Expanding the Boundaries of Brand Communities:
The Case of Fairtrade Towns.

Abstract

Purpose – This paper seeks to further our understanding of brand communities, and their role in brand co-creation, through empirical and theoretical contributions derived from researching the marketing dynamics operating within a successful but atypical form of brand community, Fairtrade Towns.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper reflects a pragmatic application of Grounded Theory that captured qualitative data from key "insiders", with a particular emphasis on Fairtrade Town steering group members and their role as "prosumers". Data was gathered via ethnographic involvement within one town and semi-structured interviews with participants in others.

Findings – Fairtrade Towns, as brand communities, demonstrate elements of co-creation that go beyond the dominant theories and models within the marketing literature. They operate in, and relate to, real places rather than the online environments that dominate the literature on this subject. Unusually, the interactions between brand marketers and consumers are not the primary source of co-creation in Fairtrade Towns. Instead, factors usually identified as merely secondary providers of additional brand knowledge become key initiators and sources of co-creation and active "citizen marketer" engagement.

Originality – This study demonstrates how brand co-creation can operate in physical geographical communities in ways that are formal without being managed by conventional brand managers. It conceptualises Fairtrade Towns as a nested and "glocalized" brand and demonstrates how steering group members facilitate the process of co-creation as prosumers. It empirically demonstrates how Fairtrade Towns have evolved to become unusually complex brand communities in terms of the variety of stakeholders and the multiplicity of brands involved, and the governance of the localized brand co-creation process.

Keywords: Fairtrade, Co-creation, Brand Communities, Prosumer, Branding

Introduction

The rise to prominence of service dominant marketing logic (Vargo, 2011), and its emphasis on customer value creation, makes consumers' value co-creation role interesting for management practitioners and scholars (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). However, our understanding of brand co-creation remains at an early stage of development (Gyrd-Jones and Kornum, 2013; Payne *et al.* 2009). Several distinct research themes addressing brand co-creation have emerged. One explores how brand co-creation is defined, delineated and represented in models (Ind *et al.*, 2013; Payne *et al.*, 2009). Another addresses the role, nature and structure of communities involved in co-creation (Hatch and Schultz, 2010; Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001), and brand communities, consumer/brand tribes, brand cults and co-consuming groups have all been proposed as relevant forms. The roles that consumers play in co-creation have also been explored (Gyrd-Jones and Kornum, 2013; Pongsakornrungsilp and Schroeder, 2011). These include acting as "prosumers" (Xie *et al.*, 2008; Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010) who co-create goods for their own consumption; "brand warriors" (Pongsakornrungsilp and Schroeder, 2011) who add value by protecting and promoting brand image and traditions, and by maintaining standards within the community; and the notion of consumers co-creating through "brand volunteering" (Cova *et al.*, 2015) or as "working consumers" (Cova and Dalli, 2009; Zwick *et al.*, 2008). Other research considers the relationships that evolve between consumers and brands (Gyrd-Jones and Kornum, 2013; Payne *et al.*, 2009; Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009), often using metaphors likening brand relationships to friendships (Aggarwal, 2004), and exploring particular relationship themes such as the role of trust (Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009). A further theme considers the processes through which co-creation occurs (Bendapudi and Leone, 2003; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004), and the extent to which both brand communities and brand managers/teams can manage or influence them (Gyrd-Jones and Kornum, 2013). This list is not intended to be exhaustive, but to illustrate those most relevant to this paper, other themes are highlighted by Hatch and Schultz (2010) and the other studies cited above.

This paper seeks to extend our understanding of brand communities, and the role they can play in brand co-creation, through a study of an atypical, yet rapidly growing form of brand community, the Fairtrade Town (FTT). The FTT movement began in 2001 when a campaign initiated by Oxfam volunteer Bruce Crowther led to the accreditation, by the Fairtrade Foundation, of Garstang (UK) as the world's first FTT. Since then, FTTs (which can include

cities and villages) have grown to reach 1,728 FTTs across 26 countries by 2015 (Fairtrade Towns, 2015), including 612 in Britain. Although now a global market phenomenon, FTTs have featured in relatively little marketing-based research beyond Nicholls and Opal's (2005) consideration of them as marketing networks. In this paper we argue that FTTs represent co-created marketing systems that fit the characteristics of brand communities, without conforming to much existing brand community theory, making them worthy of investigation.

Our paper proceeds in four stages. First, we review the literature on brand communities and co-creation and identify a number of gaps. Secondly, we introduce FTTs as the context for the empirical research. We then present our methodology. Finally, we present our findings followed by a discussion of their implications for theory and future research

Co-creation and collective stakeholder brand building

The dominant theme in co-creation research concerns how organisations encourage consumer dialogue or "brand conversations" (Van Belleghem, 2010) to contribute to product development and innovation and therefore to competitive advantage (Roberts, 2014; Van Dijk *et al*., 2014). The perceived marketing communication power of consumer endorsement (driven by social media) is gaining in significance and is coveted by many organisations. The value of such endorsement is greatest when it is collective, promoting interest within the brand management and marketing literature in "brand communities" (Hatch and Schultz, 2010; Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001). Since consumers rarely engage in co-creation alone (Payne *et al*., 2009), the role of brand communities as a catalyst for co-creation is viewed as an important and intriguing research topic (O'Hern and Rindfleisch, 2008). Such communities tend to be enduring, but can be transient (McAlexander *et al*., 2002) and form when consumers' admiration for a brand connects them with others to create a social relationship ranging from "formal and structured" to "informal and loose" Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009, p.316).

Informal and unstructured brand communities are often conceptualized as "consumer tribes" (Cova and Cova 2002, Goulding *et al.,* 2013) which Cova and Cova, (2001, p.69) define as heterogeneous networks of people who, through a "shared passion or emotion", display similar behaviour or attitudes towards activities (e.g. in-line skating) and brands (e.g. Beanie Babies and the Citroen 2CV). Goulding *et al.* (2013, p.815) argue that consumer tribes do not necessarily "locate their socialisation around singular brands", instead members

bond through shared social experiences that can be facilitated by various brands (Canniford, 2011). Using specific brands to facilitate displays of acceptance and belonging help tribes to construct and communicate a desired identity (Connolly and Shaw, 2006) and provide them with a social context (Gabriel and Lang, 2006). Consumer tribes can "hold people together" (Cova and Cova, 2002 p.603) through their devotion, enthusiasm and lifestyle associations in ways that can facilitate a brand's social construction, communication and consumption (Moutinho *et al.,* 2007).

Structured brand communities actively encourage consumers to develop more formal relationships through knowledge sharing, collaborative learning and participative activities to develop/augment a particular brand (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). For example Gyrd-Jones and Kornum (2013) describe the LEGO adult user community that involves both online and offline communication with certified professional users, expert "lead users", selected "Ambassadors" and adult enthusiasts generally. These formal brand communities attempt to create spaces where consumers and producers meet to share thoughts, ideas and experiences to augment the brand (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). In such communities, stakeholders engage as more than consumers purchasing and communicating a lifestyle. They can take up formal positions, and be "put to work" for the brand (Cova and Dalli, 2009; Zwick *et al.,* 2008), as in LEGO's certified users or ambassadors, where they contribute to the brand's personality and value (Ballantyne *et al*., 2011). Such roles represent "prosumption", which Xie *et al*. (2008) characterise as involving three types of co-creation contributing to brand value: through physical activities such as procuring, assorting, comparing and combining inputs; via mental efforts such as planning, evaluating, monitoring and regulating progress; and by relating their socio-psychological experiences to themselves and others. Prosumers' willingness and ability to actively customise consumption practices and experiences for themselves and others is becoming increasingly acknowledged as a positive co-creational contributor to many organisations' brand values and competitive advantage (Cova and Salle, 2008).

Brand communities, from the organized and contrived to the organic and evolving, share a common identity as "specialized non-geographically bound communities" (Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001, p.412), forged from individual consumers united by their emotional attachments to a brand (Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001). As Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009, p.316) summarize:

"A brand community is an enduring, self-selected group of consumers, sharing a system of values, standards and representations, which accept and recognize bonds of membership with each other and with the whole. The members of the community have some degree of awareness that they belong to the group and a sense of obligation towards the brand community and they influence each other."

Muñiz and O'Guinn's (2001) work on brand communities proposes three common markers for any community to form and function:

1. A consciousness of kind: members feeling a sense of belonging to the brand and the community who make, develop, endorse, champion or co-create it;
2. Shared ritual and traditions: members sharing a common set of values, behaviours and communication both within and outside the community (Zaglia, 2013); and
3. A sense of moral responsibility to others in the community: often displayed through helping to ensure the appropriate use of the brand, or by integrating new members into community norms.

These markers were also supplemented via the review of brand community studies by Schau *et al.* (2009) which identified as brand community practices:

- community engagement: badging or documenting one's community engagement and delineating or "staking" areas for involvement;
- social networking: to build and maintain community ties through practices like welcoming, governing and empathizing;
- impression management: by evangelizing on the brand's behalf and justifying one's involvement; and
- brand use: promoted through knowledge sharing and commoditization efforts linked to community resources to promote brand use.

These practices combine to create cultural capital for the brand community and its members.

Co-creation via brand communities: Research gaps.

The research literature on brand communities and co-creation processes has three key limitations. Firstly, rather than focusing on "everyday" purchases, it tends to focus on brands related to luxury or other high consumer involvement contexts including motorbikes, fashion and computers (Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander *et al*., 2002; Algesheimer *et al.,* 2005; Muñiz and Schau, 2005), football teams such as Liverpool FC (Pongsakornrungsilp and Schroeder, 2011), or hobbies such as LEGO (Gyrd-Jones and Kornum, 2013; Hatch and Schultz, 2010). To calibrate this limitation, consulting the previous ten years' issues of leading marketing journals (judged as awarded at least one star in the UK Association of Business Schools' quality rankings) reveals 104 papers substantively addressing brand communities (ie. more than mentioning the term, using it for comparisons, or referencing it). Of these papers, 24 are unrelated to specific brands (e.g. literature reviews of the topic, conceptual papers, or surveys of a population of brands). The remaining 80 papers studied 137 instances of specific brand communities (including multiple studies of some), whose distribution between sectors is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Coverage of Brand Communities in Leading Marketing Journals 2007-2016

Automotive (Cars/motorbikes)	37
ICT (Primarily computers and smartphones)	23
Entertainment (Movie franchises, celebrities, fantasy universes)	15
Consumer Durables (Non-automotive or ICT)	12
Health & Beauty (devices, gyms, remedies & exercise/weight-loss systems)	9
B2B (including franchisee & employee targeted)	8
FMCG (Nutella, pasta, sodas)	8
Football (European "Soccer" & US NFL)	7
Tourism (including travel, hotels & cruise lines)	6
Games & Toys (including computer gaming)	5
Not-for Profit (Charities, colleges/alumni)	4
Retailers (1 pro and 1 anti-brand community)	2
Total	**137**

This illustrates the dominance of high-involvement categories linked to vehicles, computers, phones, entertainment, football teams and tourism. For more "everyday" FMCG purchases, the eight studies include three for Nutella (including Cova and Pace's original (2006) exploration of the community dedicated to the chocolate spread in EJM) and four addressing "soda" brands. The crucial factor here may be that communities form around brands that consumers share a "passion" for (Cova and Pace, 2006; Goulding *et al.,* 2013). So although consumers may be loyal to a brand of detergent, and even interested in exchanging information about its use, they are unlikely to feel passionate about it, as they might about a car, phone, football team or even a chocolate spread.

A second limitation is the emphasis on on-line communities of interest, rather than offline or actual geographic communities (Ind *et al*., 2013; Pongsakornrungsilp and Schroeder, 2011; Hatch and Schultz, 2010). Although some of the most influential studies consider offline community interactions (e.g. Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander *et al*., 2002), online community research predominates. Returning to the previous decade's 104 brand community based marketing papers, 75 concern specifically online communities or involve "netnographies". Nine conceptual papers apply equally well to online or offline communities, and nine consider both. Of the eleven offline papers, four concern "brandfest" events which are typically organised via online communities; two discuss offline activities of communities with a strong online dimension (linked to gaming and football); and two involve service use communities whose members' sense of community came via their shared relationship to the brand rather than with each other (relating to what Anderson (1983) identifies as an "imagined community"). Only three studies refer to specifically offline communities whose members interact. Few studies connect to actual places beyond one addressing a religious community and one for a beer popular in (but not confined to) a local region. Five consider football clubs which are place specific, but of these, three concern online fan communities. Similarly, two consider universities, but with one addressing their online alumni. Two consider specific leisure clubs and their customer base, whilst the four brandfest papers concern temporary geographic concentrations (McAlexander *et al*., 2002) which occur in particular places that vary over time.

Finally, research concentrates mostly on direct interactions between brands or brand managers and consumers (Payne *et al*., 2009). There is a recognition that co-creation involves a range of stakeholders that need to be considered (Gyrd-Jones and Kornum, 2013).

However, most commentators agree that firm-consumer interactions are the key locus for value co-creation and therefore the focus of research (Grönroos, 2011), which treats brands in a compartmentalised way. In modeling the co-creation process, Payne *et al.* (2009) portray it as primarily about consumer-firm interactions (or encounters), with the influence of other brands, stakeholders, endorsements and events positioned as merely secondary brand knowledge sources for consumers (and firms). Van Dijk *et al.* (2014, p.110) describe the potential for "all kinds of sources", including other brands, to become actors in the brand co-creation process by contributing to brand identity and values. They suggest that consumers and organisations' symbolic interactions with events, other people, other causes, places and even other brands can all add value. However, empirical work into the brand co-creation influence of stakeholders beyond consumers and marketers has "barely begun" (Hatch and Schultz, 2010, p.591).

These limitations are not unacknowledged, Cova and Pace (2006) demonstrate that brand communities can extend beyond online environments and obvious high-involvement products to encompass offline interactions and FMCG brands. However, there remains a relative lack of empirical research exploring brand co-creation in the context of more "alternative" brands and brand communities, in the context of geographical communities, and in terms of stakeholder relationships beyond the consumer-marketer interface.

The relatively narrow scope of research on brand communities raises questions about their extent and potential limits. How do consumers and other relevant actors, including other brands, contribute to brand co-creation, and what relationships and processes are involved? Can brand communities be effective for low involvement, everyday, short purchase cycle products? Can offline geographic communities be mobilised for co-creation purposes? This paper seeks to address these questions and contribute to our understanding by exploring them in the context of efforts to build and promote the Fairtrade (FT) brand through offline communities involved in creating FTTs, both as markets and as brands.

Place branding
Although most brand community research concerns online communities, or transitory offline brand-fest events, the potential exists for a brand community to form around actual places such as specific clubs, universities or towns. This is perhaps most obviously possible where the place itself is the brand. In the last decade EJM has published several papers focussed on the branding of a country, region, city or landscape. EJM's recent contributions include

studies of the agency of a place's heritage (Alexander and Hamilton, 2016); corporations' role in representing a country (Lopez *et al*., 2011) or city (Trueman *et al.,* 2012); and the values different stakeholders ascribe to a city (Merrilees *et al*., 2012). Iversen and Hem (2008) discuss how a place's brand can be an "umbrella" under which clusters of certain consumer goods can reduce their marketing costs, gain market entry, display their products' provenance /authenticity and differentiate themselves.

The role of community residents in place branding is addressed by Braun *et al*. (2013) who identify three key roles for them:

1. Their interaction forms the natural social milieu of a place;
2. They can provide authenticity to a place's brand by granting credibility to any communicated messages; and
3. As citizens, they can participate in the formal governance of a place, and therefore wield political power in place-making decisions.

Kavaratzis and Kalandides (2015) argue that place branding should be viewed as a function of synthesising a place's physical elements, social structures and interactions, regulatory institutions and systems of representation into associated meaning. This process is akin to brand co-creation because it depends upon the interactions of citizens and other stakeholders to build a place's brand (Braun *et al*., 2013; Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015).
In studying FTTs, this paper considers them as place-based brand communities that are formed and led by local residents, and which then play an increasingly important role in co-creating the FT brand within their town.

Research Context - Fairtrade and Fairtrade Towns
The history of FT is detailed by Doherty *et al*. (2013) and considered in relation to branding by Reed (2009). Its success has generated sales estimated at £7 billion by 2015 in W. Europe & North America (Fairtrade International, 2016, p.11), including £2.1 billion in the UK. This success is consistently attributed to the FT label as a brand (Doherty *et al*., 2013) with 70% of the UK population recognising the FT trademark and logo, and perhaps more pertinently, 64% displaying an understanding of the concepts behind it (FT Facts & Figures, 2009).

The FT label instils consumer trust, by signalling "fair" prices and a contribution to sustainable development in Southern producer communities, and also (in the past decade) by

indicating high quality products to Northern consumers (Golding, 2009; Low and Davenport, 2006). A major theme explored in FT branding research is the ability of a trustworthy, third-party accredited product label to drive the mainstreaming of ethical consumption (Zadek *et al*., 1998). This is because the FT label concentrates the cognitive framing of a social movement into a specific type of brand (Larceneux *et al*., 2012), whilst also contributing directly to the multifaceted brand construction of the physical product. As Connolly and Shaw (2006) discuss, consumers' shared passion for the FT brand makes them feel part of an "imagined" community of socially concerned and active consumers.

Fairtrade Towns

An increasingly significant contributor to the social construction, mainstream success and co-creation of the FT brand is the FTT movement. Lamb (2008) frames FTTs' early development as an inspired case of community activism uniting small groups of local people behind the FT brand. These groups attempt to influence local consumers, retailers, organisations and public services to supply or buy FT products (Alexander and Nicholls, 2006). Becoming certified as a FTT depends upon meeting the following five criteria (Fairtrade Towns, 2014):

- The local council must pass a resolution supporting FT, and serve FT coffee and tea at its meetings and in offices and canteens.
- A range of FT products must be readily available in the town or city's shops and served in local cafés and catering establishments (with targets set in relation to population).
- FT products must be used by a number of local work places and community organisations (churches, schools etc).
- The council must attract popular support for the campaign.
- A local FT steering group of community representatives must be convened to ensure continued commitment to FT status.

The steering group (fifth criteria above) usually acts as a catalyst in working with FT campaigners to pursue Fairtrade Foundation accreditation for a town. The pursuit of the five criteria generates voluntary community engagement through key stakeholder buy-in that entwines public, private, third sector organisations, citizens and consumers into a proactive community network (Davies, 2009). This network formalizes attempts to mobilize and empower people, from all walks of life and all sections of the community (Lamb, 2008), to

form a localized brand community to develop and communicate the FT message, and attempt to increase FT consumption in their local area (Alexander and Nicholls, 2006; Malpass *et al.,* 2007; Nicholls and Opal, 2005). FTTs therefore play an integral role in building a co-created stakeholder-driven FT brand by designing and engaging in "initiatives aimed at transforming infrastructures of collective consumption" Barnett *et al.* (2011, p.162).

Methodology

This study explores FTTs' co-creational functions and dynamics by applying the interpretive methodology of Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This method is used widely across social science, but comparatively infrequently in marketing contexts (Goulding, 1998). It is particularly suitable for researching phenomena where pre-existing theory or rich data is lacking, as was the case with FTT (Samuel and Peattie, 2016). Grounded Theory allowed the exploration of the social world of the FTT movement through the eyes of key "insiders" by capturing qualitative data about their social situations, views, motives, interactions, interpretations and everyday actions (Blaikie, 2000). The main focus for data collection was FTT steering group members, local volunteers who collectively contribute to instigating and then developing the FTT initiative within their towns. An overview of the phases and methods of data collection used to gather data is presented in Table 2.

Data Collection	Research Landscape / Participants	Rich Data
Phase 1 Three years ethnographical involvement and voluntary participative membership of a FTT brand community	Attendance and participation at FTT steering group meetings and events Participant observation	Official group minutes Research journal notes
Phase 2 Semi-structured, in-depth interviews with FTT brand community members	29 interviews completed in 11 different UK FTTs including Bridgnorth, Cardiff, Carmarthen, Garstang, Hereford, Keswick, , Merthyr Tydfil, Millom, Oundle, Swansea and Worcester.	Interview transcripts capturing FTT participants' narratives, views, experiences, actions and observations.
Phase 3 Semi-structured interviews with FT organisation pioneers and a prominent FTT (Liverpool).	Interviews with Three CEOs of FT pioneer organisations involved in everyday FMCG such as coffee, chocolate, and nuts, a Fairtrade Foundation Senior Manager and Liverpool FTT members.	Interview transcripts capturing FT organisations' leaders' and activists views, experiences, actions and observations.

Table 2: *Fairtrade Towns Data Collection*

Data analysis

Each phase provided rich qualitative data via interview transcripts, steering group minutes, researcher journals and other documents totalling 110,432 words of data. This was coded using immediate line-by-line coding (by hand), followed by focussed coding to condense and understand the data by constantly comparing experiences, actions and interpretations across all data sets to identify themes and relationships (Charmaz, 2006). Coding was complemented by the creation of memos to capture thoughts, facilitate contrasts and identify connections across the data (Charmaz, 2006). This process is described in much greater detail in Samuel and Peattie (2016). Analysis of the codes and memos led to the creation of three core categories: the role of key FTT stakeholders in generating "Validity" for the FT brand; FTT as a multi-dimensional form of "Place-based marketing"; and how FTT activists use "Pressure and Support" to promote FT. Each category revealed findings demonstrating how FTTs function as place-based brand communities and how co-creation processes operate within them, as discussed below. Table 3 provides an example of how data analysis captured significant brand community themes using one of the three core categories mentioned, validity for the FT brand.

Insert Table 3 here.

Findings and Discussion

Past research into brand communities has frequently involved studying particular communities and then deriving theory and principles to apply more generally. Studying FTTs allows us to consider: (a) whether they fit with existing theory concerning brand communities' nature and structure, and stakeholder roles within them; and (b) whether they suggest any new principles or research avenues. Given their status as brand communities that operate offline, within geographic communities and involving a range of stakeholders, their study also allows us to contribute to addressing the three key research gaps related to brand communities.

The key themes emerging from this study concern the roles played by stakeholders within FTTs; how FTTs represent communities focused on "everyday" brands operating within specific geographic places; and how they operate as complex co-branding networks.

FTT brand community roles

Steering groups as prosumers: Co-creation involves a range of networked stakeholders including marketers, consumers and others (Payne *et al.*, 2009). Conventionally the key relationship is seen as the consumer-marketer (or brand manager) interface, and individuals are considered to have relatively specific roles within the network. Although considered by Pongsakornrungsilp and Schroeder (2011), the variety of roles that participants can have in co-creation has received relatively little attention.

As highlighted by Figure 1, Xie *et al.*'s (2008) prosumer is central to the development and accreditation of a FTT through the work of its steering group who share a passion for FT, and collectively invest time, effort and social capital in promoting it. This includes the physical effort of expending "shoe leather" (as one respondent phrased it) in undertaking local FT audits and persuading retailers to stock FT, and mental efforts through planning and communication work. Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010) define prosumers in terms of engaging in production activities including helping to define the brand's meaning, providing word-of-mouth leads, and staging experiences for other consumers, which matches closely with steering group activities. They also promote FT as individuals, through exemplary consumption, conspicuously consuming FT products and taking any opportunities to pursue conversations with retailers, friends, workplace colleagues, acquaintances and even strangers about the value of FT consumption. Steering group members recognize that their behaviour as consumers is observed to the point that it determines their own validity in promoting FT consumption.

> "*I think people are aware that I'm very keen on the whole idea behind Fairtrade and so I talk about it whenever I can. I make a point of buying Fairtrade things in the shops and asking for them if they're not available and if I go into cafes or bars.*"

> Community Representative (Steering group member, Oundle)

Steering group members also consistently shared socio-psychological experiences (Xie *et al.*, 2008), by relating stories of their personal FT consumption to whoever they can. This biographical story telling helps to augment the FT brand through both message and media, since the story-teller (FTT member) becomes a symbolic representation of the FT brand.
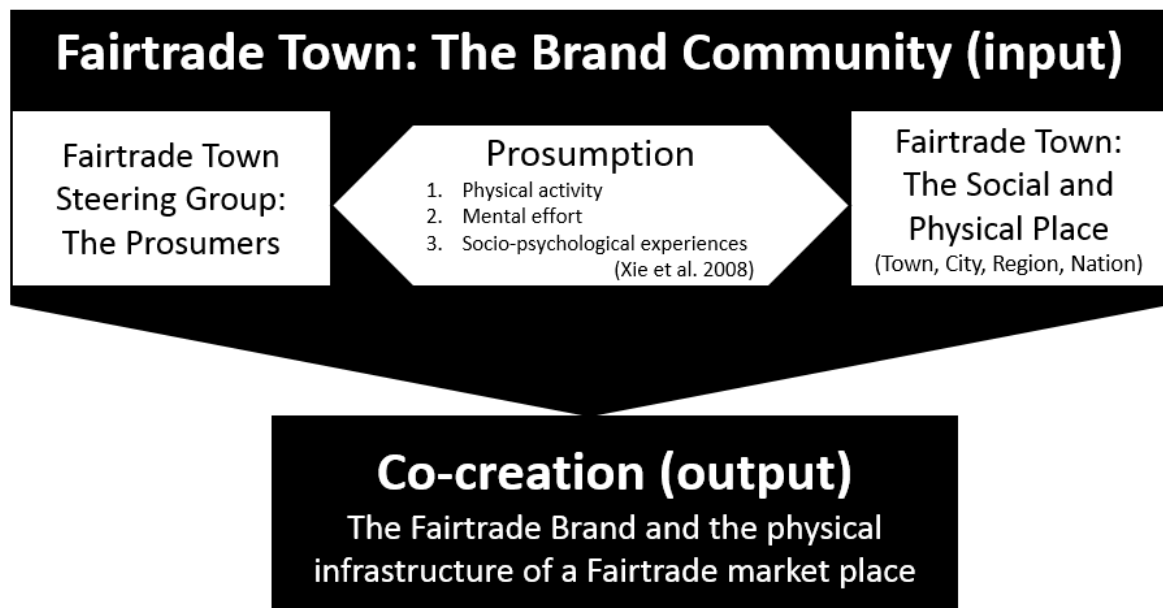
Figure 1. Prosumption within FTTs

One important perceived role for steering groups was to protect and uphold FT brand values and community standards in the face of mainstreaming and pressures to widen the scope of FTT campaigns beyond accredited FT products to embrace other "ethical products". Such efforts reflect a collective embracing of the type of standards-defending brand warrior role described by Pongsakornrungsilp and Schroeder (2011).

> *'The Fairtrade Label is vital… The first thing that we do, and the most visible thing that we do in the community, is to promote products with that symbol on it, so that people can recognise it on their bananas and on their coffee and so on, so look for the mark, that has been so important to us and will continue to be so in terms of our popular campaigning.'* NGO worker (Steering group member, Keswick).

FTT supporters' multiple identities: People within FTTs did not just play distinct roles within a brand community (as observed by Pongsakornrungsilp and Schroeder, 2011) but they tended to combine their membership of the FTT steering group with other roles and memberships within their town. The diversity in FTT members' social capital and skill sets helps validate the FTTs' marketing functions, whilst also determining the role that each individual or organisation plays. There were examples of FTTs co-creating the FT brand through the local teacher's knowledge and wisdom, the NGO worker's compassion, the Co-operative's retailing ethics, the church leader's spiritual authority, and the council official's role in democratic representation. In each case those external roles helped to locally validate

and communicate the FT brand, reflecting a similar process to the validation role played by residents in place branding (Braun *et al.*, 2013). It also represented a form of "staking" (Schau *et al.*, 2009) in which group members had specific responsibility for networking with other local organisations.

Brand volunteering: Steering group members represent the type of brand volunteers discussed by Cova *et al*. (2015). Lyon (2014) notes that the important role of community volunteers within FTTs has led to tensions following the growth in mainstreaming and the increasing involvement of major company brands. From the volunteers' perspective, mainstreaming's success can change their perceived role from promoting an ethical cause within their community, towards acting as unpaid marketers for major multinationals. This reflects the risks of conflict and compromise for brand volunteers that Cova *et al*. (2015) explore. In the FTTs researched here, the brand volunteer role is viewed as adding unique value and authenticity rather than just supplementing mainstream marketing resources for free. The fact that people "give up their free time" to promote FT is perceived as a symbolic representation of the value attributed to the brand:

> "*If Nestle had an idea like this they would put millions into it…It wouldn't work because, when there's a debate on Fairtrade, Nestle send a representative, they're doing that in overtime, they're getting paid, they want to clock off as soon as they can. The campaigner goes there, doesn't get paid, it's in their spare time, but that passion comes out and that's the strength… Somebody once said to me … you are a really good sales person and I said no, I'm not a good sales person, I passionately believe in what I'm doing and therefore I can sell it to you because I believe in it.*"
> Chairman of FTT steering Group (Garstang)

Fairtrade Towns as an "everyday" brand community

Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001) suggest that any brand could become the focus for a community, but that they are likely to be those consumed publicly rather than privately, with a strong image, a rich history, and may be non-conformist or "underdog" brands, although Cova and Pace (2006) suggest they are also commonplace for dominant brands. Often, brand communities champion a product or technology viewed by its supporters as technically superior in quality (e.g. fans of Apple or Harley-Davidson). By contrast for FT there is a well-documented, troublesome past relating to the quality and desirability of FT products

(Doherty *et al.*, 2013) that was articulated during the very first interview conducted for this study by a respondent saying:

> "*My first experiences with Fair Trade was before the Fairtrade mark was around and it was rather disgusting Nicaraguan coffee. I was a student and I think the people who were really into it were Christians and chaplaincy who maybe sold it and drank it but it wasn't very popular because it was poor quality and it certainly wasn't as good as standards are now, so it was quite an heroic endeavour. It was actually like drinking brown sludge.*" Chaplin (Steering Group Member, Carmarthen)

Such early consumer positioning of FT consumption as "heroic" may have appealed to some consumers with a "brand warrior" spirit and created a strong sense of community, but it represented a barrier to mainstream market penetration (Low and Davenport, 2006). Improvements in FT product quality combined with incremental growth in consumer acceptance and confidence amongst "ordinary people" (Malpass *et al.*, 2007) represents a key element in creating a brand that attracts consumers interested in ethical, but not heroic, consumption.

Significantly, in the explanations given by respondents, the developmental agenda of FT is recognized as a catalyst for their participation, but is not the only motivation for it. Participation in FTTs also reflects the perceived importance of consumer endorsement and the post-mainstreaming growth in demand for FT products. The symbolic significance of seeing the market share for FT grow in size and gratify consumer expectations appears to help participants see themselves as "making a difference" thus increasing their willingness and confidence to contribute. This ethical augmentation allows "everyday" products such as coffee and tea to become brands suitably inspiring for communities to form around them due to their "extraordinary" effect within poorer countries. Steering group members consistently and deliberately sought to evangelise about the dual virtues of FT as worth consuming and worth supporting.

Fairtrade Towns as "placed" brand communities

In being place specific, FTTs challenge Muñiz and O'Guinn's (2001) definition of brand communities as non-geographical. Their reliance on face-to-face contact also goes beyond the offline interactions described by Gyrd-Jones and Kornum (2013), which largely concern non-internet communication (e.g. letter writing). Steering groups' interactions with other local

groups and organisations (including local councils and NGO groups), and local residents' adoption and discussion of FT consumption (Wheeler, 2012) all add to the local social milieu.

FTTs as a "nested" and "glocalized" brand: The concepts of sub-brands and nested brands are well established. FTT marketing demonstrates a brand nesting effect in which the broad global FT brand is promoted locally by establishing a distinct FTT brand to engage with consumers and mobilize local organisations and citizens. Although technically the similarity of names would qualify FTT as a sub-brand of FT (Bhat *et al*., 1998), the difference between the broader social movement and its application within a specific place makes the nested brand concept seem more appropriate. Those behind the localized FTT brand would typically seek to connect their support for FT as a global brand with local understandings of place identity. This is not unlike the use of co-branding strategies that connect local and global brands to improve prospects within local markets by providing additional information, authenticity and meaning for consumers (Abbratt and Moltana, 2002). Therefore, for the City of Cardiff, the pursuit of FTT status was strongly linked to its identity as the capital city of Wales:

> *"Cardiff is a small and friendly city and I think it links well into that image and the fact that the group was started by so many different people from across the city not just the council people but local organisations and individuals, shows that it's a city that is, sort of leading the way in, sort of ethical consumption and it's a great thing to put on a flag as well."*

> Student Union representative (Steering group member, Cardiff)

Keswick was an interesting case using multiple elements of local identity in its interpretation of FT. Firstly it had one particular identity as a tourist town, and therefore FTT brand development engaged specifically with the tourism trade through a campaign to persuade all local hotels and B&Bs to stock FT tea and coffee. Secondly, Keswick's identity as a farming community was used to connect the benefits of FT with the plight of farmers in poorer countries. Similarly in Garstang, the FTT steering group promoted links between local farmers and coco producers in Ghana by likening the struggle of the Ghanaian producers to attain a fair price for their commodities to those of local farmers facing not dissimilar economic challenges. Together this gave new meaning to the global brand at the point of consumption by combining the validity generated by the FT movement with further

endorsement by local stakeholders, and connecting FT consumption to existing notions of local identity and branding.

Such a glocalized and nested branding combination is uncommon amongst the commodity food and drink products associated with FT. The closest obvious parallel would be sporting franchises like the NFL or Premiership Soccer that represent the global brand, with individual city or town based clubs operating as the localized place-based brands. Even then, there are issues that supporters are not necessarily confined to the city or town a team hails from, and management of the team and its brand is not normally in the hands of the community (with honourable exceptions such as the Green Bay Packers in the NFL or Athletic Bilbao football club).

Ultimately a three way split emerged in the brand co-creation activities of the FTT steering groups. In relation to the global FT brand they were seeking to interpret, explain and promote it locally. There was also a generic FTT brand that steering groups related to and felt they represented, particularly in terms of establishing a new FTT and gaining accreditation. They also valued the FTT brand as a platform that supported them in engaging with people:

> *"Fairtrade Towns has made it easier you might say, to be part of a local campaign, you can actually feed into it, there's an identity there, you know, and that's the strengths of it, that's what's really made it, what it is, I'm quite sure, that's what's made it popular."* Sustainability Centre Manager (Steering group member, Swansea)

This platform was credited with being able to "open doors" and improve the movement's access and communication to consumers and organisations within a town. The individual FTTs operate as specific place-based brands which the steering groups actively create, promote and manage by using and adapting branding materials, provided via a two person team (plus volunteers) within the Fairtrade Foundation, who support FTTs and their marketing efforts. The FTT brand also acts as a place specific umbrella brand (Iversen and Hem, 2008) under which both the generic FT brand and specific FT brands such as the Co-op or manufacturer FT brands can also be promoted.

Brand ownership and governance: Co-creation creates brand governance challenges for marketers wishing to benefit from involving consumers in the creation of value since this risks ceding some control to consumers (Zwick *et al.*, 2008). Most co-branding research considers specific individual product or corporate brands and interactions with their

consumers (e.g. Pongsakornrungsilp and Schroeder (2011) who focus on Liverpool FC, or Hatch and Schultz (2010) who focus on LEGO). Deepening consumer involvement can see the brand manager's role in co-creation evolving from "instigator" to "orchestrator" and consumers becoming active carriers of brand meaning rather than just followers of the firm's brand construction (Gyrd-Jones and Kornum, 2013). In extreme cases (often related to the imminent demise of a beloved brand) consumers can seize the initiative and "hijack" the brand (Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2004). FTTs are different since there is no specific manufacturer or business behind the FT brand as instigator or even participant, although the Fairtrade Foundation can be considered the ultimate brand owner since it oversees FT accreditation. However, there is no obvious sense of a "conversation" between consumers and the Foundation, although there are more conventional conversations visible with specific manufacturer or retailer FT brands (such as Cafédirect, Co-op, Nestlé and Starbucks). The FTT steering group instigates co-creation of the FTT brand and leads the conversations with local consumers, retailers, media representatives, educational establishments, government officials and other stakeholders.

> "*We think our role is to keep promoting it through different groups locally and to keep putting on events and just to keep the presence locally and to put pressure on any new retailers and café owners that come into the town.*"
>
> Chaplin (Steering group member, Carmarthen)

In localizing consumer understanding of, and engagement with, the FT brand, they are effectively co-creating the FTT as an authentic "community brand" not owned, governed or even actively promoted by a manufacturer, but by the geographical community itself:

> "*There is quite a movement here in Liverpool to encourage consumers to buy in independent cafes, restaurants etc, so we have got the independent Liverpool group involved in the steering committee which has helped increase the sales of FT products through independents*" Chair of Fairtrade Steering Group (Liverpool).

Pongsakornrungsilp and Schroeder's (2011) exploration of the "ThisIsAnfield" online community identified it as co-managed by consumers because experienced participants moderated and influenced the behaviour of newer members. They propose this as a significant form of consumer organisation and empowerment contributing to brand co-creation processes. However, we propose that the roles, organisation and influence on co-creation that characterise the FTT steering groups take these notions much further. Payne *et*

al. (2009) stress the community dimension to co-creation since consumers engage in it through networking and information sharing. In the case of FTTs, these processes drive the co-branding process, but mostly without a specific company as instigator or even participant.

FTTs can be understood as place-based brands, reminiscent of destination branding within tourism, but they lack the ultimate civic ownership and management common within place branding. Place branding efforts, like FTTs, involve a complex stakeholder network (including hoteliers, transport businesses and attraction owners (Baggio, 2011)) and can include a formal role for citizens (Braun *et al.*, 2013), but ultimately civic authorities lead and coordinate the brand management process. Within the FTTs studied the steering groups, as self-appointed voluntary marketing collectives, oversaw the promotion of the FT brand within the town and the emergence of the FTT nested-brand, albeit (a) they depended upon the local authority's support for accreditation, and (b) in some towns the response of local authorities was seen as enthusiastic to the point of attempting to "take over" the FTT initiative.

Fairtrade Towns as complex co-branding networks

Muñiz and O'Guinn's (2001) conceptualization of a brand as a set of customer-to-brand and customer-to-customer relationships was extended by McAlexander *et al.* (2002) to a more complex network of relationships between and amongst consumers, products, brands and the marketers behind them, which was evident in the work of FTTs.

FTT co-creation processes: Benapurdi and Leonne (2003) identify five forms of co-creation. Two of these: generating emotional engagement between consumers and the brand, and engaging the consumer in brand related experiences, were reflected by FTT steering groups.

> *"Fairtrade allows you, gives you the opportunity to make a response every day to world problems, so when you shop, when you shop for sugar, or tea or bananas or whatever, you are actually doing something within the framework, within your framework, as an individual who is concerned about issues with global justice, and I often say to people that Fairtrade is, trade justice at the checkout, and that is exactly what it is for me."* NGO worker (Steering group member, Keswick)

The other three: self-service; using processes to help consumers solve their own problems; and engaging in product design, were not particularly relevant, perhaps reflecting the emphasis in co-creation research on complex products, innovation and online environments.

Emotional engagement efforts can involve a range of influences through brand advocacy, and the use of themes, metaphors, analogies and stories (Payne *et al*., 2009). Advocacy was a fundamental role of steering groups, but their reliance on metaphors, stories and analogies was also a key finding.

Where FTT brand co-creation goes beyond Benapurdi and Leonne's (2003) range of activities is in the mental and physical effort groups invest in functional marketing activities. This included negotiating with retailers and public procurement managers to stock FT products to create new channels of distribution, providing product samples at events, and persuading retailers and businesses or organisations using FT products to display the brand through stickers or other materials. In terms of marketing communications, FTTs raised awareness of the FT label within the geographical community by running events, school talks and arranging media coverage such as local newspaper articles and local radio appearances (with FTT steering group members typically liaising with the FT label organisations to write press releases). Through such activities steering group members went beyond conventional understandings of prosumers within brand communities. They were not involved in co-production of the core offering for themselves (as per Vargo, 2011), or through innovation or designing products (Zwick *et al*., 2008) and their role went beyond co-creation in the sense of adding value during consumption through conventional brand co-creation (Roberts, 2014; Zwick *et al*., 2008). Their role could be described as "co-marketing" through a role as a type of "citizen marketer" (McConnell and Huba, 2007). Although not actively involved in product co-design as highlighted by Benapurdi and Leonne (2003), groups were strongly involved in distribution and communication strategy co-design, more usually the sole remit of the professional marketer.

> "*My role during my lunch breaks at the University was to be responsible for working with the City Council procurement buyers and Local Agenda 21 Officer responsible for sustainability to persuade them ways to switch to Fairtrade products. In fact I became quite an expert on public procurement*."
>
> Student (Steering group member, Liverpool).

Producer involvement: Within FTTs, a major promotional effort involves the hosting of visiting FT producers from developing economies. Their ability to personally authenticate the developmental benefits of FT consumption (through their own experiences) was regarded by respondents with unequivocal reverence. FTTs, as part of the annual "Fairtrade Fortnight"

UK marketing campaign, made maximum possible use of FT certified producers *"telling their story"*. Producer stories of developmental gain, regularly disseminated to consumers first hand at FTT events, and often promulgated through local media and classrooms, are recognized for their ability to add a "real" dimension to the brand that validates an FTT's campaigning credibility.

> *"What has been very, very valuable for our campaign, but in quite a unquantifiable way has been our link with a coffee farming community in Ethiopia, because that has bought the reality of the life of coffee farmers who sell into the Fairtrade market to our community. It was, in particular, when two coffee farmers came to Keswick last year that people met them and that in itself was a hugely beneficial process, not only for the coffee farmers, but also for our community and we want to build on that and we want more, and more people to participate in the experience of the link."*
>
> NGO worker (Steering group member, Keswick)

Such consumer and producer encounters within FTTs represent a brand gathering that is "at once global and local" (Whatmore and Thorn, 1997, p.289). Zadek *et al*. (1998) argue that the difference between FT and conventional consumer brands is that the latter act as a mirror, reflecting back the consumers' own values, identity and aspirations, whilst the former acts as a window making visible the lives and conditions of people supplying consumer commodities. FTT producer tours bring FT producers and consumers together, turning the FTT brand into a doorway that allows the two to meet.

The varying and multiple roles of FTT stakeholders underline the extent to which FTTs take us beyond the conventional understanding of brand co-creation processes that are strongly focused on the brand manager (or team)/consumer interface. As marketing networks, FTTs encourage interactions that (a) go further into the supply chain than usual, by bringing producers and consumer communities together, effectively uniting the two ends of a global supply chain at a single physical location, and (b) go beyond the normal supply chain by understanding the co-creation influence and potential of educators, clerics and local government, stakeholders more normally considered part of the marketing environment rather than the marketing system.

Nested concepts of community: In addition to representing a nested set of brands, FTTs also can be viewed as part of a nested set of interconnected brand communities. The FT steering group, can itself be viewed as a brand community since they exhibit Muñiz and O'Guinn's

(2001) three key characteristics of consciousness of kind; evidence of the rituals and traditions; and a sense of obligation to the community and its members. Although perhaps they could be more accurately conceived as a band of enthusiast brand warriors (Pongsakornrungsilp and Schroeder, 2011) within a wider consumer tribe. Those involved in the wider consumption, supply and promotion of FT within the FTT can also be conceived as a brand community sharing some degree of enthusiasm for the FT and FTT brand. Both of these brand communities exist within a broader geographic community and its social milieu, which can also be considered as a brand community, but relating to place as a brand. FTT steering groups actively sought to connect the FT brand to notions of local identity and social solidarity, partly hoping to attract consumers who were not naturally strongly sympathetic to FT, but who might be more interested if it became established as a local social norm and element of local identity:

> *"I think it's a pride Cardiff can have, which is different to other cities, they can push forward, they can say this is what we agreed to. Therefore you can push people who might not know about Fairtrade. So, we are now a Fairtrade city, this is what we've agreed to, could you have a think about introducing more Fairtrade products, and we do that in shops. Wherever I go, anywhere, every restaurant I go to, I ask have you got Fairtrade coffee and even if they don't, it raises the question, why haven't you got it."* Social Enterprise Manager (Steering group member, Cardiff)

Therefore, those who engage with a FTT because they consciously adopt FT consumption practices (Wheeler, 2012) become members of both a local FT "constituency" and the abstract global imagined FT community discussed by Connelly and Shaw (2006).

FTTs represent a "nested concept of community" through the actions of three distinct contributors: FTT steering group members, community based supporters (individuals and organisations) and general consumers of FT branded goods. Each demonstrate different levels of commitment and impact upon the dynamics of FTT brand communities. FTT steering group members are proactive in the prosumption and co-creation of FT. Some local individuals and organisations within the geographical boundaries of FTTs demonstrate a commitment to the brand community through supplying and consuming FT products. While residents of the geographic community (and visitors to it) may passively contribute to the FTT as a consumption community unconsciously via FT consumption prompted by local choice editing decisions, rather than individual consumer choices. Significant aspects of these roles are considered in Tables 4 and 5.

FTTs as brand networks. With a backdrop of mainstreaming and product quality acceptance FTTs engage with a wide spectrum of individuals, organisations and representatives from civil society (Alexander and Nicholls, 2006) to advance their agenda and develop the FT brand. This reflects Merz *et al.*'s (2009, p. 338) view of brand value as "co-created through network relationships and social interactions among the ecosystem of all stakeholders":

> "*The FTT supporter, campaigner network around the country, the churches, the schools, the universities, the town groups who meet regularly, have been invaluable in helping us to grow the sales of Fairtrade products at a local level. The groups raise awareness and it means local wholesalers have to stock Fairtrade products and the town groups pull the products through into distribution*"
>
> Senior Manager at the Fairtrade Foundation.

Studying the way in which FTTs operate as marketing networks, and the role of co-creation within them, reveals that FTTs involve both a nested set of FT brands (global FT, generic FTTs, specific FTT) and connections to a range of other brands. These include longstanding FT specialist brands such as Café Direct and Divine Chocolate, retailer brands associated with supporting FT (particularly the Co-op), and increasingly, and sometimes controversially, mainstream brands that have embraced FT. It is evident within FTTs that the co-creation process is strongly influenced by stakeholders other than consumers, and intersects with other brands to the extent that it would be more meaningful to talk about a network of brands. Alternatively, one might argue that FTTs are brand communities, whilst also acting as community-governed brands, and as a community of brands.

The brand community characteristics from Muñiz and O'Guinn's (2001) and Schau *et al.* (2009) are applied in Tables 4 and 5 to summarise the empirical findings of this research. Table 4 presents how FTT actions represent a pro-active brand community, while Table 5 highlights the empirical insights that extend the boundaries of knowledge about brand communities' engagement in co-creational activities. In doing so they can contribute to our understanding of the role that real places of consumption and production can play in the co-creation of FT marketing.

Table 4 : Fairtrade Towns as Brand Communities in Action

Fairtrade Towns (FTT) Brand Community Activities	Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) Three Markers of a Brand Community			Schau et al. (2009) Brand Community Practices			
	A Consciousness of Kind	Shared Rituals and Traditions	A Sense of Moral Responsibility	Community Engagement	Social Networking	Impression Management	Brand Use
FTT steering group members and some local people and organisations show a shared belief that FT consumption has and can further lead to the sustainable development of producer communities in the developing world.	*					*	
FTT accreditation act as a platform and gives validity and traction to FTT steering group actions and their marketing dynamics.	*	*		*		*	*
FTT steering groups meet frequently to report on progress and develop new co-created strategies for advancing availability & demand for FT in their place.	*	*	*	*			
Local consumers unite through consumer product utility and the developmental outcomes of FT.	*	*		*		*	*
FTT Brand Community governance develops from the 5 goals set by the Fairtrade Foundation & Fairtrade label.		*	*	*			*
FTT steering group members are exemplary in their individual purchase & consumption and share their stories through extended social networks.	*	*	*		*	*	*
FTT steering groups initiate community networking with individual consumers, retailers, media, education establishments, local government & other stakeholders.		*	*	*	*		
FTT accreditation comes with FTT steering groups showing a sense of responsibility to promote FT labelled products only.		*	*			*	*
FTT steering group members take up a responsibility to develop new markets & opportunities for FT consumption	*		*	*	*	*	*
FTT steering group members use their social capital to recruit new members and assist each other person to person or FTT to FTT to build their marketing capacity.	*		*	*	*	*	*

Table 5 : Fairtrade Towns (FTT) Expanding the Boundaries of Brand Community	Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) Three Markers of a Brand Community			Schau *et al*. (2009) Brand Community Practices			
Fairtrade Towns (FTT) Brand Community Activities	A Consciousness of Kind	Shared Rituals and Traditions	A Sense of Moral Responsibility	Community Engagement	Social Networking	Impression Management	Brand Use
FTT steering group members along with 'local' people and organisations promote consumption choice that enables the sustainable development of other people and places (ie FT producers and their communities).		*	*			*	*
FTTs' engagement stretches beyond consumer-to-consumer and consumer-to-producer. It develops the co-creation of FT promotion and availability at the Meso level of society. Thus schools, local authorities, community groups and third sector charities become committed members of the Brand Community.		*	*	*	*	*	*
FTT steering group members have facilitated the co-creation of a geographical community brand through localizing engagement in villages, towns, cities and nations.		*	*	*	*		*
FT Producer tours to FTTs brings consumers "up close and personal" with the reality of their contribution and obligation to FT producer communities.	*		*	*		*	*
FTT steering groups extend co-creation activities of prosumers into functional marketing activities such as extending distribution and promoting product trial			*	*			*
Organisations adopt on-site FT consumption / promotion demonstrating BC membership operating at a meso level.	*		*	*			*

The results also reveal FTTs as communities that combine the characteristics of brand communities identified by Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001) with some of those of a brand / consumer tribe as identified by Cova and Cova (2001) and Canniford (2011). FTTs have the tribal tendencies of identifying with multiple brands rather than just one, and demonstrate the multiple identities and entrepreneurial nature viewed as characteristic of tribe members (Canniford, 2011). However, FTTs lack the transient nature and preference for "playfulness" over a sense of moral responsibility characteristic of tribes (Canniford, 2011). Indeed FTTs extend their sense of moral responsibility to beyond the functioning of the community itself,

to encompass the welfare of those who benefit from the community's championing of FT. Also, whereas tribes tend to attach meaning to products in ways shared only within the tribe to keep the meaning "secret" amongst members (Cova and Salle, 2008), FTTs seek to do the opposite. This suggests either that FTTs represent a hybrid between the two, or perhaps that the delineation between the two needs to be reconsidered. Taute and Sierra (2014) argue that in relation to brands, the terms communities, tribes and cults are currently used interchangeably and inconsistently within the literature and, beyond some ideas about the intensity of the relationship involved, with a lack of theoretically sound differentiation between them. The type of nested community represented by FTTs, with an enthusiastic core group of prosumers seeking to engage local people and organisations in both a local consumption community and a global imagined community, perhaps demonstrates why consistent theoretical boundaries between types of groups have been hard to draw.

Limitations.

This research has a number of limitations, including its emphasis on FTT steering group members as supporters of FT. The research did not consider other types of consumer that exist within FTT brand communities, although this is something encompassed within Wheeler's (2012) study of one FTT. It also did not consider stakeholders who might be critical of, or resistant to, FT. The study is also UK based as the point of origin of FTTs and still the leading country in FTT numbers. However, the experience in other countries may be different as suggested by Lyon's (2014) study of US FTTs. All of these limitations represent opportunities for future research.

Conclusions

Payne *et al*. (2009) would recognize brand FT as resulting and benefiting from the process of stakeholder brand co-creation in which FT consumers, producers and other stakeholders are encouraged to "communicate" and "act upon" the FT brand. In doing so they co-create both economic and social value. This process is increasingly taking place in the context of FTTs acting as brand communities, led by their brand warrior bands of citizen marketers, individually and collectively demonstrating elements of co-creation that go beyond the dominant theories and models in the marketing literature. They operate in, and are strongly emotionally related to, real places rather than online environments. Although there are some studies relating to offline communities such as motorbike or car clubs who might gather occasionally (Algesheimer *et al*., 2005) or car-sharing clubs within a location (Payne *et al.,*

2009), these studies say little about the actual offline places where brand co-creation happens. FTTs also involve everyday products like tea, coffee and sugar rather than the complex technological or fashionable brands that communities usually form around (albeit with an added layer of meaning). They also involve not one, but a network of brands, including the generic FT brand, the generic and specific FTT brands, the brands of contributing retailers and producers, and the place itself as a brand. The interface between brand marketers and consumers is not the primary source of co-creation in FTTs, and instead other "stakeholders, endorsements and events" (Payne, *et al*., 2009) move from a role as secondary providers of additional sources of brand knowledge to become key initiators and sources of co-creation and engagement between and amongst citizens and marketers.

This study highlights further potential research questions and needs relating to how co-creation operates in communities that are formal but not instigated or managed by conventional brand managers; what impacts having connected or nested brands has on co-creation; how stakeholders can adopt multiple roles within co-creation processes; and the extent to which prosumers can co-create through functional marketing activities.

FTTs in this study emerge as fully functioning brand communities, demonstrating all three of Muñiz and O'Guinn's (2001) common markers of a brand community, and the co-creation practices identified by Schau *et al*. (2009). FTTs also show comprehensive evidence of being a brand community that encourages its members to assume and extend the role of prosumers into active marketing agency beyond mere brand augmentation. The empirical findings of this paper subsequently unpack FTTs' role as brand communities and their unique processes and contributions to the co-creation of brand FT.

It may be tempting for readers to dismiss FTTs as a niche brand with which few consumers interact. The reality is that the 1,728 FTTs encompass millions of consumers and have FT consumption practices and messages increasingly deeply woven into their fabric. The routes into many FTTs have signs proclaiming their FT status which expose every resident to FT(T) branding and its connection to local identity each time they return home. The effect of this is unknown but could be an interesting avenue for future research.

The experience of FTTs could also inform research and practice concerning how local brands might build and benefit from brand communities. There are often local brands from beers and cheeses to musical styles or tourist attractions that have a devoted local following. Such brands may have the potential to generate and support a "glocal" brand community,

integrating brand and local characteristics in ways that resonate locally and act as a basis for brand outreach.

Aggarwal (2004) argues that people relate to brands much like friends. The efforts of FTTs opens up the possibility of people also relating to the FT brand more like a neighbour, who is at least familiar and connected to the place where you live, even if it is not someone you are on intimate terms and interact with regularly. Further exploration of the offline co-creation potential of prosumers and consumers operating within specific places represents a significant opportunity for future research.

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Table 3. Illustration of Focused Codes from Data Analysis

Significant Themes in the Data for Core Category 1: Validity For The Fairtrade Brand	Relationship to Brand Community Building
FTT steering group partake in "exemplary consumption" to improve the validity of the product (Requested by NGO and church based members and pursued by all).	Prosumer Activity
FTT steering group validate the FT brand through consumer / developmental stories (All members active in various physical settings).	Prosumer Activity
FTT steering group protect FT brand values against other potential imitators and rivals (Initiated by NGO member and agreed by all).	Prosumer Activity
Combined membership of FTT steering group with other life /place based roles to draw upon different skill sets (E.g. School teachers producing educational material).	Multiple Identities and Social Capital
FTT steering groups donating time and effort to promote FT helps validate the brand (All members seeing themselves as volunteers).	Brand volunteering
Consumer acceptance amongst "ordinary" people (via quality of FT products) and delivery of the development message promoted.	'Everyday' Brand Community
Fostering a sense of local acceptance, belonging and identity of FT.	Nested / Glocalized Brand
Coordination with the Fairtrade Foundation for governance support and marketing copy (Steering group Chairperson).	Co-creation Process
FT producers introduced to FTTs via producer visits (consumer meets producer).	Producer Involvement
Connecting FT to existing notions of local identity.	Nested / Glocalized Brand