not followed slavishly in the interview. Instead, the informants were let to speak rather freely on topics that they personally regarded as significant and essential in relation to community management.

Altogether five people who were responsible for dealing with the consumption communities in their companies were interviewed. The first two interviewees represented Reino & Aino Kotikenkä Oy, and they were interviewed simultaneously. One of the interviewees was the CEO and one of the two owners of the company, who is in the text referred to as *R&A 1*. The other person was the other owner of the firm, who is in the text referred to as *R&A 2*. In the second interview the two founders of Tikis, Managing Director (later in text *Tikis 1*) and the Sales Director (later in text *Tikis 2*) of Muscle Up Media (the organization behind Tikis) were interviewed individually. The last interviewee was Digital Marketing & Consumer Community Manager of Fiskars Home Oy Ab (later in text *Iittala 1*), who was responsible for the community matters in Iittala brand area. The first two interviews had roughly the same duration and resulted in 215 minutes of recorded material. The third interview lasted 70 minutes so the overall length of the recordings was four hours and 45 minutes.

All five interviewees were considered as experts in managing consumption communities as they were responsible for developing and maintaining the vital communities in the companies employing them. They all also had a significant role in the establishment of the communities they advocated. In order to efficiently explore how suppliers can manage consumption communities the interviewees were asked questions about their concrete actions as well as about their thoughts and reflections. However, to enable the emergence of the richest empirical data possible the interviewees were allowed to speak rather freely on topics that they saw as essential for shedding light on the subject.

In addition to the interviews, the study also utilizes other data sources. Primary data generated via face-to-face interaction was complemented by observing the communities' online activity. Background information was gathered using sources available in the internet (for example on the suppliers' home sites or the communities' Facebook pages) and existing literature such as various articles and publications made by the companies. The researcher prepared herself for the interviews by using information from the internet and written sources to help the question layout. Additional data generation was seen

necessary to acquire sufficiently comprehensive background information, because the researcher, as well as the reader of the thesis, can only understand the management possibilities if case histories and influential background factors are known well enough.

Data analysis

The data was analyzed by using thematic analysis. Interview recordings were first transcribed in English (the interviews were originally conducted in Finnish) and then coded by highlighting text sections concerning similar subjects with the same colors. After coding the text, sections marked with the same color were gathered together and inspected carefully to identify the themes they epitomize. After identifying the most salient themes (that were in this case actions) they were refined and pieced together in order to determine what broader (action) categories they constructed. Then these actions were qualified by examining the existing literature for support and confirmation. Because the purpose of the study was to be open also for themes that were not noted in the prior studies, also actions that did not find direct affirmation in the existing literature were included in the results of the analysis if they were frequent in the data to a significant extent.

Next, a more extensive interpretation of the actions implemented by the suppliers was conducted and appropriate quotes were selected to verify the researcher's interpretation. As mentioned above, the interview citations were translated by the researcher. Under the circumstances, the researcher aimed to preserve the linguistic style, such as the use of colloquial language, while translating the interviews in order not to interfere with their authenticity.

3.4 The post-review seminar

After analyzing the data generated in the depth interviews the findings were surveyed in a post-review seminar. Töytäri, Rajala and Alejandro (2015), who also used the procedure of data analysis' group review in their research, state that noticing multiple views instead of relying on insights of just one person is regarded as a more reliable approach. Accordingly, the objective of the debriefing was to verify the researcher's interpretations

by presenting the findings to an expert panel and utilizing their insights into presented themes. In addition, the post-review seminar also aimed to enrich the data and ensure its saturation.

The participants of the post-review seminar were six experts who all had significant knowledge and years of experience of consumption communities due to their professional statuses. Experts 1, 2 and 3 had gained consumption community expertise in the business world, while Experts 4, 5 and 6 had primarily acquired understanding of the topic within the academic community. Thus, both practical and academic standpoints were equally represented in the panel discussion that lasted for approximately 1,5 hours.

At the beginning of the seminar the expert panelists were instructed to frankly and without reserve to express their views and advocate or question the presented action categories as well as their sub-themes. The actual seminar proceeded as follows. First the researcher introduced one category at a time using PowerPoint presentation. After that, the panelists discussed the presented theme relatively freely before moving on to the presentation of the next action category. Even though the panelists were allowed to dig into topics that they felt most important, the researcher also participated in the discussion by asking questions and responding to the questions raised by the experts. The purpose of the researcher's relatively minor participation was to stimulate the debate without excessively affecting its progress.

Overall, the expert panelists shared the opinion that the identified actions and action categories were accurate, reasonable and representative. They agreed that the disclosed results reflected well the reality as they perceived it. Even though some of the action categories were questioned at first, at the end of the discussion they were all approved and endorsed. The post-review seminar significantly strengthened and enriched the empirical data as the expert panelists raised some aspects that had gone unnoticed in the actual analysis phase. Many of these considerations were therefore included in chapter 4 concerning the supplier's facilitative role and management actions. As the final step of the research process, the researcher combined the major findings derived from the interview analysis and the post review seminar, and created a holistic framework for community management from the supplier perspective.



Figure 1. The research process progress

To conclude, the actual research process included six major stages; 1) the creation of preliminary understanding by exploring the existing literature, 2) the depth interviews, 3) thematic analysis of the data obtained in the interviews, 4) the search for verification of the identified actions from existing literature, 5) a post- review seminar, and finally 6) the assemblage of the final framework. Figure 1 depicts a simplified presentation of how the research process progressed.

3.5 The communities in question

This study builds upon the depth interviews of five supplier representatives of three consumption communities. In order to better understand the empirical evidence and the researcher's interpretation, it is necessary to be familiar with the communities which the interviewed supplier representatives manage. Therefore the communities are now briefly introduced one by one.

The first community is built around Reino & Aino brand, which produces footwear. The brand is widely known in Finland, as the first Aino slippers were produced already 85 years ago (Reino & Aino Kotikenkä Oy 2011a, 2011b; Roavvoaivi Oy 2015). The turnover of Reino & Aino Kotikenkä Oy was in 2014 1,63 million euros (Taloussanomat 2015). Reino & Aino community is clearly the most incoherent one of the three communities presented in this study, as it includes separate groupings that do not necessarily have any contact between each other.

The second community of this study, Tikis, is a community that provides tips and information about sporty lifestyle. The main purpose of the community is to advocate a healthy, athletic way of life by motivating people with inspiring content and events

(Muscle Up Media 2015). Tikis has almost 47 000 likers on Facebook (Facebook 2015a) and more than 19 000 followers on Instagram (Instagram 2015a).

The third consumption community is that of Iittala. Iittala is a famous Finnish tableware and cookware design brand. Iittala Group belongs to the Fiskars Group, which is Finland's oldest company. Iittala Group is the auxiliary business name of Fiskars Home Oy Ab, a firm with 166,2 million euro turnover and 825 employees in 2013 (Fiskars Home 2015). Iittala has 175 000 likers on Facebook (Facebook 2015b) and over 30 000 fans on Instagram (Instagram 2015b).

To conclude, the biggest differences between these three communities emerge in their main focuses. The Reino & Aino community is formed by many separate subgroups, which center on various things. Some of them are clearly activity oriented (such as assemblages organizing football and ice hockey tournaments) whereas others are more brand focused (for instance the actual slipper fan groupings). Even though Tikis at first seems to center on sporty activity, it can after closer inspection be entitled as a chiefly ideology focused community as it is not concerned with any specific form of exercise, but on positive, motivating healthy life -ideology instead (also the interviewee *Tikis I* endorsed this view by stating: "I personally see this Tikis thing as much deeper thing than just some specific sport. To me it is kind of way of life."). The Iittala community, on the other hand, can be defined as a community mainly concentrating on the brand. Even though Iittala as a brand represents also interior design activity and sustainable Scandinavian ideology, what most strongly links the community members is the fondness for the Iittala products. These major differences between communities in question bring added value to this study by creating greater tension to the research. The disparity of the three communities also underscores the diversity and heterogeneity that strongly characterize consumption communities, and thus supports the use of the broad consumption community concept.

4 CONSUMPTION COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT FROM THE SUPPLIER'S PERSPECTIVE

4.1 The supplier's role as a facilitator

As was pointed out before, previous research strongly emphasizes that aiming to control communities is not an effective mode of operation when it comes to collective consumption (Canniford 2011; Cova & Cova 2002; Fournier & Lee 2009; Jang et al. 2008; Schau et al. 2009). All interviewees clearly endorsed this opinion. Although the suppliers described their role in the community in different words, they were all unanimous that this role was *not* that of a controller or a commander. Without exception, the interviewees all agreed that consumers would react negatively if the supplier directly tried to regulate or dominate their behavior excessively.

It [immediate controlling] is not possible in any way. Too much patronizing just annoys people. (R&A 1)

Direct controlling is difficult. Like if you would want all the Tikis members to do something, I don't think you could do that. The community kind of lives its own life in a sense. -- But what you can do instead is to offer a stimulus to them about what they could do in the community and then they tell you if it is a good thing or not. It is an intriguing symbiosis. (Tikis 1)

We absolutely do not want to do that [give direct commands]. -- Above all we want to be friends with the consumer. (Iittala 1)

All the interviewed community suppliers shared the view that the community was a fairly autonomous and self-governing entity that operated outside the suppliers' direct control. Nevertheless, they admitted having a special, recognized standing in the community that distinguished them from other community members. As suggested by the comments of Tikis and Iittala community suppliers, the consumers held them in high esteem. This appreciation was reflected in the consumers' behavior: not only did they give straight feedback, but they also indicated their respect, approval and admiration by imitating and copying the supplier's posts in social media.

If a young fella asks something about training and gets an answer from Tikis, the answer itself may mean more to him or her than the actual information given. It is also like ‘damn yeah, Tikis replied to me or Tikis liked my comment’ or something. In those situations you can notice that you have succeeded in creating a brand. (Tikis 1)

It is a funny phenomenon that when we posted this picture [photo of Iittala’s dessert bowl filled with strawberry curd to Instagram] there were approximately five similar posts in a few days. I mean photos with the same bowl and the same idea. It is an intriguing Instagram effect that is happening. (Iittala 1)

In accordance with Närvänen and colleagues’ (2014) opinion all the informants believed that the role of the supplier changed according to the situation. In all cases the suppliers found it rather difficult to articulate their role within the community unambiguously.

We are like a good friend to our business partners and to the athletes [appearing on Tikis’ videos and photos]. But at the same time we also have great relations to our customers. We are a channel that connects those two parties. (Tikis 2)

I would describe our role in the community as an entrepreneur. We are trying enthusiastically to do everything you can imagine; we play football or do whatever it takes. (R&A 1)

We are a moderator, yes. And a controller in a sense as well. -- But a curator is the role we aim to have in the future. -- There is an enormous amount of content and material out there so we have to curate the most interesting matters to our consumers. Then the task of the consumer is to trust that what we bring to him or her is intriguing. Please notice that I am now talking about the future scenario when we already have the [forthcoming] Myiittala page. Then we curate the best bits out of all that huge information overload. (Iittala 1)

Interviewees’ narratives revealed that over time the community suppliers as individuals achieved a kind of a celebrity status among community members, which strengthened the suppliers’ influential position. Participating consumers were eager to see the interviewed suppliers “in real life”. This phenomena is also indicated in the previous community literature: McAlexander et al. (2002, 51) note consumers’ strong desire to “meet with the previously faceless and nameless people behind the brand”. For example Iittala’s supplier told that community members really enjoyed meeting Iittala’s employees in events organized by the supplier. Also the Tikis’ supplier confirms the celebrity trend exists:

We don’t feel like we are celebrities or anything like that but it seems like some consumers think that way. (Tikis 2)

Community interaction often took place on platforms that suppliers' policed, such as on company's official social media sites, just as Canniford (2011) and Goulding et al. (2013) stated. Even though the suppliers were not capable of directly controlling community members as individuals, they were still able to administer their own publication channels that were forums for intra-community discussion. Individual consumers' admiration and respect towards community suppliers together with this administrative power gave them a certain position of authority in relation to consumers. Due to this recognized standing suppliers' exercised influence over the community members' actions.

If there [on Iittala's social media page] is some inappropriate message which includes mocking and swearing so of course we have to delete it. It is about a general code of conduct that tells you what you can say and what you cannot say. (Iittala 1)

People are still gregarious animals to some extent. -- What has surprised me is that every time you tell people to tag their friends, many of them do that. Or if you ask them to share something, many of them do. If you don't ask them to tag or share, people usually don't take the initiative. Often when you use the imperative mood, even if it sounds a bit rough to you, it usually works. I mean that people often behave according to your wishes. In that way you can influence people quite a lot. (Tikis 2)

The interviewees all shared Fournier and Lee's (2009) view that pursuing direct controlling and commanding power was contrary to the purpose. However, the informants strongly believed that the suppliers should aim to affect community activity by other gentler means. Thus, being merely a passive observer was not seen enough, as the informants thought that the supplier could play more active role of a contributor. The interviewees thought that the most efficient way was to abdicate authoritarian control and make use of the suppliers' recognized standings and the influencing power that came with it. Just like Fournier and Lee (2009) and Schau and colleagues (2009), also the informants of this study saw creating favourable conditions and supporting the community as the supplier's most useful ways of action.

Supporting the communities is the most important thing. It is all about balancing; if you try to influence community activities too much it can easily cause a counter reaction. (R&A 2)

Adopting a supportive approach was in the existing theory favored also by Cova and Pace (2006, 1087), who state that the supplier "should play the role of non-intrusive enabler"

which does not include supervision over community-related brand meanings. Consequently, based on the empirical evidence and the affirmation derived from the previous literature, the role of the supplier in the context of consumption communities can be defined briefly as a facilitator.

4.2 The supplier's management actions as a facilitator

As the preceding chapter discloses, the interviews suggested that the informants firmly believed that the supplier could affect collective activity in a positive manner through its own actions. The comments and narratives of the informants indicated that the suppliers could manage community activity in their facilitator role by implementing various actions that can be divided into six main categories. These actions and their categories derived purely from the empirical data are presented in Table 2. All actions are presented together with the examples of how they manifest themselves concretely in the interview data. The aim of the examples is to clarify the analysis and make it more transparent.

Table 2. Supplier's community management actions and categories they form

CONCRETE EXAMPLES FROM EMPIRICAL DATA	ACTIONS	ACTION CATEGORIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Determining the community focus</i> - <i>Recognizing underlying values of the supplier</i> - <i>Aligning all supplier's actions and supply with the guiding principles</i> 	Creating guiding principles	DIFFERENTIATING THE COMMUNITY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Fostering innovation, creativity and experimentalism</i> 	Striving to be distinctive	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Multi-channeling</i> - <i>Organizing face-to-face events</i> 	Providing platforms and paths	ACHIEVING A STRONG PRESENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Continuously creating new content</i> - <i>Participating events actively</i> - <i>Achieving free visibility through consumer-driven marketing, famous endorsers and CSR</i> 	Attaining active and wide visibility in both online and offline environments	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Providing relevant high-quality content</i> - <i>Being responsive and interactive</i> 	Motivating consumer participation	INVOLVING CONSUMERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Providing opportunities for consumer-generated content</i> - <i>Fostering intragroup discussion</i> - <i>Inviting consumers to events</i> - <i>Being open to consumers' initiatives</i> 	Enabling consumer participation	

- <i>Diversifying content and supply</i>	Expanding the membership	RESPECTING HETEROGENEITY
- <i>Targeting content and supply for specific consumer groups</i> - <i>Adjusting the communication style</i> - <i>Enabling customizing</i>	Noting intragroup diversity	
- <i>Setting furthering own commercial interests and direct profit-making as a secondary objective</i> - <i>Providing community services without seeking direct profit</i>	Concealing the supplier's economic interests	BALANCING THE INTERESTS OF THE SUPPLIER AND THE CONSUMER
- <i>Minimizing consumers' financial sacrifice by keeping participation and services affordable</i> - <i>Rewarding consumers with financial benefits</i>	Promoting consumers' interests	
- <i>Reorganizing successful events</i> - <i>Establishing daily and weekly activities</i>	Creating community rituals and traditions	ASSURING CONTINUITY OF THE COMMUNITY
- <i>Appointing the person in charge of community management within the organization</i> - <i>Integrating community strategy to the supplier's business strategy</i>	Addressing the strategic importance of the community	

In the following chapter, the actions and the action categories presented above are reviewed and explained in more detail. According to the researcher's interpretation all action categories are equally important but in order to maintain consistency they are next explored in the same order as they are presented in Table 2.

4.2.1 Differentiating the community

Muñiz and Schau (2011, 213) state that when the supplier aims to involve consumers in the community activity to a large extent, some kind of "governing architecture" is necessary. They explain that the purpose of this architecture is to indicate the prevailing behavioral norms and expectations (see also Schau et al. 2009). As the supplier interviews revealed, this governing architecture existed in the communities, and in all cases it consisted of the community values and the communities' fundamental reason for their existence. The interviewees brought up that in order to build and maintain an effective consumption community where the consumers actively participate it was crucial for the supplier to have a clear view on the focus and underlying values which direct all supplier activity. The existence of guiding principles simplifies decision making and thus reduces

impulsivity (Challagalla, Murtha & Jaworski 2014). Therefore, in addition to making consumers aware of behavioral expectations, clear focus and values also made the community distinctive by coordinating the supplier's operation and ensuring supply consistency. Thus, the ultimate goal behind acting in compliance with a certain set of characterizing values was to guide consumer participation to in a favorable direction and to maintain the supplier's and hence also the community's credibility. Without a clear understanding about the core of the community and the underlying values the supplier's actions could easily become inconsistent, which would lead to a lack of stability and originality. The lack of governing architecture highlighted by Muñiz and Schau (2011, 213) would also blur the boundaries of desired and undesired consumer behavior and consequently guide the community in (from the supplier's point of view) unwanted or even harmful directions.

As discussed earlier, determining what the community is built around is not always unambiguous. Different intergroups within one community can have divergent emphasis on their underlying focuses. Only if the supplier recognized what the core of the community was, it was capable of comprehending the fundamental reason for the consumers' willingness to participate in community activities. As disclosed in chapter 3.5 there were several separate communities with different focuses within the Reino and Aino community. Some of them were built around a certain activity while others were more brand-centralized. So, whereas the Tikis community was interpreted to be based on the athletic and healthy feel-good ideology, Iittala could be seen as a primarily brand-focused community.

As important as it was for the supplier to identify the focus of the community, it was to recognize the underlying values that the community was desired to represent. Also Husemann (2012) recognizes the existence of community values in the context of consumption communities and underlines the importance of staying true to them. In the case of Reino & Aino these values were company-wide, stated and officially expressed by the management. They include domesticity ("Finnishness"), warmth, joy and renewal. According to R&A 1 and R&A 2 respecting these values was extremely important. The community suppliers were for example determined to construct and strengthen the national label of the Reino & Aino brand because they found out that many community members regarded domesticity as one of the biggest reasons for their commitment to the brand and the communities around it.

These last years we have been working hard to follow these values. -- When we bought the Reino and Aino brand we for example made the decision to move the production back to Finland because one of our core values is being Finnish. (R&A 1)

The underlying values also characterized all Reino & Aino community events. For instance the value of joy was clearly one of the key factors in the communities' gatherings.

From my point of view all of these happenings are fun. That is what they have in common. (R&A 1)

As Iittala's communities were focused on the brand, the values that characterized the community were naturally in close relation to the brand itself. What made Iittala's community distinctive was that it mirrored fresh yet enduring Nordic design.

Iittala is all about Scandinavian lifestyle. -- Iittala as a brand definitely has a good self-confidence. And then we are more like forerunners than followers lagging behind. If I think about the cornerstones of the Iittala brand, one is definitely some kind of timelessness. (Iittala 1)

The intrinsic nature that characterizes not only the brand, but also the community, was reflected in all actions and reactions of Iittala's community supplier. Moreover, the values that defined the brand were significant in the way the supplier communicated with the consumption community members.

We want to activate consumers but at the same time be careful with excessive asking and pleading, like do this do that. -- That would modify our brand in a totally wrong direction. Because then we would be more in a situation where we lose our confident position. (Iittala 1)

We should aim to communicate in all our medias that our products are made to last and that they are not only for this moment and just a one transient trend among others. (Iittala 1)

Also other than publicly expressed brand-related values influenced the formation of values that made the community distinctive. In the Iittala community activating was also strongly guided by the values based on tacit knowledge and the customer-oriented organizational culture of the corporation.

What guides me in my job [as Community and Digital Media Manager] is the idea of good customer service. -- The customer experience is a driver that conducts us the most; we have to be honest and open at all times and also answer in time and keep our promises. (Iittala 1)

Like other interviewees, also Tikis' founders mentioned values that made the community special by guiding what kind of content and events the suppliers provided. According to *Tikis 1* and *Tikis 2* all publications made by Tikis should have been reflecting good spirit and a cheerful attitude. In addition, the founders' own passion for sports and well-being was a determining driving force behind their actions. The founders strongly felt they were fulfilling their own vocation and passion for sports through Tikis, and therefore wanted to encourage and motivate people who shared the same inner ambition with them.

In our web site we have opened up what Tikis is all about; that you should do things that you enjoy and find your own passion. And also the positive feeling and encouraging and that after all you have to have goals in life. So that if you want to achieve something you have to work for it. -- And one Tikis-like value is that you have to enjoy your journey to your goals. It describes this whole thing well. (Tikis 1)

In all cases respecting the supplier's distinctive values was also reflected in the choice of business partners. Working together was only considered feasible if the prospective partner shared at least most of the suppliers' values. This meant that if the values represented by a company or a person wanting to collaborate conflicted with the views of the supplier, the cooperation offer was refused.

We have certain policies so that we will not promote McDonald's. -- Our values have to match with those who we work with. (Tikis 1)

Also the post-reviewers saw the existence of community values as very important. The expert panel members noted that the values the community represented actually attracted people who shared the same perceptions, reducing the need for interfering managing.

Pointedly said, if everyone shares the same values there is not much need for any other kind of management. -- Of course in reality it never goes like this. Probably the challenge is related to it how much those values can be harmonized in respect of both the community's firm and the customer base. (Expert 2)

The focus of the community together with the values that it represented formed the guiding principles that harmonized the supplier's operation. All the suppliers' supply and actions were aligned with these principles, which helped suppliers to refine their communities more coherent and uniform and thus more stable. As indicated above, these values also made the communities distinctive and recognizable.

Consumers participating in consumption community activities typically take great pleasure in spending their time and innovativeness on community activities. The most efficient way to keep these creative consumers interested and committed is to develop something new and unprecedented (Canniford 2011; Kozinets 2002). This idea is also supported by Jahn and Kunz (2012, 354), who disclose that providing innovative content is absolutely essential in online environment.

Thus, even though the interviewed suppliers told that they aimed to have a consistent supply that represented their focus and fundamental values, they all had in common a remarkably strong desire to be creative and to experiment. The multiplicity of consumption communities and the ease of participation have pampered consumers with a lot of choices. Therefore the consumption community had to be somehow dissimilar and distinguishable compared to other options in order to be inviting and desirable. Standing out from the crowd with originality was thus extremely important, which meant that suppliers had to express their distinctive values in creative ways. Thus, *R&A 1* gave a brief and pithy piece of advice for those trying to activate consumption communities:

Be innovative and do things differently. (R&A 1)

When it comes to marketing, for example the Reino & Aino community suppliers had become known for their open-minded approach towards unusual marketing efforts, such as ordering music tracks from local ice hockey stars. The communities related to the Reino & Aino brand were also widely famous for organizing playful, imaginative sports competitions, which the suppliers had been actively involved in.

Probably doing marketing in a different way is the reason why our product has been so easy to see as a comfy and folksy commodity. Those records and events, they have been really original and fresh ways of promoting. (R&A 1)

In the case of Reino & Aino the element of surprise had also been strongly present when for instance launching new products or making even more comprehensive moves. Taking

unexpected and novel action attracted consumers' attention and also stimulated discussion both within and outside the community.

In my opinion that [moving manufacturing back from abroad] gave us plenty of favorable publicity because it was actually quite abnormal that a handicraft company like us brought work back to Finland. (R&A 1)

It is important to see the brand with new eyes. Unforeseen combinations are a brilliant example; when Reino and Aino slippers were shoes for the elderly, nobody would have immediately guessed that the pink-colored or first step Reinos are going to come to the market. -- They were something new and surprising. (R&A 2)

Also the Iittala supplier organized imaginative events for Myiittala members. In the winter 2014 Iittala arranged a flea market event called Myiittala vintage, where members of the community sold their second hand Fiskars products such as tableware and items of interior decoration. Altogether 120 community members sold their bargain-priced goods to approximately 2000 visitors. Moreover, Iittala arranged unusual and extraordinary consumer competitions. In the spring 2014 Myiittala members were for example asked to share their memories related to a glass vase designed by Alvar Aalto in 1936. The vase is well-known among Finnish consumers as 'the Aalto vase'.

That Aalto competition was spectacular because people's memories and all material that we gathered was so incredibly personal. When I was reading them I was at times crying and at times laughing really hard because the way a brand can touch people's lives is so unbelievable. It is so amazing that we can actually do that. (Iittala 1)

For the winners of their unique competitions, Iittala awarded unique prizes.

In that Aalto vase competition we chose the best ones of those memories, one per focus market, and then we flew all five winners to Finland. We spent one day at our factory -- and on the next day we visited Aalto's [the designer] former home and the Arabia design museum and in the evening also our own sales exhibition (Iittala 1)

Last fall we had a competition where consumers were invited to depict how some Iittala product appears in their life in 2064. Then they had to take a photo of that and post it in social media. -- The prize we gave to the winner was a trip with us to a design fair in Milan. The winner operated our design scout in there. That is,

during the fair we published content created by her, such as things she found interesting, in our social media pages. (Iittala 1)

Similarly to their colleagues at Reino & Aino and Iittala, the Tikis' directors saw the need for being distinctively recognizable as a major factor. They highlighted the importance of creating something novel or developing an existing idea further in order to get people's attention. Standing out from the others with creativity was regarded as a prerequisite for the formation of a successful consumption community:

We started to think that we want to do things a bit differently. There was for example no one in Finland making sport memes in Finnish. -- To our knowledge we were the first one who began to write them. (Tikis 1)

You don't always have to do something that has never been done before. You just have to something in a better or different way. That's how it works. (Tikis 2)

The suppliers did not feel that distinctive, guiding values restricted desired creativity. Instead, they thought these values actually left plenty of room for continuous renewal and the spirit of innovation. These above presented, underlying values formed a framework which limited the number of options regarding different modes of operations by excluding all the actions that were incompatible with the company's underlying alignments. They eliminated excessive choice and released the suppliers' finite cognitive capacity for creative thinking as opposed to weighting extensive possibilities (Challagalla et al. 2014; Chua & Iyengar 2008; Dahl & Moreau 2007). As the suppliers' mental effort was thus focused on innovativeness and the use of imagination (Dahl & Moreau 2007), the suppliers enjoyed a so called *freedom within a framework* (Challagalla et al. 2014; Goldenberg, Mazursky & Solomon 1999). This freedom within a framework aligning all supplier's actions and supply with guiding values was a great benefit. It did not limit, but rather fostered the supplier's creativity and in effect generated consistent, integrated differentiation of the community.

4.2.2 Achieving a strong presence

All the informants saw achieving strong presence in consumers' lives important. This included providing platforms and paths for the members to gather together and attaining active and wide visibility in both online and offline environments.

Recent studies indicate that in the context of consumer tribes one of the most focal and pragmatic ways for the companies to support them is to provide platforms and paths for community members to gather together and execute community-related practices (Canniford 2011; Goulding et al. 2013). Community members need a location where they can share their opinions, ideas and passion with at least somehow congenial people. Providing a stage for consumers to perform and interact is a prerequisite also for consumer participation and thus extremely important (Canniford 2011; Muñiz & Schau 2011). As Muñiz and Schau (2011, 212) concisely express it, “you can’t have a community without a place to commune and interact”. In turn, Jahn and Kunz (2012, 353) state that fan pages in the internet are extremely good tools for modern companies as they are proven to have potential to measurably improve the customer-brand relationship. With the so called fan-page strategy the users can be better engaged and integrated to the community, which naturally helps to generate more active and lively consumption community. The consumption community sites often are exactly certain kind of fan pages, which is why this applies to their context as well.

The provision of forums and sites was seen as an essential supplier task also among the interviewed informants. Achieving a strong presence in consumers’ lives by providing places for consumers to congregate was considered as a crucial supplier action. Instead of offering just one site or place for consumer to gather together, all of the suppliers used multi-channeling strategy in online environment. Every one of the suppliers had their own official website, which was in all cases one of the main content sharing channels to customers. Tikis had a content creation team of 10 hired people, who produced new articles and videos to Tikis’ own web page nearly every day. In turn, Reino & Aino had a web site which included topical news and information about the over 80-year-long journey of the brand, as well as links to the online shop Reinokauppa and to the home page of the consumption community Reino club. Iittala had a website which contained a wealth of information related to Iittala’s products, designers and company’s history. Iittala also kept in touch with its Myiittala members via e-mail letters; Finnish Myiittala member received usually two digital newsletters per month. One was so called tactical letter which included for example product pickups and presentations with links to Iittala’s online store. Another one was an inspirational letter which consisted of material and items aimed at arousing enthusiasm among consumers and feeding their creativity.

In order to be easily reachable to customers and to have a strong presence in their life suppliers also used various social media services. Social media management has a crucial role in enhancing organization's capability to form and maintain interactive relationship, because social media is intrinsically a consumer and relational-oriented platform (Jahn & Kunz 2012, 354). Indeed, all community suppliers had one or more pages on Facebook. In addition, Tikis' suppliers used Instagram and Youtube and Iittala had its own profiles on both Instagram and Pinterest. Iittala also extended its visibility through cooperation with bloggers, who wrote about the Iittala objects in return of for example free products. Reino & Aino brand was present in Facebook via its official Reino shop page, but also through event and fan pages founded by consumers.

Our main media is Tikis' own web page, to which Facebook, Instagram and Youtube are supporting channels. (Tikis 1)

Suppliers found that multi-channeling not only helped to reach the customer more easily, but also enabled versatile and wide-ranging content provision. For example the supplier of Myiittala underlined that the content conveyed was different depending on the used media. Different channels had distinct use intentions: Instagram was seen as a channel that best enabled the customer involvement and best brought up the consumers' perspective. Respectively, Facebook was seen as a service that most efficiently permits direct communication between the supplier and the customer.

The content provided via Instagram is considerably lighter because it is not even meant to be permanent. But on the other hand it [Instagram] discloses best what the brand is all about as it communicates the brand meanings so clearly through the consumer. -- As its best Facebook is an excellent customer service channel; on there you can easily communicate about new things and rapidly and effectively answer to consumers' questions. And also keep everything really transparent to the consumer. (Iittala 1)

Even though using multiple channels in an active manner was favored by every one of the interviewed suppliers, they all highlighted that maintaining such an approach is hard work. In addition to integrating the use of several social media services with each other the suppliers had plenty of planning and arranging to do related to content production.

There are so many things that needs to be done. -- Scheduling all social media channels is important. They have to be updated systematically so that for example Instagram and Facebook are updated regularly. Then you have to consider

appropriate topics for our site to forward to our writers. -- Then there are many things related to our videos, such as agreeing on timetables. I also ponder who would be interested to be on our videos and contact those people. (Tikis 2)

Also the expert panel saw that multi-channeling was not entirely trouble-free. In the post-review seminar a question whether it was better to use many channels in online environment or focus on just one or two of them rose to the discussion.

I would see it preferable to focus on just few channels and naturally try to do it really well. (Expert 2)

However, after discussing and pondering the matter more closely, the expert panel agreed with the interviewed informants in that using multiple platforms was more beneficial to the supplier. The optimal number of used channels was seen dependent on the situation and especially on the amount of available resources in each company. The multi-channel approach was finally favored by the expert panelists because it better acknowledged the rapidly changing nature of the online world and social media services in particular. When using many channels to interact with the consumer, the supplier was not as completely at the mercy of shifting trends as when directing all its resources to just one platform.

Isn't it so that social media services also have a certain life cycle so that the 'right' communication method changes all the time. In the same manner [as in case of products etc.] there are new ones coming up while some others are overshadowed. (Expert 1)

According to Jahn and Kunz (2012) the supplier can strengthen the community's position in the internet for example by providing exclusive content, sweepstakes, online events, and contests. The interviewed suppliers used all these means. In addition to using multiple medias in online environment, all suppliers organized plenty of various offline context events besides: Tikis had recently organized for example a workshop tour which included training sessions in the biggest cities in Finland. Correspondingly, there were many Reino & Aino related events organized by consumers (such as sports tournaments) but also for instance plenty of charity events organized by the supplier itself. Also Iittala organized face-to-face happenings where community members arrived on the ground. These events included for example new product launch ceremonies, flea market happenings and excursions organized to contest winners. The afore mentioned events were often solely

meant for Myiittala members or an even more restricted group of consumers, which labeled the happenings exclusive and thus increased their attractiveness.

When we launch a new product there may be the designer in our store telling about it and then there may also be some food and beverages and a DJ or some other entertainment. And you can only participate if you are a member of Myiittala and have received an invitation from us. (Iittala 1)

The interviewed suppliers did not only organize events themselves, but were also strongly present in occasions held by other actors that represented the same values with the suppliers. For example Tikis' suppliers actively participated big sports events such as Fitness Expo, CAGE mixed martial arts tournament and Tough Viking obstacle race.

We wanna be attending these sport events. -- For instance with Tough Viking we did cooperation so that they gave us a possibility to take part in the race. (Tikis 1)

The expert panelists pondered what purpose this participation in on-site happenings served and if they provided any added value compared to technology-mediated communication.

What meaning do these face-to-face events have compared to the online services? (Expert 3)

Kozinets' (2010, 15) statement indicates the following: "Online communities are not virtual. The people that we meet online are not virtual. They are real communities populated with real people, which is why so many end up meeting in the flesh." After discussion the panelists agreed with this opinion. They noted that even though online communication was not perceived any less real than communication taking place on the ground, the context still mattered. The post-reviewers talked specifically about the significance of face-to-face meetings between the supplier and consumers, and felt that they importantly increased the supplier's genuineness and reliability compared to only communicating online. The panelists believed that providing opportunity for consumers to see the suppliers in offline context was the most important thing, regardless of whether the meeting eventually realized or not.

It [the supplier meeting consumers in the flesh] probably indicates the authenticity that Expert 6 mentioned. It is not that relevant in terms of information but it shows respect. -- it is enough for people that they have a possibility to meet. (Expert 2)

Jahn and Kunz (2012, 354) argue that if the supplier “is not (inter)active” the community sites cannot be successful. They also state that if for example an online site does not deliver value satisfactorily to the community members often enough, the consumers will easily react by abandoning the site. The importance of being active and lively was emphasized by the suppliers in both discussed contexts, those being online and offline environments. Creating new content continually and organizing events frequently not only helped to remain interesting in the eyes of existing community members, but also furthered attracting new members.

In social media the rule number one is to be active. (Iittala 1)

We started on October and got thousand fans by mid-December. It was a big achievement for us. After that we began to post more actively and realized that ‘hey, this is working’. Week after we got one thousand more and a week after that we obtained three thousand. -- We still have an active grip. Those who don’t like us posting five times a day naturally stop following us, but we do not need those kind of fans. Everybody knows we are active and we always provide something new. Probably many people have noticed that we have continuously developed and proceeded onwards. (Tikis 2)

We provide plenty of content. -- After all our company does a lot; there is something happening every day. We are rather active to organize these events, during the past ten years there have been hundreds of different kinds of happenings. (R&A 1)

The expert panel brought up the question whether the achieved communality around a specific brand, activity or ideology was sustainable or just transient. They saw that generating temporary sense of community was not that hard, while maintaining more durable effect was considered much more difficult.

Maybe especially in the activity and social media use what appears to be characterizing is the campaign nature. I mean that anyone can create communal features just for a little while. (Expert 4)

The continuity of the supplier’s activity was thus regarded as an extremely important factor in order to create communality that was more permanent and did not last only a short period of time. Hence, instead of intermittent activity that occurred at intervals, supplier’s activity should take place uninterrupted, without too long pauses.

Showing vitality was not the only purpose why suppliers aimed to be active in both online and offline environments. Through activeness and multi-channeling suppliers were also striving to be more widely present in consumers' lives through larger visibility. Cova and Pace (2006) reveal that in product-focused consumption communities consumer-generated content often replaces marketing material created by the producer. According to them, community members frequently show themselves in the Internet with brand-related symbols and thus bring up their preference for the brand. Based on Närvänen et al. (2014) and the empirical evidence, it is justified to argue, that this consumer-driven marketing extends to cover also other types of consumption communities than just those with central product-orientation. Närvänen and colleagues (2014) express that the communities themselves are doing plenty of marketing activities on behalf of the supplier. For example at Tikis, the suppliers had noticed that thanks to active community members and investing in genuinely interesting and content, a lot of free space had been achieved in social media. Thus, the need for paid promotion had reduced significantly which had resulted in savings on market investments.

From the very beginning we have had scarce resources which means we have always had to use our creativity and to get so called free promotion through consumers. -- When you come to think of it, we haven't done any paid marketing in Facebook during the last six months. It all [the growth] has been achieved organically. It is pretty big deal. -- You see many people complaining that without spending any money your visibility is close to zero. But we have this thing that we don't basically have to pay because our posts and pictures get shared and bring us visibility. (Tikis 2)

However, pursuing visibility ambitiously through consumer-driven advertising was considered rather risky by the Tikis' suppliers. Posts that evoked some kind of emotions in consumers attracted most attention and re-sharings, but when trying to avoid being nondescript the balance between being conspicuous and decent was sometimes hard to find. The suppliers were well aware that when in pursuit of visibility, they often needed to push things to the limit. Therefore they acknowledged that pleasing everybody was not always possible or even desirable when aiming to get consumers to forward supplier-generated content.

Every time we post something we consider whether it can offend someone. -- But obviously you can't please everybody. Somebody is always crying, that's for sure. Usually postings that evoke feelings, either positive or negative, get the largest

visibility. That's why one of the things we have discussed is that we must by no means be boring. We rather arouse some emotions. (Tikis 2)

Reino & Aino had also got free publicity via its well-known users. As *R&A 1* remarked, many national and local celebrities (mainly pop singers) used the slippers publicly free of charge of their own free will. Both *R&A 1* and *R&A 2* emphasized the significance of famous endorsers which can be interpreted to act as community mascots.

We should not downplay the effect of Juice, Kari Tapio or Topi Sorsakoski using these slippers in public.-- For example in this one television piece Kari Tapio tells about his relationship with Reinos. Like for six minutes he praises them and tells what he has done with them and stuff. (R&A 1)

As Närvänen et al. (2014) put it; trust is one of the preconditions for formation of an effective consumption community. Thus, the supplier has to prove its trustworthiness by showing reciprocity and social responsibility in its operations in order to. This is exactly what the suppliers of Reino and Aino have done: the brand has been in the glare of publicity also because of its busy ethical and philanthropic activity. A case of point is a book collection Juice's library that Reino & Aino Kotikenkä Oy donated to Viola-home which offers housing services for elderly and disabled.

The Reino brand has been prominently in the spotlight. We have enjoyed a lot of media attention considering what a small company we are. We have received plenty of positive publicity. (R&A 1)

As mentioned in the chapter 4.2.1, the supplier of Reino & Aino also moved the production of their slippers back to Finland right after buying the brand. Finnish people saw this as a demonstration of corporate social responsibility and solidarity, which is why the decision brought a lot of free, positive visibility to the company. The expert panel strongly supported the idea of implementing this kind of operation that got non-paid visibility to the firm. The post-reviewers stressed the importance of positive publicity that was acquired not with money but through responsible or socially valuable activity. They saw for example the relocation of Reino slippers' production as a perfect example of gathering favorable attention and wondered why so rare companies actually took advantage of their domestic origin in attracting publicity.

Why an earth are not our big Finnish firms seeing this thing like this? -- After all, we are living the year 2015 and still if we're talking about the top 10 biggest [Finnish] companies, particularly the commercial ones, they have no clue what's going on. (Expert 1)

4.2.3 Involving consumers

Jang et al. (2008) argue that in communities where consumers participate of their own free will information quality has an important role in increasing community commitment among consumers. This is why the supplier should systematically focus on improving it. Regarding information quality, Iittala's community supplier highlighted the urgency of understanding what is important to the community members. Only by doing so, the supplier could deliver compelling content that makes consumers want to participate in the community activity.

You have to be able to produce such great material that consumers want to start to make similar things and also share it. Therefore the content must be good. For different companies this 'good' means different things, depending on the target group, that is those who they want reach. (Iittala 1)

Also Jahn and Kunz (2012, 354) emphasize that brand fan pages must deliver interesting and entertaining content to the consumers. They see that providing valuable content and attracting new consumers to the online site require considering both functional and hedonic aspects. At Tikis combining and balancing these considerations was seen as a key success factor in involving consumers.

What we have had right from the beginning is that we provide both utility and entertainment. That is the combination that works. -- We can compound those two in a way that attracts people. We haven't lost our twist of humor. This is still not too serious. We have been able to deliver the message that you have to train hard but have fun at the same time. (Tikis 2)

According to Canniford (2011) suppliers can only attract community members if they know what is relevant to them. Due to the autonomous consumer's influential role and complex power structure temporariness and dynamicity are integral elements of consumption communities. Therefore, to produce relevant material, the suppliers must continuously strive to update and develop their offerings. The suppliers interviewed in this study all agreed that the material offered had to be apposite and pertinent. According

to *Iittala 1* the relevancy could be built upon topicality, shared priorities and interests as well as identification.

A capturing message is the reason why the customer reads for instance our newsletter. Therefore it has to be something that the customer attaches great importance to. So great that he or she is ready to suspend some other thing and prioritize reading this message. Figuring out what actually matters to the customer is probably the most challenging part of this job. (Iittala 1)

You have to provide a relevant message to the customer, because general bellowing does not interest anyone. -- The message has to be topical and pertinent; it has to be associated with the customer's life somehow so that one can identify with it. (Iittala 1)

Naturally, creating content that attracted consumers required understanding of the needs, desires and preferences of the intended audience. At Tikis suppliers had ensured that the content provided was interesting and relevant to their target consumers by hiring content providers among their own followers.

We have found all our content providers through our own channels. It was actually interesting that first we were thinking that do we have to put a job advertisement to Mol [a national employment agency] but then we realized that hey, wait a minute, we have incredible great fans including people with a wide-range of skills so of course we recruit them. And it applies to all; we can recruit among them for example people to our video production, because it's like an important value to us that those people working for us are truly dedicated. (Tikis 1)

The expert panelists believed that being able to provide interesting and relevant content required constant learning by the supplier. According to them, success in content creation was achieved through diligent trial and error.

You are going to make mistakes of course. But then you just look that 'hey, this is what the community appreciates' and then you have to shoot more that kind of stuff. (Expert 1)

However, generating interesting and relevant high-quality content is not enough in itself. Even though a consumer is motivated to participate in community activities, he or she cannot contribute in the platform administered by the supplier if the supplier does not offer means to do so. In response to that, consumers were enabled to give their own input in several ways. Consumption communities provide a unique opportunity for suppliers to

get involved in close, fruitful conversation with consumers, keeping in mind the consumers' empowered role (Canniford 2011). Interaction is one of the major value drivers in consumption communities, which is why suppliers should support it as much as possible (Jahn and Kunz 2012, 354). The interviewed suppliers had clearly recognized the positive effect of enabling and fostering interaction, because they all had a strong belief that direct, open communication played a key role in activating consumers in consumption communities. They emphasized the importance of being responsive in order to increase the interaction between the supplier and the consumer. Giving answers to consumers' questions was seen crucial, as it generated dialogue between the supplier and the consumer.

We believe in open dialogue. For example in Facebook we give answers to consumers' inquiries openly on our Facebook wall so that everyone can see the conversations. (Iittala 1)

We also receive a lot of inbox messages in addition to those questions people write directly on our Facebook wall. -- These questions vary; usually younger people are asking tips from us related to training like 'my muscles aren't growing, what to do?'. There are also diet-related questions, such as what supplements we recommend. We receive all kinds of questions. Folks get a good feeling when we respond, therefore we aim to answer every single question. It is a sort of customer service. -- That customer service is the only contact between us and the consumer. When the person sends us a message and receives a nice reply we have the opportunity to create our image. It is the moment when the consumer decides if it is positive or negative. (Tikis 2)

According to Jang et al. (2008) community interaction has positive effects on community commitment. According to existing literature interaction among customers, such as positive word-of-mouth, increases the company's profit and strengthens the supplier's relationship with its customers (Hur et al. 2011; Reichheld 2006). Therefore in addition to enabling interaction between the supplier and the consumer, also interplay between community members is extremely important. As Jahn and Kunz (2012, 354) state, "beside the interaction between the brand and the consumer it is very important to moderate the ongoing fan interaction". The informants had understood this and thus purposefully aimed to foster conversation between consumers. Many times the supplier only provided a platform and a trigger to the conversation which consumers then continued among themselves.

If we post something funny people tag their friends or other people that are part of Tikis. And then of course those comments sometimes create conversations. Thus

we can be the one to give the seed for the discussion which continues below those posts. (Tikis 1)

Numerous studies agree on that consumers possess enormous potential to contribute to community content creation in online environment (see e.g. Cova & Pace 2006; Muñiz & Schau 2007; Muñiz & Schau 2011; Närvänen et al. 2014; Schau et al. 2009; Schau & Muñiz 2006). Consumer-generated content is exceptionally valuable to the supplier as it brings out voices of many exceedingly committed customers and enhances dialogue among these highly engaged actors (Muñiz & Schau 2011). At both Tikis and Iittala photos taken by consumers had a significant role in suppliers' content creation. In the digital environment, especially in social media sites, consumers were able to participate by liking, commenting and sharing suppliers' posts, but also by publishing their own postings tagged with community and brand related hashtags so that suppliers as well as other consumers can easily find them. The possibility of tagging, sharing, and commenting indeed enabled consumer driven content creation.

"The consumer can like, comment, post his or her own pictures and take part in the conversation." (Iittala 1)

The suppliers told that based on the amount of likes they gained consumers seemed to enjoy watching photos taken by their compeers. Reposting consumers' pictures on a regular basis also encouraged consumers to use brand-related hashtags more frequently in the hope of getting their photos re-published, which in turn brought more visibility to the supplier's brand in social media. For these reasons, the quantity of content initially produced by consumers had been recently substantially increased.

"Last year we did not post so many photos taken by the customers, we only posted a so-called 'Best of the Month' consumer picture once a month. Now we do not do that anymore. It is not not needed when we publish them [consumer photos] much more often. -- Thus, if you have a nice moment in your life that is somehow related to our brand you can make it visible to us." (Iittala 1)

Also Tikis' suppliers actively reposted their followers' pictures. Therefore, one way for consumers to participate was to send their transformation photos to Tikis' suppliers, who share them again on Tikis' official Instagram page:

"We have the idea that while there are plenty of articles about celebrities' weight-loss stories we don't want to forget those normal people who managed to

change their lifestyle. It has been very nice to see that so many people have sent us messages telling about their complete make-overs and results they have achieved. It always nice to share those stories which again motivates others.”
(Tikis 1)

Consumers were involved also in shorter-term projects, such as the aforementioned competitions and other kinds of campaigns directed to consumers. The Tikis community members were provided with an opportunity to participate in the community’s activities for example by proposing their favorite music tracks to the work out play list. The recommended tracks were then compiled and shared in the internet. The supplier of the Reino and Aino community correspondingly gathered information from consumers when accumulating brand-related narratives for a release.

We got this thing a while ago that people told some memories and stories about Reinos and then those narratives were collected and published. (R&A 1)

In addition to enabling consumer driven content creation and discussion between community members and the supplier, involvement in co-creation was also made possible for consumers in offline context. Naturally consumers were able to be physically present in various events organized by the supplier. Moreover, they could be even more closely involved in orchestrating community happenings: Many of Reino and Aino -related events, such as the annual road running event that brought a lot of positive visibility to the brand, were actually organized solely by the consumers without any initiative from the supplier. This is why the supplier emphasized that being possessive of the brand or community symbols and ideology can easily suppress communal activity and consumers’ participation. Thus, suppliers should avoid excessive jealousy and favor all action related to the community or their brand as long as the values it pursues are not contradictory with those of the supplier.

To us cooperation with communities around Reino has been easy, but I think that to many firms that jealously try to guard their brands it is much harder. -- We are really open to all propositions coming from the consumers. When they propose something, some kind of happening or cooperation, our response is almost always a categorical yes.” (R&A 1)

The idea of abandoning this so called jealousy over the brand and giving the control to the consumers via involvement and co-creation was first questioned by the expert panelist number 2. This person thought that giving free rein to consumers would lead to losing the

community's focus. However, the other post reviewers supported the interviewees' opinion of giving freedom and leverage to consumers. They believed that strictly regulated and congruent brand communication was old-fashioned and outdated, which is why it should be replaced by more permissive and individualistic approach.

"According to many previous brand theories forming consistency is the key. So that there is one message in every channel -- For example these onion models: you have that one thing and you develop all your affairs around it. Whereas, this diversity means that Reino and Aino is a platform or base to which everyone can bring their own meaning and things that are important to them. Still those intrinsic values, such as Finnishness, warmth, empathy et cetera, are not lost, they can just appear in really many ways. So it is quite a different way to think than before. (Expert 5)

After hearing the arguments of the other expert panelists Expert 2, who at the beginning disputed the more permissive mind set in this matter, changed his/her opinion and agreed with the others. Expert 2 summed up trying to control conversation around the brand and the community was unfavorable to the supplier. Oversimplifying complex and subjectively perceived brand meanings was considered to reduce the organization's credibility.

If consumers receive for example in social media messages that are slightly different from each other, it can actually even increase the trustworthiness of the whole organization, because then communication is not so simplistic. People see through this hierarchy-based thinking that produces clear-cut communication, because then communication gives an impression that it is somehow forced" (Expert 2)

4.2.4 Respecting heterogeneity

Community research has traditionally been strongly based on the view according to which communities are rather homogenous entities. However, among the recent consumption community research heterogeneity has inevitably raised as one of the most emphasized attributes of consumption communities. The recent literature recognizes that instead of consisting of actors of the same kind, consumption communities are composed of diverse autonomous actors such as suppliers, consumers and even resources and institutions (Schouten, Martin & McAlexander 2011; Thomas et al. 2013). All of these actors have different orientations and motives for participating the consumption community activity.

Even actors within the same role are rarely uniform: for instance consumers often differ from each other in relation to their conceptions of community membership and commitment or even consumption at whole (Beverland, Farrelly & Quester 2010; Thomas et al. 2013). Some community members are always more involved, committed and dedicated than others, which is why diversity is an inevitably essential part of all consumption communities (Muñiz & Schau 2011). Consumer and community member diversity are thus clearly topics that have to be taken into consideration when aiming to stimulate the community activity.

The consideration of consumer diversity was seen as an important factor when shaping the target group in order to expand the existing community member base. The segmentation based on the demographical or geographical factors does not really apply to the context of consumption communities, which include people with various backgrounds, characteristics and goals (Thomas et al. 2013). According to the suppliers, taking the heterogeneity of consumers into account could even led to reaching new groups of customers. This happened for example when the current owners bought the Reino & Aino brand and started to rethink their customer base, and also when Tikis community began to grow.

The target group was restricted. It included merely elderly and senior citizens. They [Reino and Aino slippers] were only sold three times a year: on Mother's day, Father's day and at Christmas. (R&A 1)

At first we thought this was a going to be a men's thing. But then it came clear that we should definitely involve women as well because they are always more active. They share our content more easily and they give likes more easily while men usually just follow more passively. Men usually do not participate as much as women. (Tikis 2)

At Tikis, the heterogeneity of consumers with regard to their gender led to expansion of their target audience. The somewhat differentiating needs of both sexes were taken into consideration in content creation; some articles and other posts started to be consciously addressed explicitly to female readers. In turn, Reino & Aino addressed heterogeneity by new product launches and brand extensions. Via the expansion of its product offering the brand succeeded to reach new users. At first Reino & Aino slippers were only available in two colors and in adult sizes. The first product extension brought to the market was then the children's collection. Next Reino and Aino slippers began to be available also in pink color in addition to the traditional brown and red. After that the product range has

been extended in numerous ways; new color options from lime to grey have come to the market, as well as new models from lace-up shoes to lighter designs. In the case of Reino & Aino the most successful product extension of all time has been the first-step line for infants.

During the first year they [first-step Reinos] sold 30 000 pairs. Considering that there are approximately 60 000 babies born in Finland yearly, so this means that half of the nation's newborns got these shoes. (R&A 1)

With these product launches R&A 1 and R&A 2 have thus succeeded to expand the age distribution of Reino & Aino brand user and thus enabled new people to join the communities. Brand extensions also provided an opportunity for existing community members to more prominently indicate their commitment to the brand. With more product options they were able to show their "Reino spirit" in more manifold ways: most eager consumers could buy many different colors and models of the slippers, even one of their own especially designed for Finland's Independence Day.

The heterogeneity of the community members has also been taken into consideration when organizing the events. Differentiating motivators for participation has been noticed for example when planning the sport tournaments' structure:

In the ice hockey and football tournaments there are competition leagues for those who take it seriously. Then there are own separate leagues for those people who are participating just for the fun of it. (R&A 1)

The heterogeneity of existing and potential community members was noted at Tikis as well. Even though in the suppliers' view all followers of Tikis media shared the interest towards a healthy and athletic lifestyle, they were people with very different backgrounds and demographics. This complies with the practice of staking presented by Schau et al. (2009), which refers to recognizing intragroup variance and noting distinction and similarity within the community members. Despite its emphasis on fitness, Tikis was not a strictly sport-specific community, which is why it interested enthusiasts of many kinds of sports from football players to gymnasts. The community also included sport-loving people of all ages.

Naturally, we have a lot of people with different ages. We have plenty of really young people from fourteen to seventeen-year-olds and then up to over 18 and twenty-something. But there are also some 'iron grandpas' who comment on our

postings. It is great to have incredibly great deal of all kinds. But the unifying factor is that everybody is interested in healthy life and nutrition. (Tikis 1)

Follower diversity guides content production. The aim of the supplier is to provide versatile material in order to satisfy as many followers as possible. For example at Tikis, providing rich, diverse content was ensured by hiring content providers with various objects of interest.

Among our content providers there are different kinds of people. It already affects. All those content providers has basically been selected on the principle that every one of them has a topic especially of interest that they write about. In this way we get different subject areas covered. (Tikis 1)

In turn, the supplier of Myiittala underlined the importance of matching the supplier's way of communication with each consumer's language in online environment. Adjusting the use of language was therefore one of the means of respecting and fostering heterogeneity within the community.

We want to respond to the customer in his or her own way. To some people you can reply in much more casual manner while others you have to address formally so that it [communication] is more conservative. (Iittala 1)

Despite the recognized significance of respecting heterogeneity, taking consumer diversity into account in content creation was seen partly intractable by the suppliers. For instance at Tikis, where the age distribution of the members was wide, satisfying all consumers simultaneously was often difficult. Postings made by the supplier had to be appropriate for young community members, but also appealing to older followers.

Of course we have to pay attention to the fact that we have those younger followers. At times we have to weigh if some posts are suitable for them. (Tikis 2)

One theme related to consumer heterogeneity that occurred in empirical evidence was customizing, which also Schau et al. (2009) mention in their list of value-creating practices in communities. In their work *customizing* is presented as a practice belonging to the category of brand use. They describe customizing as “modifying the brand to suit group-level or individual needs” that “includes all efforts to change the factory specs of the product to enhance performance” (p. 45). Customizing is also recognized by Muñiz

and Schau (2011) as an action that facilitates consumer-generated content creation. They address that community members are exceptionally dedicated consumers with a huge ability and willingness to improve suppliers' products and develop them further. This is why the supplier should in their view allow for brand customization and product tailoring. The suppliers of Reino and Aino community acted accordingly, as they addressed customers' differing needs and preferences by providing them a concrete way to affect the product through personalization. Customers had an opportunity to customize their own Reino and Aino slippers by choosing the colors, patches and embroideries via "My own Reino" service in the internet. Reino and Aino also used customization on group-level, as it had previously done custom slippers also for example for fans of various Finnish ice hockey teams.

In the post-review seminar the most discussed topic within respecting heterogeneity was cultural diversity. The globalization of markets was brought forth as worthy of remark, as it increased the diversity of already different consumers. Acting in a multicultural environment increased the need for the supplier to pay attention to regional disparities and heterogeneity in general.

This is certainly true, especially when it comes to global brand management. -- If we see that Scandinavia and Europe are following certain trends, Japan might be ahead of time. You have to take these things into account. Then again North-America can be following different paths. (Expert 1)

4.2.5 Balancing the interests of the supplier and the consumer

Just like any other marketplace constructions, consumption communities are not free from economic influences but in close connection with them. Consumption communities operate between two conflicting pressures: they keenly aim to cherish communal spirit, but at the same time they are necessarily at the mercy of market forces. They simultaneously try to alienate themselves from the marketplace and get in closer touch with it (Muñiz & Schau 2011; Schau et al. 2009). Therefore consumption community suppliers seeking financial gain through the community inevitably face the great challenge of balancing the service of economic motives and the community values, and must be somehow able to combine these two desires (Husemann 2012; Muñiz & Schau

2011). Naturally, different communities give different emphasis on these two contradictory forces. Non-profit communities often seek to distance themselves entirely from commerciality, but when the supplier uses the community to acquire direct profit or other more implicit commercial advantage this is not simply. In these situations reconciliation between producing social and economic capital comes even more central (Husemann 2012).

The interviewed suppliers told that economic influences were present in their communities' everyday life in various ways. As mentioned earlier, all interviewed suppliers aimed to benefit from the community economically. For example Tikis' supplier actively achieved financial benefits by implementing promotion campaigns to its business partners and maintaining a small-scale online store which sold t-shirts equipped with Tikis' logo.

We are doing different ad campaigns to our partners. So it involves banner ads and cooperation patterns that can include Facebook contests or articles or such. Now we have quite a lot of video collaboration coming which means that we will do interesting videos with different types of companies. (Tikis 1)

According to Husemann (2012) social-capital driven consumption communities use four different concealment strategies when encountering economic influences. These conducts include 1) denial of economic capital production, 2) re-articulation of economic capital production, 3) partial appropriation of economic capital production, and 4) teleological alignment of economic and social capital production. These four strategies vary in relation to the degree of concealment, so that in the first one the hiding rate is the highest and in the fourth one it is the lowest. The suppliers of Tikis, Iittala and Reino & Aino communities all used means that fit the description of the fourth concealment strategy and more precisely its expression of focusing on functional goals of the consumption community. The suppliers' policies considering economic capital-making seemed to be parallel to this Husemann's (2012, 544) *teleological alignment* as "they legitimized and even welcomed the aspects of economic capital production to the extent that it helped to reach functional goals of the community". For example in the case of Tikis this meant that as long as supplier's actions, such as advertising social media posts, endorsed healthy lifestyle and were related to sports, they were seen justified and acceptable in the eyes of the supplier.

Even though financial influences were in afore mentioned circumstances generally accepted by the consumers, there appeared to be a very fine line between admissible and reprehensible supplier behavior as consumers were really easily irritated by suppliers' excessive push of commercial matters. Several interviewees emphasized that if consumers felt that the company was trying too vigorously to profit from the community members, community commitment and engagement would significantly suffer. They saw that the commercial interest of the supplier should be appearing to consumers as a secondary objective.

Collecting fares kills the community. -- We want to do what we can to help them [community members], but we are not ready to support them financially. That is because we have tried to keep money apart from this whole community thing. All of these communities around Reinos are voluntary so they are not some kind of money-making machines. -- They are not about collecting cash from people, they are all about something else. (R&A 1)

The expert panelists strongly agreed with the idea that actions that favored only the supplier's own interests were often judged by the other community members. They underlined that when planning supplier activities, the starting point should always be consumers' preferences, needs and desires.

If tuning or brand extension or product variation or such is seen as a supplier-driven way just to produce something new to sell to the customer, the community's interpretation of it is probably quite negative. On the other hand, if it is based on a theme that derives from the community and is supported by the community members, the economic interest is easier to swallow. (Expert 4)

Putting aside direct monetary benefits realized in suppliers' action for instance in enabling free participation and organizing free of charge events. Even though some events had a small participation fee, in case of all communities involvement and membership were mainly gratuitous, which is a natural choice also because all the communities extensively utilize social media platforms (such as Facebook and Instagram) with free access and registration. The suppliers hid economic interests also by monitoring that the percentage of business-related content does not become too large.

Some people are all the time advertising something. We have aimed to having 90 percent of so called good content that has nothing to do with the commercial matters and 10 percent is something that promotes for example our own T-shirts or partners or some product. It has to be a really small part, otherwise if the

proportion is for instance fifty-fifty, the number of our readers would surely decrease. (Tikis 2)

The importance of directly non-commercial subject matter in online environment was recognized as it was seen improving the richness of the content and evoking genuine interest among consumers. Correspondingly, publishing business-related material unduly was believed to irritate and harass consumers.

You do not always need to aim at selling something. The message sent has to be interesting in some other way. At least I am as consumer really annoyed by the brands that for example in Facebook only shout out their offers and things like that. (Iittala 1)

In the opinion of the Iittala's community manager stressing suppliers' economic interests was considered unpleasant by consumers and according to her the reason for this was that the time consumers used on community-related activities was their leisure time, which was hoped to remain separate from financial pressures and direct, continuous advertising.

The time you spend in Facebook for example is your free time. Therefore the marketing communication done there infiltrates into your leisure time. (Iittala 1)

Covering up financial profit-making also manifested itself in offline context. In many situations related to the community, being present and getting positive visibility to the brand were the most important priorities for the supplier that overshadowed direct sales benefits. For example when the Reino & Aino brand was promoted by participating in summer festivals with an advertisement truck, actual selling was subordinate.

There [in the truck] were bands performing and stuff like that. -- Our products were sold there too but it played a minor role. The most important thing was to gather people together and to get visibility while cruising along the roads. (R&A 2)

Even though suppliers' own economic interests were often veiled or at least strictly regulated in the context of consumption communities, paying attention to consumers' financial aspects was slightly more open and visible. For example Tikis offered discount codes to its Facebook and Instagram followers for example for reductions on dietary supplement prices from firms with which they cooperate.

If a fan achieves something through us, it is awesome. It is the added value that if you are a Tikis fan you get special treatment. But you must not overdo it so that you won't advertise too much. (Tikis 2)

At Iittala financial benefits were offered to customers as rewards for spending money generously on the brand's products. This practice was also supported by the existing literature. According to Jang et al. (2008) rewards for activities improve consumers' community commitment. Economic advantages received by the consumers were tied to the amount of money they have used on the brand's products. Twice a year Myiittala members got vouchers that offered discounts (from 10 to 25 %) or could be used as means of payment (up to 100 euros). The monetary value of the received voucher, as well as getting invitations to certain community happenings, depended on the amount the particular customer had spent on Iittala products in the last six months. The bonus system of Iittala can also be seen to be reflecting the community engagement enhancing practice of milestoneing presented by Schau et al (2009; see also Muñiz & Schau 2011). They define milestoneing as taking note of substantial achievements, performances and defining moments related to the brand and its consumption. In the case of Iittala's community, obtaining the biggest 100€ voucher can be interpreted as a significant milestone for consumers.

Those Myiittala members who have been the biggest spenders are rewarded with invitations to our various events in addition to getting more valuable vouchers. (Iittala 1)

In addition to promoting consumers' economic interests, the interviewed suppliers aimed to advocate consumers' social and hedonistic interests as well. The suppliers rewarded community members not only financially, but also in ways that had social or emotional value to the consumer. One example of this was the Reino and Aino community suppliers' custom to delight one community member yearly by awarding the title "Reino of the year" (which will be introduced in more detail in chapter 4.2.6). Even though this title did not bring any economic benefits to its recipient, it certainly made the title holder proud and satisfied. Also at Tikis the reward for participation was rarely anything material, but rather something with abstract and intangible value.

The basic thing is that when you are actively involved you learn things and get food for your thoughts. I mean that our articles and our content actually enrich you somehow. (Tikis 1)

In the post-review seminar the distinction between the concepts of consumption community and customer loyalty system was called into question when addressing the action of promoting consumers' interests. The expert panelists pondered the relation between these terms and tried to clarify what distinguishes or connects them.

This arises the question: is customer loyalty program a tool for community management or what is it? (Expert 6)

Following the discussion the experts agreed that strict demarcation between the two concepts was difficult to make as they were partly overlapping. However, the post-reviewers suggested that the key difference between these two constructs was that community membership was usually characterized by its emphasis on emotional, social and hedonistic values, whereas the strongest motivator for being part of the customer loyalty program was often the economic benefits it provided.

The community is driven by content aspects, not so much by economic considerations. And the community involves exclusivity so that the members feel like they are part of the so called inner circle. So it is not just like 'if I write my e-mail address here I become a regular customer in the company's CRM system, and if I pay 50 euros I get a loyalty card'. (Expert 4)

4.2.6 Assuring continuity of the community

One of the three core community commonalities presented by Muñiz and O'Quinn (2001) is the existence of shared rituals and traditions. These social processes are usually built around common consumption experiences somehow related to the brand, through which a community recreates and distributes its meaning within and beyond the community boundaries. Shared rituals and traditions form the culture of the community and are therefore crucial for the survival of the community (Kurikko & Tuominen 2012; Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001). Rituals and traditions were evident in the empirical data of this study. Suppliers tended to make a regular habit of arranging again and again events that had previously turned out to be successful and popular among community members. When

suppliers managed to plan and implement an event or a contest that worked out well, they wanted to make it recurrent.

Myiittala vintage was a great event and succeeded very well. We are really satisfied with it. -- This year we organize it again and do it even better than last year. It is supposed to become an annually repeated event, which is always arranged at the same time of the year during Design weeks in the autumn. (Iittala 1)

We will probably organize the same type of contest [as the aforementioned Aalto vase competition] again next autumn when Oiva Toikka's new birds [decorative items] are launched. (Iittala 1)

Annual events and contests were however not the only representatives of the generation of rituals and traditions. In addition, the suppliers organized a wide range of daily and weekly activities. At Iittala, these included among others the weekly routine of a consumer photo review.

We go through all photos tagged with hashtag iittala every week to see which of them we would like to publish in our profile. (Iittala 1)

The expert panelists praised this routine that they regarded as an excellent way to pay tribute to the consumers.

I think this is a perfect example of showing respect to the community members. Picking up someone from the community and thanking that person for a great photo is certainly a functional mode of operation. (Expert 1)

The fact that there was a constant flow of supplier activities and events gave community members a reassuring sense of continuity, as there was always some well-established event or activity to look forward to. Gradually, when gatherings, competitions or other practices are systematically arranged time after time they became traditions.

These happenings, for example rock festivals and football and ice hockey tournaments, are annual. So of course there is the repetition factor present. (R&A 2)

Whereas some of the rituals and traditions are well-known and established across the whole community, others are more localized and consequently only recognized and

implemented by certain subgroups and cliques within the community (Muñiz & O'Guinn 2001, 421). Good examples of the latter in the empirical evidence were the football and ice hockey tournaments arranged by Reino and Aino supplier, since they were clearly geographically localized. On the other hand, the nomination of “the Reino of the year” was an example of widely known rituals and traditions. This title awarded every year to a person who had altruistically done a lot of charity work. The designation (first started in 2011) demonstrates the practices of both milestone and badging identified by Schau et al. (2009). Being selected as “the Reino of the Year” was a great honor and a milestone to any Reino user. Badging, in turn, refers to “the practice of translating milestones into symbols” (Schau et al. 2009, 45). The most eager brand enthusiasts enjoy getting tangible mementos that remind them of brand or community-related achievements (Muñiz & Schau 2011), and that is exactly what “the Reino of the year” diploma offers.

As the rituals and traditions are significant in building community culture (Muñiz & O'Guinn 2001), the suppliers considered it to be important to make sure they continue. This was evident even in situations where the community members rather than the suppliers had the initiative. If the community members had made the commencing move to organize an event, the suppliers were willing to help them to achieve their goal and to overcome any obstacles that might stand in the way of a potential tradition.

If they [the event organizers] called us that they could not get a band to play in the event next year and therefore could not organize it, of course we would help them to find one. (R&A 1)

Since repetition is a prerequisite for the establishment of rituals and traditions, things cannot be expected to happen overnight. Instead, the development is a long-term process. The need for time was recognized in previous research. Shared traditions immortalize community's history (Muñiz & O'Guinn 2001; Kurikko & Tuominen 2012), and traditions can only be created if the community has a common past. The richer and longer this shared history is, the more solid a foundation it forms for mutual rituals and traditions. Also the interviewed suppliers stressed the importance of being patient and not trying to excessively rush things.

This has taken a lot of patience, nothing happens quickly. (Tikis 2)

Another way to assure the community continuity was to raise consumption communities to the center of the supplier's strategy. According to many researchers the strategic importance of marketing in general has long been underestimated in companies, despite the fact that marketing can be entitled as the only function that actually generates revenue to the supplier (Gummesson et al. 2014). This is also reflected in the appreciation of consumption communities within firms. The significance of consumption communities has often been belittled in the same manner as marketing in its entirety: they are often not sufficiently, if at all, addressed in supreme managerial decision making (Boyd, Chandy & Cunha 2010). As discussed in the introduction, a consumption community can form a substantial competitive advantage to the company (Goulding et al. 2013), which is why it should be considered as a key element when making strategic choices and long-term plans for the firm. As Fournier and Lee (2009, 106) put it, managing consumption community should not be seen just as an element of a company's marketing strategy but a focal part of a firm's overall business strategy. Only then the consumption community experience can become central to the firm's business model and thus achieve the priority it deserves.

As pointed out in the post-review, nowadays firms tackle with the crucial question of *who* in the company should take the main responsibility for community management within the organization.

One interesting question in my opinion is also to decide whose responsibility community management is in the company then. (Expert 5)

I was also wondering if there even can be a so called 'community manager' or how it should be organized. -- Does it have to be seen as a functional operation or how should it be done. -- Is it a matter of [organizational] levels; like if the CEO does not necessarily have to be the manager, who is it then? (Expert 6)

The three suppliers whose representatives were interviewed had their distinctive ways of sharing responsibility for community management. At both Reino & Aino and Tikis, community management was in the hands of the top executive of the company. This emphasized how highly appreciated community-related work was. In the case of Tikis this was quite obvious, as their business was fully built upon community, but at Reino & Aino the CEO's (R&A 1) concentration on community activities was especially

noteworthy. In the case of Iittala community, the responsibility issue was dealt with in a different way. This had to do with the fact that the supplier was a much larger company than the other two presented in this work. Hence, Iittala had a Digital Marketing and Consumer Community Manager (interviewee *Iittala 1*) who was in charge of community management. This manager concentrated solely on community-related tasks instead of having to cope with other responsibilities at the same time.

The expert panelists agreed that it was imperative to have a designated person or a team in a company to manage communities. This is also a view presented by Fournier and Lee (2009). Moreover, the expert panelists stressed how essential it was to extend community-oriented thinking beyond the marketing function across the whole organization.

It is not enough that it is just a duty of a marketing department or outsourced to a marketing agency. (Expert 5)

Furthermore, the interviewed suppliers unanimously supported the view that community management should be the responsibility of the organization itself. Outsourcing was seen harmful in many ways, not least because it increased the risk of losing the community's authenticity.

The way we could screw this thing up is that we would give Tikis out of our own hands. I mean that someone else could try to take advantage of our community if we do not decide our content ourselves. Therefore it's damn important and related to many things that we retain the content provision in our own hands. This means that if we start to outsource, we lose. (Tikis 1)

In all three companies consumption communities had clearly reached the status of significant strategic resource as recommended in the existing literature (see e.g. Goulding et al. 2013). Accordingly, the firms under scrutiny in the present discussion were fiercely committed to retaining and further developing the community-oriented thinking. For instance at Iittala, the effort of forming a community was seen as a far-reaching, business guiding choice that determined the company's position in the market:

We did not want to take part in the price war. -- Therefore we needed some reasons why consumers would like to purchase from us. We wanted to offer something more which is why we began to develop the community in the first place. (Iittala 1)

The expert panelists highlighted that consumption community management should be clearly target-oriented. By this they meant that community facilitation should have specific objectives, and that the realization of them should be carefully monitored. According to the post-reviewers target setting helped the suppliers to plan their activities and use their resources more effectively.

Setting goals and measuring their achievement is, at least in my opinion, really essential. It is important to know what achieving the objectives can cause or cannot cause. Conversely said, huge amounts of resources will be wasted if the supplier thinks she or he is doing the right things that eventually end up not working. (Expert 4)

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Summary and conclusions

The aim of the research was to analyze how the supplier can manage consumption communities which it promotes in pursuit of commercial benefit. The aim of the study was further specified by two research questions: *What is the role of the supplier in the consumption community?* and *How can the supplier manage the consumption community?*

The research problem was answered by determining supplier's role and identifying supplier actions in the empirical data. To explore this, altogether five persons representing three community suppliers were depth interviewed. The three communities whose suppliers were interviewed were 1) *Reino & Aino* community, which is built around a Finnish footwear producing brand, 2) *Tikis* community, a community focusing on motivating its members to follow a sporty and healthy lifestyle, and 3) *Iittala* community, which is centered on the traditional interior and tableware design brand of Iittala. All interviewees of this study were people who were responsible for community management in the companies that they worked for. The two owners of Reino & Aino Kotikenkä Oy (one of whom serves also as the CEO of the firm) represented the Reino & Aino community supplier, the Managing Director and the Sales Director of Muscle Up Media Oy represented Tikis community supplier and the Digital Marketing & Consumer Community Manager of Fiskars Home Oy Ab represented the supplier of Iittala community. In addition, a post-reviewing seminar was organized to verify the researcher's analysis on the interviews. In the seminar six experts were openly discussing the results under the permissive direction of the researcher. The panelist were chosen based on their long experience with community management and deep insight into the theme, and they represented both academic and business circles.

First, in order to be able to understand the actions the suppliers implement to manage consumption communities, it was necessary to analyze what is the role of the supplier in the consumption community. Although the suppliers can never have full control over the

communities, influencing the communities will help them to reach their business goals such as strong customer loyalty, increased marketing efficiency and enhanced brand value. Consequently, after a literature review the role was determined as facilitator. This determination was also supported by the empirical evidence. Adopting the role of the facilitator means that the supplier does not try to directly control the community or its individual members, but aims to influence the community through more gentle management actions.

Secondly, the aim of the study was to analyze how the supplier can manage the consumption community. Based on the thematic analysis of the depth interviews, as well as the comments of the six expert panelists, it was indicated that the supplier can manage the consumption community by implementing certain management actions. Therefore, identifying a set of management actions answered the question of *how* the management can be done in the context of consumption communities. In total twelve management actions of a facilitative supplier were identified. These were: 1) creating guiding principles, 2) striving to be distinctive, 3) providing platforms and paths, 4) attaining active and wide visibility in both online and offline environments, 5) motivating consumer participation, 6) enabling consumer participation, 7) expanding the membership, 8) noting intragroup diversity, 9) concealing the supplier's economic interests, 10) promoting consumers' interests, 11) creating community rituals and traditions, and 12) addressing the strategic importance of the community. Having identified these twelve actions, they were further divided into six action categories based on the broader action they serve.

The role determination together with twelve concrete actions presenting six action categories form a framework, through which community management can be examined exclusively from the supplier perspective. This framework is presented in Figure 2. To summarize, the framework specifies the role of the supplier in the community and answers to the question of how consumption communities can be managed by determining the management actions and the action categories.

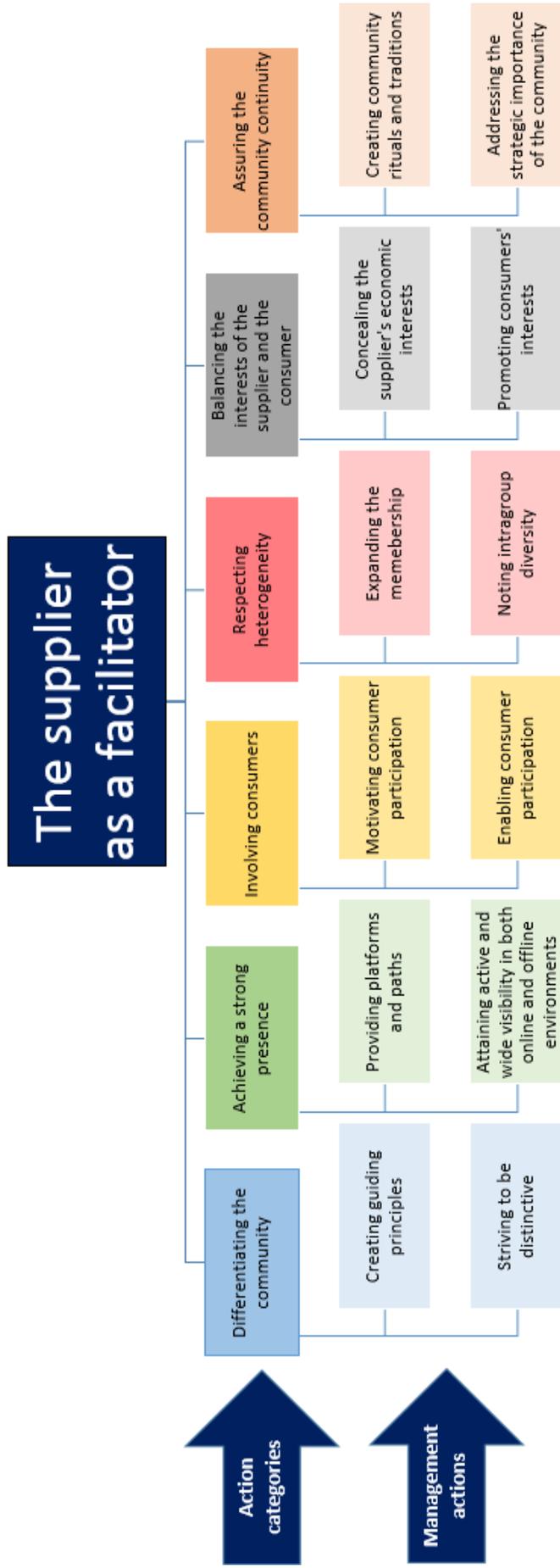


Figure 2. A Framework for consumption community management from the supplier perspective

This framework presented in Figure 2 is the main result of the study and it has both theoretical and practical implications. These implications are discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

5.2 Theoretical contribution and managerial implications

Theoretical contribution

Ladik and Stewart (2008) present (paraphrasing Brinberg & McGrath 1985) that theoretical contribution to academic literature can be made in three different domains. These domains are theory, method and context. Ladik and Stewart (2008, 162) argue that studies rarely feature contributions in all of these three domains. Therefore achieving significant contribution in two or even one domain is well worth pursuing.

The main contributions of the present study are in the domains of theory and method. First, the theoretical merits of this study are noticeable. This paper focuses on and provides new insights into community management specifically from the perspective of the supplier, not from the perspective of other parties. This alone makes this piece of research stand out from previous ones. Moreover, this research clarifies the role of the supplier within the consumption community. In addition, it creates a solid framework for consumption community management with twelve actions and six categories as stated above. With these actions and categories suppliers can manage their communities and try to reach their objectives. Therefore, the present study offers unprecedented insights that are “meaningful and useful to broad constituencies” (Ladik & Stewart 2008, 162) and for their part remarkably benefit the domain of theory.

Second, this study has considerable merits in the domain of method, as it stands out because of its methodological freshness. Adapting an abductive approach that has been entitled as a research trend of tomorrow. The present study makes use of a substantially data appreciative perspective, as the presented framework is mainly derived from the empirical data. This means that even though the identified actions and action categories are connected with the existing theory, the academic discussion benefits from the new information and insights provided in this study. The study does not settle for reviewing or combining the existing literature but aims to generate new knowledge on consumption

community management, and therefore delivers something novel to the academic discussion.

Moreover, in the present study an exceptionally insightful knowledge production method is used: the researcher utilizes the process of post-reviewing, which has not previously been extensively used in consumption community research. The post review seminar significantly enhances the credibility of the study by allowing various opinions to influence the research outcome.

Managerial implications

The topicality of community management cannot be overstated. As pointed out many times before, the research phenomenon of this study is indeed current, which is why it has great contribution value also in the practical business life. This study exclusively adopts the supplier perspective, and therefore it is most particularly beneficial to business managers. Analyzing the role of the supplier within a consumption community offers managers a possibility to understand the settings and operating conditions prevailing in the context of consumption communities. As communal consumption is a central part of modern commerce, all business managers are somehow, directly or more indirectly, dealing with the consumption communities in their work. Therefore knowing what is the most appropriate role for the supplier in consumption community context is valuable to managers in all sectors and industries. Understanding that the role of an authoritarian controller or a strict supervisor is not efficient and focusing on adapting the facilitative role instead will help managers to avoid many pitfalls. Both time and effort can be saved in organizations if resources are allocated to the pursuit of the facilitative role right from the beginning.

The interviewees of this study were community managers of the suppliers that had very well succeeded in community management, at least if success is measured in the number of community members and the growth rate. Therefore the actions they have undertaken can be regarded as benchmarking controls to other suppliers. By following the example of the interviewed well fared suppliers, managers may achieve equally great success in the domain of consumption community management. The identified actions and action categories based on the concrete activities of the real-life suppliers help managers to plan and evaluate their own community management activities. Having exemplary actions for

consumption community management reduces the risk of failure: identified actions give indications for managers of what to do and what not to do when aiming to establish consumption communities.

The presented abductively created framework deepens the understanding of consumption community management in practical business life, and therefore supports managers' efforts to build more community-focused business strategies. When managers better understand the operation logic related to consumption community management, they can better embrace fruitful community-thinking within the organization. Being aware of the most effective modes of community management also succors managers to deal with the communities more consistently. Getting more information about the community management via the presented framework enables managers to enrich their business insight with demonstrably beneficial humane aspects. The presented community management framework makes dealing with communities in the business world much easier: knowing the fundamental action principles of community management facilitates the structuring of companies' own community management efforts.

5.3 Evaluating the research quality

Quality in qualitative research is something that we recognize when we see it; however, explaining what it is or how to achieve it is much more difficult.
(Corbin & Strauss 2007, 297)

As Corbin and Strauss' citation indicates, evaluating the quality of qualitative research is not an easy task. Since the qualitative research method inevitably includes the researcher's somewhat subjective interpretation, positivist evaluation criteria are not applicable to it. For instance validity and reliability are words that are often used to describe the quality of quantitative research, but they are certainly not suitable to describe high quality research that uses reflexive methods (Corbin & Strauss 2007). However, some generally acknowledged evaluation criteria do exist. One of these sets of criteria is presented by Spiggle (1994). According to her, the merit of qualitative research can be most appropriately evaluated by assessing its usefulness, innovation, integration, resonance and adequacy.

Usefulness can be summed up in the question of whether the research aids in furthering inquiry or not (Spiggle 1994, 500). In the present discussion the researcher has aimed to make the connections between her own representations and most topical issues of the research area as visible as possible by introducing the fiercest debates in the theoretical part of the study. In addition, the research problem has been determined so that responding to it addresses one of the most significant issues in current community research. The researcher has also strived to improve the usefulness of the study by using a rather general concept of consumption communities in order to make the findings more applicable to various contexts and settings. However, it is important to notice that the research results are not transferable to contexts deliberately excluded from the research scope (see limitations in chapter 5.2.3).

Innovation, in turn, refers to the novelty and originality value of the research (Spiggle 1994, 501). Unlike many other studies regarding consumption communities, the present study strictly adopts the perspective of the supplier. In addition to exploring the research phenomenon solely from the supplier's point of view, this study also aims at originality through its methodological choices. Exploiting the practice of post-review seminar is not a common way of strengthening the data collection and verifying the analysis in marketing research. In effect, it boosts the innovativeness of the study.

Assessing *integration* of the study means evaluating how holistic the presented framework or synthesis is, and how refined the findings are (Spiggle 1994, 501). The researcher has paid attention to integration by processing the identified supplier actions closely and creating parent categories that integrate and clarify the discoveries. Creating the framework that combines and summarizes the major research findings also improves the integration of the study as it assembles the outcomes into a coherent whole.

Resonance reflects how enlightening, resonating and evocative the qualitative research is (Spiggle 1994, 501). The researcher's firm belief is that due to the meticulously executed research work the study deepens and enriches the understanding of the phenomenon of consumption community management from the supplier perspective.

Lastly, *adequacy* refers to the extent to which the researcher's representations are grounded in the empirical data (Spiggle 1994, 501). In this study the researcher's interpretations have been made as transparent as possible by including plenty of

descriptive citations to support the researcher's explanations. This improves the adequacy of the study and has a positive effect on the overall quality of the research.

5.4 Limitations and future research directions

This study identifies the actions through which the supplier operating in a facilitative role can manage consumption communities. Yet, there is a number of limitations that need to be pointed out. One of these limitations is a consequence of adopting the research philosophy of moderate constructionism and the qualitative research method: the research findings are based on the interpretation of the researcher, which is why the element of subjectivity is unavoidably present. This means that some significant issues might have remained undetected by the researcher. In addition, despite the employment of the abductive research approach, the existing literature used to gather preliminary understanding of the research phenomenon has exposed the researcher to certain preconceptions. Therefore, the examination and interpretation of the research data does not rigorously follow the rules of pure detachment. Also, even though great effort was taken to ensure the saturation of data by gathering a wealth of interview data and arranging the post-review seminar, the question of whether the research material is sufficient or not is no doubt feasible.

This study solely focuses on investigating actions of those suppliers that directly or more indirectly aim to benefit from the community for commercial purposes. This excludes non-profit suppliers from the study, non-profit suppliers being organizations and individuals who do not seek commercial gain from the community. For instance concealing economic interests of the supplier is not presumably as relevant management action in the context of communities whose suppliers are non-profit actors as it is in communities with profit-seeking suppliers. Because of these assumed management differences, it would be extremely interesting to explore how the profit-orientation of a supplier affects the consumption community management.

As the research progressed, many other research gaps became apparent as well. One of the topics that needs further research is the evolution of consumption communities. It would be extremely interesting and useful to disclose if consumption community development can be divided into certain chronological evolution phases of for example

establishment, growth, maturity and so forth. Identifying the stages of consumption community development would certainly help suppliers to deal with consumption communities, especially if research could explain which management actions community suppliers should implement at each stage.

Another interesting research topic would be to determine how suppliers should set objectives for community management. As pointed out in the post-review panel discussion, setting measurable goals is far from easy when it comes to community management. Popularity in social media does not always correlate to the supplier's economic results and profitability, which is why additional success indicators for community management should be elaborated. Another topic requiring future research would be finding out how scholars of various fields could contribute to deepening the understanding of consumption community management. For instance, industrial network management thinking could be to some extent useful or at least inspiring when exploring how consumption communities can be managed.

The proposals mentioned above are just few examples of promising paths for future research. To conclude, consumption community management is an area that provides a large number of interesting and relevant research topics to the academic audiences of marketing science. In the best scenario, further research of consumption community management will provide managers with advanced tools to successfully deal with the communities. Additional research will also help managers, as well as academics, to understand how to best treat the empowered consumers that consumption communities consist of.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: The question template used in interview of R&A supplier representatives

REINO JA AINO

TAUSTATIEDOT

Titteli, rooli ja vastualueet yrityksessä?

Mistä Reino & Aino –yhteisössä on kyse? Miksi ja minkä ympärille yhteisö on muodostunut? (Ydinteemat, kulutuksen keskiö)

PERUSTAMISVAIHE

Mistä kaikki lähti liikkeelle yhteisön rakentumisen suhteen? Mitkä olivat ensimmäisiä toimenpiteitä, joita teitte yhteisön syntymisen eteen?

Mistä yhteisö sai ensimmäiset jäsenensä?

Millaista yhteisön toiminta oli alussa?

Missä vaiheessa koitte, että kyseessä on selkeästi yhteisö?

RAKENTUMISVAIHE

Miten yhteisö lähti kasvamaan? Miten uusia jäseniä saatiin mukaan?

Muuttuiko yhteisön toiminta jotenkin sen kasvun myötä?

Pyrittekö edesauttamaan yhteisön kasvua ja kehittymistä jollakin tavalla? Miten?

Mitä ajatuksia yhteisön rakentuminen teissä herätti?

YLLÄPITOVAIHE

Millaista toimintaa yhteisöllä on tällä hetkellä ja millainen on teidän roolinne toiminnoissa?

(Osallistuttekko yhteisön järjestämiin tapahtumiin yms.?)

Mistä saatte tietoa yhteisön toiminnasta ja jäsenistä?

Miten kuvailisitte yrityksen roolia yhteisössä tällä hetkellä?

Mitä yrityksenne tekee yhteisön jäsenten sitouttamiseksi?

Millainen tilanne yhteisön kannalta on nyt? (Kuinka paljon aktiivisia jäseniä? Onko yhteisö sen historiaan nähden aktiivisimmillaan vai vastaavasti hiipunut?)

Miksi ihmiset ottavat osaa yhteisön toimintaan? (Mikä osallistujia motivoi?)

Miten luonnehtisitte nyt olemassa olevaa yhteisöä? (Mitä ominaispiirteitä sillä on?)

Pyrittekö omalta osaltanne ylläpitämään yhteisön toimintaa jollakin tavoin? (Onko käytössä joitakin rutiineiksi muodostuneita vs. kertaluontoisia aktiviteetteja, joita toteutate?)

Onko yhteisö kohdannut historiansa aikana joitakin siihen merkittävällä tavalla vaikuttaneita tapahtumia tai tilanteita (konflikteja, poikkeuksellista julkisuutta, taloudellisia suhdanteita tms.)? Miten nämä ovat yhteisöön vaikuttaneet? Miten itse olette kyseisissä tilanteissa toimineet?

Nyt jälkikäteen katsottuna, toimisitko jossakin yhteisön historian vaiheessa eri tavoin?

APPENDIX 2: The question template used in the interview of representatives of Tikis' supplier

TIKIS

TAUSTATIEDOT

Titteli, rooli ja vastualueet? Muscle Up media?

PERUSTAMISVAIHE

Mistä kaikki lähti liikkeelle yhteisön rakentumisen suhteen? Mitkä olivat ensimmäisiä toimenpiteitä, joita teitte yhteisön syntymisen eteen?

Mistä yhteisö sai ensimmäiset jäsenensä?

Millaista yhteisön toiminta oli alussa? Oliko mukana kaupallisia intressejä/ missä vaiheessa ne tulivat mukaan kuvioihin? (Esim. paitakauppa, yhteistyö Fitness-tukun kanssa jne.)

Missä vaiheessa koitte, että kyseessä on selkeästi yhteisö?

RAKENTUMISVAIHE

Miten yhteisö lähti kasvamaan? Miten uusia jäseniä saatiin mukaan?

Muuttuiko yhteisön toiminta jotenkin sen kasvun myötä?

Pyrittekö edesauttamaan yhteisön kasvua ja kehittymistä jollakin tavalla? Miten?

Mitä ajatuksia yhteisön rakentuminen teissä herätti?

YLLÄPITOVAIHE

Millaista vuorovaikutusta teidän ja yhteisön jäsenten välillä on?

Yhteisön painopiste online-kontekstissa, mutta onko myös offline-ympäristön (face2face) toimintaa?

Millaista toimintaa yhteisöllä on tällä hetkellä ja millainen on teidän roolinne toiminnoissa?

Mistä saatte tietoa yhteisön toiminnasta ja jäsenistä?

Miten kuvailisitte yrityksen roolia yhteisössä tällä hetkellä?

Mitä yrityksenne tekee yhteisön jäsenten sitouttamiseksi?

Millainen tilanne yhteisön kannalta on nyt? (Kuinka paljon aktiivisia jäseniä? Onko yhteisö sen historiaan nähden aktiivisimmillaan vai vastaavasti hiipunut?)

Miksi ihmiset ottavat osaa yhteisön toimintaan? (Mikä osallistujia motivoi?)

Miten luonnehtisitte nyt olemassa olevaa yhteisöä? (Mitä ominaispiirteitä sillä on?)

Pyrittekö omalta osaltanne ylläpitämään yhteisön toimintaa jollakin tavoin? (Onko käytössä joitakin rutiineiksi muodostuneita vs. kertaluontoisia aktiviteetteja, joita toteutate?)

Mistä Tikis –yhteisössä on kyse? Miksi ja minkä ympärille yhteisö on muodostunut? (Ydinteemat, kulutuksen keskiö)

Onko yhteisö kohdannut historiansa aikana joitakin siihen merkittäväällä tavalla vaikuttaneita tapahtumia tai tilanteita (konflikteja, poikkeuksellista julkisuutta, taloudellisia suhdanteita tms.)? Miten nämä ovat yhteisöön vaikuttaneet? Miten itse olette kyseisissä tilanteissa toimineet?

Nyt jälkikäteen katsottuna, toimisitko jossakin yhteisön historian vaiheessa eri tavoin?

APPENDIX 3: The presentation used in the post-review seminar to present the findings of the interview analysis to the expert panel

Kulutussyhteisöjen johtaminen

Pauliina Koivisto 5.5.2015

Johdanto aiheeseen

- Aiemman tutkimustiedon mukaan kulutussyhteisöjen suoranainen kontrolloiminen ja hallitseminen ei niiden autonomisen luonteen vuoksi ole mahdollista

"Suora kontrollointi on vaikeaa. Siis jos sä haluisit kaikkien Tikiksen jäsenien tekevin jotain niin en mä usko et sä voisit tehdä niin. Tätä yhteisö elää tavallaa niinku omaa elämäänsä."

"Se [suora kontrollointi] ei oo mitenkään mahdollista. Liiallinen holhoaminen vaan ärsyttää ihmisiä."



- Yritykset eivät kuitenkaan voi jäädä vain passiivisiksi sivustakatsojiksi

Jotain on siis tehtävä, mutta mitä?



Presentaation eteneminen

1. Yrityksen rooli kulutussyhteisössä
2. Yrityksen toimenpiteet yhteisöllisen toiminnan tukemiseksi
 - 2.1 Yhteisön erilaistaminen
 - 2.2 Aktiivisen läsnäolon saavuttaminen
 - 2.3 Kuluttajien osallistaminen
 - 2.4 Yhteisön moninaisuuden huomioiminen
 - 2.5 Taloudellisten intressien tasapainottaminen
 - 2.6 Yhteisten rituaalien ja traditioiden luominen
3. Yhteenveto



1. Yrityksen rooli kulutussyhteisössä

- Yrityksen rooli yhteisössä on erilainen kuin kuluttajien, sillä se hallinnoi monesti alustoja, joilla yhteisö toimii ja on lisäksi usein kuluttajien arvostuksen ja ihailun kohde
 - Yrityksellä vaikutusvaltainen asema
- Ratkaisuna kontrollista luopuminen, kuluttajien osallistaminen ja suotuisten toimintaedellytysten tarjoaminen



Yhteisöllistä toimintaa fasilitoivaan ja tukevaan toimintaan keskittyminen

➔ Yritys mahdollistajan roolissa

Mitä yritys voi mahdollistajan roolissaan siis konkreettisesti tehdä?

2.1 Yhteisön erilaistaminen

- Ohjaavien periaatteiden luominen
- Kulutuksen keskiön määrittäminen: Minkä ympärille yhteisö on rakentunut?
 - Yhteisön edustamien arvojen identifiointi: Mitä arvoja yhteisön toivotaan edustavan?
- ➔ Kaiken yrityksen tarjonnan ja toiminnan yhteensovittaminen ohjaavien periaatteiden kanssa



Omaleimaisuuteen pyrkiminen
Innovatiivisuus, luovuus ja kokeilunhaluisuus markkinoinnissa sekä tapahtuma- ja sisällöntuotannossa

Freedom within a framework:
Johdonmukainen erilaisuus, omaperäisyys ja uniikkisuus

2.2 Vahvan läsnäolon saavuttaminen

Kohtaamispaikkojen tarjoaminen

- Useiden kanavien hyödyntäminen online-ympäristössä
- Face-to-face -tapahtumien järjestäminen

Aktiiviseen ja laajaan näkyvyyteen pyrkiminen

- Uuden sisällön jatkuva tuottaminen
- Tapahtumiin (sekä omiin että muiden järjestämiin) osallistuminen
- Ilmaisen näkyvyyden saaminen kuluttajalähtöisen markkinoinnin, kuuluisien suositelijoiden ja vastuullisuuden kautta

"Sosiaalisessa mediassa aktiivisuus on sääntö numero yksi."



2.3 Kuluttajien osallistaminen



Osallistumisen motivointi

- ▶ Relevantin, korkeatasoisen sisällön tuottaminen
- ▶ Interaktiivisuuteen ja responsiivisuuteen pyrkiminen

"Sen täytyy tarjota asiakkaalle joku relevaatti viesti koska ei sellainen yleinen huutele kiinnosta ketään."

"Me ollaan taas asioimia kaikille ehdotuksille josta kuluttajilta tulee. Jos ne ehdottaa jotain, vaikka jotain tapahtumaa tai yhteistyötä tai jotain, niin meidän vastaus on melkein aina katsojortimen kyllä."

Osallistumisen mahdollistaminen

- ▶ Kuluttajalähtöisen sisällöntuotannon mahdollistaminen
- ▶ Yhteisön jäsenten välisen keskustelun tukeminen
- ▶ Yhteisön jäsenten kutsuminen erilaisiin tapahtumiin
- ▶ Avoimuus kuluttajilta tuleville aloitteille

2.4 Yhteisön moninaisuuden huomioiminen

Yhteisön laajentaminen

- ▶ Yhteisön tarjonnan monipuolistaminen



Yhteisön sisäisen erilaisuuden huomioinnottaminen

- ▶ Tarjonnan kohdistaminen tietyille kuluttajaryhmille
- ▶ Kommunikointitavan mukauttaminen kuluttajan mukaan
- ▶ Kustomoinnin mahdollistaminen



2.5 Taloudellisten intressien tasapainottaminen

Yrityksen taloudellisten intressien verhoaminen

- ▶ Omien kaupallisten intressien edistämisen ja suoran voitontavoitteen asettamisen toissijaiseksi tavoitteeksi
 - ▶ Oikeutus yhteisön toiminnallisiin tavoitteisiin keskittymisellä
- ▶ Yhteisöpalveluiden ja -sisällön tarjoaminen voittoa tavoittelematta

"Rahastaminen tappaa yhteisöllisyyden."

"Me ollaan pyrityt siihen et meil ois 90 prosenttia sellasta hyvää sisältöä millä ei oo mitää tekemistä kaupallisuuden kanssa ja loput kymmenen on sit esim meidän T-paitojen mainostamista tai muuta. Sen täytyy olla täsi pien osa, muuten - meidän lukijoiden määrä varmasti tippuis."

"Ei aina tarte koittaa myydä jotain. - Mä ainakin ite kuluttajana ärsyynyn brändeistä jotka Facebookissaki vaa huutelee tarjouksiaan..."

2.5 Taloudellisten intressien tasapainottaminen

Kuluttajien taloudellisten intressien edistäminen

- ▶ Kuluttajien kokeman taloudellisen uhrauksen minimointi osallistumisen ja palveluiden edullisuuden kautta
- ▶ Kuluttajien palkitseminen taloudellisten etujen avulla



2.6 Yhteisten rituaalien ja traditioiden luominen

- ▶ Menestyksekkäiden tapahtumien uudelleenjärjestäminen
- ▶ Päivittäisten ja viikottaisten toimintatapojen vakiinnuttaminen
- ▶ Tavoitteena vakuuttaa osallistujat yhteisön toiminnan jatkuvuudesta sekä rakentaa yhteistä historiaa



3. Yhteenvedo

Kulutusyhteisöjen johtaminen yrityksen näkökulmasta



Tulosten vaihtehtoinen esittämistapa

