



Citation for published version:

Mamali, E, Nuttall, P & Shankar, A 2018, 'Formalizing consumer tribes: Towards a theorization of consumer-constructed organizations', *Marketing Theory*, vol. 18, no. 4, pp. 521-542.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593118767723>

DOI:

[10.1177/1470593118767723](https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593118767723)

Publication date:

2018

Document Version

Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication](#)

Mamali, Elissavet ; Nuttall, Peter ; Shankar, Avi. / Formalizing Consumer Tribes: Towards a Theorisation of Consumer Constructed Organisations. In: *Marketing Theory*. 2018 ; Vol. 18, No. 4. pp. 521-542. Copyright (C) The Authors 2018. Reprinted by permission of SAGE Publications.

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Formalising Consumer Tribes: Towards a Theorisation of Consumer Constructed Organisations

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Abstract

Marketing theory on consumer tribes explores how these ephemeral collectives can grow into more formal, organisational systems that become subject to the various demands of the market. But how tribal doctrines endure in communities that are formalising their market engagement remains under theorised. To address this, we draw from literature on hybrid organizations and ethnographic data from an art-house cinema tribe that is formalising its operations into what we conceptualize as a “Consumer Constructed Organization” (CCO). We theorise CCOs as dynamic, hybrid organisational forms that balance the doctrines and characteristics of consumer tribes with their role as market actors. In addition to introducing CCOs as a theoretical and empirical point of reference in consumer research literature, we contribute by theorising the ongoing tensions that unravel as tribal doctrines persevere or dissipate in the face of market demands and organisational formalisation.

Keywords: consumer tribes, consumption communities, consumer constructed organisations, formalisation, hybrid organisations, hybridity, consumer organising, tribal doctrines, market logics.

Introduction

Marketing theory documents many different forms of consumption communities, most notably tribes and brand communities, that engage in practices that can be characterized as organising (Cova et al., 2007; Schau et al, 2009). Organising manifests, for example, in the consumer-run executive boards that coordinate Star Trek's culture of consumption (Kozinets, 2001), and in the coordination of gatherings by the in-roller skaters' tribe (Cova and Cova, 2002). These "working consumers" engage in markets, producing value for and with corporations through their activities, while nurturing emotional social relationships with one another (Cova and Dalli, 2009). However, for members of such communities, the social and hedonic benefits of participation outweigh the group's economic significance in the market (Canniford, 2011). In other words, members prioritize linking over economic value (Cova, 1997).

In some cases, the amateuristic, hobbyist activities of working consumers evolve to more complex, formalised consumer organisational systems. These systems structure consumption communities and organise their functions, integrating cultural, social, human, and economic resources, in pursuit of particular opportunities, sometimes for profit. ManiFest, for example, is a Scandinavian registered association that emerged from the fetish tribe, organising parties for its paying members (Langer, 2007). Similarly, Danske Ølentusiaster (DØE) is a formal association born of a consumer tribe of beer enthusiasts in Denmark that engages in lobbying and entrepreneurial activism to change the dynamics of the Danish beer market (Kjeldgaard et al., 2017). When consumption communities evolve to formal organisational systems as is the case with ManiFest and DØE, members have to increasingly engage with external actors, including customers

and suppliers, financial institutions and regulatory bodies. As a result, members' ability to play by their own rules becomes restricted and the doctrines governing previously amateuristic organising practices are subject to change. Pursuing tribal hobbyism, such as a love for beer or a fascination with fetish, becomes co-dependent with, and often obstructed by the need to function as economic actors. That is, the original doctrines of the tribe and members' developing role as market actors, creates a new, hybrid organisational form.

Because of their hybrid nature, these consumer organisational systems are contested sites (Husemann et al., 2015; Scaraboto, 2015). Contestation occurs between the ethos of sharing and caring that characterises communities, and the market's more calculated, rational logic of commercial exchange, profit, and weaker social ties (Kozinets, 2002). In other words, while these consumers are actively seeking to shape markets, for example by producing and distributing their own Cola alternative (Husemann et al. 2015), they are not prepared to act as *conventional* economic actors. However, it remains unclear how these consumers negotiate different aspects of tribal organising when they engage in markets as more than just working consumers, and as the nature of their market engagement develops. To address this theoretical gap, we report on an ethnographic study of an organisation born of a consumer tribe, brought together by a shared passion for art-house cinema. In the building that houses the organisation, a permanent tribal meeting place, community members are now called upon to perform the roles of producers, consumers, workers and owners, organising their practices in response to conflicting tribal doctrines and the formal structures of the film and arts market.

Our theorisation is the result of the sensitization of emergent ethnographic themes within the existing literature on consumer tribes and literature on hybrid organisations. In building our understanding of a formal system of consumer organising, we interrogate the data to ask the following questions: how does formalisation manifest in members' organising? How do tribal doctrines endure in members' practices as the organisation engages more formally in the market? We find that tribal doctrines leave a significant footprint in these organisations that becomes even more apparent when members are challenged by market logics and the demands of formalisation. Specifically, we trace this footprint in members' symbolic demarcation from other, competing arts organisations, and in tensions that arise as members' participation fluctuates between fluidity and structure, art and commerce, and kinship and professionalisation. Emergent from our ethnographic data is a new analytic category that encapsulates the idiosyncrasies of more formalised consumption communities that we term "consumer constructed organisations" (CCO). We define a CCO as a dynamic, hybrid collaborative system of organising born of a consumption community. CCOs seek to balance the doctrines and characteristics of consumer tribes with their role as market actors in order to pursue a mission that amounts to more than just affect. We contribute to literature on consumer organising (Martin and Schouten, 2014; Scaraboto, 2015; Kjeldgaard et al., 2017; Husemann et al., 2015; Langer, 2007) by mapping the space between consumer tribes and "conventional" hybrid organisations. Specifically, we crystallize an analytic category that captures the characteristics of more complex consumer organisational systems that no longer fit the definition of a consumer tribe or brand community.

Theoretical Background

We start by reviewing research on consumer-born organisational systems that have given up their transience to formalise their operations. Drawing from literature on hybrid organisations, we then go on to demonstrate how organisational formalisation contests tribal doctrines.

Formalising Consumption Communities

In conceptualizing consumption communities, marketing literature has marked a theoretical move from passive consumers to innovative prosumers, who integrate cultural, social, human, and economic resources to organise their activities and co-create value with and for corporations (Cova et al., 2015; Cova and Dalli, 2009; Schau et al., 2009). Largely these consumers engage in new forms of work (Kozinets et al., 2008), a serious type of leisure, in through which they give meaning to their hobbyist pursuits (Stebbins, 1982). That is, even though consumption communities are collaboratively organised in an amateuristic fashion, members treat their participation with the seriousness and dedication more commonly attributed to career building. Studies of consumer tribes and brand communities, for example, show that consumers organise informal leadership teams that moderate participation (Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder, 2011), they project-manage fan events (Cova and Cova, 2002; Kozinets, 2001; Schau et al., 2009), and they even coordinate the production of advertising campaigns (Kozinets et al., 2008). By participating in consumption communities, individuals also gain personal fulfilment as they are able to cultivate skills and use their creativity in ways that may not be possible in their regular work environments (Kozinets

et al., 2008; Stebbins, 1982). Through their prosuming behaviours consumption community members reconfigure traditional transactional relationships with the marketplace (Cova 1997; Cova and Pace, 2006; Muniz and O’Guinn 2001) and sometimes create new opportunities for entrepreneurialism (Cova et al, 2007; Goulding et al., 2009). By contrast, a more critical stance on prosumption ascertains these phenomena as a form of affective labour that is exploited by marketers with the pretence of placing consumers in a sovereign position within the marketplace (Zwick and Bradshaw, 2016).

More recently, studies have reported on more formalised organisational systems which, while differing in their exact shape and form, are emergent from the consumption activities of communities (Martin and Schouten, 2014; Scaraboto, 2015; Kjeldgaard et al., 2017; Husemann et al., 2015; Langer, 2007). These systems are hybrid in nature because they serve community pursuits, whilst intensifying their market engagement. We select and list some of these empirical contexts in table 1, alongside information on their community origins, central pursuit and legal status. We brand these examples as “formalised” organisational systems because despite them being grounded in consumption communities, they no longer fit the definition of a brand community or tribe for two reasons.

Table 1. Examples of Formalised Organisational Systems in Consumer Research

Empirical Context	Origin	Central Pursuit	Formalised Status
Premium (Husemann et al., 2015)	Brand community that centred on an “Afri Cola” drink	Production and distribution of own cola, beer and coffee.	Non-profit association
DØE (Kjeldgaard et al., 2017)	Beer enthusiasts	Disseminating knowledge about beer quality and supporting Danish craft brewing	Non-profit association
Geocaching (Scaraboto, 2015)	“The Global Positioning Stash Hunt”, online newsgroup and subsequently mailing list facilitating a stash game in physical locations	Outdoor stash game in which participants hide and seek “caches” with the help of a GPS receiver	Collaborative network of participants, including an official, incorporated website owned by a few individuals
MMSX (Martin and Schouten, 2014)	Community of local enthusiasts, who informally organised races in their back yards	Two wheeled motor racing	Complex market network, comprising racers, audiences, publications, parts suppliers and event sponsors

First, as their members exhibit more and more hyper-organisational behaviours (Schouten and Martin 2010), the transience commonly associated with consumption communities (Cova 1997; Cova and Cova 2002; Canniford 2011) dissipates. Consumption communities “exist in no other form but the symbolically and ritually manifested commitment of their members” (Cova, 1997, 301). By contrast, cases such as Premium, DØE, Geocaching and MMSX acquire permanence and presence through changes in their legal and/or ownership status (i.e. they become incorporated, register as associations, receive sanctions etc.). Second, while these organisational systems are formed on the basis of an attachment to a brand (Premium) or consumption of a product or activity (DØE, Geocaching, MMSX), the absence of a sovereign marketer that leverages (economic) value out of members’ affective labour changes the nature of prosumption in

these systems in ways that are yet to be explored. We note that in cases when individuals directly profit out of the activities of these systems (as is the case in MMSX and Geocaching), these beneficiaries are not mainstream industry players as it is commonly the case with marketers leeching onto traditional consumption communities.

Consumption communities in their formalised expression are thus engaging in markets in different ways to their amateur counterparts. As members become producers, consumers, workers and owners themselves, and assume different forms of ownership and responsibility, while pursuing hedonic, political and sometimes financial ambitions, it is unsurprising that the original tribal doctrines come under pressure.

We explore this premise further in the next section, drawing upon literature on hybrid organisations and unpacking the contestations that are prevalent in such organisations. Specifically we argue that formalised consumption communities are themselves a form of hybrid organisation (Scaraboto, 2015), albeit with their own unique idiosyncrasies. This enables us to explain why tribal doctrines are challenged when consumers are required to organise their activities in a more business-like fashion.

Hybrid organisations

Hybrid organisations engage in markets as economic actors but they are distinguished from other organisations by the centrality of their social mission. This manifests in “core features and is central to organisational functioning” (Besharov and Smith, 2014, 365), and their operations concentrate on providing market-informed solutions to social issues (Peredo and Chrisman, 2006). Hybrid organisational systems, thus, get their hybrid characterization because they incorporate diverse, often incompatible, logics that

manifest in their culture, management and operations (Battilana and Dorado, 2010). Their attempt to serve their social and/or environmental goals is co-dependent on running a successful business (Battilana and Dorado, 2010; Sanders and McClellan, 2014). For example, in her study in Natural Food Stores, Besharov (2014) identified the tensions that arise when participants prioritize promoting the environmental mission of the organisation and giving back to the local community, over financial prosperity. In other words, management responsibilities in such organisations are often at odds with the social, ethical and even emancipatory aspects of their mission. Their non-market pursuits, that largely centre on a narrative of passion, morals, idealism and “giving back to communities”, conflict with market impositions including the need for income generation, service levels (Battilana and Dorado, 2010), cost reduction, and people management (Sanders and McClellan, 2014; Smith et al., 2013).

Hybrid organisations are not dissimilar to the more formal consumer organisational systems that we encounter in marketing literature. Workers in both organisational forms are constantly faced with paradox because they manage contradictory elements of organisational practice that exist simultaneously and persist over time (Jay, 2013; Smith and Lewis, 2011). Scaraboto (2015) for example, describes how participants of the Geocaching game have to reconcile contradictory market-based and non-market based modes of exchange such as sharing and gift giving in their interactions. Similarly, prosumers in the Premium association oscillate between principles of open participation and governance, and centralisation of decision-making (Luedicke et al., 2017). As studies on hybrid organisations show, such paradoxical modes of organising may manifest across all aspects of organisational practice: in organisational

performance, where plurality creates ambiguity with regards to what constitutes organisational success; in belonging, when competing doctrines encourage identity ambiguity; and in structures of organising, when employees are called to evaluate trade-offs between collaborative ways of working that reflect the social drive of the organisation and more authoritative management styles (Jay, 2013). Despite the similarities that we observe between “conventional” hybrid organisations and consumer-born organisational systems, the latter are idiosyncratic in their form and composition, because they are hobbyist in their origins and remain consumption-centric in their formalised expression.

Drawing from the challenges facing conventional hybrid organisations we now turn to explain why tribal doctrines and modus operandi are challenged as communities formalise. In laying out the doctrines that underlie consumption communities we rely primarily on consumer tribes. While we recognize that not all tribal doctrines are necessarily present in all consumption communities, we focus on those doctrines and assumptions that are more likely to be contested by market logics and that to some extent can be found in both tribes and brand communities. Our argument is based on the following considerations; First, tribes do not rely on a central power for the coordination of their activities (Cova, 1997). Tribal identities are temporal and fluid (Bennett, 1999) and members move across different sites of identity expression without necessarily adopting fixed roles in the collective. As they become more akin to hybrid organisations, however, structure and stability of participation become essential to survival (Cornforth and Roger, 2010), severely limiting the ability to remain fluid. Second, tribe members seek experiences through shared emotions and passion. In that sense they are affectual

(Maffesoli, 1996) in nature and unconcerned with the pragmatic fiscal and legal demands that they would face as formal hybrid organisations. Third, consumer tribes are known to be playful arenas (Kozinets, 2002; Cova et al., 2007), particularly in their treatment of marketplace resources (Cova et al., 2007) continuously re-assembling them in collective performances. Yet, as hybrid organisations pursue long-term (social) goals and juggle what are often limited resources (Smith and Lewis, 2011; Battilana and Lee, 2014), the need for efficiency contests playful amateurism. Finally, consumption in tribes primarily serves to increase linking value amongst participants who seek roots through association to others (Maffesoli, 1996; Cova and Cova, 2002). While social bonds amongst participants may well manifest in the formalised expression of the community, conventional hybrid organisations tend to be more focused on serving a social mission (Besharov and Smith, 2014; Peredo and Chrisman, 2006; Battilana and Dorado, 2010; Sanders and McClellan, 2014) rather than member rapport.

To summarise, we deem behaviours that are underlined by fluidity, playfulness, sociality and affect to be expressive of tribal doctrines. We seek to understand how these doctrines are impacted by the need for structure, stability, professionalism and solvency brought on by formalisation, and how they endure in organisational systems that are born of consumption communities but that no longer fit the definition of a tribe or brand community.

Methodology

Empirical Context

We conducted ethnographic research in an arts centre in the United Kingdom, which we will hereafter refer to as “The Square”. The Square operates primarily as a cinema, with other art forms (e.g. live music performances and visual arts exhibitions) occasionally present in its program. The organisation was born of a consumer tribe in 1998 and the “catalysts” (Martin and Schouten, 2014) to its formalisation were the acquisition of the building that now houses the organisation, a permanent tribal meeting place, and the tribe’s registration with the Companies House¹. It is run by a community of volunteers who self-organise to manage a building that houses a performance space/cinema, a bar, and an office.

In its initial incarnation, The Square comprised of an informal, loose-ties community that operated in the same city, organising unlicensed film screenings and music events in squats or other ad-hoc spaces made available via members or their friends. In line with the characteristics of consumer tribes, the community’s operations were ad-hoc and its gatherings transient and illegal, largely depending on members’ commitment and space availability. In other words, the community existed only insofar as its members symbolically and ritually manifested their desire to participate (Cova, 1997). As is the case with consumer tribes, members were brought together by a highly symbolic and conspicuous passion (Maffesoli, 1996); that is cinematic consumption of 16mm avant-garde and experimental films. Longstanding members report that this consumption desire was, unsurprisingly, not satisfied at the time by the local multiplex,

¹ the United Kingdom's registrar of companies

or the local art-house cinema, which was thought to have an unchallenging program. Early participants largely fit the UK Film Council's description of a film buff: film consumers who eschew mainstream cinematic consumption, seeking more specialized and challenging films. These consumers tend to socialize around film and film commonly binds them in communities of interest (UK Film Council, 2007).

Dissatisfaction with mainstream offerings for these consumers brought on the need for them to "make their own" leisure. This was facilitated by the skills and experience of those members whose main job was in the arts field (mainly visual artists and musicians) and who possessed sufficient cultural and social capital to energize participation and make events feasible, for example through securing films out of catalogues or collections from London filmmakers, co-op collections and the British Film Institute's avant-garde series. The tribe progressed through different stages of formalising, accumulating tacit knowledge and developing local social networks, the first of which involved occupancy of a permanent office space from where the core members worked. The building that houses The Square was acquired in October 1998, after two years of informal organising in temporary and semi-permanent spaces.

Today, over 300 unpaid members are involved on a casual basis in the routine, daily operations of running the organisation with a core team of approximately 50 dealing with management processes and administration. Members enact a prosumer role, whereby carrying out a "staff" role on any given evening (e.g. usher, bartender, Djing, selling tickets, cleaning) concurs with consuming what's on at the time. Revenue is based on three sources: door income, bar sales, and selected private hires (e.g. private screenings, hires of the space for talks etc.).

Data collection methods

The first author gained entry to the backstage action by volunteering, without having any prior involvement with the community. An overt role was adopted and members of the community were made aware of the researcher role of the ethnographer-volunteer both in the new volunteers' induction event that the ethnographer attended, and in the community's central mailing list. Fieldwork was conducted over a year during which the ethnographer conducted participant observation by volunteering on average two evening every week in roles such as ushering, selling tickets and most commonly bartending, which provided better opportunities for data collection due to the social nature of the role. In addition, the ethnographer attended general and department specific (e.g. programing, podcasting, bar running) meetings. Getting close to members allowed the gathering of unsolicited accounts whereby the ethnographer posed questions to the respondents when the situation and context was deemed suitable in an attempt to get as experience-near as possible.

In addition, long interviews (McCracken, 1988) were conducted with 15 volunteers (Table 1). Six of the interviewees had joined the organisation through prior tribal association, having been involved with the community in different capacities before it occupied a permanent space. One of these interviewees is the only remaining founder. Seven of our participants joined after having visited the organisation as customers for a period of time, and, finally, two of the participants joined after discovering the organisation online. Interviewees were broadly questioned on their involvement with the organisation. Operations were discussed in relation to members' roles in the venue, the nature and social aspects of the organisation, decision making processes, the doctrines

and ethos of the group and challenges faced or ways in which members thought The Square dysfunctional.

Finally, data was also collected through the central mailing list that is accessible to all registered and working volunteers. The mailing list provided a valuable source of data due to its status as the primary decision-making forum. The mailing list does not replace physical meetings but ensures that any matter brought up in such meetings is then opened up for discussion to all members. As such, email conversations provided insights to the operational challenges faced by The Square, enabling the uncovering of conflict and tensions. Over 2000 emails were exchanged during the ethnographer's immersion in the field site, all of which were monitored for relevant data and scrutinized for emergent themes. Data from the mailing list allowed for triangulation. Particularly when it comes to organisational conflicts and debates, we were able to observe these unfold offline, online and then access the (often opposing) perspectives of different members through the interviews.

We analysed interviews, field notes and email conversations using QRS NVivo, which facilitated the organising of transcripts, thematic categories and integration of data. We uncovered themes and patterns between informants and observations by abstracting, comparing and integrating, using a back and forth process between theory and data. In absence of a definitive concept for the organisational systems that consumption communities enact, we draw both from existing literature as well as from our analysis of The Square and we set out to specify a theoretical and empirical point of reference for such organisations. In this process we were guided by the apparent contradictions between tribal doctrines and the environmental conditions in which hybrid, formalised

organisations operate, as set out in our literature review. We sensitize these contradictory forces to anchor our themes to the existing literature and to provide specification to formalised systems of consumer organising (Blumer, 1954; Bowen 2006).

Table 2. Participant Information.

Pseudonym	Roles Held in The Square	Joined Through	Highest Level of Education	Occupation
Max	General volunteering, programmer, keyholder	Tribal association	BA Arts	Artist
Johnny	General volunteering, IT management, keyholder	Tribal association	BSc Science	Private Sector Professional
Frances	Bar stocking, finance, programmer, IT management, keyholder	Tribal association	BA Arts	Artist
Jack	General volunteering, programmer	Tribal association	MSc Humanities	Public Sector Professional
Daniel	Programmer, IT management, finance, keyholder	Tribal association	BA Arts	Artist
Patrick	General volunteering, programmer, keyholder	Tribal association	BA Humanities	Artist
Mark	General volunteering, stocking, keyholder	Customer first	Secondary School	Clerical support worker
Neal	General volunteering, programmer, keyholder	Customer first	BA Humanities	Private Sector Professional
Penny	General volunteering, programmer, keyholder	Customer first	BSc Social Science	Private Sector Professional
Alex	General volunteering, programmer, keyholder	Customer first	BA Humanities	Clerical support worker
Jake	General volunteering, keyholder	Customer first	BA Humanities	Artist
Billy	General volunteering	Customer first	BA Arts	Clerical support worker
Lisa	General volunteering, waste management	Customer first	BSc Social Science	Service Worker
Robbie	General volunteering	Online WOM	PhD Science	Student
Jane	General volunteering	Online WOM	BA Social Science	Public Sector Professional

Findings

In our analysis we start by providing an account of the ways in which tribal doctrines manifest as a symbolic mechanism of distinction from competing institutions in the local established cultural scene. We subsequently explore how, despite tribal doctrines constituting a symbolic resource for The Square, they are largely contested. Specifically we show how differences in members' symbolic capital, limited resources and formalisation spark tensions that are embedded across all areas of organising. Throughout our analysis we show how The Square recombines organisational practices prevalent in "conventional" hybrid organisations with tribal doctrines to legitimize its form.

Tribal doctrines as symbolic mechanism of distinction from competitors

Throughout the ethnographer's participation at The Square members exhibited cultural sovereignty over other arts organisations operating in the local cultural scene, often expressed in "us versus them" discourses. The local cultural scene is complex and competition develops amongst clusters of organisations positioned closer in social space and which see themselves as primary competitors. For The Square, juxtapositions are palpable with distant actors like multinational chain cinemas that construct an experience around state of the art equipment and blockbuster movies. By contrast, art house cinemas and arts centres capitalizing on an off-the-mainstream positioning and elitist programming present more similarities to our investigated organisation. Our analysis shows how the prevalence of tribal doctrines plays an important role in members' symbolic demarcation from such competitors. As Jake explains:

As far as the [local art house cinema] experience is concerned, you phone up and you get somebody who always asks you exactly the same stuff on the phone, and it is like 'I want to see such and such' They don't really chat with you on the phone, they are just somebody doing their job. And then they will say 'right ok... so which showing you want to come to... blah blah blah... give me your card number details....blah blah blah...I hope you enjoy the film'. You know, that is basically what you get there. And then you go along, there may be somebody ushering but you are not going to chat to them, they are just doing their job again. (...) They have a cafe but the cafe is not THAT inviting to chat in, especially with strangers... Whereas at The Square it is like you phone up, you might get somebody at the office, you might not (laughs)... If you do, they will be able to chat to you for hours about it [the film]! You then have to go down and gonna pay by the door, you get that funny ticket and then if you are a smoker you go outside to the garden and meet other smokers and people hanging out there, drinking or whatever and chat to somebody there, or if not there then in the cafe/bar area. (...) and in a strange sort of way it gives you a good feeling. It is a friendly feeling.

Jake asserts organisational distinction by comparing and contrasting practices in The Square to those of the local art house cinema. Playing on members' passion for film, he juxtaposes participation with the robotic, mundane work practices of employees in more market-oriented institutions. Jake's account also demonstrates that participation in The Square has linking value (Cova and Cova, 2002). Patrons tend to hang out at the premises before and after the projection of films, alongside permanent members that enact their prosumer roles by working shifts whilst consuming film offerings. There is, in that sense,

a complete continuity between patrons and permanent members, which makes the organisation a community hub rather than a retail space.

Members further leverage the participatory structures that they enact in asserting sovereignty. Unlike The Square that is reliant on providing services for income, many local arts organisations that hold a charity status, benefit from multi-million pound grants awarded by funders such as The Arts Council England and The Lottery Fund, and the local city council. As hybrid organisations, these competitors create jobs that serve the social mission of the advancement of arts and culture, as well as roles that attain to business pursuits (Cornforth and Roger, 2010). Patrick, a member of The Square that has experience of working in such arts organisations, describes the tensions that occur when employees' passion clashes with funder requirements that senior management teams have to deliver against. He then explains how decision-making in The Square differs:

Say the [local art gallery] or even somewhere like [local arts center] you obviously... you got to persuade the administration of that organisation of what you think is a good idea and that administration is NOT your peer group. It's a hierarchy that has its own value system and own ideas about you know...Whereas here the people you have to persuade something is a good idea are basically your peers and are your equals.

Patrick describes how through democratic participatory structures, members act in ways that advance the interests of the group as a whole. The lack of a designated central power, reminiscent of a tribe-like structure (Canniford, 2011), is compared to the hierarchical administration of other institutions, where centralized decisions often serve individualistic, profit-making goals rather than collective passion. Indeed, commonness

of goals and interests amongst members who are there primarily to prosume, rather than to run a business, means that decisions are largely driven by affect, or as Patrick explains: “The program is done out of passion really, people put things on because they want to see them themselves, which is a good principle”.

Finally, The Square is characterized by a sense of playfulness that is prominent in consumer tribes (Goulding et al., 2013; Canniford, 2011), which we attribute to members’ lack of prior experience. Having to understand how to carry out certain tasks “on the job” entails trial and error, and in the absence of rigid supervision members adopt a playful stance in their treatment of available resources. Neil explains how this constitutes an important part of his participatory experience:

The big thing for me is that [The Square] is a bit of a toy box (...) From an artistic point of view, there are video cameras there [in the projection room], there is an editing suite, there is lots of different stuff to play with. So I don’t know about other arts organisations in [city] but there is very much a sandbox feel to The Square. You are encouraged to go play with stuff, figure out how it works, unplug things, plug things back in.

Despite scarcity of resources and the organisation often struggling to replace and maintain equipment, Dave’s account illustrates that material resources are not there merely for utilitarian purposes and have more than just an investment value. They are tools with which to play, experiment, practice and learn.

Fluidity and Structure

The Square's constitution is modelled after the organisational form that is the Worker Cooperative, known to exhibit anti-authoritarian behaviours, including an overtly assertive division of labour, in favour of flatter, participative structures (Diefenbach and Sillince, 2011; Rothschild-Whitt, 1979). Management of the different aspects of running the organisation is through division of labour in 'departments' that look after programming (separate groups for music, film and visual arts), finance, IT technology and bar stocking. These departments are only reified through the activities of their members since departmental roles are not formally registered, nor do they occupy a distinct physical location in the building.

Departmental division in The Square does not prevent the free flow of members from one department to another or parallel participation in multiple sub-teams. The departments are comprised of around 15 permanent members and a fluctuating turnover of a few others who want "a taste" of the nature of the work in each department without long-term commitment. The practice of flexible transition from one departmental team to another reflects the volunteer nature of prosumption and fluidity of roles commonly associated with consumer tribes (Cova et al., 2007; Canniford, 2011), and the ethnographer was encouraged to freely associate with roles covering any aspect of the production of offerings they want to see realized and to consume. The ethnographer experienced the working consumer role as multiple and varied, engaging with production tasks such as gathering props and marketing screenings, serving in different front of house roles like usher and bartender, and attended films screenings and live performances as a consumer.

Fluidity of roles, a tribal attribute that differentiates The Square from conventional hybrid organisations, is contested by organically arising hierarchies. These are both hierarchies of “effort”, as observed in some consumer tribes (Goulding and Saren, 2007) and hierarchies of competence, whereby some members exercise increased cultural and social capital (Husemann et al., 2015). Operational need for some members to assume more responsibility than just irregular participation, paired with the participative patterns of members involved recurrently and intensively with a particular role, result in these members formalising their authority. For example, the programming, finance and IT departments all had 2-3 individuals that were perceived as “leaders” by other participants, manifesting their authority by taking on more tasks, as well as in their increased ability to oppose proposals or ideas deemed unsuitable. As Frances describes, admitting the existence of such informal hierarchies is a taboo in the organisation:

There is always a bit of tyranny of structurelessness going on here. A co-operative is supposed to be much flatter and I don't think those structures work. Most people would be horrified, I don't say these things at meetings, because people hate to hear that. I don't think flat structures exist. It is a fantasy.

Frances expresses her doubts with regards to an all too common ideal in The Square: peer participation. As discussed earlier, the sense of participating amongst equals comprises a large part of members' tribal identity and largely contributes to how they identify with the organisation. In practice, however, fluidity of roles co-exists with semi-formal hierarchies that are frustrating to those with less power, or as Alex puts it: “Everyone in The Square is equal but it does seem sometimes and in the words of George Orwell that

some people are more equal than others”. We see here that members compensate for the breach of tribal doctrines by negating the existence of power hierarchies and by discursively constructing a utopian vision of a structureless institution. This is evident in the manner in which The Square is portrayed on its website and in promotional materials, like hard copy programmes, that draw emphasis on cooperative principles. While in practice the organisation enacts structures that distribute decision-making power in unequal ways, tribal doctrines of flexible and autonomous participation endure, albeit as a fantasy.

Members’ symbolic capital is also a significant drive of how structures manifest. Longstanding members, and particularly those with more cultural capital gained through their broader experience in the arts (e.g. education or main occupation within the cultural field), take a protectionist stance towards The Square by limiting the decision-making power of those with less capital. Protectionism commonly manifests in the power of some members to question and problematize ideas for their “fit” with the organisation. Daniel, who has been active at The Square for over a decade, explains the necessity to assert authority in this way:

In the past there was this kind of idea that it was "the way of The Square" which was not written down and you could not define it or write it down but it was in the air. That was the sort of spirit in which we did things and approached culture and did art and events (...) If people are now coming in and just saying “oh I want to put this on”, and you say “why?”, and they say “why not?” , then that is a problem I think.

Daniel has a nostalgic view of the earlier days of The Square when commonness of thought amongst a considerably lower number of members rendered the need for structuring obsolete. By contrast, in the current incarnation of The Square and while departments are open for any member to join, decision-making power is not automatically assumed upon participation and members must demonstrate commitment, skills and an understanding of the organisation's mission in order to improve their standing.

The existence of hierarchical structures clashes with some members' expectations regarding their prosumer roles and particularly the ability to act freely and "out of passion", in a manner reminiscent of tribal participation (Maffesoli, 1996; Cova et al., 2007). Neil explains:

The film programing team is a bit of a disappointment to me to be honest. And there are people there that tend to try to dominate the proceedings and issue instructions to everybody else. (...) If you are a volunteer then you should be able to put things on, that is what makes the program interesting.

Neal's views are representative of many members who are frustrated over structuring being the privilege of only certain participants. Members like him, generally do not possess sufficient capital to subvert the formalisation of role authority that others have achieved, despite verbally challenging the arbitrariness of the power inequality they sustain.

Art and Commerce

Film programming in The Square, the main offering of the organisation, comprises of an eclectic mix of independent and foreign language films, as well as documentaries, repertoire cinema and more mainstream Hollywood productions with an alternative “flair”. A number of factors contribute to the formation of the organisation’s programming identity, including its founding roots, organisational mission and financial and industry constraints.

In the early days of The Square one of the primary motivations driving the community’s activities was dissatisfaction with the variety of offerings in other arts venues. The one remaining founder explains:

“We weren’t really happy or stimulated by what was going on [in the city] at the time and the [local art house cinema] which had a very, very blunt programme. It was all very mainstream so we thought we got to do something ourselves”.

Members’ discontent with local offerings is reflective of the state of the cinema sector in the UK, where despite the increased number of screens since 1986, access to a diverse range of filmography has remained comparably more restricted (Kerrigan and Ozbilgin, 2002).

What started out as a need to “make our own leisure”, with members programming films and events that they themselves were passionate about, has evolved to a mission of providing audience access to alternative filmography. When Max was asked to describe what makes for a good programming choice he explains:

I think it's when people's minds are blown. Even if you have 10 people in the auditorium. Especially if there is someone who had no interest in something like that before and stumbled in. That is amazing, isn't it?.

As this participant explains, prosumption is not merely self-indulgent and for members' own satisfaction, but aims to provide a service of "educating" patrons about the value of film as an art form. With that mission in mind, tensions often emerge between the goal of providing access to alternative art offerings that are able to challenge, provoke and educate through their complex narratives, and ensuring commercial viability by programming films that have entertainment value and can attract mass audiences.

Debates that reproduce an "art versus commerce" discourse are often initiated in the central mailing list when members with high cultural capital zealously defend a certain vision for the organisation:

Obviously, we do need to generate income - of course - but I feel that if a perception has developed that this should be a main driving force or reason for being or doing, I would see that as unfortunate (...) I would say this: the income that is (absolutely) necessary needs to be considered only as component of facilitating our independence, which enables us to do interesting, culturally valuable things for the wider community (email exchange, March 2012)

Members here attempt to moderate the market orientation of the organisation. Money, considered to be a "dirty" word amongst many members, is framed as necessary means in the process of educating the wider community, rather than an end in itself. By contrast,

those more attuned to the fiscal obligations and restraints facing The Square, demonstrate a commitment to the survival of the organisation that is more akin to accountability. The building housing the organisation, for example, is constantly in need of maintenance and repair, while essential equipment in the projection room and back office requires updating, the cost of which is often prohibitive. Penny explains how pragmatic constraints impose the need for more commercial programming:

Necessity requires us sometimes to show films that don't quite fit. I mean for instance at the moment we got the Andersen film, 'Moonrise Kingdom'. It has Bruce Willis in it, Tilda Swinton, a lot of other very famous actors. The audiences for that have been close to capacity. I think last night was sold out. And The Square has got to survive in the long term and it needs money. So those kinds of films are absolutely an essential part of the mix. So you got a film programming team that has blinkers on if you like and conducts all its debate in those terms: it's got to be experimental, mustn't be predictable.

Market impositions, such as the need to remain lucrative, structure programming decisions in more than one ways. The unequal power that the organisation holds against distributors is another manifestation of market constraints. Unable to negotiate deals due to the small size of the organisation, members have to comply with major distributor requirements for showcasing a film recurrently, guaranteeing a more significant profit. This practice is seen as "applying retail philosophy" by members, who are interested in variety of offerings rather than aggregating profits. We see then how the permanence of the organisation embeds the community in formal distribution channels, imposing constraints that are ideologically at odds with members' affectual attachment to art.

Despite expressing dismay towards mainstream programming, members are prepared to make concessions. This is morally justified as a necessity that enables The Square to carry out its mission of making available niche offerings. Jack, who runs a highly profitable, recurrent cabaret event, explains:

I know that if we want the cabaret on a certain date and there is something [already] in the diary, I know we have a certain amount of power to say could you perhaps move it, because we make The Square a lot of money which helps support showing...I don't know, a Lithuanian film with 5 people coming in. I love seeing a really full house obviously but it is good to make lots of money on certain nights to support the nights that don't. But also supporting niche programming I suppose. But what you don't want to do is have really niche programming on nights of the week where you could be making money.

By selectively combining events that have entertainment value with niche programming, members reconcile the institutional pluralism facing The Square (Pache and Santos, 2013). Through compromising and synthesizing, practices that are common in hybrid organisations that serve contradictory demands (Kratz and Block, 2008; Jay 2013), The Square challenges existing provision within the limitations imposed by mass audiences' tastes, distribution systems and the organisation's own fiscal needs. These tactics balance a more tribal sentiment of "art for art's sake" with economic efficiency in patterns of programming. Under the mission of "educating audiences", members reconcile their tribal, affectual attachment to film as cultural expression with a market logic that sees art as a commodity that has exchange value.

Kinship and Professionalisation

Running The Square involves managing with limited material, financial and human resources. Often, those members with experience of managing in more conventional organisations (gained through their main job) use their cultural capital to professionalise organising practices in a bid to improve the efficiency with which resources are used and distributed. That is, members fluctuate between amateuristic and professionalised attitudes to organising that profoundly alter the nature of the work that they do. This includes establishing scripted, repeated practices that formalise and homogenise processes to allow for better monitoring of resources. An example of such a practice is the recurrent induction event which is held every few months, when a sufficient number of new volunteers have expressed their interest in participating. Inductions are essentially a one-off training event that familiarizes newcomers with the organisation and in the words of those running the induction a “practical way to pass on information on how we operate”. Longstanding members are often vocal about their opposition to the induction process which they see as a “bureaucratic imposition” that is “damaging” to The Square. Max describes a more organic process of joining the organisation that was prevalent in earlier times:

People initially would be coming because they came to see something that interests them and usually it [the process of joining] would be something that was fairly esoteric. So that is already a kind of introduction... it is already is a sort of kinship that is happening and then come back a few times, you are getting to talk to people and then... that seems to me a much healthier way in.

For Max an unorganised process of joining that is gradual and based on forging relationships is a better way for The Square to grow. The formalisation of the induction process homogenizes the process of joining in the name of operational efficiency and consistency and, in the eyes of Max, threatens the ethos of mutuality and commitment that underpin communities. The scripted induction process in that sense makes The Square less tribal in nature by revoking the possibility for an esoteric understanding of the organisation, whereby newcomers align with the doctrines of the community by nurturing tribe-like links with others (Goulding et al., 2013; Cova, 1997).

A similar conflict manifests in the formalisation of staffing management through the adoption of an online information system. For a number of years planning for staffing at The Square took place via a paper roster where members could sign up to fill front of house roles up to two weeks in advance. The effectiveness of the roster was questioned by some as understaffed screenings and events were often spotted at the last minute, resulting in urgent calls for help at the central mailing list and even cancellations and lost door income. When a proposal was put forward to adopt an online staffing management system that would improve the running of The Square, this was met with dismay by some. Johnny, who is supportive of the online rota and has technical expertise to help with its implementation, explains the reasons behind the conflict:

The argument runs something like this: The Square is a social organisation, people should be talking to each other. The rota has traditionally been a scrappy piece of paper on the wall, people when they are working should come in and sign up for the next shift or two and have a chat or a cup of tea while they are doing so. So other people replied to that by saying that well actually 98% of the other business is done

by email or electronically so why should this be any different? There isn't really a good answer to that. So we did gradually get in agreement to try an online rota. There are taboos in The Square. The online rota is a taboo and when they get discussed the temperature goes up. And there is this kind of idea around that by doing some things like having the rota online, there is this notion that somehow we are jettisoning some core principles.

As Johnny describes, transitioning to a streamlined process of staffing is seen by some as disruptive to established ways of working together, and damaging to the manner in which collective work strengthens connections between members. The online staff management tool, in other words, deprives the roster of its linking value (Cova, 1997). Efficient behaviour in conventional organisations is rewarded by profit (Weisbrod, 1988). In absence of a profit motive, these members show preference for a more 'unorganised' approach to management processes that is more akin to the amateurism that characterises consumer tribes and gives space to doctrines like kinship to flourish. The market logic of efficiency that requires control in how resources are used and allocated is seen as detrimental to members' connectedness that is best developed through a less rigid approach to organizing.

Discussion

We have shown how a group of prosumers who are passionate about film and seek to provide access to the consumption of niche programming, are formally organising their

operations in a permanent tribal meeting place. Members of this organisation leverage tribal doctrines as they symbolically demarcate from competing actors in the arts field. While the tribal footprint is evident across all areas of organisational practice, we also see that tribal doctrines are challenged and even dissipate as the community engages formally in the market and its members adopt business-like practices.

Marketing literature has documented numerous consumer organising systems that are born of consumption communities, but have evolved in ways that profoundly alter their form (Martin and Schouten, 2014; Scaraboto, 2015; Kjeldgaard et al., 2017; Husemann et al., 2015; Langer, 2007). We know, for example, that these systems are hybrid in nature as they adhere to both market and non-market logics (Scaraboto, 2015), they are underpinned by conflict (Husemann et al., 2015) and they can alter the dynamics of markets (Kjeldgaard et al., 2017; Goulding et al., 2009). To date, however, the nature of these formalised systems and their shared DNA with the dominant construct of “consumption communities”, has not been interrogated. Drawing from our analysis of The Square and to differentiate our context of study from traditional consumption communities, and from consumer tribes in particular, we develop and crystalize a new concept, that of Consumer Constructed Organisations (CCOs). We define a CCO as a dynamic, hybrid collaborative system of organising born of a consumption community. CCOs seek to balance the doctrines and characteristics of consumer tribes with their role as market actors in order to pursue a mission that amounts to more than just affect.

Consumer tribes are known to sometimes develop antagonistic attitudes in their market engagement. The kinship and care ethos that underpins members’ relationships and practices is incongruent with the interests of market actors to monetise such

relationships and to over-commercialise products, meanings and behaviours that are significant for members (Kozinets, 2001; 2002; Goulding and Saren, 2007). We show that when consumer tribes formalise their existence as legal and fiscal entities, these challenges do not merely manifest as a competitive relationship between the community and other market actors but become internalised as contradictions that members have to live with and manage.

We find that tribal doctrines endure through such contradictions in three different ways. First, as our analysis of imagined participatory structures shows, they persist as a fantasy of how things ‘ought’ to be done, an ideal that members take pride in but don’t necessarily actualise. Second, some tribal doctrines endure through means of compromise. This is more evident in members’ mainstream programming decisions that become morally justifiable so long as they support a broader organisational mission. Finally, we also witness instances when tribal doctrines endure as discourses that problematise organisational practice, particularly as these reflect a logic of efficiency that results in the homogenization of processes and threatens relationships. CCOs, thus, forge new pathways of market engagement for consumers.

Marketing theory has been criticised for fixating on a particular vision of consumer communities as a marketing tool from which corporations can subtly extract value (Zwick and Bradshaw, 2016). CCOs represent a very different vision of consumer organising. Rather than socially constructed marketing tools, CCOs are reified through their legal status and operations and grow independently of mainstream marketing players, pursuing a mission that is grounded in members’ interests. CCOs, thus, differ in their market engagement because the affective, cultural and economic value they produce

is primarily captured and managed by participants and is reinvested back in the organisation.

In the rest of our discussion we map the space between consumer tribes and “conventional” hybrid organisations (table 3). We use The Square as a point of reference, and draw from examples in the literature, to demonstrate the broad application of CCO as an analytic category. This allows us to show how CCOs are an idiosyncratic form of hybrid organisation. We focus on four aspects of organising: the purpose underlying members’ involvement, structures of participation, manifestations of commitment and the management of processes and resources.

Table 3. Organising in Consumer Constructed Organisations.

	Consumer Tribes	The Square	Conventional Hybrid Organisations
Purpose	Self-seeking, affectual	Mission-serving, affectual	Effectual
Structures of Participation	Informal roles, participative hierarchies	Fluid roles, participative hierarchies	Formal roles, Anti-authoritative Hierarchies
Commitment	Symbolic & Ritualistic	Moral Accountability	Legal & Fiscal
Management of Processes & Resources	Playful, socially collaborative	Socially collaborative with ongoing scripting	Professionalized

Consumer constructed organisations

At The Square, consumers’ productive engagement with leisure has a civic side to it that is absent in most consumption communities. Consumer tribes are affectual in their leisurely pursuit of consuming together and their members participate because “it feels good doing so” (Cova, 1997; Canniford, 2011). While affect is evident in members’ motivation for participating in The Square, both in their pledge to program “out of

passion”, and the emotionally charged “us and them” comparisons they draw to other arts organisations, the purpose of the organisation in its current form is the advancement of a practical mission. Conventional hybrid organisations are effectual in their pursuits because mission centrality (whether social or environmental) is their *raison d'être* (Besharov and Smith, 2014; Peredo and Chrisman, 2006; Battilana and Dorado, 2010; Sanders and McClellan, 2014). Similarly, The Square’s members are motivated by a civic responsibility of making available niche offerings of film consumption to the wider community.

The advancement of a practical mission is also evident in DØE, an association comprising of beer fanatics whose members are motivated by more than just enthusiasm for self-consumption. DØE constitutes a challenging voice in the beer market, rooting for a “craft” logic that contests mass production and standardization (Kjeldgaard et al., 2017). While in The Square members’ organising is centred on providing alternatives, rather than promoting them as is the case with DØE, in both contexts the self-indulgence that is evident in consumer tribes co-exists with an emphasis on providing a service that extends outside the boundaries of the CCO. That is, members’ organising is motivated by more than just affect. Akin to hybrid organisations with a primary social mission, members work towards what they believe to be a worthy pursuit (Besharov and Smith, 2014).

The looseness we observe in the participatory structures of The Square is reminiscent of consumer tribes’ lack of reliance on a clear, central power, whereby membership is open to anyone who possesses sufficient field-related capital to participate (Goulding et al., 2009) and decision-making powers are determined by authenticity of

membership or length of service (Goulding and Saren, 2007; Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1999). At the same time, The Square differs in its division of labour to a consumer tribe. Where participant roles in tribes are informal and can exist or perish depending on members' willingness to perform them, in The Square the number of roles and their associated (informal) job descriptions (such as programmer, bar stocker and IT specialist), are essential for the functioning of the organisation. This resembles more closely the job descriptions encountered in conventional hybrid organisations, where, for example, clear distinctions are created between roles serving the social mission of the organisation and those attaining to business pursuits (Cornforth and Roger, 2010). What remains fluid in The Square, by contrast to conventional hybrid organisations, is members' ability to occupy and perform diverse roles, not through a process of formal assignment, but through members' patterns of participation and competencies.

A significant challenge facing CCOs is that they tend to be caught up between looseness and formality of structure. In The Square, structurelessness is a narrative of sovereignty to other arts organisations and the openness of different operational departments is valued for encouraging individual participation and members' skill-building. Similarly to the governance structures described in the Premium association (Luedicke et al., 2017), we find that elite members that have increased subcultural and social capital also enjoy increased decision making powers. These members exercise symbolic power over other participants through their intense, continuous participation. A challenge facing CCOs, thus, is that in holding onto a tribal fantasy of "peer participation", unequal power distribution is masked (Freeman, 1972) and the means by

which elite members establish their position remain largely inaccessible to other participants.

Another difference between CCOs and consumer tribes lies in members' commitment. In tribes, this is symbolically and ritually manifested (Cova, 1997). That is, members' dedication to the community is expressed through temporary, recurrent acts of engagement and is meaningful only insofar as their emotional and moral attachment to the community persists. In The Square members also exhibit a strong moral commitment towards the organisation, by internalizing its goals, values and mission. This is evident in how programming decisions are driven by an attachment to niche programming, film as a form of cultural expression, and serving the wider community. At the same time, however, members that are more attuned to the pragmatic constraints of formalisation, demonstrate a commitment to the financial survival of the organisation that is more akin to accountability. Conventional hybrid organisations are well documented for having to navigate legal and fiscal responsibilities as the means through which to pursue their social mission (Battilana and Dorado, 2010; Sanders and McClellan, 2014). Our study shows that CCOs are not different in that respect.

Contrasting expressions of commitment are also prevalent in the Geocaching network. Scaraboto (2015, p. 162), in her study of the outdoor stash game, documents how the owners of the organisation behind the game purposefully appeal to participants' sense of accountability by urging them to purchase premium membership in order to "support the game they love". At the same time moral commitment underpins the Geocaching community by encouraging, for example, gift giving modes of exchange that reflect collaborative values that characterized the early days of the tribe. In both

Geocaching and The Square, moral commitment and accountability are in a fractious relationship, yet co-dependent. That is, the loss of transience in CCOs necessitates the need for accountability, but it is moral commitment that ultimately differentiates CCOs from conventional organisations.

Lastly, an important attribute of our investigated CCO, that is largely unaddressed in previous studies on consumer organising, is the formalisation of management processes. This manifests as an area of tension in The Square as evident in the scripting of the induction process and streamlining of staffing. Such scripts provide a guide to appropriate behaviour in organisations and require employees to hold specific knowledge that can be applied to specific organisational situations (Gioia and Poole 1984).

Consumer tribes' treatment of resources, by contrast, is amateuristic and playful (Goulding et al., 2009; Kozinets, 2002; Cova and Cova, 2002) and engagement with community processes is socially collaborative and primarily desired for its linking value. Because organisational scripts are performed with little variation and don't account for individual differences amongst those interacting (Gioia and Poole 1984), they are detrimental to the playful and social ethos of consumer tribes. So our study shows that while scripting and streamlining in The Square improves the efficiency of processes, allowing the organisation to better manage its limited resources, it simultaneously disturbs tribal modus operandi that are valued by members and fuel their participation.

Conclusion

Further research is required to understand and map the diverse constellations of consumer organising. Consumer organising, for example, may pursue profit-making endeavours

(Scaraboto, 2015; Martin and Schouten, 2014), centre on brands (Husemann et al., 2015), or product categories (Kjeldgaard et al., 2017), be confined within the distinguishable boundaries of an organisation (Kjeldgaard et al., 2017; Husemann et al., 2015; Langer, 2007), or extend further to form economies (Martin and Schouten, 2014) or collaborative networks (Scaraboto, 2015). CCOs, thus, is not a prescriptive term but a theoretical and empirical point of departure from traditional consumption communities to consumers seeking alternative ways of engaging in social and economic life. Our contribution lies in outlining the theoretical relationship between CCOs, consumption communities and conventional hybrid organisations and the challenges that consumers face when self-organising.

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