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Collective market shaping by competitors and its contribution to market resilience

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A B S T R A C T

Employing an inductive approach, we found that competitors engage in market shaping, where they actively change their market through their purposeful actions. These competitors shape their market from one characterized by competition to one of collaboration when facing disturbances, ultimately contributing to market resilience, with benefits to market actors. They achieve this through engaging in unique forms of work, which we have called ‘resilience work’ and its three associated practices, namely meshing, pooling, and deploying. The competitors engage in these practices, which provide for and deploy communally pooled resources across their cultivated web of meshed relationships in the face of disturbances. The findings, which provide a model of market resilience, contribute to marketing’s emerging knowledge of competitors’ collective actions with respect to market shaping, while delineating an important outcome of market shaping, that of resilience.

1. Introduction

Marketing scholars have issued calls to further investigate market shaping (e.g., Mele, Pels, & Storbacka, 2015; Kindstrom, Ottosson, & Carlborg, 2018). Market shaping occurs when firms engage in purposive actions to change markets (Nenonen, Storbacka, & Windahl, 2019). Although market shaping can trigger market decline or market creation (Baker, Storbacka, & Brodie, 2019), we find it can also result in its maintenance - or resilience, where resilience is defined as maintenance of functions and structures in the face of disturbances (Allenby & Fink, 2005). In other words, change is needed not only to create markets, but sometimes to maintain them.

Marketers are required to handle increasing levels of complexity (Trim & Lee, 2008). Given the rising threats to markets, including the effects of climate change and the ravages of the recent coronavirus, marketing academics need to better understand not only how market shaping can create markets, but also how market shaping can support its maintenance - or resilience - in times of disturbances. Resilience is increasingly seen as a desirable goal by marketing academics (Trim & Lee, 2008). Despite this, resilience is a significantly understudied area in marketing, despite some notable exceptions (e.g., Trim & Lee, 2008; Baker, 2009).

Using an inductive, qualitative approach, where we collected interview-based and observational-based data in fieldwork in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar (also known as Myanmar or, previously, Burma), we found that competitors collectively shape their market from one characterized as competitive to one characterized as collaborative in the face of disturbances to maintain their market. We identify work associated with this market maintenance, which we have called ‘resilience work’, and also identify three practices involved in this work, namely deploying, pooling, and meshing. Recently, there has been a turn towards practices (see Smets, Aristidou, & Whittington, 2017), where practices are defined as established, ‘embodied, [and] materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understanding’ (Schatzki, 2001, p. 2). Thus, like Lindeman (2014) and Kjellberg and Helgesson (2007a), among others, this study takes such a practices approach.

We make the following major contributions. First, we found that competitors collectively engage in market shaping. We thus answer calls by Nenonen, Storbacka, and Windahl (2019) for research that provides further insights into how market shapers, including competitors, engage in collective action. Second, we find that market shaping can trigger market resilience. Extending the empirical findings of Baker et al. (2019) study, wherein they found that market shaping can lead to market creation or decline, we find that it can also contribute to its maintenance - or resilience. We thus answer their calls for further investigation into...
market maintenance. Thirdly, we contribute to our understanding of market maintenance, which we have called resilience work, and its three associated practices. Marketing has called for a better understanding of markets in general, including through integrating new theoretical perspectives (Mele et al., 2015), such as resilience. We provide this and contribute a model of market resilience, while answering calls for empirical research into resilience in business (e.g., van der Vegt, Essens, Wahlström, & George, 2015; Linnenluecke, 2017). Taken together, we contribute to marketing knowledge at the nexus of market shaping and resilience.

In what follows, we turn to the literature and introduce the key concepts of market shaping, practices, work, and resilience. We then describe our methods and present our findings. We conclude with theoretical and managerial implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Market shaping, practices, and work

Markets have largely been overlooked by marketing thought (Storbacka & Nenonen, 2011), but that is changing, with a burgeoning attention to markets within marketing. From a neoclassical economic perspective, markets are viewed as abstract spaces characterized by aggregate demand and supply driven by calculating actors engaging in singular transactions (see Callon & Muniesa, 2005). Marketing, building on this view, tends to see markets as stable backdrops to actions by individuals (Mele et al., 2015).

However, recent literature is challenging this conceptualization. Markets are increasingly viewed as complex systems that are adaptive (Nenonen et al., 2014) and emergent (Callon, Méadel, & Rabeharisoa, 2002; Callon & Muniesa, 2005). In this way, markets “are always in development, generated by the practices performed by those actors operating within them” (Baker et al., 2019, p. 303). Building on past literature, Lindeman (2012) succinctly describes markets “as ongoing processes of economic organization constituted by bundles of practices” (p. 236), where practices are activities organized around shared and practical understandings (Schatzki, 2001). Individuals’ practices can thus be viewed as constituting markets (Storbacka & Nenonen, 2011; Araujo, Kjellberg, & Spencer, 2008) and can provide a useful conceptual frame in the study of markets (Araujo, Finch, & Kjellberg, 2010). For example, practices are thought to facilitate exchange (Araujo, 2007) and shape markets (Kjellberg & Helgesson, 2007a).

Practices generate, reinforce, and alter the social order through ‘mundane’ - yet consequential - everyday activities, which have order and meaning (Smets et al., 2017). In other words, this is about what actors actually do and what they actually say, the environments that they are in, and the tools they use (Lindeman, 2014). Practices are interconnected (Nenonen et al., 2014), collectively meaningful, and context specific (Schatzki, 2001), where involved actors can be seen as the ‘relatively more dense areas of activity, rather than distinct classes of practices” (Kjellberg & Helgesson, 2007a, p. 145).

Interconnecting practices between heterogeneous actors can both create and maintain markets (Nenonen et al., 2014). Changes in markets occur, where actors can induce these changes (Kindström et al., 2018; Storbacka & Nenonen, 2011; Araujo et al., 2008) through their collective activities (Lindeman, 2012). Markets are continuously (re)shaped by an actor’s activities and by coordinated actions across actors (Kindström et al., 2018), where actions can both be a consequence of market organization and influence markets (Storbacka & Nenonen, 2011). Such changes can come from everyday activities of people ‘on the ground’ enacting practices, where interconnections extend beyond a singular practice (Smets et al., 2017).

Towards making these changes, actors can engage in market work, which is the “purposeful efforts by a focal actor to perform and transform markets” (Nenonen, Storbacka, & Freithy-Benthem, 2019, p. 251). Work in general is defined as “actors engaged in a purposeful effort… to manipulate some aspect of their social context” (Phillips & Lawrence, 2012, p. 224). Market work can contribute to market change. Nenonen et al. (2019c) identified six key elements of market change and 25 indicators that underpin them. While market change does not require a change in all elements (Jarvis, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2003), aspects include changing the interaction and cooperation of competitors, changing activities perceived as acceptable, and changing of pricing levels, among other aspects (Nenonen et al., 2019c).

Such actors can include competitors. Competitors can engage in collective action (Nenonen, Storbacka, & Windahl, 2019b). However, business in general tends to separate the individual from the communal (Solomon, 1994), leading to calls in marketing for a better understanding of collective actions (Beninger & Francis, 2016), including involving market shaping (Nenonen, Storbacka, & Windahl, 2019b). This relates to cooperation, which is a process of concurrent cooperative and competitive behaviour (Bengtsson, Eriksson, & Wincent, 2010). However, we know less about how market shaping can involve “changing the way competing providers interact or cooperate” (Nenonen, Storbacka, & Windahl, 2019b, p. 624). In other words, how do competitors collectively shape their markets? We build on extant research by contributing to marketing’s understanding of how competitors shape their markets.

Market shaping is seen as a continuous process in which, failing its execution, markets would cease to exist (Kjellberg & Helgesson, 2006). Baker et al. (2019) found that market shaping can trigger market creation or decline. They found that certain actions, such as being unresponsive, resulted in market decline, while other actions, including accessing new resources, resulted in market creation. However, we know less about market maintenance (Baker et al., 2019) - or resilience, including how it is related to market shaping.

While, on the surface, market change and resilience seem to be at odds with one another, a deeper look provides a different perspective. The following text highlights the interconnection between change and resilience, where

“… ‘stability and change are different outcomes of the same dynamic, rather than different dynamics’ (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011: 6). Change and stability are both effortful accomplishments of multiple actors engaged in a practice (Schatzki, 2012). It takes work to remain unchanged, as much as it takes work to change.” (Smets et al., 2017, p. 371).

Despite the emerging wealth of literature on the topic of market shaping, marketing still lacks an understanding of the relationship between market shaping and resilience.

2.2. Resilience

Resilience has been conceptualized in a number of ways (see Linnenluecke, 2017), with definitions largely emphasizing the ability to absorb and recover (van der Vegt et al., 2015) or maintain functions and structures in the face of change (Allenby & Fink, 2005), or disturbances.
Disturbances are situations that threaten the functioning of communities, organizations, and individuals (Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche, & Pfefferbaum, 2008), and include disasters and other devastations (Bhamra, Dani, & Burnard, 2011). Disturbances can be mild or severe (Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003) and internal or external in origin (Bhamra et al., 2011). For example, the recent novel coronavirus is heavily impacting markets. Disturbances affect both market decline and creation (Baker et al., 2019), although we know less about the impact on market resilience.

Shocks can be overcome by individuals, but also by communities (Rao & Greve, 2018), organizations, and other groups. For example, there is evidence that cooperatives are more resilient in the face of stresses than competitive market arrangements (Roelants, Dovgan, Eum, & Terrasi, 2012). Indeed, resilience is postulated to require concerted efforts (van der Vegt et al., 2015) and coordinated responses (Norris et al., 2008). On an organizational level, disturbances can lead to a response that ultimately maintains functions and structures (Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003). However, what constitutes such a response remains to be empirically interrogated (Linnenluecke, 2017), especially at a market level. Further, while marketing actors are thought to influence resilience (Layton & Duan, 2015), not much is known about the role of competitors.

Resources can be used in reaction to disturbances (Vogus & Sutcliffe, 2007), in which they can be reconfigured (Parker & Ameen, 2018) and drawn upon as needed. For example, access to technology can be useful to weather disturbances (Polsa & Fan, 2011). Such resources can be highly discretionary, as is the case with cash, inventory, and low-skilled labor, or less discretionary, such as skilled labor and dedicated machines, where the latter are limited in their ability to be useful in all but a few specific disturbances (Sharman, Wolf, Chase, & Tansik, 1988). Indeed, having a flexible structure of suppliers and transportation alternatives can positively impact resilience (Pereira and Da Silva, 2015). Despite what we do know, we lack an understanding of the resources that competitors can collectively use towards resilience.

Relationships are also theorized to be important to resilience (Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003), as they may determine what other resources are accessible in the face of disturbances (van der Vegt et al., 2015). Cooperation between buyers and suppliers within supply chains can support resilience (Wieland and Marcus Wallenburg, 2013), where enduring relationships in markets can act as a buffer (Viswanathan, Rosa, & Ruth, 2010). People can, for example, borrow things from each other (Banerjee & Dufo, 2007; Viswanathan et al., 2010). While it was found that actors, such as customers, vendors, family (Viswanathan et al., 2010), and members of formalized savings groups (Lindeman, 2014), can provide such a buffer, competitors might be important too.

Although not much is known about the role of competitors in market resilience, some existing literature has pointed to their importance. Viswanathan et al. (2010) briefly mentioned that the vendors they studied, part of a tightly knit group of people, engaged in “mobilizing” supplies from other vendors rather than letting (merchants) seek them out on their own” (p. 7) in the face of, for example, stock outages and closures due to social and religious obligations. Retail agglomerations, which are stores in specific areas such as shopping malls (some of which would be competitors), are also thought to contribute to their own resilience through providing offerings that differ from competing agglomerations (Teller, Wood, & Floh, 2016). There are, therefore, potential indications that firms should increase collaboration to support resilience (Teller et al., 2016).

Despite all that we do know, we lack an understanding of how competitors could contribute to market resilience, the practices involved, and how this relates to market shaping.

3. Methods

This empirical study was approached from a grounded, inductive perspective.
local research assistant who acted as interpreter. A semi-structured interview approach was used (e.g., Charmaz, 2014), as it allowed for a consistent approach across interviews, while providing room for the interviewer to follow up on important aspects. We initially drafted the interview guide in English, and the Burmese research assistant then translated it into the Burmese language. Two Burmese development professionals checked the guide and its translation.

Interviews were secured following theoretical sampling, concentrating on those knowledgeable in the focal area of interest (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), who were “typical… members of a broader ‘selected society’” (Shenton, 2004, p. 65). As such, the 30 interview participants were traders involved in an array of the growing, sourcing, buying, packaging, transporting, and selling of products. Some of these traders also grew vegetables in other parts of their day. Holding multiple roles throughout the day is common in contexts characterized by economic constraint (Banerjee & Duflo, 2007).

Different approaches were used to secure interviews. In the initial stage, the first author leveraged the existing networks of the research assistant and other contacts affiliated with the United Nations Development Programme that was active in the area. Second, the study used a snowball approach, where some of the competitors interviewed provided introductions to others in their social network. Third, in limited cases, competitors were approached in isolation. Interviews were conducted at three locations, including Yadanaarbon (or Diamond) market (19 interviews), Zegyo market (4 interviews), and the nearby suburbs of Mandalay (7 interviews), which some referred to as the ‘Mandalay villages’, in which shops and plantations are located, which is a 20 min motorcycle drive from the city center. The decision to interview in different locations allowed for the observations of, and interviews with, a diversity of competitors, including those who played different roles throughout the day. Additionally, some competitors, such as those selling seeds, were located in a different location to the one that we gained access to early on in the process. Table 1 contains a description of the traders, including denoting their suppliers and customers with an ‘X’.

Table 1

| Participant | Suppliers | Customers |
|-------------|-----------|-----------|
| Transcript number (main job) | Seed seller | Farmer | Vegetable wholesaler | End Consumer | Other reseller | Hotels, restaurants |
| 1 (green grocery competitor) | X | X |
| 2 (green grocery competitor) | X | X | X |
| 3 (green grocery competitor) | X | X | X |
| 4 (green grocery competitor) | X | X | X |
| 5 (green grocery competitor) | X | X | X |
| 6 (green grocery competitor) | X | X | X |
| 7 (green grocery competitor) | X | X | X |
| 8 (green grocery competitor) | X | X | X |
| 9 (green grocery competitor) | X | X | X |
| 10 (green grocery competitor) | X | X | X | X |
| 11 (grocery competitor/farmer) | X | X | X | X |
| 12 (green grocery competitor) | X | X | X |
| 13 (grocery competitor/farmer) | X | X | X |
| 14 (grocery competitor/farmer) | X | X | X |
| 15 (farmer/retired competitor) | X | X | X | X |
| 16 (grocery competitor/farmer) | X | X | X | X |
| 17 (grocery competitor/farmer) | X | X | X | X |
| 18 (green grocery competitor) | X | X | X | X |
| 19 (green grocery competitor) | X | X | X | X |
| 20 (green grocery competitor) | X | X | X | X | X |
| 21 (green grocery competitor) | X | X | X | X |
| 22 (green grocery competitor) | X | X | X | X |
| 23 (green grocery competitor) | X | X | X | X |
| 24 (green competitor) | X | X | X |
| 25 (seed competitor) | X | X |
| 26 (seed competitor) | X | X | X |
| 27 (seed competitor/farmer) | X | X | X |
| 28 (green grocery competitor) | X | X | X |
| 29 (green grocery competitor) | X | X | X | X |
| 30 (green grocery competitor) | X | X | X | X |

Interviews, which ran for an average of 48 min, took place during the competitors’ working hours, and while, for example, helping in plantation fields, sitting on the ground, or sitting on small plastic stools inside brick-and-motor and open-air shops.

Following an explorative approach, the overall and original guiding research question was to understand the role of small-scale traders in their markets. Specific interview questions thus originally focused on understanding the competitors’ activities, as related broadly to marketing, including their approach to pricing, promotions, products, and place aspects, along with their relationships with others, such as their suppliers and neighboring shops. Over the course of the interviews, questions were refined, not only to better fit the context and to elicit more thorough responses, but also, as is common in an exploratory approach, to narrow in on an unanticipated important aspect that arose, namely the relationship between competitors.

The interview questions were asked in English and were then translated into Burmese by the research assistant, who then relayed the Burmese answer into English (in one case, an interview was conducted in a Mandarin dialect, a language also spoken by the research assistant). The Burmese research assistant conducted five interviews without the author present to see if answers differed without a foreign outsider. No discernible difference was found. To ensure that the transcriptions reflected what the participant said, all interviews were first transcribed in the participant’s language and then translated into English.

Participants showed a great homogeneity in answers, likely due to their shared life experiences. The number of interviews was appropriate, as no new information emerged in the last few interviews, thus indicating saturation.

3.2. Data analysis

The lead author employed an inductive approach to data analysis (Charmaz, 2014). First, line-by-line coding was undertaken, both of interview transcripts and of the field notes. These elements, with particular attention to the interview transcripts, were coded in an
iterative process of constant comparison supported by qualitative data analysis software (Charmaz, 2014; Locke, 2011). Preliminary codes were then organized into interim categories through a process of constant comparison, which requires iterating between data and theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), including the existing research on resilience and market shaping. Throughout this iterative process, following best practices outlined by Polsa (2013), literature from a multiple of disciplines and from contextual sources was sought out. Memos were also created, towards increasing reflexivity. An overview of the coding is found in Table 2.

This field site was in an uncertain political environment that was feeling the effects of its long history as a military dictatorship. One participant remarked offhandedly that, until recently, the participants could have been jailed for just talking to a foreigner. In the case of a shifting political situation, we thus did not record any places or names of the participants, have declined to use pseudonyms when writing up the findings (although names are denoted below, referring to different transcripts, to show the breadth of coverage), and did not engage in participant checks. Following Shenton (2004), debriefing was conducted with experts to support analysis.

We also assessed the study for trustworthiness, following the specifications of, for example, Hirschman (1986), Shenton (2004), Lincoln and Guba (1985), and Wallendorf and Belk (1989). Following Flint, Woodruff, and Gardial (2002), the details of the trustworthiness assessment are included in table form (see Table 3).

In the findings, we included both representative verbatim participant quotes (denoted by their transcript numbers) and a table comprised of additional longer quotes (see Table 4).

4. Findings of marketing shaping and resilience work

The findings indicate that the actors engage in market shaping when facing disturbances, shifting the market from a competitive one to that of a collaborative one to support its resilience. Below, we first describe the competitive nature of this market before turning our attention to the change towards collaboration.

4.1. A competitive market...

The market is one usually characterized by competitiveness. This competitive environment is evident in the retailers’ purposeful activities. The competitors try to edge out the competition and face the very real threat of losing customers, where even regular customers can go elsewhere. Customers are often following routines, but these routines can be upset, causing a shift to competitors (Callon et al., 2002). A competitor, recognizing this, said, “I am afraid my customers will go to others if they don’t get the products they want from me” (11). As a result, another said, “I always try to offer products exactly at the time they want with best quality products and good pricing” (3). To keep their customers, actors seek to deliver on the three key aspects of price, quality, and availability, discussed in turn below.

The competitors pay “special attention to pricing” (25). Many believed that their competitive advantage was setting their prices lower than their competitors do. A competitor noted that customers buy from them because “they get the most cheapest price from me” (11). Another said that they sell “cheaper than others, … [a] reason why people come and buy.” (2). To support this competitiveness, they communicate with suppliers, where, “I just say things [to them] like, to send me the quality products that meet their standards and rejecting those that did not.”

Regarding quality, competitors feel that they “need to sell the good quality products” (1). We observed actors purposefully selecting suppliers’ products that meet their standards and rejecting those that did not. They convey this quality, where a competitor said “I told [the customers] about the quality, the goodness of the lettuce” (14). To do so, the competitors seek out good suppliers. Many of these suppliers are also

### Table 3

| Trustworthiness assessment | Criteria of trustworthiness | How addressed |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|
| **Transferability**       | is “concerned… with the transferability of one manifestation of a phenomenon to a second manifestation of the phenomenon” (Hirschman, 1986, p. 245), including presenting sufficient details about the context of the fieldwork when writing up the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). |
| **Dependability**         | seeks for data collection that is stable and consistent, such as involving more than one researcher (Hirschman, 1986, p. 245) and presenting the research process in detail, including “the minutiae of what was done in the field” (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). |
| **Confiability**          | is the pursuit of ensuring interpretations are supported from the gathered data, representing “a logical set of conclusions, given the reasoning he or she employed during the interaction, and to be nonprejudiced, nonjudgmental rendering of the observed reality” (Hirschman, 1986, p. 245, italics removed). |
| **Credibility**           | is the “extent to which the findings fit reality (Merriam, 1998), or the “extent to which the results appear to be acceptable representation of the data” (Flint et al., 2002, p.106). |
| **Integrity**             | is the “extent to which the interpretation was unimpaired by lies, evasions, misinformation, or misrepresentations by informants’ while understanding “that data are never perfect reflections of the phenomena being studied” (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989). |

### Table 2

| Descriptive coding                  | Interpretative coding                          | Aggregated codes |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Holding inventory                   | Providing for                                   | Pooling         |
| Determine product mix               | communally-accessible products                 |                 |
| Selling the same                    | Building financial slack into the market        |                 |
| Holding financial assets            |                                                |                 |
| Engaging in group savings           |                                                |                 |
| Stabilizing prices                  |                                                |                 |
| Following daily routes              | Suppling communal labor                        |                 |
| Being present daily                 | to the market                                   |                 |
| Having multiple roles               |                                                |                 |
| Managing relationships              | Forging relationships                           |                 |
| Communicating                       | with competitors                                |                 |
| Building relationships              |                                                |                 |
| with competitors                    |                                                |                 |
| Facilitating payment                | COPING/MAKING DO                                 | Deploying       |
| Stabilizing prices                  |                                                |                 |
| Displaying flexibility              |                                                |                 |
| Moving goods towards customers      |                                                |                 |
| Solving problems                    |                                                |                 |
| Sharing on the market               |                                                |                 |
| Facing uncertainty                  | Political, social, economic, ecological        |                 |
| Experiencing stressors              | disturbances                                    |                 |

This study used theoretical sampling, specifically interviewing those who were traders involved in the focal industry of vegetables, located in a resource-scarce context. Also, the research context, as well as “sufficient thick descriptions of the phenomenon under investigation was provided” (Shenton, 2004, p. 70) in the present paper. Interviews were conducted by both the lead author, and the local research assistant (on her own), and observations were undertaken by both authors at separate points. Further, the details of the research process were recorded and detailed in the paper. We conducted debriefing sessions with those familiar with the data, with the context, or with theoretically similar contexts, in order to solicit feedback. The lead author kept detailed memos to support reflexivity, both observations and interviews were conducted and reported, and limitations were included (e.g., Shenton, 2004).

As Shenton (2004) recommended, we followed established research methods, sought early familiarity, used debriefing sessions, and invited peer scrutiny of the project over multiple occasions. We also conducted interviews at multiple locations, Following the guidelines by Wallendorf and Belk (1989), the interviewer sought to build up rapport and trust with the participants. The interviews were anonymous and conducted in a nonthreatening and friendly way. Five interviews were also conducted by the Burmese research assistant.
competitors who sell both wholesale and to end consumers. For example, a participant said, “I prioritize buying from my suppliers because they choose good products for me” (10).

The competitive environment is also indicated through their desire to ensure availability. They do so in a customer-centric way, where they “always try to get the products whatever [the customers] order” (12). These efforts are supported through developing supply relationships and reserving products, where a competitor “usually put[s] aside the products [the] regular customers like to get’ (9). Overall, these competitors try to edge out the competition on quality, availability, and pricing and fear losing their customers.

4.2. ...and when facing disturbances...

While these actors usually compete and “just work independently” (11), the actors shape their market by moving from a competitive market to a much more collaborative one in the face of disturbances. The competitors discussed many disturbances they face, where four general categories of disturbances emerged from the data, including ecological, social, economic, and political. Each disturbance is described below.

The competitors shared challenges related to the ecological realm. A competitor said, “In this winter, products are a bit rare, just because of the bad weather” (21), where, for example, crops are “destroyed because of the rain” (23). In addition to localized storms where “farmers can’t predict the situation” (27), they are also impacted by weather further afield, such as the 2008 Cyclone Nargis, which resulted in over 138,000 fatalities in Myanmar. Myanmar is “among the world’s countries most vulnerable to natural disasters,” (World Bank (2015), 2015, p. 29). For example, drought in Myanmar costs its farmers 12 percent of their annual output, and Mandalay is the most affected (UNDP, 2013). The competitors also identified social disturbances, such as health issues and social events. These health issues ranged from the micro level, when people “don’t feel well” (21), to widespread disease common in Myanmar, such as malaria or dengue fever. Relatedly, they face disturbances inherent in taking care of others, including taking care of [their] grandchildren” (22) and attending to life cycle events. For example, a competitor noted they took a break unless they “have to go to weddings, funerals, or donation ceremony” (22).

Competitors also discussed widespread economic disturbances. Dealing with scarcity of products is very commonplace. A competitor noted, “sometimes, I can’t buy seeds. Seeds from China are sometimes out of stock” (15). They also face irregularities in selling patterns where “selling each day is not the same. Sometimes... there are also times I can’t sell more” (21), intertwined with wider shocks.

The market is also subject to significant political disturbances, including interference and instability. Despite individuals specifically not being asked about this topic for security reasons, the political aspect came up. There were accounts, for example, of market places being destroyed or relocated. In reaction to such an event, a competitor said, “At the time, we went to the... municipal office and do a demonstration for not moving this market... Because of that demonstration, I was in prison for... months” (28).

Product flows can also be halted, where “customs does not let the products go into Myanmar” (17), causing shortages.

While competitors often “don’t have time to talk” (18), competitors still communicate, which helps create and maintain market intelligence. A trader described, “We, the ones who are doing the same business as me, talk [about] many things” (14). For example, they discuss disturbances related to pricing changes and product scarcity, including, for example, whether “the prices are risen or fallen” (21). With this market intelligence, competitors can spot disturbances and react accordingly, which involves shaping the market to be collaborative.

4.3. ... becomes a collaborative one...

When these disturbances hit, competitors actively shape their market from competitive to collaborative. Competitors thus engage in market change, where the cooperation changes between actors, as does activities perceived as acceptable (e.g., Nenonen et al., 2019c), in order to...
drive market maintenance - or resilience.

In particular, competitors collectively engage in purposeful efforts to maintain the market’s functions and structure, activities that we call ‘resilience work’. This work involves three practices. These three practices are purposefully undertaken to maintain the structure and function of their market when it faces disturbances. They collectively deploy communally pooled resources across their meshed web of mutually reinforcing relationships in the face of disturbances. Both pooling and meshing are needed in order for deploying to happen. Meshing is the creating and maintaining of longstanding relationships over time, while pooling is the building up of resources at a communal level. When disturbances occur, competitors shift to communally deploying pooled resources, including labor, goods, and money, across their meshed relationships, described in turn below.

4.3.1. Deploying pooled labor across their meshed relationships

While “I do mine and they do theirs” (15) most of the time, competitors deploy community-held labor reserves when facing disturbances. This pooled labor is provided for those competitors that have forged relationships, what we have called meshing. In order to deploy the pooled resources in a responsive way, competitors build - or mesh - relationships with each other in a reciprocal and purposeful way. According to a competitor, “I have a good relationship with [my competitors]” (22). They are thus ‘familiar with all the people from the market’ (21). Some liken their competitors to family. For example, a competitor said, “We are familiar like real siblings” (25). This meshing supports the deploying of pooled labor.

Most commonly, many competitors “help each other selling the products when [a competitor] is away from her shop” (19), such as when facing social disturbances related to poor health or social obligations, or “helping… out with selling the products [the competitor] couldn’t sell” (18). A competitor explained, “Whenever we need help, we can ask help from each other” (15). Such occurrences were relayed by a competitor, who said, “Sometimes, if I finished selling out all my products, I helped them selling their products. Sometimes, they also come and sell for me.” (16).

In other words, they can draw upon a communally held store of labor when needed. Another competitor echoed this and said, “We are also helping each other take care of the shops when someone is away from their own shop” (23). Competitors created a communal pool of labor that is accessible, available, and flexible and draw up on this when disturbances hit.

Regarding the element of accessibility, competitors were located in close proximity to their competitors, where “there are so many people who are doing like me” (28). When asked where their competitors are, many competitors gestured to the people immediately around them, and explained that “most of the shops here in this market are selling like these. I think there are estimated about 10 to 15 shops. Even my neighbors sell like us” (30). As one said, “I have good relationship with people around me. For example, if I am busy distributing the lettuce to restaurants, they help me by selling my products” (12).

We saw these shops packed closely together, with competing shops either touching or having only a narrow opening for customers to be able to move through to a deeper row of competitors. The stalls often overlapped with neighboring stalls, which, in turn, were flanked by brick and mortar stores sharing walls, while areas in the suburbs bordered each other. A competitor noted, “We had to take our own place. A person can take one spot. We took two spots, one for me and one for my mom” (10). Locating next to their competitors means that they can step seamlessly into another competitor’s business when needed.

This pooled labor is also readily available. The competitors’ businesses remain open throughout the entire day, often from before dawn until late into the night, remaining physically at their place of business. All respondents gave details of long hours, where they maintain “the same routine every day” (9), where they “work every day… [their] daily life cycle” (1) if possible, thereby supporting availability. This ‘every day’ routine is largely broken only by disturbances, such as taking a “day off when… sick” (5). When this happens, they can draw upon their competitors, asking them to step into their businesses in the interim.

This communal labor pool is also flexible, as the competitors often engage in different roles, or “other jobs” (17) throughout their supply chain or their day, with great flexibility. Competitors sell to end consumers or to “people from restaurants who come and buy products” (23) and “big hotels” (29). Many also wholesale to other competitors (see Table 1), including selling from their market stalls or from their plantations, depending on the time of the day. This decision to “sell both the retail and wholesale” (11) provides flexibility.

Competitors have the necessary knowledge and skills to step into their competitors’ businesses. They have forged a fluid communal labor pool that they can execute with low transaction costs. The market-level consequences are that customers continue to get their products, and suppliers are able to continue moving their income-generating product.

4.3.2. Deploying pooled money across their meshed relationships

In addition to deploying pooled labor across their meshed relationships, competitors also deploy pooled money when facing disturbances. Competitors have built up financial assets at a communal level. Almost every interviewed actor ran or belonged to one or more grassroots groups.

4.3.2.1. Building communal money pools

In order for deploying pooled money across their meshed relationships, competitors engage in purposeful efforts to build a communal pool of labor, described in turn below.

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The competitors provide for a flexible market arrangement, allowing flows of money between customers, themselves, and (sometimes
completing) suppliers. The competitors’ collaboration impacts other market actors, where, without this work, customers could not delay payment, which would limit their access to needed quality and affordable products and, thereby, undermine welfare and jeopardize the income of suppliers.

4.3.3. Deploying pooled goods across their meshed relationships

In addition to deploying labor and money, competitors deploy their pooled communally held goods through purposefully borrowing, lending, buying, and selling goods to and from each other. While the interaction between the competitors is usually competitive, they change to a cooperative stance when facing disturbances. As such, they change their activities perceived as acceptable, an aspect of market change (e.g., Nenonen et al., 2019c). For example, a competitor said, “We share if the products are getting rare—“I give my customers to them” (14). A referral of this kind helps keep products flowing while reducing search costs for the [customer] to others. Saying things like, “I promise [customers] to keep providing products” (26), “We try to get mutual agreement first before dividing something” (19).

The second author, for example, observed competitors splitting up arriving goods to ensure that they and their competitors and, by extension, the respective customers, have access to at least some products during times of scarcity. This collaboration is in contrast to the rush to get the appropriate amount of the best quality products observed when there was no scarcity.

In addition, they also “refer” (10) to each other. This referral provides continued movement of products. As one said, “when they run out of seeds, [the wholesaling competitors] refers me to another place” (11). Another trader noted, “If I don’t have the quality products, I referred [the customer] to others. Saying things like, “my products are not in good quality, that’s why I’d go and buy from the other shop”” (11). This deploying is reciprocal, as a trader said, “I give my customers to them sometimes and they give their own customers to me sometimes, depending on the availability of the products” (14). A referral of this kind helps keep products flowing while reducing search costs for the customers, including both end customers and other wholesale-buying traders.

Overall, they “take from” (25), “buy from” (30), “exchange” (26), and resell needed products from competitors directly. This form of deploying requires that the competitors need to create and maintain relationships - meshing - and offer similar products. This is the case, where “all the sellers have the same products” (8). They purposefully “choose those products to sell” (4) by determining their product mix in such a way that “almost the whole market is selling the same products” (19). A competitor noted, “I think there will have more than 30 people selling the same products as me” (18). Our observations confirmed this, with many stores showing similar products.

Through their selection of substitutable products, they have, in effect, created a communal safety stock of products with their competitors that they can readily draw upon, rather than holding inventory individually. As such, instead of holding reserve inventory within their own enterprises, with its accompanying financial and spoilage risk, competitors have access to goods at a communal level that they can deploy in the face of disturbances.

4.4. … towards resilience

Competitors change the competitive environment to a collaborative one when facing disturbances. In other words, they engage in market shaping. This behavior maintains their market over time, and their meshing, pooling, and deploying contributes to this resilience. Two preconditions are necessary for resilience. First, the market has to both face and survive its disturbances (Masten & Reed, 2002). Second, the market has to maintain its functions and structure (Allenby & Fink, 2005). In this case, while some aspects of the market may evolve (e.g., the introduction of cell phones, just emerging in 2015), its core function and structure has continued, despite many disturbances. The function is for suppliers to provide food products to customers, and the structure is one characterized by a multiplicity of competitors.

The findings indicate that this market has both faced a myriad of disturbances and survived over time for “quite a long time” (9). This ongoing nature was discussed, where one individual, for example, said, “It has been working… I guess already about 15 to 20 years” (14). The competitors often linked this longevity generationally, where one said, “when I first came to the market, I was so young” (10) and another noted, “It has been quite a long time… When I was young, I came along with my mom to the market” (23). Despite its longevity, this market is not static. Rather, the market is dynamically changing, where the shaping of the market from competitive to collaborative in the face of disturbances ultimately helps the market to maintain its functions and structures - or resilience - over time, supported by the competitors’ work and associated practices.

Other market actors are impacted by the work of these competitors. As a competitor said, “I promise [customers] to keep providing products all the year round while keeping a good relationships with them” (12). The competitors’ work allows customers to avoid switching costs. Burnham, Frels, and Mahajan (2003) detailed costs faced by customers switching to new providers, such as convenience risks; search costs; and costs associated with loss of personal relationships with past suppliers. Due to the competitors’ work, customers avoid such costs while continuing to access affordable food. The deploying of resources also allows suppliers’ products to be continually sold, while removing costs associated with switching to new customers, thus maintaining livelihoods. In this way, the work of competitors helps to provide a safety net, one sorely needed in Myanmar. Taken together, this resilience work by competitors benefits actors in the market.

5. Discussion

5.1. Contribution to theory

The studied market is highly competitive, with purposeful efforts aimed at enticing and keeping customers on the basis of quality, price, and availability. However, when disturbances hit, this competitive nature of the market becomes collaborative. The market work of transforming markets from competitive to collaborative involves market...
change aspects found by Nenonen et al. (2019c). In particular, the competitors’ interaction and cooperation changed, as did the activities perceived as acceptable (e.g., from competitive to collaborative). From a practices perspective, these actions involve changing both normative and exchange practices (e.g., Kjellberg & Helgesson, 2007a). Regarding the former, the community accepted “guidelines for how the market should work according to some... actor(s)” (Kjellberg & Helgesson, 2007a, p. 143) changes (e.g., suspending competition to collaborate). Exchange practices also shift, where exchange parties (e.g., involving other competitors) and terms (e.g., delayed payment) change.

While Baker et al. (2019) found that market shaping can trigger market decline and market creation, our findings indicate that market shaping can also trigger market resilience. Competitors engage in purposeful actions to change their market temporarily from one of competition to one of collaboration towards supporting the market’s overall structure and function. In this way, market shaping can also serve to stabilize markets, where, perhaps paradoxically, change is needed to maintain them.

From a practices perspective, although people are often just coping with life’s demands, individual intentional activities can reverberate and trigger wider changes (Smets et al., 2017). In this case, the competitors shape their markets, which ultimately supports resilience. We thus build on Nenonen et al. (2014) who theorized that “the existence of carefully aligned sets of practices that allow market activity to continue uninterruptedly contributes to the market’s ability to retain form” (Nenonen et al., 2014, p. 278).

We also contribute to resilience literature by providing a model of market resilience. Past work has presented models of resilience. For example, Sutcliffe and Vogus (2003) created a model of organizational resilience, while Ponomarov and Holcomb (2009) present one of supply chain resilience. Both models denote how there is a response, supported by organization or supply chain capabilities respectively, in the face of ‘threats’ (Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003) or ‘events’ (Ponomarov & Holcomb, 2009), leading to a ‘positive adjustment’ (Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003) or ‘recovery’ (Ponomarov & Holcomb, 2009). At another level of abstraction, that of markets, we present a model of market resilience (Fig. 1).

Emerging from the data, we added specificity to generic ‘threats’ or ‘events’, by delineating specific disturbances (ecological, social, political, and economic). We choose the word ‘disturbance’, as it captures a wide range of situations that can interrupt markets, going beyond the more generic ‘events’ while less limited than ‘threats’, where threats usually refer to negative elements, and disturbances can include aspects such as life cycle events. We specify a market response, which occurs in the face of disturbances. As deploying denotes a response of adjustment and recovery in the face of specific disturbances, the previously proposed ‘positive adjustment’ (Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003) and ‘recovery’ (Ponomarov & Holcomb, 2009) are denoted at the market level by ‘deploying’. We identified market-specific practices necessary for such a response - deploying - to occur, namely the practices of meshing and pooling involving the resources of labor, money, and goods. This work cannot be separated from market shaping. Without pooling and meshing, there would be no way to shape the market to one of collaboration. Together, these ongoing practices of the resilience work supports market resilience, defined here as maintaining market functions and structures in the face of disturbances, drawing on the resilience definition by Allenby and Fink (2005).

We found that competitors, acting communally, shape their market from one of competition to one of collaboration when disturbances hit. This study thus has implications for cooperation. Although less studied in the cooperation literature, small organizations can engage in cooperation (Bouncken & Kraus, 2013). While on the surface the studied market can be said to be engaging in the simultaneous pursuit of cooperation and competition, which is the definition of cooperation (Bengtsson et al., 2010), a deeper look reveals that such cooperation is in reaction to disturbances. Bengtsson et al. (2010) asked for increased understanding of what forces push competitors towards collaboration, and our study thus adds nuances to the coopetition literature by highlighting a range of disturbances that can prompt the shaping of the market to a more collaborative one. Future studies should focus on the intersection of coopetition, marketing shaping, and resilience, especially in developing countries.

5.2. Contribution to managers

Competition can come not only from surprising directions (Mele et al., 2015), but can also be a potential source of resilience. Markets are constructed through heterogeneous and distributed contributions (Araujo, 2007), where they are “products of investments... accessible to many and constitute a form of public good” (Loasby 1999, p. 119) (as cited in Araujo, 2007, p. 221). These competitors invest in their market, and shape it, so ensuring delivery of quality goods and a flow of needed money to their suppliers and the (end) customers. Managers can learn from these traders, where small firms, especially those in developing contexts, face limited resources while dealing with a variety of disruptions (Parker & Ameen, 2018) and are, therefore, experts in this area.

To gain similar benefits, managers can explore how they may engage in market shaping in times of disturbances, including how they can cultivate such communal practices with their competitors. Companies can develop their relationships with their competitors, including strengthening communication with them. Indeed, being aware of disruptions can support firm resilience (Parker & Ameen, 2018), and competitors can help provide such market intelligence. Disturbances from issues such as the novel coronavirus, climate change, and growing inequality are on the rise, suggesting an urgent need for firms to do so.

5.3. Limitations and future research

A limitation of this study is that the competitors forged ongoing relationship over a number of years, where competitors, suppliers, and customers know each other and can also be neighbors, friends, and family members. In other words, this context exhibited a high density of exchange relationships. These relationships support, and are part of, collective action. While communities characterized by strong social ties are more likely to weather disturbances (see Rao & Greve, 2018), future studies need to seek to further understand the role of social ties - whether weak or strong - in market shaping and its outcomes.

Another limitation of this study, as is the case in any qualitative research, is that it is likely to be ‘specific to a small number of particular environment and individuals” (Shenton, 2004, p. 69). However, it may hold the prospect of transferability to other contexts (i.e., Shenton, 2004) if using similar theoretical sampling and approaching theoretically similar contexts. Billions of people live in situations characterized by a multiplicity of small-scale entrepreneurs (Banerjee & Duflo, 2007). For example, as observed anecdotally by the authors, multiple and tightly-knit competitors were evident in open-air markets in Jamaica.
and in retailers in Italy. Like Lindeman (2012), we also add our voice to encouraging future research that engages in comparisons across markets that may consist of similar practices.

Cooperatives could also be an important group to investigate. While this present market was not a cooperative, the roles of cooperatives were found to have an implication for resilience (see Rao & Greve, 2018). Many other groups have displayed enormous resilience in their markets, including Black business communities in the United States, displaced peoples in their host countries, and Indigenous communities around the globe, all important groups for future research on resilience. Relatedly, Lindeman (2014) argues that it is important to recognize the role that communities can play in shaping markets, as “doers, deciders, and designers of markets” (p. 12), especially in resource-scarce situations. Future research could investigate whether under conditions other such groups engage in market shaping, and look at the outcomes thereof, including resilience.

In addition, this present study took an inductive approach led by researchers who are outsiders to the context. To help balance this limitation, future studies can follow Polsa (2013) recommendations and seek to incorporate multiple data collection methods that integrate deductive elements. Such work could also involve other actors. While we sought to include a range of informants, including vegetable and seed (whole)sellers, including those who also sometimes acted as the supplying plantation farmers at some point of the day, all participants engaged in retailing functions. Understanding a range of actors within the market could be useful. For example, further studies on the consequences for customers would be useful, especially any drawbacks, where some competitor actions in this present study might be viewed as anti-competitive behavior, especially in other contexts. However, it could be that severe or frequent disturbances requires such competitor collaboration. For example, in the face of the novel coronavirus crisis, the United Kingdom relaxed competition laws to allow competing retailers to cooperate by allowing them to share data, distribution channels, and staff to continue product movement and sales (Butler, 2020, March 19).

While the findings indicate that there is a change from competitive to collaborative, market stability versus change is thought to be less about pendulum movements, and more about “spiral-like development” (which) eventually led the entire market to take on another form (Nenonen et al., 2014, p. 12, italics removed). In other words, markets, and the practices that shape them, are constantly evolving (Araujo et al., 2008), and sometimes in surprising directions (Kjellberg & Helgesson, 2006). Markets can experience inertia (Nenonen et al., 2014), when, for example, sunk costs of resource use and interdependencies can cause businesses and markets to be resistant to change (Storbakca & Nenonen, 2011). While some resistance to change is needed, it can also tip into market decline. Although this market has avoided failure due to the market shaping of competitors, it might not be able to weather all future disturbances. We need to grow in our understanding of tipping points. Taken together, we implore future researchers to continue work at the nexus of disturbances, market resilience, and market shaping, including with a practices perspective.

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