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The Increased Value in Appealing to Brand Community Members
- *A Comparison with Regular Customers*

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Abstract

Title: The Increased Value in Appealing to Brand Community Members - A Comparison with Regular Customers

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Keywords: Brand Communities, Brand Value, Fashion Brands, Qualitative Research

Thesis Purpose: Identifying differences in brand value between fashion brand community members compared to regular customers in order to see value-enhancing traits.

Methodology: Qualitative, Abductive and Intensive Research based on 9 semi-structured interviews.

Theoretical Perspective: Brand communities: the definition of brand communities, the types of brand communities, the relationship of consumers and the brand in brand communities and online brand communities. The value of a brand: the definition of brand value, co-creation of brand value and brand co-value creation within a brand community and online.

Findings: The findings of this study consist of six central concepts within areas such as brand image, brand communication and the co-creation of value, that illustrate the perceived increased value perception of fashion brand community members in comparison to being a regular customer.

Implications: New insights and basis for further research within the subject.

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1. Introduction

This thesis has been written at the Master's programme in International Marketing & Brand Management at Lund University. An exploratory study has been conducted to gain more insights within the phenomenon of brand communities within fashion brands and the perceived value of such brands. Semi-structured interviews have been performed to analyse the consumers' perception of brand value in brand communities in comparison to brands where they do not consider themselves part of the brand community, in order to be able to clarify direct factors differentiating. This has been done to gain further insight into brand communities online, which are becoming increasingly relevant in the digitized world.

1.1 Background

“Imagine having customers that continue to engage with you beyond your products. This is a sign of a loyal brand community, and some of the most successful businesses are strong because of it.” - Tim Peckover (2020)

The fashion industry is on the constant rise: the global apparel market was valued to 1.5 trillion U.S. dollars in 2020 and it is projected to grow in value to 2.25 trillion dollars by 2025, showing that the demand for new clothing is continuing to grow (Statista, 2021). Simultaneously, it has been undergoing a lot of changes during a short period of time. Especially digitalisation and, more specifically social media, which experienced a significant increase in usage due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, have changed the way the fashion industry promotes and communicates itself, essentially (Gonzalo, Harreis, Sanchez Altable & Villepelet, 2020). According to Tankovska (2021), more than 3.6 billion people worldwide have been active on social media. The researcher expects that this number will increase to approximately 4.41 billion in 2025 (Tankovska, 2021). As the global population contains 7.9 billion people, that means that almost half of the global population will be active on social media by 2025 (Worldometers, n.d.). This is incredibly impactful for any brand. According to Mau (2018), Instagram is one of those social media platforms that is changing the fashion industry. A strong presence on the platform is essential in order to attain critical acclaim for fashion brands (Mau, 2018). Instagram is as of now ranked as one of the top 6 social networks worldwide with 1 billion worldwide users monthly, with a high estimated growth of +3,2% in 2021 for US Instagram users (Dean, 2021). The rise of digitalization has increased both opportunities and threats for companies and consumers in the way they consume information and products. According to Lay (2021), the role of the consumer has changed from being a passive observer to having established dominance. While on the downside, social media platforms allow the spread of criticism towards brands as well as an increased competition

due to smaller, low-budget fashion brands being able to compete on a global level, companies are also given the opportunity to gather real, authentic customer feedback and use influencers and their network to expand their target group and let them lead the way (Lay, 2021). Fashion brands can use the power of social media and the direct contact with their customers to analyze current and upcoming consumer trends, gather feedback and establish a dialogue with the customer. Sometimes this direct contact among the brand and its consumers is so close, it could be considered a community (Houalla, 2020).

A brand community is a concept that is becoming increasingly relevant both for consumers and companies in today's fast paced world (Karpis, 2018). According to Karpis (2018), people are now craving communities more than ever and it is critical for companies to take this into account to attain success. By building brand communities, companies can achieve increased brand awareness, provide customer discovery, find customer success and foster brand loyalty (Karpis, 2018). If done right, fashion brands can also use their brand community to co-create and ideally increase the perceived value of the brand.

1.2 Problem Formulation/Relevance

Marketing activities of brands that are active on social media platforms are reaching a tremendously large number of target group members with whom they can communicate directly. As was described in *1.1 Background*, this means that they can also gather direct feedback or even co-create the value of their brand. However, this does not happen with just anyone who is active online. In order to really profit from the growing number of people on social media, brands need to filter the ones who are their actual customers. To gather these customers, brands can build brand communities. Brand communities are, according to Muniz & O'Guinn (2001) "(...) a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand". Some research on brand community management has been done already. Ha (2018) is investigating the effects that an online brand community has on value creation practices by using four value creation practices: social networking, impression management, community engagement and brand use, and the mediating effects of community loyalty. Findings showed that the online brand community has the strongest influence on social networking and it also showed the importance of community loyalty to fully nurture the relationship between the value creation practices and the online brand community (Ha, 2018). This shows: brand communities should be of significant interest for brands.

When offering an online platform for consumers to gather, people are free to join, with more and more people having access to the internet and increasingly more people being active on social

media, as was previously described. One could hence assume that already existing brand admirers will naturally join the brand community if they are aware of it. Once the brand admirers join the community, they can, through their own network, communicate with other individuals and thereby potentially do word-of-mouth promotion and help to boost people's awareness of the brand (Woisetschläger, Hartleb & Blut, 2008). Hence, the bigger the community, the better. So, how can a brand community be proactively increased by the brand? How can regular customers of the brand be attracted to join the community? What is the added value that members see in a brand community and what is the missing gap for regular customers?

It has been proven in earlier studies how important brand communities are for value creation for companies, both online and offline. Also, previous studies show how the perceived value of one particular brand differs from person to person and hence also from a brand community member to a regular customer. However, the authors have not found any research about what the difference in perception for the consumer is. It remains unknown if a particular factor exists that differentiates the perceived value of any brand as a brand community member in comparison to being a regular customer.

1.3 Research Purpose and Question

This is a qualitative research study that has the aim to uncover the perceived value of a fashion brand from the perspective of a brand community member in contrast to being a regular customer. This study shall result in a greater understanding of the difference between the two. This research purpose is addressed by answering the following question:

“How do consumers perceive the brand value in fashion brand communities in comparison to other brands?”

To answer the question, the focus will lie on the consumer's perspective to offer authentic consumer insights. In order to gain an actual comparison from the consumer's point of view and find out if a particular factor exists that differentiates the perceived value of any brand as a brand community member in comparison to being a regular customer, the comparison will not be done by comparing brand community members to regular customers from the same brand, but instead by asking consumers within the fashion industry to do the comparison themselves: what makes them become a community member of one brand and keeps them from becoming one of another? The insights shall offer subjective opinions from the consumer perspective and more generalizable insights into a consumer's decision to join a fashion brand community or not. Hence, this study is not aimed to gather insights into the value of one particular brand, but instead to gather insights

into the fashion consumers value perception from the perspective of being a community member in comparison to being a regular customer.

1.4 Research Motivation

The research question is motivated by the current knowledge gap in research about brand value creation with (online) brand community members within the fashion industry. As previously mentioned, fashion marketers can rely on an extensive amount of studies that focus on a broader aspect of the research question, such as brand community management or value creation. However, there is no study that focuses on this specific combination and method which might lead to different insights. Hence, there is currently a knowledge gap when it comes to insights on value creation for and with brand community members within the fashion industry.

1.5 Research Contribution

The aim of this research is to gather additional insights on the value creation of fashion brands through the inclusion of their brand communities. It is being made through a comparison with another brand where the interviewee is not a brand community member, to define specific values added by brand community membership. This research will contribute to the already extensive research about brand value in brand communities, by trying to pinpoint more exact, differentiating factors.

1.6 Research Limitations

This study has potential limitations. The researchers have experienced a limited access to the geographic scope of participants: while the research does not focus on one specific culture, the research participants of this study will still only represent a limited amount of cultures, more specifically from northern European countries. All interviewees are female, also making it irrelevant to draw a generalizable conclusion over genders.

Despite these limitations, the authors consider this research to be contributing with some insight about value creation in brand communities in the form of general insights.

1.7 Outline of the Thesis

In order to answer the previously defined research question, the following study will be approached by first gathering insights from several different literature sources, which are listed in a matrix

(see: *Appendix 1: Literature and Theory Matrix*). Thereafter, the methodology of the study is explained, defining the research approach, design, the data collection method, as well as an explanation for why the study is valid and reliable. Following, the research findings will be analysed and interpreted. These findings are the basis for an elaborate discussion where the authors refer back to the literature review to explore which findings match or contradict the insights from previous studies and which insights are new or could be considered an extension to previous findings. Based on this, the last part of the paper is a conclusion, which refers back to the initial research aims, answers the research question and offers suggestions for future research.

2. Literature and Theory Review

As a basis for the study, lectures, articles and books have been reviewed, analysed and compared to set a theoretical foundation for the study and identify gaps and opportunities in the current literature (see *Appendix 1: Literature and Theory Matrix*). Furthermore, relevant theories have been reviewed to set a research framework and guidelines for the study. This review contains findings from existing literature and theories about brand communities and the value of brands, which are the two focus topics of this study. The chapter finishes with a framework that summarizes the most important findings and thereby sets the basis for the study.

2.1 Brand communities

The narrow context in which the key concept of value creation will be studied, are brand communities. University lectures, articles and books surrounding this topic have been collected to understand the current state of research about brand communities. This literature was gathered with four objectives in mind:

1. to understand what brand communities, by definition, are
2. to understand which types of brand communities exist
3. to understand the relationship of consumers and the brand in brand communities
4. to understand online brand communities

2.1.1 The definition of brand communities

A brand community is, according to Muniz & O’Guinn (2001) “a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand”. Such a brand community evolved from the concept of a “traditional” community. According to Bertilsson (2020), there are modern and postmodern views of communities. While the former are

characterized as solid communities which serve as a subject of identification, the latter are characterized by liquidity, interaction and an emotional aspect (Bertilsson, 2020). The strong interest in community membership can be traced back to basic needs such as security, identity formation and a feeling of belonging (Bertilsson, 2020). The concept of a community should be of interest to any marketer and brand, as it is of strong interest for consumers. According to Bertilsson (2020), consumers enjoy the social aspect of communities and draw their knowledge about brands from such. Ideally, such a brand membership can even lead to a stronger brand loyalty (Bertilsson, 2020). Such a brand community is, according to Muniz & O’Guinn (2001), characterized by organized interactions among its members, a strong support for individuality and, most importantly, three key markers: shared consciousness, rituals/traditions and a shared moral responsibility. These three markers consist of sub-concepts that support the community feeling (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001):

shared consciousness

- ❖ we-ness, legitimacy, oppositional brand loyalty

rituals and traditions

- ❖ greeting rituals
- ❖ celebrating the brand’s history
- ❖ sharing brand stories

moral responsibility

- ❖ integrating & retaining members
- ❖ assisting in the use of the brand

According to Muniz and O’Guinn (2001), the most important factor of a brand community is some type of consciousness and belonging. The members of a community feel a connection and a “we” feeling together with a feeling of a relation to the other members, despite never having met them. Legitimacy is also an important factor, where members of the community are defining who is a true member or not, by using factors such as knowledge of the brand or failure to appreciate the brand community’s culture, rituals, history, traditions and symbols. Membership is not denied, but there exists a hierarchy (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). The rituals and traditions of a brand community through social processes are also a defining factor, since they are transferred and understood by members of the community. They are usually based on shared consumption experiences and they found the culture of the community. Brand communities celebrate the history of the brand and they are also sharing brand stories and myths, building a deeper meaning and connection for the community (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). A sense of duty is also underbuilding

the brand community by a shared moral responsibility. This creates the collectivity and creates group cohesion and it can be done by integrating and retaining members and assisting in the use of the brand by looking out for other members and helping them (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001).

It is also important not to confuse brand communities with brand publics. Brand publics are, according to Arvidsson & Caliandro (2015), a concept of social interaction which is united by mediation artefacts and not bound to actual interaction among the brand public members, whereas brand community members interact with each other, create a common identity and add a “linking value” too the brand. When looking into online brand communities, it is particularly important to differentiate such from social media publics, which are, according to Arvidsson & Caliandro (2015):

- ❖ *like crowds*

- While publics are connected by continuously being connected through artefacts and media devices, crowds are a physical gatherings which are based on affect or sometimes even coincidences

- ❖ *based on collectively sharing personal opinions and ideas*

- A larger amount of diverse, individual views which collectively aggregate a shared orientation towards a common source of identity

It is furthermore important to ensure that one does not mistake brand communities with “tribes”. According to Bertilsson & Tarnovskaya (2017), tribes differ from brand communities in the fact that they are temporary and not based on a shared admiration for and identification with a brand or ritual (Bertilsson & Tarnovskaya, 2017).

2.1.2 Types of brand communities

Brand communities, as they were previously described, consist in various different forms and types. Three examples of brand communities are, according to (Bertilsson, 2020), lifestyle brands, community and subcultures. These can be understood as a graduation of community feeling intensity: while the first is an example where the only commonality among affiliated is the same symbolic expression of a lifestyle, the second describes an actual interaction among members, without a common community culture, however. Lastly, a subculture is, according to (Bertilsson, 2020) a community where the members have created their own, shared rituals and social structures. Another approach to define and distinguish different types of brand communities is categorizing them into on- and offline communities (Bertilsson & Tarnovskaya, 2017). Online brand

communities can be identified by the strong intentional social interaction, the willingness of users to communicate conflicts openly and the possibility for a large community size (Bertilsson & Tarnovskaya, 2017). On- and offline brand communities can, according to Bertilsson & Tarnovskaya (2017) be differentiated in three ways:

❖ *The way they interact*

Online brand community members interact more purposely directly with each other than offline brand community members

❖ *The environment*

Online brand community members are more comfortable to carry out conflicts openly than offline brand community members

❖ *The scope*

Online brand communities allow for more people to join the community

In 2.1.4 *Online brand communities* we will elaborate more on online brand communities.

Another way to distinguish brand communities is to categorize them into open and closed communities: the first is more about an interaction where members gather to share personal opinions and come and go, whereas the latter is a community that is based on a (longterm) shared admiration of a brand (Bertilsson & Tarnovskaya, 2017).

2.1.3 The relationship of consumers and the brand in brand communities

In order to fully understand the concept of brand communities, it is important to consider the intentions of the consumer (i.e. the brand community members). According to Bertilsson & Tarnovskaya (2017), consumers join brand communities as they can use it as a place to learn more about the brand they admire and identify socially with like-minded professionals in the field (Bertilsson & Tarnovskaya, 2017). Furthermore, they can co-create the value of the brand, which will be further elaborated on in 2.2.2 *Co-creation of brand value* (Bertilsson & Tarnovskaya, 2017).

McAlexander, Schouten & Koenig (2002) include the customer as a central aspect within the brand community and offer a perspective that is based on their perception. They define a brand community as a framework which is built on relationships among customers and the brand, the firm, the product and among the fellow customers. The perspective is consumer-centric and

focusing on the customer and its experiences and meaningfulness around the community rather than the brand. According to the authors, brand communities have several different dimensions such as geographic concentration, social context and temporality, which offers a more dynamic, vital understanding of a brand community (McAlexander et al., 2002). McAlexander, Schouten & Koenig (2002) show that brand communities can be especially positively supported through proactively creating shared consumer experiences in order to build or maintain customer loyalty, which the authors consider a key aspect within strong brand communities.

But what are “strong” brand communities? Fournier (1998) argues that such are based on (pro) active relationship management from the brand’s side. In order to achieve such successful partnership between the brand and its consumers, Fournier (1998) provides a theoretical framework which helps marketers to characterize and understand different types of consumer-brand relationships, with a particular focus on brand loyalty and brand personality. The framework consists of six elements listed in the so-called brand relationship quality model (BRQ). This includes the following: love and passion, self-connection, interdependence, commitment, intimacy, and brand participant quality. Fournier (1998) argues that this model helps brands to evaluate the strength of a consumer-brand relationship. Once evaluated, brands can thereby understand not only how the relationship toward the customer is being developed but also detect where its weaknesses are. The framework consists of six elements:

Love and passion

A strong relationship between any two parties, in this case between the brand and the consumer, is based on affection and love between the two.

Self-connection

Is about the extent to which the brand offers its customers identity-supporting aspects which help the consumer to express themselves.

Interdependence

A relationship between the brand and its consumers should be two-way, consisting of frequent interactions; ideally even rituals.

Commitment

Another major aspect of a brand-consumer relationship is the commitment towards the respective party, leading to support and longevity.

Intimacy

The brand-consumer relationship should consist of a high believe in each other, ideally a superior knowledge of the brand from the customer's side and a general, strong bond between the two.

Brand participant quality

The brand participant quality shows the consumer's judgment of the brand's performance, and its dependability, reliability and predictability as a partner.

Fournier (1998) lists three types of stresses that allow concern for a break in the relationship: partner-oriented-, environmental- and relational stress.

Partner-oriented stress

- ❖ Through either personally-induced (stress is based on change in personality, needs, wants, etc.) or managerially imposed stressors (stress is based on brand decision)

Environmental stress

- ❖ Through either situationally-imposed stressors (stress is based on physical / geographical situation change) or intrusion of alternatives (stress is based on new, better alternative being introduced)

Relational stress

- ❖ Stress is based on personal, relational failure, neglect or loss in trust

2.1.4 Online brand communities

As was stated in the introduction, this study has a focus on brand communities which operate online. Therefore it is crucial to acknowledge Lawrence's (2011) findings that companies tend to confuse customers with online community members when using the term 'social customer relationship management'. The author stresses that online community members are not necessarily paying customers of the brand. Lawrence (2011) hence coined a new term called "community relationship management (CoRM)" in which members are characterized as connecting, conversing, creating and collaborating online. Understanding this difference is crucial, when doing the study in order to answer the research question fully.

Being aware of this difference can be used to avoid the difficulty for brands to keep individual customers or "fans" engaged and entertained online (Rosenthal & Brito, 2017). A virtual brand community can help brands to increase their customer engagement. Rosenthal and Brito (2017) list that for such a virtual community creation aspects such as information exchange, communication and establishment of cultural norms are key. They also state that it might help the

brand to have celebrities among the community members in order to push the social interactions and practices (Rosenthal & Brito, 2017).

Furthermore, it is important to understand the actual potential that the online environment entails, the so-called “Online Effect” (Bertilsson & Tarnovskaya, 2017). According to Bertilsson & Tarnovskaya (2017), traditional boundaries of brand communities can easily be crossed due to technological innovations. These new technologies change the entire culture of some (brand) communities, allowing members to communicate with different, new media and in different spaces (on- and offline) (Bertilsson & Tarnovskaya, 2017).

2.2. The value of a brand

As the core of the study will be to gather insights about value creation, several articles have been collected to understand the current state of research about this topic. This literature was gathered with three objectives in mind:

1. to understand what brand value, by definition, is
2. to understand how this brand value creation within a community matures into a “co-creation” process
3. to understand how brand value is (co-) created within a brand community

2.2.1 The definition of brand value

The term “value” is a rather broad, subjective and intangible term. The term “value” is interpreted in various different ways and from various different perspectives. One perspective approaches the idea of the value of a brand as one that emanates from the consumer. According to Franzen & Moriarty (2008), the consumer’s personal and cultural value have a strong impact on their buying decision. Sheth, Newman and Gross (1991) go even further and more specific by saying that any brand is a system of values. According to the authors, there are five so-called consumption values that influence the consumer’s brand choice behavior (Sheth et al., 1991):

❖ *Functional values*

Are values about the functional, physical fulfillment of the product or service

❖ *Conditional values*

Are based on external circumstances, such as political, physical or economical situations

- ❖ *Social values*
Are values that have a positive impact on the consumer's social status

- ❖ *Emotional values*
Are values related to affection and emotion

- ❖ *Epistemic values*
Are values that are related to the uniqueness or newness of a product

This concept hence suggests that various different types of values exist that influence how the customer perceives the brand. This concept of a brand image, which is about the customer's connection, emotional connection and personal experience with the brand, is also the first part of the so-called brand value chain (Bertilsson & Tarnovskaya, 2017). This model illustrates how a company can use their strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities to create (economic) value (Bertilsson & Tarnovskaya, 2017). The second part of the brand value chain is about the customer's buying behavior and brand loyalty (Bertilsson & Tarnovskaya, 2017). A strong brand has a target group with a strong will to buy the product or service and the acceptance to pay a higher price than for comparable alternatives (Bertilsson & Tarnovskaya, 2017). Thereupon, the final concept that is grounded on the concept of brand image and brand strength is brand value.

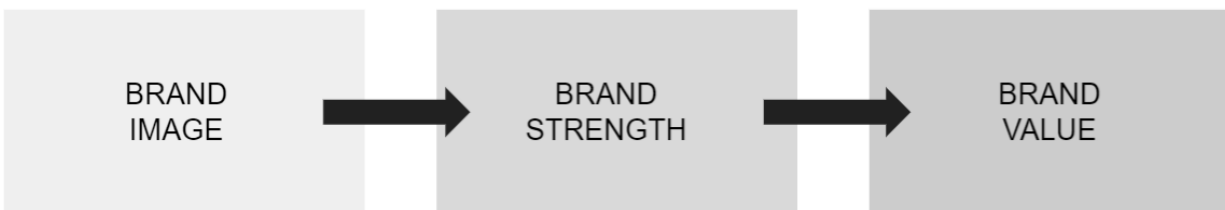


Figure 1: The Brand Value Chain

Anselmsson & Bondesson (2015) define brand value as a concept that has the potential to push the sales of the firm. According to the authors, brand value consists of three dimensions. These dimensions are, according to Anselmsson & Bondesson (2015), related to the firm's performance on the market. The authors define brand value as an ability to enhance, accelerate and / or sustain economic growth:

- ❖ *Enhance*
The amount of sales

- ❖ *Accelerate*
The speed of sales

- ❖ *Sustain*
The longevity of sales and loyalty of customers

Together the three concepts (brand image, brand strength and brand value) form the brand value (or brand equity) chain (see *Figure 1: The Brand Value Chain*).

2.2.2 Co-creation of brand value

Co-Creation of value is, according to Bertilsson & Tarnovskaya (2017) a collaborative process in which a brand and their consumers create the value of the brand together. This co-creation process can, according to Bertilsson & Tarnovskaya (2017) be approached from three different perspectives:

- ❖ The managerial perspective
- ❖ The community perspective
- ❖ The critical perspective

The managerial perspective describes how the co-creation process can be navigated, regulated and managed from the brand's side (Bertilsson & Tarnovskaya, 2017). The critical perspective describes the co-creation from a critical marketing perspective (Bertilsson & Tarnovskaya, 2017). When talking about the value of a brand within a community environment, it is important to understand that such is not a one-way process anymore but a collaborative co-creation process among the firm and its stakeholders (Bertilsson & Tarnovskaya, 2017). That is the community perspective. Within a brand community, the value of the brand is co-created among brand community members who share rituals, traditions and experiences surrounding the brand (Bertilsson & Tarnovskaya, 2017).

This value co-creation can happen with or without the awareness of both the brand-owning firm and their consumers. Grönroos, Strandvik and Heinonen (2015) list different types of value creations which depend on the consumer's and brand's awareness about the co-creation process: intentional value co-creation, provider-driven value co-creation, customer-driven value co-creation and spontaneous value co-creation.

intentional value co-creation

- ❖ In this case, both the customer and the service-provider co-create intentionally

provider-driven value co-creation

- ❖ while the customer is unaware of the co-creation process, the service-provider does it intentionally

customer-driven value co-creation

- ❖ while the customer is aware of the co-creation process, the service-provider does not participate intentionally

spontaneous value co-creation

- ❖ the customer and the service-provider are both participating unintentionally in the co-creation process

The researchers stress that, ideally, the co-creation of value should be consciously defined. The authors also stress that value co-creation should be tackled in a reflective manner to avoid dysfunctionalities and confusion.

Kennedy and Guzman (2016) are taking an approach to retrieving insights about value creation: the paper offers insights into the concept of co-creation of value from both the consumer's and the company's perspective to help both understand the concept of co-creation of value better. Even though the paper could be understood as an advice giving paper to both parties, i.e. the company and the consumer, it is ultimately the most profitable for marketers, as it offers a holistic approach to value co-creation by considering the needs and wants of both parties included.

2.2.3 Brand co-value creation within a brand community and online

Considering the so far gathered knowledge about brand communities and the co-creation of brand value, one might wonder how to bring them together. Jensen Schau, Muñoz and Arnould (2009) offer a set of value-creating practices, based on research made within nine brand communities. Such value-creating practices should ideally, according to the researchers, entail the following: common procedures and rules, consumption projects which are appropriate to the community culture and an emotional commitment from its practitioners (Jensen Schau et al., 2009). The value-creating practices that they offer are categorized into four themes (Jensen Schau et al., 2009):

Social Networking

- ❖ Welcoming
- ❖ Empathizing
- ❖ Governing

Impression Management

- ❖ Evangelizing
- ❖ Justifying

Brand Use

- ❖ Customizing
- ❖ Grooming
- ❖ Commoditizing

Community Engagement

- ❖ Documenting
- ❖ Badging
- ❖ Milestoning
- ❖ Staking

These value-creating practices are general, and hence not bound to an online or offline environment. Pütter (2017) stresses that today’s focus on digital media and specifically social media platforms have changed the interaction between brands and their consumers. According to the author, it is crucial for brands to have a strategic approach on their social media platforms in order to maintain a competitive advantage. Thereby, brands can be in control over their customer’s brand perception and, ultimately, their buying intentions.

2.3. Summary and research framework

Topic	Sub-Topic	Key findings
Brand Communities	Definition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ are not bound to geographical locations ❖ are based on a feeling of security, identity formation and belonging ❖ Brand community members share consciousness, rituals/traditions and a moral responsibility ❖ are not brand publics ❖ are not tribes

	Types	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ lifestyle brands, community and subcultures differ in their community feeling intensity ❖ on- and offline communities differ in the way they interact, the (emotional) environment and the scope ❖ can be open or closed
	Brand-Consumer Relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ brand manager can supported brand communities through proactively creating shared consumer experiences to build or maintain customer loyalty ❖ strong brand communities are characterized customer loyalty ❖ the quality is an interplay of six dimensions: passion, self-connection, interdependence, commitment, intimacy, brand participant quality ❖ the relationship is at risk when it experiences partner-oriented, environmental or relational stress
	Online Brand Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ online community members are not necessarily social customers ❖ having celebrities among the community members can help to push the social interactions and practices ❖ information exchange, communication and establishment of cultural norms are key ❖ online-Effect: new technologies change the entire culture of some (brand) communities, allowing members so communicate with different, new media and in different spaces
Brand Value	Definition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ personal and cultural value have a strong impact on their buying decision ❖ Consumption value have an impact on the buying behavior: Functional,conditional, social, emotional, epistemic values ❖ brand value is based on the brand image and brand strength ❖ brand value can enhance, accelerate and / or sustain economic growth
	Value Co-Creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ three perspectives on value co-creation: managerial, community and critical perspective

		❖ the process can be intentional, provider-driven, customer-driven or spontaneous
	Value Co-Creation in Brand Communities	❖ Value-creating practices are <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Social Networking ➢ Impression Management ➢ Brand Use ➢ Community Engagement

Figure 2: Summary of the literature and theory review

Based on these findings, a theoretical framework has been created to summarize the current state of knowledge derived from existing literature and theory. This will serve as a base for the study.

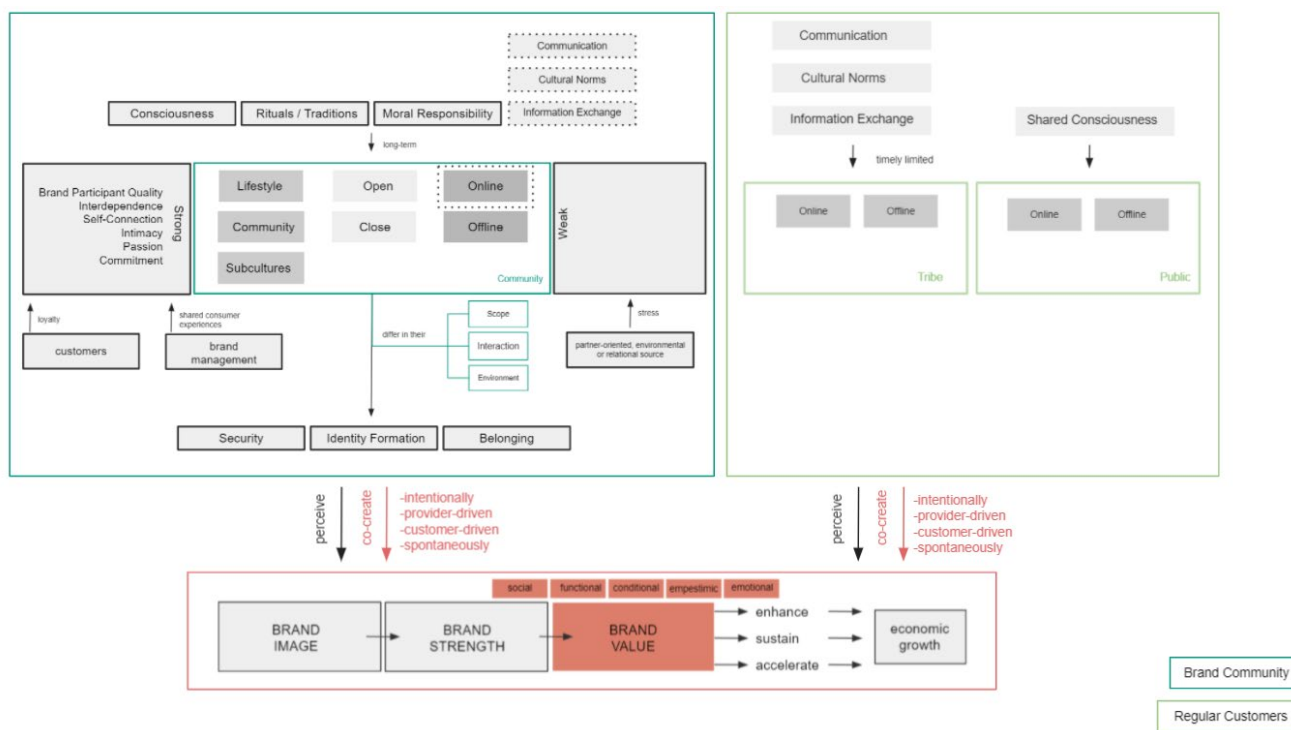


Figure 3: The Research Framework

3. Methodology

This chapter lists the methodological framework of the thesis study. The methodology is divided into eight parts: the philosophical background of the study, the research approach, the research design, the sampling approach, the data collection, the analysis, the validity, reliability and generalizability statement and lastly the research ethics. This section will elaborately explain the process and structure of the study. The research purpose is, as was previously described in the

introduction of qualitative nature, and defined to answer the research question “*How do consumers perceive the brand value in fashion brand communities in comparison to other brands?*” (see: 1.3 *Research Purpose and Question*). This purpose shall be approached in a way that aims to gather the required research results.

3.1. Research Philosophy

According to Lehaney and Vinten (1994) “A research philosophy is a belief about the way in which data about a phenomenon should be gathered, analyzed and used”. This section shall describe the approach to the study from a philosophical perspective. The research philosophy is shaped by two components: the ontology component and the epistemology component.

3.1.1 An introduction to ontology

The ontology component asks the question “what is reality?” (Nilsson, 2021a). Within this component there are several different beliefs. The most common are realism, internal realism, relativism and nominalism (Nilsson, 2021a).

Realism

The idea of realism describes the assumption that reality is an independent concept which does not rely on human perception (Dudovsky, n.d.a).

Internal realism

The concept of internal realism describes that reality is based on concrete facts which are difficult to examine and reveal (Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2015).

Relativism

Relativism describes the idea that numerous truths exist and reality depends on the observer (Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2015).

Nominalism

Nominalism describes that a general, external truth does not exist and that it is entirely created by humans (Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2015).

3.1.1.1 Relativist Ontology

For this thesis study, the relativist ontological view has been chosen as the most suitable. As was previously described, this view describes that several different ideas of what “reality” is, exist, depending on the individual (Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2015). This view is suitable for this study, as the consumer-perceived value of brands will be studied. This means that no individual, generalizable, objective truth shall be explored but the subjective perceptions of various individuals.

3.1.2 An introduction to epistemology

The epistemology approach focuses on the “knowledge about the nature of the world” (Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2015). Hence, it asks the question “What is knowledge?” (Nilsson, 2021a). Within this approach there are, again, several different beliefs. Among them are: positivism and constructivism (Nilsson, 2021a).

Positivism

Positivism is characterized by believing in measurable facts as knowledge in an objective way (Dudovsky, n.d.b).

Constructivism

The constructionist belief says that “knowledge is personally and socially constructed” (Miller and Driver, 1987) and “knowledge is actively constructed by the cognising subject, not passively received from the environment” (Lerman, 1989).

3.1.2.1 Constructionist Epistemology

As this thesis study is built with the aim of gathering subjective consumer insights, it also has a constructionist epistemology approach. The central concept of epistemology, that is to be used in this study, is “belief”. Whereas the concept of “truth” requires a match between internal beliefs and external reality, the mere concept of “belief” does not distinguish among (externally, realistically considered) truth and falseness but springs from internal thoughts and understandings (Dretske, 2000). With a constructionist epistemological research approach, the customers' perceived (and constructed) reality of the value of the brands that they consider themselves to be a part of, can be understood.

3.2 Research Approach

In this section, the combination of methods that are being used to reach the research purpose (*see: 1.3 Research Purpose and Question*) are listed.

3.2.1 Qualitative research

The study is based on a qualitative approach. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), in the qualitative research approach, “researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.”. This applies to this study, as the qualitative research approach is designed to understand consumer behaviour and their subjective perception based on narrations from the consumer’s perspective, instead of gathering fixed and measurable facts which are analysed through statistics (McLeod, 2019).

3.2.2 Abductive research

As this study does not aim to test an existing theory, but instead is based on observational consumer insights, from which generalisations are formulated, a theory is developed and hence, the research approach for this study is based on an inductive approach. Hence, this study will be rooted in particular instances, which are being observed and then go through an induction with the aim to result in a general principle (Nilsson, 2021). Some deductive elements have been used in the process when analyzing, when comparing the found insights to existing theories. This can therefore be explained as an abductive research, since the study consists of both inductive and deductive elements.

3.2.3 Intensive research

As the study is aimed to result in specific, elaborate consumer insights, the study is more intensive with long, elaborate interviews, instead of extensive, quantitative interviews.

3.3 Research Design

This section illustrates the research design, so how the data that is required to answer the research question, are collected. The research design embodies “(...) choices about what will be observed and how” (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015, p. 92). The research question is: “*How do consumers perceive the brand value in fashion brand communities in comparison to other brands?*”

The process from this research question to the research design evolves as follows:

Research Question	Type of data	Data Collection Method	Source
How do consumers perceive the brand value in fashion brand communities in comparison to other brands?	Illustrations of perceived brand value	Semi-structured Interviews	Brand Communities Regular customers

Figure 4: The process from the research question to the research design

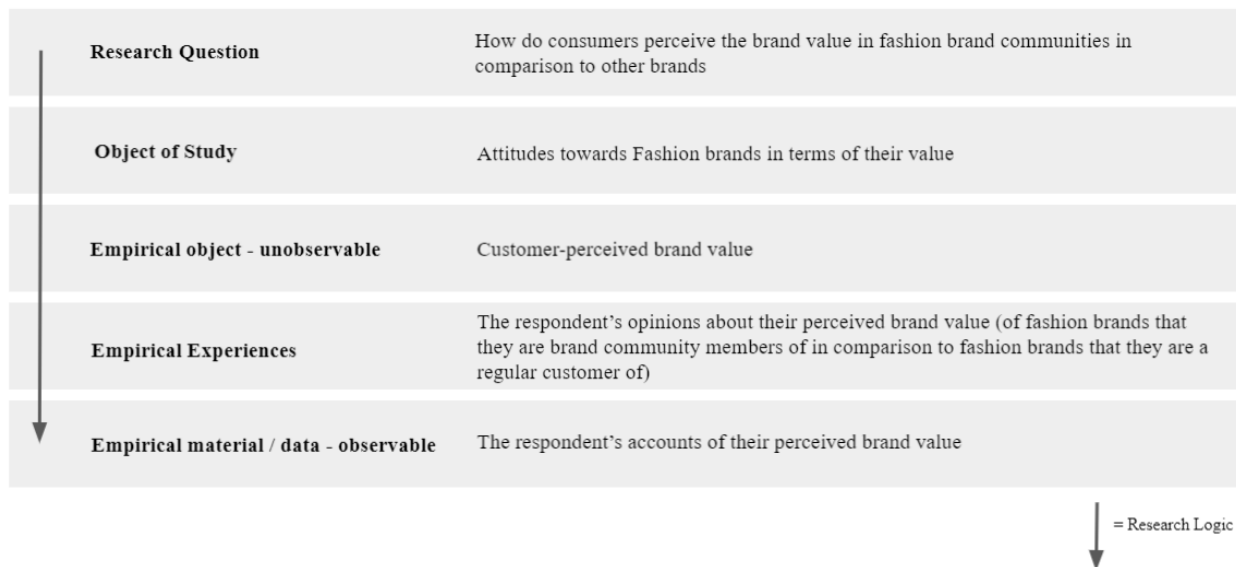


Figure 5: The Research Logic (BUSR31, L1)

As the research purpose states, this study aims “to uncover the perceived value of a fashion brand from the perspective of a brand community member in contrast to being a regular customer” (see: 1.3 *Research Purpose and Question*). The research philosophy of this paper was earlier described and is rooted in a constructionist epistemology approach and a relativist ontological view, “which describes that several different ideas of what “reality” is, exist, depending on the individual” (see 3.1.1 *Relativist Ontology*). This latter approach was chosen to stress the subjectivity of the research aim: no objective observations shall be gathered, but instead individual, subjective consumer opinions. Hence, even though the research aim might at first sight hint at a netnographic research approach, as it has a major focus on online brand communities, netnography is not an approach which deems efficient to answering the research question. For reference, when observing (real or virtual) social interactions, research approaches are oftentimes classified as either an ethnographic

or netnographic approach. These are two techniques which offer different approaches to observing social scenarios and social life. Ethnography is “a qualitative research method in which a researcher—an ethnographer—studies a particular social/cultural group with the aim to better understand it” (Allen, 2017). Netnography, on the other hand, is an ethnography research technique to analyze (specifically) online communities (Bertilsson, 2021). This approach derives from ethnography, but has a specific focus on social interactions within technological cultures (Jones, 2019). As was previously mentioned, the goal is to understand the consumer-perceived value of brands within a technological culture - not social interactions within technological cultures. Hence, a netnography approach does not seem effective but instead an ethnography approach has been chosen.

3.3.1 Primary Data

In order to gather the consumer-perceived value of fashion brands of brand community members, opinions of brand community members have been gathered. Hence, the study gathers “new information that is collected directly by the researcher” which is, according to Easterby-Smith et al. (2015), primary data. The data is based on the research question and the focus of the study. As was previously described in *Figure 5: The Research Logic*, the object of this study is the attitude of consumers towards the value of Fashion brands. As can be retrieved from *Figure 4: The process from the research question to the research design*, the data collection method is doing interviews.

Nine interviews have been conducted, for which the opinions and perceptions of Brand Community members within the fashion industry will be collected to gather insights about the perceived value creation of the prospective fashion brand. The type of knowledge that has been acquired is therefore local and contextual knowledge (Kvale, 1994). The interviews have been based on the same pre-structured interview questions (*see Appendix 2: Interview Guide*). These cover the following topics:

1. *Introduction*
2. *Brand 1:*
 - a. *Brand Community Membership*
 - b. *Value of brands*
3. *Brand 2*
 - a. *Regular Customer / Relationship*
 - b. *Value of brands*
4. *Closing*

In accordance with these pre-structured topics, primary questions and follow up questions have been formulated. As it is the aim of the study to gather personal opinions from the participants, the structure is not strict though, in order to allow the participants the freedom to express and share all thoughts, without limitations. This balance between a structured interview, on the one hand, with the room for spontaneity and adaptability is, according to Salmons (2012) a semi-structured interview.

3.3.2 Semi-structured interviews

The semi-structured interviews will be conducted with brand community members of different fashion brands. The same base questions will be used for all the participants, with the possibility of additional questions being asked for more complete answers, depending on the interviewees responses (*see: 3.3.1 Primary Data*). The complete set of interview questions may be found in *Appendix 2: Interview Guide*.

(Semi-structured) interviews have been chosen to be the best practice, as this is a suitable method for reaching the aims of this inductive, intensive and qualitative research study. The aim of the semi-structured interviews is to get insights into which perceived value brand community membership adds to a brand. The option of using a focus group for the data collection was discussed but deemed inconvertible in this case due to the interviews taking place online. This could lead to eventual hardships in sparking a vivid discussion and creating the right atmosphere for insightful and unexpected statements, thought processes and ideas from the brand community members, and it makes it hard to note the participant's body language (Remesher, 2021). The chosen semi-structured interviews have instead been chosen to provide the opportunity for the authors to ask follow up questions and supplementary questions in order to gain an advantage and deeper complexity (Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2015). However, this choice also entails limitations: according to Kvale (1994), qualitative research interviews are regularly criticized for being too subjective, difficult to replicate, unstructured, descriptive and not useful for replications. In the case of this study, these limitations should not be too concerning though, as aspects such as the interviews being subjective and unstructured are not limiting in this case, but actually part of the aim of the study, as it is the goal to learn about subjective consumer perceptions and hence, unexpected topics and follow-up questions are wanted. Even though the aim is for the researchers to be as objective as possible, it is not always completely possible. However, the researchers can at least strive to be aware of their own subjectivity, which Alvesson (2003) refers to as being reflexive. A way to achieve such reflexivity is by focusing more on interpreting and analysing data than correcting and enhancing it. This will be done by using the "sorting, reducing, arguing" technique of Rennstam and Wästerfors' (2018).

Throughout the study, it is in some cases difficult to ensure that the interviews can be conducted in person. The authors are located in two countries (Denmark and Sweden) which, at the time of the study, have different, changing regulations to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus. Furthermore, as will later be elaborated upon in *3.4.2 Sampling Strategy* the participants are gathered through a mix between convenience and snowball sampling method, which entails an online announcement on Instagram about the study and the possibility for those who feel addressed, to participate. This means in the case of the authors, that an international, geographically spread group of people are being approached. Hence, depending on the geographic location of the participants and the current COVID-19 regulations, some interviews were conducted online, through the digital video communication platforms “Zoom” or “FaceTime”, or offline in a face-to-face setting.

3.4 Sampling

After deciding on the type of data and method of gathering, a strategy for choosing the participants for the study must be created. For the sampling process of this study, the structure of Robinson (2014) was used as a template.

3.4.1 Sampling Universe

According to Robinson (2014), the sampling process should start off with defining a sample universe. This sample universe summarizes the targeted audience, so the total number of people that could technically be used as samples for the study. As has been touched on in *1.3 Research Purpose and Question*, an actual comparison from the consumer’s point of view shall be done to gain insights into the perceived difference from the consumer’s perspective. Hence, the research has a focus on consumers who identify as both a brand community member and a regular customer for two, comparable fashion brands. The benchmark is therefore one individual customer to ensure that the insights into the value perception is about the consumer, not one particular brand.

Robinson (2014) suggests that defining the sampling universe should be done by deciding on exclusion and inclusion criteria: the first describes the aspects that disqualify volunteers from participating in the study, the second one specifies which criteria the participants must meet in order to qualify for the participation. In the case of this study, the criteria that were decided upon, were the following:

Inclusion Criteria: the participants must

- ❖ be part of a brand community that interacts (primarily) online

- ❖ be a regular customer of a similar/competitive fashion brand that they like a lot and/or might have bought from but are not a community member of

Exclusion Criteria: the participants must not....

- ❖ be a paid employee of the brand-owning company

For the exclusion criteria, it is important to stress that not being a paid employee of the brand-owning company does not include people, who were previously employed for the brand or do voluntary work. The difference between these and paid employees is that the latter might base their interview responses on their (perceived) obligation to be loyal and supportive to their employer (e.g. for financial, job-securing or legal reasons), whereas people who are voluntarily supporting the brand-owning company or are ex-employees of the company are particularly interesting for the study as their admiration for the brand and inclusion in the brand community is so strong that they are spending their free time to support the brand actively.

No predefined criteria regarding the gender, age and nationality of the participants have been done. This was a conscious choice, as excluding or including any participants based on (only) these criteria is not necessary for helping to answer the research question better. Hence, it was decided that allowing a variety of participants in terms of these aspects would likely lead to a higher heterogeneity and hence research outcomes that are more generalizable (Robinson, 2014).

3.4.2 Sample Size

According to Robinson (2014), the sample size cannot be randomly decided upon, but depends on theoretical aspects and the feasibility within the timeframe of the project and other practicalities. Robinson also stresses that it is suggested to decide upon a sample size early on in the project, with the possibility for adaptation. As this study aims to focus on individual consumer insights instead of generalizing results to an entire population, the research has an idiographic aim (Robinson, 2014). According to Robinson (2014) this means that a rather small sample size makes sense. For the purpose of this study, this has been considered logical and feasible, as it was clear that the timeframe of this study (approx. 2.5 months) only allows a limited amount of extensive interviews. Knowing that the project team consists of two people, a maximum sample size of 10 interviews was considered realistic when considering the feasibility of the research. From a theoretical perspective, a minimum number of samples was decided upon in order to ensure that the amount of results offer enough outcomes to conduct a convenient, legitimate analysis and discussion. Hence, a minimum of 5 interviews was decided upon.

As it will be elaborated upon in *3.4.3 Sampling Strategy*, the participants have been selected by using a combination of convenience and snowball sampling. In total, 9 consumers ended up participating in the interviews. How these 9 participants have been selected, will be elaborated upon in *3.4.3 Sampling Sourcing*.

3.4.3 Sampling Strategy

The participants have been approached by using a combination of convenience and snowball sampling. Convenience sampling is, according to Lavrakas (2008) “a type of nonprobability sampling in which people are sampled simply because they are "convenient" sources of data for researchers”. While convenience sampling is the cheapest and least time-consuming method, it also has the danger of selection which might lead to samples that are not generalizable (Taherdoost, 2016). Convenience sampling has been conducted in this study by the researchers' private inquiry for participants among their personal network. Snowball sampling is, according to Mack, Woodson, MacQueen, Guest and Namey (2005), a method in which “participants or informants with whom contact has already been made use their social networks to refer the researcher to other people who could potentially participate in or contribute to the study”. Snowball sampling has, according to Taherdoost (2016) both strengths and weaknesses: while the sampling strategy can help to reach rare characteristics, it is on the down side also very time-consuming. Snowball sampling has been conducted in this study through the social media platform Instagram, which is the main environment that the study focuses on, anyways. As the target audience of the study are brand community users which interact on Instagram, the platform on which the convenience strategy was conducted, already ensured a first step in reaching the correct audience; the “key players”, in accordance with Nilsson (2021b), were later on sourced (*see: 3.4.3 Sampling Sourcing*). Here, two approaches have been conducted:

1. a so-called “story” has been created by the researchers which lists the aim of the study and the prerequisites for attending. The information that the “story” entailed was the aim of the research, the definition of a brand community and the data collection strategy, i.e. that it would be conducted through an interview (*see: Appendix 5: Instagram Sampling Strategy*). The followers were furthermore asked to share the story among their followers to create a snowball sampling strategy.
2. 20 brand community accounts have been directly approached through a direct message on Instagram (*see: Appendix 5: Instagram Sampling Strategy*). As currently little research has been done on brand communities on Instagram, no research statistic was found to refer to as an inspiration for reaching out to community pages, such as a statistic of the most

followed brand community pages. Hence, instead, a list with the most followed fashion brand pages on Instagram was used. Considering that these accounts have a, comparatively, large amount of followers, it was assumed that the likelihood is high that these accounts also have the highest probability for brand communities.

As the research is being done with brand community members, no gatekeepers have been detected who could make the access to the interviewees difficult, as the interviewees will be private individuals. Considering that the aim of the thesis is to offer insight on the consumer-perceived value of fashion brands within a brand community in comparison to a comparable brand, a certain level of marketing and brand value expertise is required from the interviewers to conduct the interview in a professional manner. As this paper is based on a master thesis project though, it can be said that the knowledge and level of expertise of the researchers is sufficient to conduct interviews that meet the required standards to reach the aim of the study. The previously elaborated upon limitations result, unfortunately, in an inability to achieve a reaching saturation, though.

3.4.4 Sampling Sourcing

This section elaborates upon how the participants have been recruited. After posting the Instagram story (*see: 3.4.3 Sampling Strategy*) 12 people reached out, who were both interested in the topic of the study and were also confident that they meet the criteria of being a brand community member of a brand they adore. After elaborating with them on the brand that they chose and asking for the reason as to why they consider themselves a brand community member, it became clear that not everyone who reached out actually meets the criteria and hence, there was some self-selection bias (Costigan & Cox, 2001). Some were just regular customers who liked the brand that they mentioned but could not be considered a member of a community surrounding the brand. Similarly, some of the account owners that the authors reached out to through the direct messaging option on Instagram also did not meet the participant criteria, as some were not brand community account owners but actual store owners who e.g. re-sell the products of the brand. Here, only 3 people out of the 20 people that were approached, reached out. Unfortunately, all 3 volunteers who responded to the direct message on Instagram, turned out to be resellers, who are not private brand community members. The interested volunteers who did not meet the participant criteria were thanked for their interest and informed that they may not participate in the study to be conducted. In total, 9 participants were chosen from the volunteers who reached out through the Instagram story and no brand community account owner from the 20 direct messages that were sent out participated. While choosing these participants, the authors ensured that the inclusion and exclusion criteria that were mentioned in *3.4.1 Sampling Universe*, are being met and hence that

“key players” were chosen (Nilsson, 2021b). The recruiting was furthermore non-incentivised, so the participants (Robinson, 2014).

As it turned out, the 9 selected samples correspond to a similar profile: all of them were female, northern European, in their early to mid twenties and mostly studying or working within the field of marketing and communication or even fashion. This outcome can be traced to the disadvantages of convenience and snowball sampling that have been elaborated upon in *3.4.3 Sampling Strategy*. Due to the previously described exclusion criteria, more diversity was, unfortunately, not possible. Hence, the heterogeneity, which was touched on in *3.4.1 Sampling Universe*, has not been achieved. Instead, the sourcing resulted in a demographic and geographic homogeneity (Robinson, 2014). However, the fact that the selected 9 interview participants have 4 different nationalities offered at least some intercultural diversity, even though these nationalities were all of northern European nature.

Robinson (2014) explains that this stage is also about educating the interview participants about the content of the interview, their voluntary participation, and their required consensus. This happened after agreeing on a date and time for the interviews. The participants received the interview guide (excluding the follow-up questions and the examples, to ensure a natural conversation) before the interview took place and were asked for their voluntary participation and consent to the interview being recorded, transcribed and used for the sake of this study (*see: Appendix 2: Interview guide*).

3.5 Data Collection

3.5.1 Role of the interviewers

As previously mentioned, the authors of this thesis are collaborating remotely, with one working on the project from Sweden and the other from Denmark. While this collaboration worked out in a synergetic way throughout the research and writing process, it was agreed that the interview conduction makes more sense with only one person as the interviewer. This allowed a more natural, uninterrupted conversation flow in both on- and offline interviews. With the interviewee being either interviewed on Zoom or in person by one of the two authors, she was being asked all questions by only one person, who could lead the interview and follow-up on the participants' statements. If a second author would have joined, the flow of the conversations would not have been as fluent, as both interviewers being separated and collaborating through a screen could have caused inefficiencies or misunderstandings. Hence, only one of the authors took on the role of the interviewer per interview.

As aforementioned in 3.3.2 *Sample Size*, it might be considered that it is difficult for the researchers to be completely objective. In his paper, Alvesson (2003) argues that “language constructs rather than mirrors phenomena, making representation and empirical work privileging “data” a basically problematic enterprise”. It was also mentioned in 3.3.2 *Sample Size* that Alvesson (2003) says that researchers can at least strive to be aware of their own subjectivity, to which he refers as being reflexive.

In order to understand how the authors of this paper acquired the knowledge from the interviews, it is helpful to consider Kvale and Brinkmann’s (2009) metaphors of the miner and the traveller. According to the researchers, one type of interviewer pre-defines which information they are interested in and therefore approaches the interview with a specific target in mind (“*miner-interviewer*”) (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). The other type of interviewer does not have a specific, pre-defined information in mind, and approaches the conversation with the aim to discover the interviewee’s experience with openness (“*traveller-interviewer*”) (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). As was aforementioned in 3.3.2 *Semi-structured interviews*, the interviews for this thesis study did not follow a strict set-of questions, but were instead conducted with pre-defined leading questions that allow room for follow-up questions, depending on the interviewee’s responses. This was done to ensure that the participants were given enough freedom to elaborate upon their subjective, personal experiences. Hence, the authors took an open approach to the interviews. Nonetheless, the interviews did have a specific target information to acquire, which is the difference between the perceived value of a brand that the participant considers themselves to be a brand community member of and the perceived value of of a brand that they are just a regular customer of. Therefore, the role that the interviewers took applies more to that of a “*miner-interviewer*” (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009).

3.5.2 Preparation: Interview guide

In order to ensure that the interviews can offer the data that contributes to the aim of the thesis study, the authors agreed that it is most effective to prepare the participants before conducting the interview. Hence, they were given the following information 30 minutes prior to the interview:

1. *an initial pitch, which introduced the aim of the interview*

The pitch included an introduction to the subject of the programme and our roles as thesis students.

2. *the research question*

The research question was read out to the participants in order to ensure that they would understand the aim of the interview.

3. *a short introduction to what a brand is*

a visualisation of the aspects and basic modules of the construct of a brand was shown to the participants. This was done to ensure that the responses to the author's questions would not be adulterated due to a misunderstanding of the term "brand".

4. *the request to decide on the two brands that the interview will be about*

The participants were asked to decide upon two brands:

- ❖ Brand 1: a fashion brand they like a lot and/or frequently buy/have bought from and feel so connected to that they would consider themselves a brand community member of it (*remark: from here on to be referred to as brand 1*)
- ❖ Brand 2: a similar/competitive fashion brand (same target group) that they like a lot and/or might have bought from but are not a community member of (*remark: from here on to be referred to as brand 2*)

By asking the participants to decide upon those two brands, it was ensured that the participants would make the comparison between the perceived value of fashion brands from their own perspective, as being a brand community member on the one hand and a regular customer on the other hand. Thereby, it was ensured that the purpose of the study could be met. As was described in *1.3 Research Purpose and Question*, "the study is not aimed to gather insights into the value of one particular brand, but instead to gather insights into the fashion consumers value perception from the perspective of being a community member in comparison to being a regular customer".

5. *a declaration of consent*

The participants were asked for their consent for the interview to be recorded, transcribed and the content to be used for the purpose of this thesis.

As was previously described in *3.3.1 Primary Data* and *3.3.2 Semi-Structured Interviews*, the data gathering was done through a semi-structured set of questions to gather insights from the participants. The authors ensured that the amount of questions were feasible to conduct a conversation that offers the required insights on the one hand but does not lead to a divagation in which the author or interviewee loses sight of the central theme of the conversation. Hence, an appropriate compromise between a conversation that goes deep enough to gather deep insights but covers a variety of questions to ensure that the breath of the topic is covered, was decided upon.

In total, 13 primary questions were formulated, for which a set of follow-up questions were formulated. Depending on the participants statements, these predefined follow-up questions or other, spontaneous follow-up questions that push the participant to elaborate more on the statement, have been asked. These questions were formulated with the knowledge of 2. *Literature and Theory Review* in mind. Nonetheless, as was described in 3.2.2 *Abductive Research*, this study is based on a mix of inductive and deductive research approaches. Hence, the interview questions do not include any theoretical concepts but have been formulated with the knowledge about such. The questions that were asked were categorized into a section about brand 1 and brand 2, which have been previously described. More specifically, the questions have been categorized as follows:

1. *Introduction*
2. *Brand Communities*
3. *Regular Customer*
4. *Closing*

The complete set of questions can be found in *Appendix 2: Interview Guide*.

3.5.3 Interview depiction

As was explained in 3.4.4 *Sampling Sourcing*, 9 interviews have been conducted. Freja was the first interviewee whose interview was conducted face-to-face. It was both recorded and simultaneously notes were taken. As it became evident that the note writing process takes time which hinders a natural conversation with the interviewee, both authors thereupon only used a recording app, so that no written notes had to be taken. In total, 4 interviews were conducted face-to-face, hence offline, and 5 interviews were conducted online, through the application “Zoom” or “FaceTime”. The transcripts of all interviews may be found in *Appendix 4: Interviews*.

3.6 Data Analysis

3.6.1 Sorting, Reducing, Arguing

After the interviews were conducted that qualitative data was analysed. To analyse the collected data, the researchers used the qualitative data analysis method of Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018), which is called the “Sorting, Reducing, Arguing” approach. The three steps have been followed and done as follows (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018):

- ❖ *Sorting*

In this step, the researchers read through the statements of the interviews and categorized them. The researchers have sorted the data of the semi-structured interviews in a table which can be found in Appendix 3: Coding Table. This was done in three sub-steps: first, quotes which give a direct answer to the interview questions were pasted into the table (*see: Appendix 3, Step 1: Quotes*). The table was categorized according to the interview questions from *Appendix 2: Interview Brief*, so that a direct comparison among the interviewee's responses could be done. In the next two steps, the data was "coded". The process of coding is one in which the data is labelled "with a word or short phrase that summarizes its content" (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Here, the researchers did not use pre-defined coding schemes based on the literature and theory review ("deductive coding") but instead decided to base the codes on the statements of the participants and create the codes from there ("inductive coding"), in order to maintain the aim of gathering perception (Asher Consulting, n.d.). The coding process went as follows:

➤ *Initial Coding*

First, the researchers did an initial coding by labeling the statements according to lines (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). This means that the quotes from *Appendix 3, Step 1: Quotes* have been summarized into one or more "themes" that epitomize and sum up what the interviewee has said. The outcome of this can be seen in *Appendix 3, Step 2: Initial and Focused Coding*.

➤ *Focused Coding*

Thereafter, the researchers did the focus coding, in which the labels from the initial coding process were summarized into more abstract codes that summarize the data even more and allow a clear and structured overview over the collected data (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). The outcomes of this can be seen in the column "focused coding" in the coding sheet (*see: Appendix 3, Step 2: Initial and Focused Coding*). For the focused coding process, the authors have used colours to facilitate the coding process and detect structures and similarities more easily. The colour differs for each research question and hence there is no connection regarding the choice of colour for the coding overall. The colours only detect similarities and structures within one answered question; not comprehensively for all questions.

❖ *Reducing*

In this step, the researchers reduced the codes down to the most significant ones. This means that the "focused coding" column in the coding chart in *Appendix 3, Step 2: Initial and Focused Coding* was reviewed and narrowed down; only codes that are of significance

and interest for answering the research question have been selected for the continuing analysis process. The outcomes of the reducing process have been listed in the results and interpretation section (*see: 5.1 results and interpretation*). Here, the authors have chosen to do the “illustrative reduction”, which means that examples of statements and quotes were listed that illustrate the selected categories from the reduction process (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018).

❖ *Arguing*

The last step in the “sorting, reducing, arguing” approach is about creating a concept and independently formulating a position (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). For this step, the authors decided to approach the arguing part by applying the four basic rules of theorizing by Richard Swedberg (2011). When distinguishing between theory and theorizing, the difference is, according to Swedberg (2011) that “theorizing is primarily a process, theory is the end product”. This means that theorizing is the process of developing a theory and hence the recognition that this process does not forthwith need to offer an ultimate and final theory but rather offer new insights to understanding a phenomenon. Hence, this happens within a so-called “context of discovering”, where a subjective thinking process is conducted, instead of within a “context of justification”, where a thinking process from another person is being communicated and justified (Swedberg, 2011). For the sake of this study, this approach is considered appropriate, especially considering that the research is done through an abductive approach, where theory and insights from previous studies are not being tested but acknowledged for the understanding and analysis of the insights that result from the semi-structured interviews (*see: 3.2.2. Abductive research*). The four basic rules of theorizing by Richard Swedberg (2011) have been implemented as follows:

Part I: Observation

The most important observations from the interviews have been summarized in a table (*see: Figure 7: The Central Observations*). This table hence lists a summary of the findings that have been introduced with illustrative examples in *4. Results and Interpretation*. Here, a direct comparison between the perceptions of the brand community perspective and the perception of the regular customer perspective was illustrated.

Part 2: Naming and formulating central concepts

Thereupon, the authors have defined central concepts from those most important observations, which combine the comparisons from *Figure 7* to clearly illustrate and emphasize the gap between the two (*see: Figure 8: The Central Concepts*).

Part 3: Building a theory

In this step, the central concepts are compared with existing theory and findings from previous studies. Hence, in this step, the authors refer back to the findings from 2. *Literature and Theory Review*. The comparison and argumentation is a crucial part within the theorizing process, where similarities and differences in the findings, in comparison to previous studies, are elaborated upon. Through this comparison, the originality and insightfulness of the findings of this study are argued for and become evident.

Part 4: Completing the theory with new insights

Lastly, based on the outcomes of part 3, final statements with the ultimate new insights from this study are listed in *Figure 9: The New Insights*. These final statements highlight what the ultimate new insights from this study are and how they contribute to the current state of knowledge about the topic that is being researched.

3.7 Validity, Reliability and Generalizability

To ensure the quality of the study, the authors have used the criterias of validity, reliability and generalizability during the study and performed interviews. Validity consists of authenticity, plausibility and criticality. The authors have made sure to take into account that the information provided is relevant to the question and to encourage the readers of its importance and to give new insights. The insights given will be provided in a trustful manner with transparency (Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2015). Reliability will be provided through transparency of the interviews performed and the questions posed. This will be done to provide results as close to reality as possible, and to make the study grounded on the fact that others can perform similar ones. Bryman and Bell (2017) are also talking about lacking transparency in interviews since the readers can not partake in the actual interviews, hence why the authors have chosen to publish the interview questions (*see: Appendix 2: Interview Brief*) and answers (*see: Appendix 4: Interviews*). Regarding the generalizability of the study the authors have made background research to see if it confirms earlier findings and structures, but the authors have also taken into account the hardships in generalizing the study since the interviews will be performed in a low quantity and on a narrow demographic.

3.8 Research Ethics

There are many aspects to take into consideration when conducting qualitative research. According to Diener and Crandall (1978) cited in Bryman & Bell (2017) there are four main areas to act

according to: (1) if any harm can be done for the participating interviewees, (2) if a lack of full consent amongst any of the respondents is present, (3) if the study in any way intrudes on the privacy of the respondent and (4) if the persons responsible for the interview are withholding important information from the participants or conducting fraudulent or fake information (Diener and Crandall, 1978, cited in Bryman & Bell, 2017).

The performed interviews have been conducted and structured according to the mentioned guidelines to maintain an ethical perspective. The participants have not been under any risk of harm due to the nature of the questions or risk of lacking confidentiality. The last names have been kept out of the interviews and only the first names have been published. The structure of the interview has been clearly set with clear instructions that the interviewees have gotten beforehand and with a recorded consent to the interview and its questions. The authors have not withheld any information from the interviewees and they will receive a final copy of the study.

4. Results

The following part will state the central results from the conducted research, after having been sorted and reduced into main categories. The subcategories are based on themes that emerged within the main categories. As was previously described, the results from the interviews are based on nine interviews performed around two brands of the interviewees choice.

Brand 1:

a fashion brand they frequently buy/have bought from and feel so connected to that they would consider themselves a brand community member of it.

Brand 2:

a similar/competitive fashion brand (same target group) that they like a lot and/or might have bought from but are not a community member of.

The brands that were chosen by the participants were the following:

Participant	Brand 1	Brand 2
Elisabeth	Max Volmary	Zimmermann
Freja	NA-KD	Lounge Underwear

Cecilie	Stella McCartney	Samsøe Samsøe
Ilse	Hugo Boss	Suit Supply
Saga	Hunkydory	Rodebjer
Ariana	Hugo Boss	Max Mara
Anesa	Levis	Guess
Louise	Rodebjer	Filippa K
Melina	Ralph Lauren	Coach

Figure 6: The participants choice of brands

4.1 Brand Community Members

4.1.1 Brand Image

The first part of the interview was about the participant being a brand community member of a brand. The brands that the participants considered themselves to be a community member of were different fashion brands, from international, popular brands to smaller, local brands (*see: Figure 6: The participants choice of brands*). When asked how the participants became a member of these brands, the participants stated that they purchased a product and were convinced by it; they followed the brand for a long period and then turned into a brand community member out of fidelity; or they admired the image of the brand. What stood out was that especially the latter two were mentioned numerous times. Many participants credit a long personal or professional relationship to the brand as the initial reason as to why they became a brand community member.

“I had a really good time working there at the brand. And I have a really deep connection to it because I'm still in contact with the people who work there and with, like for example, the other interns. I also know a close group of people that are still working there.”

Another participant said:

“I got to know it before it got really big. Like now it's the top 20 growing in Europe. It is now approximately five years old, and I think I knew it from like three, four years ago. So I also saw it when it was smaller. So I watched it grow.”

Following the brand for a longer period was also named as the reason as to how the brand community member perceives the image of the brand:

“I was 16 and I had my first job and there was an older colleague and I think she was 24 or something. And I thought she was so cool. I really looked up to her and she always wore this Stella McCartney classical Falabella tote bag. And I was like “okay”! And she had the shoes and she had the perfumes and I was like, “Okay, so...how can I be as cool as her?”

The brand image was not only the initial reason as to why the participants became a brand community member but also an aspect that maintains the connection to the brand. Perceiving a positive brand image seems to keep the brand community members engaged and close to the brand. One participant stressed that she considers the positive brand image a form of therapy which she appreciates:

“I mean, definitely it’s kind of like a form of therapy for me, especially when you go into a physical store. And, knowing that the store has standards considering how they greet you and how they treat you. And, just like the small attention to details that you would think are unnecessary but it does a lot to the experience like how they package it. And also how the employees are dressed.”

All participants agreed that the brand image is in fact so crucial that a (perceived) negative image could even break the brand community bonding. Examples that were stated were related to a deficiency, instability or unethical reputation in the perceived brand image. When asked what could break a brand community, one respondent stressed:

“I think when they do unexpected things where they out of nothing change their brand identity or when they change the way in which they can engage. Or if they launched a lot of new product lines. These sorts of things that are not what people expected from it, then I think it can break it. And also, I think, in luxury you see sometimes that brands kind of get conflicts or into a scandal. I think it was brought out of this fashion show in China. I think they tried to do a Chinese special show and then online people said that's racism, for example, they're not using culture in the right way.”

4.1.2 Community Feeling

When asked about the definition of a brand community, the participants responded with different definitions. The participants defined the concept of a brand community as a place for self-expression, a platform to communicate or a strategic marketing tool of brands. One term that stood out was the term “connection”. Most participants agreed that the concept of a brand community

nourishes a sense of connection and unity, an emotional bonding not only among the members but also to the brand itself:

“I think a brand community is a purpose for people that somehow connects them with a certain brand on different levels like online or offline, in stores or on other platforms.”

Another said:

“I would define a brand community like: someone you can feel the connection to, that, you can feel that you belong, that you can wear the clothes or jeans or whatever that they produce.”

A third participant said:

“(…) I think there is an unspoken thing about it. We're wearing the same thing. So we feel a bit connected. I reflect on you.”

When asked what makes a community, so what are the key aspects that are required to consider a brand community as such, the participants' responses varied again: some took a brand management perspective and listed structural aspects such as bonding activities and membership requirements. Others stressed consumer characteristics and one even stressed that the actual products of the brands also have a key impact on establishing a brand community. What stood out in most answers was that a culture of caring is considered a key element for a brand community. One participant for example said:

“(…) you can share with each other your favorite brands. Maybe you haven't heard of a brand before and they give you tips like yeah, they have really good dresses or whatever, and you find a new brand. And so there is a community between customers, I think is really nice. Because you can find inspiration between each other.”

4.1.3 Communication through technical devices

Throughout the interviews it became clear that the brand communities that the interview participants consider themselves a community member of are mostly interacting on a technical device, via social media platforms such as Instagram or text messaging. The closeness of the communication thereby differed, with some communicating directly with other brand community members and others indirectly interacting with the community, for example through likes or shares on social media. One respondent said:

“(...) we do actually communicate via phone or also text messages. And also I see, of course, the likes on Instagram.”

Another one said:

“So, we always send each other pictures on Instagram of new collections and livestreams or fashion shows.”

The online interaction has been considered a positive impact on community bonding by most respondents. Many agreed that it fuels the interaction among the members and strengthens the community bonding. One respondent praised it as an opportunity to eliminate exclusivity and stay engaged with the community:

“(...) when there is four releases, smaller releases a year, and then of course you can not go to the fashion show because you have to be a huge celebrity, but they do live streams and influencers go to the fashion shows and live stream, and then they have these, like, for example, like giveaways and stuff like that will be what makes community members attached to that.”

Another respondent illustrated how dense the mobile and online communication among the community members is:

“So we have a group chat on WhatsApp where we send links, when there are new fashion articles online about the brand or when they have a new collection or when something happens where they have a new collaboration or something or campaign. I guess it's because we are all still working in fashion or studying it. And so everyone is really up to date with the news. So we always, when we do something, come across something, you always send it to each other. And, we also, uh, we also do it on Instagram. You can create a group where you can send pictures or videos as well.”

Furthermore, many agreed that online communication is a helpful asset for the brand to engage directly with consumers. It makes some respondents not only feel a closer connection to other community members but also the brand itself:

“For example, they put pictures up of family members, for example Paul McCartney, a picture of her dad, and he is standing there wearing Stella McCartney's clothes and people, the community members, can answer and they answer back. It's not a one way communication.”

Another respondent said:

“I think since social media is interactive in its nature, it can create a greater connection to the brand and like more of a dialogue around the brand.”

4.1.4 Subjective brand value perception

Most participants agreed that the brand that they consider themselves to be a brand community member of, represents and communicates values that they consider important. When asked about the brand, most participants defined the brand that they are a brand community member of, based on their values. One respondent said:

“I think it's like a lot of these old school family values so that you really want to deliver a high quality product.”

When asked about activities or experiences that the brand community members share with the brand, most respondents also stressed values as a significant bonding aspect. One respondent said that she feels that a regular newsletter supports the relationship. Here, she especially appreciates learning about the brand’s implementation of values that she personally shares. She said:

“I get news about the brand and their goals and their values. And, how they are trying to see what they are doing in order to reach their goals, to be a part of the process.”

Even though the term “value” was often mentioned proactively by many respondents, it became evident that the definition of such differs. While some define the value of a brand as economic value, others said that the value of a brand is related to technical product aspects or the brand image in terms of social contribution and integrity. The vast majority agreed though that values related to the brand’s public image and social responsibility are, to a large degree, the main impact on a brand’s value. When asked about the definition of the value of a brand, one respondent said:

“That it definitely, um, that it has a vision. That it has a purpose and that it doesn't just sell its soul.”

Another respondent also put an emphasis on social impact. She said:

“I think for brands, I do not think it's only the economic perspective, but also for example, in the fashion industry, the consumers are more demanding. The social economic aspect. Like paying workers and the one who makes the products. So I think that , and also sustainability for the environment actually. Putting in mind who makes the products and the people actually having well paid jobs and that they are thinking a lot about the environment.”

Not only did the definitions of brand value differ among the respondents. Almost everyone, except for one, agreed that the value of fashion brands specifically differ from the value of brands from other industries. All also agreed that this difference is of an emotional nature. One respondent said:

“I think maybe it's a bit more special, like for the fashion industry, because you actually wear their clothes. So you kind of promote them in a way. So I think maybe like the brand values and like what they stand for. Maybe that's a bit more important, like when it comes to clothes, than for example, I don't know, like maybe interior design, for example. No one really can see this, but in fashion, everyone can see it on you. And I think many people nowadays like a spot-on-brand. I guess that makes it a bit more special.”

Another one compared the value within the fashion industry to the car and mobile phone industries and thereby pointed out that this emotional connection can also have negative effects for the brand:

“(…) it's more emotional. When it comes to clothes, that's who I am, how I express myself. And that's how I show other people who I am, which maybe is the thing with a car for some people. So maybe it's similar in many ways too, and a bit different in some ways. It must be harder for a company, for example, with clothes, because there's also so many different companies and so many brands. Whereas for example, mobile phones, a lot of the time, I guess it's the same type of brands. And then you could just have a connection to one of them, and then you go with that. Like if I have an iPhone now I would probably buy an iPhone next. Uh, no matter what they do, but if I buy a blouse from Hunkydory now, and then they changed their aesthetics, or I want to try something new, or if my friends have started to buy something from a new brand then I'm probably more likely to change. Really.”

What was particularly outstanding was the fact that every interview participant believed that they can have an impact on the value of the brand that they consider themselves to be a part of. Most believed that their influence is only significant as a part of a larger community. They believe that an effective value co-creation process happens as a collective. One of the interviewees said:

“I don't really have the power, but that's also what makes a community so powerful. Because of course, if you break your own community, they will put their money in another place. Not in your brand. So yeah, it's a social thing. Yeah. I have power but not alone.”

Another said the value co-creation not only happens through the brand and its “close” customers, the brand community members, but any sort of collective:

“If a huge amount of people cancel a brand, they won't have any customers, even though their brand community is strong. If people cancel it and talk bad about it, it would impact their ratings, their selling numbers, everything.”

Some also said that an individual can also have an impact on the value of a brand, in both positive and negative ways. One participant said:

“(...) you can shape a brand while being a person that recommends it to your friends and family. When I engage with it, I want other people to engage with the brand as well. And since I choose to pick those people, those people's values will automatically then be associated with the brand as well. Because if that person is like a really good person and wears a certain piece and people like that person, they feel like “Oh, the brand must be something good as well”. However, if it's like a, let's say a “Trump” person, so unethical and he wears the brand, then you would not be so prone to wear that anymore.”

When asked if the brand community members have co-created the value of their adored brand themselves, most referred to online activities when affirming that they did so:

“(...) I do some research on where these clothes are made. Are they made fairly and squarely all the way? And of course, I'm starting to think a lot about the environmental impact the clothes have. So by that I do [co-create] yeah.”

Another said:

“I mean, like when you're online, it's so interactive with other people. So I think that has a greater impact on other people as well than if it's only in the real world, so to speak.”

4.2 Regular Customers

4.2.1 Brand Image of the non-community brand

The brand image of *Brand 2* was by the consumers described in many different ways. A lot of attributes were brought up, such as boring, mainstream and basic. One of the most common factors was the lack of identical belonging or identification for the consumers. The majority of the consumers were lacking a clear brand image of the second brand due to them not portraying it well enough but also due to themselves not investing enough time in the brands to find out about them. One of the interviewees said:

“I mean, since I don't know what I'm getting. I feel like I am probably more cautious and when it comes to the price.”

Some consumers also described a higher pricing point as a negative factor in combination with the unclear brand image. The consumer then felt less inclined to pay the price to try to find out more about the product, due to the risk it entailed. The lack of clarity and information about the brand and its image made many of the consumers less inclined to want to try their products.

Positive traits amongst *Brand 1* were described as timeless, classic, unique, staying up to date with trends but still staying true to the brand and consistent to its brand image. The opposite was being described as *Brand 2's* brand image by one of the consumers:

“I think it's like a personality in their brand and obviously they succeed with this but I think in their clothes there is no personality, so I can't express myself with their clothes. It's just like regular clothes, like you see every day.”

The brand image of *Brand 2* was also very clearly described by all consumers as being very unclear, and not only related to their lack of knowledge or interest in the product, but they had a harder time to grasp the concept and image of the brand, due to inconsistencies and inauthenticity. This was mentioned as a factor of why they didn't feel like they could connect to the brand, despite following them and trying to understand the brand image. One interviewee said:

“I think for me, it's just the values. So I don't really know about their values. I follow them on Instagram, but they never really communicate.”

Another big factor being pointed out by multiple interviewees was the lack of responsibility with *Brand 2*, showcased through an ignorance about diversity, social and environmental issues.

“It's actually weird because Samsøe Samsøe is a Danish brand. So if we have to generalize it, I can reflect myself more in the brand of Samsøe Samsøe, but I think they have bigger needs. They

need things. For example, diversity in the models. They have no diversity. It is literally just this white, skinny girl that is their standard of beauty. They do not care about the environment. They need personality, for example, it is a totally one way communication on their platform. If we compare it to Stella McCartney who shares pictures of her dad in her clothes, it's so personal. You can reflect yourself and your own family to their family, but in Samsøe Samsøe, they just put up a picture of a girl in clothes and then you're like, well, like, yeah.”

Another respondent also claimed double morale for *Brand 2* as a negative trait, stating:

“While NA-KD has inclusivity, they don't mean it, you know what I mean? They have it in their products, because they do have bigger sizes, but like the image of the whole brand, like when you go for example on their Instagram, it just doesn't represent that.”

4.2.2 Brand Value

Most participants had some similar ideas about what embodied brand values, but also a lot of different opinions and takes on what the importance in brand value was for them. As was aforementioned, brand value was classified in many different ways, through categories such as their online presence, emotional connection to the brand through brand communities, product attributes and brand image.

One of the biggest factors for consumers to perceive the brand value for *Brand 2* to be of the lesser sort was due to their lack of a clear brand identity. In *4.2.1 Brand Image of the non-community brand*, the consumers clearly stated how *Brand 2* was in almost all of the cases lacking a clear brand image. This also became to be mentioned as one of the biggest factors why the consumers perceived them to offer less value than *Brand 1*. The interviewees often came back to their lack of knowledge of the brand due to their unclarity, and not just due to lack of interest in *Brand 2*.

One respondent stated her personal importance in finding a deeper meaning in belonging to a brand community, but also the triviality around it as:

“Well, I think when you look at the product and the quality and the price and everything, they're both doing well, but I think like their visibility and the way in how they communicate, that's really what makes a difference for me. Um, and that makes coming back to Hugo Boss so often much easier, because I think for me, a brand's value is really about feeling, um, that you're part

of a group of people that, you know, have a passion for a certain brand. I feel like people just go there because they like the clothes, but I don't really feel like there's more than that."

When delving deeper into *Brand 2* and a possible brand community, the respondents were asked about changes *Brand 2* could do to attain a higher brand value. The respondents pinpointed activities such as being more affordable, a less demanding membership, more communication through interactions with consumers and events, but also attributes such as better customer service, better products and to attain a better, clearer brand image. Some interviewees saw a possibility of ever becoming a brand community member of *Brand 2*, but it was thoroughly mentioned how it is a gradual process that takes time and trust. One respondent said:

"I don't know. I guess it's a gradual process too, or it was when I became a brand community member at Hunkydory. I mean, it's not impossible. It's just that, I guess over time you just know the quality. I feel like it's good quality to just get in the right mindset, I guess just getting the emotional connection, which I guess you can, after a while, I mean, if you have a favorite piece of clothing from a brand, then you will probably also have that emotional attachment and feel more excited about buying something next time as well."

Another respondent connected the deeper value to her identity, by saying:

"I think it's like a personality in their brand and obviously they succeed with this but I think in their clothes there is no personality, so I can't express myself with their clothes. It's just like, regular clothes, like you see every day. And I think compared to Rodebjer: it's unique, in another way than Filippa K."

Another interviewee tried to define the difference in value between *Brand 1 & 2* as a small factor, and in the end coming down to being about a clear brand image and being easy to identify and connect to:

"I mean, I don't think it's something very important that they're missing, I think it's probably some minor thing. But I think it's maybe because for example, Ralph Lauren, they have more classical pieces, you know, like for example, like there are certain types of pieces or aesthetical, like...you know...I don't know how to describe it, but they have a certain look, so you can like, immediately know "okay, that's that brand". And I don't think Coach has it, I don't think it's as easy to identify, like something from Coach."

Another respondent also stated a similar opinion as above:

“I think it's just like the overall brand isn't appealing to me. So I wouldn't even consider buying anything from them. Like, I think what's missing is that they have a certain type of people buying their things and I'm not that person. So I don't feel connected to them. Like we said in the beginning, Levi's has a wide range of consumers. Everyone can relate to Levi's, either if you have a casual style, if you have a fancy style or if you have a whole complete, the older style, like you can find some you like. With Guess it feels like you have to have a certain style, the type of clothes or bags, or yeah. You have to like something special to find something there.”

4.2.3 Connection

One of the most stated underlying values amongst the majority of the interviewees was the emotional connection to *Brand 1* where they considered themselves brand community members. When it came to *Brand 2*, a clear lack of emotional connection or interest is evident. One interviewee said:

“I think HunkyDory is more safe because I feel in a way I know what they stand for. So I feel like if I wear those types of clothes, then I know what I stand for, or I know what I'm expressing, whereas with Rodebjer I don't really know that much about the brand. I don't know about the values. I don't really know much about like... I've seen clothes, you know, and I bought some. But I don't really know that much about the brand as a whole or the clothes as a whole or the style as a whole. So it feels more scary. Right. If I went to buy something from HunkyDory, then I know what I get. If I buy something from Rodebjer, I don't really have a relation to it as I'm not as sure that I can stand for wearing that brand or like wearing those types of clothes.”

Another interviewee, talking about *Brand 2*, also showcased a lack of emotional connection and interest through her statement:

“(...) when I think of the brand Coach, I can't really think of what they stand for. It's harder for me to know what kind of style I should associate with them. And therefore I don't really gravitate towards their brand as much.”

Another interviewee even showcased a higher liking of *Brand 2*'s products, but described the lack of an emotional connection to be a high factor of the lack of commitment to the brand. She said:

“I think for me, it's just the values. So I don't really know about their values. I follow them on Instagram, but they never really communicate. I just like the clothing. Whereas, with Max

Volmary, I know more or less exactly what it represents, where it's being made from and what it was made off, like the entire supply chain and as a brand community, we're all aware of its purpose. Whereas with Zimmermann, the products are more appealing to me, but they don't mean something to me."

It could also be seen that in some cases, the interviewee did not actually consider the differences between the factual product and its attributes of *Brand 1 & 2* to be that large, but there was rather the connection to *Brand 1* that still made them consider the value of their products to be larger. One interviewee described it as:

"For me, I feel like there's a difference in how much work they put into the collections. Cause I feel like, they do have some similarity when it comes to visual aesthetics, but the main difference being the small details, and it's relatively small details, but it does, it does make me think "well, this one has an extra touch to it and I will most likely not find this within another brand, but this one is absolutely also very nice, but it feels very mainstream"."

Another interviewee also discredited it being all about attributes said:

"Guess is a bit too much as an overall impression, even though their jeans might be a good fit for me. It might look good as well, but the overall impression of the brand is like ... I don't even want to go there. I don't have a good experience with the brand overall. So I won't even try on what I like there because I don't even want to go into the store. It doesn't appeal to me. Like I don't want to go in there. When I see everything in the store. It's like "oh, this is too much." So I don't need to look at the things that might be good. "

The interviewees made a lot of statements, claiming it to be about something deeper, such as an emotional connection, rather than just a factual disliking of the products, even if that might come in as a factor every now and then too. Another respondent said:

"I think I will always have a little deeper connection to Hugo Boss, because I used to work there and my friends are in the same group, like we share this thing together, like the other interns that I used to work with, and my colleagues. So I think I will always have a preference for Hugo Boss. But I also buy Suit Supply sometimes. So, I mean, it would be nice if they would do more about it, because then I think I would actually also start following them more about what they're doing and new collections that are coming out and events that they have."

4.2.4 Online Presence

A reoccurring factor that came up in the majority of the interviewees responses was the claim that *Brand 2* had a less strong or existing position on social media. This was described by all interviewees as a negative factor, causing them to lose important attention and the opportunity to strengthen and clarify their brand and its image.

“They have like some billboards here in Amsterdam, some clients, but I don't feel like I really communicate with them because they're not as interactive on their socials as for example Hugo Boss where I feel like...I always look for it and when I come across it, I already like read the text and like the post, but at Suit Supply, I don't feel like they're really visible online.”

When asked what *Brand 2* could do better, to increase their value, a lot of more hands on practical advice came up amongst the interviewees. Before, complaints about their brand presence and image had been complained about, together with their products and activities. But in the feedback session, some clear factors on how to improve their brand value came up. One respondent said:

“I would say be more visible on social media because this feels like it's become a bit unknown, especially amongst younger people because they don't really use social media that well. So it just kind of speaks to its loyal, small, older generation of customers, but they don't really do anything to appeal to people on social media.”

Another respondent said:

“I feel like I don't know enough about it, but if I knew more about, for example, their environmental aspects or the quality aspects, then it would be easier. But since I don't really know enough, I feel like it's also hard for me to answer that question, what they are missing. “

Another respondent stated:

“Well, I can't say if their clothes are not worth the price, but for me, they're not. And I think it's hard to say when you see it's a big brand already, but I mean, they could do commercials that were bigger and more explosive. Because if you pass the ad, if you're on like in a subway and they have an ad on the wall or something, I don't pay attention to it because...Or not what I've seen before, when I've seen their ads, it's nothing happening. Like I don't react on it. It's like, it's just there.”

Overall, the respondents found that *Brand 2* was lacking a clear brand image, which could be improved by achieving a higher social media presence, so that they could gain more attention and make higher efforts in presenting their brand and their clear values and visions.

Analysis and Argumentation

5.1 Central Observations

	Brand Community member	Regular customer
Brand image	most became a member out of fidelity or admiration of the brand image.	The participants experienced a lack of identical belonging or identification with the brand where they are a regular customer. They have no clear knowledge about the brand's image; either due to the brand not portraying it well enough or due to them not investing enough time in the brands to find out about
	a positive brand image seems to keep the brand community members engaged and close to the brand	The brand image of Brand 2 was furthermore difficult to grasp due to inconsistencies and inauthenticity in the brand communication, which resulted in a difficulty to connect with the brand, despite following them.
	a (perceived) negative image could break the brand community bonding	The brand image of Brand 2 was furthermore difficult to grasp due to inconsistencies and inauthenticity in the brand communication, which resulted in a difficulty to connect with the brand, despite following them.
		The participants consider a higher pricing point to be a negative factor.
Community Feeling	The concept of a brand community is defined as a place for self-expression, a platform to communicate or a strategic marketing tool of brands. One term that stood out was the term "connection".	
	a culture of caring is considered a key element for a brand community	
Online Communication	Most brand community communication happens online or on a technical device	The participants often criticized that brand 2 has a less strong or non-existing position on social media, which caused them to lose attention

	It fuels the interaction among the members, strengthens the community bonding and is considered an opportunity to eliminate exclusivity push engagement	Some of the participants criticized the perceived lack of responsibility and double morale with Brand 2, which becomes especially evident in the lack of communication about such online.
	It makes some feel closer to both other community members and the brand itself	
Brand Values	The brand where the participants are a community member represent values that they consider important.	The participants experience their lack of knowledge of the brand due to their unclarity, and not just due to lack of interest in Brand 2.
	Brand activities that illustrate, accentuate or communicate their values are considered a significant bonding aspect.	The participants stated more affordability, a less demanding membership, more communication through interactions with consumers and events, attributes such as better customer service, better products and a better, clearer brand image as possible changes for higher value perception of the brand.
	The definition of brand “value” differs: some define it as economic value, others relate it to technical product aspects or the brand image in terms of social contribution and integrity.	The participants felt an emotional connection to brand 1, while they experienced a clear lack of emotional connection or interest to brand 2
	The perceived value of fashion brands differs from the value of brands from other industries: Fashion brands are considered to be more emotional	Even if the participant could not state clear differences among the factual product and its attributes of Brand 1 & 2, their connection to brand 1 was still at times so dominant that it made their perception of the value of the first brand’s products better
	All participants believe that they have an impact on the value of the brand as a part of a community, especially online	
	Some also believe that they have an impact on the value of a brand as an individual.	

Figure 7: The Central Observations

5.2 Central Concepts

	Central concepts
Brand image	Regular customers are missing a clear brand identity and knowledge about what the brand stands for. This can be avoided by providing the customer with clear and consistent knowledge about the brand’s identity. If this identity formulation is done authentically and successfully, a sense of connection and

	admiration for the brand's image can evolve, which can arouse fidelity in the customer and thereby turn them into a brand community member.
Community Feeling	A brand community embraces a culture of caring and offers its members a platform for self-expression, communication and connection, which regular customers do not experience.
Online Communication	Brand community members feel a strong community bond and engagement while eliminating exclusivity as they have a close communication through online platforms and on their technical devices. Regular customers are missing this and hence lose attention to the brand quickly and have less knowledge about the brand's possible efforts to be socially responsible.
Brand Values	While brand community members consider the value of a brand an important aspect in their bonding, the understanding of this value differs from member to member. Other than for other industries, the perceived value of a fashion brand is, however, largely characterized by emotional aspects. The emotional connection is even stronger, when the customer considers themselves a part of the brand's community and not just a regular customer.
	Brand community members can have an impact on the value of a brand, especially as a collective group. Online platforms facilitate this impact.
	Even though enhancing the perceived value of a brand requires many changes, according to customers, an emotional connection to the brand can be so dominant that it can make their perception of the brand value more positive than without an emotional connection.

Figure 8: The Central Concepts

5.3 Arguing the central concepts

Central concept 1: Regular customers are missing a clear brand identity and knowledge about what the brand stands for. This can be avoided by providing the customer with clear and consistent knowledge about the brand's identity. If this identity formulation is done authentically and successfully, a sense of connection and admiration for the brand's image can evolve, which can arouse fidelity in the customer and thereby turn them into a brand community member.

As the findings show, a crucial difference between being a brand community member and being a regular customer lies in the perceived image of the brand: while the participants admired the values that brand 1 represents and communicates so much, that they are part of the brand's community, they are confused or even indifferent about the perceived brand image of brand 2. The findings show that this perceived image, hence the emotional aspect, especially when it comes to the values that they communicate, is even more important than aspects such as the quality or price of the product. As was described in 2.1.3 *The relationship of consumers and the brand in brand relationships*, Fournier (1998) lists six elements that should be fulfilled in order to ensure a strong consumer-brand relationship: love and passion, self-connection, interdependence, commitment, intimacy, brand participant quality. When talking about the perceived lack of a brand image for

brand 2, the participants were largely referring to a lack of intimacy. Whereas the brand that they consider to be a brand community member, actively creates an intimate bonding, brand 2 does either not do that or is communicating an overall unclear brand image. As was aforementioned, this lack or failure seems to weigh much more than other aspects. Besides, it seems, according to the findings of this study, to be a requirement for aspects such as “commitment”. Hence, while the findings of this study agree with Fournier’s six elements, it could be argued that this study additionally adds that the elements are of different importance and interdependent. The significance of each element and interdependence is, according to the findings of this study, furthermore dependent on the industry in which the brand cooperates. As the findings show, most participants agree that fashion brands are considered much more emotional than brands from other industries. Hence, it could additionally be added that not only the individual elements differ in their importance and interdependence but the complete interplay of them also differs from industry to industry, making the key elements of a strong consumer-brand relationship different dependent on the product or service that the brand-owning company offers.

***Central concept 2:** A brand community embraces a culture of caring and offers its members a platform for self-expression, communication and connection, which regular customers do not experience.*

As can be seen in the findings, one major difference in the consumer’s perception as a brand community member and a regular customer is the feeling of community. As the findings show, a brand community is, according to most participants of this study, characterized by a culture of caring and offers a platform for self-expression, communication and connection. Especially the culture of caring, both among the members and among the brand and the members, was stressed a lot. This insight complements one of Muniz & O’Guinn’ (2001) three markers of sub-concepts that support the community feeling: shared consciousness. According to Muniz & O’Guinn (2001), this marker is, as was previously described, an ensemble of we-ness, legitimacy and brand loyalty. The feeling of we-ness, so a feeling of bonding and togetherness, was described by the interview participants in various forms: some described a shared community identity based on friendship, others described it based on professional relationships and again others stated a more distant relationship, for example online with strangers, which did not lessen the feeling of we-ness though. Also the demand for moral responsibility, especially from the brand’s side, was stressed a lot when talking about brand communities. However, Muniz & O’Guinn’s (2001) second marker called “rituals and traditions” was deemed to be not as significant for the participants of this study. When asked about rituals or traditions within their community, the participants either negated such or stated rather infrequently rituals such as annual fashion shows or newsletters as examples. Even though these rituals, which could be considered a way to “share brand stories” according to Muniz

& O’Guinn’s (2001), do happen, all participants made clear that those traditions are not a key component that makes or breaks the community feeling. Besides a culture of caring, it became furthermore clear that brand community members experience the community interaction on a platform for self-expression, communication and connection, which regular customers do not experience. Arvidsson & Caliandro (2015) touch on this: as was described in *2.1.1 The definition of a brand community*, brand communities are characterized by interaction, a common identity and the co-creation of a “linking value”, and thereby differentiate themselves from more loose and detached brand publics. While the participants from this thesis study also listed interaction and a co-created linking value as a key aspect of a brand community, the more self-centered reason for joining a brand community is something that is not included in this and rarely mentioned in other definitions. Fournier (1998) has one element called “Self-connection” which, as was described in *2.1.3 The relationship of consumers and the brand in brand communities*, describes the extent to which the brand offers its customers identity-supporting aspects which help the consumer to express themselves. The insights from this study however, show that not only are consumers of fashion brands expecting the opportunity for self-expression within the brand community but some also want the possibility to co-create the value of the brand through the self-expression. Examples from this study are voluntary support of the brand in terms of brand promotion or a brand ambassador who supports the brand through their Instagram account. Hence, a direct combination of the element of “self-connection” and the possibility to co-create a “linking value” is something that the participants from this study crave in a brand community.

The insights from this study show that brand admirers are not only looking for a sense of community and collective interaction and co-creation but also for a platform to express themselves. A community program such as the one that one of the participants joined as an ambassador to post images of the fashion brands collection on her Instagram profile is not only considered an awareness spreading promotion program but a creative platform for self-expression, as was stated by the interviewee. This self-interest within the concept of a community is something that has been left out of when aiming to explore how to create brand communities.

Central Concept 3: Brand community members feel a strong community bond and engagement and an eliminated exclusivity as they have a close communication through online platforms and on their technical devices. Regular customers are missing this and hence lose attention to the brand quickly and have less knowledge about the brand’s possible efforts to be socially responsible.

As the findings show, the brand community members communicate with both other members and the brand to a large degree online (e.g. social media platform Instagram) or on a technical device

(e.g. via text messaging). The participants stated that this results in a stronger community bond and more engagement. This complements the theory from (Bertilsson & Tarnovskaya, 2017), where it was stated that online brand communities interact more purposely than offline brand community members. Furthermore, it was added that the members are more comfortable in the online environment to discuss opinions and ideas freely (Bertilsson & Tarnovskaya, 2017). As regular customers from this study seem to miss the online communication, especially from the brand's side, it can be argued that increased efforts to stimulate online followers to actively engage should not be too difficult, as, according to Bertilsson & Tarnovskaya (2017), people are more comfortable to interact online with each other. Hence, the demanded brand communication on the brand's values would possibly meet a willing audience to respond, which could quickly emerge into a vivid exchange that, ideally, grows into a community.

Regular customers are, as was explained in concept 2, lacking a culture of caring and the platform for self-expression, communication and connection. When asked about what the missing piece is that would convince them to join the community, the participants largely responded that it is a clear (online) communication about the brand's values that is lacking and hence creating a sense of disconnection among themselves and the brand. Generally, most brand community definitions only state what communities are - and not what they are not. While there are a lot of insights on the former, there are rarely any on the latter. Fournier (1998) touches on it a bit: as an extension to her brand relationship quality model (BRQ), she lists three types of stress that can break a brand relationship: partner-, environmental- and relational stress. However, these only describe types of stress that could potentially break an already existing relationship. The model in its original form only evaluates the strength of a consumer-brand relationship and what stresses could break that relationship. It could be extended to a guide that lists which steps need to be taken to actually acquire the status of a strong consumer-brand relationship. This would then, based on the findings of this study, include a strategic online communication that helps the consumers, and especially (possible) brand community members to understand which values the brand believes in and stands for.

Central concept 4: *While brand community members consider the value of a brand an important aspect in their bonding, the understanding of this value differs from member to member. Other than for other industries, the perceived value of a fashion brand is, however, largely characterized by emotional aspects. The emotional connection is even stronger, when the customer considers themselves a part of the brand's community and not just a regular customer.*

As was described in central concept 1, it is crucial for the participants of this study to know about which values a brand stands for in order to feel a strong connection to it. This, in turn, is key for

the participants of this study to become a brand community member. When asked about the value of a brand, the answers differed, with some stressing more practical aspects such as product quality or pricing, and other stressing the social responsibility efforts or intimate brand communication as the definition. This complements the claim of Sheth et al. (1991) who say that any brand is a system of values. As was described in 2.2.1 *The definition of a value of the brand*, the authors identified five consumption values that influence the consumer's brand choice behavior (Sheth et al., 1991): functional, conditional, social, emotional and epistemic values. As the findings of this study show, the participants consider especially conditional, social and emotional values of importance when it comes to fashion brands. This model could also be added with a new dimension that stresses the dynamic, changing significance of the values, depending on the product or service that the brand-owning company offers and the industry in which it operates.

Central concept 5: *Brand community members can have an impact on the value of a brand, especially as a collective group. Online platforms facilitate this impact.*

As can be seen in the findings, all participants of this study believe that they have an impact on the value of a brand, in general, but specifically when it comes to brand 1. While only a few stated that they believe they can have an impact as an individual, everyone agreed that they can definitely have an impact as a collective group; irrespective whether this group is the brand community or the general public. Some even took it so far that they said that a collective has the power to “make or break” a brand. When referring back to Bertilsson & Tarnovskaya (2017) and the three perspectives on the co-creation process (managerial, critical and community), this finding agrees with Bertilsson & Tarnovskaya (2017): the consumers that participated in this study believe that the value of a brand is co-created among the members and hence not only by the brand. The findings also show that some believe that especially within the fashion industry, consumers who, as a collective, criticize the social responsibility efforts or even unethical behavior, have previously obliterated brands through collective, public criticism and thereby degraded the perceived social value of the brand (Sheth et al., 1991). When referring to Grönroos et al. (2015) who, as was described in 2.2.2 *Co-creation of brand value*, discovered that the value co-creation can be intentional, provider-driven, customer-driven or spontaneous, this would be an example of customer-driven value co-creation. As the study gathered merely consumer insights, this can, of course, not be generalized as the only form of co-creation within the industry and among the discussed brands. However, the participant's perception that they have the capability to impact the value of a brand so drastically, especially on social media, shows that the community perspective on value co-creation within the fashion industry is particularly confident (Bertilsson & Tarnovskaya, 2017). As was also mentioned by Grönroos et al. (2015), the co-creation of value should be consciously defined and be tackled in a reflective manner to avoid dysfunctionalities. Being aware of the growing confidence of fashion customers about the customer-driven value co-

creation capabilities, especially with the ever evolving social media culture, can help to pre-empt a “take-over” by consumers, particularly when it comes to “social” value-creation (Sheth et al., 1991). Additionally, this awareness can help to create a strategic intentional value co-creation (Bertilsson & Tarnovskaya, 2017).

Central concept 6: *Even though enhancing the perceived value of a brand requires many changes, according to customers, an emotional connection to the brand can be so dominant that it can make their perception of the brand value more positive than without an emotional connection.*

The findings show that the participants have numerous demands to brand 2 that they would need to change, in order for them to join the brand community. Mostly, this was connected to the perceived image of the brand’s social and emotional value. Nonetheless, many of the participants said that even if the brand’s would change this, the current loyalty towards brand 1 is strong that they could still imagine choosing brand 1 over brand 2, they have built a strong emotional connection to the brand over time. This shows: the duration of the consumer-brand relationship is a key aspect in the consumer’s loyalty. As was shown in 2.1.1 *The definition of brand value*, the value of a brand can, according to Bertilsson & Tarnovskaya (2017) also be economic value. This economic value is, according to the brand value (or equity) chain, based on the brand image and brand strength, as explained in the segment. The brand strength is the result of the consumer behavior and consumer loyalty. Combining this with the findings of this study, this means: in order to increase the (economic) value of a fashion brand, not only does the brand image need to be communicated effectively (i.e. communicating what the brands social and emotional values are) through their online platform (see: central concept 1), but also does the brand strength rely on a long history with its consumers, in order to gain their loyalty. Only if this is achieved, the participants of this study would consider joining the brand community; in turn, according to Bertilsson & Tarnovskaya (2017), this would lead to an increase in the economic brand value.

5.4 New Insights

Considering the previous argumentation of the findings in combination with the collected theoretical insights from the literature review in 2. *Literature and Theory review*, the following final statements can be concluded as new insights from this study:

Theme	Central Concept	New Insight (extensions to previous findings from other studies)
Brand Image	Regular customers are missing a clear brand identity and knowledge about what the brand	As an extension to Fournier’s (1998) brand relationship quality model, this study shows that

	stands for. This can be avoided by providing the customer with clear and consistent knowledge about the brand's identity. If this identity formulation is done authentically and successfully, a sense of connection and admiration for the brand's image can evolve, which can arouse fidelity in the customer and thereby turn them into a brand community member.	the elements to a strong consumer-brand relationship are of different importance and interdependent. The significance of each element and interdependence depends on the industry in which the brand cooperates. As fashion brands are considered to be more emotional than brands from other industries, not only the individual elements differ in their importance and interdependence from brand to brand, but the complete interplay of them also differs from industry to industry.
Community Feeling	A brand community embraces a culture of caring and offers its members a platform for self-expression, communication and connection, which regular customers do not experience.	As an extension to Muniz & O'Guinn's (2001) three markers of a brand community, this study's findings show that the three markers are not considered of equivalent importance for a strong brand community. The second marker called "rituals and traditions" was deemed to be not as significant as the markers "shared consciousness" and "sense of moral responsibility" and infrequent occasions or even absence of such does not make or break a community, whereas the other two markers do. As an extension to Fournier's (1998) element of "self-connection" in the brand relationship quality model, an additional dimension for brands within the fashion industry could be added, which combines the element of "self-connection" with the possibility to co-create value for a stronger bond among the consumer and the brand.
Online Communication	Brand community members feel a strong community bond and engagement and an eliminated exclusivity as they have a close communication through online platforms and on their technical devices. Regular customers are missing this and hence lose attention to the brand quickly and have less knowledge about the brand's possible efforts to be socially responsible.	As an extension to Fournier's (1998) brand relationship quality model, this study shows that it could be extended to a guide that lists which steps need to be taken to actually acquire the status of a strong consumer-brand relationship. As the findings of this study show, this should include a strategic (online) communication that helps the consumers to understand which (emotional and social) values the brand believes in and stands for.
Brand Value	While brand community members consider the value of a brand an important aspect in their bonding, the understanding of this value differs from member to member. Other than for other industries, the perceived value of a fashion brand is, however, largely characterized by emotional aspects. The emotional connection is even stronger, when the customer considers themselves a part of the brand's community and not just a regular customer	As an extension to the five consumption values that influence the consumer's brand choice behavior, as defined by Sheth et. al. (1991) (functional, conditional, social, emotional and epistemic values), a dimension to identify the consumer-perceived differences in the significance of the values could be added. For fashion consumers conditional, social and emotional values are of particular importance when considering joining a brand community.
	Brand community members can have an impact on the value of a brand, especially as a collective group. Online platforms facilitate this impact.	The (fashion) community perspective on value co-creation is particularly confident about the customer-driven value co-creation capabilities (explained by Bertilsson & Tarnovskaya, 2017), especially with the ever evolving technological possibilities to communicate. Monitoring the dynamics within the brand community through an intentional value co-

		creation strategy, can help to pre-empt a “take-over” by consumers, particularly when it comes to “social” value-creation (Sheth et. al., 1991).
	Even though enhancing the perceived value of a brand requires many changes, according to customers, an emotional connection to the brand can be so dominant that it can make their perception of the brand value more positive than without an emotional connection.	The findings of this study offer an extension to the brand value chain of Bertilsson & Tarnovskaya (2017): to increase the economic value of a fashion brand, the brand image does not only need to be communicated effectively through their online platform (as was described in insight 3), but also does the brand strength rely on a long history with its consumers, in order to gain their loyalty. Only if this is achieved, the regular fashion customers would consider joining the brand community.

Figure 9: The New Insights

Conclusion

In this chapter, the main findings are presented and summarized in relation to the thesis main objectives and aims. The chapter finishes off with a discussion about future research in combination with a chapter summary.

6.1 Research Aims

The aim of this research study was earlier mentioned in *1.3 Research Purpose and Question*. The thesis is a qualitative research study with the aim to uncover and identify the perceived value of a fashion brand from a brand community member’s perspective, and this is compared in contrast to being a regular customer of another brand. The aim is that this study shall result in a broader understanding in what differentiates the value between being a brand community member compared to being just a normal customer to another brand.

The research question of the study is as earlier stated: “*How do consumers perceive the brand value in fashion brand communities in comparison to other brands?*” and the authors have aimed to answer this question by pinpointing more exact differentiating factors in the context of the research question. The purpose of this study was to find differentiating factors of brand value from a consumer's perspective. A direct comparison between a fashion brand community member and the same consumer as a regular customer was conducted, to see if any special factors or value increasing traits could be pinpointed as belonging to a fashion brand community. Through the conducted study, six general concepts were identified as differentiating between brand community members and regular consumers.

6.2 Research Findings

The research question of the study is as earlier stated: “*How do consumers perceive the brand value in fashion brand communities in comparison to other brands?*” and due to the conducted research, the authors have found six general concepts that show a difference in perceived value between the fashion brand community consumer and the regular consumer.

The six central concepts found and concluded through the research are:

Central concept 1: Regular customers are missing a clear brand identity and knowledge about what the brand stands for. This can be avoided by providing the customer with clear and consistent knowledge about the brand’s identity. If this identity formulation is done authentically and successfully, a sense of connection and admiration for the brand’s image can evolve, which can arouse fidelity in the customer and thereby turn them into a brand community member.

Central concept 2: A brand community embraces a culture of caring and offers its members a platform for self-expression, communication and connection, which regular customers do not experience.

Central Concept 3: Brand community members feel a strong community bond and engagement and an eliminated exclusivity as they have a close communication through online platforms and on their technical devices. Regular customers are missing this and hence lose attention to the brand quickly and have less knowledge about the brand’s possible efforts to be socially responsible.

Central concept 4: While brand community members consider the value of a brand an important aspect in their bonding, the understanding of this value differs from member to member. Other than for other industries, the perceived value of a fashion brand is, however, largely characterized by emotional aspects. The emotional connection is even stronger, when the customer considers themselves a part of the brand’s community and not just a regular customer.

Central concept 5: Brand community members can have an impact on the value of a brand, especially as a collective group. Online platforms facilitate this impact.

Central concept 6: Even though enhancing the perceived value of a brand requires many changes, according to customers, an emotional connection to the brand can be so dominant that it can make their perception of the brand value more positive than without an emotional connection.

It has earlier been clearly stated the importance of brand communities when it comes to value creation for companies. The factors that have been found as differentiating as value creating between brand community members and regular customers are stated in the six central concepts. They can be described as being defined by the high relevance of having a clear brand image in order to formulate a clear bond to the brand, the brand community as a platform for self-expression and the greater self, the high relevance of the social media platform as a bond creator, emotional aspects and bonds as value enhancer, brand community members and their partaking in value creation and the loyalty created through the emotional bonding to a brand community as a consumer. Therefore, one can see that despite value being a hard concept to define, there are certain concepts and factors that are unique and exclusive as value increasing for brand communities, which are not accessed as a regular consumer.

6.3 Practical Implications

The nature of the study is as earlier mentioned in *3.2.2 Abductive Research* an abductive research, hence based and compared both on earlier theory but also with the goal to gain new insights. The practical implications of the study does not lead to any concluded or generalizable insights that can be clearly stated or formulated as the basis of a new theory, but it does inspire and give background to a future, more extensive research about the broad subject. See part *6.4 Future Research* where a discussion about future research that could be done is presented and argued about. The aim of this research is stated to have been to gather additional insights on the value creation of fashion brands through the inclusion of their brand communities, and the research conducted has contributed to an already extensive theory background with new ideas, concepts and insights about the subject matter.

6.4 Future Research

As was listed in *5.4 New Insights*, the findings from this study offer the possibility for extending existing theories, such as Fournier (1998), Muniz & O'Guinn (2001) or Sheth et al. (1991). As the concept of a brand community is dynamic, especially considering the fast and drastic evolution of technologies and related opportunities for consumers to connect, interact and communicate, studies on the topic of brand communities will likely always remain extendable, adaptable and are never fully finite. The same goes for the value of a brand. The subject is so broad and subjective that it offers room for numerous more insights, especially in the context of brand communities. What stuck out in this study is the particularity of the fashion industry: as can be seen in the findings, the perceived value of a brand differs within this industry. This shows: likely, the results of this study would differ if they were collected within the context of another industry. Therefore, it can be concluded that various fields of brand community management and the value of a brand within

different industries are still waiting to be explored. This study shows: the findings could differ from what is currently known about the subjects and hence forward the art of brand community management drastically. There is also a lot of future research and new findings that can be conveyed by looking at different age groups and geographic locations. This study focused on northern European females in their young to mid-twenties, maybe conveying a less generalizable result. A culturally more appropriated study could possibly show new interesting insights.

6.5 Chapter Summary

The conclusion chapter can be summarized as a brief summary of the main findings in the form of six central concepts in relation to the stated main objectives and purposes of the study. This has been presented in relation to a suggestive discussion of future research that could be implemented to further gain insight into the complex world of brand communities and brand value creation.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Literature and Theory Review Matrix

Authors	Title	Year	Key Findings
Anselmsson, J., Bondesson, N.	Brand value chain in practise; the relationship between mindset and market performance metrics: A study of the Swedish market for FMCG	2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study identifies the link between the customer mindset metrics and their link with their actual market performance. • The authors offer a cash flow-oriented framework which identifies three types of market performances: enhanced, sustained or accelerated
Arvidsson, A., Caliandro, A.	Brand Public	2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arvidsson and Caliandro describe the connection between brand communities and the value creation concept in an online environment • The study explores brand-related communication on social media platforms by analysing a data set of tweets an Italian luxury brand • Thereby, the authors identify the differences between brand communities and brand publics and conclude the following: • brand publics are not based on interaction but a continuous focus of interest and mediation • participation in brand publics is based on individual or collective affect • in brand publics consumers consider the brand a medium that offers publicity to diverse situations of identity
Bertilsson, J.	BUSN33: Lecture 5, Brands and Social Value	2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the lecture of the course on value of brands, Bertilsson discusses how brands create a social value for consumers • Bertilsson touches on social relationships among individual brands and among consumers • key topics are the Brand Relationship Quality model (BRQ-model), brand communities and tribes
Bertilsson, J., Tarnovskay, V.	Brand Theories: Perspectives on Brands and Branding	2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The authors explain brand and branding practices from several perspectives: the brand management, consumer and critical perspective • The authors touch on numerous different topics within the field of brand management and offer insights into how to tackle such holistically
Fournier, S.	Consumers and Their Brands: Developing Relationship Theory in Consumer Research	1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The author stresses the importance of relationship management in the consumer-brand context, specifically the importance of the brand as an active relationship partner in order to create a strong consumer-brand bond • Fournier provides a theoretical framework for characterizing and understanding different types of consumer-brand relationships • The article is based on three case studies as well as a literature review on person-to-person relationship • The author focused on two research domains: brand loyalty and brand personality
Franzen, G., Moriarty, S. E.	The Science and Art of Branding	2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • approaches brand management from bthe management and the consumer perspective • The authors elaborate on various concepts ,case studies and market

			<p>research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The authors also explain the core concept of brand equity
Grönroos, C., Strandvik, T., Heinonen, K.	Value Co-Creation: Critical Reflections	2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The authors claim that value co-creation is an interplay between service providers and customers They suggest that value co-creation should be properly defined divide them according to the providers and customer’s awareness: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Intentional value co-creation ○ Provider-driven value creation ○ Customer-driven value creation ○ Spontaneous value creation
Kennedy, E., Guzman, F.	Co-creation of brand identities: consumer and industry influence and motivations	2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper offers an explanation to the phenomena of co-creation and how it shapes brand identities • The research provides insights for both the consumer and the industry to understand co-creation better • Paper is based on two studies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ first is created to gain insights from key decision-makers with responsibility for a brand ○ second is a study of millennial consumers to develop the basis of consumer motivations of co-creation of brand identities • the findings of the paper offer a framework that includes two models of brand identity co-creation • paper helps marketers to gain a better understanding for co-creating their brand identities with all stakeholders, articularly their consumers
Lawrence, A.	Community relationshipmanagement and social media	2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The author argues that companies often falsely confuse customers with online community members when using the term ‘social customer relationship management’ (social CRM) • He stresses that online community members are not always actual, paying customers of the brand • He alternatively coins the term “community relationship management (CoRM)” • CoRM is defined by people connecingt, conversing, creating and collaborating online
McAlexander, J.H., Schouten, J., Koenig, H.F.	Building Brand Community	2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The authors analyse brand community from a consumer perspective • The authors define brand community as a framework built on relationships among customers • the most important relationships are between <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ the customer and a brand ○ the customer and a company ○ the customer and a product ○ and among the customers • Outcome: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ extended definition of the term “brand community” (including entities and relationships ○ study considers vital characteristics as dynamic instead of static phenomena

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ shows that marketers can push brand communities by supporting shared consumer experiences to alter the previously stated characteristics ○ new perspective on customer loyalty as a crucial part in a brand community
Muniz, A. M., O'Guinn, T.C.	Brand Community	2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● defines brand community as one that is irrespective of geographics ● brand communities are based on structured (social) interactions among its members ● brand communities are information source for consumers ● individuality is celebrated ● traditional markers of a community: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ shared consciousness (we-ness, legitimacy, oppositional brand loyalty) ○ rituals and traditions (greeting rituals, celebrating the brand's history, sharing brand stories) ○ moral responsibility (Integrating & retaining members, Assisting in the use of the brand)
Pütter, M.	The Impact of Social Media on Consumer Buying Intention	2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pütter stresses that the increasing focus on digital media, specifically social media changed the interaction between brands and their consumers ● According to the author, it is crucial for brands to have a strategic approach on their social media platforms in order to maintain a competitive advantage ● Thereby, brands can be in control over their customer's brand perception and, ultimately, their buying intentions
Rosenthal, B., Brito, E.P.Z.	How virtual brand community traces may increase fan engagement in brand pages	2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● it can be challenging to keep fans engaged on brand pages on social media ● the creation of virtual brand communities can help brand managers increase fan engagement ● important for virtual brand community creation: information exchange, communication and establishment of cultural norms ● important: having celebrities among followers to strengthen social interactions and legitimate social practices
Schau, H.J., Muniz, A.M., Arnould, E.	How Brand Community Practices Create Value	2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● article is about the process of value creation within a brand community ● hence: about co-creation of value ● value creation in a community consists of common rules; skills, abilities, and consumption projects; and emotional commitment ● consumers acknowledges value beyond the one that the firm created through 12 common brand community practices, categorized in 4 categories ● practices incl.: interaction among members, function, gifting participants cultural capital, insider sharing, consumption opportunities, brand community vitality, and value creation
Sheth, J. N., Newman, B. I., Gross, B.L.	Why We Buy What We Buy: A Theory of Consumption Values	1991	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The authors describe different types of consumption value as a part of a study on the effects of discriminatory fees on ATM investment and welfare

Appendix 2: Interview Guide

Before the interview:

1. Send questions 30min before
2. Ask the interviewee to:
 - a) Pick brand 1: a fashion brand they like a lot and/or frequently buy/have bought from and feel so connected to that they would consider themselves a brand community member of it
 - b) Pick brand 2: similar/competitive fashion brand (same target group) that you like a lot and/or might have bought from but are not a community member of

Structure

5. Introduction
6. Brand 1:
 - a. Brand Community Membership
 - b. Value of brands
7. Brand 2
 - a. Regular Customer / Relationship
 - b. Value of brands
8. Closing

Introduction to the topic

We are writing a thesis at the Master's programme in International Marketing & Brand Management at Lund University in Sweden. We are conducting an exploratory study to gain more insight within the phenomenon of brand communities within fashion brands and the possible added value. More specifically, we are researching the following question:

“How do consumers perceive the brand value in fashion brand communities in comparison to other brands?”

Hence, we would like to get your insights as a brand community member of your choice. For the purpose of this study, it is important to understand the concept of a brand. In the following you can find a pyramid which illustrates the concept of a brand:

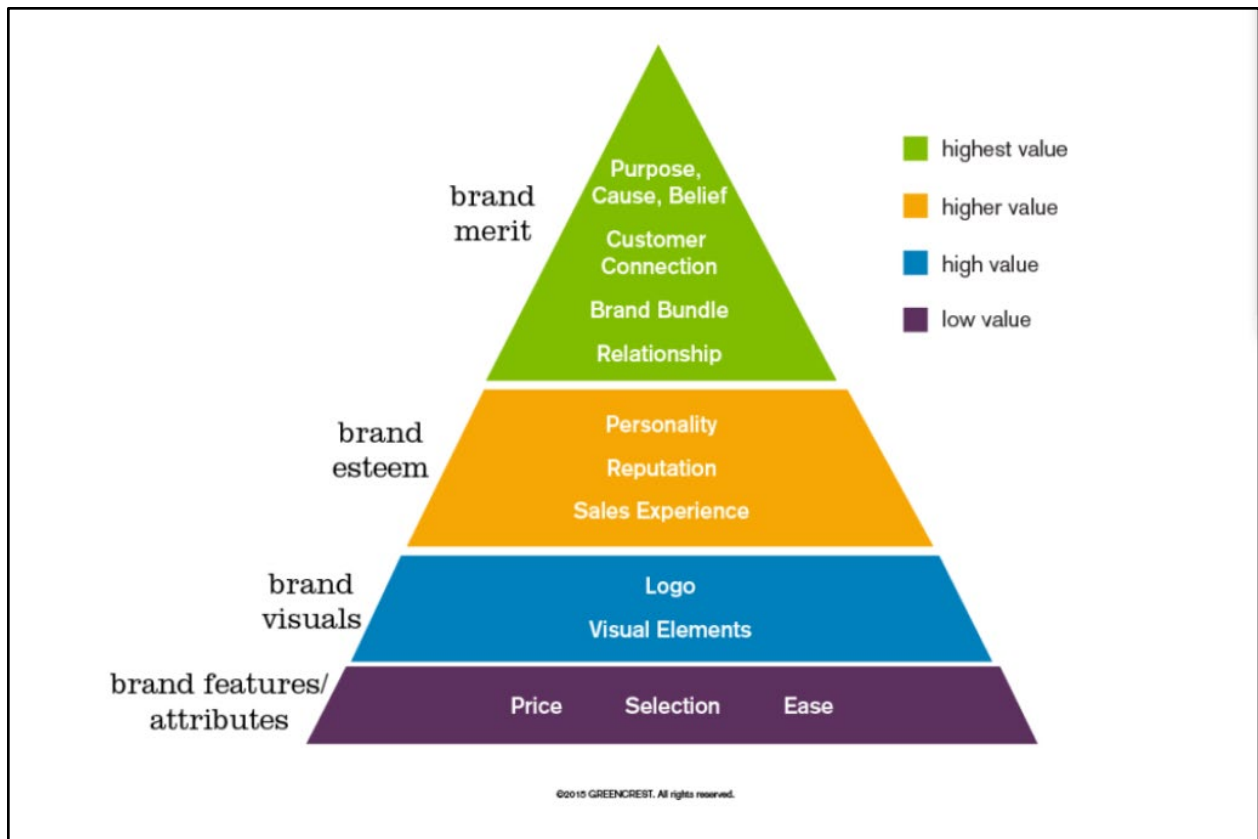


Figure 10: The Brand Pyramid (Greencrest, n.d.)

Before the beginning of the interview, we kindly ask you to pick two brands:

- c) Brand 1: a fashion brand they like a lot and/or frequently buy/have bought from and feel so connected to that they would consider themselves a brand community member of it
- d) Brand 2: similar/competitive fashion brand (same target group) that you like a lot and/or might have bought from but are not a community member of.

Consent by interviewee

Before starting the interview, we would like to ask you for your consent that we are recording and transcribing the following interview for the Master Thesis of this study.

Topic	Primary Question	Follow-Up Question	Examples
Introduction	❖ Can you briefly introduce yourself?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Age ❖ Gender ❖ Nationality ❖ Occupation 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ What is your connection to Fashion? 		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Can you briefly say, in one sentence which brands you chose and why (relationship)? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Brand 1: a fashion brand you frequently buy/have bought from and feel so connected to that you would consider yourself a brand community member of it ❖ Brand 2: a similar/competitive fashion brand (same target group) that you like a lot and/or might have bought from but are not a community member of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Relationship to the brands
Brand 1: Brand Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Generally, how do you define a brand community? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ What makes a community? ❖ What breaks a community? ❖ What differentiates a community member from a regular customer? ❖ How do you think do social media platforms, e.g. Instagram, impact brand communities? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Bonding practices, rituals, experiences ❖ change in personality, geographic relocation, loss in trust ❖ Personality traits of the costumer ❖ Characteristics of the brands ❖ Closeness of members ❖ Internationalization
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ What fashion brand do you consider yourself a brand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ How did you become a member 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Purchased Product ❖ Friends are

	community member of?	and why?	members
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Can you describe what the brand community that you are a part of, is like? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Nationalities ❖ Gender ❖ Age ❖ Interests ❖ Occupation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ How do the members interact? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Do you have any rituals and traditions within that community? ❖ Do you personally know each other? ❖ How is the communication online? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ greeting rituals ❖ traditional celebrations ❖ celebrities? ❖ Video Chat, Re-Posts, Give-Aways, Live Stories
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ How would you describe your relationship to the actual brand? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ How would you describe the brand? ❖ What are specific activities or experiences that you share with the brand? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Characteristics, values ❖ Product ❖ Visiting Fashion shows, working for them
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ How do you define the value of a brand? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Do you believe that there are different types of value? ❖ Do you define the value of a Fashion brand differently than the value of other types of brands? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Economic, Emotional, Social value
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Would you say that you, as a customer, can impact the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ What can a co-creation process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Activities ❖ Working together

	value of a brand?	look like? ❖ Do you believe that you are co-creating the value of the brand that you consider yourself to be a community member of?	(Employee of social media collaboration)
	❖ Do you think that your brand community membership impacts your perceived value of the brand?	❖ If so, how?	
Brand 2: Regular Customer	❖ What other fashion brand are you a regular customer (not a brand community member) of?	❖ What distinguishes your admiration from the brand you consider yourself a <u>brand community</u> member of to this other brand? ❖ What would it take for you to join the community?	❖ Emotional Aspects ❖ Product ❖ Quality ❖ Price
	❖ How do you think your perceived value of this brand differs from the one where you are a community member of?	❖ What exactly are you missing? ❖ What could they do better?	
Closing	❖ Is there anything you would like to add that has not been discussed?		

Appendix 3: Coding Table

Step 1: Quotes

	Elisabeth	Frida	Cecilia	Isa	Ariana	Egga	Anesa	Louisa	Melina
Introduction	My name is Elisabeth Vikhary. I'm 24 years old. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	My name is Frida. I'm 24 years old. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	My name is Cecilia and I'm 21. I'm a fashion designer. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	My name is Isa. I'm 24 years old. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	My name is Ariana. I'm 24 years old. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	My name is Egga. I'm 24 years old. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	My name is Anesa. I'm 24 years old. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	My name is Louisa. I'm 24 years old. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	My name is Melina. I'm 23 years old. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.
What is your connection to fashion?	My dad is in the fashion industry with his own brand called Max Vikhary. While growing up, I had a lot of contact with him. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	Fashion has always been a part of my life. I've always been interested in it. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	I did not grow up in a fashion oriented family. I think that I started being interested in fashion and design when I was around 10 years old. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	I feel like I've always been creative and I always loved beauty and clothing and fashion in general. I think I started being interested in fashion when I was around 10 years old. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	Very interested in it since I like it. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	I'm interested in fashion. I think it's a really interesting industry. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	I really like fashion because I'm interested in it. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	I've always been interested in fashion. I think it's a really interesting industry. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	The always been interested in fashion. I think it's a really interesting industry. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.
Can you briefly say, in one sentence which brands you chose and why (understanding)?	There are a huge number of brands where I'm a brand community member. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	There are a huge number of brands where I'm a brand community member. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	There are a huge number of brands where I'm a brand community member. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	My first brand is Huggi Bros. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	The first brand is a brand that I frequently buy from. For that I chose Huggi Bros. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	The first brand is a brand that I frequently buy from. For that I chose Huggi Bros. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	The first brand is a brand that I frequently buy from. For that I chose Huggi Bros. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	Brand number one is the one I'm most into. It's the Swedish brand Huggi Bros. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	The first brand I chose is Huggi Bros. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.
Brand 1: Brand Community in General	1. Generally, how do you define a Brand Community?	For me, a brand community is a group of people who are interested in a certain brand. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	I define it as two separate groups. One is the brand itself and the other is the people who are interested in it. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	I would say, well I mean, it's a group of people who are interested in a certain brand. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	I guess that when from the same brand. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	I would define a brand community as a group of people who are interested in a certain brand. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	I think that the brand community is a group of people who are interested in a certain brand. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	I would say it's probably like a group of people who are interested in a certain brand. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	
1.1 What makes a community?	I mean, definitely it's kind of the form of things for me to, uh, especially when you go into a physical store. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	What, the type of clothes, if I guess if there's a brand that more people are interested in, that's what makes a community. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	I think the main reason that you get a brand community is because there are a lot of people who are interested in it. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	Yeah, I could also be that maybe they're more like they want to be part of the community. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.					
1.2 What breaks a community?	If they're interested in some unrelated stuff, then the business makes different statements. I think that it's important to have a clear vision of what the brand is. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	I think it would have something to do with the business making different statements. I think that it's important to have a clear vision of what the brand is. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	I think when they do unexpected things, when they do something that they're not used to. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	I guess when the values change. For example, if a brand that they used to like suddenly changes their values, that's what breaks a community. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	Kind of the same thing, when a brand that they used to like suddenly changes their values, that's what breaks a community. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	I think when you feel, when a brand that they used to like suddenly changes their values, that's what breaks a community. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	I would maybe say, loss of identity. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.		
1.3 What differentiates a community member from a regular customer?	I think a brand community member is someone who is more engaged with the brand. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	As a community member you are more engaged. You are not just buying the product, you are also interested in the brand. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	I think a community member is someone who is more engaged with the brand. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	I would definitely say that it's someone who is more engaged with the brand. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	I guess it's because, partly because of the brand itself. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	A brand community member is someone who is more engaged with the brand. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	For example with Huggi Bros. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	I would say that a community member is someone who is more engaged with the brand. I'm currently doing the Master's in Communication and I'm also fashion industry. I'm going to be doing different fashion jobs in the design, marketing, etc.	

Table with 10 columns and 4 rows containing interview transcripts. Row 1: 9. How do you think your perceived value of this brand differs from the one where you are a community member of? Row 2: 9.1 What exactly are you missing? Row 3: 9.2 What could they do better? Row 4: Closing section with a 'No' response.

Step 2: Initial and Focused Coding

Initial Coding / Theme	Elisabeth	Freja	Cecile	Ira	Artana	Saga	Anessa	Louise	Melina	'Explanation'	Focused Coding / Abstract
Introduction											Introduction
Can you briefly introduce yourself?	Female, 23 student, Marketing and Management	Female, Danish, laboratory assistant	Female, 21, Gap Year, Danish	Female, student, Fashion, Dutch	Female, 24, Student, Chemistry, Swedish/Balkan	Female, 26, Doctor, Swedish	Female, 24, Student, Marketing, Swedish/Balkan	Female, 24, Student, Marketing, Communication, Swedish	Female, 24, Law Student, Sweden	BC: Brand Community, RC: Regular Customer	
What is your connection to Fashion?	Father owns fashion business; grew up in Fashion	Self-Expression	Historical aspects of fashion	Creativity, Occupation, Job	Interested, Personalized, Penetration, Job, Occupation, Confessions	Interested, Fun, Like Fashion, Following, Trends	Consumer, Can't afford	Dream to work with fashion, interest, Fashion, Magazines	Interested in fashion, but not ready to buy		Profession, Personality traits
Can you briefly say, in one sentence which brands you chose and why (relationship)?	BC: Max Volmoyr / RC: Zimmermann	BC: NA-KD // RC: Lounge Underwear	BC: Stella McCartney // RC: Samsoe Samsoe		BC: Hugo Boss // RC: Maxmara	BC: Hunkydory // RC: Roberger	BC: Lewis // RC: Roberger // RC: Filippa K	BC: Roberger // RC: Coach	BC: Ralph Lauren // RC: Coach		Brand 8: Brand Communities in General
1. Generally: how do you define a Brand Community?	Group helping, support, like-mindedness, purpose	Online exchange, inspiration	Active and active members, personal branding, collaboration, communication, connection	Sociology, connection, online or offline exchange, like-mindedness, engagement	Same target group, same interests, similar style	Connection	Close relationships to the consumer, want consumer opinion, limiting product	Identification, stronger interest in a product	Identification, stronger interest in a product		Brand 1: Brand Communities in General
1.1 What makes a community?					Form of therapy, shared interests, treatment, interaction in health, drawing, music, physical, personalized, newsletters	Direct discourse, and group sharing, communication, same style	People can help each other, recommendations, like-minded, inspiration	Stronger relationships, interactions	Stronger relationships, interactions		Caring, Brand Management perspective, Structural Aspects, Consumer Characteristics
1.2 What breaks a community?	Unethical behaviour, misrepresentation of customers, selling against values, communication issues	Unethical behaviour, fraudulent communication	Fraudulence, acting against brand identity	Fraudulence, selling against brand identity, change of brand value	Being too specific and niche, exclusives	Being too specific and niche, exclusives	Loss of consumer trust, exclusives	Loss of personality, loss of authenticity, too much change, not wanting to identify	Loss of personality, loss of authenticity, too much change, not wanting to identify		Unethical reputation, Inauthenticity and lack of integrity, inconsistency in perceived brand image, Differences in perceived brand image, Change in consumer's repeat set
1.3 What differentiates a community member from a regular customer?	BC: engagement, promotion, strong family and friends // RC: self-interest	BC: engagement, passion // RC: no conviction	BC: thoughtful, activity, commitment // RC: thoughts, practical, anonymous	BC: regularity, interest, commitment // RC: practical, anonymous	BC: knowledge of effort, process and work	BC: someone standing for the brand, critical, Swedish, knows the geographic location	BC: followed for many years, brand, knows history and development, respect for brand	BC: closer relationship, greater loyalty	BC: closer relationship, greater loyalty		BC: Active membership, Knowledge, Exclusivity, Inauthenticity, Inconsistency of an aim
1.4 How do you think do social media platforms, e.g. Instagram, impact brand communities?	Building and guiding, social media, advertising, interactive	advertising, largeness, openness, interaction, authentic, story	direct communication, indirect, internal communication, influence	interaction, internal communication	Huge impact, easier to buy	Close group, necessary for demographic, easier access to community, customer communication	Building, social media, brand knowledge, customer communication	Good platform, greater connection to brand, better advertising	Easier member interaction, getting closer to brand, more advertising		Strategic brand management tool, strengthening community bonding
2. What fashion brand do you consider yourself a brand community member of?	Max Volmoyr	NA-KD	Stella McCartney	Hugo Boss	Hugo Boss	Hunkydory	Levi's	Roberger	Ralph Lauren		Brand image, Identity, Product purchases
2.1 How did you become a member and why?	buying clothes, early involvement, general interest in fashion, progress to personal brand and push the image	friend, social media advertisement for brand community	emotional connection through former colleague	former client of the brand, exchange with other former colleagues about the brand	not following, bought without consideration, started looking for the brand, preference for Hunkydory	buying without consideration, started looking for the brand, preference for Hunkydory	single shared app looking for the brand, quality and price value	connected to designer, shared interests, follows them, selections	became more interested, use value in being a brand member		
2.2 Can you describe what the brand community that you are a part of, is like?	Age: 40, 45 or 50 / gender: female / if characteristic: mature / style: elegant + flexible / values: premium quality, practicality, fit, representation	Age: 16 to 25 / gender: female / if characteristic: ordinary	Age: young / gender: female / if characteristic: Scandinavian / if characteristic: environmentally aware, international, modern women		Person that wants to look sharp, male and female, cares about looks, willing to pay for quality, typical group: high cancer, European	no certain demographics due to global knowledge, knows where to find them. Fit for all	no certain demographics due to global knowledge, knows where to find them. Fit for all	Swedish men, Nordic style	unique, classic, timeless, any age, no certain demographics		
3. How do the members interact?	Mobile communication, online communication, (Level: frequent)	personal communication, frequency increases for professional influences	online communication, personal communication	Mobile communication, online communication	Community, not much interaction, the benefit only for target group	online communication, interactions on Instagram, representing interest	online communication, interactions on Instagram, representing interest	communication events, new on social media, specific interactions	events, new on social media, specific interactions		Platforms of communication, Frequency of communication
3.1 Do you have any rituals and traditions within that community?	Events, product use	Events	Connection through symbolism	Events	buying birthday presents for target group	No, maybe brand, participating in same events, follow same things	No, maybe brand, participating in same events, follow same things	Occasionally, sometimes, but not often	No, maybe brand, participating in same events, follow same things		events, social communication, Personal relationship, Superficial, close relationship, relationship
3.2 Do you personally know each other?	Family	No	Personal interaction, professional connection	Professional connection	No	No, maybe brand, participating in same events, follow same things	No, maybe brand, participating in same events, follow same things	No, maybe brand, participating in same events, follow same things	No, maybe brand, participating in same events, follow same things		

3.3 How is the communication online?	customer service, interaction, promotion	promotion			YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, SoundCloud, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, SoundCloud, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, SoundCloud	not much personally, community members, influencers, traditional advertising	Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, SoundCloud	positive, comments, shares, retweets, likes, reposts, shares, retweets, likes, reposts	normal communication, community members, influencers, traditional advertising		Communicator brand or marketing related Communicator brand community members
4. How would you describe your relationship to the actual brand?		appreciation for product variety and quality		Loyalty	good solid brand, brand, follow brand with vision	I have interest, follow on social media	good quality and price range	strong relationship, Swedish identity	strong and loyal, follow, appreciate and like, influence classic and trendy		based on product based on vision based on brand image
4.1 How would you describe the brand?		traditional values, high quality, progressive, variety				values customer service, extra touch, environmental values, personal, good values	good quality, good price range				product characteristics brand value
4.2 What are specific activities or experiences that you share with the brand?			long-term admiration for the brand		follow social media, fashion shows, read posts	newsletter, goals and values following process and happenings, feel part of them	value for money	wearing stores, good impression and service			marketing activities emotions and values
5. How do you define the value of a brand?	brand awareness, product understanding, engagement, equity	knowing brand understanding	economic value, social value, sustainability	balancing price and quality, convenience, easy buying	value, purpose not selling just bad materials, quality features and fast labor	yes, different branches	value for money	positive history with brand, emotional and social value			economic aspects technical product aspects emotional and social aspects
5.1 Do you believe that there are different types of value?			other brands, practical intentions (e.g. convenient products) if fashion brands, more valuable	other products, functionality (e.g. both products) if fashion brands, fast moving, practical	yes, different branches	individual, emotional, value with clothes, very	style match	value for money, knowledge of quality			difference in consumer's perceived value difference to the actual value no difference
5.2 Do you define the value of a Fashion brand differently than the value of other types of brands?					no same value no matter what product	individual, emotional, value with clothes, very	style match	value for money, knowledge of quality			emotional difference no difference
6. Would you say that you, as a customer, can impact the value of a brand?	impact of the consumer as an individual, promotion, engagement, reflection of customer's character on product perception		impact of consumer as a subjective, economic result	impact of consumer as a subjective, economic result	individual, no part of a bigger community - yes	Yes	style match	value for money, knowledge of quality			difference in consumer's perceived value difference to the actual value no difference
6.1 What can a co-creation process look like?					general public can have input when brands use social media, social media can spread	wrong target group can affect brands	educating each other to be better	educating each other to be better			reactive / critical co-creation promotional / positive co-creation
6.2 Do you believe that you are co-creating the value of the brand that you consider yourself to be a community member of?					through research on small scale	through social media	through social media	through social media			active passive
7. Do you think that your brand community membership impacts your perceived value of the brand?		Yes	Yes	Yes	yes decreased judgement	yes decreased judgement	yes decreased judgement	yes decreased judgement			decreased judgement
7.1 If so, how?		more convenience, big product variety, followed entire journey of the brand	more emotion								
Brand 2: Regular Consumer											
8. What other fashion brand are you a regular customer (not a brand community member) of?	Zimmermann	Lounge Underwear	Samsonite	Suit Supply	MaMaMa	Rodejager	Cluses	Filippa K	Coach		Brand 2: Regular Consumer
8.1 What distinguishes your admiration from the brand you consider yourself a brand community member of to this other brand?	BC brand values, public communication, knowledge about easy clean, history of BC, no communication about brand values, communication is based on practicality	BC brand values, public communication, knowledge about easy clean, history of BC, no communication about brand values, communication is based on practicality	BC brand values, public communication, knowledge about easy clean, history of BC, no communication about brand values, communication is based on practicality	BC brand values, public communication, knowledge about easy clean, history of BC, no communication about brand values, communication is based on practicality	BC brand values, public communication, knowledge about easy clean, history of BC, no communication about brand values, communication is based on practicality	BC brand values, public communication, knowledge about easy clean, history of BC, no communication about brand values, communication is based on practicality	BC brand values, public communication, knowledge about easy clean, history of BC, no communication about brand values, communication is based on practicality	BC brand values, public communication, knowledge about easy clean, history of BC, no communication about brand values, communication is based on practicality	BC brand values, public communication, knowledge about easy clean, history of BC, no communication about brand values, communication is based on practicality	BC brand values, public communication, knowledge about easy clean, history of BC, no communication about brand values, communication is based on practicality	BC brand values, public communication, knowledge about easy clean, history of BC, no communication about brand values, communication is based on practicality
8.2 Do they have a brand community?	Maybe if so: bigger BC brand, lots of collaboration with influencers, bigger budget, bigger brand	Yes, if requires posting products (photos on social media, interaction on social media (e.g. games, commenting))	Maybe if not aware of it, but guesses that there is a BC behind Samsonite	Maybe if brand experienced "buzz" in many years, similar to BC, maybe that if a BC, it is not as close	up their game, makes more edgy products	becoming brand member is a goal, takes time, not impossible, get an emotional connection	maybe going to guess service, service was last 2m ago through	better clothes, more pattern and color more	coach being more about brand, but what they are promoting, clearly aesthetic		positive image of brand community
8.3 What would it take for you to join the community?	affordability of products, can imagine becoming a BC member	relationship without having to post pictures of products, can imagine becoming a BC member		events, more interaction with consumers, guesses that she will check how it performs for Hugo Boss							Product or Service Innovation or Communication Emotional Connection Brand Image
9. How do you think your perceived value of this brand differs from the one when you are a community member of?	unknown about BC brand values and "story" behind the product	authenticity of BC brand values, whereas BC brand embodies values in various aspects (images, product sense, etc)	quality and price are similar, BC brand is both subtle and does not communicate effectively, whereas BC brand often communicates community feeling	BC: the attention to detail and adding of something extra, not communicable effectively, whereas BC brand often communicates community feeling	RC: more confident since I've been in it, I know what I'm getting, the price and quality are too high to try	RC: change how they reach out, BC is better at reaching out, maybe due to following, so RC connection, BC can maybe do a better targeting	difference is personality, I don't expect myself with RC as unique	BC: Inflexible and works for every occasion, versatile and dress as a part of fashion, BC: follow trends, harder			BC: - Brand Image - Community feeling - Strong knowledge, identity - RC: - Brand Image - Brand Identity
9.1 What exactly are you missing?			both brands are so big that they have a responsibility to use their platform for social, environmental or political issues, but only BC brand does it. RC brand is lacking a sense of responsibility								Social responsibility Marketing Brand Image
9.2 What could they do better?					be more visible on social media for the mass, need to appeal to new people	RC: not know enough about them to know maybe more environmental	value for money, but a big brand like them could make more, better commercials, more explosive and eye-catching				Marketing Brand Image Social responsibility Product
Closing	Is there anything you would like to add that has not been discussed?				No	No	No	No	No	No	Closing

Appendix 4: Interviews Elisabeth

Okka: All right. Okay. So we are writing a thesis at the master's program in international marketing and brand management, and we are conducting an exploratory study to gain more insight into the phenomenon of brand communities within fashion brands. And so the following question will be the research question that the whole interview is based on.

So that's "How do consumers perceive the brand value and fashion brand communities in comparison to other brands?" Um, and to ensure that, you know what a brand is, we, um, stated this little pyramid in the picture. So do you think you know what a brand is?

Elisabeth: Yeah, I feel like I recognized.

Okka: Okay, nice. Yeah. Um, so before, um, the interview, we already asked you to choose two brands, which I will ask you about later. Um, but also we need to ask you for your consent, um, because we are recording this, uh, interview and we're going to transcribe it and use it for the thesis.

Elisabeth: That's fine.

Okka: Okay, great. So can you briefly introduce yourself?

Elisabeth: Sure. So my name is Elisabeth Volmary. I'm a German 23 year old girl. I'm currently doing the masters in Copenhagen and, um, yeah. I'm also in the field of communication, marketing and management.

Okka: Okay. So you study.

Elisabeth: Exactly.

Okka: Okay. Um, and so as you know, as I just said, um, this whole research, um, is around fashion. So could you say what your connection to fashion is?

Elisabeth: Yeah, sure. My dad is in the fashion industry with his own brand called Max Volmary. While growing up, I had a lot of touch points to the fashion industry in general, by going to different fairs or joining him in the design process, meetings, etc.

Okka: Um, and as I said before, we ask you to come up with two brands. So one Brand would be, um, a fashion brand that you frequently bought, and that you feel connected to so that you would consider yourself to be a brand community member off. And then a second brand, um, that you also like a lot and that you also buy every now and then, but your connection is not so close as that you're an actual community member. So which two brands would that be for you?

Elisabeth: Of course, for the first one, I would take Max Volmary, so the brand of my father. I wear a lot of their stuff because of course it's super convenient to me. And also I identify with that a lot. It has certain value to me in the sense that I just know the quality of the product. I totally stand behind it. And then I like the designs.

Okka: Okay.

Elisabeth: Um, and the second one is Zimmermann, which I think is a comparable brand in terms of pricing and also in terms of quality and value. However, it is still somewhat, more a "fashionista" kind of brand from where I see their Instagram posts. And I know it's quite an expensive brand. So as a student, you don't buy it

Okka: Okay. Okay. Um, so let's first talk about the first brand. So for you, that would be Max Volmary, the one where you're a brand community member off. So my first questions would be general, so this doesn't relate yet to the brand. Um, but just to get into the topic, um, how do you define a brand community?

Elisabeth: So for me, a brand community is a grouping of people around a certain brand. So in terms of Max Volmary, the box would be the brand. And then there are people around it that believe in him, the value of the brand. So meaning that, as I talked about earlier, with the price, the quality and of all the purpose, there is a purpose for the brand to exist. And with a brand community, I also associate like-minded people who see the brand in the same light as you do, and have the same taste and styling probably, like in terms of fashion. So you also exchange your opinion between each other and need to identify with a brand.

Okka: Okay. So as I understand, that is what for you makes a community. And what would break a community? So what, if already a community exists for a brand, what would break that bonding?

Elisabeth: What you think you know about a brand that is guided by an overall company. If they interact in some unethical way and the business makes unethical statements. I think that it would be a reason for community members to break out of being in the community because you are not feeling represented by the brand and its values anymore, or don't want to be represented by the brand. So I think it's much about the communication of a brand.

Okka: Okay. And, um, so you consider yourself a brand community member. What does that mean to you? What differentiates a brand community member of a regular customer?

Elisabeth: Mm, I think a brand community member is different to a regular customer because you also engage a lot in word of mouth with your friends and family that are not yet in that community. So, yeah. Like definitely selling or promoting that brand because I believe in it. Um, so when I go, let's say to H&M or Zara and buy something, I'm just wearing that for my own sake, but I wouldn't go to friends and, um, tell them how amazing this clothing is or give them advice on going to that specific brand to buy it. Whereas with Max Volmary, if people ask me about it, I would also tell them the background story and what the quality is, or generally what the higher meaning for me is to wear it. So I think there's a difference.

Okka: Okay. Okay. Um, and how do you think social media, like for example, Instagram, which you already mentioned, um, impacts Brand communities?

Elisabeth: Yeah. So I think, um, nowadays social media is super important. You can really build brands and guide them and the Brand communities as well, because there's two ways now of communication. It's no longer the brand, just sending marketing messages. If you have the immediate feedback from your customer, it allows you to create this community feeling. That is something that I also realized myself because I set up this Instagram account for my dad's brand as a voluntary project because I really believe in the brand and the values. I also get, um, just like normal requests from people about where they could buy stuff or if a certain size is still available or questions about that product that you are able to answer and

get into direct contact with, which I think is great. And also you can take the people with you on a story. So like in general, storytelling is a way that is more interactive and you can show them what is going on behind the curtain, how the businesses actually operates.

Okka: Yeah. Okay. Um, okay. So I already, yeah, we're already talking about Max Volmary, so that's the fashion brand you chose. Um, how specifically did you become a member? So you already said you're working for them. Um, how did that start off?

Elisabeth: Yeah, so, um, based on the fact that my dad and my dad's friend built it and I was involved in it from an early age and I just have a general interest in fashion. And then I also obviously chose to wear the brand as often as I could. I just got super immersed into it. And when I saw that social media is becoming a thing also for brands, I just set up this account for the brand as a voluntary project and I'm still just feeding it with some photos and sharing some updates, specifically for B2B customers in that sense, because we only sell to retailers, not to the end consumer.

Okka: Okay.

Elisabeth: So sometimes it can happen that, when somebody reaches out and asks you about if a certain clothing is available in size “whatsoever”, then, um, I'm usually able to direct them to a certain retailer who's close to them and can provide them with that.

Okka: So it's kind of like customer service as well?

Elisabeth: Yeah, I guess.

Okka: Yeah. And can you describe what the brand community, um, is like of the brand? Like in general, some characteristics?

Elisabeth: Demographic-wise, I would say the median age is around 40, 45 or 50, maybe like more mature women, elegant style and also lifestyle. And, um, they really value wearing good clothing. So something that you don't just like to wear once or twice, but you can wear every day and it's washable, so that it doesn't shrink and doesn't lose color. So, it's a premium brand but it's not high end. It's not high fashion, like for example Chanel. Yeah. Um, it's still more focused on being practical and fitting to a woman's body in the sense that also after you gave birth, you don't want to wear something that is tight to your skin, but you want to feel comfortable and still be represented by what is your style.

Okka: Okay. And is there a certain nationality among the customers?

Elisabeth: They're international. However, I think since we are based in Germany, there is a strong German base. Yeah. But I wouldn't narrow it down to one, like we are everywhere, also in Canada and in Denmark.

Okka: Okay. Yeah. And how do the brand community members interact?

Elisabeth: Um, Most of the time, um, since we are all somehow connected to the brand due to us being in a family or being friends, so like in an inner circle, we do actually communicate via phone or also text messages. And, um, also I see, of course, the likes on Instagram. Um, so I think it's quite a personal connection and it's not this typical, um, let's say “modern brand communication”. Communication where you have a group chat and then you all communicate there, but it's more, very personal and one-on-one.

Okka: And, um, are there any rituals and traditions? So, surrounding the brand, like, for example, fashion shows or something, where you could just directly interact with brand community members?

Elisabeth: Mm. I mean, we do print every half a year these catalogs. So either for autumn, winter, or for summer and spring. And, um, the distribution of the catalogs is of course, something that is like a personal connection or like a family event where you would also meet up. Everybody is most of the time wearing Max Volmary now. Not because it's like an agreement, but it's just unspoken. Everybody has it in the closet and you talk about it as well. And, also with friends of my parents, they're usually also wearing something and then they're like “Oh, actually I love this one, have you seen it?”. And it's just like by accident and it's not like we have this one group and we all communicate. This is more casual. Um, but we still kind of feel bonded to the brand.

Okka: Okay. So there's not like a. Like a strict line between who is a Brand community member and who isn't, it's more fluid

Elisabeth: Yes, sometimes, I even saw that when we got into the restaurant and we saw a random person wearing it, and then we like sperm. I think I spoke to that person, or like I just said, ah, that's maximize. Um, and then you immediately had this connection and they were like, Oh my God, I love this brand. The quality is amazing. You guys also. Um, and then you feel like, yeah, I kind of feel like minded with that person, even though it's like a 40 year old woman maybe. Yeah. But still you felt that they have the same kind of values.

Okka: Okay. Um, okay. And how is the communication specifically online? So on Instagram?

Elisabeth: Yeah. Um, so the communication, I would say is on the one side on Instagram which is a big project, also together with my sister now. Um, and we want to show also what is so special about, for example, a blouse; that there is like a certain fabric or that we use certain buttons or something. So it's more focused on fun upon the clothing and, um, then the second, like the second dimension of getting feedback comes in through likes and comments. Um, and then like through the, the private chat function where they, um, text us something as I mentioned, um, and then you can engage with them. And, um, what I also realized is that the retailers love to post stories of their own purchases, like Max Volmary. And then you would repost it again so that our followers also see that, um, the retailers are actively engaging into it. Spreading

the message about the brand. Yeah. So that other retailers see it would feel like this is something that they could also try out.

Okka: Yeah. Okay. Um, okay. And then more specifically, just about the brand, not the brand community. Um, I mean, you did already explain and touch a bit on that, but like, how would you generally describe the brand? Like what does the brand stand for?

Elisabeth: Yeah. Um, so I think it's like a lot of, um, these old school family values so that you really want to deliver a high quality product, as I said. And also you still want to go with the time, so you don't want to have this one kind of style that you see every year, but you adapt to it. In this modern industry changes are happening so rapidly, um, like certain textures, certain colors. Um, so that is also the vibe of where the modernism comes in. Um, and then there are like different lines within the brand where you will focus more on like basics and one is more rebellious, so it's more experimental. And then the last one is more classical, so elegant. So, there are sub brands. They are very different personas that actually were named after us. Yeah. So it's um, like each one of us, his daughters is being represented by like one line, which would fit our characteristics. Yeah. So that's a bit, the idea.

Okka: And, um, okay. Talking more about the value of friends, because that's also one main aspect of the, um, research. How do you define the value of a brand?

Elisabeth: Um, I think the value of the brand, as you can see at Coca-Cola, can be huge in just, um, the brand awareness that people have. The value of a brand can also be about the understanding that people actually have a view, so for example, brands like Schweppes, everybody knows it's like this tonic water, but then only few people understand that there's also a premium version of Schweppes water. So they see it more as a basic. So I think here it comes into play that a brand value is understood. Then also what is super important is that you have engaging customers. Like someone who is in this community of telling other people to join and buy the brand because of its value, so someone who is being super loyal. And I think that dimension is probably the most important one out of those three

Okka: Okay. Um, how do you define the value of a fashion brand? So specifically, what is the difference to other brands?

Elisabeth: Yeah. With a fashion brand, I think it's a lot about the perception that people have. So if you look at a brand like Dior and Chanel, it's not usually about what the clothes actually look like, but the whole setting. So, if you go to a fashion walk, it's also the “who-knows-who” industry, it's more about, um, this whole appearance of the brand And people who wear Chanel, they want to see other people that wear Chanel. So in that really premium high-end segment, the value of a brand comes from, um, the perception that people have and a really high price. Yeah. And, um, when you look more downstream, um, like Zara and H&M, I think the value of a brand comes through what you are able to deliver. So it's more the value from, um, delivering a super modern piece from a certain point in time, which is like as fast as possible as this thing is modern and relevant and then making it also super cheap. So, um, a brand value is in both

sense, something that people perceive of you needs to be as somehow value adding to them in order to be perceived as something good.

Okka: Okay. Um, then, um, would you say that you as a customer can impact the value of a brand?

Elisabeth: As I said with the brand community, you can shape a brand while being a person that recommends it to your friends and family. When I engage with it, I want other people to engage with the brand as well. And since I choose to pick those people, those people's values will automatically then be associated with the brand as well. Because if that person is a really good person and wears a certain piece and people like that person, they feel like "Oh, the brand must be something good as well". However, if it's like a, let's say a "Trump" person, so unethical and he wears the brand, then you would not be so prone to wear that anymore. So if you imagine then, um, like someone politically, for example, where that's, I think also a reason why you don't see that so often, but, um, like I'm going to America would wear something different. To a, um, like maybe someone from the right-wing party where the same piece, and you could see a logo on there and you feel like, Oh, this person feels, um, feels close to this brand. That there must be something wrong with the brand. Yeah.

Okka: So that would mean that the brand isn't always under control?

Elisabeth: Exactly. Even though they try to sometimes. I think they also sometimes pay people to really not wear something, like if they are in the public eye and if they don't want to be perceived as trashy. So they really need to make sure that it doesn't happen. Also, Ed Hardy is a good example. There was this one trend where Ed Hardy suddenly became a trend because I think Madonna got a shirt from Ed Hardy for free. And she wore it just because I think she went to the supermarket and people photographed her, maybe a good setting, like photos everywhere. Suddenly everybody wanted to buy Ed Hardy because they were such fans of Madonna and they thought "Oh, Madonna loves that, then we've got to love Ed Hardy as well. And that's how it became a trend.

Okka: Okay. And for the brand community of Max Volmary, would you say that you are, um, like how much are you in control over the members? Do you feel like the ones that you would consider brand community members are like representative of the brand or?

Elisabeth: Yeah. Um, I think I can't control anybody, but I also don't feel the need for it because since it's like this close family and friends group, um, you know, other more or less, which is fortunate in our example. We know each other, so there's no need to control. And you feel like the brand is represented very well. However, if it would grow like even further, and sometimes you don't know if somebody is maybe in our community, but we don't really interact with, or they might have their own brand community of Max Volmary in another country that we can't relate to. I can neither control that nor say something about it. Yeah. Um, so there are boundaries as to how much control you have.

Okka: Um, okay. Wait, let me think. Okay. Then talking about the other brand that you chose: that was Zimmermann. What distinguishes your admiration for this brand from Max Volmary?

Elisabeth: I think for me, it's just the values. So I don't really know about their values. I follow them on Instagram, but they never really communicate. I just like the clothing. Whereas, with Max Volmary, I know more or less exactly what it represents, where it's being made from and what it was made off, like the entire supply chain and as a brand community, we're all aware of its purpose. Whereas with Zimmermann, the products are more appealing to me, but they don't mean something to me

Okka: Okay. And do you know if they have a brand community, so not just regular customers, but is there like a brand community they have?

Elisabeth: I'm pretty sure they have and I'm also pretty sure it's way bigger than Max Volmary, since they do a lot with influencers. They have a much bigger budget. They have a much bigger brand in that sense. Um, so I think, yeah, they definitely have a bigger brand community.

Okka: Okay. And what would it take for you to join the community? What is the missing gap?

Elisabeth: Um, I think for now it's the money. I can't afford to buy so much clothing from them. But I feel like from the quality, what I've experienced so far, I'm super happy. Like I have this amazing piece and I love it. So one day when I'm not a student anymore, and will hopefully have enough budget on the head, I would definitely consider buying more. Then I think there could be the tipping point at one point where I wear equally as much as I wear from Max Volmary and then kind of be in randomness be part of both.

Okka: Okay. All right. Um, okay. Yeah. I, I mean, I kind of asked this already: "How do you think your perceived value of this brand differs from the one where you are?" So actually that's it. So is there anything you would like to add?

Elisabeth: No.

Okka: Thanks for taking the time.

Freja

Okka: Okay. So we are writing a thesis at the master's program in international marketing and brand management at Lund University. And we are conducting an exploratory study to gain more insight within the phenomenon of brand communities within fashion brands and the possibly added value. So specifically we are researching the following question:

How do consumers perceive the brand value of fashion brand communities in comparison to other brands? Hence, we would like to get your insights as a brand community member of your choice. For the purpose

of this study it is, uh, it is important to understand the concept of a brand and in the following you can find a pyramid which illustrates the concept of a brand. Did you read that?

Freja: No.

Okka: That's fine. Did you read through the, um, pyramid image that you see there?

Freja: No. The one, um, that one, yes.

Okka: Do you understand that? Um, so basically it just shows you what a brand is just to not confuse it with like a product itself, for example, or, yeah. Um, okay. So we've given you the research questions and the interview questions before. So we asked you to pick two brands. Um, but before we start, we need your consent. So we would like to ask you for your consent. We are recording and transcribing the following interview for the master thesis for the study.

Freja: Yes, you have my consent.

Okka: That's good. Thanks. Okay, so can you briefly introduce yourself?

Freja: Hi, um, my name is Freja Abildgaard I am Danish. I'm a laboratory assistant at the biggest hospital in Denmark, I am about to study, so I am currently just working.

Okka: Okay. Um, and as you know, like this research is about fashion brands. So what do you think, um, what is your connection to fashion? So why are you participating in this?

Freja: Uh, fashion has always meant a lot to me. I love being able to express how I'm going to wear things and wearing them in general. It means a lot that I can decide how I feel on the inside to show it on the outside.

Okka: Okay.

Freja: And then I like changing my outfits and I feel also comfortable.

Okka: Okay. So, um, one second, sorry. I'm writing. Um, so as you know, this study is also about Brandmanagement, so what would you say, um, are the two brands that you chose? So we asked you before to come up with one brand, that's a middle designer fashion brand that you frequently buy or have bought from and feel connected to. And another brand that is similar to this first brand. Um, so that has like the same target group that you might have bought from, but you're not really like a brand community member off, so you can be a fan, but not a brand community member.

Freja: Um, I have chosen, uh, two brands. The one is lounge underwear where I'm a brand community member, but it's a bit different because it's underwear. So it's not something that you show off as much as other clothing brands. And the other brand that I chose is NA-KD. Which is a brand that I am actually a brand ambassador for, but I definitely feel way more connected to the Lounge Underwear.

Okka: Okay. One second. I'm just going to read the note. Okay. Great. So we will, um, come back to both of those brands. Um, but first of all, let's start talking about the first brand that you're, uh, an actual run community member off. So as I understood, that would be NA-KD for you. Yeah, where you're in brand ambassador. So, um, my first question would be like, as you could tell from the research question, we're talking about brand communities, how would you personally define a brand community just freely? Like there's no right or wrong.

Freja: Uh, for me, like with my age group, a lot of the brand communities are very visible on Instagram and like into stories. Like among, especially Danish influencers. There is a lot with this NA-KD brand and they like to post brief stories of how to match outfits. Also with styling problems. For example, like I want to wear more patterns, more colors, but I often tend to wear black on black, and then you can post like an entire story and just be like, yeah. Then you can try to spice your up and up with some of the basic essentials that you can have, or like being creative with your okay.

Okka: And, um, why do you think that that is an example of a brand community? So when they post those stories, like, what about that makes you feel like it's a part of being a brand community

Freja: because, um, most of them interact like with their followers, so they make like open questions so they can write in questions and then they will enter it then either with like a life story or just like these, um, 10 top, most, um, fashion issues ora way to dress differently without getting out of the comfort zone, but just there.

Okka: And what do you think would break a community? So let like break in terms of like, if there's already, like, for example, here with NA-KD, they already established in your opinion a Brand community, what would break that?

Freja: Um, I think it would have something to do with the brand itself. NA-KD for example often has collections with influencers. So they have more regular people who also bring in their ideas for the fashion brand. They, for example, have the recycle collection that you can actually go buy on their website. And I think what would break it is if they got into a scandal, if for example the whole image of their brand was not what was really going on behind the scenes. So in the case of the influencers collection, it would be that they just got their name on it, but the influencers did not do anything.

Okka: Okay. I understand.

Freja: Fast fashion, but with no person.

Okka: Okay. And, um, what do you think differentiates a community member from a regular customer?

Freja: Um, uh, community member for me would be, just a bit more like you have this... I have a Danish word and I'm having trouble translating it.

Okka: You can Google it. That's fine.

Freja: Um, I will just Google ...engage.

Okka: Oh, okay. So you mean like the type of relationship ?

Freja: As a community member you are more engaged. You are not just interested in it but there's a bit of, not necessarily a fire, but there's something more. I, for example, definitely also buy from other brands. But in the case of Zara, for example, I don't feel connected to the brand at all.

Okka: Yeah. Okay.

Freja: It doesn't say anything for me, whereas with NA-KD, I feel more personally connected to. Also I think it's because it's Danish friend and it's yeah.

Okka: Okay.

Freja: It just hits.

Okka: So. Um, do you think that the cultural aspect also has an impact on it since you?

Freja: Yeah.

Okka: Okay.

Freja: Also because I got to know it before it got really big. Like now it's the top 20 in growing in Europe. It is now approximately five years old, and I think I knew it from like three, four years ago. So I also saw it when it was smaller. So I watched it grow. It's also so fun.

Okka: Okay. Um, and how do you think social media platforms, like for example, Instagram impact brand communities?

Freja: Yes. Um, especially with NA-KD, there is a lot of Instagram advertising and, there's a lot, like almost every influencer is a part of the brand community. So it's also very large and open one. So it's not like a close community. So it's also easier to feel connected and allowed to be there. And through Instagram

it's just easier because it's a big platform and it's not necessarily something that you sign up for. And then now you have to do some extra, so you can just like small things and there's stuff like it's a job. It's more a hobby. Like something you do for fun. Yeah.

Okka: Okay. So, yeah, we already talked about it: The fashion brand that you consider yourself a brand community member of is NA-KD. So, um, let's talk a bit more about that. Um, how did you become a member of, do you remember?

Freja: It was actually not that long ago because I have always been interested in the Brand a bit more, like they had one billion amounts of clothes. So you could get every style. Whereas, with some brands, they have 30 tops and that's it. And then they had 4,000 tops. So there were a lot of options. And then, it was just easy to just find something to like, it was very open for everyone and they had very different styles. Then recently they made a post on their Insta Story that said "How to be a NA-KD fashion ambassador". And it was super easy: just three steps. You get the app, then just answer why you wanna be an ambassador. And then they made an introduction to why do we want you or what does it take to be a brand ambassador. And it was very open. So they were not like "You have to have at least X amount of followers on Instagram" Like you have to be big or something. Followers don't matter. It's more the engagement and the love of the brand

Okka: Okay.

Freja: And. Yeah, just being able to say, create, and I call them with outfit ideas, how to style different items in different ways than you normally think.

Okka: And what's like, what is the job of a brand ambassador? What would that entail?

Freja: Um, for NA-KD, it would just more or less be doing stories. If you do it on Insta, for example, but again, they're showing the items off. And if you have one item, uh, let's say a slip dress and then you're like "five ways you can use it". As you're going out, you can put a t-shirt on with boots, then there's more streetwear. You can put a blazer on or take a sweater on top. So it's more like a skirt and then more different ways of using one item. And then sometimes people forget that the dress is more than the dress. So there's different ways of using your clothes and being creative.

Okka: Okay. And would they pay you?

Freja: Um, depends how big you get. Some of the biggest influencers in Copenhagen get paid.

Okka: Okay.

Freja: Because they will get this discount code, for example, like OLIVIA30 and she will get the discount. So if I use her code and I save a hundred Crown, she will earn a hundred Crowns. So depending on what

the discount is, she will get it. So the more we use her code, the more she gets. And so it's more, how much you get out there. You're bigger. So it was like the more engagement, the bigger the price.

Okka: Okay. Okay.

Freja: And you would get maybe promo codes or you would get sent items over here. Then you would post about them.

Okka: And would you say that there is kind of like a hierarchy within the community? Because they get paid through those codes and people who don't have as many followers or as much engagement get more?

Freja: There is a bit but every brand ambassador is appreciated.

Okka: Okay.

Freja: But when there's a sales code, every brand ambassador would be able to give their followers 30% off, like "FREJA30", "OLIVIA30", etc. So then it's about as many as will use this specific code. Okay. So it's just clicks. So bigger persons would definitely get more because they have a wider audience, but they will still don't be able to give their followers more off. So on that level it's equal, but they are bigger and for some people it's also more work than just having fun and being glad that you're a community member. For some it is more like a job. For others it is for the love for the brand.

Okka: One second.

Freja: Okay.

Okka: And can you generally describe what the brand community is like? So we know there is some kind of a hierarchy, but are there other characteristics that you could describe? For example, what type of people are their community members?

Freja: There's a lot of Instagram girls and young, I would say between the age of 16 to 25, maybe a bit older. So I'm like as much. So that is. Like maybe 70% of the brand investors would be being that age range for Denmark. I only know, or what I at least see. And then of course there are someone else, like celebrities, more like smaller, so cheese from my other countries, but from Denmark it's. More, not the basic girl, but just someone regular, so it can be anyone.

Okka: Okay.

Freja: So you don't have to have a certain amount of money or have this hierarchy in real life.

Okka: So do you think that, um, since you said that there are some celebrities from other countries that the brand communities and other countries look different from NA-KD? Do you know what I mean? Um, so you said that the Danish Brand community members are like regular girls.

Freja: No, what I meant is that they have made a collection. And so most of the brand ambassadors here in Copenhagen, the bigger ones actually get a collection with NA-KD. But that is more influences who use it as a job. I think the celebrities, it's more a sign that they're growing. But I'm not sure if they're a Brand community member or, or just advertising.

Okka: Mm. Okay. So how do the members interact among each other? So the brand ambassadors, do you know if they have direct communication or is it just individual?

Freja: I think when you are smaller, it's a lot individual, but if you're, again, the Danish influencers, they interact more. Oh, I also think it's because they have other things in common.

Okka: Okay. Okay. So you wouldn't say that that's because of NA-KD?

Freja: For me, I think it's just because I am not that big in the community, so I don't really know anyone because of that.

Okka: Okay. Um, okay. And therefore, um, you probably also don't know anyone personally from that brand community?

Freja: No, no.

Okka: Um, one second.

Freja: Nope.

Okka: Um, and how is the communication online? So. Um, as I understood, like most of the interaction is online anyways, right?

Freja: Yeah.

Okka: Is it all online or do, do you know, like outside of COVID they would have for example celebrations or events?

Freja: I think they sometimes have events, they have definitely had events before Corona.

Okka: Okay.

Freja: I have only recently become a member. So I haven't tried anything before Corona, but before I have seen on their stories where they were hosting events, celebrating their new collection. It was bigger. But now, yeah, not as much as, before. Now you can sometimes miss a collection that came out.

Okka: Okay.

Freja: And then before it was everywhere.

Okka: Oh, okay. All right.

Freja: Because when there's an event, influencers post so many more stories and it's more active. Because everything is now online, it's not that special anymore. But before, like when it was an event, then they could have something crazy, awesome. They're suprt, not only the clothing, but if there was some nice decorations, food or something like that, the whole pack. Now you only get a bit of it. So, yeah.

Okka: So, um, you said that, um, some like influencers do interact with each other who know each other from other purposes, not just NA-KD, but you don't know how the communication happens?

Freja: They have managers at a, what is it called? The workplace where managers work?

Okka: Uh, agency?

Freja: ...yeah, an agency and they all like a lot of them work at the same agency, but have different manages. So there is an agency I think is called "Gonzo" where a lot of Danish influencers are a part of where they often come and work and they will meet each other through the agency.

Okka: Oh, okay.

Freja: And then they will, of course learn each other to know, because they more or less go to the same events.

Okka: All right. Um, okay. And how would you describe your relationship to the actual brands? Not the brand community, but NA-KD as a brand.

Freja: I like the brand because it has all these, um, different varieties and they have so much opportunities, you can get almost every style. So if it's not necessarily what is the most trendy, you can still find something that is for you. And also if it used to be a trend, sometimes it's still there, even though there's not as much. They said on their website that they have a lot of expertise for fast fashion, just as well as haute couture. So even though they're saying that they are a fast fashion brand, they also have a high standard. The quality is there.

Okka: Okay.

Freja: Um, and it says “our policy is that the customer is going to be treated as king or queen” and they, yeah, “we'll do their top best with their SoMe”. And, um,...it's a Danish word.

Okka: Okay. I think you can, um, do the English version of the website

Freja: Content.

Okka: Okay. Just the whole sentence.

Freja: Um, the whole sentence was “Our policy is that the costumer shall be treated as King or queen, and we do our top best every single day for our SoNe Content and our artistic management. Also, “keep going new ways and being unique and just giving you the possibility to stand out.”

Okka: Okay.

Freja: And yeah, so the customer can be able to express.

Okka: Okay. Um, and what are specific activities or experiences that you share with the brand? Um, so for example, yeah. Have you been to like events yourself or have you seen a fashion show? Do they have fashion shows?

Freja: No. No. I think they had, but it's more because they're five years old. And they started growing like crazy. So before Corona, almost a bit over a year ago...no, yeah, one and a half years, when it was fashion week in Copenhagen, they were not completely big enough. Okay. Or they were getting bigger, but they weren't the biggest, yeah.

Okka: Okay.

Freja: And now almost every Danish girl at least has one, I assume from NA-KD. Yeah. But I have never been funded.

Okka: Okay. And now we're coming to, uh, a new topic, which is the value of a brand. Um, so what do you understand under that? How would you define value of a brand?

Freja: Um, for me, a value of a brand is the middle of what keeps them together? Core. And like the whole idea of the brand, for example, what I'm trying to wear, Their whole idea is comfort-made-sexy.

Okka: Okay.

Freja: And they have all this “every body is perfect in their own way”. And they have a lot of focus on both mental health and also being good for the environment, like recycling and also the “feeling good”

Okka: Okay.

Freja: When you wear it, you will feel nice.

Okka: Okay.

Freja: Also the quality is there. But in general, it’s more their focus to make sure the one who wears it feels amazing.

Okka: Okay. Okay. So, um, those are all emotional aspects I would say, right?

Freja: Yeah. So that's what the second part is.

Okka: Okay.

Freja: Not necessarily emotional. That is all their packaging is usable and they also have some collections made from bamboo.

Okka: Okay.

Freja: So yeah. So they focus a lot on love.

Okka: Okay. Um, so, but, um, how would you describe it? Like what is the fact that they are recycle? Like that's not emotional?

Freja: It's um, because they go a lot about “love the body, love the underwear, love the planet”

Okka: Oh, okay. All right.

Freja: So it's especially about love, but also feeling nice, looking nice and not hurting the planet.

Okka: Okay.

Freja: So it's more of a whole aspect. So they base it a lot on how you're going to feel when you wear it.

Okka: Yeah. Okay. And so that is what makes a product from NA-KD valuable for you? So, let's say you bought a shirt. And then you're like “Oh, this is a valuable shirt, because...?”

Freja: I thought you said you were going to change. It's not like...this is about lounge underwear.

Okka: Oh, no, no, no. Okay. No, it's okay.

Freja: So this was all about lounge.

Okka: Okay. That's fine. I can add that.

Freja: I feel way more connected to lounge underwear than NA-KD.

Okka: Oh, okay.

Freja: Because lounge underwear makes me feel very nice. Like from the inside, like, it doesn't matter what I wear to feel nice where the NA-KD part, I feel nice wearing the outfit and I also sometimes feel super cool and whatever, but it also depends what I'm going to wear, but anything from lounge underwear makes me feel amazing

Okka: Okay, amazing.

Freja: ...whereas with NA-KD, it is more the combination of that outfit, whereas the other is more from the inside.

Okka: Ah, okay. All right.

Freja: It doesn't matter what I wear to feel nice. With NA-KD, I had to wear a good outfit to feel nice.

Okka: So you are a brand community member since you are an ambassador of NA-KD,, but you're a regular customer of lounge and you have like a stronger connection to lounge than to NA-KD?

Freja: Yeah.

Okka: Okay. And, okay. So as I understood, the main reason for that is the fact that lounge makes you feel good, generally,, no matter what you're wearing, whereas with NA-KD, it depends on the product?

Freja: Like sometimes the combination is nice, but sometimes it isn't. Yeah.

Okka: So do you think, um, so like what exactly, it's the difference? Is that like an emotional aspect that you say, like, you have like a more emotional connection to the brand of, um, Lounge, or is it about the product itself, the fact that it's the underwear?

Freja: It is the whole pack. I think, it's like, the brand itself, but also because they focus a lot on making the underwear comfortable. So when you wear it, it doesn't make you feel like "Oh, it hurts here". Or "Here it is like a bit too tight" or the underwear hurts. So you feel very nice. And then when you look in the mirror, you're like "Ooh". so you feel sexy or I feel very confident when I'm wearing it. I can wear anything on top and be like "I feel good".

Okka: Okay.

Freja: So whereas with NA-KD, if I do a bad combination of the items and I don't think my outfit looks that nice, I could even be a bit annoyed. Whereas with Lounge, I'm like "yeah"! It just shines through. Because it's the combination that makes it feel like wearing nothing.

Okka: Okay. And so the fact that you are a brand ambassador of NA-KD doesn't even make it better?

Freja: I definitely still like NA-KD more than other brands. And I feel more connected to it than, for example, ZARA. It also has a big variety and is fast fashion, but I don't feel connected to them at all. Whereas with NA-KD I do. And I think it was also more the journey. I knew them from when they were small.

Okka: Okay. So if, um, does Lounge have a brand community, like a similar program as NA-KD does?

Freja: They actually have, um, a brand community, but it's also very different from NA-KD. Because at NA-KD, I can post a story whereas I don't feel comfortable with posting my lingerie on my Instagram. Yeah. You can see everything. I would only post a picture of the underwear itself, not on the body. Yeah. But I definitely also interact on some level when they have quizzes or have these "Why does Lounge make you feel nice?" And then I write sometimes. And when they post a picture or something, then I would write a comment or something like that.

Okka: So there is some interaction. Okay. So you said that Lounge does have, um, a brand community. What does it look like? Do they also have an ambassador?

Freja: Yeah, they also have that, but then I think they edit the nipples off. So it's naked. You're actually posting it on the internet.

Okka: Okay.

Freja: But as far as I know, also some of the same influences as before do post sometimes in their underwear.

Okka: Okay.

Freja: But Lounge is different in some way, because they have for example focus weeks.

Okka: Okay.

Freja: And this week they have focused on mental health.

Okka: Okay.

Freja: And then they interact with their community.

Okka: Yeah. And also with the general community, not just ambassadors?

Freja: with the general community. They post some of the phrases that someone said, for example about someone struggling. So people are aware and also saying “mental health matters”.

Okka: Okay.

Freja: And just saying how important mental health is.

Okka: Okay.

Freja: And just because sometimes mental health is something you don't necessarily talk about and they post lot of pictures with stretch marks, about the body being different. For example three quarters of one arm or looking different or someone with an amputated leg or just showing everyone can wear this and everyone can look sexy in Lounge.

Okka: Alright.

Freja: And just not getting the “picture perfect side”.

Okka: Okay. So when I go back to NA-KD, what do you think is missing for them?

Freja: NA-KD always looks perfect. You don't see the other side, like there's a lot of plus sized models from Lounge, whereas there's a lot of blonde girls, skinny, one girls on NA-KD.

Okka: Okay.

Freja: Which also for me makes it a bit different because every time you see a photo from NA-KD's Instagram, you're like, damn. “Yeah, she looks good”. And, uh, and you can almost tell, like, it's a facade whereas Lounge takes you everywhere. You can say, see like a closeup of the bottom part of the underwear.

And then you can see like the cellulite, and then ingrown hairs and just like things that are meant to be on the body that is there, where NA-KD is more smooth, like a beautiful harm.

Okka: Okay. Okay. So you think that, um, NA-KD not as inclusive?

Freja: Like, like their clothing also is inclusive of, they have really big sizes, but the models look very nice. And even though they are “regular people”, they are always also “pretty regular people”.

Okka: Okay. Okay. So, while NA-KD represents inclusivity, they don’t mean it? They have it in their products, because they do have bigger sizes, but the image of the whole brand, like when you go for example on their Instagram, it just doesn't represent that?

Freja: Yeah. And Lounge on the other hand, it definitely does.

Okka: Um, okay. And just, um, a couple of last questions about, um, Lounge’s community. Um, could you explain what the community looks like? Like what are the, um, influences? Like, are they also so inclusive? So do they represent a variety?

Freja: There is. Very tall, super, super skinny girls. And then there are short, not chubby, but bigger ones. And there is one small boob, one big boob, like people are looking very different. Also their ambassadors have very different body types. So you can still use the same bra and bottom, but it looks different.

Okka: Okay.

Freja: And there's every single skin color, like they are the whole pack.

Okka: Um, yeah, I think that's actually almost good because I'm just going through. Yes. Is there anything you would like to add that you would like to say?

Freja: Um, I would just say that I think the reason why I'm not an official brand ambassador for lounge, it's not that I don't want to. It's just, I don't want my naked body on the internet.

Okka: Okay. Okay.

Freja: Whereas with NA-KD it’s more...not respectable, but it's like, my family follows me on Instagram. Yeah.

Okka: So it's about the products themselves?

Freja: It is because it is underwear. Yeah.

Okka: Okay.

Freja: And yeah. And regarding NA-KD: it's not like I won't buy a blazer from ZARA, just because I like NA-KD. I will, like, I definitely like NA-KD, but it's not like I won't buy from other brands, whereas with Lounge, since I started buying it, I actually prefer not buying it from elsewhere.

Okka: Okay. Okay.

Freja: I like this more. I would rather save some money and get one set for now, than get three sets or two sets from a different brand and not feel as nice.

Okka: But is it, so is that also about the quality of the product or is it like loyalty?

Freja: A combination. Because the quality is there and then I'm like "I only buy from Lounge".

Okka: Okay. All right. Perfect. Then I guess that's it. Thank you for participating.

Freja: Thanks for inviting me.

Ilse

Okka: Okay. So this research is, um, the master's program in international marketing and brand management at Lund university. And we are conducting an exploratory study to gain more insight within the phenomenon of brand communities within fashion brands and the possibly added value. So the research question will be "how do consumers perceive the brand value and fashion brand communities in comparison to other brands"?

So for your understanding, we have like this pyramid, um, that describes what a brand is. Did you, do you understand what a brand is?

Ilse: Yes.

Okka: Okay. You can read through it again, if you want to.

Ilse: No, I understand what you mean.

Okka: Um, and so before beginning the interview, I would like to ask you for your consent because we will be using, um, the content from this interview, um, for the Master thesis, um, that I just mentioned. So we will record it and transcribe it and also, yeah, just use it in the thesis.

Ilse: Okay.

Okka: Perfect. So could you briefly introduce yourself ?

Ilse: Yes. So my name is Ilse Ricken. I'm a fashion and management student here in Amsterdam at the Amsterdam Fashion Institute. Right now I'm doing an internship in a luxury lifestyle brand. Um, and before I did an internship, uh, in New York at Hugo Boss. Um, I also lived in Hong Kong, um, and I'm going to graduate in a few weeks hopefully. Um, and then I want to, uh, start a master's in entrepreneurship.

Okka: Um, and you already touched a bit on it that you are studying fashion management. So I guess that would be your connection to fashion. Why did you decide to study that? Like, what is the background?

Ilse: Um, I feel like I've always been creative and I always liked beauty and clothing and fashion in general. Um, I think when I was younger, uh, like from a very young age, I already had this interest, I think like a lot of other girls. I did my presentation in primary school already about fashion. And, um, later, a few years later, I found out that I could actually study it and work in it. And, um, since then I actually knew that I wanted to, uh, do this in my life. And, um, yeah, it never really changed for me was a really a natural thing.

Okka: Yeah. And then, because you studied fashion, you took those internships, um, at Cashin related brands, such as Hugo Boss?

Ilse: Yeah.

Okka: Okay. Nice. Um, so as I said, the, um, the study is not only about fashion, but also, um, about brand communities. Um, so could you maybe define what a brand community is in your own words?

Ilse: I think a brand community is a purpose for people that somehow connects them with a certain brand on different levels like online or offline, um, in stores or on other platforms. Um, and I think a community is really like a group of people that are, um, that have something in common and that makes them feel connected. And I think it's, um, Brands can do that in many different ways. Um, but I think nowadays it's really important for brands to build a community, to keep customers engaged.

Okka: So what you just mentioned is basically, um, what makes a community and what do you think could break a community? So if a brand already established a community feeling among their customers. What could break that bond?

Ilse: I think when they, uh, do like unexpected things, um, where they, like out of nothing like changed their, um, like brand identity or when they change, like the way in which they can engage. Um, or if they launched like a lot of new product lines or new, um, that's sort of things, um, That's are like not what people expected from it, then I think it can break it. And also, I think, um, in luxury you see sometimes that brands, um, kind of get conflicts or into a scandal. Like, uh, I think it was brought out of this, uh, like a fashion show in, in China. I think they tried to do like a Chinese special show and then. Uh, online people said that's like racism, for example, like using like culture in the right way.

Okka: And what would you say, um, differentiates a community member from a regular customer of a brand.

Ise: Sorry, could you repeat it?

Okka: What differentiates a community member of a brand from a regular customer?

Ise: I think a community member comes back regularly. It's not only there maybe to buy products, but also to, um, to, to see what's going on. They have a really broad interest in everything that the brand does, not only buying the stuff and, um, "go and shop", but also like looking up like more, if there's just like information behind it and yeah. Like communicating with the brands, um, watching videos, um, and interacting on social media, the difference. Yeah.

Okka: Talking about social media, how do you think, um, that influences, um, brand communities, the fact that social media platforms like Instagram, for example exist?

Ise: Well, I think that social media is one of the most important aspects of the brand community because, um, for customers it's the easiest way to interact with the brand online. You can look up fashion shows. You can watch live streams even sometimes, or, um, see what the brand's doing. Uh, the only way to communicate back towards the brand is I think if you are on social media, like Instagram, where again, you like pictures and comment and watch live streams and, uh, like answer these kind of questions on their stories. Uh, yeah. And feel that brands also use that on Snapchat. Yeah.

Okka: And what fashion brand would you consider yourself a brand community member off?

Ise: I would consider myself a community member of the Brand Hugo Boss where I worked before. Uh, because I had a really good time working there at the brand. Um, and I have a really deep connection to it because, um, I'm still in contact with the people who work there and with, like for example, the other interns, who do they. I also know a close group of people that are still working there. So, uh, we always send each other like pictures on Instagram, uh, new collections, um, and like livestreams, uh, or fashion shows. Um, And I feel like, um, I'm still really following it. Um, I used to work in New York, but, um, we also have stores here in Amsterdam where I sometimes go to check out the new collections and yeah, for me, I think that's what a brand community is. I followed them really closely on social media as well.

Okka: And you said that you're also still in contact with the interns that work together with you at Hugo Boss. So how do you guys interact when you talk about Hugo Boss?

Ise: So we have a group chat on WhatsApp where we send like links, when there are like new fashion articles online about to brands or when you have a new collection or, uh, when something happens where they have a new collaboration or something or campaign. I guess it's because we are all still working in

fashion or study it. And so everyone is really up to date with the news. Um, so we always, when we do something, uh, come across something, you always send it to each other. And, um, we also, uh, we also do it on Instagram. You can create a group where you can send like pictures or videos as well, and use it as well.

Okka: And would you say that you have any rituals or traditions within that group?

Ise: Um, well I think we always, um, like fashion week is always like an important thing for us. Um, a few times a year they have like a really big launch of a new collection that has to do with the runway shows. They do it online. They always have this live stream where you can watch it online. So that's always a big moment for us where we try to watch it together. Even from a distance. Sometimes we would like one time we did a zoom call where we were all watching the show together, which is nice.

Okka: Nice. Um, and how would you describe your relationship to the actual brand?

Ise: My relationship to their brand? Well, I will always, uh, like, uh, I will always wear it throughout my whole life, probably, because I would really like to work and in a professional atmosphere and I think people consider it the perfect brand, because they also have a really nice casual wear, like, um, what is it called? Like a normal production, not only suits but also casual wear.

Okka: Isn't it called pre-a-porter? Ready-to-wear?.

Ise: Yeah. Yeah. Um, so I think for me, it's really a brand that is for everyone and that will work for different phases in your life, basically. So I think I will always kind of have this, uh, connection with it and, um, yeah, it's really interesting to see how they develop the brands. Like over the years take off, came up with new lines, new, right. Yeah, I think I will. I would like to keep continue following me here.

Okka: And, um, another aspect of the research question was the value of a brand. Um, so how would you define that? Um, the value of a brand again, there's no right or wrong. Just what comes to your mind?

Ise: I think the value of a friend is, um, I think the difference between a friends does doesn't really have a lot of value to me that I don't feel very connected to is... um...wait. Let me think about it. What was the question again? Sorry.

Okka: No problem. Uh, how do you define the value of a brand?

Ise: I think the value of a brand is really the combination between having a good connection, like, like, um, offering the right products for the right price. But it's also, um, marketing and communication that really has to reach you in a way, because I think nowadays when the brand has a nice products, I might buy it, but I feel like I'm willing to like, um, I don't know. I feel more connected to a brand when it has like a really good story behind it. And, um, when I feel like I can really be part of it it's okay. Okay.

Okka: And do you think that, um, uh, fashion brands...the value of a fashion brand is different to the value of any other brand from another industry?

Ise: I think, I think, um, I think it is because I think fashion brands are changing so much and so quickly, like the fishing industry and the trends. So I think, um, for example, when I'm buying more tech products, then it's more of a function for me. Fashion is more about the feeling that you have with it. I think sometimes the clothes are not even done nice, but just because I think the brand is cool, uh, I still want to buy something from it. Um, so I think like fashion brands are more about the feeling that you have.

Okka: So, more emotional aspects?

Ise: More emotional. Yeah, for sure.

Okka: Okay. And would you say that you as a customer or even as a brand community member can impact the value of a brand?

Ise: Hmm. Yeah, I think so. Because as I said, for example, with these kinds of scandals, so that happens with some luxury brands, um, over the past years, I, uh, some brands really underestimated the impact that, um, brand community members or customers, or even, even before are not customers can have when they, um, kind of come together online and make statements about that brand do damage, uh, to the brands. If they, if there's enough people that, um, that are, yeah, that want to say something about it, then I think, um, that's something that some brands really underestimated because, um, as part of a community member, you can actually make a difference or, um, that your voice be heard. Back in the days like these luxury brands, they were really, um, um, like untouchable or like there always were, you know, these prestigious brands that no one could really touch, but I think now with everyone, um, being able to give their opinion online, um, it's way easier to change the, uh, the value of brands. Some like overnights, uh, like a whole brand that has been existing for 60 years or even longer can be cancelled and that's what really makes a big difference also.

Okka: Yeah. And have you had, um, an experience, um, as a brand community member of Hugo Boss where you felt like you co-created the value of the brand in some way?

Ise: Um, Hugo Boss never really had any really big issues or things where I felt like the community members really like had to make a statement or something against the brand or for the brand. Um, because they've always been... I don't know the word, sorry. Um, like, they have never really been in trouble. No scandal. But I feel like, um, I feel like people who follow the brand and are already into it, they are really closely connected with it because on social media, they have multiple content and a lot of things that are being held online, and so they can actually have an impact on it. But I don't think, um, it has really happened before, like anything like this.

Okka: And, um, so you're a brand community member of Hugo Boss. Is there another fashion brand that you also like, and that you are maybe even a regular customer of, but that you don't like enough to consider yourself a brand community member?

Ise: Um, yes. Uh, for example, there is this brand that's called Suit Supply here in the Netherlands, but I think it's worldwide as well. And it's, it's kind of comparable, like they have collections and, um, they also have a lot of like professional workwear basically. Um, and that they also have more casual collections, but I feel like the product has the quality and the price, they're all basically the same, or maybe better sometimes than Hugo Boss. But I feel like they're not doing that much on social media and I followed them, but I never really see like a lot of comments and it doesn't attract me. I think they only do posts. Um, I like the pictures of it, but I've never really watched any of their shows or, um, like live streams or like, like really special things that they did online. Um, yeah, it's more a brand that I see on the streets. Uh, they have like some billboards here in Amsterdam, some clients but I don't feel like I really communicate with them because they're not as interactive on their socials as for example Hugo Boss where I feel like...I always look for it and when I come across it, I already like read the text and like the post, but at Suit Supply, I don't feel like they're really, um, visible online.

Okka: So, it's basically due to their communication strategy? So if they would, for example, um, be more interactive on their Instagram, you could imagine being closer to them?

Ise: Yeah.

Okka: And do you know if they have an actual brand community though? So are there, for example, fan accounts or something? Have you noticed that they have customers who really worshipped them, or admire the brand a lot?

Ise: I'm not sure. I think a few years ago, when it was more like a new brand, I think there was a little bit of a hype around it because they do have really nice stores and everything. So I feel like in the past, they got a little bit more attention and people fell for it. I think nowadays, they probably have some fans that really like the brand, but I'm not sure if they already have a close community. Um, yeah, because yeah, it's also like a smaller brand, so it's also maybe a little bit hard to compare because Hugo Boss is much bigger. And more well-known, but I do not believe that they already have like a brand community, um, that interacts with them

Okka: And coming back to, um, the value of a brand. How would you say does the value of Suit Supply differ from the value of Hugo Boss?

Ise: Well, I think when you look at the product and the quality and the price and everything, they're both doing well, but I think like their visibility and the way in how they communicate, that's really what makes a difference for me. Um, and that makes coming back to Hugo Boss so often much easier, because I think for me, a brand's value is really about feeling, um, that you're part of a group of people that, you know,

have a passion for a certain brand. I feel like people just go there because they like the clothes, but I don't really feel like there's more than that.

Okka: And let's say they would really change their communication on Instagram and would do everything like Hugo Boss, what would it take for you to actually join the brand community? Would you still stick with Hugo Boss or can you imagine that you would actually even switch to Suit Supply?

Ise: Well, I think I will always have like a little deeper connection to Hugo Boss, because I used to work there and my friends are in like the same group, like we share this thing together, like the other interns that I used to work with, and my colleagues. So I think I will always have a preference for Hugo Boss. But I also buy Suit Supply sometimes. So. I mean, it would be nice, um, if they would do more about it, because then I think I would actually, um, also start following them more about what they're doing and new collections that are coming out and events that they have. Um, because there are some stores around here and I never really go there unless I already need something. But if they would organize nice events, then I would actually like to go there, but, um, yeah, as far as I know, they don't really do it, but it would definitely be, uh, a nice opportunity for them. And I think I, and a lot of other people would be interested in it.

Okka: Um, okay from my side, I think that's it. Do you want to add anything to the interview? Do you feel like you couldn't say something that's still missing?

Ise: No.

Okka: Okay. Thank you for your time.

Ise: No problem.

Cecilia

Okka: Okay. So we are writing a thesis at the master's program in international marketing and brand management at Lund university. And we are conducting an exploratory study to gain more insights within the phenomenon of brand communities within fashion brands and the possible added value. So the research question for this interview will be "How do consumers perceive the brand value and fashion brand communities in comparison to other brands?". So, as a preparation, we described, um, in the document that I sent to you, what a brand is, um, in the pyramid. Did you look at that?

Cecilia: Yes.

Okka: And do you understand what a brand is?

Cecilia: Hmm..

Okka: Okay, so it's basically those different layers that are listed here.

Cecilia: Okay.

Okka: Um, so before we begin with the interview, I need to ask you for your consent because we're going to use, um, the content of this interview too. Um, yeah, just like, as a basis for our study. So therefore I will record it and I will also transcribe it and then it will be included in our thesis. Do we have your consent?

Cecilia: Yes.

Okka: Perfect. Um, then I would first like to ask you to briefly introduce yourself.

Cecilia: My name is Cecilia and I am 21. I'm a woman, uh, and my nationality is Danish. I am at my second semester of a gap year. Hopefully I'll get into university next year.

Okka: Perfect. And do you know what you're going to study?

Cecilia: Uh, I hope, hope that it will be studying journalism and communication.

Okka: All right. And as I said before, the research question, um, is about. Um, brand communities within the industry of fashion. So what is your connection to fashion?

Cecilia: So I did not grow up in a fashion orientated family. I think at first I started being interested in history and then I became interested in fashion. Like fashion really reflects the development of humans. And how would you like send signals to the world?

Okka: So, it's more like a theoretical perspective on fashion that you have?

Cecilia: Yes. I think because if you look at history and specifically the history of women, you can see how the clothes developed. Through history. For example, when Coco Chanel wore pants as the first woman. And it was like a revolution. And then I became interested in different professional brands.

Okka: Okay. And talking about different fashion brands, we asked you before the interview to come up with two fashion brands, one, where you consider yourself to be a brand community member, and one where you only think that you're a regular customer, but still like the brand a lot. And which ones did you choose?

Cecilia: So I consider myself as a community member of Stella McCartney and the other brand is Samsøe Samsøe.

Okka: All right. Um, we will talk about both later on, but for now I would like to ask you if you can define what the word brand community means to you, how do you define that?

Cecilia: So when I think about it, in my head, I divide it into two separate groups. There would be the ones who are inactive who just consume the brand and wear the brand and continue to choose the brand. And they have a personal branding fun, for example they are posting pictures on their Instagram. And then there's the other ones who are kind of corroborating and communicating their social platforms, like how to pronounce it, but interacting and also like to dig into their history and like, see it as a personality trait. I think it is.

Okka: All right. And what, um, so the second one, like which one of those would be a brand community and which one wouldn't? So do you think both are?

Cecilia: Actually, I think both are.

Okka: So you divide like you subdivide already you branch communities?

Cecilia: A little bit. Because I think there is an unspoken thing about. We're wearing the same thing. So we feel a bit connected. I reflect on you. Right now, in Copenhagen, there's this trend that everyone is wearing Prada. So two years ago it was Stella McCartney. That is the unspoken thing: when you wear the same thing, you have a kind of connection. Of course. It's not as deep. Okay. If you're an adolescent.

Okka: Okay. So then you're not proactively a member.

Cecilia: Yeah.

Okka: But kind of coincidentally?

Cecilia: Yeah.

Okka: Um, okay. So that basically describes what makes a community and what do you think in your opinion could break a community? So if a brand already established a community feeling, um, what could break that?

Cecilia: I think, you know, a brand has a profile. So if they do something active that works against the profile, it breaks the community.

Okka: Okay. So do you mean, um, profile in terms of characteristics? Like what it represents?

Cecilia: So for example, Stella McCartney, they represent this "break out", from these general big haute couture fashion brands, like Chanel, Prada, Yves Saint Laurent. So Stella McCartney wanted to break out

and make a brand to show that sustainability, the environment, and fashion are not the opposite of each other. For example, all her bags are made out of mushrooms. Everything is vegan. So for example, if they were making leather bags, just from one day to another, it will break the community because their consumers are mostly vegan and very aware of the environment and for example, if a company invests in weapons or tobacco companies, it will work against the community because the buyers and the consumers are not in that target group. So I think that breaks the community.

Okka: Okay. And what do you think differentiates a community member from a regular customer? So basically if I come back to your first definition, what's what's, um, differentiates the inactive member...well, not the members, like customers that are only customers, but not even the inactive members that you were talking about, you know, from brand community members?

Cecilia: I think when you're a brand community member, you have a thought and an idea of what you're buying. You're actually buying an actual product. And when you, for example, when I buy something from Samsøe Samsøe, it's thoughtless. I do not think about it. I'm just like, okay, I need something now. And so, and then we'll now go into the store. If I'm just walking past it, I will go in and buy something without even thinking about it. I'm just a regular consumer. Like I have no, it's so anonymous, but when you're a community member, you will, for example, if there is a bag that you really want, you will save up. It's an active thing you do. So I think that's the difference.

Okka: Um, and then how do you think social media influences brand communities?

Cecilia: Okay. So at first I think that social media, for example, Stella McCartney's platforms, they can, they can communicate directly to the community members. For example, they put pictures up of family members, for example Paul McCartney, a picture of her dad, and he is standing there wearing Stella McCartney's clothes and people, the community community members can like answer and they answer back. It's not one way communication. Is that what you mean?

Okka: Yes. Yeah. Just whatever comes to your mind. So like, the question is just like, how do you think, um, the fact that now social media exists and specifically Instagram, how does that differentiate like the way brand communities communicate from back in the days or even now from other brand communities that only act offline, like, is there a difference to you?

Cecilia: I think for an example, I feel I have a better connection because it's not a one-way communication. So I feel that, for example, if I get a notification that there is a live stream for a fashion show, I feel much more included, not just invited to be a regular customer. Yeah.

Okka: So it's two ways as you said. Yeah. Okay. And, um, so talking more about, um, Stella McCartney, um, the brand that you consider yourself, a brand community member of. Um, do you remember how you became a member and why?

Cecilia: Yes, I actually do so it's a little. It's a fun story. Like I was 16 and I had my first job, so, and there was an older colleague and I think she was 24 or something. And I thought she was so cool. I really look up to her and she always wore these Stella McCartney classical Falabella tote bag. And I was like, okay. And she had the shoes and she had the perfumes and I was like, okay, so: "How can it be as cool as her?" and I started saving up for my own little Stella McCartney bag. I have it on my shelf. I don't wear it but I just have it like a little, "This was the day I became cool". Yeah. And since then, I don't know, I just think I fell in love with the brand because I think it's a fun story. That is a breakout.

Okka: Yeah. So like the story behind the brand?

Cecilia: Yes.

Okka: Nice. And, um, can you describe what the brand community that you're part of is like, so what are other brand community members like?

Cecilia: I think the diversity is not that high. It's mostly people that look like me, quite young, white, Scandinavian girl. It's just weird because the brand is American. But the most, most of them, as I see it, are from here, from Scandinavia. And there is a concept where we switch backs. So. Yeah, so ...I just need to think it's because it's not my, my number one language. Okay. So for example, there is this site. And then I put my bag up and they put their bag up. And when we meet up in person, it's always a girl who looks totally like me, but on social media, I think people have the same interests.

Okka: Yeah. So, um, mostly girls your age and from your nationality?

Cecilia: Yes. Girls who see themselves as this "environmentally aware, international, modern women". That's the root of that.

Okka: Got it. And. Um, talking more about like the members, um, how do the members interact among each other? So you were just talking about this platform where people can switch out their bags. Um, how do they communicate there and how do they also communicate in other ways on social media?

Cecilia: What do you mean was communicating?

Okka: Um, just like generally, how do they interact? So what makes them a brand community basically. What is the interaction between people who are members of the brand?

Cecilia: Well, of course we share the same interests. So for example, Stella McCartney is not a fast fashion industry. They don't do not have these big releases, so you're not like getting bombarded with notifications. So for example, as I said, if you switch bags, the target group of this brand is not a fast fashion, tiny group. So, we like to switch products. And for example, when there is four releases, smaller releases a year, and then of course you can not go to the fashion show because you have to be a huge celebrity, but they do live

streams and influencers go to the fashion shows and live stream, and then they have these, like, for example, like giveaways and stuff like that will be community members will attached to that.

Okka: Okay. Yes. Got it. And are there any rituals and traditions within that community? So I guess the fashion shows would probably be an example, which are like events, but are there any other traditions if you want, so that are happening within the community?

Cecilia: No, I don't know. Think so. Not like traditions. I think it's a tradition that the bag has to be made out of mushrooms. It's not a classical bag, but it's a food bag. And as a community member, you can see from miles away, if it's a classical bag or not a real bag. But of course, if you see another one with a real Stella McCartney, you're blinking.

Okka: Okay. So you recognize it, it's kind of like a symbol?

Cecilia: Yes, it's also like the MC world, like motorcycles. When they drive by someone, they wave. Or the bus drivers. It's the same.

Okka: Okay. And do you know personally someone of the McCartney brand community members?

Cecilia: Yes. My old friend. She works in Dubai. She posts pictures about it. Yes. And my sister works in the fashion industry and she also knows it. She likes the perfumes and stuff. So she had these events. For the company. She works for it. She like, I don't know what the word is called, but she will teach people to put on makeup.

Okka: Oh, like a makeup artist?

Cecilia: Yes. So mostly the makeup products are of course, from Stella McCartney.

Okka: Okay. Okay. And how would you describe your relationship to the actual brand? You did touch a bit on that already. So what you said in the beginning, um. And are there any specific, um, experiences that you share with the brand? We'll probably the first story that you told?

Cecilia: Yes, I think we have touched on that.

Okka: Then how do you define the value of a brand?

Cecilia: I think for brands, I do not think it's only the economic perspective, but also for example, in the fashion industry, the consumers are more demanding. The social economic aspect.. Like paying workers and the one who makes the products. So I think that, and also sustainability for the environment actually. Putting in mind who makes the products and the people actually having well paid job and that they are thinking a lot about the environment.

Okka: So, do I understand correctly, that would mean that there are different types of value?

Cecilia: Yes. So for example, with toilet paper or something for your kitchen it's different. It's not fashion. It's not a low, practical thing. So you have to find a personality to sell the product, to have standards for the product. Of course, at Prada, you pay 20,000 for a hat out of polyester, which is basically plastic. Yeah. Yeah. But in new fashion brands, they have standards and the products...you actually buy a product. And I think that is the value of the brand.

Okka: Do you think that you as a customer can impact the value of a brand as well, so that you like co-create the value?

Cecilia: Yeah, I think in the end, it depends on where I put my money. I think as an individual, I don't really have the power, but that's also what makes a community so powerful. Because of course, if you break your own community, they will put their money to another place. Not in your brand. So yeah, as a social thing. Yeah. I have power but not alone. Okay.

Okka: So, as a collective, you have power?

Cecilia: Yes, but as an individual, no, I actually don't think I have power.

Okka: Do you think that you being a brand community member of Stella McCartney impacts your perceived value of the brand? So imagine if you were a regular customer of McCartney: do you think if you were not as involved and didn't have the story of the coworker from back then, but if it was just a regular brand for you, do you think that your perceived value of that product of any product of Stella McCartney would be different than it is now for you since you are a brand community member?

Cecilia: Yes. Because I put feelings in my products but if I didn't know it, if I would just find it on the streets, I don't think I would put as much value in it.

Okka: Um, and then we asked you to think of another fashion brand that you're just a regular customer, so not a brand community member of. What was that again?

Cecilia: Samsøe Samsøe.

Okka: So what distinguishes your admiration for Stella McCartney from Samsøe Samsøe?

Cecilia: It's actually weird because Samsøe Samsøe is a Danish brand. So if we have to generalize it, I can reflect myself more in the brand of Samsøe Samsøe, but I think they have bigger needs. They need things. For example, diversity in the models. They have no diversity. It is literally just this white, skinny girl that is their standard of beauty. They do not care about the environment. They need personality, for example, it is a totally one way communication on their platform. If we, if we compare it to Stella McCartney who

shares pictures of her dad in her clothes, it's so personal. You can reflect yourself and your own family to their family, but in Samsøe Samsøe, they just put up a picture of a girl in clothes and then you're like, well, like, yeah.

Okka: What if Samsøe Samsøe had the platform that you were talking about before, like where they can also, where customers can exchange products? Would you join that from Samsøe Samsøe?

Cecilia: Yes, yes. Yes. I would definitely. Cause there's, there's no reason to throw out clothes. That still can be used.

Okka: So, do I understand correctly that that would be more like a practical reason or would it also be related to the actual brand, so that you want to join the platform because you like brand so much, you know, the platform of switching clothes or would you like to join it because you think that it's a more sustainable thing?

Cecilia: Both. I think it's a way of getting new, because you have to start somewhere. And if you wanted to have more community members of the target group that is aware of the environment and stuff like that, maybe that could be a possibility. Also, because if you have a lot of things from Samsøe Samsøe and you don't use it, then it could be a fun way to like, get to know other people who are interested in the same brand.

Okka: Yeah. Okay. And do you know if they have any kind of brand community?

Cecilia: No, actually do not. I know they, of course they have fashion shows and stuff like that, but I don't think they really have a community member.

Okka: All right. And, so talking again about the perceived value of a brand, how do you think your perceived value of, um, Samsøe Samsøe differs from, uh, Stella McCartney?

Cecilia: But what do you mean with the value?

Okka: Um, how did you describe it again? You had a definition for the value of a brand.

Cecilia: Oh, you know, the different values. Yes. For example, the socioeconomic.

Okka: Exactly. Exactly. So how does that differentiate or differ from Stella McCartney for Samsøe Samsøe?

Cecilia: Um, I think it differentiates where if you have such a big brand as Stella McCartney, and you have such a big brand as Samsøe Samsøe, you do have a responsibility because your community members look

up to you. What you do is cool and you have a responsibility. And I think, in my perspective, Samsøe Samsøe do not take responsibility. Maybe it's because they do not brand themselves on the environment, but maybe that is what differentiates them. Okay.

Okka: Um, yeah, from my side, that's it. Do you have any other questions? Do you feel like something was not mentioned that you would like to mention about this topic?

Cecilia: No. No.

Okka: Well then thank you a lot for your time.

Ariana

Klara: (Sw: Är du redo? Yes, yes.) Okay, so it is May 17th, and I already gave you a quick introduction to the topic, but (Sw: borde jag göra det igen? Eller? Om du vill, om det, [som en] uppvärmningsgrej) Okay so me and Okka are as you know writing our thesis at the Master's program in International Marketing and Brand Management at Lund University in Sweden. So what we are doing is we are conducting an exploratory study to gain more insight within the phenomenon of brand communities within fashion brands, and the possible added value. So more specifically, we are researching the following question: *"How do consumers perceive the brand value in fashion brand communities in comparison to other brands?"* So, I already asked you to pick two brands. Um, brand one is the middle designer fashion brand you frequently buy, have bought from, and feel connected to and brand two is a similar competitive fashion brand with the same target group that you might have bought from, um, but not really a fan of or never really caught on to. Um, so, with the insights that we are gathering, I've also sent you a model, um, a brand pyramid model, brand value pyramid. For the purpose of this study it's important to understand the concept of a brand so I just wanted to remind you quickly as well that when we talk about the concept of a brand we are talking about brand features and attributes such as price, selection, ease. Brand visuals which could be logo, visual elements. Brand esteem, such as personality, reputation and sales experience, and brand merit which is purpose, cause, belief, customer connection, brand bundle and relationship. So, quick recap of that. So, before starting the interview, I would like to ask you for your consent that I am recording and transcribing the following interview for the master's thesis of this study.

Ariana: I accept.

Klara: Great. Okay, so let's start with the introduction. Could you briefly introduce yourself?

Ariana: Okay, ehm, my name is Ariana, I'm 24 going into 25, I'm female, student here at Lund university and I study chemistry, so I guess that's my main occupation but I also work part-time at a lab. And, nationality, I would say according to my passport Swedish, but with some Balkan roots to that.

Klara: Okay, so what is your connection to fashion?

Ariana: Uhm, when I think of my connection to fashion, uhm, I am very interested in it and I do think it shows the outside world without like saying anything about yourself who you are as a person and how you would like to be perceived.

Klara: Okay.

Ariana: And, for instance like how detail-oriented you are, how much you care or like what kind of job you have, you could almost, it's like it's at least a direction of what kind of occupation a person has.

Klara: Mhm.

Ariana: So and, I do think that it does a lot for me as a female especially, that if I do feel confident in the clothes that I'm wearing or the fashion that I have that it does a lot for my confidence and for how I want to be perceived.

Klara: Yeah, good. So, could you briefly say, in one sentence which brands you chose and why. So, just short statement as of what's your relationship with this brand is and why you picked this certain brand when I asked you to pick one of them.

Ariana: Okay, so my first brand, is Hugo Boss. because, I do think, like, short, elegance, clean cut. And, good quality.

Klara: Yeah.

Ariana: And the other brand that I chose is Max Mara which kind of has a similar approach but not as cutting edge or it's like it doesn't really make you stick out from the crowd.

Klara: Okay. Have you bought from any of these brands?

Ariana: Yes.

Klara: Frequently or?

Ariana: Yes.

Klara: From both of them?

Ariana: Not so frequently from my second one.

Klara: Okay.

Ariana: But, frequently from the first.

Klara: Okidokes, uhm, so I am gonna go into uhm another category (huh? How am I doing, great) into another category and that is brand communities in general.

Ariana: Mhm.

Klara: So this might be a bit, hard maybe, but in general, how would you define a brand community?

Ariana: (sigh) I mean, fashion specifically?

Klara: Mhm.

Ariana: I would say, well I mean, if you have an opportunity to kind of, I don't know, socialize, with people that you don't really know, it does feel like it's easier to approach someone that you see has a specific style or wears a specific brand that kind of also speaks to you.

Klara: Yeah.

Ariana: So you instantly feel like we have some common ground and it would be way easier to just, you know, I love, for instance, I love your jacket, is this from that collection.

Klara: Yeah.

Ariana: So, yeah.

Klara: So is that what makes a community according to you as well or, how:

Ariana: What makes a fashion community...

(Gets interrupted by a phone call)

Klara: Let's see, yeah, so. Where were we. Yeah, so. Okay so, we can aim at looking at some examples instead, to clarify the question. So are there any bonding practices, rituals or experiences that you have found in Hugo Boss?

Ariana: I mean, definitely it's kind of like a form of therapy for me (laughter) to, uhm, especially when you go into a physical store.

Klara: Mhm.

Ariana: And, knowing that the store has standards considering how they great you and how they treat you.

Klara: Yeah.

Ariana: And, just like the small attention to details that, you would think are unnecessary but it does a lot to the experience like how do they package it.

Klara: Yeah.

Ariana: Uhm, how are the employees dressed. So definitely a ritual to it.

Klara: That's great. So could in a sense, describe according to you the characteristics of the brands?

Ariana: Of both of them?

Klara: Of Hugo Boss.

Ariana: Uhm, I would say, quality, timeless, it's elegant, and it definitely speaks to the crowd it's aiming to reach.

Klara: Okay, and how would you describe the personality traits of the consumer, the customer.

Ariana: I would say, well. Refined, (laughter). Good taste and cares about what they wear.

Klara: That's good. Uhm, do you feel like there's a closeness of the members? In Hugo Boss.
7:44 You mean, the customers?

Klara: Mhm.

Ariana: No i wouldn't say that. No.

Klara: Okay. That is fine. So what according to you breaks a brand community?

Ariana: Breaks? A brand community? So I would say..

Klara: So when we're talking about what makes it and all of the standards and traits that you really love about the brand for example, what is it that breaks a community?

Ariana: Uhm, I would say that this sudden turn that a fashion brand can take from what they normally put out to the customer (mhm). And, it's like sidetracking with way too many like side brands (mhm), of one brand and it doesn't really have any silver lining to it.

Klara: Yeah.

Ariana: And eventually it just becomes a bit mainstream (mhm) and you feel like I could get the same sweater at target for half the price.

Klara: Yeah.

Ariana: So if you don't have this feeling of "I know it's a bit pricey but I still really want it cause I'll never find it again (mhm). Then that would be the breaking point.

Klara: Yeah. Okay, so what do you think differentiates a community member from just a regular customer?

Ariana: I mean, I would definitely say that it's someone that knows the effort that is put in and the process of making what these companies do (mhm) and it's like, really has a close eye to, you know, what this brand would say is trending right now (mhm) and what they would say spring/fall should look like.

Klara: Yeah. Okay. uhm, so. In accordance to that, how do you think social media platforms, such as Instagram, uhm, impacts the brand communities?

Ariana: I mean it's a huge impact, because the majority of people are on there and because most people aren't looking at billboards anymore. (No) most people are looking down their phone and if they see say a model or an ad that they feel like they can relate to, it definitely, I mean it's a lot easier to see an ad on Instagram and then just go online and purchase it right away instead of seeing a billboard and forgetting about it ten minutes later so I think it's very smart advertising.

Klara: Okay, so. Okay, so, let's move on to the fashion brand that you consider yourself a brand community member of which is hugo Boss. So, how would you say, did you become a member and why?

Ariana: Because, I felt like I didn't really wanna just be a part of the crowd, you know. I've never been interested in following trends, I'm would, I prefer these brands that are, that have a bit more timeless touch to them (mhm). And I feel like this is a brand where you can't really go wrong (yeah) and it's good quality and I feel like this is the aesthetic that I want to portray and how I perceive myself.

Klara: So when would you say that you actually became a member? Of a brand community.

Ariana: I would say in my late teens. (mhm) uhm, when I started getting my own money so I could actually buy my own clothes, obviously (laughter) (yeah). Uhm, but.

Klara: So how did you find the brand?

Ariana: I mean, honestly I, I just think that i googled elegant clothing brands.

Klara: Fair enough.

Ariana: And, from an old store in my hometown, uhm, that sells, these more a bit, exclusive (mhm) brands. And well most girls my age wouldn't really be interested in that store. I remember going in there and feeling like this is exactly how i wanna dress. (mhm) This speaks to me. So I would say, it would, it started there.

Klara: 11:59 Okay. Uhm, so could you describe what the brand community that you are a part of is like? Exclusively down to Hugo Boss.

Ariana: What. the type of people? Or.

Klara: I mean, we, we can even go into, so what's, yeah what type of person is part of the Hugo Boss brand community.

Ariana: (sigh) I feel like, it's a person that's, that wants to look sharp. That again, both male and female, cares about their looks, and is willing to pay for that quality. So, I mean, I feel like I'm tooting my own horn here but.

Klara: Uhm. Do you think there's like a special nationality, age or occupation or interests or?

Ariana: I mean, yeah, i do think that I don't directly fall into the correct age category, because this does feel like a brand that is more, targeted (mumbles) starts getting more people that are working, these high demanding jobs and need to look good and need to look fresh and I also do feel like this is more of a European brand.

Klara: yeah. Okay so, moving on to the members. How would you say that the members of Hugo Boss brand community interacts? Do,

Ariana: Uhm, I do feel like, to kind of continue on my question and my answer earlier on that they do target people in Europe mostly caucasian with these top notch jobs so I would say there's definitely the, some, I think there's some community between them. Uhm, and, but I don't think i fall directly into that category, but I'm assuming here.

Klara: Okay. So, do you have any rituals or traditions or anything like that, or anything, your own secret language, I don't know?

Ariana: Uhm, can you rephrase that.

Klara: Okay so, do you have anything, language-wise, or activity-wise or anything that -

Ariana: I do have an activity which is I do buy myself (a) very nice dress or suit from Hugo Boss every time it's my birthday. Like a little gift to myself and reminder to stay classy.

Klara: Mhmmm, that's good. So, do you personally know each other. In the brand. Like the other members of the brand community.

Ariana: No I don't.

Klara: So how is the communication online? Do you feel like there's any, uhm, interaction amongst the members online, maybe say in video, chats, reposts, give-aways, live stories. Or like how would you describe the online communication?

Ariana: I mean there are definitely some YouTubers that I like to watch that do these, um, kind of like hauls of what they bought. And obviously I do enjoy watching those videos of brands, such as Hugo Boss that I really enjoy. So I would say that is my closest relation to a community for a specific brand, would be to like, see, or look under the hashtag of the brand and see what people have posted or YouTube and you know, showing like how they match things. So, yeah.

Klara: So do you actively communicate or interact with the brand, say with likes or comments or?

Ariana: Um, definitely with likes, but I'm not that wordy when it comes to it. I'm more of an observer and a follower.

Klara: Okay. So moving on a bit from, like brand communities. Um, how would you describe your relationship to the actual brand? So not like the membership and the brand community, but what would you say is your actual relationship to the brand Hugo Boss?

Ariana: I mean, I would say it's a good, solid bond that I have no plans on breaking anytime soon. Um, no, but I, um, it's a brand that I trust and, uh, I feel like it's a brand with vision, so I would love, I would gladly like, follow them.

Klara: So what are specific activities or experiences that you share with the brand?

Ariana: I mean, um, so, um. Sorry, the question was, uh.

Klara: Question was, um. So what are specific activities or experiences that you share with the brand?

Ariana: Well, I mean, I do keep track of all their social medias. I do read their posts and, uh, I do follow their fashion shows obviously online.

Klara: Yeah.

Ariana: Um, so yeah.

Klara: Okay, so let's move to brand value now, then, uh, which we talked about in the beginning, uh, looking at the model and here comes the pretty hard question then, but how do you define the value of a brand?

Ariana: Um, I would say, that it definitely, um, that it has a vision. That it has a purpose and that it doesn't just, um, sell its soul. So to say, and just follow trends with the wind, like quick fashion. So I would say the value of a brand is defined by, does it cave in to quick fashion? Does it cave into, um, cheap materials and cheap labor work and doesn't really care about more than just producing an income?

Klara: Yeah. So do you then believe that there are different types of value?

Ariana: I mean, um, um, different types of values.

Klara: Like think economic, emotional, social value. It's. I guess, as I said, it's hard to define brand value, but.

Ariana: I absolutely agree that there are different branches to a brand value. And I feel like some companies fall into some of these, but not all of them, but then you have some that kind of have a whole, I don't know how to explain it, but I do believe there are different branches. Yes.

Klara: So. Do you define the value of a fashion brand different, um, compared to the values of other types of brands? Like another industry?

Ariana: I mean, no, I really don't. I feel like it's, it's the same value, no matter what you produce. If I were to compare a fashion company to a car company, I mean, if you have the vision of wanting to manufacture good quality and timeless, and that it, yeah. I mean, no, I think it's the same, no matter what you produce.

Klara: Okay. So would you say that you as a customer can impact the value of a brand?

Ariana: As an individual, no, but as a part of a bigger community or mass then yes.

Klara: So what could a co-creation of value process look like?

Ariana: I mean, I would say, so I would say that, I mean, if a brand is starting to kind of lose its moral compass, Say, maybe use children as a labor in factories, which a lot of companies have proven to be doing. If the general public disagrees with this and kind of boycotts this brand, then I would say that would make an impact and make them rethink.

Klara: Yeah. But do you feel, do you feel like you are part of co-creating a value while taking part in the online brand community?

Ariana: Partly. Yes, because again, with the same example, I do do some research, um, on where are these clothes made. Are they made fairly and squarely all the way? And of course, I'm starting to think a lot about environmental impact the clothes have. So by that I do yeah. A small impact. So to say.

Klara: Yeah, Um, so do you think that your, like you being part of the brand community of Hugo Boss, do you think that that might impact your perceived value of Hugo Boss? Does it affect it in any way?

Ariana: I mean, absolutely. If it's a brand that I feel like I can relate to. And then, uh, I would maybe turn a blind eye to a collection that I find ugly or so to say and just, um, see it as a bad, bad day. Not a bad brand, but, um, no. Yup.

Klara: Okay. So thank you for that. We're going to move on to brand number two, which you chose as MaxMara.

Ariana: Yes.

Klara: So. What is it that distinguishes your admiration from Hugo Boss in comparison to MaxMara? So what, what is it that distinguishes the admiration between these two?

Ariana: For me, I feel like there's a difference in how much work they put into the collections. Uh, cause I feel like. They do have some similarity when it comes to visual aesthetics, but the main difference being the small details and it's, it's relatively small details, but it does. Um, it does make me say, look at two similar shirts and think, well, this one has an extra touch to it and I will most likely not find this within another brand, but this one is absolutely also very nice, but it feels very mainstream.

Klara: Okay. Hmm. So, so what is it that, what's the extra added value with Hugo Boss? Would you say?

Ariana: I would definitely again say the, uh, paying attention to details as form fitting, adding something extra to it and looking sharp, but still looking trendy while MaxMara offers a bit more of, um, basic, uh,

um, collection. And it feels like more if you want to blend into the crowd for people that have that kind of point of view.

Klara: So, what would it take for you to join the community of MaxMara?

Ariana: I would definitely say to up their game. No, but, um, again, follow maybe more in this footsteps of, um, making the products a bit more edgy.

Klara: Yeah. So. Yeah. What exactly are you missing? What could they do better? Is it anything else, like more specific that you want to add about MaxMara, that, anything maybe in general or a specific requirement that MaxMara could do to increase their brand value?

Ariana: I would say be more visible on social media because this feels like, um, It's, it's become a bit unknown, especially amongst younger people because, um, they don't really use social media that well.

Klara: Yeah.

Ariana: So it just kind of speaks to its loyal, small, older generation of customers, but they don't really, um, do anything to appeal to people on social media.

Klara: Okay. So since you're mentioning social media as well, and we talked about your brand membership on social media, would you say in the end that being a part of being a part of Hugo Boss' brand community, would you say that that's an increased value for you as well?

Ariana: I mean, absolutely. It does add the personal touch and it does make me as a customer feel invited and welcome and not completely closed off.

Klara: Yeah.

Ariana: And getting to know the actual brand.

Klara: Okay. Also about getting to know the actual brand. Yeah. Um, okay, good. So otherwise, is there anything you would like to add, uh, that has not been discussed?

Ariana: No, I think I'm good. Thank you very much.

Klara: Thank you for your time.

Saga

Klara: Okay. So I'm going to start, uh, so I, I sent you these questions in advance and you already read the introduction. Uh, so as you know, we are writing our master's thesis in international marketing and brand management. And the research question is how do consumers perceive the brand value in fashion brand communities in comparison to other brands? And hence what we're looking for here is to get some of your insights as a brand community member of your choice. And for the purpose this time, it is important that you understand the concept of a brand. So I sent you a brand pyramid, which illustrates it. And just for a quick recap, we have, when we talk about brand value, we are talking about, uh, the brands features and attributes. Such as price, selection, ease, brand visuals, uh, such as logos, brand esteem, personality, reputation, and brand merit, such as purpose cause and belief. Uh, so before the beginning of this interview, I asked you to pick two brands, brand, number one, a middle designer fashion brand that you frequently buy from, or have bought from and feel connected to. And brand number two, which is a similar slash competitive fashion brand within the same target group that you might have bought from, but you're not really a fan of them, or you never really caught on through them. So before starting the interview, I would like to ask you for your consent, that we are recording and transcribing the following interview for the master's thesis of this study.

Saga: Yes.

Klara: Okay, good. Okay. So I'm going to start off with the introduction and ask you to please briefly introduce yourself, age, gender, nationality, occupation.

Saga: Wait, I'll just find it in my email too. And then at the same time, um, I, um, my name is saga. I am 26 years old. I am a woman, I'm from Sweden and I work as a doctor.

Klara: Okay. So what is your connection to fashion?

Saga: Um, I am interested in fashion. I think it's fun. I think it's the. Uh, well fun way to um, it's, show the world who you are and show your personality. Uh, I'm interested in it, but I'm not a high end fashion buyer. And I don't really follow the trends that much either. I mean, I think it's interesting, but I don't follow it. Uh, that much.

Klara: Okay. So. Before getting into brand number one, it would be nice if you could briefly say, uh, in one short sentence/statement, which brands you chose and why, so what's your relationship with brand number one and brand number two.

Saga: The first brand, a brand that I frequently buy. For that I chose hunky-dory. Uh, and for brand number two a similar fashion brand that I didn't buy as usually from I chose Rodebjer.

Klara: Okay, good. Uh, so then moving into more of brand communities in general. So in general, how would you define a brand community. According to your standards?

Saga: Uh, a brand community. Um, um. I guess that we're from the same target group, I guess, in a way so that there are people similar to me in some ways that are, have the same values and interests in fashion and like the same style. Um, maybe appreciate the same things, for example. Choice of materials or, uh, well, general style.

Klara: So when we're talking, what do you think makes a community? If we talk more about, um, personality traits, practices, experiences, activities, do you have anything that's interlinking there?

Saga: Um, well I guess it's, um. Well, the type of clothes, I guess if you, if there's a brand that's more like active sportswear and then they will have a different type of target audience and maybe their advertisement will be more towards like mountains. So walking, hiking, like in, uh, whereas in fashion, I guess it's a bit more complicated because, and well, maybe the general size of something more romantic or something more edgy or, um, More classic style or type of style,

Klara: But, but are there like any activities that are used as bonding within the brand community?

Saga: Jag tror det.

Klara: Okay. So again, what makes a community?

Saga: Yeah. Um, well I'm thinking, uh, for example, social media, and uh, the community there. If you see the pictures in your, uh, how do you say that? Flow?

Klara: Uh, I think so. In your feed,

Saga: Your feed. Yeah. You see pictures in your feed and you can kind of feel connected to the people you see in the pictures and an advertisement, maybe girls from the same age group as me, or like if they like the same style as me. Um, also things like, like the physical store, even though I guess that's less of that now, or like sales and stuff, you know, you get the personalized letter, like a newsletter for members, and then you get, um, you know, early access to sales or, and early access to new trends or um, the new lines or whatever they're called.

Klara: Uh, so looking at it in the opposite direction, what would you say breaks a community?

Saga: Uh, I guess when the values change, for example, if I'm, um, uh, liking, um, a certain thing, a company has that then. Then I also probably think it's important. What type of material, uh, ethically are they ethical. And if they were to come up news that they are not ethical, then that would change my view on the brand. And that will probably make me feel less interested in, you know, wanting to be associated with that brand. Or for example, if they were to change. Um, like, uh, the prices or trying to like move too much from a segment, each group or category, or like move, change their target audience. I guess that would also make me see like, okay, maybe this is not the brand for me.

Klara: Yeah. So in that sense, what would you say differentiates a community member from a regular customer. So say for example, in your example, picking hunky-dory. What makes, what differentiates, what differentiates you as a brand community member from someone that maybe are buying their products, but cannot be considered a community member?

Saga: I guess it's because, partly because I followed them. So I chose to be a part of their feed and I chose to be a part of their community, I guess. Uh, so I will, I guess I will have lower standards too. If they drop a collection that I don't think is as nice. I will probably think more fondly of it or like think more of it and compare compared to if it was just something. Uh, like something I just bought now and then, and I would be more invested, I guess, in news about the brand. I would be more invested in the, uh, in the backstory and the, uh, the advertisements, the, uh, I guess,

Klara: Do you think there are any, for example, personality traits or, um, demographics or something maybe that would. Would differentiate them or?

Saga: Yeah, maybe I guess since hunky-dory is a Swedish brand, I guess it's more easily accessible here in comparison to like, if I were to live in America or something. Uh, and also I guess, geographically that you notice other people wearing the same types of brands, um, and my surroundings. Uh, and like my groups of friends or acquaintances that you see, the same type of clothes were worn at different people in your surrounding. And then you will feel like closer because of that too.

Klara: Yeah. So how do you think social media platforms, um, say Instagram, impacts brand communities?

Saga: Hmm, I guess it closes the gap and makes it less necessary for the demo. Like the demo graphics, is that the word? Geographic?

Klara: Demographic, yes.

Saga: Yeah. So I guess that bridges that gap so that, and you can see up close and you can see like in the community, even though we don't see people in your surrounding wearing the same type of clothes, because you still see it on like Instagram. And Instagram, on Instagram you see people. Um, with the same personality traits that you have.

Klara: Yeah.

Saga: I don't know. Like, for example, hunky-dory I feel like that's, um, like a modern woman who, uh, likes to be part of fashion, but more like casual maybe, and that likes, uh, to pick clothes that has good quality and good fabrics, uh, but a little something extra to it. Uh, and I could see that types of clothes on other people in my surroundings, but I could also see that and in an ad on Instagram, or just see it in a blog

or like a blogger or something, I follow the same type of clothes, and then I would feel, um, closer to that community.

Klara: Okay. So you said that the fashion brand that you consider yourself a brand community member of is hunky-dory. So, how did you become a member? Like when and why?

Saga: Um, I guess it started with me buying clothes from them, but not really caring where they were from in a sense, mostly like, Oh, I like that blouse, you know? Uh, I want to buy that. And then after a while, I guess you start looking for hunky-dory specifically, uh, for example, when online shopping, you know, or looking at their own website or something, and just specifically picking out hunky-dory from the rest.

Klara: Yeah.

Saga: So if I were to buy a nice dress, for example, then I'd rather buy a nice dress from hunky-dory compared to a nice dress and a similar price from another brand.

Klara: Yeah. So, um, so do you have a clear statement as of why you consider yourself a brand community member?

Saga: Um, why I consider myself a brand member because, uh, I feel like I am proud of being connected, being part of the community. And I feel like I want to express that. For example, while buying clothes. And I am proud to be part of that community. I feel like that is a representation of me and my style that I see when I look at the images. On their instagram post or the advertisement or whatever. Uh, and I feel like it's also a way to connect with other people. If I see someone with similar styles or if I see someone with a blouse or something that I know is from hunky-dory, then I can feel a connection to that person as well.

Klara: Yeah. So. Can you describe what the brand community that you are a part of is like? It could be, it could be demographics. Um, the interests, the, like characteristics, um, activities.

Saga: Um, you mean like following them on Instagram or more like the type of person, what, who is the person who buys from hunky-dory?

Klara: No. So, like, the brand community that you are a part of, what is it like?

Saga: Well, it's an open community. It's people that like fashion and want something, um, uh, I don't know. I don't know the English for it. Stilrent?

Klara: Um, classy, I guess

Saga: Classic? Yeah. So something classic, but still something extra because they still have that-

Klara: You mean classy? Right?

Saga: Classy. Yeah, sure. Classy.

Klara: Yes.

Saga: So something, it's like classy and I feel like the fabrics are good, but they're still like environmental in a sense. Or you think about production and. Uh, they do, they have like the extra touch, for example, if it's the embroidery or like the fabrics, I dunno. It's something extra. I feel like the type of people who buy it are just like, people like me, I guess.

Klara: Yeah. So speaking of the members, uh, such as other members in the brand community as well, how do they interact? Um, If and how they interact. Um, do you have any rituals and traditions or any type of communication?

Saga: Uh, well, I don't really feel like there's that much communication. I mean, maybe it's if you like the pictures on Instagram or something, or, you know, well, yeah, it's more of a following. Maybe not that much interacted. But I think it's hard when it comes to fashion. Maybe especially these like middle fashion brands, maybe it's easier with high-end brands to have like, you know, people who are dying for Prada or something, whereas people will probably not die for Hunky-dory. They will just buy it and wear it and feel like it represents them. Um, but that was not the question. Um, Uh, so, well, I don't feel like I am interacting that much, but I feel like I am a representative of the community when I wear the clothes.

Klara: Yeah. So do you personally know each other or?

Saga: No? I don't think so. No. I mean, sometimes you see friends or something have something from there, or like acquaintances. And I mean, in a way you participate in some things like, for example, as I said, the spring sale, or you get a newsletter, uh, and then I guess you follow the same things. Um, yeah.

Klara: So how would you say the communication is online? Still speaking about the brand community members.

Saga: Um, on my part is not that much, but I see other community members like finding and encouraging things, or maybe posting pictures and, um, with a hashtag, um, and particularly like, um, the influencers. So people that have a platform, but they would probably more likely to be, um, Yeah, more vocal, I guess, about that. They are part of the community.

Klara: Yes.

Saga: But I don't really have that much strong media platform. So for me it's really the same.

Klara: Yeah. Okay. So moving on to your actual relationship to the brand. So not speaking about the brand community members anymore, but your relationship to the brand hunky-dory. Um, how would you, yeah. How would you describe your relationship to them?

Saga: Um, I feel like I have, um, an interest in what they do. I follow them on social platforms. I follow their newsletters and, uh, Um, yeah. So my relationship. Hard question.

Klara: Yeah. So how would you describe the brand in terms of their characteristics, their values, products? Um, like think about, think back to the brand pyramid pretty much. Um, how would you describe the characteristics?

Saga: Well, um, well, I think it, part of the experience as a customer. Um, I feel like they really value their customer. For example, if you're in contact with customer service, um, they are quick to reply. They're very nice. If you buy something from their website, they usually send these really nice cute packages. With, um, well, with a nice paper, you know, almost, you know, it feels very personalized. Like someone has actually like, put some time in and then like they value you as a customer. Um, I also feel like. They strive to be environmental. And they have like values such as not buying new all the time, but also like valuing the things that you have. Um, and like for, for example, to have like materials that are good materials, that if you can have stuff for a longer time as well, um, uh, and like reinventing themselves at the same time, obviously, but. Uh, it's just a nice mix. It feels like it's a brand that, you know, what you get when you buy from them. And like they have a good reputation and, um, uh, that they value you as the customer and you know, what you get, so it feels safe, I guess.

Klara: So are there any specific activities or experiences that you have shared with the brand?

Saga: Specific activities or experiences? No, no. I mean, I'm part of the newsletter. Could that be an experience?

Klara: Sure.

Saga: Um, because I'm part of the newsletter and then I get news about the brand and their, uh, like their goals and, you know, their values.

Klara: Yeah.

Saga: Uh, and how they are trying to see what they are doing in order to reach their goals, to, to be a part of the process. And you feel part of them, uh, well, you know, you're part of their well, um, and, uh. Just getting like new information about the brand too, and new clothes and just following what's happening.

Klara: Okay. So moving into quite the tricky part of the interview questions, uh, we're going to talk about brand value and it is very hard to define, but according to you, how would you define the value of a brand. Like what's important to you and what is value adding for a fashion brand to have, or do?

Saga: Yeah, I think it adds value, if, um, if it's a brand that thinks about like materials and the quality of the clothes, also having the like environmental aspect, for example, Uh, picking fabrics or thinking about the environmental impact, uh, because it feels like that is getting more and more important too, especially now when it feels like an environment is a big part of it. And fashion is an industry where it's quite hard on the environment. So that feels even more important to think about that, uh, in that setting. Also, I guess what ads or what could decrease value is if, for me, at least if the brand gets too widespread too, I feel like if anyone is wearing something, then it's not as fun or interesting anymore.

Klara: Yeah.

Saga: So it adds value if it's like it specifically targets an audience and then. It's more like for them and not all of them, all people, even though that sounds quite, you know, um, what else? I guess like the social media platforms too adds value, like how do they communicate with the customers and the personalized touches? As I said, the department sells when you buy from their website. And like how, yeah, I haven't been much in contact with the, um, but then, um, what is it called? Kundenservice?

Klara: It's customer service.

Saga: The customer service, but the times I have, I feel like they've been very polite and nice and quick to answer. So I guess that also brings value because that also makes it feel like they value me as a customer.

Klara: So would you define the value of a fashion brand differently than the value of say a company from a different industry? Or how do you perceive the different types of value?

Saga: I think so, because I mean, a few things, clothes, for example, it's so individual what you like. So there's also a huge part of the value, is how I perceive the. The brand and, um, what I'm interested in. Whereas if I went to buy, um, a car, then I probably wouldn't think as much about the brand, the more about, you know, is it a good car? Um, so in that sense, and also,

Klara: but you do, you do think about that when it comes to clothes as well, right? Since you've been talking a lot about quality.

Saga: Yeah, that's true. So I'm actually, uh, well I guess maybe, yeah, that's true, but it's more, like emotional, I guess when it comes to clothes, because that's who I, how I express myself. And that's how I show other people who I am.

Klara: Yes.

Saga: Which maybe is the thing with a car for some people.

Klara: For some people maybe.

Saga: Yeah. So maybe it's similar in many ways too, and a bit different in some ways. It must be harder for a company, for example, with clothes, because there's also so many different companies and so many brands. Whereas for example, mobile phones, a lot of the time, I guess it's the, the same type of brands. And then you could just, you just have a connection to one of them, and then you go with that. Like if I have a, I have an iPhone now I would probably do buy an iPhone next. Uh, no matter what they do, but if I buy a blouse from hunky-dory now, and then they changed their aesthetics, or I want to try something new, or if my friends have started to buy something from a new brand then I'm probably more likely to change. Really.

Klara: Yeah. So. Moving on a little bit further. Would you say that you as a customer can impact the value of a brand?

Saga: I guess so, uh, I mean. Part of that I guess, is who they collaborate with, but if they collaborate with how collaborations would, uh, people or things, people that I don't feel connected with. But I also guess, like, if I see someone, as I said, if anyone were to wear hunky-dory all over the place, then I probably would feel like the brand value would lessen. So in that sense, I guess I could impact the value of the brand. To, or like the community. How did the community react and is it a nice community, uh, that is uplifting or is it a community that is, you know, just not caring.

Klara: So do you think you could describe, or if you could describe what a typical co-creation of value process would be like then between you and Hunky-dory if you have an example or any idea?

Saga: Um, well, if I, uh, if I am not like really part of the target audience and I, um, wear the clothes and upload it to my social media, And I'm not really standing for the values. And I don't know, actually, I think it's a hard question too, but, um, I guess isn't it like that with anything really? That, which is probably also hard for the brands because they can't really, um, uh, control it, I guess. But if I buy something and then I wear it, if I were to in, inappropriate places or something, it would get, give a bad image of it, I guess, in a way.

Klara: So do you believe that you are, well that's pretty similar, so you do believe then that you are part of co-creating value of the brand that you consider yourself to be a community member of?

Saga: Yeah, on a small scale, but yeah, I think so.

Klara: So do you think that your brand community membership impacts your own perceived value of the brand?

Saga: Yes, I, yeah, because since I feel like I'm part of the brand community, then I will probably. Um, be more likely to have a positive view on the brand. And if I feel like this represents me, then I will probably stand for that. And then I will be proud to be a part of the member and I will value the brand more.

Klara: Yeah. So,

Saga: So, yeah, I think that's important.

Klara: So I'm gonna move on to brand number two and ask you a couple of questions. So now we're speaking of, um?

Saga: Oh, sorry. Uh, Rodebjer. Sorry.

Klara: So now we're speaking of Rodebjer.

Saga: Yes.

Klara: So, and this is, as we've mentioned earlier, a fashion brand that you might've bought something from, uh, but you do not consider yourself part of the brand community. So what would you say distinguishes your admiration from HunkyDory to Rodebjer?

Saga: Um, well, I feel like. I think HunkyDory is more safe because I feel in a way I know what they stand for. So I feel like if I wear those types of clothes, then I, I know what I stand for, or I know what I'm expressing, whereas Rodebjer and I don't really know that much about the brand. I don't know about the values. I don't really know much about like, I've seen clothes, you know, and I bought some. But I don't really know that much about the brand as a whole or the clothes as a whole or the style as a whole. So it feels more scary. Right. If I went to buy something from hunky-dory, then I know what I get. If I buy something from Rodebjer, I don't really have a relation to it as I'm not as sure that I can stand for wearing that brand or like wearing those types of clothes.

Klara: Okay. So. Is there anything concrete you can think of, that. Like what would it take for you to join the brand community of Rodebjer?

Saga: I don't know. I guess it's a gradual process too, or it was when I became a brand community member. Hunky-dory I guess so, I mean, it's not impossible. It's just that, I guess over time to just know the quality. I feel like it's good quality to just, uh, get in the right mindset, I guess just getting the emotional connection, which I guess you can, after a while, I mean, if you have a favorite piece of clothing from a brand, then you will probably be, you know, also have that emotional attachment and feel, um, more excited about, about buying something next time as well. Um, Yeah.

Klara: So, like really delving into the value parts. What do you think is the biggest. Um, so how do you think your perceived value of this brand differs from the one where you are a community member? What, what are the differences in the value of these two brands?

Saga: Um, I mean, since I don't know what I'm getting. I feel like I am probably more, more cautious and like, uh, when it comes to price, for example pricing if it's, um.

Klara: Like, is it something you feel like you are missing something they could do better or.

Saga: Well, I don't know. I don't know. I mean, part of it is how do they reach out to me, I guess, but I dunno if they can do much more. Um, I mean, Hunkydory is something, I chose myself to follow on social media, for example. So maybe for them to reach out. Maybe if they were to target more people that I follow in my social media flow. For example, if my friends or like acquaintances, where to wear more Rodebjer, um, or if I were to see it more around me in a way

Klara: So, but is there a specific value or anything concrete that you feel like Rodebjer is. Missing this part, or this is something I would really need to become a member of this community. Or

Saga: I feel like I don't know enough about it, but if I knew more about, for example, their environmental aspects, for example, or the quality aspects, then it would be easier. But since I don't really know enough, Then I feel like it's also hard for me to answer that question, what they are missing.

Klara: Okay. Hmm. Um, yeah, I guess that's just it then. Or is there anything else that you would like to add or discuss that we have not brought up?

Saga: Um, No, I don't think so.

Klara: Okay. Thank you for your time.

Saga: Thank you.

Anesa

Klara: Ska se om det hörs. Är du redo?

Anesa: Yeah.

Klara: Okay. So with me, I have Anesa, and she already got all of the questions in advance and a short introduction to the topic. Uh, and the research question is how do consumers perceive the brand value in fashion brand communities in comparison to other brands? And I also sent Anesa a brand value pyramid, uh, just to give her, give her some theory behind it. Uh, so a quick reminder for you is when we're talking

about a brand and the concept of a brand, we are talking about things such as brand features and attributes, brand visuals, brand esteem, and brand merit. So I already asked you to pick two brands. And before starting this interview, I would like to ask you for your consent, that we are recording and transcribing the following interview for the master thesis of this study.

Anesa: Yeah you have my consent for that.

Klara: Okay. Great. So let's jump into the questions and I would like to start with the introductions. So could you please briefly introduce yourself, age, gender, nationality, and occupation.

Anesa: So my name is Anesa, I'm 24 years old, in Sweden, and I have a healthy relationship from six years ago. Yeah.

Klara: Uh, gender and occupation?

Anesa: Female, taken, same as him.

Klara: Occupation, um, like your job or what you're doing.

Anesa: Student (marketing).

Klara: So what is your connection to fashion?

Anesa: Uh, I really liked fashion because I'm interested in like designer bags and stuff like that. But since I've been studying. Mostly of my life. I'm not really in that category. Like luxury brands that I'm interested in them. Like I like the designs. So I like to pinpoint the goals are with the fashion brands, but currently they're not the, in the right price range.

Klara: Right. Fair enough. Okay. So could you briefly say in one sentence, which brands you chose for brand one, brand two. And why? And what's your relationship to them?

Anesa: Uh, the first brand I chose for brand one is Levi's. Because it's a brand that I usually choose when I go shopping for jeans, especially, and like jackets and stuff like that.

And the, brand number two, a similar fashion brand is Lee. And Guess I think they have, or do you want me to choose one?

Klara: You can pick one. Yeah.

Anesa: Yeah. I can take, I guess them,

Klara: Have you ever bought from Guess?

Anesa: No, but I've been in the store and online and I didn't feel the vibe.

Klara: Okay. So now we're going to talk about brand communities and we're going to talk about them more of a, in a general aspect. So in general, how would you define a brand community?

Anesa: Uh, I would define a brand community like. Someone you can feel the connection to, that, you can feel that you belong, that you can wear the clothes or jeans or whatever that they produce.

Klara: Yeah. So are there any bonding practices, special rituals or experiences, special demographics?

Anesa: I think the primary reason that you feel a brand connection is when you become like a member and then you get like discounted emails to get the direct commercials to you, or I don't know how to describe it, but the, it feels like the commercials and the marketing is especially for you, do you understand what I mean?

Klara: Yeah, I do. Yeah. So do you feel like in a brand community, there is the closeness of the members as well?

Anesa: Um, kind of because, eh, I can't really explain how I feel because I'm not like. Stuck to one brand. You know what I mean? I'm like, I'm glad, like I only buy from these or from these stores. Yeah. You can feel a connection. Like if you see someone with the same pair of jeans or something like that, you feel like, oh, we like the same things. We have the same style. So you can feel connected in that way, but I'm like, I'm not like, oh, I only buy from this brand.

Klara: Yeah. So. Looking at it in the opposite way. What would you say breaks a community,

Anesa: But it's kind of the same thing there, because if, if someone is too much specific into one, I don't know how to explain it that in one direction, like it's a brand new is like, oh, we only make clothes for girls, girly girls who wear pink. You know what I mean? It's like, okay. But someone else that doesn't wear that can define themselves with that brand. So it's kind of the same thing because the people that are in it can really define themselves, but no one else can. So it's either that it makes it or breaks it kind of.

Klara: Yep. So, um, going further into that question, in a sense. What would you say differentiates a brand community member from just a regular customer?

Anesa: Um, a brand community member is someone who really stands for the brand who. Who appreciates what the brand has done and become. So you don't only buy the thing for the brand. You buy it because you know it's good quality. You know, what to expect from the brand. A regular consumer is someone who's like, okay, I'll try that. Then they maybe never come back and they don't really have the same expectations as a brand community member. For example, when I buy jeans from Levi's I know it's

good quality. I know how they would fit. I know everything because I know that my previous experience has shown me that.

Klara: Yeah. So how do you think social media platforms, uh, for example, given then Instagram impact brand communities?

Anesa: I think they really support the marketing channels from where, when, before, when there wasn't really social media, I think it was hard for brands to get out there and maybe not Levi's because it's a well known brand, but smaller brands, like, I don't know, for example, the NA-KD a Swedish brand websites. I think it would be much harder for them before. When the social media platforms didn't exist because then the bigger brands like H and M Zara, et cetera, would take over because they would have much more money to put in the marketing channels.

Klara: Yeah. So you think it kind of brings the closeness of members then, or as well? Or is it just about building a brand.

Anesa: Yeah, it's a closeness and it's much more, it's much easier for the brands to bring awareness to what they want and what they want to communicate to their members.

Klara: Yeah. Okay. So now we're going to adapt this to the brand that you chose, which is Levi's as you said. So the first question I would like to ask you is how did you become a brand member of Levi's and why.

Anesa: I think it began a couple of years ago when I went shopping for jeans and I always felt like they fit well, they looked how I wanted the price range was okay. And I know the quality was good, i became stuck. And now when I shop for jeans, I immediately go there and choose their jeans because I know everything I don't have to, to try on a hundred pairs of jeans to see how they fit.

Klara: Yeah. So could you then describe what the brand community of Levi's that you are a part of is like, so I'm speaking in terms of, for example, the demographics, the characteristics, personality traits, or if you have any other ideas, uh, I'm not sure if the demographics is a huge thing here because Levi's is known all over the world. And either if I'm here or I'm at vacation somewhere else, I can find the jeans. I know where to find them. The stores are similar and stuff like that. It's like, you immediately know what to expect. As I said before. And what was that a question?

Klara: Uh, no, it was pretty similar. So like if they had any special characteristics.

Anesa: Yeah. And then the characteristic, I think is that, eh, either way, if you're or. The jeans aren't depending on your body type, they fit every one. You can find a fit for everyone.

Klara: So would you say there are any special personality traits with, um, amongst the actual consumers of the brand community?

Anesa: Hmm, not really, because I think there are like a fit for all the, maybe a more casual style or. Yeah, I'm not sure because people use it to parties as well, but it's more like a casual, everyday lifestyle.

Klara: Okay. So moving on, we're going to look at the members specifically in the brand community, and we're gonna look at how the members interact with each other.

Anesa: Yeah.

Klara: Uh, so do you have any examples of activities of how the members interact?

Anesa: Um, not in, not a specific situation, but maybe. I don't know if this is a real example, but yesterday one of my friends, she wore a pair of jeans that I've never seen that type of style on her. And it was a pair of Levi's and I was like, oh, do you also have those pants? Yeah. So that's maybe a, an example. I'm not sure.

Klara: So more like a bonding practice.

Anesa: Yeah. Like, oh, we're like the same thing.

Klara: Yeah. So do you know if there are any other rituals or traditions or activities that you guys, if you meet someone from the same brand community, for example, say online or offline?

Anesa: No, not really. The only thing I can come up with is like, it gets the same discounts and emails. You get the same commercial towards you or like that.

Klara: So would you say that the brand community members personally know each other.

Anesa: No, not personally, but the people in your inner circle, they know, like I know people who wear them like the same style as me. But not like on a personal level. I don't know. I'm not going to talk to someone, like in a mall with the same jeans.

Klara: So, how is the communication online for the brand community? So looking at, say for example, Instagram, is there a community they're taking place through, say videos, comments, live chats.

Anesa: I think it's, uh, the most common thing is like comments on Instagram, when they release, uh, something new people comment what they like. They discuss and stuff like that, but I'm not sure. It's like, it's, uh, it's a more complex brand community. It's more like everyone knows what a pair of Levi's is yeah. It's like a bigger community, like a, it's like a statement piece, or I don't know how to explain it.

Klara: No, I get it. So moving away from the brand community, uh, now we're moving to the actual brand of Levi's and you, so what is, how would you describe your relationship to the brand of Levi's?

Anesa: I would explain it. Like my relationship towards Levi's is, like I said before, it's a brand I know has good quality. It's a good price range. I know everything about them already that one might know. I don't have to like do research before I buy anything from them. I already know everything, because I'm familiar with the brands.

Klara: So would you say that you consider yourself loyal or because you mentioned earlier a little bit more, you don't buy from them at all times, right?

Anesa: Yeah, I would, I would consider myself loyal because when I buy from them, I know what to expect, but also I'm not like loyal: I will never buy from anyone else because I also like to try new things. But I know myself, that whenever I go to someone else, I don't get the same experience with them.

Klara: Yeah. So how would you describe the brand of Levi's in terms of their characteristics, values and products?

Anesa: Good quality, trustworthy jeans. Like, you know what you get, um, a wide price range. It's not like the cheapest thing you can buy, but it's also, you know, when you buy it it lasts for a long time, so it's like value for your money and then lifestyle, like. You're not high end fashion but they're not, they're not like sweat pants.

Klara: Yes. So are there any specific activities or experiences that you share with the brand? And when I speak about activities or experience, I'm talking about things such as visiting fashion shows, working for them, or just your own experience with them online or.

Anesa: No, not really anything like that, like fashion things, but, uh, visiting the stores and things like that. I've always got a good service and a good introduction. Um, "intryck", uh, it was always a good experience there shopping with them. They were able to help. Yeah, good impression overall.

Klara: So we're now going to talk a bit more about the value of a brand, which is a hard concept to define, obviously, but I'm still going to ask you, how do you define the value of a brand?

Anesa: The value of a brand? I don't know how to define it otherwise than if it's value for the money or because it's not a real value because I don't have a connection to like, if I will buy a designer bag for 20,000SEK. And yeah, it wouldn't be like, oh, I have value for this brand because I know what would last me a lifetime, but it's like value for the money.

Klara: Okay. So, I mean, I guess that's economic value, but do you believe that there are other different types of value. I mean, it could be such as emotional or social value, or

Anesa: I think it's kind of a social value as well because people see it as like, not really a connection that like, oh, we have the same thing or something like that.

Klara: So more like a belonging or?

Anesa: Yeah. Like, oh, we like the same style as I said before.

Klara: Yeah. So would you define the value of a fashion brand different than the value of another type of brand, like from another industry?

Anesa: What do you mean?

Klara: So say that we compare, you say that the value of a fashion brand is this, uh, would you consider the value of, say, for example, a car brand would the value measurement be the same. Would you think they are different?

Anesa: I think it depends on what it is because I know many people are like, oh, it's good for the environment and stuff like that. I must, that's what you're getting too. But I know myself like, this might sound rude, but I don't really care about the environment. If it fits me well.

Klara: Yeah.

Anesa: Yeah. It's because if it's a good price range and it fits well, I'm like, okay, whatever.

Klara: Yeah.

Anesa: But also it's not like, like a really bad brand. If you know what I mean? You heard, you heard of brands like. For example, H&M are using children as workers and stuff like that. I had never heard about something like that happening to Levi's, maybe that would have been, I would be like, oh, that's not good.

Klara: Yeah. So, I mean, what you were speaking about now is also leading into the next question a little bit as well, I guess one could say, and that is, would you. Would you say, or do you think that you as a customer can impact the value of a brand?

Anesa: Um, yeah, I think so, because if many people think the same and say their opinion, I think the brands need to change, and need to listen to their customers. Because as we talked about earlier, social media is a big thing right now. And it's so, you know, a cancel culture. If a huge amount of people cancel

a brand, they won't have any customers, even though they're brand community strong. If people cancel it and talk bad about it, it would impact their ratings, their selling numbers, everything.

Klara: Yeah. So do you believe as well then that you can be part of creating, co-creating value? For a brand, as a consumer.

Anesa: I think so, because I, I also believe that the reason why Levi's are so big, that they actually are, is because the consumers are hyping, the jeans up, like hyping the brand up. Yeah. It's a good brand, but it wouldn't be anything without the people standing behind the brand.

Klara: Yeah. So do you think, also that then, because, do you think that your brand community membership, uh, impacts the way that you perceive the value of a brand? And, in that sense, I mean, it could be a lot of different examples, but you being a member of this brand community, could it make you be blind to, in some ways maybe or extra loyal, or do you think that you're seeing the value of the brand? Does that get impacted by you being, maybe knowing them well.

Anesa: I think so, because since you know, no. You're used to using the brand, you know, nothing else, or I don't know how to say that. Since you're used to using the same brand, always, see you, you know, the quality, you know, everything. You're like, okay, whatever. Like you're a bit blind to what they do wrong. And I think that is because you're a brand community member because you're, you're like everything you've received. And then like the perception, I don't know. Like what you get is because you're basing it on what they tell you.

Klara: Yes.

Anesa: So maybe I don't even know if they have the children working for them because I know I only listen to their side.

Klara: Yeah, so you wouldn't listen, even if you heard it from another perspective, is, are you that loyal, do you mean?

Anesa: No I'm not that loyal because I'm not that loyal to any brands, but I would. I would be more blind because I know that the reason why I buy them, the quality is good, et cetera. Is "det vägrer tyngre".

Klara: It weighs heavier, I guess.

Anesa: Yeah. Uh, I don't know if that's how you say it anyway. It's like a big reason why you continue to buy it.

Klara: It upweighs the bad side.

Anesa: Yeah. So I think if you're a brand community member, you're like, oh, but I know it's good. And I am not saying I would continue buying different, you know, that shows that they have children working for them.

Klara: I do, I'm not calling you out in any way. Okay. So we're going to move on to brand number two. That you chose, uh, Guess. Yeah. And let's see. So, what would you say is the biggest difference or what is it that distinguishes your admiration of Levi's to Guess?

Anesa: I think it's because I don't have a good, uh, not a bad experience, but when I go into the stores, like the people working there aren't as service-minded, I think overall. The brand is a bit too. How do I say this? It's a bit too much for me. Like it's a bit too much details too much bling-bling overall. So I think that even though their jeans might be good, I would rather choose Levi's because I know what I get,

Klara: So this is not really about the quality either, because you're saying that you don't really know about the quality, but it's more about the attributes of

Anesa: Exactly, because if I would compare like, uh, a pair of jeans, exactly from Levi's and a pair of jeans from Guess, most certainly choose the Levi's because I know what, what I get. I know the fit. And I know that the overall impression of the brand is good. Yeah. What I, Guess is a bit too much as an overall impression, even though their jeans might be, might be good, might be a good fit for me. It might look good as well, but the overall impression of the brand is like, oh, I don't, I don't even want to go there.

Klara: So I'm guessing it doesn't really match with your, what you want from a product either?

Anesa: What do you mean?

Klara: So, because you're saying that you maybe like some of the products, but it's just that the brand is too much.

Anesa: Yeah. It's like, I don't have a good experience with the brand overall. So I won't, I won't even try on what I like there because I don't even want to go into the store.

Klara: So that's probably more an emotional aspect, right?

Anesa: Yeah. Nah, It's not an emotional, it's not like I don't wanna, it's more like. It doesn't, hm. How do you say this.

Klara: It doesn't appeal to you or?

Anesa: Yeah, it doesn't appeal to me. Like I don't want to go in there. When I see everything in the store. It's like, oh, this too much. So I don't need to look at the things that might be good.

Klara: Okay. That's interesting. Um, are there any emotional aspects that you can think of that makes you not like Guess?

Anesa: Not really because sometimes when, uh, people I know have their brand, it's like, oh, that jacket was really nice. Where did you get it from? From Guess. And I was like, oh God, no, but it's, it's like, they're, they have nice things, but I just don't go there. So I have, I only have like bad experiences from, from Guess. It's not like I hate them. If you give me a purse. And it's Guess and I like it, I will still wear it, but I wouldn't buy it myself.

Klara: Yeah. You wouldn't take the time to try them out either. So, interesting aspect of this is what would you, what would it take for you to actually join their community? Do you think there are any options for them? So to say.

Anesa: Hmm. Maybe if I went into the store with someone else that would, uh, that would like to buy something there. And the service was really good. Maybe that would change my mind. But at the same time when I was there, like two months ago, the service was really bad. And that is like one of the huge parts why I don't like the brand.

Klara: Yeah. That's great. So we're down to the last question and what I want to know is how, so we talked about perceived value before. And how do you think your perceived value of Guess differs from Levi's? Are there any like, value points that you can point out that's different between them?

Anesa: I'm not sure, really, because I can't judge the brand by not even having a single piece from them, but only like from the perception I get it's like, oh, it's, it's, um, like Levi's is better quality because I know the brand, but maybe it isn't like that.

Klara: So what exactly is it that you are missing from Guess? You think.

Anesa: I think it's just like the overall brand isn't appealing to me. So I wouldn't even consider buying anything from them.

Klara: Okay. So,

Anesa: You know what I mean? Like, I think what's missing is like, they have a certain type of type of people buying their things and I'm not that person. So I don't feel like, connected to them. Like we said in the beginning and Levi's is a very. It has a wide range of consumers. Everyone can relate to Levi's either, either if you have like a casual style, if you have a fancy style or if you have a whole complete, the older style, like you can find some, something you like that in Guess it feels like you have to have a certain style, the type of clothes or bags, or yeah. You have to like something special to find something there, like, you know,

Klara: So could you, could you come up with any examples of what Guess could do to increase their brand value?

Anesa: If they're personally, I don't know, had a bit more if they hired someone a bit more service minded. My first thing that I come up with, because I know I work in a store and I know how to talk to people. And that's not the way they talk to me when I was in the store. Like they were a bit full of full of themselves. So they didn't even say hi correctly, like small things like that is like, you're losing customers over nothing.

Klara: Yeah.

Anesa: And for the brand it's like, maybe do a more wide range of bags, especially because I don't think their bling-bling bags appeals to everyone.

Klara: Yeah. Okay. So is there anything else that you would like to add that has not been discussed or

Anesa: Not what I can come up with right now.

Klara: Okay. Well then I thank you for your time.

Anesa: Thank you-

Louise

Klara: Jag har satt igång nu, är du redo?

Louise: Yeah.

Klara: Okay. So this is interview number four, with me I have Louise and I already sent her in advance, a short introduction to the subject and the questions so she could read them in advance. So the research question is how do consumers perceive the brand value in fashion brand communities in comparison to other brands? So together with that, I also send a model, a brand value pyramid. And I'm just going to give you a quick recap so that you know that when we're talking about the concept of a brand, we're talking about features such as brand features, attributes, brand visuals, brand esteem, and brand merits, such as purpose, cause and beliefs. So before this interview, I asked you to pick two brands. And before starting the official interview, I would like to ask you for your consent, that we are recording and transcribing the following interview for the master's thesis of this study.

Louise: Yes, I accept.

Klara: Okay, great. So let's jump to the introduction. Could you please briefly introduce yourself?

Louise: Yes. So my name is Louise. I'm 24 years old. I'm a woman. I live in Sweden and I'm a student.

Klara: What are you studying?

Louise: Uh, market communication.

Klara: Okay. And what is your connection to fashion?

Louise: Uh, I've always dreamed about being a fashion designer and since I was like 11, 12, I've always read like, Elle magazine or Vogue. Uh, and I've always been the one in the family who is like insanely, uh, interested in fashion. So it means a lot to me. Uh, and, um, yeah.

Klara: Okay.

Louise: Very interesting.

Klara: That's good. So could you briefly say in one sentence, uh, which brands that you have chosen and why? Like what's your relationship with them?

Louise: All right. So, uh, brand number one, uh, the one I frequently buy from, is the Swedenbrand Rodebjer.

Klara: Yeah.

Louise: And the second one is Filippa K, also a Swedish brand.

Klara: Have you ever bought something from Filippa K?

Louise: Never.

Klara: Never? Okay. So we're gonna skip into part number one, which is about brand communities. I'm going to start about speaking about them in general. So in general, how would you define a brand community?

Louise: Um, do you mean like how the brand have their community with their, uh, customers or,

Klara: Yeah. So how the brand has their community with the customers, but also mostly speaking about brand communities is about the interaction between the consumers.

Louise: All right. Um, Well, it's a hard question.

Klara: It is. And it doesn't have to be perfect. It's just how you would define it, maybe.

Louise: Well, I think that the best brand community is when they have a close relationship to the consumer, like. They want to have the consumer's opinion, to be a better brand, both with like maybe online shopping or whatever. Uh, and also like being, inviting consumers to watch maybe their new collections. Like Rodebjer, I was on their release of, uh, one of their fall collections. In one of their stores in Stockholm. Uh, so I think a close relationship to the consumer. That's what I think is a good brand community.

Klara: Okay. So if we speak about it in terms of, um, the consumers, what do you think makes a community in terms of, for example, like, are there any special demographics, any bonding practices, experiences, activities between the consumers or maybe even personality traits?

Louise: I lost you a bit, little bit, so I couldn't hear the whole sentence.

Klara: Okay. I'll say it again. So, uh, what makes a community like amongst, the members, the consumers. Uh, and I'm speaking about things such as if you have any, if you think brand communities have any bonding practices, activities, or common experiences, or maybe even personality traits or characteristics.

Louise: Eeeh.

Klara: It's a long question.

Louise: Yeah. Yeah. What does it mean with like, uh, bonding practices?

Klara: So for example, I would say, um, for me, the first thing that comes to mind is, say for example, that I would choose Acne Studios and I see someone wearing their latest dress or something. And I would be like, I could even go up and speak to her or compliment on her dress, but it could also be experiences such as just, um, commenting on their. Um, on their Instagram or partaking in, um, a competition or, um, like there are so many aspects to a community, but is there anything special that comes to your mind? When, when I mentioned the word brand community, what do you think is a brand community?

Louise: Hallå?

Klara: Kan du inte höra mig?

Louise: Ja jag förlorade dig.

Klara: Okay.

Louise: Um, I have to think of it.

Klara: That's fine.

Louise: It's like, a really interesting question, but I've never thought about it. So, but I. Between consumers. I mean, today with like Instagram and all social media. Um, I like that people can help each other. Maybe find a brand that they liked. For example, if there is an influencer or a friend or whatever who has a dress or pants or whatever, that, you think it looks really nice. And then. Then you can share with each other like favorite brands and maybe you haven't heard of a brand before and they give you tips like yeah, they have really good dresses or whatever, and you find a new brand. And so I, that like community, between customers, I think is like really nice.

Klara: That's great.

Louise: Because you can find inspiration. Between each other.

Klara: Yeah, that's good. So what would you say would break up a brand community? What is like any factors that could cause a brand community to almost fall apart?

Louise: Uh, is this the, between customers or like in general?

Klara: You can do both.

Louise: All right. Um, so I think. When you lost, when a brand lost like, uh, the consumers trust. It's like H&M for example, when they have this, um, eh, king of the jungle or whatever, these t-shirt on these, this kid. And that's when I think you lose a lot of consumers' trust in a brand and people are more aware of what they're buying today. So I think when you're making that sort of a mistake you yeah, you break the community, I think. Is that the answer to your question?

Klara: It is, yeah.

Louise: Okay.

Klara: Great. If we think about, um, a brand again. So what would you say differentiates a brand community member from just a regular customer? So like, it might still be someone buying from the brand, but what do you think is the difference from someone, actually being a part of the brand community and someone just buying the products? Maybe once.

Louise: I mean, from my perspective, I think like, um, For example with Rodebjer. I have followed them for many years and I have like, some connection with the brand. Uh, I think I know, uh, I like to see how

the brand was built up from nothing and now it's, is a huge company and a brand. And I think that's why I have a lot of respect also for the brand, because I know the hard work and I've seen the. Um, uh, "utveckling"

Klara: The developments.

Louise: Yeah. Then developments.

Klara: Yeah. That's great. So how would you say, or how do you think that social media platforms such as Instagram impact brand communities?

Louise: Uh, apart from like, it's a very good, uh, platform to, um, um, do a commercial for your brand as well. But also I think, um, you can learn from others. Like if you didn't know any brand, if there was a brand who made a mistake and you didn't know it, and that's, that's the thing you, that will be a thing that you can find out. On social media, you can learn more about it or you can find like, a better brand who makes clothes made in Sweden, for example, and not in China or whatever. Yeah.

Klara: Okay, great. So now we're going to go into Rodebjer, which is the brand that you chose, that you consider yourself a brand community member of. And my first question is how did you become a brand community member and why?

Louise: Uh, well, first of all, I know Rodebjer because my mother has a connection to the designer. So I've known it for a couple of years before it was like, quite big now. And, um, then my colleague started working there. So my. My interest in the brand, got bigger. So now I have, now I follow them on Instagram and I really like to see like, the new collections for fall and spring and everything. So, yeah.

Klara: Yeah. That's great. So how would you describe the brand community of Rodebjer?

Louise: Umm.

Klara: I mean, are there maybe any, I mean, now you have a very close, personal connection to it as well, and you really know the brand, but is there anything special or in particular that comes to mind when you think about Rodebjer and their customer circle and the designer?

Louise: Well, the first thing that comes to my mind is like, it's very like Swedish, Nordic, style. And, um, I think even if they're now, not only a brand in Sweden, I think they still have that Swedish, um, "hur ska man förklara" roots or something. I don't how to say it.

Klara: Yeah. Maybe like the Swedish identity as well? Yeah.

Louise: Yeah, exactly.

Klara: Okay. So how do the members of the Rodebjer brand community interact? Or do they?

Louise: Um, well on social media they do, um. And just because I know someone who works there, I, when I see her, we always talk about Rodebjer and their new collections so. But I can't tell if like the members outside social media are communicating in any way.

Klara: Okay. So that, yeah, that pretty much answers the next question as well. If do you personally personally know each other?

Louise: Yeah.

Klara: To some extent, but you, as you said, you don't really know any other members?

Louise: No.

Klara: Okay. So how is the communication online?

Louise: Um, you mean like comments on Instagram or?

Klara: Yeah. Sure.

Louise: Okay. Well, it's often very positive. I just follow them on Instagram. So it's all of them very positive, um, comments. Uh, it's not so much that they really interact with the customers on Instagram.

Klara: Okay.

Louise: Uh, uh, people are just commenting the clothes there are putting..

Klara: But do they have any like, um, stories or repost, giveaways, um, live things or anything like that?

Louise: Yeah. They have stories. Uh, and sometimes reposts, like if someone has, uh, like a Rodebjer dress on it or something, but, uh, I don't think they had any giveaway actually.

Klara: Okay. Uh, so how would you describe your relationship to Rodebjer.

Louise: Uh, well, one of the reason I love Rodebjer is because it has a lot of pattern. And as I said, they have like this Swedish identity and I love Swedish fashion. So that's my relationship. It's a, I think it's really close to what I love. With clothes, like a lot of flowers, different patterns, colors. So I really feel like if I got the money, I could buy everything from Rodebjer.

Klara: Yeah okay, so you have a strong relationship.

Louise: Yes, I do.

Klara: Okay. So you just described as well, some characteristics and everything about them. Um, are there any other characteristics about Rodebjer as a brand that you would like to add?

Louise: Um, no, I don't think so.

Klara: So how, when we're speaking about, so this comes back a bit to the brand value pyramid as well, uh, and about defining the value of a brand. And it's a hard question. I'm going to say that in advance, um, but what do you, how do you define the value of a brand? What is it that gives a brand extra value? So to say.

Louise: I'm looking at this picture right now, should I follow it now?

Klara: Absolutely not, you can just, whatever comes to mind when we speak, it's just, um, as a template, if you need an idea about it, but I mean, is there something you personally feel like when you think about what is it that really brings value to a brand? What is the first thing that comes to your mind?

Louise: First of all, I think it's important that you feel like it's worth the money because Rodebjer is, uh, it's not like Zara prices. Um, but it's like, it's more, a little bit more expensive. Uh, so when you put on a piece from Rodebjer, I think you have to feel like, yeah, this is, this is worth the money.

Klara: Yeah.

Louise: That's the first thing. Um, And then of course, like we talked about earlier about, for example, H&M like, how do they, uh, uh, um,

Klara: What's it called? Brand themselves. So like even become perceived. Yeah.

Louise: Yeah, exactly.

Klara: So that's more ethical value.

Louise: Exactly. Yes.

Klara: So, do you feel like there's any emotional or social value as well, or any other different type of value?

Louise: Yeah, like it said before also that, um, I feel like it's my style. They do clothes, uh, that fit perfect for my own style.

Klara: Yeah. Great.

Louise: That's pretty much it.

Klara: So when we talked about different types of values, and now we've been speaking about the value of a fashion brand, but do you think the value is, would you define value in the same way if we were talking about a brand from another industry or like a complete other type of brand. Do you think you would define the value in the same way?

Louise: Um, does, um, I mean, like if we're talking about cars..

Klara: For example, yeah.

Louise: Yeah. I wouldn't be as much. I, I wouldn't do as much research and you know, about what the brand has for ethical or, you know what, like I said before, like technical parts and, um,

Klara: You think that is correlated to your interest in fashion and maybe lack of interest in cars?

Louise: Yes, definitely. I just go with the nicest one.

Klara: That's a fair point. Okay. So. Would you say then that you as a customer can be a part of impacting the value of it?

Louise: How do you mean?

Klara: I mean, when we're talking about, we talked about how you perceive that the company Rodebjer, how they create value for you as a consumer. But do you think that you can be part of this creation of value? Can you as a consumer impact the value of a brand?

Louise: Oooh. I guess.

Klara: I mean, just an example. I feel like you brought it up earlier, um, with the, uh, H&M thing. About the king in the jungle t-shirts do you, do you feel like you there as a consumer, like, do you feel like that's part of creating value by taking a stance, so to say?

Louise: Yes, of course.

Klara: So can you think about any other activities where you as consumer maybe create value together with the company? It could be. I mean, now you mentioned that your friend was working at Rodebjer and I mean, working together could probably be mentioned as value creation. Um,

Louise: Yeah.

Klara: But is there anything you can come up with us, a consumer, maybe any activities, anything on social media or?

Louise: Yeah, I mean maybe if, uh, people wouldn't have talked about the king of the jungle t-shirt for example, uh, I think a lot of people wouldn't even care if it didn't come as a discussion.

Klara: Yeah.

Louise: Uh, so maybe in that way, like people can, we are more, more close to speak about brands and what we think is wrong or right. And also, uh, educate each other to be better consumers.

Klara: Definitely. Do you think you can do it in other ways, like online, like maybe by just being part of, um, I'm not trying to lead you, I'm trying to fish for information, but like if we move it, if we move it online instead, how could you be a part of helping them increase their brand value. Just by your own Instagram, for example.

Louise: Yeah, but maybe sharing their post for example, or wearing, uh, uh, their clothes, uh, a photo and tag them in a photo too. So people can see where it's from, I guess.

Klara: Yeah. So let's see. So do you think that the fact that you're a part of Rodebjer's brand community, do you think that that is impacting your perceived value of the brand?

Louise: Yes.

Klara: Like the fact that you're so close to, such a big part of the community. How, how does that affect you? Or how does that affect your, the way that you see them?

Louise: Of course, I see them maybe in a better way than others do. Who's not familiar with Rodebjer.

Klara: Yeah.

Louise: Um,

Klara: Do you think you would be less critical towards, do you think you would be less critical if they got a lot of, um, backlash or something?

Louise: No.

Klara: You would still, you would still give them the same criticism, even if you're..

Louise: Yes, I think so. I would be, maybe I would put, more time to do the research on my own first. Instead of like, if I saw someone post on Instagram, I would search for it by myself at first to see like, is this for real, uh, is this like straight facts?

Klara: Yeah.

Louise: Uh, maybe I wouldn't have done that for H&M, for example.

Klara: Yeah. That is true. Okay. So we are going to move into the second part, which is about the second brand that you chose, which is Filippa K. And what do you feel is the distinguishing factor, um, that shows what this, like what distinguishes your admiration from Rodebjer and Filippa K.

Louise: Ummm. Like what I think is different or?

Klara: Yeah. So why, what's the difference between why do you love Rodebjer so much and in comparison to Filippa K?

Louise: Yeah, because I think Filippa K is really, uh, stiff. "Hur säger man det på engelska?"

Klara: That's stiff. Yeah.

Louise: Stiff, yeah. And it's also very like, Northern/Nordic style, but it's, I think it's, is there is like, no colors. There's a lot of like, boring clothes, to be honest.

Klara: I mean, that's, I just have to say it's a bit funny since you earlier said that you love the Nordic style.

Louise: I know. But it's a difference.

Klara: Yeah, no, that makes sense. Maybe it's not the same identity-wise.

Louise: It's a different, because uh, Nordic people we're very good at dressing ourselves, but, um, there is difference because I think Rodebjer is more like, from my opinion, like more like, Denmark style with all these, uh, colors and, uh, but I think why I see them as Swedish is how they brand themselves, the, um, the commercials and Filippa K, I think is stiff, like Swedish people can be. Very like boring. Straightforward.

Klara: Yeah. So it's something,

Louise: Yeah. So I think it's a difference.

Klara: Something you don't identify yourself with.

Louise: Exactly.

Klara: Okay. So what would it take for you to join the community of Filippa K? What would they have to improve in terms of value? Pretty much.

Louise: Yeah, better clothes. No, but more pattern and colors, not these are the, colors, tones, and, uh, maybe more fun clothes, I think.

Klara: But do you feel like there's anything else, um, maybe emotional that makes you have, have this feeling for Filippa K as well, or?

Louise: When I see their, uh, posters or something and stuff.

Klara: Ads, and stuff?

Louise: Yeah ads, uh, I think it's boring actually. So..

Klara: Yeah, I mean, that makes sense.

Louise: It's, it doesn't happen anything. It's just the models standing there with their clothes and I think it's quite boring.

Klara: Yeah. So that's, I mean, the next question is pretty much what we discussed, but we're going even deeper into the perceived value. So when we compare, uh Rodebjer and Filippa, K, if you think about the value that they offer, what is the difference in value between the two. So like, let's think back at the way you defined value earlier, and it was both about, as you mentioned now, Rodebjer matches with your identity, um, and more their offerings and the way that they branded themselves. But can you think when we're thinking value, can you come up with any like straight factors as of what Filippa K is missing in value?

Louise: Um. I think it's like a personality in their brand and, and obviously they succeed with this, like, um, but. I think there is, in their clothes there is no personality, so I can't express myself with their clothes. It's just like, regular clothes, like you see every day. And I think compared to Rodebjer it's, um, "kommer inte ens på det svenska ordet". Um, it's, it's unique, in an other way than Filippa K.

Klara: Yeah. So that's what you're missing pretty much.

Louise: Yeah.

Klara: So what would you say that they could do better? Like more than changing their collection? Because we talked about the way that Rodebjer brands themselves as well. Um, and how you also pretty much feel at home in their community. So, like, if you were to say that you would consult Filippa K, or just to increase the value of the brand, I know that you talked about pricing earlier as well, for example, that you actually felt that the clothes were worth their money with Rodebjer. What do you think Filippa K could do better? It could be product, quality, price, just emotional aspects, their branding..

Louise: Well, I can't say if their clothes are not worth the price, but for me, they're not.

Klara: Yeah.

Louise: Um, and I think it's hard to say when it's it's you see it's a big brand already, so, but I mean, they could do commercials. Uh, that was more.. Can you say eye-opener like, if you are more?

Klara: Yeah. More statement wise, more bigger and more explosive maybe?

Louise: Yeah. Because if you pass the ad, if you're on like in a subway and they have an ad on the wall or something, I don't, I don't pay attention to it because. Or not what I've seen before, when I've seen, seen their ads, it's nothing happening. Like I don't react on it. It's like, it's just there.

Klara: So they're boring?

Louise: Yeah boring. Oh my God. I'm so mean. No, but it's compared to Rodebjer, that's because also their clothes, but they have like, I mean, with, compared to like Acne, they have like really. Uh, their clothes it's happening, something, in their clothes. So even if a model's just standing there, there's something happening in the picture, but Filippa K is just straight clothes with a model standing there. So nothing has happened in the photo or the clothes.

Klara: Yep. Hmm. Interesting. So, I mean, it sounds as well, like it's pretty linked to your personality no?

Louise: Of course. Yes.

Klara: Interesting. Okay. I mean, that was pretty much my last question. Unless is there anything that you would like to add that has not been discussed?

Louise: No. I'm good.

Klara: Okay. Then I thank you for your time.

Louise: Thank you.

Melina

Klara: Okay. So I have with me Melina, and we're going to do the last interview together. So I already sent her a quick introduction to the topic and introduced her to the research question, which is how do consumers perceive the brand value in fashion brand communities in comparison to other brands? Together with that, I sent her a photo of the brand value pyramid, which illustrates the concept of a brand. So doing a quick recap, talking about brand value, we usually mean stuff such as brand features and attributes, brand visuals, brand esteem and brand merits. So before beginning this interview, I asked Melina to choose two brands. And before starting the interview, I would like to ask you for your consent, that we are recording and transcribing the following interview for the master thesis of this study.

Melina: Yeah, that's fine.

Klara: Okay, great. So we are going to skip into a short introduction of the topic, and I would like to begin by asking you, if you could please briefly introduce yourself.

Melina: Uh, yeah, so my name is Melina. I'm 23 years old and I'm from Sweden. I'm currently a student at Lund University and I guess that's the basic introduction.

Klara: That's, that's well enough. So what is your connection to fashion?

Melina: I would say I've always been interested in fashion. Like I think it's fun to read, like fashion magazines and watch, like TV shows about fashion and stuff like that. I guess I would say, um, I'm interested in like, yeah, for example, like new collections and things like that, but I don't have, like a work connection to fashion, for example. So I'm just like a very interested consumer, I guess.

Klara: So could you briefly state in one sentence, which brands you chose and why? Like what's your relationship to them?

Melina: Mm. So the first brand I chose is Ralph Lauren, because I liked their designs and their aesthetic. And I feel like I can identify with your brand image. And the second brand I chose was Coach because I have bought things from them previously, but I don't really feel the connection to the brand.

Klara: Okay, great. So we're going to get into a little bit about brand communities and we're going to start speaking about it more in general. So generally, how would you define a brand community?

Melina: I would say it's probably like a certain amount of their consumers, but they have been more like they have a stronger interest or usage of the products of said brand. So they had like more identify with the brand than the regular consumer.

Klara: Great. So is there any other like underlying things such as, um, bonding practices or activities, do you think, or is it just about the interest in the product?

Melina: Yeah, it could also be that maybe they're like that they want to take parts more of like, for example, if they have, like, if they show the first collection, like maybe they have like some kind of viewing that they go there, maybe that they like go to the stores and talk to the people working there, like when will the new collection come, stuff like that. So maybe they are more interested than the average consumer who just like, goes to the store whenever they need something.

Klara: Yeah. So what, according to you breaks the community, if you know any factors that might decrease its value.

Melina: I would maybe say like, loss of personality. That was one of the examples. So maybe if the brand does not feel authentic anymore, or if it changes too much.

Klara: Yeah.

Melina: Or maybe like if yeah. They change in a way that does not feel like it's that you want to identify with them anymore. I would say.

Klara: Yeah. So what, according to you differentiates, uh, a community member from just being a regular customer?

Melina: I would say that a community member has a closer relationship to the brand and also feels like a greater loyalty to the brand.

Klara: Okay. So how do you think social media platforms such as Instagram impact brand communities?

Melina: I think since social media, there's like a greater possibility for interaction between the brands and their, like the community members, if you compare that to example for like normal advertising, like if there's just a magazine or like TV commercial, it's not really like interactive. So I think since social media is interacted, like in its nature, it can create a greater connection to the brand and like more of a dialogue around the brand.

Klara: Okay. Okay. So you already mentioned that the fashion brand that you consider yourself a brand community member of is Ralph Lauren. So how did you become a member and why?

Melina: I guess I've become, I became a member through buying their products and getting more and more interested in, in like the brand history and like they're just, the brand in itself. And. Yeah, I guess I became interested and became a member because I was interested in the brand and like saw a value of being a member of being a community member.

Klara: Okay. So was it, were you influenced by other people you think or?

Melina: Yeah, I mean, probably like, I think a lot, some of my friends also liked the brand, so that could also be why I became interested initially.

Klara: So how would you describe the brand community of Ralph Lauren?

Melina: I think it's, I think it's, um, I think it's hard to describe because I think like if you compare, uh, Ralph Lauren to other brands, I think like it's, what's a bit unique is that it's like very like unisex, it's both for women and men. And I think it's kind of timeless and like a classical brand. So it's not like, for example, um, I mean, some brands are like heavily just for women or like for a young woman or like very trendy. And I think Ralph Lauren, like, what's unique about them. It's like, they're very like timeless. I think they seem like any age and any gender. So I think it's hard to like describe the community.

Klara: Yeah. So there's no certain demographics either?

Melina: No, I don't think so.

Klara: Okay. So if we go into more, how, looking at the members and how they interact. Um, how would you say that the members of the brand community in Ralph Lauren interacts between each other? Like, do they have any rituals and traditions or certain activities between each other?

Melina: Hmm, I'm not sure. I thought this question was the hardest. Um, I can't come up with anything actually for this brand, because like, if you could, for example, compare it to, like, if you. If it's like a sneaker event, for example, I think they have more like, rituals, like when there's like a new release. I think it's more of a hype compared to a Ralph Lauren and I maybe also, because it's not like a very specific demographic, there's not like the same kind of ritual or traditions.

Klara: Yeah.

Melina: So I think it's hard to answer that question just for this brand.

Klara: Definitely. Okay. So do you, would you say that you personally know each other?

Melina: I would say no, not really.

Klara: Okay. So moving on to, uh, how is the communication online for the brand?

Melina: Um, I mean, I think they have like, the normal communication. So like, I think probably mostly on Instagram, but also I guess maybe on YouTube or Facebook. Um, and I think it's kind of like the same tone in their like, more traditional advertising.

Klara: Yeah. So would you say that you are partaking in the online communication or?

Melina: Not really that much, I would say no.

Klara: Okay. Not on Facebook, Instagram, nothing. Okay.

Melina: I mean, I like, follow them, but I don't, like, I'm not like, super active, but I follow them.

Klara: Okay. So how would you describe then, your relationship to Ralph Lauren?

Melina: I guess it's a brand that I like to follow and that I. I appreciate their like, aesthetic and the brand image like that. They're very like, I guess, classic and preppy brand, I would say.

Klara: Yeah.

Melina: So I appreciate that. And I kind of, yeah, I think that also influences me and my style.

Klara: Yeah. So you mentioned earlier that you felt some type of loyalty. Uh, so would you describe the relationship as a strong one and a very loyal one or?

Melina: Yeah, I guess I would, yeah.

Klara: Okay. So I already asked you before, uh, how you would describe the brand. Um, but are there any, any specific activities or experiences that you share with the brand? And this could be like, there's not really any, um, sharp definitions. I mean, it could be visiting a fashion show or having a certain experience in a store or online or working for them or just the personal connection to it.

Melina: Um, I'm not sure. And not that I can think of. Not really.

Klara: Okay. So we are going to speak a bit more about the value of a brand. And I can say in advance that I know that this is a very hard concept to define, but I'm still going to ask you, how do you define the value of a brand?

Melina: Um, yeah, I think it's a very, like, very tricky question. Um, I'm actually not sure how it, how it, how I would define it.

Klara: Um, but it's, so let's see, like this, what is it, do you think in brands, what can they offer or do for you that adds extra value? So they're not just a regular store or what is it that brings you value?

Melina: Um, yeah, I guess it's maybe that you have some kind of history with the brand and you have like a positive history with it, but it gives you kind of that's. So you know that if I go to this store, this brand, I will have a good experience. So I guess that would be like the emotional value of it. And then I guess maybe this social value would be that you can also relate to other people that also go to that store or, you know, that you kind of, it kind of becomes like a community sense in a way.

Klara: Yeah. Do you, uh, do you care about the economic value of a brand like considering prices and stuff like that? Or.

Melina: Yeah, I mean, I guess for example, like if it's a brand that you have had good experiences with and you know that, for example, like their clothes, they don't deteriorate. They have good quality. Yeah. I guess that could be also like, an economical value.

Klara: Yeah. So you feel like Ralph Lauren then for example, is offering value for the money?

Melina: Yeah. Yeah.

Klara: Okay. So also, so do you, would you define the value of a fashion brand differently than the value of other types of brands? And when I speak about other types of brands, I mean like different industries, it could even be cars or services.

Melina: Hm.

Klara: But would you define the value differently between these different industries? Or do you feel like the fashion industry is unique?

Melina: I think maybe it's a bit more special, like for the fashion industry, because you actually like, wear their clothes. So you kind of like, it's like kind of like, that you promote them in a way. So I think maybe like the brand values and like what they stand for, Maybe that's a bit more important, like when it comes to clothes, then for example, I don't know like maybe like interior design, for example, like no one really can see on this, but you know, like I think fashion, like everyone can see it on you. And I think many people nowadays can kind of like spot a brand, you know?

Klara: Yeah.

Melina: I guess that makes it a bit more like special.

Klara: Totally. Okay. So would you say then that you, as a customer can be part-taking in the impact of the value of a brand?

Melina: I mean, yeah. Yeah. I mean, because the, like the persons or the people that wear a certain brand, I think they kind of like become the face of the brand. So I guess it can impact the like, value of a brand. Yeah.

Klara: Would you, let's see now, how to phrase it. Would you, do you think you would be able to. Like acting online, say, would you be able to impact or affect the brand value as well with your online behavior?

Melina: Yeah, I think so, because it's, I mean, like when you're online, it's so interactive with other people. So I think that has like a greater impact on other people as well. Then if its site only like in your, like, you know, in the real world, so to speak.

Klara: Yeah. Do you think that. So this one is a bit tricky to understand maybe as well. But do you think that your, you being a brand community member of Ralph Lauren, do you think that might impact your perceived value of the brand?

Melina: Yeah. I think if you're like a community member, you probably value the brand way more, right. Maybe I didn't really understand the question.

Klara: No, no, that's what I mean. But also like, say for example, if they get criticism, would you be extra nice? Would you be blind to that? Or would you still handle criticism in the same manner? Or.

Melina: I think maybe like, if you are a community member, maybe you. Kind of like, you're not as hard on the brand because you think, oh, this is just like one mistake. And like, I know how they really are. So maybe you're like less critical of the brand, I would say. But some people would maybe be like more critical because they identify with the brand. So maybe they feel like, I don't know, betrayed or something.

Klara: Yeah.

Melina: So I think it can go both ways.

Klara: Okay. Definitely. Okay. So brand number two, then some quick questions. And here you chose Coach. Yeah. So what is it that distinguishes your admiration from Ralph Lauren to Coach?

Melina: I guess it has, because I don't really have a, like, when I think of the brand coach, I can't really think of like, what they stand for.

Klara: Okay.

Melina: I. Like, it's harder for me to like, know what kind of style like, I should associate with them. And therefore I don't like really gravitate towards their brand as much. Yeah.

Klara: So is it also about the products, quality price or is it just about the emotional aspects of it?

Melina: I think it's only the emotional aspect of it.

Klara: Yeah. Okay. Yeah, because you said that you had bought stuff from Coach before, right?

Melina: Yeah.

Klara: Okay. So twisting the question then, what would it take, what would Coach have to do for you to join their community?

Melina: I think maybe like being a more clear, like what kind of brand image they want to promote or like what, what the brand is, because I think that is kind of hard for me to know, like what do they really stand for? Like, what is the. Like aesthetic they're going for.

Klara: Yeah.

Melina: So maybe just being like a bit more clear about that, I guess.

Klara: Okay. So let's go into the value again, like the actual perceived brand value. So if you think about what you said about Ralph Lauren's value, what do you think is the different value that Ralph Lauren offers compared to the value that Coach offers?

Melina: Hmm, to me, I feel like a Ralph Lauren they have like more, I think they're sort of like, I think they're very timeless. So I think like I could buy a dress today and then I could still have in like five years and it kind of works for every occasion. So I think that is something that gives it more value that I feel like it's very like versatile and it's not, it's not like going out of fashion. Whereas I feel like, Coach is more like of a trendy brand, I guess. Like they. Follow trends a bit more.

Klara: Okay.

Melina: So things that kind of takes down the value of the brand.

Klara: Okay. So it's connected to your identity as well then?

Melina: Yeah.

Klara: Okay. So what is it exactly that coach are missing in the value? So let's say because, what we're trying to look for pretty much is a little bit the value gaps. So. You are very much for Ralph Lauren. And then we have Coach, which is a very similar brand, but when it comes to their value offerings, is it something very in particular or just something small that Coach is missing or can do better?

Melina: I mean, I think it's probably something a bit like, I don't think it's something like, very important that they're missing, I think it's probably some minor thing. But I think it's maybe because for example, I can think, uh, Ralph Lauren, they have like more classical pieces, you know, like for example, like there are certain type of pieces or like, um, like aesthetical, like. You know, um, I don't know how to describe it, but like they have a certain look, so you can like, immediately know like, okay, that's that brand. And I don't think Coach has it, like, has I think, I don't think it's as easy to identify, like something from Coach.

Klara: They don't have as clear of a brand image?

Melina: Yeah, exactly. Okay. So I think that's like why I don't think they have a high, like as a high value.

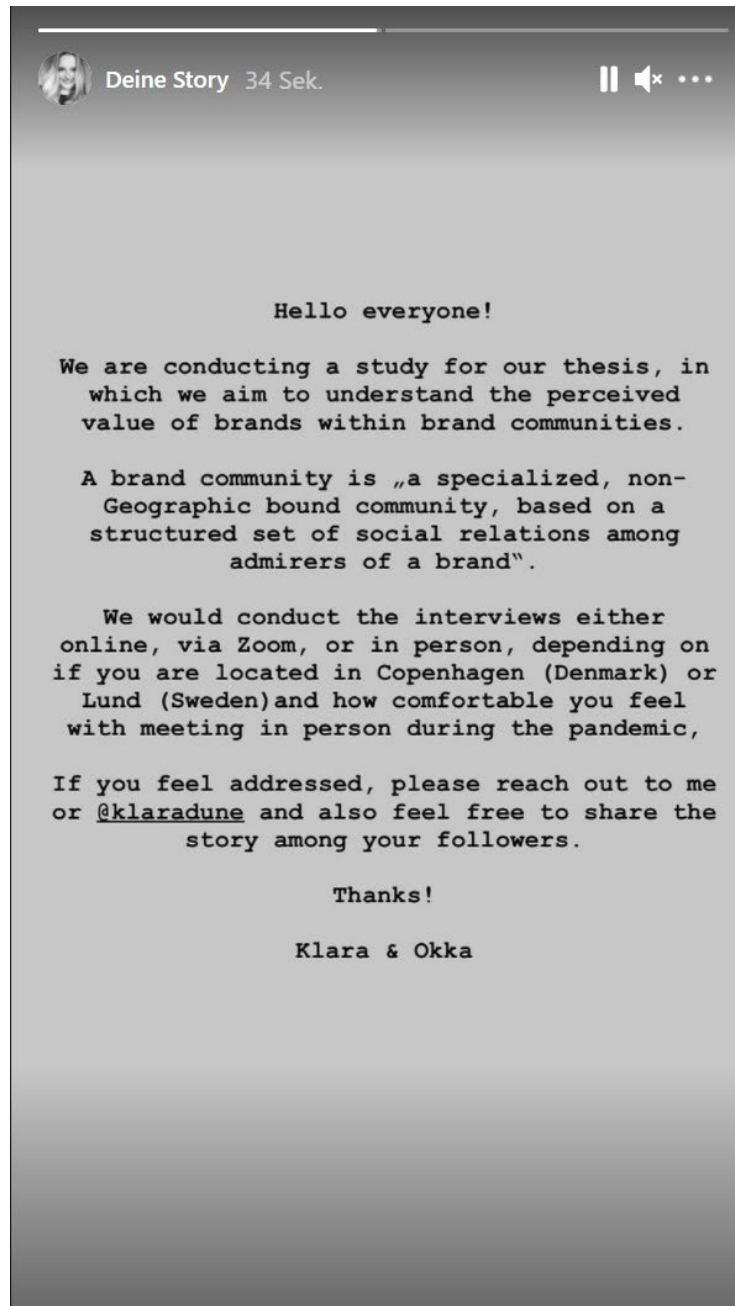
Klara: Okay. That's perfect. So that was my last question. Unless there is anything that you would like to add as well, that has not been discussed.

Melina: No, I think, I think you've covered most things.

Klara: Okay. Then I thank you for your time.

Melina: Yeah. Thank you.

Appendix 5: Instagram: Sampling Instagram Story



Instagram Direct Message

Example of a Direct Message that was sent out on Instagram as a part of the sampling strategy (*see: 3.4.1 Sampling Strategy*). The same template was sent out to all accounts that were approached via Instagram "Direct Message".



nike_sneakers_



Montag 16:16

Hi there! I am Okka, a German Master Student in Marketing and currently writing on my thesis at Lund University in Sweden with @klaradune about Brand communities. We are trying to explore the consumer-perceived value of a brand for brand community members, such as you are, in comparison to average paying customers. We would therefore love to interview you (via a video call of your choice) on your admiration for Nike and would appreciate if you would take the time to support our thesis. Please don't hesitate to let me know if you have any questions about this! All the best, Okka

P.s: if you prefer an another type of interview, e.g. regular call or any other, we are more than happy to adapt 😊



Nachricht schreiben ...

