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Events and online interaction: the construction of hybrid event communities

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ABSTRACT

Events are per definition limited in time and space. However, the social interaction taking place during events can continue virtually. This can result in hybrid communities, existing of an offline and an online dimension. This paper explores the construction of hybrid event communities based on the following research questions: (1) What type of online practices can be identified before, during and after the event? (2) How do online and offline event practices and rituals influence each other? (3) How do combinations of online and offline practices contribute to the creation and maintenance of hybrid event communities?

The practices of three events were studied using qualitative methods. Fifty-six interviews were conducted, and participant observation took place during 11 editions of the events. This was complemented with an online study.

The findings identify different types of online practices around events such as connecting practices, recruiting practices and creative practices. Moreover, the combinations of practices lead to different types of event communities. The paper develops a framework of online/offline interaction processes that result in different types of event communities, contributing to our knowledge about the role that events can play in the contemporary network society.

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Introduction

Events have traditionally played a role in creating group solidarity and sense of togetherness (Finkel, 2010; Getz, 2008). Whereas originally these event impacts were place-bound, in the contemporary network society (Castells, 2010), events have become nodes in complex, location-independent social networks (Richards, 2015). This paper aims to analyse the processes that lead to the creation and maintenance of hybrid event communities: communities of which the network infrastructure include both a physical (event) environment and a virtual (online) component (Sechi, Skilters, Borri, & De Lucia, 2012).

Events create the space for interaction, but community is also shaped through the practices that take place within this space. By analysing both the online and the offline event practices and the relationships between them, we can understand more about the way event communities are developed, maintained or abandoned. Events tend to be studied as isolated moments in time. Existing studies regarding event practices have focused on social interaction during events, identifying different types of social practices (Nordvall, Pettersson, Svensson, & Brown, 2014; Quinn & Wilks, 2013; Rihova, Buhalis, Gouthro, & Moital, 2018; Rihova, Buhalis, Moital, & Gouthro, 2015). However, there is a lack of linkage between events and their antecedents and

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consequences, such as prior and subsequent interaction between participants, of which online interaction is an important aspect. Studies that take online interaction around events into account usually focus on online practices that are initiated by event organisers (Calvo & San Salvatore Del Valle, 2014; Flinn & Frew, 2014; Holt, 2015). However, in order to gain insights into the formation of hybrid event communities, the visitor interactions that are outside the scope of event organisers should be included as well.

The purpose of this study is to add to our understanding of the ways people use their leisure time to form new communities through combinations of offline and online practices. Within hybrid communities, 'physical (offline) and digital (online) relationships generate a complementary structure where online links often support offline relationships and vice versa' (Sechi et al., 2012, p. 2). Therefore, the objectives of this paper are (1) to identify processes of offline (event-based) and online interactions, (2) to explore the ways in which these processes contribute to the construction of hybrid event communities and (3) to identify different types of event communities.

Literature review

Events as interaction ritual chains

In order to study the complementary character of online and offline interactions around events, an important part of the theoretical framework is based on the theory of interaction ritual chains (Collins, 2004). This theory explains how the shared event experience, in the form of interaction rituals, is linked to interactions before and after the event in a chain of rituals. Through these ritual practices, community is performed, making the event a central node in a more complex structure of offline and online interaction.

The sociology of rituals is very applicable to events because it deals with group assemblies, gatherings and crowds, who share a focused attention and emotional state, thereby collectively producing a temporary reality (Durkheim, 1912; Kjølørød, 2013). During an event people come together in a defined space for a certain period of time. The co-presence of bodies (Getz, 1989; Jago & Shaw, 1998; Morgan, 2008; Richards & Palmer, 2010; De Geus, Richards, & Toepoel, 2016) leads to interactions that carry ritualistic elements. Another reason to view events as rituals is the 'out of the ordinary' character of events (Falassi, 1987; Goldblatt, 2011). Morgan (2008, p. 91) describes festivals as 'a space and time away from everyday life in which intense extraordinary experiences can be created and shared'. These out-of-the-ordinary experiences involve a strong, although temporary, sense of togetherness and one-ness amongst the participants, which many authors have labelled ritualistic. They refer to Turner's concepts of liminality (Turner, 1967, 1979, Van Gennep, 1960/2010); an in-between state of possibilities and exploration, and *communitas* (Jaimangal-Jones, Pritchard, & Morgan, 2010; Rihova et al., 2015; Sterchele & Saint-Blancat, 2015; StJohn, 2017; Turner, 1995); a community of like-minded comrades.

In their study of the anti-racist world cup, Sterchele and Saint-Blancat (2015) examine how a state of liminality can be created and prolonged. They argue that a multifocal and polycentric event enhances the state of liminality and *communitas*. But they also observe difficulties in preserving liminality, which seems to be a temporary state, leading to temporary communities. A temporary sense of community resulting from ritualistic elements during an event can be a goal in itself for many events as it strikes a balance between sense of belonging and perceived freedom. However, for this study, it is particularly interesting how ritual outcomes, such as a strong sense of togetherness, are maintained over time. The processes in which ritualistic event practices are combined with other practices before and after the event can explain how events can play a role in the emergence of new informal self-organising networks.

In order to study the lasting effects of the performance of rituals during events, Collins' (2004) framework, describing a chain of rituals that follow from each other and build on each other, is suitable. Collins (2004) states that the emotional energy obtained from a successful ritual

stimulates participants to seek similar experiences, which leads to the creation of 'interaction ritual chains'. The chain of rituals can move outside the original event context, carrying the symbols of the event over time.

Collins' theory of interaction ritual chains (2004) builds on the work of Durkheim (1858–1917). By interpreting Durkheim's work through the eyes of Goffman's micro sociology, Collins designed a model, which can be applied to specific (event) practices, while at the same time focusing on the structural outcomes of these practices. Collins distinguishes a number of ritual ingredients: bodily co-presence, barriers to outsiders, mutual focus of attention and shared mood, which have to be present in order to create a successful interaction ritual. The ritual ingredients create a state of 'collective effervescence', which has a similarity to Turner's liminality. The rhythmic entrainment during this state causes people to feel a sense of oneness. As a result of a successful interaction ritual, Collins describes ritual outcomes: group solidarity, emotional energy, symbols of social relationship and standards of morality. These ritual outcomes form a combination of individual and communal benefits (Figure 1).

The framework of interaction ritual chains has been applied to events before. Richards (2014) examined the implications of Collins' ritual approach in two events, Hieronymus Bosch 500 in the Netherlands and Festes de Gràcia in Barcelona, Spain. He concluded that Collins' model makes it clear that 'there is an important link between events over time: each successive event or ritual has an important effect on what follows' (Richards, 2014, p. 23). He argues that the implications of rituals during events can range from the simple production of emotional energy to harnessing that energy to bring about change.

Collins' chain of rituals explains how the ritual outcomes are maintained over time and how the symbols of a successful ritual are circulated and internalised. However, since Collins developed his framework in the pre-internet era, he did not take account of how interaction rituals can be sustained through virtual contact, but he assumes the need for physical co-presence. These days people's lives have become interconnected with digital activities (Silk, Millington, Rich, & Bush, 2016) and 'offline and online social life ... have blended into one world: the world of real life, as people live it' (Kozinets, 2010, p. 2). Although there is a growing body of literature on virtual communities and virtual publics in leisure studies (McGillivray, 2014; Silk et al., 2016; Torres, 2017), the complementary relationship between online and offline worlds is much less researched. In order to explain the way event communities are developed, shaped and reshaped, it is crucial to study if and how the interaction

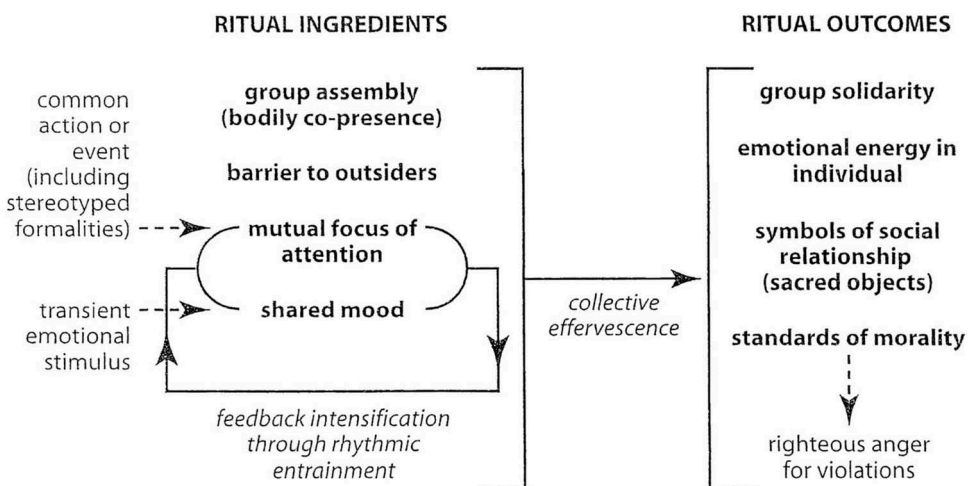


Figure 1. The interaction ritual (Collins, 2004, p. 48).

ritual chain (Collins, 2004) can shift from bodily co-presence to virtual co-presence and vice versa. For this purpose, the online and offline practices through which the interaction rituals are performed, before, during and after an event, should be studied.

Event practices

Practices carry the dominant meanings of a community (Panelli & Welch, 2005). As Liepins (2000, p. 31) states: 'Practices enable us to investigate the dynamic nature of "community" as a set of processes which are "performed" and contested.' By placing the practices at the heart of the analysis (Shove, Pantzar, & Watson, 2012; Simons, 2017) and by focusing on the sayings and doings of a practice (Lamers, Van der Duim, & Spaargaren, 2017; Shove et al., 2012), the actual shaping and reshaping of a community can be studied.

According to Shove et al. (2012), practices consist of three elements: materials, competences and meanings. They state that practices 'emerge, persist, shift and disappear when connections between elements of these three types are made, sustained or broken'. This leads to a recursive relationship between practices-as-performance and practice-as-entity. Moreover, Shove et al. (2012) explain how connections between practices form bundles and complexes, which are either loosely connected or tightly bound. The concept of practices and the connections between practices are helpful in explaining the chain of practices and rituals around an event, through which an event community is socially constructed. Practices can take place in an online and an offline context, and the bundles and complexes of practices (Shove et al., 2012) can consist of a combination of offline and online practices.

Offline event practices are the subject of a study by Rihova et al. (2015), in which three different types of practices are distinguished. Firstly, they define bonding practices, which are characterised by socialising with significant others. Bonding practices are performed in order to catch up with each other and share experiences. Secondly, Rihova et al. (2015) distinguish communing practices, which refer to Turner's (1995) *communitas*. These practices occur when event attendees find themselves removed from their daily routines and ordinary lives. Within this state of liminality, strong, but temporary social links are made with strangers. The third category are belonging practices, which Rihova et al. (2015) link to what Maffesoli (1996) calls *neo tribes*; emotional communities of interests around particular themes. Belonging practices can result in attendees experiencing a sense of kinship and belonging that goes beyond the scope of the event, resulting into a long-term commitment to the community and potentially to the event. In a later refinement of this study, Rihova et al. (2018) show how diverse these event practices are and how they lead to consumer-to-consumer value creation during the event.

Online event practices occur at all stages of the event journey (Geurtsen, 2014; De Geus et al., 2016), ranging from a controlled interaction by event organisers and marketers, to practices that are completely outside the scope of the event organisers. Many event organisers recognise the online possibilities and they attempt to increase the event experience via online practices. Event design is influenced by digital technology, social media channels and mobile applications (Calvo & San Salvatore Del Valle, 2014; Flinn & Frew, 2014; Holt, 2015; McGillivray, 2014). Although the main motivations of these online practices are economic, they do have another, more cultural, effect: they create expectations, desired behaviours and ways of imagining the festival world (Holt, 2015). Nevertheless, the majority of online practices around events is outside the control of the event organisers (Wilks, 2012). These include, for example, interactions between event attendees who have met during an event and who prolong their friendship online and the photographs of the event that are shared and commented on, sometimes visible, for example on the Facebook page of the event, and sometimes hidden in closed virtual communities.

Event communities

Through offline and online practices during and around an event, communities are shaped, performed and maintained. The term ‘community’ is complex and has different meanings attached to it (Laing & Mair, 2015; Simons & de Groot, 2015). Originally, the term community referred to relatively stable, geographical, place-based communities. Since Tonnies (1955, 1974) defined community in terms of *Gemeinschaft*, the concept of community has been expanded.

Firstly, communities are not necessarily place-based (Hall & Richards, 2000). Gardner (2004) and Chayko (2007) describe portable communities, consisting of likeminded people who create their own spaces, which are not geographically rooted. Similarly, Liepins (2000) describes communities of interest. This transition in the understanding of the term community can be seen as a shift from communities that are more localised to communities that are centred more around the individual (Gössling, Cohen, & Hibbert, 2016; Wellman, 2001). In the case of event communities, part of the practices through which community is performed are place-based, during the event, but the community is maintained place independently, resulting in what Sechi et al. (2012) call a hybrid community.

Secondly, instead of regarding communities as static and homogeneous social categories, a more dynamic and diverse notion of community developed. Communities can consist of members who differ in values, interests and power, while performing similar acts of community. This contradiction leads to the idea of community in difference (Panelli & Welch, 2005; Young, 1990). Event practices through which community is performed are also carried by people with different degrees of experience and commitment. This is also supported by studies by Quinn and Wilks (2013) who model the festival landscape into different zones and identify the festival actors within these zones. Collins (2004) describes these differences in terms of centrality in the ritual.

Taking these notions of community into consideration, a hybrid event community can be defined as a diverse and dynamic community around shared meanings and symbols consisting of a complementary structure of event practices and online practices. The event is the space in which the community physically comes together, performing interaction rituals that enhance further online social interaction. Event practices support online practices and vice versa, resulting in a lasting construction of perceived togetherness.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the construction of hybrid event communities, more insight is needed into the processes whereby online and offline rituals are combined to create lasting event communities. This leads to the following research questions: (1) What type of online practices can be identified before, during and after the event? (2) How do online and offline event practices and rituals influence and shape each other? (3) How do combinations and chains of online and offline practices contribute to the creation and maintenance of hybrid event communities?

Methodology

This study adopts a case study approach. Three cases were purposefully selected as events that offer opportunities for participants to perform community. The selected events are located in the Netherlands, but they attract an international audience. The international audience of the events makes it more likely that a place-independent community will form. All three events are highly recognised in their fields, which makes them credible nodes in a network around the topics of interest. The ritual ingredients defined by Collins (2004) are observable within the cases (e.g. a clear focus of attention and clear barriers to outsiders). However, the cases differ in type of practices and ritual ingredients, which makes them suitable for exploring different combinations of online and offline practices.

Qualitative data were gathered using ethnographic methods such as participant observation and in-depth interviews. Ethnographic methods are very suitable for studying practices and interaction rituals because they focus on the actual ‘saying and doings’ of the practice (Spaargaren, Lamers, & Weenink,

2016). The order of the data collection was (1) participant observation of the event including recruitment of informants, (2) interviews in the weeks after the event and (3) online observations. This sequence was repeated until a saturation point was reached.

Participant observation took place during multiple editions of the events from 2014 till 2018 (see Table 1). To increase the reliability of the observations, a team of research assistants took part in the observations. The data collected by the assistants were not used in the data analysis, but were used to increase the trustworthiness of the data gathered by the researcher. The observations were aided by an observation guide based on Collins' (2004) rituals ingredients and Spradley's (1980) dimensions of social situations. The observations generated recorded and written field notes, supported by photographic reports.

Fifty-six semi-structured interviews were conducted, with 18–20 informants per event. In all cases, the respondents varied in age and the number of previous event visits. The interviewees were a mix of Dutch and international visitors. The informants were selected purposefully (Patton, 2002) based on their different positions within the event rituals (Collins, 2004) or within the online practices. Ritual positions are enabled by actor-related conditions: general resources and specific event-related knowledge, skills and experience (Van der Poel, 2004). The operationalisation of the actor-related conditions differs slightly per case. For example, in the case of the Redhead Days, the informants differed in the distance they had travelled to the event. In the case of Incubate, there was a difference in preferred music genre and specific knowledge of the type of music. By varying the level of inclusion in the event practices, a detailed understanding of the ritual practices was obtained.

The interviews took place during the weeks after the events. The interviews were conducted face-to-face when possible, in the informants' homes or in a neutral place like a coffee bar. The interviews with international informants took place via Skype or face-to face during one of the editions of the events.

The informants were asked about the meaning of the event and the community surrounding the event, including emotions, explicit and implicit rules, both during the event and in the wider online community. They were encouraged to illustrate their answers with examples, stories and photographs. All informants gave consent to use the interviews anonymously. If the anonymity could not be guaranteed, the informants were contacted for approval.

The online practices were addressed during the interviews. This was followed up by participant observation on social media sites that were identified by the informants as important platforms for interaction. The online platforms were a mix of the official event websites, social media pages and

Table 1. Selected cases.

<i>Case 1:</i>	
Incubate Festival, Tilburg, the Netherlands: cultural event celebrating 'cutting-edge culture', attracting more than 16,000 visitors from 30 different countries	Participant observation:
Event practices: music and art performances	14–20 September 2015
Main focus of attention: performing bands and artists	13–15 May 2016
Barriers to outsiders: knowledge of music genres, paid event	8–11 September 2016 10–11 December 2016
<i>Case 2:</i>	
The Redhead Days, Breda, the Netherlands: the world's largest gathering of Redheads, attracting 10,000 visitors from 80 different countries	Participant observation:
Event practices: photographing, socialising, pub crawl	5–7 September 2014
Main focus of attention: visitors with red hair	4–6 September 2015
Barriers to outsiders: hair colour, free event	2–5 September 2016
<i>Case 3:</i>	
Elfa, Arcen and Haarzuilens, the Netherlands: the largest fantasy event in Europe, attracting 25,000 visitors from 30 different countries	Participant observation:
Event practices: performing in costume, photoshoots	24–25 September 2016
Main focus of attention: the costumes of the visitors	29–30 April 2017
Barriers to outsiders: costumes, paid event	23–24 September 2017 21–22 April 2018

other relevant platforms. Following Kozinets' (2010) Netnography method, which is an unobtrusive approach, a first exploration took place to get an impression of the dynamics within the platforms. The Netnographic data were limited to archival data and elicited data. Interference in the online discussions was avoided as much as possible.

The data collection resulted in transcribed interviews and detailed field notes. These were analysed using the qualitative data analysis program MAXQDA. A first layer of coding entailed the theoretical themes of interaction ritual chains (Collins, 2004) and social practices (Shove et al., 2012; Van der Poel, 2004). The second and third layers of coding were based on themes that emerged from the data, such as the different types of online practices. The emerging themes were identified, categorised and labelled in order to reflect the meanings as given by the informants as accurate as possible.

Findings

The findings are structured according to the 'event journey' (Geurtsen, 2014; Geus et al., 2016). This structure enables us to identify bundles and complexes of practices (Shove et al., 2012), before, during and after the events which together construct hybrid event communities. The elements of Collins' model of interaction ritual chains are used to describe the interactions within the practices in more detail.

Online practices before the event

Planning practices

A first category of pre-event online practices are planning practices. These practices involve online preparations for the event, such as getting familiar with the content of the event and making travel arrangements. In the case of Incubate festival, the visitors listen to music fragments before the event and design their own preferred routing through the event via the official event website. According to the informants, the practice of designing personal routes is a necessity for a positive event experience because the performance schedules are tight, the range of music styles is broad and the venues are spread over the city. This illustrates how the online planning practices are tightly connected with the offline event practices, which Shove et al. (2012) call a complex of practices. However, according to most informants, these are individual practices and therefore, according to Collins (2004), they do not qualify as an interaction rituals. Instead, they help to develop competence and they determine the intended focus of attention during the event. That planning practices can also take the form of interaction rituals, as is demonstrated in the case of the Redhead Days. On the official Facebook page of the event, attendees who live in the same area try to arrange travelling to the event together. They also offer rides to the event, illustrating how online planning practices can result in acts of solidarity.

Co-creative practices

A second category of online practices that support event practices is event co-creation. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) describe co-creation as the development of experience environments in which individuals can co-construct their own experiences. The organisers of Elfia initiate some co-creative online interaction before the event. An example is the election of the king and queen of Elfia. The candidates have to promote themselves on the official event website by uploading videos and posters. The actual election of the king and queen of Elfia takes place during the event.

In the case of Incubate festival, the organisers use a virtual platform called Userve, which allows visitors to recommend bands for the festival. Thousands of tips are provided through this online system.

Everybody can post bands, ... you just put the link to the website and other people can vote if they think this is a good band, they have to play at Incubate. (Informant 13)

Besides involving the visitors in designing the festival programme, Incubate designed the so-called a 'Social Festival Model', which invites the event attendees to co-write the festival policy. This is an attempt to make the festival more transparent, to engage the attendees and to make use of their knowledge and skills. These practices, initiated by the event organisers, provide event attendees with the opportunity to contribute to the event, and to show their competence (Shove et al., 2012) regarding the music and the event.

The organisers of the Redhead Days also initiate some co-creative practices before the event, such as voting for the preferred dress code of the year. However, the most essential co-creative online practice for the Redhead Days is an online crowdfunding campaign. Visitors can contribute financially to the event, and in return, they receive 'perks' which carry the symbols of the event, such as the logo, or a T shirt in the theme colour of the year. The crowdfunding video is shared widely on social media pages of the visitors and in platforms about red hair. The video evokes many reactions and leads to online discussions around the beauty of red hair. These interactions can be labelled interaction rituals because they contain Collins' ritual ingredients and they form a chain with the interaction rituals during the event. For example, one of the most expensive 'perks' of the crowdfunding campaign is a VIP treatment during the event. The VIP treatment involves a central position in the event rituals; the VIP is made the focus of attention by being called on stage and applauded. This results in high levels of emotional energy.

They make sure everyone here knows that you are here and make you feel special. So yes I am a celebrity here in Breda for three days for Redhead Days. (Informant 22)

Recruiting practices

The case of the Redhead Days reveals another form of pre-event online interaction: recruiting participants for the event. As Shove et al. (2012) indicate: practices recruit their practitioners through their meanings. This type of recruitment happens via online interaction rituals of event visitors. Some informants only knew about the existence of the event through online practices:

What got me to go to Redhead Days was that I was already chatting with these people on Facebook and Redhead Days was a rally point that we could all agree on going to. (Informant 25)

Recruiting practices are also visible in the case of Elfia, where photographers and models (people wearing the costumes) make arrangements for photoshoots during the event.

Most of the times, beforehand, we put a photo on the Facebook page about how we will look. And actually, to our surprise, this year there were many people who reacted, also beforehand, o, how nice ... I would like to take your photograph. (Informant 49)

Besides arrangements between individuals, there are specific groups of Elfia participants that are recruited for sub-practices during the event. For example, a Disney cosplay group stages a photo moment during Elfia, to which all Disney characters are invited. This can be seen as a separate interaction ritual during the event, with its own barriers to outsiders, based on the type of costume. As a result of this online subgroup recruitment, people decided to visit the event together, and one interviewee described how she borrowed a costume from another participant. This illustrates how solidarity can result from an online interaction ritual, even before the event itself.

On the other hand, even though the recruitment practices can result in solidarity, this is not always the case. Not all online interaction rituals are followed by a successful interaction ritual during the event.

And then they say, you can come and chat with me . . . But sometimes, when you do that, and you just want to start a conversation, they just walk away . . . You never know who these people are. They can seem nice on Facebook, and in reality they are not. (Informant 51)

The implicit rules are different in online interaction and offline interaction. Practitioners need to realise this and have to be able to switch between them.

Creative practices

Finally, the case of Elfia reveals another type of online practices that take place before the event. These creative practices involve the sharing of and commenting on ideas and the making of artefacts that are used and presented during the event. A way to ensure a central position in the interaction rituals during Elfia is wearing an impressive costume, which attracts attention. This requires materials and competence (Shove et al., 2012). Many participants spend several months preparing their costumes. This can be a shared practice in an offline group, but many informants also describe this as an activity that is shared online.

The typical process of sharing the making of a costume starts with gathering ideas via Pinterest and YouTube. Then, half-finished costumes are shown, via social media, on Pinterest or Instagram, which allows others to give advice on how to improve the costumes. These practices take the form of interaction rituals (Collins, 2004), including ritual ingredients. At first glance, asking for and giving advice seems very open, but within these online practices, implicit rules are developed which require some tacit knowledge. One informant describes how someone posted a photo of a person in a costume, asking for advice on how to make a similar costume. This caused negative reactions, stating that she should not post a photograph without asking permission. Furthermore, much online discussion arose around costumes and skin colour. One of the informants posted a picture wearing a dress belonging to a black princess while she was white. This evoked many reactions, both positive and negative, illustrating how people collectively develop standards of morality.

Online practices during the event

Connecting practices

The first type of online practices that occur during the event are connecting practices. Connecting practices can take place within the known group, but also with strangers. Known group connecting practices are present in all cases. Event visitors arrive and interact in a known group, and when they split up during the event, they use WhatsApp to keep in touch. This type of online interaction makes it possible to combine bonding practices (Rihova et al., 2015) with a personal event experience.

Then we start together, or not, it depends on what we want to see. We are not dependent on each other . . . we can App. (Informant 8)

Secondly, connecting practices can include external socialisation (Nordvall et al., 2014). Visitors of the Redhead Days and Elfia describe how they make friends during the event and how they add them as friends on Facebook:

And you might become Facebook friends even after you have met them for 20 minutes. (Informant 24)

Becoming Facebook friends is an act of solidarity, enabling further interaction after the event.

Recruiting practices

Whereas before the event recruiting practices involve online interaction to recruit people for the event, during the event, visitors recruit participants for online practices and communities. In the case of the Redhead Days, people are recruited to join Facebook groups which are often related to the country of residence.

You go through Breda and then you hear German speaking people and then you have a look and you say 'Hello, where are you from?', and so we talked and he said we have a Facebook group. (Informant 31)

In the case of Elfia, visitors are recruited to join online communities around fantasy themes. The recruitment practices involve specific materials (Shove et al., 2012) in the form of business cards.

So at some point we also started printing business cards and brochures, all paid for by ourselves ... to hand out, with our forum name and where they can find us and our Facebook name and those kind of things. (Informant 55)

This illustrates the hybrid nature of community construction where materials are used to indicate the virtual spaces in which community is performed.

Online practices after the event

Reflecting practices

The first type of online practices after the event involve reflection on the event practices. These practices have the intention to extend the positive feelings of the interaction rituals during the event. Reflecting practices involve the release of after movies and official photographs by event organisers, but they also include the posting of photographs and texts by event visitors. Photographs can serve as symbols, infused with the emotional energy of the event (Collins, 2004). Some reflecting practices are individual activities, but others involve interactions.

There are these photo groups and ... they are completely filled with pictures of those days. And there you are looking through all these albums for photographs of us or our friends. Then we tag each other all the time. (Informant 49)

Relating practices

The second type of online practices after the event are relating practices: online interaction rituals resulting from the connecting and recruiting practices during the event. In both the Redhead Days and the Elfia case, many attendees keep interacting with other event visitors via Facebook, Instagram and specific theme-based platforms. The contacts vary in intensity, from superficial to meaningful acts of solidarity:

You talk about anything, jobs, your own family ... you help the younger, I mean for instance I met (name) last year, she is a sixteen year old teen ... She was really really shy, ... I am older than her so I can help her, support her and chat. (Informant 28)

The case of Incubate does not demonstrate any relating practices after the event. The connecting practices during the event mostly support known group socialisation (Nordvall et al., 2014), which can be an explanation of the lack of relating practices. Although the festival caters for niche music genres, the data do not show a clear link to online networks around these niches. Some respondents refer to the metal culture, but they then mention other metal festivals that are more obvious nodes in this network. For these respondents, the interaction ritual chain moves offline, over a range of niche events.

Creative practices

Finally, the creative practices that play a role before and during Elfia are continued after the event. Besides making and discussing costumes, another creative practice is revealed. Many Elfia visitors create personal websites, where they present their characters, including storylines, photographs or drawings. Some of the informants use their websites to sell costumes, head ornaments or other materials.

People came to me and said hey, your costume looks quite good, can you make one for me? And so it started slowly and now I have a few orders and it is becoming a side job. (Informant 56)

It is notable that on these websites the practitioners do not use their real names, but instead they use the name of the fantasy character that they embodied during the event. Many informants want to keep the fantasy world separated from their private lives. By creating fantasy characters in detail, including a description of the character's identity, a separate reality is created, which is acted out both online and offline. This adds an extra dimension to the bodily co-presence of the interaction ritual chain: the interaction rituals are performed through an altered/created body, both online and offline.

Discussion and conclusions

The three cases exhibit some similarities in how offline and online interaction is combined. A first conclusion is that (elements of) the interaction ritual chain can move from bodily co-presence to virtual co-presence and vice versa. In two of the cases, moments of high emotional energy and solidarity during the event are used to recruit people for online activities. Vice versa, there is online recruitment for offline activities during the event, initiated by both individuals and groups of practitioners.

A second conclusion is that participation in online interaction rituals influences the position that people take in offline interaction rituals during the event. By participating in online interaction rituals, people acquire competence or materials and learn about meanings (Shove et al., 2012). This allows them to become the focus of attention during interaction rituals during the event. Besides creating a chain of interaction rituals, this shows that the online and offline interaction rituals can influence each other in terms of intensity. This illustrates the importance of online aspects in creating event experiences and the role that online interaction plays in the event journey.

However, the three cases also have very different patterns in the way online and offline practices are combined. And not all combinations of online and offline interactions lead to the construction of a hybrid event community.

In the case of Incubate festival, the pre-event online practices involve planning and co-creative practices. The practitioners show their competence by adding to the event programme and the event policy. Moreover, participants can acquire competence for the event through online preparations for the event. Although these online practices influence the event experience as well as the participant's position in the event practices and rituals, they are individual preparations for the event, instead of shared rituals. During the event, the connecting practices are mostly focused on combining known-group socialisation (Nordvall et al., 2014) with personal event experiences, which limits the performance of community. After the event, the online interaction is limited and consists mostly of reflecting practices. The event does not result in a hybrid event community, but in a predominantly offline ritual chain. This example shows that online practices can be beneficial to event experiences, they can influence the positions people take in offline rituals, but they do not necessarily lead to a lasting hybrid event community.

In the case of the Redhead Days, a pattern of interaction emerges around symbolic meaning, which is transferred online. Before the event, online planning and co-creative practices take the form of interaction rituals, leading to acts of solidarity, before the event. During the event, red hair becomes a symbol of beauty and pride. This shared symbol enables connecting practices and recruiting practices that are followed by relating practices after the event. The symbolic meaning of the event is maintained online, through online interactions via texts and pictures. In this case, the embodiment of the shared symbol leads to a high level of involvement, and because the practitioners automatically carry the symbol, no extra competence is required. This results in a hybrid event community, which is formed around shared symbols. The online interaction rituals contain many of the same ritual elements (barriers to outsiders, symbols of social relationship and standards of morality) as the offline interaction, emphasising the symbols of the event.

In the case of Elfia, creative practices play a key role before, during and after the event. In contrast to the Redhead Days, where the practitioners themselves are an inseparable symbol of the event, in the case of Elfia, the practitioners first create the symbols and then come to embody them. This means that both connecting and relating practices, during and after the event, take place via the embodied characters. Symbols and materials are developed through the creativity of the practitioners, which is often a shared practice. Online and offline practices exist separately, each with their own combinations of materials, competence and meaning, but they form a logical connection with each other. The created and then embodied character becomes the carrier of online practices that form a complex or bundle (Shove et al., 2012) with the event practices (Table 2).

The different processes of online/offline interaction lead to different outcomes in terms of the creation and maintenance of event communities. The first process, 'event co-creation', occurs in many events these days. Through online interaction, the event visitors become involved in decision-making and in the creation of the event. This can create high levels of attendee engagement and positive event experiences. Still, these practices do not necessarily lead to a hybrid event community. Often the goal of event co-creation is designing personal event experiences, whereas for the creation of a hybrid community, a crucial factor is shared and lasting online interaction in the form of relating and creative practices.

The second process of 'symbolic transfer' results in a hybrid event community that is based on meaningful symbols of the event. The interaction ritual chain moves from the event to online

Table 2. Types of hybrid event communities.

Process of offline–online interaction	Online practices by event phase	Type of hybrid event community
Event co-creation	<p><i>Before</i></p> <p>Planning practices</p> <p>Co-creative practices</p> <p><i>During</i></p> <p>Connecting practices: known group</p> <p><i>After</i></p> <p>Reflecting practices: prolonging individual event experiences through texts, photographs and videos</p>	<p><i>Event with online interaction</i></p> <p>This event does not result in a hybrid community around the event</p> <p>Offline interaction ritual chain, within event or over a range of events</p>
Symbolic transfer	<p><i>Before</i></p> <p>Planning practices</p> <p>Co-creative practices</p> <p>Recruitment practices for the event</p> <p><i>During</i></p> <p>Connecting practices: know group and new connections.</p> <p>Recruitment practices for online communities</p> <p><i>After</i></p> <p>Reflecting practices</p> <p>Relating practices: sharing and reaffirming symbolic meaning.</p>	<p><i>Hybrid symbol-based event community</i></p> <p>A hybrid event community around meaningful symbols of the event</p> <p>The interaction ritual chain moves from the event to online rituals and vice versa, based on the symbols of the event, which are reaffirmed online</p>
Mobile chains	<p><i>Before</i></p> <p>Planning practices</p> <p>Co-creative practices</p> <p>Recruitment practices for the event</p> <p>Recruitment of specific groups for event sub-practices</p> <p>Creative practices</p> <p><i>During</i></p> <p>Connecting practices: known group and new connections</p> <p>Recruitment practices for virtual communities</p> <p><i>After</i></p> <p>Reflecting practices</p> <p>Relating practices: sharing and reaffirming symbolic meaning.</p> <p>Creative practices: reaffirming and (re)creating symbols and materials</p>	<p><i>Hybrid practice-based event community</i></p> <p>A hybrid event community that shares online practices that exist separately from the event, but are (loosely or tightly) connected to the event</p> <p>The interaction ritual chain moves from the event to online rituals that are performed within online practices, and vice versa</p>

rituals and vice versa, reaffirming the meaning of the event symbols online. The emotional energy and solidarity that are experienced during the event are followed by online relating practices around these symbols. The bodily co-presence (Collins, 2004) during the event plays an important role in this type of event community. The 'practice as entity' (Shove et al., 2012) takes place during the event and 'practice as performance' takes place both during event and online. This can lead to a strong hybrid event community, but it remains unclear whether the symbolic meaning would last without the event practice.

The development of hybrid event communities is also dependent on the mobility of interaction ritual chains, and their ability to shift between offline and online contexts, providing connections between online and offline practices. Within the third process of 'mobile chains', virtual interaction rituals are performed within online practices, with a different focus of attention, different barriers to outsiders and their own standards of morality. Both the 'practice as entity' and the 'practice as performance' (Shove et al., 2012) take place during the event as well as online. The online practices are outside the scope of the event, making the event part of a larger bundle of practices. It can be expected that these event communities are long lasting because of their diversity in practices. However, this study was carried out over the course of three years. In order to confirm the lasting effect of this mobility on the sustainability of hybrid event communities, a longitudinal study over a longer period of time is needed.

As Wilks (2012) argues, much of the online interaction takes place outside the scope of the event organisers. It seems that in order to create a hybrid event community the event organisers have to accept a loss of control. The different processes of online/offline interaction show a decline of control by the event organiser and an increase in community construction. The first process, event co-creation, is facilitated by the event organiser, but does not necessarily lead to community construction because community is performed through interaction between event visitors. The second process, symbolic transfer, can still be controlled to some extent because it involves symbols of the event. But in the process of mobile chains, separate online practices occur in which the event organiser is no longer involved, while at the same time these practices influence and shape the event (Shove et al., 2012).

Although event organisers play a significant role in the construction of hybrid event communities, by bringing people together and facilitating interaction, this study shows that the influence of event organisers is limited. The successful creation of an event community depends on the balance between facilitating planning, co-creative and connecting practices on one hand, and leaving space for the participants to perform their own connecting, recruiting, relating and creative practices.

As Arai and Pedlar (2003, p. 199) state, 'When the context or space is created, community forms since individuals are no longer bound by the structures that previously separated them from each other.' Events can clear space for a community to come together (Arai & Pedlar, 2003). However, this idea of clearing space is not just relevant for the event itself, but it can be extended to online practices. Instead of organising an event community, it is more a matter of clearing space in which practitioners are free to perform community.

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