

RESEARCH PAPER

Building tribal communities in the collaborative economy: an innovation framework

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, there has been a groundswell of initiatives aimed at providing platforms to share resources among people. Collaborative consumption provides a model for a 'sharing economy' where the dominant logic of consumers is resource access rather than ownership. This study examines the nature and development of a variety of collaborative consumption businesses; in particular, we explore how start-up entrepreneurs see the problems of creating a tribal community among customers and users. Interviews were carried out with founders and co-founders of collaborative consumption ventures during 2014–15. The results suggest that these organisations face many common issues. We develop and apply a framework to understand some of these. We find that collaborative consumption entrepreneurs strive to build a tribal community by matching, in an innovative way, supply and demand. This is typically done by co-creating shared commonality, developing scalable electronic platforms, and building trust into platforms using social media to develop proxy social capital. Consequently, by using existing ecosystems of social media, tribal communities can be formed and scaled much more quickly than via traditional marketing approaches.

Introduction

A pressing issue for individuals, organisations, societies and economies that has come to the fore in recent years is how the current trajectory of resource usage can be tempered to become more sustainable. Given the fact that natural resources are finite and that global populations are steadily growing, traditional models that involve inefficient, wasteful and ecologically-dubious mass production of products for consumers to buy and own require reinvention. One purported alternative to hyperconsumption and traditional ownership models is collaborative consumption, where the logic of using or access supersedes that of ownership – sometimes referred to as product service-systems (Tukker, 2004; Baines *et al.*, 2007). Despite its recent rise in popularity, the concept is not new (Leismann *et al.*, 2013). Felson and Spaeth (1978) define collaborative consumption as events involving joint consumption of physical products among intimate participants, typically friends and family.

More recently, however, this concept has been redeveloped and rescaled to encapsulate sharing of a wider variety of resources, not only at a local level, but also potentially on a global scale among unknown parties. Botsman and Rogers (2011) define collaborative consumption as sharing resources using peer-to-peer marketplaces where unused space, goods, skills, money or services can be rented, borrowed, bartered, traded and swapped. Key drivers are economic, technological, social, cultural and environmental (Barnes and Mattsson, 2016).

There are few scientific predictions regarding the future growth of collaborative consumption and its economic impact on industries. A rare working paper by Zervas *et al.* (2015) found that the effect of Airbnb on the hotel industry in Austin, Texas was significant, attaining 8–10% of revenue and suppressing prices of incumbents. Not surprisingly, there is intense commercial interest in the impact of the sharing economy upon industry sectors and the extent to which these new business models are powerful enough to provoke a disruptive shift in consumption patterns and industries (Christensen, 2003).

Collaborative consumption business models are not well understood and the limited amount of research and anecdotal evidence suggests that supply chains are being redefined and that use/consumer motivations differ from previous social sharing initiatives, such as open source software (Benkler, 2011), and including, for example, possible new economic and environmental drivers (Hamari *et al.*, 2015; Möhlmann, 2015). However, few attempts to explain comprehensively consumer engagement in collaborative consumption have been undertaken. A recent study by Barnes and Mattsson (2016) suggests that consumer intentions to participate are driven by perceived economic, environmental and social benefits through the mediator of perceived usefulness and enjoyment, in turn driven by sense of belonging to the sharing community.

This study attempts to understand the critical success factors for collaborative consumption communities. From a narrow business standpoint, the main issue is how to generate quickly a large enough number of active users that, combined with online word of mouth interactions, can create a self-sustaining virtual community. Loyal communities have been found to be very important in this regard (Arnould and Thompson, 2005), especially those that involve the sharing of resources (Cova and White, 2010). The key research question in this paper is: what are the critical success factors for developing collaborative consumption tribal communities? The study takes a marketing and innovation approach and uses detailed interviews with founders and entrepreneurs from seven different, but successful, collaborative consumption ventures to explore the key characteristics underpinning their successful development.

The structure of the paper is as follows. In the next section, we examine the extent of current understanding of the nature of collaborative consumption, drawing together a disparate literature from innovation and marketing to identify definitions and key characteristics defining collaborative consumption ventures and communities. We then outline the methodology for the study, and present the results before synthesising the findings and providing a framework for understanding resource-sharing activities in collaborative-consumption tribal communities. The paper rounds off with conclusions and implications for research and practice.

Innovation and marketing theory: shaping online tribal communities

Building an online community can be construed as an innovation process, which includes the search for, experimentation with and discovery, development, imitation and adaptation

of new products, services and production processes (Dosi, 1988). Early innovation as a process was seen as a sequence of consecutive stages, such as those of search, selection, development and implementation (Tidd *et al.*, 2001). Present theory recognises that innovation involves complex and disordered interactive processes (Fischer, 1999), often more chaotic than structured, and that a sequential process pattern is difficult to observe (Buijs, 2003).

Building an online community is a complex innovation undertaking requiring the construction of a network, which often develops around innovations of products and services that entail several different technologies (Aune and Gressetvold, 2011), and therefore different types of knowledge. In this way, networks involving, for example, suppliers of key competencies may facilitate innovation (especially in the initial idea-generating stages of innovation processes), and thus help reduce development times and costs (Kliutch and Leker, 2011). However, challenges often arise in the early period of network construction, commonly termed the ‘fuzzy front-end’ of innovation, because of lack of clear product concepts, uncertainties about customer needs and relevant technologies, and the absence of trust (Colombo *et al.*, 2011).

Building an innovation network for online start-up ventures is normally done through applying parallel innovation processes (Sørensen and Mattsson, 2016). This means that different activities in innovation processes are performed by different people or groups simultaneously. This, however, requires effective information sharing among participants (Loch and Terwiesch, 1998). Given the right conditions, parallel innovation can then increase the speed of innovation by its ability to transfer tasks, improve information flows and higher integration of various innovation activities.

Users are now seen as a crucial part of the innovation network as they contribute important input to the innovation process (Alam, 2002; Morrison *et al.*, 2004; Baldwin *et al.*, 2006). Hence, the concept of user-driven innovation has become central to the innovation discourse (von Hippel, 2005; Heiskanen and Repo, 2007). Taking a service perspective (as in this study), user-driven innovation seems particularly relevant because production and delivery of services is often based on service encounters among service organisation employees or online websites and their users/customers (Gallouj and Weinstein, 1997). Much service innovation has been linked to actual service delivery processes (Toivonen and Tuominen, 2009). Such service innovation has been termed ‘service encounter-based innovation’, which can be defined as innovation that develops from ideas, knowledge or practices derived from the meeting of frontline service employees (off- or online) with users in the service delivery process (Sørensen *et al.*, 2013).

As mentioned above, developing collaborative consumption tribal communities is here seen as the key research question. This entails both innovating a new online business (as a start-up and venue for collaborative consumption) and – concurrently, and by means of marketing procedures and tools – quickly growing the number of avid users (the tribe) to reach a sustainable community and market. Consumption communities are recognised as a key element of modern marketing, creating meaning, sharing value and capable of making or breaking marketing campaigns (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001; Cova and Cova, 2002; Cova and White, 2010; Canniford, 2011). There is a burgeoning literature on subcultures of consumption (Celsi *et al.*, 1993; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Goulding *et al.*, 2002) and brand communities (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001; Cova and Pace, 2006). However, a more recent vein of research is that of consumer tribes, which focuses more on the shared use

of various products and services and linking value (Cova, 1997) rather than focusing on singular brands (Cova and Cova, 2002; Cova *et al.*, 2007).

Canniford (2011) finds four key characteristics of consumer tribes: multiplicity, whereby they do not dominate consumers' lives and membership of other tribes is not precluded; playfulness, whereby there is little reverence for brands *per se*, but rather value is placed on passions and creating new forms of linking value; transience, where tribes change as the combination of people and resources alters; and entrepreneurial, where social innovation leads to new entrepreneurial opportunities. Kozinets (cited in Hamilton and Hewer, 2010), explores dimensions of e-tribes, which further communicate via the Internet [providing a 'virtual glue' (Simmons, 2008)], cross network boundaries, are self-generated and create emotional involvement.

An alternative conceptualisation to the online tribe concept used here is what has been termed the 'virtual community of practice' (VCoP) (Dubé *et al.*, 2005). This terminology focuses on the explicit behaviours of users when they collaborate online in discussions, newsgroups or other forms. As we do not explicitly study these behaviours online, but rather the innovation process of building the tribe community, we instead use 'tribe' as a term for what the start-up wants to shape.

It is the premise of this study that the entrepreneurial effort of building tribal collaborative consumption communities is the essence of starting up the venture (Holzweber *et al.*, 2015). We define the core tribal community as the initial small number of ardent and highly involved users who co-create and share values, taking on the role of generating the necessary word-of-mouth in the start-up phase of the business (kinship among members is not an issue). Through the efforts of tribal members, the number of users will grow into what can be seen as a full-blown community. Hence, tribal communities are those in a state of growing from a relatively small number of users into a sustainable size. Many of these start-ups lack traditional marketing skills (Barnes and Mattsson, 2016), and use investor angels, mentors or advertising companies to help. Hence, much of the initial strategic marketing efforts of these new kinds of start-ups is improvisational and aims to reach a critical mass of community users from an initial core of members (the tribe). Hence, tribe building is the first challenge for start-ups.

Cova and Cova (2002) were among the first to explore the nature of consumer tribe characteristics and recent work has attempted to define community concepts more fully (Fournier and Lee, 2009; Goulding *et al.*, 2013). Nevertheless, there is still much to learn about how to build and sustain consumer tribes (Gomez *et al.*, 2005; Hamilton and Hewer, 2010; Mitchell and Imrie, 2011; Canniford, 2011). Certain kinds of online communities, such as massively multiplayer online role playing games (MMORPGs), demonstrate characteristics of unique brand tribalism in an anthropological sense as they transcend normal online communities through the strong cognitive and affective involvement of gamers (Badrinarayanan *et al.*, 2014).

Electronic word of mouth (see, for example, Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004; Kozinets *et al.*, 2010) is now growing in importance in social media and networking sites and is especially critical for start-up ventures (Kumar *et al.*, 2013). Online brand communities, for instance, are effective in influencing sales, regardless of ownership, with positive information having a stronger moderating influence than negative on purchase behaviour (Adjei *et al.*, 2010). Social media use in general positively contributes to brand performance (Rapp *et al.*, 2013). Kozinets *et al.* (2010) demonstrate how word of mouth, through social media

for virtual communities, does not simply increase or amplify marketing messages, but also alters meanings and embeds them among members. For the above reasons, we anticipate that social media platforms will be particularly important in tribal community building for collaborative consumption ventures.

Methodology

This study uses an exploratory approach to capture and analyse the experiences of the initial tribe-building effort of start-up entrepreneurs in the collaborative consumption industry. Qualitative data collection methods were used to capture in text format the voiced experiences of key entrepreneurs. These consisted of interviews with a number of CEOs and COOs of collaborative consumption ventures during the period 2014–15. Each selected venture had a thriving tribal community. Four countries and a variety of shared resources were involved (including labour, office space, accommodation, money, fruit and car sharing). The following companies were contacted and agreed to be interviewed in the research:

- Airbnb (Denmark) (<https://www.airbnb.com/>)
- Hinner Du? (Sweden) (<https://hinnerdu.se/sv-se/>) and Den Lille Tjenste (Denmark) (<https://denlilletjeneste.dk/da-dk/>)
- Urban Fruit Initiative (Sweden) (<https://fruitinitiative.firebaseio.com/>)
- FundedByMe (Sweden) (<https://www.fundedbyme.com/en/>)
- GoCarShare (United Kingdom) (<http://gocarshare.com/>)
- SpaceCubed (Australia) (<http://www.SpaceCubed.com/en>)

A total of eight interviews were conducted and analysed. Each interview lasted between one and two hours and followed a standard protocol (Yin, 1994). A fact-oriented coding was used (Miles and Huberman, 1994). In this way, the protocol helped coding by sorting the key ideas underpinning the search for the emerging framework. Saturation in the data was reached quite early. The empirical components of the framework for collaborative consumption were extracted by selective coding from each of the recorded accounts of cases by each author independently (Krippendorff, 2012). Subsequently, components were compared across the different interviews. In-depth discussions of the main features of these components led to a basic framework for collaborative consumption start-ups. Note, however, that a more detailed description of each start-up firm is not given here because of space restrictions. What is central is the fact that digital entrepreneurs sought to create market space for buyers and sellers. Based on the protocol, questions centred on drivers and inhibitors of growth, business strategy in terms of uniqueness, business process and value creation, business model, and finally, expectations about the future of the collaborative consumption industry. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for further analysis. The eclectic case results below summarise the findings related to: (i) drivers and inhibitors of tribal community building; and (ii) key elements related to business models and strategies.

One could argue that this small sample may not be substantial enough to generate new substantive knowledge. However, in line with Crouch and McKenzie (2006), we argue that what is being sampled is not so much individual persons of a kind, but rather variants of a particular social setting (the real object of the research in question) and of the experiences arising in it. Consequently, respondents are not systematically selected as carriers of

previously defined knowledge, but are seen as representing meaningful experiences related to the research question: building community tribes for the first time. This is what we define then as a 'case'. This is the holistic experience of dealing with all the challenges of a start-up in the crucial phase of building a first set of users (a tribe), and using them to help grow to a sustainable entity. Crouch and McKenzie (2006, p.496) even argue that analytic and exploratory studies are best carried out using small samples. To insert further rigor into our selection of cases, we applied the dimensional approach suggested by Arnold (1970, p.147) whereby one first delineates the dimensions that may vary among cases, 'typically drawing one case from each cell of the typology'. 'The point with dimensional sampling is that it is based on a preconceived theoretical framework although not a preconceived theory' (Arnold, 1970, p.149). Hence, the explorative nature of this study. We took advantage of international collaboration and selected cases from four advanced economies (in which English is well spoken) where the collaborative economy has taken off. As mentioned above, different dimensions of sharing served as the frame for selection: accommodation (Airbnb), labour (Hinner Du? and Den Lille Tjenste), fruit products (Urban Fruit Initiative), money (FundedbyMe) and car sharing transport (GoCarShare). The SpaceCubed (office space) case was used to understand the importance of part-time and collaborative work much used by the founders of Internet start-ups in the sharing economy.

Case study results

In this section, we briefly summarise the descriptive results of each case study, focusing on key drivers and inhibitors to community building and core elements of the business models. Quotation from interviews is used throughout the presentation of the case studies.

Urban Fruit Initiative: sharing unused fruit resources

The Urban Fruit Initiative was the winner of the Swedish competition for sustainability projects in 2013. The Urban Fruit Initiative focuses upon fruit trees in Gamla Enskede, a suburb of Stockholm. By matching fruit tree owners with local pickers, it has turned a waste disposal issue into an ecological apple juice. Fruit owners, many of whom have large gardens, often do not have time to care for and pick apples from their trees. People who live in apartments want to share the neglected resource. Collaborative consumption in this case provides a system to help connect the supply and demand for apples by turning the apples into apple juice. Through the initiative, the waste of apples is reduced (90% had been wasted), a clean and tasty local product is produced, and house owners get both a tidy garden and juice as their reward, in addition to the satisfaction of sharing.

According to its founder, the main problem in establishing this venture was selling the idea to an initial group of local owners and pickers. In our terminology, this is the initial tribe of users/producers who will generate growth. Considerable logistical and organisational effort was required to develop the Initiative. Many garden owners needed to be contacted and pickers recruited (and taught how to care for the trees when picking) in order to collect and transport apples to juice factories. In a sense, this was a local initiative with a community built around a neighbourhood. Apart from having a Facebook page as a billboard, the Initiative has a website for recruiting growers and fruit pickers. Further advertisement for the recruitment of pickers and house owners is made through flyers in letterboxes and via

local farmers' markets. Apple juice is sold through channels in the local community, typically local restaurants and coffee shops. Most administrative work is manual and managed during the spare time of the two founders, a married couple with children.

Using a bartering business model (payments in juice or apples) with a local geographical focus, this Initiative has none of the scale advantages that are key to quick growth. Indeed, the limited geographical scope of Urban Fruit is the main obstacle to growth. Each new area needs 'a hands-on and feet on the ground' approach to organise the system (or the tribe) in a face-to-face manner, supported by the online website and social network presence. Because of its seasonal dependence (the fruit is picked in autumn), the peak load is very concentrated in time. Hence, the tribal communities generated by Urban Fruit will most likely be rather small and local (consisting of fruit tree owners, pickers and retailers), with little possibility of scale effects between urban areas. The local characteristics of the tribe in sharing apple resources will hinder its growth and new areas will need new system builders. In addition, the cost of juice making is high relative to expected sales price, and so the economic outcome is not the ultimate driver for Urban Fruit. Instead, stopping economic waste and changing perspectives on fruit and its use are underlying objectives.

SpaceCubed: sharing unused office space

Another local venture is SpaceCubed in Perth, Western Australia. The founder, a social entrepreneur from the city, wanted to support people with new ideas through a non-profit solution for social problems. He was the first to set up a local co-working space. Although government funded start-up support, the available small business/innovation centres had not changed in 20 years, and a fresh initiative was needed. After making a deal with a large property owner (who had free office space available), he opened a 'creative environment for mentoring start-up entrepreneurs' called SpaceCubed. The overall idea was to assemble a self-selecting crowd (tribe) of part-time start-up entrepreneurs to allow them to learn from each other. SpaceCubed takes a hands-off and open approach to those who want to join. Funding for community activities is organised through optional pre-paid events and memberships. SpaceCubed makes efficient use of office space, even after office hours, and by creating trust and a community feeling among members through staged events, it has quickly grown to 550 members.

In contrast to Urban Fruit's system of matching supply and demand of fruit resources, SpaceCubed's co-working space is based on a strategy of fostering innovation through serendipity and openness among young people. Events generate income and bring forward common interests among members, building intimacy and social capital. The founder admits that 'the main problem concerns how to grow and sustain the membership tribe'. Many entrepreneurs are working only part-time on their ideas/companies and some do not succeed. A key ingredient is the social capital generated through connections and networks enabled by the sharing of cost-free office space (and additional events). Key limitations to growth are the local start-up environment and the difficulty of staging attractive events for funding.

Airbnb: sharing home and cultural experiences

One of the best-known collaborative consumption websites is Airbnb. This global accommodation-sharing site has attracted the attention of regulators and has had a tangible effect

on the hotel industry. The interviews were conducted with the manager of the Copenhagen office, covering all of Scandinavia, and the manager of marketing communications for the same region. Airbnb was started to solve a very personal problem for the founders, namely the ability to 'pay the rent'. During the Obama election campaign, the founders saw potential in home rental space and travelled ahead of the campaign to let people know that they could rent spare rooms to the massive entourage following the campaign (since hotels were already fully booked). However, only after joining the incubator of Paul Graham, an American angel investor, were they ready to implement their business model for tribe building in New York. In the words of Paul Graham: 'it is better to have 1000 people loving you than 100,000 liking you ...'. Hence, building a loyal tribe of initial users in a dense urban environment made strategic sense.

The founders of Airbnb initially knocked on doors to generate a supply of hosts in order to match supply (of rooms) with demand. Key to development was creating what the manager calls 'social proof', whereby users could feel safe in unknown locations. This was the main inhibitor. Face-to-face meetings, so-called 'meet-ups', of users, hosts and representatives of Airbnb were organised. Meet-ups could take the form of guided city tours, special events in rented locations, or even a pizza party in the manager's home. The aims were to bring people together and to treat them as business partners rather than customers. The manager estimates that 80% of new users come from organic growth through word of mouth communication. Marketing is typically digital and social, and little traditional marketing is undertaken.

Airbnb takes safeguards very seriously and a US\$1 million guarantee is in place for hosts should they incur damage to their property. Through such social media as Facebook, Airbnb can verify the person, account (PayPal), and thereby build mutual trust for both guests and hosts. This is imperative for growth. The manager underlines that Airbnb is 'not an Internet company', but rather 'a hospitality venture'. It is also stressed that government regulators need to be 'educated' to understand fully the business model and its benefits so that they do not clamp down on private initiatives to gain from unused room space.

Airbnb's strategy is to build a global community of people sharing home space (from air mattresses to caves, tree houses and castles) in order to make people 'belong anywhere', the new slogan of the brand. Both the accommodation space and its associated cultural impact may be as much the reason for visiting as the city or country destination. In addition, by increasing the number of hosts renting rooms in both central and peripheral urban areas, Airbnb can 'unlock new neighbourhoods and boost small businesses there' (such as restaurants and corner shops). In this way, the community of users can grow very quickly and now has a substantial impact on the hotel industry (negative) and local service firms (positive). Personal connections created through links between guests and hosts have led to the rapid growth of a global community.

Hinner Du? and Den Lille Tjenste: sharing labour resources

The Swedish HinnerDu? venture is a forerunner of TaskRabbit in the US (started 2010). The female founder got the idea from an auction site (Blocket in Sweden) and wondered why the auction idea (of selling and buying products) could not be used for services? She was keen to start a business, but had no real plan. By moving into an incubator in Malmö, she secured funding from an angel investor with Danish connections, and links to a sister

company, Den Lille Tjenste. A website was the first priority, but early designs failed because they were far too complicated. After analysing ‘where users dropped off the site’, improvements were made. Little marketing was carried out; instead, the company relied on publicity from approximately two local newspaper articles per week. The founder concluded that it was easier to start with simple tasks, such as dog walking or assembling IKEA furniture.

The business model is simple. It operates in a number of cities in Sweden and Denmark. Customers post tasks (partitioned in a few categories on the website), decide upon the price for the service required, and then advertise on the website. Service providers (runners) sign up for an advertised service and customers can pick one of them. Often the task is short and one-off. Tax is thus avoided. The practical arrangements are left to the parties, and little profile information is kept from the users (only name, address, email and phone number). Payment is made after one week, with 16% of the price deducted as a fee. The site is intended for all types of users and is folksy in nature. A surprising feature of this business is that most new users come from a Google generic search with a high conversion rate of 9%.

The business model does not control for the flow of money or the ratings of the runners. Even though some 83% of posts get offers, 20% of tasks are not paid (as can be seen in the system). Hence, payments may have been made directly between parties, or customers did not trust any of the runners. Even though the core benefit of the venture is ‘fast and cheap task completion’, growth is very slow, and running the company is only a part-time job for the founder. Quality control and trust issues have not been resolved. The one-off nature of tasks prohibits community feeling among users (compare TaskRabbit’s recent problems). The initial tribe has not yet been created in the local areas (cities) and overall the effort of tribe building has not been successful. The founder insists that ‘We do not make much money ... helping the customer is the most important thing for me’. With another full-time job, the founder is already contemplating a merger or sale of the business to a larger partner from the newspaper or publicity industry.

GoCarShare: sharing car transport

GoCarShare in the UK (founded in 2009) is one among many ridesharing start-ups. Capital has been raised by means of crowdsourcing from 300 investors in Europe in two tranches. However, the operations are still limited to the UK. The founder recalled his first idea about car sharing:

I was walking down the street where I live and I noticed a long line of stationary cars ... each car had one person in it ... then I got the idea ... matching people over the Internet ... many benefits and happier passengers with another one in the car.

The first year after leaving his accountancy job, the founder chased journalists to get free publicity. Finally, he got a feature article as ‘Eco-hero’ in the *Daily Telegraph*, a breakthrough. Initially, university students were targeted by contacting seven universities. Being passionate about green issues, he also took aim at music festivals around the country. By working to attract drivers with common music interests, he received good publicity. Festivals generate a lot of traffic to and from the events and parking space is typically scarce. Car sharing enables more efficient use of parking space and reduces congestion. Moreover, GoCarShare creates social connections between driver and passenger, reduces costs for both, contributes towards the reduction of CO₂ emissions, and has a pro-social ‘feel good factor’.

GoCarShare suggests that it is a fun experience to share car rides. A key factor in building a successful tribe was establishing trust, underpinned by using Facebook to vouch for driver/passenger identity and personality, and PayPal to make payments. A traceable rating system for all users enhances community strength. The founder even speculates about combining ratings from across many different Internet sites to construct a general trust rating score for site users, including official information about drivers, such as driving records. In the words of the founder, 'We are based around social networks and shared interest'.

The business strategy focuses on sharing cost, but not profit, by social media integration and partnerships with organisers of large events with massive transportation requirements. Recently, a number of sports clubs (football and cricket) have been approached to initiate collaboration. By using fan sites, GoCarShare users get priority parking near venues. GoCarShare also gets a chance to market its offerings in a tangible way. Traditional relationship marketing is required to reach relevant user communities. The newly recruited COO sees the main obstacle to growth as

... behavioural change ... we have to do a hell of a lot of education ... our partners (football and rugby clubs) do not yet know what car sharing is ... we spend a lot of money to adapt our service to their (partners) websites ... making it user-friendly is the key.

FundedByMe: peer-to-peer money lending

FundedByMe is a crowdfunding platform (among the five largest in the world with a total turnover of US\$10 billion in 2014). There are two types of funding: reward-based and equity-based. The former is a 'kick starter' service: individuals invest small sums in an idea or project with the intention of reaping rewards after completion, such as a product price discount. The latter is a way of buying shares directly (peer-to-peer) in a new company. The idea behind FundedByMe is to become a marketplace for projects and investors. The founder states that he aimed for '... a one-stop shop for business and an environment for funding'. Recently, a so-called partnership programme (which includes lawyers and accountants) has been put in place to support start-ups in the initial phases. A key benefit for start-up entrepreneurs is the global reach of the platform. Around 25% of investors are international. Nevertheless, the founder strives to build a local community of entrepreneurs and investors to create jobs (650 so far in Sweden).

Programming for the platform's website and its related services is done in-house, as this is considered a strategic element of the business. This knowledge facilitates the development of self-service add-ons for the website to be used by project proposers. The platform performs due diligence and gives the green light to the proposals advertised during funding campaigns. Listing fees are around €500 and 6% of the amount is deducted as a funding fee.

The crowdfunding platform supports both investors and entrepreneurs/business managers in the tribal community. The funding level of individual projects and the actions of other investors can be followed online. These 'followers of projects' are the tribal community. Customer profiles in the community may be analysed (e.g. those who have invested five times or more) and particular industries (e.g. consumer products and technology) are typically targeted when selecting from available funding projects. Banks are not seen as competitors in this peer-to-peer market. The founder thinks '... banks are too slow and we are more customer-oriented ... experimentation is the key ... and problems are solved along the way'. To sustain the community, continuous use of the funding platform is crucial.



Figure 1. Innovation framework for understanding tribal collaborative consumption communities (T3C).

It needs to be of value not only before and during the funding campaign, but also after its completion. Consequently, community members need to be able to follow the start-up company in the future. FundedByMe proactively uses information about the development of successfully funded start-ups to help the tribal community learn why certain projects are successful and why some fail.

Synthesis and discussion

In this section, we compare and contrast the above case studies to develop and apply a framework for examining online tribal sharing communities.

Towards an innovation framework for understanding tribal collaborative consumption communities

Figure 1 provides a synthesis of the key features or themes from our cross-case analysis: an innovation framework for tribal collaborative consumption community (T3C). Looking at the cross-case findings from a user-innovation point of view, we can see the framework in Figure 1 as a roadmap for innovation in the collaborative economy. All components of the T3C framework need to be addressed to innovate in online venture operations and tribal community. Linking innovation activities to actual user behaviour in online service delivery is key (Toivonen and Tuominen, 2009). Parallel innovation is also required because time-to-market is very important for successful community building (Sørensen and Mattsson, 2016). Reinterpreting user-driven innovation to encompass the self-growing aspects of the tribal community by means of community interaction, control and word of mouth makes the framework developed from this study a link between innovation and marketing theory. The cases of innovation explored here cannot be easily classified as either radical

or incremental. Case entrepreneurs go about their work in an incremental way by putting together innovation networks, mostly effectual because they focus on control (Sarasvathy, 2001). However, the growth of these online collaborative ventures may be disruptive to established industries.

The community dimensions identified from the cases include reach (local/global), level of intimacy (intimate/strangers), extent of controls of community interaction (low/high), community goals (altruistic/commercial), shared values (low/high), resource types (items/space/tasks/money) and social capital (low/high). We now examine each of these aspects in turn, juxtaposing characteristics against the salient literature on collaborative consumption before then applying the framework to our case studies.

Belk (2014) is critical of the broad definition of collaborative consumption put forward by Botsman and Rogers (2011), mentioned in the Introduction, preferring a narrow definition that lies in the spectrum between non-monetary and commercial activities:

Collaborative consumption is people coordinating the acquisition and distribution of a resource for a fee or other compensation. By including other compensation, the definition also encompasses bartering, trading, and swapping, which involve giving and receiving non-monetary compensation. But this definition of collaborative consumption excludes sharing activities like those of CouchSurfing because there is no compensation involved. (Belk, 2014, p.1597)

Belk (2014) draws on the definition of sharing provided by Benkler (2004) – ‘nonreciprocal prosocial behaviour’ – and uses the example of Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) as a misspecification of sharing that is, in fact, access-based consumption through market-mediated access.

Other researchers are supportive of the broader definition of collaborative consumption given by Botsman and Rogers (2011) that includes non-monetary activities. Martin and Upham (2015) examine the free reuse group, Freecycle, under the collaborative consumption label. Critically, they point out that although there is no compensation for a particular transaction, from an economic perspective, this form of activity can be viewed as a sort of generalised reciprocal exchange whereby, although no compensation is involved in a specific transaction, an individual may call upon the network for a free item at a later date (Willer *et al.*, 2012; Martin and Upham, 2015). Clearly, collaborative consumption ventures can vary significantly in their goals, with some being more oriented towards altruism and sustainability, and others more towards commercial, economic goals. Such goals will play an important role in the ability to gain a critical mass of users.

Individual values are important in driving collaborative consumption behaviour. Martin and Upham (2015) apply the value theory of Schwartz *et al.* (2012) to determine the specific values underpinning sharing among participants in free reuse groups. Using a sample of 2692 users of Freecycle (www.ilovefreecycle.org), they find that the majority of those sharing items hold significantly stronger self-transcendence or pro-social values of benevolence and universalism than the general population (of the UK, in this case). However, some users hold other values in common (such as openness to change via self-direction and stimulation, and conservation via tradition, security and conformity), and some users are less pro-social. A similar study by Piscicelli *et al.* (2015) examines Schwartz *et al.*'s (2012) theory of values and participants of Ecomodo (www.ecomodo.com), a UK-based collaborative consumption platform where people can lend and borrow various resources, including items, spaces and skills. A survey of 63 respondents determined that those engaged in collaborative consumption hold higher self-transcendence values (particularly universalism) and openness to change values, but – in contrast to Martin and Upham (2015) – typically hold lower

self-enhancement and conservation values. The common finding among these studies is the importance of pro-social values. A concrete example among the cases is Airbnb's new slogan: belong anywhere. The values of participants who share in collaborative consumption are likely to vary significantly among business models.

As pointed-out by Botsman and Rogers (2011), the nature of the resources shared in collaborative consumption networks varies significantly, including household items, sports equipment, space, vehicles, skills, media and money (PwC, 2013). Such resources vary in terms of the latent demand that is likely to be apparent and the degree to which such sharing markets are already well served, with skills/time, household items and appliances, vehicles, living space/travel accommodation, meals/food preparation, money, and sporting goods among the best new opportunities (Latitude, 2010). The items most likely to be shared are distinguished by their high economic value (e.g. cars, living space and money) and infrequency of use (e.g. sporting goods, travel accommodation and unusual household appliances) (Fremstad, 2014).

The Internet and more recently the Web have become conduits for the development of social sharing activities that extend far beyond local communities. The open source movement, where software source code is made available to all, typically on a gratis or generalised reciprocity basis, was one initial driver for such activity (Benkler, 2011). This was followed by Web 2.0 and social networking (John, 2013). Consequently, technology has enabled an extended reach for collaborative consumption activities, and we see huge global sharing initiatives, such as Airbnb, along with small local sharing ventures. Barnes and Mattsson (2016) conducted a Delphi study of experts involved with collaborative consumption and found that there were mixed drivers both to globalisation and localisation. This suggests there is variation in the reach of collaborative consumption ventures, with some focusing on a global scale (e.g. FundedByMe), some on local communities (e.g. Hinner Du? and Den Lille Tjenste), and some on the spectrum between the two (e.g. GoCarShare).

The nature of the parties involved in sharing activities can vary significantly. This point is examined by Belk (2014, p.1596), who describes the difference between concepts of sharing in and sharing out. Sharing in is 'an inclusive act that is likely to make the recipient a part of a pseudo-family and our aggregate extended self'. As such, sharing in is likely to involve a high degree of intimacy. In contrast, sharing out 'involves dividing something between relative strangers or when it is intended as a one-time act' (Belk, 2014, p.1596). When applied to global and local collaborative consumption initiatives, we would expect local neighbourhood initiatives to bear more resemblance to sharing in, while global initiatives among relative strangers would be considered sharing out. Overall, we surmise that collaborative consumption ventures will vary significantly in degree of intimacy among involved parties.

Sharing activities in collaborative consumption require using social capital. Sharing in tight local communities will involve strong bonding social capital (Putnam, 2000). However, in dispersed, heterogeneous, global online communities bonding capital is likely to be weak, and efforts will be needed to build bridging social capital. Sharing is likely to rely on the reputation of other parties in any interaction. If the other party is known, then this is less problematic. However, if the other party is not known, the dominant method for providing a proxy of social capital is the development of structural assurance and reputation mechanisms that provide an indicator of such factors as the trustworthiness, reciprocity and tenure of an individual through ratings and feedback from peers. Barnes and Mattsson (2016) find that for word of mouth recommendations, consumers consider website trust, underpinned

Table 1. Summary of case studies and potential for tribal community growth.

Characteristic	Urban Fruit Initiative	SpaceCubed	Airbnb	Hinner Du? and Den Lille Tjenste	GoCarShare	FundedByMe
<i>Reach</i>	Local	Local	Global	Local	National	Global
<i>Level of intimacy</i>	Medium/high	Medium/high	Medium	Low	Medium	Low/medium
<i>Extent of controls</i>	Low	Low	High	Low	Moderate	Moderate
<i>Community goals</i>	Altruistic	Altruistic	Commercial	Commercial	Altruistic	Commercial
<i>Shared values</i>	Pro-social	Pro-social	Medium	Low	Pro-social	Low
<i>Resource types</i>	Fruit	Space	Space	Labour/tasks	Car sharing	Money
<i>Social capital</i>	High	Medium/high	Low/medium	Low	Low/medium	Low
<i>Potential for tribal community growth</i>	Low	Low	High	Low	Moderate/high	High

by the structural assurances of the collaborative consumption website, to be an important influence on behaviour. Both large and small ventures have typically used established social networks, such as Facebook, to help in building social capital.

Online market-maker collaborative consumption websites typically allow consumers to make many of their own decisions about listings, pricing and preferred buyers within a framework of rules, regulations and safeguards. For example, in the case of Zopa, lenders choose credit ratings of borrowers, rates and loan term. Similarly, lenders on RelayRides can all choose rates and with whom they wish to have transactions. Peers are empowered to make decisions. The intermediary provides limited safeguards, and the risk is largely borne by the peers in the network. For example, Zopa spreads a lender's loan book over many borrowers and collects missed repayments using a collection agency, but the lender bears any loss from default. For RelayRides, in addition to reputation data, renters are screened and the lender meets the renter in person before handing over the keys of a vehicle. Thus, collaborative consumption websites will vary in the extent of controls implemented over the tribal community.

Application of the T3C framework to the case studies

In this section, we apply the framework developed above to the case studies examined. A summary of the results is shown in Table 1. SpaceCubed is clearly a local, pro-social, person-to-person, altruistic, space/idea-sharing venture with few or no controls. Hence, although social capital is built, the community is fuzzy and emerging, driven by serendipity. Such ventures appear to be a better mode of assistance than government-funded small business centres. However, the potential for achieving a strong tribal community is marginal; individuals come and go according to how much spare time they can afford to give their ideas and how much they appreciate the events offered by SpaceCubed. Similarly, the Urban Fruit Initiative is a local, person-to-person, altruistic, pro-social transformative waste resource handling system with little control of the community. Although social capital is high, the potential for growth is small. Activity is hyperlocal and there are peak load periods for picking and juice making, but little interaction in between these periods.

In contrast to these two localised ventures, Airbnb is already a global brand. It is also a commercial, host/guest community with shared room and experiences, combined with

high control of the interactions among members. The business model clearly adds value and encourages individuals to visit new types of accommodation as destinations in their own right. Social capital relies on reputation created through social networks. The growth potential is very high and hindered only by the possibility of stricter local governmental regulations to protect vested interests.

The Swedish venture, HinnerDu?, and the Danish venture, Den Lille Tjenste, are local, service seeker/provider, commercial, peer-to-peer platforms with little control of actual tasks delivered. They focus upon inexpensive and fast one-off help, and appear to have little in the way of shared values among members. This makes it difficult to create a strong tribal community and intimacy, and to build social capital. The ventures resemble auction websites, which was the starting idea. Hence, there appears to be little potential for future growth.

GoCarShare is currently UK-based, altruistic, person-to-person, and event-driven, with some controls over the pro-social tribal community. By integrating the management of the community (more control) with strong partners (music event organisers and sports clubs) and social media, GoCarShare is able to create long-term relationships with an expanding number of partners with strong brands. Therefore, the growth potential is great, at least in the United Kingdom.

Finally, FundedByMe is a global, commercial, project/company/investor funding platform with a high degree of operational control (but not yet of the community). Funding projects and investors come and go, but the founder understands the need to keep his 'herd' together by sharing information about development of the funded projects and companies (after the funding campaign), and by establishing partnerships with local, but leading, professional service firms (lawyers and accountants). In-house programming competency can accelerate the speed of improving the platform to secure more control of the community of users. Hence, the growth potential of FundedByMe is increasing with more control and integration of community activities.

Within the set of case studies examined in our study, we can distinguish two main groupings. On the one hand, there are geographically expansive, social-media integrated ventures, such as GoCarShare and Airbnb. Both focus significantly on traditional sales marketing with important partners, and integrate strongly with social media, placing emphasis on trust, safety and fun social experiences. Enjoyable experiences are a key value driver and sharing rooms or car rides is only part of (and a conduit for) the overall experience. It is important to note that traditional business to business (B2B) marketing is still needed to create important stakeholder relationships to unlock user communities. These ventures appear to be on an upward growth trajectory. As mentioned, they use a number of control procedures to build trust. First, integration with other social media is crucial. Individual ratings and evaluations can be used as a digital currency of trust among online sites. Second, safety of operations is important. This is ascertained by using money-back guarantees (or insurance against damage or misuse) and working with established online partners, such as PayPal and Trustly. Third, transparency is needed. This translates into an open communication between all involved, start-up managers and users alike. Traditional B2B sales with important partners and users can still be highly relevant for managers. So, we see very localised ventures with little control, such as SpaceCubed and the Urban Fruit Initiative. These ventures have strong pro-social values and altruistic goals, but they lack the features of scalability for tribal communities and are not well integrated within social media. The other business models are very different from those of these ventures.

Conclusions

The cases explored here are just a few exemplars among a new breed of ventures combining commercial and altruistic motives for growth. We have developed and applied an innovation framework for understanding tribal collaborative consumption community building (Figure 1). A key component for growth is the degree of integration and control of real-world operations. This is exemplified by the very traditional marketing, sales and PR activities required by ventures in their initial development, including knocking on doors and visiting fairs and events. Existing eco-systems of social media are found to be important tools for demonstrating social capital and establishing control with little extra cost. Another important component in establishing a tribal community is the strategic framing of the commonality of the community – the underlying interest or motive that will enable it to keep expanding (e.g. music or sport for GoCarShare and cultural experiences for Airbnb). Baiting hooks that will attract consumers to these common interests becomes the dynamic force that enables the scaling of tribal communities for collaborative consumption ventures.

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