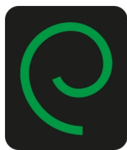

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Market practices in countercultural market emergence

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the growing marketing literature that investigates markets as "configurations", i.e. networks of market actors engaged in market-shaping practices and performances. As this pioneering work has been largely focused on established mainstream markets and industries driven by large multi-national companies, the present article extends practice-based market theorizing to countercultural market emergence and also to unconventional market practices shaping it.

Design/methodology/approach – Insights are drawn from a four-year multi-sited ethnographic study of a rapidly expanding electronic music scene that serves as an illustrative example of emergent countercultural market.

Findings – In contrast to mainstream consumer or industrial markets, the authors identify a distinctive dynamic underlying market emergence. Countercultural markets as well as their appeal and longevity largely depend on an inherent authenticity paradox that focal market actors need to sustain and negotiate through ongoing market-shaping and market-restricting practices.

Practical implications – From a practitioner perspective, the authors discuss the implications for market actors wishing to build on countercultural authenticity. They highlight the fragility of countercultural markets and point out practices sustaining them, and also possibilities and challenges in tapping into them.

Originality/value – The study contributes by theorizing the tensions that energize and drive countercultural market emergence. In particular, the authors address the important role of market-restricting practices in facilitating countercultural appeal that has not received explicit attention in prior marketing literature.

Keywords Practice theory, Counterculture, Market dynamics, Market emergence, Market practices, Music scenes

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The entire dark nightclub vibrates from the bass, while the otherwise ill-lit dance floor flashes with blinding disco lights until being once again subsumed by the anonymity of darkness. The DJ, who most of the club patrons specifically came to see, steps behind the turntables and "drops" the first "tune" of his "gig". Instantly, the crowd is swept into a state of frenzy, but their

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motivation for showing up is not merely the sweat-drenched euphoria of the party. They are also there to hear the specially selected and potentially novel tunes the DJ has been able to obtain through his personal contacts from the producers claiming centrality in the scene at that very moment (Field note summarizing a club night experience, early 2010).

There has been a growing interest in marketing literature to conceptualize markets as configurations of interdependent actors that constitute markets through market-shaping practices and performances (Andersson *et al.*, 2008; Araujo, 2007; Araujo *et al.*, 2008, 2010; Kjellberg *et al.*, 2012; Kjellberg and Helgesson, 2006, 2007; Storbacka and Nenonen, 2011a, 2011b). This approach aims to move away from neo-classical approaches to markets by building on practice-theoretical (Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, 1996; Schatzki *et al.*, 2001) and actor-network perspectives (Callon, 1998; Callon and Muniesa, 2005; Latour, 1987), where markets are not seen as purely cognitivist constructions, but as heterogeneous constellations of emergent meaning-makings, practices and performances. These alternative views have opened up a new perspective to examine how market practices and their performative effects (Mason *et al.*, 2015) contribute to market emergence and change.

However, although this nascent literature has predominantly focused on more established mainstream markets and industrial business settings (Azimont and Araujo, 2010; Cochoy, 2009; Finch and Geiger, 2011; Geiger and Finch, 2009; Hagberg and Kjellberg, 2010; Rinallo and Golfetto, 2006; Diaz Ruiz, 2013; Storbacka and Nenonen, 2011a), we believe it is time to explore other sorts of market configurations and market actors. In doing so, we wish to respond to recent calls to broaden the market theorizations to cover different types of market contexts and dynamics (Kjellberg *et al.*, 2012; Martin and Schouten, 2014).

The purpose of this article is to extend market practice theorizing toward examining market emergence in the so-called countercultural market settings (Arsel and Thompson, 2011; Frank, 1997; Goulding *et al.*, 2009; Heath and Potter, 2005; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli, 2007) to demonstrate how they differ from and relate to commercial mainstream markets. As suggested by several prior studies, countercultural consumption contexts abound in contemporary society (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). They are also distinctive in the way they carry with them powerful and resonant identity myths (Holt, 2004), ideological tensions (Arsel and Thompson, 2011; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli, 2007), rebelliousness and resistance (Kozinets, 2002; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Thornton, 1995), political and aesthetic deviance (Heath and Potter, 2005) and authenticity paradoxes (Rose and Wood, 2005; Beverland *et al.*, 2010). Although the links between countercultural and mainstream market dynamics have been widely recognized, notably through theories of co-optation through which commercial actors absorb and adapt countercultural ideas, styles, myths and symbols into marketable value offerings (Frank, 1997; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli, 2007), systematic analyses of how market actors engage in market practices in countercultural settings are scant. Also, less focus has been given to the generative roles of subcultural members in the in the creation and shaping of markets (Martin and Schouten, 2014).

In this research, we offer a multi-sited ethnographic investigation of the "dubstep" electronic musical scene as an example of a countercultural market emergence. Dubstep is a musical genre and style that is based on minimalist experimental electronic sound that emerged in the early 2000s in the UK as a development of related dance music styles such as "jungle" and "drum and bass". As depicted in the opening vignette, the dubstep

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scene is characterized by constant change driven by influential underground actors, including DJs, music producers and promoters. This empirical context represents a rapidly growing and vibrant grassroots-level musical scene that offers an alternative perspective to mainstream markets. Yet, during and after our fieldwork, important popular and commercial interest in dubstep music was readily observed[1]. The dubstep sound has recently gained worldwide recognition through endorsement by mainstream figures including Rihanna, Taylor Swift and Snoop Dogg, as well as mainstream advertising by brands such as Apple, Samsung, Heineken, Skoda and BMW to mention but few popular examples[2].

As many global markets have roots in small-scale countercultural scenes – consider, for instance, skateboarding, surfing, music, organic food and indie consumption – it is essential for companies to grasp what makes them flourish or fade away. Our findings offer new insights into market theorizing by elucidating how countercultural market emergence unfolds as a result of largely unconventional market practices by influential market actors. In addition, we suggest keys to success for any market actor operating within such markets entail finding a balance between market-shaping and market-restricting practices.

Theoretical background

Markets as embedded configurations of actors

Recently, the need for grounding the link between *marketing* and *markets* has been emphasized (Araujo *et al.*, 2010, 2008; Venkatesh *et al.*, 2006). These calls draw attention to how the role of marketing in the production and shaping of markets still remains in need of further critical conceptual and empirical investigation. Although there has been an increasing interest among marketing scholars to adapt conceptual tools from fields largely outside the marketing discipline, namely, by drawing from economic sociology and sociology of markets (Callon, 1998; Callon and Muniesa, 2005; MacKenzie and Millo, 2003; Fligstein and Dauter, 2007; Granovetter, 1985, 1992), substantial disagreements remain regarding what sets of practices marketing entails, how markets are constituted and how the variety of market forms, processes and interconnections should be investigated (Araujo *et al.*, 2010).

Several lines of inquiry to studying markets have nevertheless been established. Fligstein and Dauter (2007) identify three distinct theoretical approaches within sociology of markets that utilize networked, institutional or performative perspectives as the explanatory framework. Marketing scholars have recently begun to explore the third approach (Andersson *et al.*, 2008; Kjellberg *et al.*, 2012; Kjellberg and Helgesson, 2006, 2007; Nenonen *et al.*, 2014; Storbacka and Nenonen, 2011a, 2011b; Mason *et al.*, 2015), building principally on practice theory (Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, 1996; Schatzki *et al.*, 2001) and actor-network theory (Callon, 1998; Callon and Muniesa, 2005; Latour, 1987). The analytical focus of this view is on *market change* that comes about as an effect of market actors' ongoing engagement in a wide range of market practices[3] (Andersson *et al.*, 2008; Araujo *et al.*, 2008; Kjellberg and Helgesson, 2006; Storbacka and Nenonen, 2011a).

Consider the example of mainstream mass music industry that is dominated by a relatively small number of large multi-national record labels, media and publishing houses as well as affiliated localized concert venues, festivals and clubs, magazines, Web sites, journalists and critics. All these operate to collectively produce, shape,

promote and co-create musical experiences and performances targeted to the global audiences (Anand and Peterson, 2000; Lopes, 1992; Negus, 2002). Taken together, they constitute the market as a "configuration of actors" (Andersson *et al.*, 2008; Storbacka and Nenonen, 2011a) through which concrete actions – toward selling, buying, promoting and exchanging music in various practical situations – are pre-configured and enacted, and through which the actors use their relational power. Market actors here are viewed in the broadest sense, thus including both human and material, and "all parties that are active in the market: suppliers, firms, customers, authorities, etc." (Storbacka and Nenonen, 2011a, p. 242).

While such market configurations may at first seem relatively stable, at least on the aggregate level, they are incessantly being negotiated, stabilized and destabilized and "in the making" (Araujo *et al.*, 2010; Finch and Geiger, 2011; Kjellberg and Helgesson, 2007; Latour, 1987; Martin and Schouten, 2014). Therefore, it has been suggested that studying the influential or "focal" market actors – i.e. those wanting to actively influence the market configuration – would be necessary for describing markets (Prenkert and Hallén, 2006; Storbacka and Nenonen, 2011a). For example, in the popular music industry, focal actors are the ones continuously working to introduce and define new artists, talent, styles, media and musical genres to the audiences. The "performative power", or the extent to which a market actor can favorably mold the market, depends ultimately on its relational network position and capacity to co-create value efficiently (Kjellberg *et al.*, 2012; Storbacka and Nenonen, 2011a). Large multi-national record labels have been studied as such pivotal intermediaries that nearly dictate which musical artists or styles gain global media exposure (Negus, 2002).

It is important to clarify the way in which market practices shape the markets. The term market practice refers to a wider set of micro-level "activities that contribute to constitute markets" (Kjellberg and Helgesson 2007, p. 141) broadening the focus from the more traditional marketing activities (such as marketing planning, branding, positioning, pricing and distribution) conducted commonly by brand managers and marketing departments. Kjellberg and Helgesson (2007) further suggest that we need to understand and distinguish between three interlinked market practices: exchange, normalizing and representational. While *exchange practices* aim primarily at accomplishing and facilitating economic exchanges, such as record or concert ticket sales, *normalizing practices* work on to establish normative objectives and rules concerning how markets should work, or how (some group of) market actors should act and, finally, *representational practices* contribute to creating semiotic systems of markets, market actors and objects/products being exchanged, for instance, in relation to different musical styles and tastes.

In this study, we critically assess the conceptualization of market practices, and following calls from Kjellberg *et al.* (2012), we wish to extend market theorizing beyond current focus on established industrial (Callon and Muniesa, 2005; Geiger and Finch, 2009; Storbacka and Nenonen, 2011a) and mainstream consumer markets (Azimont and Araujo, 2010; Cochoy, 2009; Finch and Geiger, 2011; Hagberg and Kjellberg, 2010; Rinallo and Golfetto, 2006; Diaz Ruiz, 2013). By analyzing countercultural markets as an alternative setting, we also wish to shift the focus from large corporations as the focal market actors toward examining the market practices of influential consumer-producers (Cova and Cova, 2012; Ritzer *et al.*, 2012; Martin and Schouten, 2014).

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Countercultural market emergence

Consumer research has long established that novel markets do not form *ex nihilo*, but are instead often preceded by subtle and emergent forms of active consumer networks, underground scenes and collective countercultural movements (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Martin and Schouten, 2014). Although the idea of counterculture is hardly new (Frank, 1997; Heath and Potter, 2005; Roszak, 1969), research into countercultural markets has developed fairly recently and with varied perspectives. In this research, we conceptualize these as markets founded upon an inherent oppositional stance toward mainstream society, consumption tastes and market actors.

For example, Arsel and Thompson (2011) show how "indie" (short for independent) consumption phenomenon has grown out of consumers' assiduous rejection and stigmatization of mainstream market offerings and tastes. This pushed forth countercultural "artistic creations produced outside the auspices of media conglomerates and distributed through small-scale and often localized channels (e.g. nonchain local retailers, art-house theaters, DIY channels such as Web sites and zines, and other small-scale enterprises)" that later became branded under the "hipster" marketplace myth by mainstream commercial actors (Thompson and Arsel, 2011, p. 792). In turn, Thompson and Coskuner-Balli (2007) illustrate how countercultural organic food movement was co-opted by powerful multi-national corporations and turned into a global mainstream market. Other examples include commercial markets building around and absorbing countercultural consumption ingredients, styles and subcultures (Canniford, 2011; Frank, 1997; Goulding and Saren, 2007; Heath and Potter, 2005), and underground or illegal consumption scenes transformed into mainstream leisure industries (Giesler, 2008; Goulding *et al.*, 2009; Humphreys, 2010).

Yet, perhaps the most notable examples of countercultural market emergence can be found in the music industry. It has consistently been shown that mainstream popular music markets depend largely on small-scale underground musical scenes that offer them essential "raw-materials", such as new musical styles, sounds and artists (Bennett and Peterson, 2004; Thornton, 1995). The notion of "scene", originally coined by Straw (1991), is a good example of a countercultural market configuration in the sense that it has been used to theorize the production, performance and reception of music (Bennett, 2004). In this view, a scene is constituted of "situations where performers, support facilities, and fans come together to create music for their own enjoyment" (Peterson and Bennett, 2004, p. 3). Thus, these notions contrast sharply with extant research on the popular music industry, where markets have been viewed as driven by relatively few global actors that produce and market music for the masses. What sets music scenes and global markets apart, according to Peterson and Bennett (2004, p. 4), is that "scenes that flourish become imbedded in a music industry".

However, much of the prior countercultural research has focused primarily on exploring the variety and different forms of "authentic" consumer identity, myths, lifestyles and negotiation of community membership (Beverland *et al.*, 2010). For example, most studies on music scenes have tended to focus analysis on understanding identity and style of various genres – including jazz (Becker, 2004), rock (Cohen, 1991), punk (Hebdige, 1979) and dance (Thornton, 1995; Goulding *et al.*, 2009). We, therefore, wish to extend emphasis on studying influential countercultural market actors and how they engage in market practices.

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Empirical analysis of dubstep musical scene

Ethnographic fieldwork

Seeking a more nuanced and empirically grounded understanding of countercultural market dynamics, we chose to study the dubstep musical scene, as it was quickly developing from a grassroots-level underground scene into a global mainstream phenomenon. We found this music genre particularly insightful for studying market practices, as the popularization of the sound was both highly visible (e.g. in advertising and media), while the focal market actors – for example, the founding members of dubstep movement – were still possible to identify and connect with.

To this end, we followed common methods and procedures for studying market dynamics (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Martin and Schouten, 2014; Moisander and Valtonen, 2006; Rinallo and Golfetto, 2006) by engaging in a multi-site ethnography spanning over four years. We explored and established contacts with club venues, home studios of prominent dubstep producers, online forums and blogs, as well as other secondary sources, such as existing documentary films of the dubstep music culture. Conducted in the spirit of *in situ* videography (Hietanen *et al.*, 2014), our primary data consist of in-depth interviews with 28 participants, over 40 hours of video footage and participant observation conducted in the United Kingdom, USA and Finland between 2008 and 2012. As our goal was to identify and examine market practices where focal market actors engage in, we conducted interviews with music producers, DJs and promoters from different backgrounds, countries and varying levels of experience in the scene, using purposive sampling through our personal contacts. All interviews followed a similar thematic structure covering first an outline of participant's background, involvement in the dubstep scene, practices related to music production, dissemination and also commercialization. Finally, participants were asked about their views on the evolution of dubstep scene, key tensions and its possible future directions.

Our key research participant was the Finnish DJ/producer Desto, who provided us with invaluable access, insider insights and a long-term collaboration that let us feel like we had become, in our small way, constitutive forces within the scene, rather than mere outside observers. Desto took an active role to make our encounters with various actors in the scene into conversations where cultural knowledge was not only exchanged but also emergently produced. We visited prominent locations, such as renowned clubs, record stores and sound studios where the dubstep culture had originated from in London (UK), Croydon (UK), New York (USA) and Helsinki (Finland). Table I lists our interactions with our research participants.

The data were analyzed by following procedures common to qualitative research (Moisander and Valtonen, 2006). First, we obtained our insights mainly from insiders and focal actors in the studied context; second, we employed triangulation of different types of data (i.e. observations, interviews, subcultural media and Web sites) gathered in different situations (Seale, 1999); third, we analyzed and coded recurrent themes from data individually and then iterated coding between two researchers by reading and rereading the data; and finally, we employed member checks with our informants by getting their feedback on our analysis and findings through shared video links. In summary, we sought to gather and analyze our data and also produce a comprehensive account from a market practices lens (Alvesson, 2003).

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Interviews (ID of participant)	Role in dubstep music scene	Location and time
1	DJ/producer, based in UK	Helsinki, Finland, January 2010
2, 3	DJ, based in UK; DJ/producer, based in Finland	Helsinki, Finland, February 2010
3, 4	DJ/producer, based in Finland; DJ/producer, based in Finland	Helsinki, Finland, February 2010
5	DJ/producer, pirate radio broadcaster, based in USA	New York, USA, June 2010
6, 7	DJ, based in USA; DJ/producer, based in UK	New York, USA, June 2010
8	Online forum administrator, based in USA	New York, USA, June 2010
9, 10	DJ/producer, based in US; DJ/producer, based in USA	New York, USA, June 2010
11	DJ, blogger, journalist, based in, UK	London, UK, July 2010
12, 13	DJ/producer, based in UK; DJ/producer, based in UK	London, UK, July 2010
14	Online broadcaster, blogger, based in UK	London, UK, July 2010
15, 16	DJ/producer, based in UK; Master sound engineer, based in UK	London, UK, July 2010
17, 18	DJ/producer, based in UK; DJ/producer, based in UK	London, UK, July 2010
19, 20, 21	DJ/producer, based in UK; DJ/producer, based in UK; Master of ceremony, based in UK	London, UK, July 2010
22	DJ/producer, based in UK	Helsinki, Finland, July 2010
23	Sound engineer, DJ, based in Finland	Helsinki, Finland, October 2010
3	DJ/producer, based in Finland	Helsinki, Finland, April 2011
24, 2	DJ/producer, based in Finland; DJ/producer, based in Finland	Helsinki, Finland, April 2011
26, 27, 28	DJ/producer, based in Finland; DJ/producer, based in Finland; DJ/producer, based in Finland	Helsinki, Finland, April 2012
Observation	Description	Location and time
Club nights	Slam It, Kuudes Linja (Helsinki, Finland)	November 2009
	Alas, Kuudes Linja (Helsinki, Finland)	January 2010
	Dub War 5th anniversary (New York, USA)	June 2010
	Turrbotax (New York, USA)	June 2010
	DMZ (Brixton, UK)	July 2010
	Alas, Kuudes Linja (Helsinki, Finland)	November 2010
	Slam It, Kuudes Linja (Helsinki, Finland)	April 2011
	Flow Festival (Helsinki, Finland)	August 2012
Live radio shows	Basso Radio (Helsinki, Finland)	February 2010
	SubFM	June 2010
	Rinse FM	July 2010
Sound engineering studios	Transition Studios (South Croydon)	June 2010
	Timmion Studios (Helsinki)	October 2010
Subcultural media	Description	Time
Online forums and online radio broadcasts	www.dubstepforum.com	Netnographic participation between 2009 and 2012
	www.rinse.fm	
	www.sub.fm	
	www.basso.fi	
	www.stealthunit.net	

Table I. Summary of participants and ethnographic data

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A description of the dubstep scene

> What is dubstep for me […] honestly, I think dubstep is the music and expression of a bunch of people that were kind of bored of what else was going on at the time musically. Lot of people have come over from jungle and drum'n'bass and garage backgrounds […] But there's all sorts of sides to it, I mean […] I like anything that makes me sort of stop and go, "what the f*** is that", or that I haven't heard anyone do that with a tune yet […] something that carries an energizing charge with it (UK-based DJ/producer [1], Kuudes Linja club, Helsinki, early 2010).

Dubstep as a musical genre was born in the early 2000s from the emerging frustration felt by many DJs and producers toward the state of the "drum and bass", "jungle", "grime", "garage" and "2step" musical scenes. These DJs had increasingly come to feel that such musical scenes had either "ran their course" in the sense that new "fresh" sounds were not being produced, that they had become too commercially inclined or that they had developed overtly aggressive, even violent milieus. Emerging from the rooms of young DJ/producers in London's South Croydon, these pioneers began to frequent and exchange their music tracks at the "Big Apple" record store. Their approach emerged into a purification of the then hectic and "overloaded" sounds of the extant genres. This new sound was characterized by minimalism, "space" and a special emphasis on "bass-weight" and an interest in "soundsystems" that could afford to deliver such sounds. Also, vinyl and "dubplate" culture, an adoption from Jamaican music cultures (Henriques, 2011), was an important part of the early days of dubstep music.

Born at the time of the proliferation of the Internet, this sound began to increasingly sweep the globe, with important translocal hubs emerging in Bristol, New York, Los Angeles and Helsinki in addition to Croydon, to name just a few. Aided by Internet-based pirate radio shows and stations, the initial connections to party venues such as the London-based "Forward" and "DMZ" club nights and the "Dub War" night based in New York became gradually loosened. In contrast to previous scenes (e.g. drum and bass), dubstep grew into a global phenomenon in parallel with the proliferation of online connectivity and social media. Drawn in by the scene's unprecedented growth and global outreach, mainstream actors of the music industry have recently begun to swiftly move in to repackage the musical outputs of the scene into more commercially accessible products. These forces have splintered the scene, as the dubstep sound has more recently (approximately 2009 onward) witnessed a separation between the more commercially oriented sound (often called "brostep") and a parallel resistant movement by actors working to produce what they view to be the authentic minimalist and experimental sound. The mainstream dubstep sound is also challenging the original dubstep production scene by focusing more on digital media (in producing, performing, disseminating and consuming) instead of the analog and vinyl culture that has been constitutive force for the original dubstep producers.

Ethnographic themes: market-shaping and market-restricting practices

In this section, we will illustrate how the countercultural market emergence of dubstep is founded on an inherent authenticity paradox that becomes negotiated through the actors' simultaneous market-shaping and market-restricting practices. We develop the following three thematic interpretations:

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(1) practices of music production;
(2) practices of broadcasting and performing; and
(3) practices of scuffling for sustenance.

Guided by the market practices framework by Kjellberg and Helgesson (2006, 2007), the aim of our empirical work was to seek a better understanding of how influential actors in countercultural musical scenes engage in producing musical artworks and experiences by means of setting norms and rules for the community of actors, and by managing related market exchanges.

Following Thornton's (1995) influential work on club cultures, we understand dubstep primarily as a "taste culture" and as a "taste regime" (Arsel and Bean, 2013), where cultural capital and knowledge governs the way in which people congregate around musical experiences and engage in various market-shaping performances. From this perspective, importantly, our data illustrate a paradoxical negotiation of "authentic" consumption experiences that has been described in much of countercultural market literature (Arsel and Thompson, 2011; Beverland *et al.*, 2010; Frank, 1997; Heath and Potter, 2005; Kozinets, 2002; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). While pushing the dubstep sound into new interesting directions the focal market actors were constantly concerned of the consequences of the market practices they engaged in. Yet, these practices were often not purposively planned and acted upon but inherently emergent. Our study also illustrates how the constant search for new experiences leaves behind "abandoned wreckage" of decaying practices that still go on to resonate in contemporary events (Thrift, 2008, p. 8).

Practices of music production: cherishing analog media in the digital era

> For me the downside of the digital revolution is the fact that everyone can be a producer, mixer, rapper, MC, DJ with a laptop and some plugins. The problem is: because everyone is such an expert there is no second opinions (UK-based sound engineer [15], Transition Studios, London, mid 2010).

First, we turn to the ways in which dubstep sound is produced. Before the widespread digitalization of not only music but also the tools with which music is created, the production of electronic music was the practice of a dedicated enthusiast. The practice often required considerable amounts of both financial means and technical expertise for getting access to studio facilities and for being able to use equipment for music production. Today, given adequate level of technical skills, a simple laptop and access to audio sequencing software (readily available as freeware or as pirated commercial software) suffice. This makes virtually every owner of a personal computer a potential electronic music producer. As the opening vignette of this section by a master audio engineer illustrates, this has democratized both the availability and the amount of music being produced. Our participants were keen to continue to liberate expression in musical experimentation and give global audiences continuous new experiences. Yet, the problem for them was one of "extreme mediocrity", as role of the producer has become increasingly stripped of its mythical status that previously separated the consumer from the producer, as exertion of effort and cultural taste has become more difficult to recognize.

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By drawing from the Jamaican DJ culture, the foundational dubstep practitioners have long acted to resist these developments, even as the ease and accessibility of digital means of production are eroding the exclusivity of the practice. Thus, for the original practitioners, vinyl records or dubplates persist as important cultural artifacts. They are generally understood as signs of producing music with distinct value and as performative displays of effort put into the craft:

> We're here outside of Transition Studios in London […] so this is where the magic happens, you get the acetate records, the single ones where you can put music that's unreleased, might never be coming out or might be coming out in ten months' time. So, if a DJ wants to play that, among the options of going digital, obviously you, you can come down, cut it on dubplate and you'll have a unique copy (Finland-based DJ/producer [4], Transition Studios, London, mid 2010).

Facing the global shift toward digitalization of music, acts of persisting with analog mediums have become symbols of cultural investment for our participants. This entails respecting the historical roots of the scene and substantial monetary investments required for commissioning dubplate presses. The sound quality of a professionally mixed and mastered analog record, in a bass-driven culture of sonic production, is seen as an important aspect of the scene's foundation. Yet the practice is challenged by practitioners switching to digital media technologies such as mp3 file formats that offer instant online access. Engaging in sharing exclusive tunes online with other select DJ/producers is tempting due to its ease and speed. The cutting and sharing of dubplates is becoming less emotionally engaging, but it still persists as a tangible symbolic practice, although its relevance seems increasingly difficult to maintain:

> The good thing with digital media is that you can test more tunes, you can kind of like take a little bit more risks, with the dubplates, to be honest, sometimes you play a little bit more safe. But to me, dubstep is not about the format, its not about the media, it's about the music (Finland-based DJ/producer [3], Kuudes Linja club, Helsinki, early 2010).

> I play vinyl, dubplates, CD's […] I haven't been cutting [making dubplates] in a while, sorry. But to be honest, at the moment I carry that much music with me that if I'd cut dubplates I'd be here with about four bags [of vinyl], and that ain't rolling! I'm 35, my back is strong, but it ain't that strong, all right (UK-based DJ/producer [2], Kuudes Linja club, Helsinki, early 2010).

Although many founding participants of the scene profess a keen interest in maintaining their analog craft as a statement of cultural sophistication, the transition to digital formats is increasingly compelling due to its relative ease. In addition, the ever-increasing tediousness of reconfiguring stage equipment after a set performed with digital media (Montano, 2010) seems to be emergently reducing the opportunities for DJing performances with analog media:

> Soundsystems are going be made digitally now. So, Serato's [digital DJ platform] here, CD:s are here […] [companies] aren't gonna be making soundsystems that are going play vinyl […] you're going be playing vinyl on digital systems in 2 or 3 years and it's going sound terrible. Do you know what I mean, it's sad, but I'll even admit tonight you noticed, that whole set-up is set up for digital, totally (UK-based DJ/producer [19], RinseFM radio station, East London, mid 2010).

The divide between analog and digital has further narrowed following the recent introduction of digital technologies (e.g. Serato) that mimic the physical performance of

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playing vinyl. A simultaneous adoption and legitimization of these new technologies seems to be gradually ongoing. The more the DJ/producers migrate to digital formats, the more the venues are being set up technologically in ways that do not readily accommodate using more orthodox analog media. Most of our participants nevertheless contest this change and continue to invent practices (such as carrying their own needles for playing vinyl) that allow them to persist with using vinyl formats. This market-restricting practice continues to construct the scene as more concrete and tangible in terms of its symbolic artifacts that signal exclusivity and cultural authenticity, and is simultaneously a force that holds off new practitioners entering the scene opportunistically. These tensions have also had an influence on how DJing performances are negotiated, a topic to which we will turn next.

Practices of broadcasting and performing: selective outing of information and shielding of artifacts

> You escape from the normal by hearing the abnormal, and as soon as the abnormal becomes normal it loses its power (UK-based producer [1], Kuudes Linja, Helsinki, 2010).

The DJ performance (the "gig") at a club is the setting where the DJ/producer steps behind the "decks" (equipment for mixing music) and plays selected tunes (the "selection") to the party audience. Here the DJ has an opportunity to demonstrate sophistication by playing a selection that enables the audience to experience euphoric party experiences. The experience is constructed by practices of playing rare and novel tunes on dubplates or on other mediums to performatively display taste, not to mention showcasing technical mastery of the equipment. Simultaneously, the performance constitutes a public display of the DJ's opinion on the direction in which the dubstep sound should progress. Performing at club venues is more than providing entertainment or pleasure (Goulding *et al.*, 2009), as it entails a cultural encounter where the evolution of the scene is reciprocally negotiated in an emergent exchange of meanings, energies and cultural knowledge between the DJs, producers and audiences:

> Cause ultimately when they [the audiences] come out they want to hear something new. They want to experience things. Even though they've been to Dub War several times. They want every time to be as distinct and original as the first time they showed up. That's our responsibility, it's our responsibility to make sure when you go home you're like, "wow, that was really fresh" (USA-based DJ [6], Dub War club night, New York, mid 2010).

> Well I think it's easy to go to a club and, you know, expect what the crowd are gonna want and play that, which is, you know, good, everyone's happy, the club's full, the promoter has a good night. But sometimes you play a night and it's not necessarily the liveliest crowd or anything, but they're all sort of there and they are kind of being educated in a way […] I think it makes it worthwhile (UK-based DJ/producer [12], Horsepower Studios, London, mid 2010).

Facilitated by digitalization, the DJ/producers, in addition to expressing themselves through the tunes they release and perform in club venues, have the opportunity to make their voices heard on radio shows and podcasts that, mediated over the Internet, have become influential in driving the evolution of the scene. According to Thornton (1995), such underground media is not just a symbolic representation but also a network crucial to dissemination of cultural knowledge itself. Also, the global versus local distinction

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has become swiftly contested. One participant, an eminent blogger on dubstep, originally contributed to the development of the scene by uploading the sets DJs played on radio for a global audience to download:

> Because it was so essential, it was unmissable listening, and that really changed it, that made pirate radio global […] taking that model and exposing it to such a bigger audience. And I think, radio is, it's the peoples' medium, people need to be able to access it, I believe in that, and I believe that's the pirate radio model taken from a local level to a global level […] other genres of music have obviously benefitted from having the Internet […] but I think dubstep was the first new genre *per se* to be actually bred, and emerge on parallel and simultaneously with the community that was developing internationally (UK-based blogger [14], Plastic People club, London, mid 2010).

With the proliferation of practices that allow instant global access to a general and conventionally uninitiated audience, the focus on the scarcity of any particular piece of music has declined rapidly. The exclusivity in the cultural significance of sharing music with particular influential DJs seems to be eroding. This is due to the instantaneity of new tunes being uploaded, making the practice of spreading the "underground word" and slowly building the momentum for a particular tune increasingly inconsequential. One practice of maintaining a cultural status that persists, however, is the selective sharing of restricted cultural knowledge, now in increasingly interactive forms via online media. The following excerpt illustrates this in the context of an online live broadcast:

> (*Speaking to the microphone*) "Soon I'm going to share some stories with you about my recent two-week trip to the states" (Finland-based DJ/producer [3]) […].
>
> I think you might want to hear some rumors later on in the show (Finland-based producer [3]) […].
>
> Here we are, and I've been on BassoRadio since June 2004 […] been six years now, and I haven't asked a single penny for it, and neither have you [*addressing producer 4*], so we're doing this thing with pure intentions (Finland-based producer [3]) […].
>
> Thanks to all the listeners, and I want to, once again, mention our respect to the StepAhead [Internet] forum. Especially the people who have been lively, we kept a keenly reading here in the studio (Finland-based producer [4]).
>
> (Bassoradio studio, live radio show, Helsinki, early 2010).

During the radio broadcast, the audience is kept anticipating more secretive cultural knowledge. While cultural positions are negotiated in this fashion, these social performances seemed to have more in common with sharing and the emergent construction of cultural taste with the globally dispersed listeners. This occurred in the form of discussions in the forums and online chat rooms, actively engaged with by both the DJs and audiences while the musical performance was ongoing:

> That communication was always there between the listener and the DJ. And that was what was always really important about pirate radio in this country, is that anyone could just, you know, freely big up [recognize] whoever they want or request a tune (UK-based DJ/producer [19]) […].

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> Because that's the thing, like it's actual people listening and reacting, and that's, you give energy, and you know, you give it back, you get it, you give it back, it's an exchange of energy (Finland-based DJ/producer [4]).
>
> (RinseFM radio station, East London, mid 2010).

The influential DJ/producers find meaning in their role as mediators of these interactive practices, simultaneously affective and affected in the flows of digital information. For example, our US-based participants had created an online pirate radio station (SubFM) that was able to constantly offer live material, as the DJs in the network were dispersed all around the globe and could, therefore, operate the station simply "with turntables and an Internet connection" from various time zones. In this way, dubstep is as an emblematic example of a translocal scene (Bennett, 2004; Peterson and Bennett, 2004) and serves to illustrate several tensions that emerge in parallel.

In addition to physical or online real-time performances, online media, such as forums, blogs and online pirate radio stations, are of great importance for the translocal dissemination and ongoing negotiation of cultural knowledge. Online discussion forums manifest both in local languages to offer rallying points for local negotiation (commonly emerging as hubs for exchanging cultural knowledge and means for promoting the latest releases of prominent DJ/producers and for the introduction of nascent talent), and in the form of massive global online forums that act as vast resources of globally shared cultural meanings (dubstepforum.com had more than 57,000 registered members at the time of this writing). Online networking sites, such as Facebook, also offer a flurry of connectivity for active DJ/producers and audiences to incessantly follow the comings and goings of any influential member of the community of practice.

While online access has diminished the exclusivity of new "fresh" music tracks, the DJ/producers have nevertheless continued to exert much effort in coming into possession of rare or unpublished tunes by other DJ/producers close to them. It remains important to maintain a symbolic veil of mystery over which music tracks they are performing. The next vignette illustrates how a participant had removed all the labels from his selection of dubplates, making them indistinguishable to an onlooker. While he was ready to grant a glimpse of his selection (the "sleeves" of the records that still had come with the names of the tracks), the act of systematically writing down the contents of his record bag went beyond an acceptable practice of acquiring secretive cultural knowledge:

> I used to scrub the labels out so you couldn't see what the tune was. People were like, "what's this tune?" [And I would answer, by just calling it a generic] "Dubplate". "Well what's this one then?" [And I would answer] You know what I'm going to say don't you? […] There was that gig […] there was a guy who was so keen to know what was in my [record] bag that, I let him go through it, and he just started writing down the names of all the tunes […] and I was like, hang on, what the f*** are you doing? (UK-based DJ/producer [1], Kuudes Linja club, Helsinki, early 2010).

All these emergent practices seem to have become deeply internalized in how the market is performed, as the participants declined to express them as calculative efforts or acts of explicitly purpose-driven agency, but rather as responses to negative experiences with digitally mediated information. One such recurring consideration was how the emergence of the scene has become accelerated:

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> And that's all it is, it's like a moment in time. You know what I mean, it's not a timeless piece of music, it's 2010 dubstep […] and like 2011 people might be like, you know, I'm sick of that now (UK-based DJ/producer [18], London, early 2010).

Such tensions emerge between the liberating and globalizing forces of digital music that, on the one hand, have allowed the scene to rapidly expand, while, on the other, have simultaneously come to commodify the artistic endeavors of the DJ/producers in the form of uncontrollable reproduction over digital streams of information. In terms of interaction in other online media, the balance between being sufficiently accessible, so as to display adequate interest in one's audiences, needs to be constantly negotiated to not become overtly "pushy" and to not make irrelevant and superfluous postings. For a prominent DJ/producer, to remain a relevant "cultural author" becomes an emergent challenge of interaction and shielding of cultural knowledge while fostering the very community they are constitutive forces of.

Practices of scuffling for sustenance and resisting the "mainstream"

> If you're doing it for the money, you're doing it for all the wrong reasons (USA-based DJ/producer [5], Dub War club night, New York, mid 2010).

To maintain their lifestyles and to satisfy their creative ambitions, dubstep DJ/producers need to be constantly engaged in a multiplicity of practices related to market exchanges, often taking the form of "scuffling" to make a living in the market. In a countercultural scene such as dubstep, the artistic projects of DJ/producers could not be reduced to the motivation for market returns and profits. Here we see two key relations that call for exploration: what the concept of "value" consists of contextually (Helkkula *et al.*, 2012) and the extent to which a DJ/producer can pursue projects that can be described as aiming for monetary gain without becoming considered a "sell-out" or an inauthentic practitioner. Before the advent of the digital age and the accompanying democratization of access to both music and the means of production, the market structures, record labels and distribution intermediaries held control over the music released and the marketing efforts dedicated to any given artist (Negus, 2002; Peterson and Bennett, 2004). A relative "order" existed in the market that was controlled by a few powerful actors. Before social media, being "in the know" involved intricate and arduous practices of finding access to a scarce supply of marginal music. Today, the online mediated insider needs to gain access to the culturally relevant channels of musical output, which comes in the form of an overabundant flux of novel music tracks and burgeoning artists.

Similarly to how Stebbins (1982) predicted the advent of practitioners of "serious leisure", to support oneself solely by being a DJ has now become extremely uncommon. Virtually all the DJs we know of are DJs, producers, club night promoters and consumers of their scene simultaneously – and often holding conventional, usually part-time, jobs on the side to support their artistic endeavors. Yet, releasing good-quality music is no longer enough due to the superfluous amounts of alternatives. Additionally, profiting from one's released music is at best uncertain with rampant piratism arising from ease of digital reproduction of music. These new practices find fertile ground to proliferate, especially as the young listener-base that grew up with the digital formats seems content with audio formats (e.g. mp3) of inferior quality. Thus, DJ/producers need

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further practices to establish ties with the community and act in acceptable ways so as to maintain their cultural position. Indeed:

> If you come out of nowhere and produce great tracks, it's not entirely enough. You need to also be a sincere member of the community, you need to have respect for the genre. You can't be in it for the money only, as we see many coming out of other genres for such reasons today (UK-based DJ/producer [1], Kuudes Linja club, Helsinki, early 2010).

In addition, while club nights (even international ones) and released music now commonly exchanged in electronic formats online usually offer meager levels of income, the DJ/producers often seem not to entertain great monetary expectations or aspirations. This can be seen in the ongoing negotiation of how both artistic and monetary "value" emerge from the practitioners' acts remain a paradox that is wrought with tensions:

> Now if Desto here would commission a set of vinyl presses, I could do the master cuts right here […] I don't think the value of it would ever decrease, cause Desto makes ambitious music […] flea markets are brimming with old folk and, you know, weird pop shit that nobody takes any interest in […] the music that is truly of high quality, those records are not stacked there in the flea market, they have retained their value (Finland-based sound engineer [23], Timmion Studios, Helsinki, late 2010).

In the dubstep scene, the foundational practitioners forcefully resist overtly commercial pursuits and often maintain other, more artistic and salient perspectives on what is considered "valuable". For many, something that could be thought of as an opportunity for cultural authorship in ways that are accepted and appreciated by other influential cultural practitioners takes precedence:

> So I see it as a continuum, so you have this almost like a line, at one end you have very high quality audio, which you can own, and on the other end of the continuum you have low quality audio that is free, that you don't need to pay for. You know, this line between [Internet] broadcast experience and between ownership and commerce is a continuum and its fine if they're at poles, but really they're increasingly starting to edge into a gray area (UK-based blogger [11], East London, mid 2010).

The DJ/producers seem to resist this "gray area", and long to make music that would have both cultural influence and temporal longevity. Yet, diverting from this, some practitioners have recently been "signed" by major labels. Thus, the communal practices are being deterritorialized by potential for profits to be made from the popularizing scene, leading some practitioners to accept trajectories where commercialization and marketplace commodification are embraced. The remaining normalizing practices of effectively becoming shunned by the resistant practitioners are gradually becoming less relevant and are thus eroding:

> One thing that is very interesting about the underground, it never forgets people that decide to go like a more accessible (mainstream) route with their music. Never forgets! (USA-based online forum administrator [8], New York, early 2010).

As the previous vignette exemplifies, an influential cultural position in a scene is only granted for those without explicit economic interests. Although some artists have departed from this to take the commercial route, the rest are left to scuffle for sustenance, some engaging in a wide repertoire of secondary market practices. These include pursuing more lucrative side projects, usually produced under pseudonyms, such as making commissioned background music for television advertisements, doing sound

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engineering work for theater productions and producing on-order remixes of the music of more popular mainstream artists. While these practices are not praised by any of our participants, they effectively increase the gradual mainstream interest in the dubstep sound, thus potentially shaping the market further in ways that gradually erode the non-commercial ethos.

Akin to demythologizing practices used to protect their identity investments in the indie consumption field described by Arsel and Thompson (2011), we can thus also interpret ways in which many cultural agents have begun to distance themselves from what was once this "special thing", in negotiating the emergent market evolution of the scene that they are reluctant to accept:

> The promoters only want to book these DJs that play the crazy stuff cause it brings the kids in, I mean, that's totally understandable, but […] the music that people are listening to that's getting pushed to the mainstream wise is watered-down dubstep (UK-based producer [17], UK-based producer 17's studio, London, mid 2010).

For a pioneer like our participant, the frustration of not being able to prominently contribute to the scene, now increasingly taken over by the mainstream "tear-up" party-bouncing sound, was considerable and profoundly acute. He was seemingly being pushed out of the space he once prominently occupied. It is "totally understandable", but simultaneously so "watered-down". Another participant commonly alluded to how there is no longer any opportunity for cultural agency in terms of controlling the commodification of the scene's cultural expressions. Some try to remain more neutral:

> It's not like there is an end game […] it's just kind of being involved with kind of things that get me exited and that I enjoy listening to, and being part of. I don't really have an ambition beyond maintaining that […] I don't think you can plan a route for the cultural development of the scene or anything like that. I think that would sound a bit conceited and contrived […] you can't really think of it beyond the next time you're going to sit behind a computer to make another tune […] (UK-based producer [1], Kuudes Linja club, Helsinki, early 2010).

This participant stresses the importance of change, seemingly inbuilt to his very approach to music production. Thus, projections beyond the next tune, for him, have become fruitless, displaying how the scene has effectively moved into uncontrollable space. In addition, many participants, especially those familiar with the "rise and fall" of the drum and bass genre, have seemingly come to accept this apparent limit of their influence. Thus, they had begun to talk of "moving on" or finding that they "need new challenges". Such meaning-makings make intelligible the ephemerality of the digitalized cultural flux, even as this may indeed require a cultural agent "without a home" – an artist who feels alienated from his music (Bradshaw *et al.*, 2006; Bradshaw and Holbrook, 2007). This is where performativity ends and actors start to seek novel events to contribute to a new emergence to gravitate to.

Discussion

In light of the market practices literature (Hagberg and Kjellberg, 2010; Kjellberg and Helgesson, 2006, 2007; Storbacka and Nenonen, 2011a), our context of dubstep electronic music scene is reminiscent of prior conceptualizations, in that it consists of a network of focal market actors engaging in practices that performatively constitute and reconfigure a market. However, our study adds new insights and detail into the nature and dynamics of these practices in a countercultural market setting (Figure 1). Importantly, our data

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Figure 1. Practises of market emergence in countercultural markets

suggest that owing to the contradictory relation between mainstream mass markets and countercultural scenes, there exists a continuous interplay of market-shaping and market-restricting practices that at the same time work to push forward – and also hold down – market formation and growth. For example, the majority of the DJ/producers we interviewed engaged in multiple market-shaping practices. But they also aspired for balance and control by embracing highly restrictive practices opposed to the commodification of their music and performances. The key role of such unconventional market-restricting practices in facilitating countercultural appeal and tensions has not received explicit attention in prior marketing literature.

We argue it is precisely the constant interplay of counteracting market practices that makes up countercultural markets. The explanation for this can be sought from the authenticity paradoxes and tensions inherent to counterculture (Arsel and Thompson, 2011; Beverland *et al.*, 2010; Frank, 1997; Heath and Potter, 2005). We contend that such tensions hold together and energize otherwise fragile and small-scale market configurations. Prior literature has already alluded to this phenomenon, showing that artists and producers in underground scenes must constantly negotiate cultural tensions related to the production of marginal/authentic vs mainstream/commercial experiences (Peterson and Bennett, 2004; Bradshaw *et al.*, 2006). Similarly, indie consumers and producers struggle in seeking ways of managing tensions in relation to mainstream branding (Arsel and Thompson, 2011). Several other countercultural scenes ranging from skateboarding and surfing to biking show equally well how brands struggle in maintaining honest relations with authenticity seeking consumers (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Beverland *et al.*, 2010; Canniford, 2011).

Our study illustrates how focal market actors in countercultural music scene negotiate this dilemma (Table II). We detail how they engage in various normalizing and representational market practices, for instance, regarding the quality of the sound (e.g. professional mixing and mastering), physical requirements and material means of crafting authentic tunes (e.g. cutting and selective sharing of dubplates), and also the ways of creating unique experiences in front of crowds (e.g. building DJ sets with

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Table II. Market-shaping and market-restricting practices

Practices driving market emergence	Practices of music production	Practices of broadcasting and performing	Practices of scuffling for sustenance
Market-shaping practices (normalizing, representational and exchange practices aimed at creating and constituting markets)	Genre-specific norm and rule-setting based on sound (quality, elements, rhythm, tempo), cultural tastes and production of authentic musical artworks and experiences Representing the musical scene through shared images, sound, performances and discourse	Exchanging new taste-based meanings through reciprocal co-creation with audiences (online and offline) Providing unlimited and global access to select digitalized gigs and broadcasts through podcast archives, pirate radio stations or sound clouds Adopting new digital platforms for facilitating interaction through translocal networks of people and cultural sites spanning different parts of the world Booking, organizing and performing in club nights	Releasing records or tracks via underground record labels Facilitating market exchanges through promoting club nights, artists and tunes as well as adopting of digital tools (online pirate radio, forums) due to ease and cost Producing dubstep music under pseudonyms for commercial outlets (e.g. television advertisements), thus familiarizing the general audience to the dubstep sound
Market-restricting practices (practices aimed at resisting and holding down market growth and commercial co-optation)	Resisting digital technologies (Mp3, CD, digital DJing sound systems) over authentic analogue media (vinyl, dubplate, turntables) to hold off new practitioners and to cherish the pure and authentic sound Producing music with particular aesthetic that does not conform with commercially oriented "mainstream" sound Experimentation and exploration for "fresh" and authentic sound, and doing it for the honest reasons–not for pleasing the crowd or the club promoters Stigmatizing practices targeting artists going "mainstream" or commercial co-optation of dubstep sound Restricting access to cultural knowledge, declining to make produced music tracks widely available Selective sharing and shielding of scarce cultural resources and cultural knowledge Maintaining technical mastery and DJ skills, resisting digital media that undermine skill and proliferate limited audio quality	Resisting the commercial pursuits and mainstream sound through investments and sacrifices related to "bohemian" indie artist lifestyle and constructing only such an aesthetic as acceptable Limiting access to taste-based knowledge through underground media networks and select community of participants Negotiating a detachment from the scene by searching for new scenes to enter	

unreleased, symbolically loaded and "fresh" tunes). The authenticity tensions were present across all of these practices. On the one hand, our study suggests that the search for mentioned authentic "freshness" is inherently dependent on the taste regime that the music producers were part of – i.e. a discursively constructed normative system that orchestrates aesthetics of consumption objects, doings and meanings (Arsel and Bean, 2013). To gain prominence within a countercultural scene, market actors need to be able to express, signal and maintain cultural capital, knowledge, skills, tastes, social networks and status (Beverland *et al.*, 2010). On the other hand, the attributed "freshness" could be quickly depleted if the practitioner forays too much into commercially oriented sound, or if the sound becomes stagnant – thus losing its "energizing" power and, consequently, devaluing investments of effort and creativity of the entire music scene. This explains the necessity of counteracting market-restricting practices that, at least momentarily, maintain the emancipatory illusion meaningful authentic experiences (Kozinets, 2002).

Above all, our data suggest that maintaining the contradictory authenticity tension is not only paradoxical, but it is, in fact, *necessary* for the emergence of countercultural markets and their longevity. As implied by Rose and Wood (2005), authentic experiences often entail consuming contradictory marketplace meanings (e.g. between fantasy vs real) that are resonant and engaging. This is because people turn to and value contradictions that have the potential to inspire their imaginations – as a kind of energizing force. However, while Rose and Wood (2005) suggest that the contradiction must be resolved for satisfactory experience, we would like to propose that for a vibrant countercultural market, the contradiction must be sustained as a paradox. Otherwise, the experiences within it are rendered meaningless or not worth pursuing. These markets emerge *because* of their inherent paradoxes. We theorize that this sustenance happens through the careful balancing of market-shaping and market-resisting practices.

While Rose and Wood (2005) focus only on the authentic consumer experience, we would like to add that a similar dynamic seems relevant for other market actors in a countercultural market. Our data show numerous examples of DJ/producers who feel trapped within their music scene, while global market forces are constantly disenchanting it. Particularly by mainstream commercial artists and brand advertising appropriating the dubstep sound and disseminating it to wider audiences, this has led many original contributors of the dubstep scene to venture toward new directions and soundscapes, for example, other bass-sound genres including "post-dubstep" and "footwork". In accordance with Arsel and Thompson (2011), some have even gone so far as to actively dissociate themselves with the dubstep scene altogether and demythologize the increasingly popular mainstream myths of dubstep music. These examples collectively show how fragile countercultural markets are, and how easily the momentum of such configurations becomes threatened. The ongoing balancing of market-shaping and market-restricting practices, therefore, aims primarily at keeping alive the paradoxical tensions.

Theoretical implications

We contribute to market practice theorizing (Hagberg and Kjellberg, 2010; Kjellberg and Helgesson, 2006, 2007; Storbacka and Nenonen, 2011a) by connecting it with a lengthy tradition of countercultural consumer and market research (Arsel and Thompson, 2011;

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Beverland *et al.*, 2010; Frank, 1997; Heath and Potter, 2005; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli, 2007) and by offering a unique empirical study of countercultural market emergence. While many global markets, brands and consumption trends grow out of, or are inspired by, small-scale countercultural movements, it is important to understand the nature and context-specific dynamics these distinctive market settings have.

As prior market practice research has been predominantly occupied with studying industrial and mainstream market contexts, we argue that they have failed to account for countercultural market logics. For example, much of the prior literature assumes that market practices that are aimed primarily at creating, constituting and growing markets (Kjellberg and Helgesson, 2006, 2007); developing more effective marketing strategies and activities (Araujo, 2007; Araujo *et al.*, 2010); or altering market profitability to focal market actor's favor (Storbacka and Nenonen, 2011a). However, these views face difficulties in explaining the numerous unorthodox market-restricting practices in countercultural markets evidenced by our study. Moreover, we uncovered a dynamic of market-shaping and market-restricting practices performed by focal market actors that aims at balancing and holding down market growth and commercial co-optation *vis-à-vis* the search for and creation of vibrant and energizing authentic experiences. Therefore, we suggest that acknowledging the full range of market practices may help in re-connecting marketing theory and practice even further (Araujo *et al.*, 2010, 2008; Venkatesh *et al.*, 2006; Mason *et al.*, 2015).

Second, our theoretical framework extends insights on extant market dynamics research. Prior conceptual frameworks have arguably embraced a processual view (Nenonen *et al.*, 2014), where distinct stages of market catalyzation (Martin and Schouten, 2014), subcultural commodification (Goulding and Saren, 2007), marketplace drama (Giesler, 2008), ideological alignment (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli, 2007) or institutional legitimization (Humphreys, 2010; Giesler, 2012) have been identified and theorized. However, we believe that these models do not account sufficiently for authenticity-related tensions in countercultural markets. Our framework thus presents an alternative where the quest of authenticity requires sustaining a central paradox or contradiction (Rose and Wood, 2005, p. 294) that needs to be consumed and produced as an evolving "active discourse" where all market actors engage in.

Managerial implications

Our study offers several insights for market actors with regard to recognizing key market dynamics of countercultural markets. Importantly, we show how fragile the links between countercultural core and mainstream mass audiences are and how maintaining and sustaining paradoxical tensions between the two offers a path to success. Although some counterculture-referenced artists choose to gravitate toward the mainstream and mass audiences by embracing a more accessible or conspicuous sound and signing deals with major labels and other commercial contracts, the nearly inevitable result is countercultural stigmatization – as in the case of Skrillex who is known for introducing the dubstep sound to mainstream club audiences. However, some artists may choose to stay close to the countercultural core by attending to market-restricting practices, even though they are scuffling for sustenance. These artists, counting many in our data, managed to maintain their authentic status and appeal over a considerable period of time despite the rapid progression of the scene. In

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addition, we also learnt about rare cases where artists have effectively found a middle ground in achieving commercial success while continuing to enjoy countercultural authenticity. James Blake, for instance, is a dubstep-referenced artist and indie producer, known for his unique experimental sound, who keeps enjoying countercultural appreciation even after considerable market success. This can perhaps be explained by his musical wizardry and uncompromising and poetic experimenting with the sound. As descriptions of his recent award-winning album indicate: "transcendent", "innovative", "great beauty" and "one of the least commercial records of the year[4]". Moreover, here we can see a fundamental difference between artists such as Blake and Skrillex. Many consumers are not looking for conspicuously marketed brands or easily accessible and packaged experiences, but rather increasingly look for inconspicousness – nuance and subtle cues with a hint of mystery (Eckhardt *et al.*, 2014). The market-restricting practices we detailed serve as good examples tending toward this end. The music producers intentionally made their sound harder to discover and comprehend, thus sending countercultural signals, suggesting they are not trying to "please their audiences".

Many popular examples ranging from artists like Nirvana or Jay-Z to brands like Apple or Harley Davidson also confirm that commercial success can be built onto countercultural authenticity. So while in theory, we can see a paradoxical dichotomy between the counterculture and the mainstream, we have also suggested that many of the market actors, in fact, edge into an ambiguous "gray area" where both market-shaping and market-restricting practices are being employed simultaneously. We also think that this offers promising positioning opportunities for market actors for it would seem possible to devise market offerings and performances intentionally aiming toward maintaining the ambiguity – for sustaining the countercultural contradictions without "selling out". This is in line with recent branding literature suggesting consumers are increasingly looking for brands that are ambiguous (Brown *et al.*, 2013; Eckhardt *et al.*, 2014).

Finally, there is a potential for companies to manage market tensions and image by collaborating with countercultural actors. For example, they may wish to tap into countercultural authenticity by borrowing alternative music for their ads, as mentioned in the case of Apple, Samsung, Heineken, Skoda and BMW. However, here several caveats should be taken into account. On the one hand, the complex cycle of emerging music genres and scenes seem to have accelerated with the online technologies, making it extremely difficult to "be in the know" on which current or artist to follow. In our view, these brands adapted the dubstep sound practically after the scene had already started to disintegrate and lose its countercultural status. On the other hand, the selection of countercultural artists for a commercial job is a delicate matter. As suggested by Eckhardt and Bradshaw (2014), today's artists are keener than previous generations to give their music or expertise for commercial use. This tension seems relatively easy to manage as evidenced by our data, as many countercultural artists use aliases for doing commercial gigs to protect their reputations from potential stigmatization. It must be noted, however, that such practices, despite maintaining the marketplace tension, can never become authenticating acts under the same "brand" name of the artist.

Our study remains an explorative one. We acknowledge that through the dubstep music genre, we can only illustrate certain contextual market practices. However, we hope that our framework serves to inspire market research on other countercultural

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scenes and their links with mainstream markets, and how market formation occurs through a constant negotiation of emergent technologies and cultural tastes from a grassroots perspective.

Notes

1. A dubstep referenced artist won three Grammy awards in 2012, making history in dance music (www.forbes.com/sites/zackomalleygreenburg/2012/02/12/skrillex-has-already-won-three-grammys/).
2. Various top brands have adapted dubstep sound to support their campaigns (www.dubster.co.uk/tag/commercial/).
3. Kjellberg and Helgesson (2007, p. 142) hold that "market-making practices" and "marketing practices" both contribute to the shaping of markets and thus should be included under the overall term "market practices".
4. James Blake won the Mercury prize in 2013 (www.theguardian.com/music/2013/oct/30/james-blake-mercury-music-prize).

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