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Identity Construction through Consumer Collectives

A qualitative study on how consumers construct their identity within the beauty community on Tiktok

Authors: Isabella Rammasi & Karólína Pétursdóttir

Supervisor: Reema Singh

Examinator: Javier Cenamor

Abstract

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Authors: Karólína Pétursdóttir & Isabella Rammasi

Supervisor: Reema Singh

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Thesis Purpose: The study aims to develop an understanding of how consumers construct their identities through online communities on social media platforms. The paper will specifically look into the platform Tiktok, and moreover how consumers construct their identities within the beauty community on the platform.

Methodology: The study has adopted a qualitative research approach, where the data collection was gathered through semi-structured interviews. Additionally, the study is conducted through an interpretive epistemology and ontology.

Empirical Data Collection: The findings regarding the members' expressions of their experiences with Tiktok are presented. This is followed by an analysis of how they are drawing from the beauty community in relation to their identity construction.

Conclusion: The findings of the study demonstrate how consumers within the beauty community on Tiktok are seeking inspiration and recommendations about beauty products from others on the platform in their quest to enhance their own identity. Accordingly, the other members provide them with visualization of their future selves as well as providing the products they endorse with symbolic meanings, making them more desirable. The consumers are linked together by their interest in beauty where the commitment does not lie in specific brands, but to the community itself.

Practical Implication: The practical implication of the study is to provide marketers with a deeper understanding of the identity construction within the beauty community in Tiktok and how it relates to the members' consumer practices.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

“Consumption is now inseparable from identity” (Anderson, 1997, p.189)

We live in a postmodern society characterized by fluidity and constant changes (Cova, 1997). Accordingly, identities are no longer stable and we are responsible for creating our own. Identity construction has been studied extensively in the last decades (Arnould & Thompson, 2005) and it is apparent that consumption is central to this process. Put simply, individuals express their individual and collective identities through their consumption (Klasson, 2017). Hence, in today’s postmodern society, material things contain symbolic meanings way beyond the producers’ intent (McCracken, 1986). As the construction of one's identity is an ongoing process throughout life, it may be understood as a symbolic project (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Holt, 2002; Klasson, 2017).

Additionally, we live in a society where rapid improvement in technology has led to an increase in online communication and often, the preferred way of interacting with others due to convenience (Cova, 1997). Consequently, social media has become a great part of people’s lives and interactions with others. Furthermore, around 4.62 billion people use social media today, which is more than half of the world’s population (DataReportal, 2022). The usage of social media is especially high among young adults (Kastenholz, 2021) and thus, a highly influential and crucial aspect of their life. Several researchers have examined consumers’ identity construction online and have found that it differs from the offline one in certain ways such as individuals not being limited by their physical presence and enabling them to portray their identities differently than offline (Kim, Zheng & Gupta, 2011; Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin, 2008). Furthermore, individuals are able to expand their network online, leading to new relationships and less privacy as well as more self-disclosure. Lastly, the online identity is more actively managed and influenced by others and provides a greater opportunity for trying out new selves (Belk, 2013; Kim, Zheng & Gupta, 2011; Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013).

As identity construction is a phenomenon that also occurs in relation to others, studies have examined this by looking at consumer collectives, a term for social networks that are created around a product or a brand (Arnould, Arvidsson & Eckhardt, 2021). These consumer collective concepts can moreover be referred to as brand communities (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001), consumer tribes (Cova, 1997) and subcultures (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). These concepts of consumer collectives are aimed to bring attention to the social dimensions of consumption, and moreover, the relationship and meanings that are generated through consumption practices (Arnould, Arvidsson & Eckhardt, 2021).

The rise of social media platforms also provides opportunities to maintain and form relationships with other users around common interests, products, and brands which has led to online consumer collectives extending to social media platforms. As a result, the traditional concepts regarding consumer collectives have increasingly been examined in the context of online platforms and have demonstrated how community landscapes that take place in online settings are more open than the offline ones, providing individuals with more opportunities to express themselves (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2015; Belk, 2013; Fernandes & Castro, 2020; Miliopoulou, 2021; Wellman, 2002; Hamilton & Hower, 2010).

One of the most popular and growing social media platforms today is Tiktok, which is currently the 6th most used platform on a global level (Cyca, 2022). The platform launched in 2016 and has grown greatly over these years with over 1 billion monthly active users (Dellatto, 2021). The platform experienced an increase of 1157.76% in its global user base from January 2018 to July 2020. The current user demographics show that 56% of users are female while 44% are male. Further, roughly 75% of users are between the ages of 18-34 years (Datareportal, 2022). Tiktok describes the platform as *“a leading destination for short-form videos”* with a mission to *“inspire creativity and bring you joy”* (Tiktok, 2022, n.p.). On the platform, the users publish various short videos within a time range of 15 seconds to 10 minutes (Malik, 2022). The features on the platform allow other users to engage with the videos by liking them, adding comments, and sharing them. Moreover, the platform differs from most other social media platforms, as it also allows users to duet on each other's videos. Further, one of the most unique features on the platform is the “For You Page”, which refers to the start page where all the content is shown. On

the “For You Page”, the algorithm is built to expose the users to content that is aligned with their interests. Hence, the users are able to receive personalized content, which is relevant to the demands of today’s consumers (IBM, 2022).

As a result of the increase of global users on the platform, brands have taken advantage of the platform and started using it to promote products and services. More importantly, the platform’s features increase the possibilities of linking users with each other and thus, forming consumer collectives around their interests where they often share product experiences and recommendations with each other (Tiktok, 2021). This exchange of information and experiences about products among users has produced new value, both symbolically as well as materially (Galvagno & Dalli, 2014), leading to a vast increase in sales for many brands (Tiktok, 2021).

One of the consumer collectives that has been highly involved in this exchange of information and gained much attention is the beauty community that has evolved on the platform (Lysak, 2021). The users on the platform are sharing content including reviews, product experiences and tips about skincare and cosmetics products. The hashtag #Beauty currently has around 100 billion views on the platform (Tiktok, 2022) and it has become a common phenomenon to see large media such as Vogue and Cosmopolitan creating articles referencing "Best Tiktok Makeup Products" (Murden, 2021; Hunatona, 2021), which furthermore indicates the large attention around the product category on the platform. This increased interest in these short videos has led to cosmetics brands selling out their stock due to the high demand after a product has gone viral among the beauty community (Harrington, 2021).

While Tiktok is gaining more popularity among consumers, the research regarding the platform in academia is still somewhat narrow. This is mainly a result of the platform's recent growth, which indicates that it is only recently that research around Tiktok has started to become more relevant. To our knowledge, while previous researchers have studied the concept of identity construction in relation to other platforms and in other contexts on Tiktok, they have not explored how the beauty community on the platform is affecting its members in relation to their identity construction. This provides an opportunity to address this research gap by using the beauty community on Tiktok as a research context to examine the pre-established concept of

identity construction. In conclusion, gaining a deeper understanding of identity construction through online consumer collectives on Tiktok, in the context of cosmetics brands is of great relevance, both theoretical as well as practical.

1.2 Problematization

The concept of identity creation has been given a great deal of attention within the field of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) in the last decades (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). This includes both individual and collective identities. Furthermore, with the rise of social media, previous studies within CCT have researched how consumers create their identities within consumer collectives, both offline and online, and how they influence its members' identity construction and thus, consumption (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Additionally, researchers have found that there are some differences between online and offline settings (Belk, 2013).

Furthermore, the relatively new platform, TikTok, has received little attention compared to its growing popularity and influence on the users' consumption practices. Tiktok has many technological factors in common with other social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, and Snapchat, allowing users to publish both video and image material as well as interact with others. These social media platforms have been examined in relation to the users' identity creation and moreover how the users construct their identity in the online communities (Belk, 2013; Schau & Gilly, 2003). However, Tiktok differs from other social media platforms because of its "For You Page", which consists of a tailored algorithm that ensures users are only exposed to content that aligns with their interests. Previous studies have examined the relationship between the tailored algorithm on the platform and the user's self-making (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022). However, the current research on the impact of TikTok's algorithm is nevertheless limited in academic research, and therefore it is relevant to go deeper into how it impacts the users. Tiktok also enables interaction between the users on the platform, as individuals are able to reply to each other through a video format. Furthermore, another function on the platform is the duetting, which allows the users to respond to a Tiktok video from another creator on the platform.

Marketers are rapidly gaining more interest in this and thus, it has become increasingly relevant to gain more knowledge about these consumers and the platform's communities. Furthermore, to our knowledge, no previous studies have examined the consumers belonging to the beauty community on Tiktok and how they are drawing from other members in their quest to create, enhance and express themselves. In other words, constructing their own identity. Accordingly, there is a gap in the literature we seek to address in this study by gaining a deeper understanding of these consumers and their experiences with the platform. This will be done by conducting semi-structured interviews with members of the beauty community who have previously purchased beauty products after being exposed to them on Tiktok.

In summary, it is highly relevant to study the identity creation of consumers online and how they draw from the consumer collectives they belong to in order to gain a deeper understanding of young consumers within the beauty community and their consumption on Tiktok. Furthermore, it is also of relevance to examine whether the identity construction within consumer collectives on Tiktok differs from what previous research has found. Tiktok currently has over one billion monthly users (Cyca, 2022), which exemplifies the platform's rapid growth and popularity. Due to this, as well as the platform's new distinctive features, it is important to gain a deeper understanding of the consumers on the platform. As identity construction is closely connected to consumption, insights into TikTok users' identity creation can provide practical implications due to an enhanced understanding of their consumption practices as well as theoretical implications that can provide a framework for the consumer behavior among the consumers on Tiktok.

1.3 Aim and Objectives

The purpose of this study is to discover how users on Tiktok are constructing their identity through online communities. More specifically, members of the beauty community on the platform. To understand this phenomenon, it can firstly be of importance to understand how individuals create their identities. Therefore, an overview of previous literature regarding identity construction will be provided. In addition, in line with the aim of this study, it is furthermore relevant to clarify what different online communities may look like. Consequently, a literature review regarding different types of communities will be conducted.

As Tiktok has gained popularity in recent years, the research about how communities on the platform influence the users' identity construction is rather limited. Moreover, to our knowledge, no prior research has been conducted that aims to understand the identity construction among the online communities on Tiktok. Thus, this study aims to enhance the understanding of how the beauty community on the platform is influencing the identity construction among its members.

To gain knowledge about the phenomenon, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with individuals belonging to the beauty community on Tiktok. The interviews aim to gain a deeper insight into the consumers' experiences with the social aspect of the beauty community on Tiktok and to understand if they are adapting identity attributes throughout the community that is later used as a part of their identity construction.

The study is of high relevance as Tiktok is gaining more attention among marketers due to the platform's growing popularity on a global level. Therefore, the study aims to provide practical implications to enhance the understanding of these consumers and thus, the brands' marketing efforts on the platform. Additionally, as TikTok is a fairly new phenomenon, not many studies have looked into this social media platform, specifically regarding identity construction through communities. Therefore, we also seek to reduce the current research gap in the literature.

1.4 Research Purpose

This study aims to understand how communities on social media platforms such as TikTok are affecting their members' identity creation. Therefore, we seek to answer the following research question:

How do consumers construct their identities through online communities on social media platforms?

In this current study, the beauty community that has evolved on Tiktok will be explored due to its rapid growth and increased attention among users on the platform. Hence, we intend to understand how consumers draw from other members of the beauty community when constructing their own identities. As identity creation involves the consumption of objects and symbols to express one's identity, it is crucial to gain insights from members of the beauty

community on the platform about their experience of the community and how it is affecting their identity creation and thus, consumption of beauty products. This will be done by constructing semi-structured interviews to gain a deeper understanding of the consumers' experiences and lifeworlds.

1.5 Delimitations

The thesis aims to understand how Tiktok users are influenced by the communities they belong to on the platform and how it relates to their identity projects. Accordingly, the paper will focus on the consumer perspective, as the aim is to develop an understanding of the users of Tiktok within the beauty community. Thus, the paper has excluded the brand perspective, and instead solely focuses on the consumer. Furthermore, the respondents are narrowed down to young individuals who are based in Scandinavia. This is exclusively based on convenience, and thus, the particular nationalities are based on the researcher's location. Furthermore, the particular age group among the respondents is estimated to be between 18-27 years old, which is aligned with the target group of users that are active on Tiktok. Furthermore, the consumers that are part of this study are individuals who are active Tiktok users and have previous experience with purchasing a beauty product they discovered on the platform. The target group was thus chosen with the aim of narrowing down the scope of respondents. The research will furthermore focus on one specific community that has evolved on the Tiktok platform, the beauty community. This community consists of individuals interested in makeup and skincare products and has accumulated an increasing amount of attention on the platform. The rise of new social media forms, such as Tiktok, has led to an undiscovered field of consumer behaviour, which is relevant to examine further. Thus, with this research, we seek to begin filling the gap in the literature concerning the topic. Further, we seek to provide valuable contributions in a practical and theoretical sense.

1.6 Outline of Thesis

The thesis consists of five different chapters. In the first chapter, the concept of identity construction and consumer collectives in relation to the Tiktok platform was introduced. The problem formulation in the chapter demonstrates the need for further research on the topic, as the platform is somewhat undiscovered. Further, it indicates the need for enhanced knowledge regarding consumer meanings and perspectives on the topic. The second chapter includes a literature review of previous academic research relating to the thesis topic. In the chapter, we present relevant concepts relating to the thesis. Chapter three covers the methodology of the study, including the philosophical standpoint, research approach, and research design, followed by a detailed description of how the empirical data was analyzed. Finally, ethical considerations and methodological limitations are discussed. In the fourth chapter, we present the findings and analysis. This is followed by the fifth chapter which includes a discussion of the findings in relation to previous literature. Finally, in the sixth chapter, we conclude the research findings and present the practical implications of the study, as well as possible future research regarding the topic.

2. Literature Review

In the following chapter, previous academic research concerning the thesis topic will be reviewed. First, we explore the concept of identity construction to understand how individuals create their own identities in today's society. Further, we will look into how identity construction has developed with the increase in online presence. Next, we explore consumption collectives to gain a better understanding of how individuals form social groups and why it is important in relation to their self-identity creation. Moreover, we explore how these community concepts have extended through online social media platforms. Lastly, we cover previous research regarding identity construction in online consumer collectives in the context of cosmetics.

2.1 Identity Construction and the Sense of Self

Traditional identities relating to one's place of birth, family or class are no longer given in our postmodern society (Klasson, 2017). Accordingly, individuals need to take action themselves (Cova, 1997). This postmodern society is fast-shifting and characterized by fluidity and mass consumption (Yiannis, 2005) that has brought about dramatic changes in how individuals identify themselves by adding choice (Klasson, 2017) and a never-ending quest for identity and meaning in life (Cova, 1997). Individuals are encouraged to be flexible in this fast-shifting society by adapting to change and redefining themselves constantly (Negrin 2009; Yiannis 2005). They have moreover become aware of the possibilities of constructing their own identities and selves through consumption (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995) and therefore, consumption has become an act of obtaining and using objects and symbols as building blocks in their quest for self-expression and individual identity (Klasson, 2017; Schau, 2018). More specifically, they consume in regard to how they want to be perceived (Schau, 2018).

Identity creation has been widely discussed within the Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) literature. Research within the field has focused greatly on how individuals use commercial products, services, knowledge and experiences to construct their identities (Arnould & Thompson, 2018). As circumstances in individuals' lives change over time, they constantly rebuild their identity. The concept can thus be described as a symbolic project or a continuous performance of an individual that changes and evolves over time (Arnould and Thompson, 2005;

Holt, 2002; Klasson, 2017; Schau, 2018), where individuals create narratives of their self-identity in relation to their past, present and hoped-for future (Arnould & Thompson, 2018). Just as individuals perform certain social roles in different settings, they also perform identity work that is dependent on evolving circumstances and thus, social roles influence identity projects and they are performed with the act of consuming (Schau, 2018).

One of the most influential theories regarding identity within the field of CCT is the Extension of the self (Arnould & Thompson, 2018; Belk, 1988). The theory, introduced by Belk (1988), suggests that consumers communicate who they are through their consumption practices and thus, besides the obvious satisfaction of physical and utilitarian needs, possessions also provide a symbolic extension of the self. Furthermore, Belk suggested that individuals accumulate possessions in order to understand themselves better, their past, present and future (Belk, 1988). Thus, the theory suggests that a person's definition of who they are is defined by what they have (Belk, 1988). Consumer identities are thus based on their understanding of their personal surroundings rather than their personal traits or characteristics (Klasson, 2017). Furthermore, Wallendorf and Arnould (1988) found that possessions are signifiers of identities and manifestations of self-expression.

Furthermore, some studies have categorized two practices of constructing self-identity (Markus & Nurius 1986; Zhao, Grasmuk & Martin 2008). The first way implies a now-self. This is the identity one is in the possession of in the present time that others are aware of. The second way is referred to as the possible-self, which is the perception of one's own identity at the present moment, unknown to others. It can be constructed through certain visualizations one has about a future self-identity that one wishes to create (Markus & Nurius 1986; Zhao, Grasmuk & Martin 2008). In today's society, physical appearance has become increasingly important in defining one's identity (Negrin, 2009). Individuals place a great emphasis on their appearance, impressions and aesthetics. The identity project can be seen as an individualistic activity as personal appearance is seen as an expression of individual identity and a projection of the inner self. When individuals are considered to be admirable by society, it is often largely based on their physical appearance (Negrin, 2009), thus it can be assumed that the concept of possible-self can also be reflected in regards to the appearance of specific others.

2.2.1 Identity Construction in a Digital World

As a result of the increasing presence on social media, it is relevant to discuss individuals' identity creation online. Previous research has identified that the online identity differs from the offline one in certain ways (Hu, Zhao, & Huang, 2015). In the online world, individuals are not limited by their physical presence and thus, are enabled with free tools to construct their identities. This provides an opportunity to portray one's online identity in a way that might be different from the one in real life (Kim, Zheng & Gupta, 2011). In addition, previous studies have found that consumers make sense of who they are through creating an online narrative that covers the aspiration of certain identity attributes one wishes to perceive (Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin, 2008). The self-presentation of one's identity in the digital world is also less carefully construed and characterized as more dynamic (Schau & Gilly, 2003). Furthermore, researchers have identified how consumption of online content later shapes their decision-making (Hoffman, Novak & Stein, 2012). Several studies have also identified that the extension of one's identity also happens online and thus, individuals construct an identity based on how they want to be perceived on these platforms (Schau & Gilly, 2003). Belk renewed his previous research on the extended self in 2013 where he concluded that the new digital world has led to the emergence of sharing and self-disclosure where individuals feel more intrigued to express their true selves on online platforms (Belk, 2013). In addition, online identity construction increases the opportunities for trying out new selves (Belk, 2013).

As previously mentioned, researchers have outlined how individuals are able to construct their identities through a now-self and a possible-self. Social media has produced more opportunities for individuals to feel inspired by the way others portray themselves online. Accordingly, individuals may take part in the process of wanting to achieve the same attributes as other individuals they have seen through social media, which furthermore can be connected to their possible self (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013). The identity construction is thus not only relevant in physical settings, but online as well.

To conclude, this chapter explored previous literature regarding identity construction, both in the physical world as well as online. This helps us gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena and enables us to better explain our empirical findings. As Belk (1988) highlighted,

individuals do not only exist in isolation but in collectives as well. Therefore, identity is tightly linked with consumer collectives (Schau, 2018) and thus, they will be explored in the following section.

2.2 Constructing Identity through Community-based Practises

As mentioned in the previous section, today's individuals construct their own identities with resources from the market (Klasson, 2017). This is a practice consumers frequently do through social practices among other individuals as well. This means that identity construction can furthermore be identified in social communities where identity is created in connection with other people, places, or material goods (Klasson, 2017). In this section, we draw on influential work regarding consumer collectives.

2.2.1 Consumer Collectives

In today's postmodern society, individuals are constantly looking for links to other people and one way of doing so is through consumption (Cova, 1997). Hence, individuals often get involved with consumer collectives for reasons including a feeling of belonging, becoming aware of themselves by engaging with other consumers as well as showing their skills to them (Klasson, 2017). Cova (1997) introduced the concept of linking value, which refers to the value that a product has in its ability to provide the consumer with social experiences and connect with other consumers. The postmodern consumer places great emphasis on the social aspects, therefore, there is greater demand for products and services that help to create a social link between consumers today (Cova, 1997). Moreover, research has pointed out how consumers today seek to reconstruct the meaning of products and services through shared experiences with other individuals, thus creating a sense of a strong emotional bond. This has led to consumers being able to adopt the meaning of a brand more through consumption activities in order to take on an identity project in relation to the community they belong to (Cova & Shankar, 2018). Consumers get pleasure and satisfaction due to forming social relations with other consumers that belong to the same collective (Cova, 1997; Cova & Shankar, 2018). Consequently, consumption is one of the main practices that connect people today (Klasson, 2017).

The collectives are formed based on similar values, interests and behaviors (Knudsen, 2017). Individuals feel a connection towards others who they experience as having the same resources and lifestyle and thus, similar consumption preferences (Henry & Caldwell, 2018). In these collectives, individuals are able to construct their social identity by socializing with others who share the same interests (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002; Dholakia, Bagozzi & Pearo, 2004). Further, Chiu et al (2015) noted that consumers seek identity attributes among other members that are part of the same communities (Chiu et al, 2015).

2.2.2 Value Co-creation within Consumer Collectives

The consumer collectives individuals choose to be involved with can be highly influential in terms of shaping their attitudes and behaviors (Ekström, 2017). Within collectives, there are opinion leaders that have the ability to influence other group members' consumption with their knowledge, status, experience and style (Ekström, 2017). Even if those individuals are not involved with the brand, they are still able to influence perceptions about it. Studies have shown that opinion leaders are seen as experts to a much greater degree than the average consumer when endorsing a product (Ekström, 2017). Furthermore, Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder (2011) described these group dynamics by noting that there are two main roles that consumers can take on; providers or beneficiaries, where providers are the more experienced members who share their information and knowledge with the beneficiaries.

Furthermore, collective consumer activities are able to provide a new meaning for brands to be used in the members' identity construction (Cova & Shankar, 2018). Consequently, consumer collectives are able to produce both symbolic and material value for brands and this has been referred to as Value Co-creation (Arnould, Arvidsson, Eckhardt, 2021; Galvagno & Dalli, 2014). Value Co-creation within consumer collectives is thus based on sharing information and knowledge about brands and products, as well as forming social relationships among members (Cassinger, 2017).

In conclusion, consumption can be connected to individuals pursuing the need of forming social bonds with others. The social bonds can moreover be identified among consumer collectives, in which individuals form social relations around consumer goods and brands (Arnould, Arvidsson

& Eckhardt, 2021; Cova, 1997). This has resulted in value being created by consumers through sharing of information. Some of the most common concepts that aim to define this social dimension of consumption (Arnould, Arvidsson & Eckhardt, 2021) involve Brand Communities, Consumer Tribes and Subcultures (Klasson, 2017), which will be further elaborated in the following section.

2.2.3 Brand Communities

The concept of brand community was introduced in 2001 by Muniz and O'Guinn as a way of conceptualizing the communities that consumers build around brands. They described it as a “specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand” (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001 p.1). Members of brand communities form a community around a brand or product with a long-term commitment. In order to create a more clear definition of what characterizes a brand community, Muniz & O'Guinn (2001) explain three factors that describe these communities. First, brand communities are characterized by a shared consciousness, which is a factor that helps to create the bond between the individuals who form part of a community. This helps to create a sense of community among consumers as they are all part of the same community with a specific purpose. It, therefore, makes individuals feel that they know each other despite the fact that in many cases, the only thing they share is the interest in joining the specific community. Further, they include rituals and traditions that emerge through the way in which the actions relating to a community are practiced. The last characteristic is through the sense of moral responsibility, how to maintain a co-creation between the brand and the individuals who are part of the community with the aim of keeping it current and increasing the value of both the brand and its consumers (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

2.2.4 Consumer Tribes

Another frequently used community concept is *Consumer tribes*, also referred to as *Neo-tribes* (Cova, 1997). Tribes are a temporary and fragmented form of social groups (Davies & Elliott, 2006). They are unstable, fluid, rather small and involve a network of diverse individuals that can vary in regard to demographics such as age and gender (Cova, 1997). The members can be linked by common emotions, interest, consumption practices or experiences (Cova & Cova, 2001; Knudsen, 2017). Hence, when consumers are passionate about a particular subject, they

are likely to search for other individuals who share that passion and form a tribe (Cova & Shankar, 2012). As tribes are fluid, belonging to them does not include formal rules or behaviors and the members' involvement and commitment are often short-termed. Further, individuals can belong to many tribes and have different attachments to each one of them (Davies & Elliott, 2006). Consumer tribes differ from brand communities, as members are typically not engaged in a long-term commitment towards a brand, and are therefore not pursuing a meaningful relationship and identity creation with the brand (Knudsen, 2017). However, when the group of individuals is gathered together, they still engage in a relationship with one another and are thereby creating a form of community (Knudsen, 2017).

2.2.5 Subcultures

Another way of describing consumer collectives that are developed around brands are through subcultures. Members are linked through a shared commitment to a certain product class, brand or consumption activity (Klasson, 2017). Subculture communities are developed by strong interpersonal bonds, rituals and shared beliefs (Klasson, 2017). They occur with different tendencies compared to consumer tribes, as they are characterized as being more stable. Subcultures can moreover be characterized through the co-creation of value, where the members within the community express these particular values through commercial resources (Arnould, Arvidsson & Eckhardt, 2021). In addition, subcultures are also distinguished by the fact that the members have specific demographic attributes that play a more significant role in the formation of these groups (Klasson, 2017). Moreover, Schouten & McAlexander (1995) displayed the symbolic behavior among subcultures and presented how consumption activities and product categories act as a ground for interaction and social coherence among members.

Lastly, an important way individuals identify themselves collectively is also by showing who they are not and to which group they do not belong to (Klasson, 2017). Consumers rather define themselves by which products they do not like as opposed to the products they do like in order to reinforce symbolic boundaries between themselves and specific individuals they do not want to be associated with (Bryson, 1996).

To conclude, the above section has provided a deeper insight into the current research about consumer collectives and the different underlying reasons for why consumers participate in them. Furthermore, the consumer collectives mentioned above are all ways of describing the way consumers can socialize in regards to consumption but include slightly different aims in relation to why the consumers are gathered. As previously mentioned, the increasing online presence has led to an expansion of networks and thus, community concepts have extended to the online world as well (Arnould, Arvidsson & Eckhardt, 2021). This will further be explained in the following section.

2.3 The Extension of Consumer Collectives through Social Media

The development of online social media platforms has led to new ways of networking and interacting with one another, meaning that individuals are able to form relationships with others more easily and be engaged with online collectives (Knudsen, 2017). The shift in the new online presence has furthermore led to private practices becoming group activities instead (Belk, 2013). Thus, individuals are likely to engage in these online collectives and thereby, encouraged to develop an online identity that can be used to communicate how they wish to be perceived (Belk, 2013). Individuals get involved with online consumer collectives for many of the same reasons as the offline ones, such as a desire for belonging and shared interests and experiences (Arnould, Arvidsson, & Eckhardt 2021) as well as sharing a social identity (Dholakia, Bagozzi & Pearo, 2004) and seeking attributes from other members of the collective (Chiu et al, 2015). A number of authors have moreover contributed to an understanding of the differences between offline and online consumer collectives (Knudsen, 2017), and how the concepts have transformed in the social media environment (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2015; Dessart et al., 2015; Cova & Shankar, 2018; Miliopoulou, 2021). Knudsen (2017) found that there are differences in the consumers' behavior and that community landscapes that take place in online settings are more open than in offline ones. Consequently, the online identity is more actively managed and influenced by other individuals within the online networks (Belk, 2013).

In 2015, Arvidsson and Caliandro extended the theory of brand community by introducing the concept of Brand Publics. The authors introduced the concept in order to understand brand-related communication on social media. They define brand publics as “an organized media

space kept together by a continuity of practices of mediation” and that they result from an aggregation of a large number of isolated expressions about a brand or a product that have a common focus (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2015, p.1). The authors suggest that brand publics differ from traditional brand communities, as they are firstly not based on interaction among one another, but instead through a focus of interest where consumers individually express their thoughts and experiences of a brand or a product publicly (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2015; Cova & Shankar, 2018). Moreover, brand publics differ from brand communities, as the participation in a brand public is not consistent through a discussion but instead through either an individual or a collective effect such as a desire for visibility or copying. Lastly, consumers do not create a certain type of collective identity evolving the brand, but instead use the brand as a medium which then can provide multiple situations of an identity (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2015). The authors suggested that brand publics might be part of a social media-based consumer culture where publicity has become a core value rather than identity. The relationship between members involves assisting one another by sharing information and meanings through social media. Brand publics are thus made of a collection of related items of content without collective values. Similarly, it is suggested that online communities do not fulfill the sociality that individuals may require. Instead, individuals may enter online consumer collectives with the goal of sharing their opinion rather than searching for a deeper identification within the group (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2015; Knudsen, 2017). Furthermore, Dessart et al. (2015) redefined brand communities as a grouping of individuals that share a mutual interest in a brand that uses electronic mediation to overcome real-life space and time limitations.

Consumer participation in online collectives involves different types of interaction such as sharing images, opinions and reviews, as well as reacting to other members’ expressions by commenting (Henning-Thurau et al, 2004; Vohra & Bhardwaj, 2019). Thus, online platforms enable individuals to provide others with feedback that is later used in the construction of their identity (Belk, 2013). Therefore, the online identity is foremost created in the interplay with other individuals. Previous studies have identified active and passive forms of participation in online communities (Kang, Tang, & Fiore 2014; Tonteri et al. 2011). Based on the studies, active participation is when users help create content for the community, and the passive users are providing traffic for the community. However, both ways of participation are beneficial for the

online community. Furthermore, previous research has identified a correlation between user participation in brand communities and how it strengthens brand trust (Kang et al, 2011) as well as trust in the community (Flavian & Guinaliu, 2007; Liu et al, 2018). When consumers are engaged in an online community, they are provided with a sense of security (Casaló *et al.*, 2007), which further can be linked to building trust with other members. Understanding how consumers build trust towards other community members online can therefore be an essential factor in understanding to what extent the consumers trust other members' thoughts and comments regarding products.

2.3.3 Co-created Content in Online Consumer Collectives

Traditionally, brands communicate with consumers on social media using original content but more importantly, content created by their customers (Fujita, Harrigan & Soutar, 2019). In this digital era, there has been a shift in the relationship between brands and communities, as consumers are more equal due to their ability to express themselves and their experiences more freely on their online platforms (Quinton, 2013).

As mentioned, previous literature regarding brand communities has shown that content about brands coming from users themselves has a great impact on brand meanings and identity (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). Many consumers tend to share the experiences they have had with a brand or a product to make sense of their meanings (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001) but when it comes to the online setting, they also share them for visibility and enjoyment (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2015; Cova and Pace, 2006). Social media has made those expressions easy and rewarding for consumers due to the expanded network and evolving technologies (Teichmann et al., 2015).

Previous studies have shown that individuals trust recommendations from other consumers (Ekström, 2017). Accordingly, brand information and experiences shared by consumers on social media can be seen as authentic and trustworthy (Chiu et al., 2012). Consequently, entertainment and educational content made by consumers on social media can increase a brand's popularity and influence buying decisions. This further shows that the impact of this content is not based on the quality of the production or how professional it looks (Liu-Thompkins & Rogerson, 2012). Furthermore, members of a brand community do not need to be consumers of the brand because

they can evaluate it and admire it from a distance (Cassinger, 2017). According to Quinton (2013), discourses around the brand are thus more important than how the products are used.

The majority of brands have taken advantage of content created by consumers and often identify influential individuals that belong to a community related to their products, often referred to as influencers (Ekström, 2017). These individuals have the ability to influence other group members' buying behavior with their knowledge, status, experience and style and can thus help the brand by spreading the good word (Ekström, 2017). In addition, consumers are able to trust and learn from other individuals' experiences in which they are able to develop their own insight of a product or a brand (Belanche *et al.*, 2019). In this way, the brand's message comes from an individual who is part of the particular community and has knowledge about its norms and expectations (Kozinets *et al.*, 2010). Accordingly, trust in communities can influence information sharing among individuals within the community (Chai & Kim, 2010).

2.4 Identity Construction within Online Beauty Communities

As previously mentioned, with the rise of social media platforms, online communities have been established in regard to different commercial services and brands, and the beauty industry is a sufficient example of this. The social media platform, Youtube, has moreover been examined in relation to the online communities that have evolved in regard to beauty products (García-Rapp, 2019; Ledbetter, 2018; Gannon & Prothero, 2018). These studies have shown that beauty influencers on Youtube have managed to evoke a great impact on individuals who are part of the community. Accordingly, other researchers have investigated how beauty influencers are able to influence and provide trust to other members of the community (Hassan Teo, & Al-Kumaim, 2021). The findings suggest that the beauty influencers within a community are able to influence the members through their knowledge and attractiveness (Hassan, Teo & Al-Kumaim, 2021). Accordingly, studies have highlighted that opinion leaders, who are in the possession of physical attractiveness, are moreover likely to draw attention among the target audiences (Zhang & Laroche, 2019). Further, studies have suggested that consumers consume particular high-end brands as a way of constructing their identity (Ajitha and Sivakumar, 2017). In addition, beauty is articulated to have a meaningful impact in regards to how individuals portray their ideal selves (Rudd, 1997). This suggests that consumers feel aspired to achieve the same physical features as

the individuals who are associated with the products, and furthermore consume particular beauty brands with the aim of constructing their identity. Consequently, these previous studies have foremost highlighted the symbolic meaning that is associated with the consumption of beauty products, and the products can thus act as a way for consumers to construct their identity based on the symbolic attributes.

2.5 Summary of Chapter

In this chapter, we addressed a review of the literature regarding identity construction and consumer collectives. Previous research have foremost focused on consumer identity construction with the resources that are available from the marketplace, and this has significantly been covered within the field of CCT. As a result of the rise of social media, previous studies have also covered the link between identity construction and the use of social media. Furthermore, research has been conducted with the aim of understanding how factors such as appearance on social media can influence an individual's social identity.

The rise of social media has also encouraged researchers to understand the factors that drive individuals to participate in online communities, and moreover how these online communities differ from the traditional offline communities. Although the research regarding identity construction within communities has been widely extended over the past years, a gap can furthermore be identified in the field of identity construction within online communities. Thus, it is necessary to extend the current research in relation to online communities. Further, to our knowledge, no previous research has examined the influence consumer collectives on the Tiktok platform have in regard to their members' identity constructions. Further, no previous research has examined how product recommendations coming from members of a community affect the consumers' identity constructions. We also identified a lack of research that identifies the factors that influence identity construction within the different types of brand communities. To summarize, the connection between identity construction and being engaged in communities is deeply intertwined. Thus, these concepts are relevant to our study in order to enhance our knowledge of the topic and be able to better understand our empirical data. Moreover, we conclude a further need for research that implies the connection between consumers' identity construction and their participation in online communities on social media.

3. Methodology

In the following chapter, the methodology of the study will be explained. First, the philosophical stance of the study is discussed, followed by the research design. Then the data collection method is described which includes an explanation of the semi-structured interview approach. After that, the validity and reliability of the study are discussed, followed by the Data analysis which explains in detail how the data will be analyzed. Lastly, the limitations of the methodological choice will be discussed.

3.1 Research Philosophy

As different philosophical stances exist in the world, the relationship between data and theory has been greatly debated throughout the years (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Accordingly, these philosophical positions significantly impact the quality of research (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Therefore, it is important to understand them in order to be able to reflect on one's work and develop an efficient research design. For these reasons, we will briefly describe the philosophical stances taken in the current study.

As Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson (2015) noted, research approaches can be distinguished in regard to their ontological and epistemological standpoints. An ontological standpoint refers to different philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality and how one perceives the world (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). This current study takes a relativist perspective, meaning that we assume that there is no single truth, as the aim is to build knowledge from consumers' own perceptions and the way they interpret their experiences.

An epistemological standpoint refers to the assumptions one has about how to acquire knowledge about the nature of the world. There are two different standpoints in relation to this, positivism and social constructivism. A positivist standpoint assumes the world as an external reality and thus, it should be studied using objective methods (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). The social constructionism perspective, in contrast, assumes that reality can be interpreted in several different ways, and thus, there is no tangible reality. Hence, the perspective favors the use of interpretive methods (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). This study adopts the social constructivist perspective, meaning that we assume that there is no single truth

to be found and that we acknowledge that the findings of the study are based on our viewpoint as observers and interpreters as well as the worldviews of the respondents (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Hence, we will aim to be reflexive both during data collection as well as during the analysis in order to gain valuable results.

3.2 Research Approach

Three approaches regarding how to work with theory and empirical findings can be adopted when designing a research project, the deductive, inductive or abductive approach (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). The deductive method includes sufficient premises that can guarantee the conclusion. The inductive approach involves collecting data in order to study a specific topic and from there, building a theory (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Put more simply, it involves allowing the data to determine the themes that come up in the process. Inductive arguments can be looked at as premises that could potentially lead to the conclusion being accurate but can not provide a guarantee (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). According to Bell, Bryman and Harley (2019), the two strategies are not fully in contrast with each other, but can rather be looked at as tendencies. The abductive approach is used to make logical inferences and build theories. However, it involves analyzing a specific phenomenon that cannot be explained with existing theories by gathering data in order to define the trends in the literature, followed by either changing an existing hypothesis or creating a new one (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019).

In this study, we adopted the inductive approach, as there is limited knowledge about consumer identity construction in relation to the online beauty community on Tiktok. Moreover, the inductive approach is suitable for a study when the aim is to draw generalizable inferences from the findings, and therefore, theory development is thus the outcome of the research (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). The study will gather qualitative empirical data through semi-structured interviews with members of the beauty community on the platform, focusing on young adults in Scandinavia. This will allow us to gather in-depth data in order to investigate their experiences and meanings regarding the topic. Given the above, the semi-structured interview method is highly relevant in order to answer our research question. A qualitative method is adapted in this study, as the aim is to gain a deeper understanding of the consumers' thoughts and experiences with online communities on Tiktok, and moreover how they search for

identity attributes when participating in these online communities. Thus, the qualitative research approach will allow us to go in-depth with the particular phenomena. Similarly, this can further be described as the hallmark of qualitative research, where one goes into depth about a particular problem and conducts an exploratory research study (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Furthermore, a qualitative research approach is beneficial when the aim is to see a phenomenon through the eyes of the participants, which is in line with the aim of the study (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

3.3 Research Design

The aim of this paper is to develop a deeper understanding of how consumers construct their identity through online communities on Tiktok, focusing on the community that has evolved around the cosmetics industry. This is due to the increasing popularity of the product category on the platform and the effect it has had on the success of many cosmetics brands.

To achieve these aims, it is of relevance to adopt a research method that allows for a more interpretative approach, with the aim of going in-depth with understanding consumer behavior. Thus, this study is based on a qualitative research approach, where the chosen method is to collect data using semi-structured interviews, with the aim of having a flexible interview guide and allowing for spontaneity. Furthermore, a qualitative approach tends to perform with a more explorative research approach, which goes in line with the aim and objective of this study as the intention is to explore a consumer phenomenon (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). In order to analyze the data from the interviews, a thematic coding process will be used. The coding process will be conducted in a way where the data is sorted and reduced into different categories (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

3.4 Empirical Data Collection

3.4.1 Sampling strategy

In order to collect our empirical data to study our thesis topic and enable us to answer our research question, we used purposive sampling, which is a non-probability form of sampling used when a researcher has an explicit idea of what sample unit is needed in order to match the criteria and be able to answer the research question (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). In light of the thesis topic, our criteria for individuals to be able to participate was that they were members of the beauty community on Tiktok. A member of the beauty community was defined as someone who uses the platform and is interested in beauty and thus, often exposed to videos regarding cosmetics products on the platform. Additionally, we set the criteria that the individuals had previously purchased a cosmetics product after seeing it on the platform. We had access to eight individuals from three different Scandic countries who we knew matched our requirements. Due to the accessibility in our network that allowed us to find these respondents, a convenience sampling method was conducted (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

In order to reach out to these individuals, a short presentation of the study was sent via Facebook. In order to minimize the effect on the respondents, we only disclosed that the theme of the study was the beauty community on Tiktok while leaving out information regarding the effect it potentially has on their identity construction. In addition, a snowball sampling method was used, as we received recommendations about two other individuals from two of the respondents (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

Notably, Easterby et al, (2015) argued that both the purposive and convenience sampling methods are not guaranteed to represent the whole population, one can only draw conclusions from the respondents' experiences and perceptions. However, they can still be valuable in order to enhance knowledge regarding the topic (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

3.4.2 Semi-structured Interviews

As previously explained, there is a need for qualitative data regarding how members of the beauty community on Tiktok are drawing from other members when creating their identity. To

address this, we decided to adopt the semi-structured interview approach, as the aim of the study was to go in-depth with the particular phenomenon and gain more knowledge regarding these consumers' thoughts, feelings, and emotions.

Semi-structured interviews are flexible and thus, allow for being open to new input and information from the respondents and provide them the opportunity to direct where the discussion goes (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). This provides the possibility of more information emerging that can help to adjust the emphasis of the research as well as a deeper understanding of their perceptions (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Accordingly, the data collection was made through 10 qualitative interviews with Scandinavian members of the beauty community on Tiktok between the ages of 18-27.

Before conducting the interviews, we first prepared an overview regarding how they should be conducted as well as created an interview guide consisting of questions that were divided into different themes. In order to ensure that we could gain rich data, the questions were as open as possible. Further, we ensured that the questions were not leading in regard to the theories we had decided to work with. This resulted in the interview guide consisting of four themes: Demographics, Involvement with the platform, Beauty products on Tiktok, Identity creation and Community (See Appendix A). Due to the flexibility of semi-structured interviews, the questions were not set in stone but rather used for guidance and allowed for follow-up questions to be asked (Bryman & Bell, 2011). However, some closed questions were incorporated regarding demographics.

Moreover, the respondents were notified that they would be given pseudonyms in order to ensure their anonymity. However, they were notified that their country of origin, age and occupation would be disclosed due to the relevance of this information in regards to the empirical findings.

All 10 interviews were conducted via Zoom in April 2022 where both researchers were present in order to ensure the perspectives of both. One of us followed the interview guide and asked the questions while the other observed and was able to join the conversation with follow-up questions. During the interviews, eight of the respondents' were at home and two of them were at their schools. Before starting the interview, the researchers informed the respondents about its aim and purpose, in order to establish transparency. Additionally, the respondents were provided

a digital copy of the interview guide, as this can help strengthen the dependability of the study (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

Table 1: Summary of participants

Nr	Pseudonym	Country	Age	Occupation	Duration
1	Sophie	Sweden	27 years old	Full-time flight attendant	28 minutes
2	Philippa	Denmark	22 years old	Student, part-time worker	30 minutes
3	Victoria	Denmark	18 years old	Student	22 minutes
4	Emily	Denmark	22 years old	Student	25 minutes
5	Andrea	Sweden	20 years old	Student	21 minutes
6	Filippa	Sweden	24 years old	Student	31 minutes
7	Amanda	Sweden	25 years old	Student	30 minutes
8	Jessika	Sweden	25 years old	Student, part-time worker	35 minutes
9	Maria	Denmark	19 years old	Student	28 minutes
10	Carla	Denmark	20 years old	Student	31 minutes

Each interview lasted between 20-35 minutes, depending on the respondents willingness to answer in-depth as well as the attained saturation of the answers. From there, the data was transcribed and later analyzed. The answers were recorded on an iPhone belonging to one of the

researchers after receiving the respondents' approval. This was followed by transcribing the interviews over to Word. In the transcription process, we used the "dictate" function available in Word which allowed us to play the recording while the software types in the words. To ensure that the transcriptions were correct, we observed the process and fixed any mistakes that the software made. This further allowed us to listen to the interviews again, which is highly important for the analysis due to us being the interpreters of the data (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The transcription process led us to have 40 pages of material.

3.5 Data Analysis

According to Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018), qualitative data can be analyzed through three different phases, which consist of sorting, reducing, and arguing. These steps can be taken in order to solve the problems that appear when analyzing qualitative data; the problem of chaos, the problem of representation, and the problem of authority (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2015). Further, these steps help with making the material easier to work with and to find the most interesting and relevant parts. In addition, the process helps with identifying patterns and themes in relation to the respondents' experiences (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2015). As the method has clear steps to follow, it has the possibility to enhance the quality of the study and thus, reassure us that the handling of the material is preparing us to disclose the findings as well as relate them to previous theories. Following the three principles, the analysis of the data from the interview began with a thematic sorting process, where the different responses were sorted, and later turned into different themes.

3.5.1 *Sorting*

In order to operate with the data, we started by transcribing all the interviews. We decided to record the interviews in order to be fully present during the process, and thus not lose relevant input by transcribing along the way. The next step was to sort all the data so that the transcriptions of the interviews came under different categories. This was done in order to create an overview of the data. It also allowed us to identify relevant themes, which became the next step in the process. During the sorting process, the material was divided into different categories with the aim of creating a more structured overview of the data. This resulted in the various data

being divided into categories. Subsequently, the themes that were identified were coded, using open coding method. Open coding is an inductive analytical procedure and thus, the theme and categories were based on the data itself and made while reading over the interviews (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

3.5.2 Reduction

Henceforward, the further step is to reduce all the data that has been sorted that was accomplished in the previous step. The reduction phase is crucial to determine what data should be used in the representation of the study (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). During the reduction phase, some of the previous themes that were identified in the sorting process were then removed due to the relevance of the study. We, therefore, aimed to scope down the theme so the data corresponded to what the research questions aim to uncover. The data were reduced using a categorical reduction strategy, which strives to reduce the sorted material into the categories that are relevant to the research question (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). Thus, certain categories that might not be useful when answering the research question were excluded. We ensured to spend much time coping with the data, and some previous themes that were excluded were added again, and this process went back and forth. This was done in order to ensure that the material was accumulated carefully, in order to prevent excluding any noteworthy data.

3.5.3 Arguments

Lastly, the data was analyzed through the last phase, also referred to as arguing. During this stage, it is of relevance to provide arguments with the use of the theoretical framework (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). Thus, we created arguments with the use of the chosen theoretical framework. In order to ensure that the theoretical framework was correlated with the data, the different categories that were identified in the previous phrases were moreover categorized according to different theories that were described in the theoretical framework. Therefore, arguing has been an implicit factor of the data analysis and has moreover been part of the very beginning of the process. This is based on how the data has constantly been sorted and reduced based on the theoretical framework.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

It can be crucial for a researcher to outline the possible critical aspects of a study and be aware of the possible ethical issues that may arise. This study is conducted through a qualitative research method and thus, a reflection of this chosen research method can allow for a deeper reflection of how the study is conducted (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson (2015) outline several ethical guidelines concerning the collecting of data. The ethical guidelines refer to harm to participants, lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy, and lastly, deception (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). We ensured to have these principles in mind in regard to the interviews, and in order to comply with these requirements, we were very deliberate in informing respondents about the purpose of the interviews. Furthermore, the respondents were informed about their privacy in the study and that they would receive different pseudonyms when presenting the results. As the study aims to discover the identity construction of consumers, it was crucial that the respondents felt comfortable with sharing their thoughts and emotions during the interviews. Moreover, the research questions were communicated clearly so that the respondents would not misinterpret the questions that were asked. Likewise, the respondents also received the opportunity to read the results of the analysis, with the aim of obtaining transparency between the researchers and respondents.

3.7 Methodological Reflection

As qualitative research can be seen as a more subjective research approach, it is crucial to demonstrate the trustworthiness of the study, which further can be indicated through the validity and reliability of the findings. The reliability of a study is the degree to which the results are repeatable, and the validity is furthermore referred to if the researchers measure what the research is aimed to do (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Due to the limitations regarding generalizing and replicating qualitative research, Bryman & Bell (2011) described specific indicators that can be used to explain the trustworthiness of a qualitative study. These indicators are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Credibility includes examining whether the findings are believable, and moreover if the research is conducted in good practice (Bryman & Bell, 2011). To ensure the credibility of the study, we

maintained transparency when conducting the interviews, ensuring that we knew with certainty that respondents were aware of what the questions were referring to. This was done in order for the respondents not to misinterpret the questions they were being asked. However, a possible limitation of the study is that some of the respondents in the study are individuals who are familiar with the researchers, which increases the possibility of being biased during the interviews. This is a factor to take into consideration, as it could potentially affect the willingness of the respondents to share their true opinions.

Transferability includes measuring whether the findings can be applied to other contexts at another time (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In order to ensure this, we strived to gather as rich data as possible regarding the topic (Bryman & Bell, 2011). However, in the fast-shifting social media world, it is hard to ensure that the same findings would emerge.

The dependability of a study is aimed to discover whether the findings of a research would be the same in another time (Bryman & Bell, 2011). To ensure that the study is dependable, we have maintained an overview of the research process. Here we have included an overview of the respondents, the interview transcripts and the analysis et cetera. In addition, we have provided a detailed description of the chosen research method. By showcasing the process of the study, it enables other researchers to replicate the same study.

Lastly, confirmability covers the objectivity of the researcher, and moreover if the findings are influenced by his own personal values (Bryman & Bell, 2011). As both researchers are highly interested in cosmetics as well as being active users of the Tiktok platform, our perspective was from inside the community and we had our own opinions on the topic. This created a risk of being too subjective and biased. However, this was avoided as much as possible due to our understanding of the effect this can have by being reflexive and setting aside our preconceived opinions during the interviews as well as being open minded when interpreting the data.

In addition, as noted by Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson (2015), one of the problems regarding qualitative research is the decision regarding the sample size. It is challenging to figure out how many individuals should be a part of the sample before the theoretical saturation has been attained as there is no detailed description regarding this (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Therefore, as we started to see that we were not obtaining new information from

the respondents' when conducting the last three interviews, we concluded that we had established the theoretical saturation (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). Furthermore, it is highly important that the researcher considers how the sample is able to represent the larger group and thus, the variety of the sample is important (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This could have been a possible limitation in our study due to similarities between the participants. Our sample consisted of 10 female individuals between the ages of 18-27. All of them were students apart from one who had a full-time job, which indicates that the majority of the respondents shared a similar background. Regarding gender, there is an increase in the popularity of cosmetics among men and thus, only including female respondents could possibly affect the generalizability of the study. However, the beauty community on the platform still includes more female members and thus, this also makes the participants reflect the larger population to a greater extent. Lastly, a possible limitation in regards to generalizability was that the sample consisted of individuals easily accessible to the researchers and thus, gathered through convenience sampling which has been criticized for limited ability to provide generalizable findings.

4. Findings and Analysis

In this chapter, the empirical data that was gathered through the semi-structured interviews will be presented. The aim of the study was to understand how consumers construct their identities through online communities, in the context of the beauty community on Tiktok.

The first section presents general findings regarding the respondents' involvement with the Tiktok platform, as well as their interest in beauty and cosmetics. These were found to be relevant information in order to gain a better understanding of the influence of the community on the respondents' identity creation. Following this, two themes that were discovered in the analysis are presented. Identity construction through others on the platform and *Communitas*.

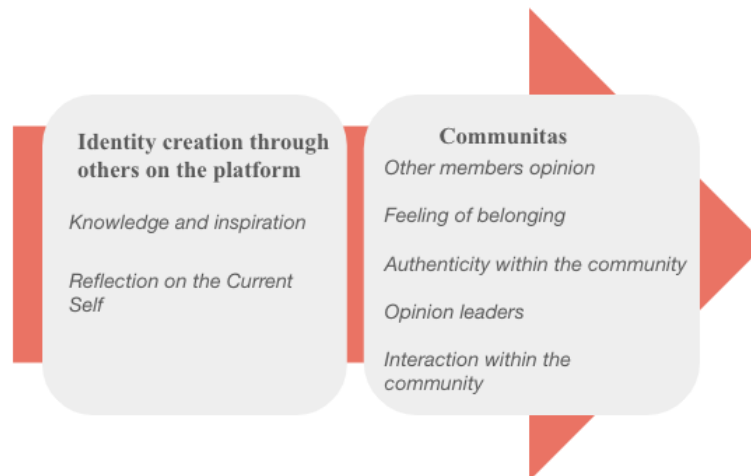


Figure 1: *Overview of the findings*

4.1 General Findings about Tiktok Consumption

Most of the respondents had been using the platform for two years, with some of them mentioning the pandemic being a part of the reason they joined it. However, Philippa had been using it for over four years. All of the respondents were active users of the platform, using it between one to two and a half hours a day. Even though they were active users on the platform, they did not have prior experience with posting any Tiktok videos themselves. When asked about the reasons they were active users on the platform, most of the respondents expressed that it was

for its entertainment, information and inspiration. Watching Tiktok is moreover an activity that is spread throughout the day as most respondents claimed Tiktok is the first thing they consumed when they woke up and the last thing they did before going to sleep. In addition, some respondents claimed using it when they were bored and therefore used it as a source of entertainment. For example, Philippa stated the following about her reasons for using it:

For joy, entertainment. Just when I'm bored but also just to do something like checking out hacks or like tricks or whatever or just yeah like before work for example (Philippa).

Accordingly, it was evident that the platform was an important part of the respondents' life. Furthermore, many of the respondents also claimed that they had replaced Tiktok with other social media platforms, and that they were more likely to spend time on Tiktok compared to other platforms such as Instagram and Facebook. As interest in beauty was a criterion for inclusion in the study, it was evident that all the respondents were interested in the field. However, as with all interests, their interest in beauty products varied. Most of them asserted they were very interested or that their interest was above average compared to other people around them. However, Philippa expressed that she was more into certain types of beauty products at different times. Additionally, Amanda stated she was into beauty and cosmetics products but was not too involved with the beauty world.

4.2 Identity Creation through Others on the Platform

4.2.1 Knowledge and Inspiration

The findings suggest that all of the respondents appeared to use the platform to engage in their interest in beauty products. Many of them spoke about keeping up to date, gaining new information and learning new things related to beauty in an effective way through watching these short videos. The majority of the respondents spoke about seeing every step of the process along with the results was the main thing that drew their attention. Further, Filippa and Jessika both mentioned that what caught their attention was seeing a video that included a person showing another use for a certain product and when they were experimenting with them.

Furthermore, Sophie expressed the following when questioned where she typically found information about beauty products:

Since I started using Tiktok, I mostly do it there. I look for reviews on a product I've heard about. (...) If I've seen it on TikTok, I will definitely search for more videos on there. (...) I see something on TikTok and if I really like the things being said about the product I will check on it next time I'm at a store that I know sells it (Sophie).

Later, she also stated the following:

When you come across people that you really relate to and feel like they are a bit better than you at something related to beauty I make sure to follow them because I always want to learn something new (Sophie).

The statements demonstrate that content concerning products coming from other users who have some more knowledge, experience or information is an essential factor. The feeling of learning something new from other individuals about beauty was an important feature. Philippa highlighted the fact that a girl that inspired her in regards to skincare was from Korea because she believed that individuals in Korea were very good at it. Furthermore, Sophie spoke about the importance of finding individuals on the platform that she felt like she could learn new things from. Accordingly, it was evident that all the respondents experienced being inspired by other users in the beauty community on the platform as well as wanting to consume, which indicates that they often purchased a product after seeing someone speaking highly of it while showing their skills and knowledge about beauty.

Interestingly, as many of the respondents spoke about seeking information and inspiration on the platform, most of them mentioned that it often came to them easily without an active search. Hence, most of the respondents expressed how they are always exposed to content that is aligned with their own interests. For example, Sophie said the following:

I always see videos that I want to see because Tiktok knows what I like and what I don't like I think. It's very personalized, it's like my own entertainment platform (Sophie).

Further, Jessika said that the platform felt like a “mini outlet” made for her, and later, when comparing Tiktok to other platforms, she stated the following:

It's like a very perfectly passive social media so you don't really have to do anything like I don't have to search up anything. (...) It's served to me on a platter, opted to me, like personalized (Jessika).

Later, when speaking about how she looks for information about beauty products she expressed the following:

I think I look less actively for makeup today than I have before (...) it comes to me without me looking for it. (...) I wouldn't search for it on Tiktok but if it's served to me then I would be like “oh interesting.” (Jessika).

Their statements imply how they are being influenced and inspired without making any effort. This is due to being exposed to different videos and products as they appear on their personalized For You Page, providing them with inspiration and information tailored to them. This further encouraged them in their identity creation, leading them to consume the products being endorsed. This was especially evident when Andrea stated the following:

If I see someone who has really good results with the product then I often get influenced to buy it even though I don't need the product or even looking for it (Andrea).

Sophie and Filippa shared a similar experience and stated that most of the products they had purchased after seeing them on the platform were ones they had only seen because they appeared on their For You Page. They had not heard of the products before, and would not have known about them or desired them if it was not for the platform. This indicates they experience the platform as a place tailored specifically to them and what inspires them. However, it was

important that the person in the Tiktok videos demonstrated that they knew what they were talking about, as evident in the following statement Sophie made:

There are so many people like random people posting and not everyone has the same taste as you or like have the actual skills I feel like they should post (Sophie).

Her statement shows the importance of others showing their skills and being selective of who she takes advice from since the platform allows everyone to express themselves regardless of knowledge and talent.

4.2.2 Reflection on the Current Self

As mentioned, the respondents were frequently provided with information and inspiration on the platform. It was evident that it mattered that they could reflect on themselves in other individuals and relate to them in order to be inspired. This applied to things such as seeing that the person shared their interest in beauty products as well as their physical attributes. For example, Philippa noted that when she saw a person with the same physical attributes as her, she related to the individual, which made her more interested in the product endorsed in the video. She furthermore stated: “*Sometimes I feel like I know the person I’m looking at cause I feel like she’s so relatable*” (Philippa).

Victoria correspondingly explained that she experiences Tiktok to be more relatable. In addition, she expressed that she considers it possible to achieve the same looks as others on Tiktok compared to other platforms such as Instagram due to relatability. Furthermore, many of the respondents spoke about the importance of finding individuals on the platform that they relate to, but also indicated the importance of them possessing similar physical attributes as themselves. This was well reflected when Sophie stated the following about being inspired by someone from the beauty community:

A girl came up on my For you page and she just looked like she was really the same type as me and she had this glowing skin and beautiful makeup on. I felt like I just kind of wanted to look exactly like her (Victoria).

When further explaining the feeling she had after buying the product she said the following:

I was just very happy about it and it looked exactly the same on me as on the girl. I would say maybe I felt more like her or whatever after buying it (Victoria).

It is evident according to her expression, that she is comparing herself to the individual in the video and experiencing that she has similar features and style. However, she feels that the other girl's identity is somewhat more elevated and thus, an inspiration for her in the development of her desired identity. Furthermore, Carla expressed almost the exact thing, stating that she felt inspired to consume a beauty product if the person in the video had similar physical traits as herself but more elevated in some way. This was mentioned by many of the other respondents as well. If they encountered a person to be attractive or aspired to look more like them, they were likely to be interested in the product. For example, when Jessika spoke about an incident she felt inspired by someone on the platform in relation to beauty she stated the following:

I saw a girl who did like her night routine and was using this CeraVe face and body cream on her face (...) and then I literally bought the same product and I'm like trying that out now. (...) She had, like, really glowy skin and she was without makeup and showing how nice it looks. (...) She was proof of that it worked (Jessika).

This indicates that the person's appearance seemed to play an important role in inspiring the respondents' identity creation and thus, consumption choices. Andrea was the only one who spoke negatively about this matter. She mentioned the feeling of social pressure to achieve the same looks and physical attributes as the individuals in the videos. Therefore, following these trends evoked negative feelings for her. The others seemed to look at the other individuals as inspirations for their desired identities.

Some of the respondents spoke about looking at the person's overall surroundings and how that was an important factor alongside the appearance. This was evident when Amanda spoke about an incident where she felt inspired by the platform:

I think I like a lot of like the clean girl aesthetic vibes, this one girl called Faith or something, I like her whole aesthetic with everything that she has like a really clean like bathroom cabinet and it's like it's like her mirror in the background so it looks really fancy and nice but yeah for me it's more maybe about like everything around the person as well (Amanda).

This demonstrates that she did not only like the girl's overall look and products, but also her overall lifestyle. In addition, Carla explained that she was more excited about a product if she felt inspired by the individual's surroundings and also stated: *"It's the vibe of the person that tells me more if I'm interested in the same products as them."* (Carla). This was also mentioned by Philippa when she talked about an incident where she felt inspired by the platform:

I really look up to one girl, Bianca Ingrosso, who is a Swedish influencer (...) and has like really good skin and just all over like beauty wise so I would say that I get inspired by her but also kind of because of her aesthetic like all the colors and everything and that like gets you inspired to investigate it or invest in those kind of products that she uses actually (Philippa).

The statements suggest the importance of the overall lifestyle and aesthetics of the individuals in the videos, and how the products are given symbolic meaning by being endorsed by these individuals. Furthermore, as the majority of the respondents were students, many of them stated that they were often very inspired to buy certain products but did not afford them. For example, Philippa said the following after speaking about products she wanted to buy after seeing them on the platform:

I have to say I cannot afford like all of those kind of expensive products (...) but in the future when I have more money hopefully. I know that I will buy it because it really stuck with me (Philippa).

The statement demonstrates her longing for more high-end products she witnessed other people use on Tiktok. Moreover, she explained that she intends to purchase them in the future. Hence, she seemed to be thinking about her future possible-self and having the intention to enhance her identity.

4.3 Communitas

4.3.1 Other People's Opinion

Evidently, other people's opinions mattered to all of the respondents. It was important that someone within the beauty community had legitimized the product before they decided to purchase it. Sophie started the following when describing an incident where a video on the platform made her dislike a certain product:

I think when I see an authentic person talking about a product and really does not like it, I kind of just immediately decide that I will not like it myself. I don't know, maybe it's naive or something but I feel like when I think about it, their opinion really matters to me, you know people on the platform that I know I relate to (Sophie).

Philippa was on the same page and stated that she had previously experienced being exposed to negative reviews about a product, which further contributed to her not wanting to try out the product anymore. It is noticeable that other people's opinion on the platform was very important and the respondents put a great deal of trust in them. It did not take more convincing than one video on the platform to eliminate the product as a possible purchase in the future for some of them. Thus, it implies that the opinions of others appear to have a significant influence in relation to the respondents attitudes towards the products.

Further, it was important for the majority that the thoughts on the product reflected the opinion of more than one individual. If they had seen videos of the same product frequently being mentioned, either positively or negatively, they trusted them more. When speaking about what made her excited about a beauty product on the platform, Filippa said that when she had seen multiple people speaking highly about it, she was more excited to buy it. Further, Maria, Andrea,

and Emily all stated that it was exciting to try a product that had gone viral and was trending on the platform. They explained that it became more exciting both due to the many individuals speaking highly of it, as well as wanting to evaluate if they shared the same thoughts as others. When describing an incident where a video on the platform made her dislike a product, Amanda expressed the following:

I think when I hear it is a lot of people talking about something (...) if people go like “oh this is not worth buying, this is worth buying” in those videos then I would never buy it (Amanda).

Her statement demonstrates how important it is for her to agree with others on the platform concerning the quality of beauty products. Thus, it can be implied that they trust recommendations that are given by the other members. She later explained a previous experience in regards to desiring a new perfume and searched for videos on the platform in order to find one:

I went on Tiktok and just found what people were talking about and then I checked out the website and was like “oh this sounds good, I’ve heard people talk about this like five times now while scrolling.” (...) I bought it off that site, like a perfume I’ve never smelled before (Amanda).

The comment exhibits the trust the respondents have in certain individuals’ opinions on the platform, and moreover how they are more willing to try out a product if TikTok is the source of information. In addition, when speaking about the process of seeing a video and then buying it, Jessika spoke about the importance of how other people had legitimized the product and the technique that she saw in the video that led her to purchase the product.

It helps that the thing that they show is like a part of the current trend or wave because then I know that it has been, like, legitimized by a lot of other people previously (Jessika).

Accordingly, it was important that the community had an overall agreement about the product and the technique. The importance of other people's opinions was also reflected in the way the respondents spoke about the comment section. Many of them mentioned that they always look at the comment section of the videos before deciding to trust them. For some, it was equally or even more important than the video itself. Accordingly, it did not only matter what the person in the video was saying, but also what the members of the community were adding to the conversation. For example, Filippa and Maria expressed that she finds it to be important to read the comments to see what other people have said about a product, and whenever they are hesitant about a product, they go to the comment section to see what other individuals have stated. Moreover, Emily and Amanda also pointed out the importance of being confirmed by other people's opinions in the comment section whenever they feel intrigued to purchase a beauty product. These statements show how the respondents search for further confirmation through others by considering what they comment on other people's videos.

4.3.2 Feeling of Belonging

For most of the respondents, the feeling of relating to the individuals in the videos due to commonality, shared interest, and consumption practices evoked a sense of belonging to the same group as them. For example, when Emily was asked about her experience with the beauty community on Tiktok she stated: *"It feels like you are a part of a group who are trying the same products even though you don't know each other."* (Emily).

The expression indicates that she had the feeling of belonging to a group and the consumption practices allowed her to feel more connected to the other members without necessarily knowing them. It furthermore suggests that Emily experiences that she is a part of a community, where she is joined by other individuals who share a specific purpose. Accordingly, she experienced the products as a valuable mediator between herself and other members. Sophie shared this feeling of being a part of a community in which she is able to be surrounded by people without having actually spoken to them. She described an even deeper connection to some of the individuals as she claimed that she experienced a feeling of knowing them, sometimes as if they were a friend. Interestingly, she further explained that occasionally, she rather wanted to spend time on Tiktok instead of socializing in real life. She said the following:

I feel like there are a lot of people out there all over that are into beauty, like me. (...) Like, sometimes I'd rather go on Tiktok than meet a friend, it's just my "me time" and I don't really feel alone. It's weird to say I know, but I feel like often I'm just watching similar people to me with the same interest giving me advice and I love it (Sophie).

The statement shows how she feels connected with the beauty community on Tiktok and senses it as a social activity even though she is not directly communicating with the individuals. Furthermore, three of the respondents spoke about how their interest in beauty products increased since they started using Tiktok. It was evident in all of the three respondents' expressions that the reason for the increased interest was the community around the products. For example, Carla spoke about the fact that her interest in beauty started after she started using the platform because of how users on the platform share recommendations with each other. Furthermore, Victoria said the following about her interest in beauty:

My interest in it started around the same time I started to use Tiktok (...) because a lot of what I saw on there was people sharing some of their favorite products and I felt like I wanted to try them out as well. Then the interest just continued to grow after that I guess (Victoria).

Andrea stated a similar thought when talking about beauty related Tiktok videos:

It almost always grabs my attention, especially because I have built up a more interest in beauty products since I started using Tiktok so much.(...) And also if the reviews are bad, I still find it interesting to watch (Andrea).

Further, three of the respondents spoke about how the platform was an essential factor to them during the pandemic and made them feel less isolated. Victoria explained that during the pandemic, the platform became a common amusement for most people in her generation and became like a meeting place. Emily and Andrea also mentioned that they had started using the platform during the pandemic. Emily stated: *"It became like entertainment in a time filled with negative news all the time and where people were isolating themselves."* (Emily). Their experience indicates how they felt like the platform was a social tool for them in a time of

isolation. Thus, being engaged on the platform became a ground for social interaction with others.

Another factor that seemed to cause some of the respondents to feel like a part of a community was that they often saw other individuals using brands that were in their price range and thus, often highly achievable to try the same products like the others. Victoria and Andrea both highlighted this as an important factor and Victoria commented: *“I think it is really good that it is often cheaper products like Cerave and The Ordinary, because then everyone can be a part of the trend.”* (Victoria).

In contrast to the others, Jessika, Filippa and Amanda did not experience being a part of a group or a community. Further, they did not follow specific individuals they related to and counted on in regards to opinions and expertise. Jessika highlighted the difference between Tiktok and Youtube when she spoke about how she experienced the beauty community on the platform:

I think it's hard with Tiktok 'cause I think when I was on YouTube a lot I felt more as a part of the beauty community on YouTube because they had their subscribers you know, they had the common sections where it's often returning viewers so you know that like it's like a small family. (...) Tiktok is purely often showcasing one product or whatever so in that relation it's less a community on Tiktok for me (Jessika).

This implies she experiences the focus to be more on the product itself rather than socializing and it is, therefore, more demanding for her to feel a sense of belonging. Further, she stated that it is easy to lose people on Tiktok due to the extreme exposure to different videos including many different individuals. Filippa expressed the following when speaking of the matter:

You don't have to follow people to the same extent as on Instagram cause you can also just like look at your feed and it's funny cause there are new people and things that you maybe wouldn't follow but you see them anyways because it's on your For You Page (Filippa).

4.4 Authenticity within the Community

Trustworthiness and transparency came up frequently, indicating that it was of high importance to the respondents. They often compared Tiktok to other social media platforms and claimed they experienced Tiktok to be more authentic. For example, Amanda expressed how she experiences other social media sites such as Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook to be commercialized, whereas Tiktok instead is authentic and more about entertainment. Andrea was also outspoken about how highly she considered the transparency to be and stated the members of the beauty community are not gatekeeping any information from each other. These opinions were also well reflected when Philippa stated: *“It's more authentic than a picture so everything doesn't have to be staged or whatever, people can like import directly like raw material.”* (Philippa).

The trust in others on the platform was further displayed when the respondents previously experienced disappointment in regards to a product they purchased under the influence of Tiktok. Nevertheless, they all expressed that they did not consider that their negative experience with a product would affect their ability to purchase a product again after seeing it on Tiktok. However, Philippa said that it was likely that she would not necessarily trust the individual or the brand again, but her trust in the overall community was not affected. Victoria had the same opinion expressed that she had previously had negative experiences with a beauty product from Tiktok, but that it did not affect her willingness to purchase a new beauty product after seeing it on Tiktok in the future. Moreover, she expressed the feeling that there is an unwritten rule on the platform, where members of the beauty community are honest and transparent with each other.

Filippa was the only respondent remarking that she found another platform to be more authentic than Tiktok. She explained that she perceives Instagram as more authentic because she is able to actively choose who she follows there. According to Filippa, Tiktok is instead different, as she is exposed to individuals who she is not familiar with, and it thus becomes a less authentic experience for her. Further, Emily said that some videos on the platform had changed her opinion on certain brands she already was familiar with. She had previously assumed that these brands were not good due to them being cheaper than many others but after seeing videos on the platform of individuals speaking highly of them, she decided to try some of them out as well.

This shows how the beauty community impacts the individuals' feelings about the products being endorsed and the trust they have towards it.

4.4.1 Opinion leaders

As previously mentioned, many of the respondents spoke highly of the fact that everyone could share their knowledge and thoughts in the beauty community on the platform. This is well reflected in Maria's following statement:

It just feels more trendy and also more honest because there are like normal people who post on Tiktok and not just influencers and I feel like it is mostly influencers on Instagram (Maria).

When Filippa, Carla and Victoria described their experience of how people engage around beauty products on Tiktok, they both spoke about liking the fact that people are able to show their interest and share their knowledge without having a big platform. There, they are referring to the fact that they feel like anyone can share their knowledge and experiences, whereas, on other platforms, people have to make a name for themselves in order to be legitimized as an expert. Further, Amanda said the following when she was asked about the importance of who it is in the video making the statements about the product:

I don't think I care as much about who it is that shows me, if it's someone that seems like they know what they're doing and like has good makeup (...) then I will definitely be inspired (Amanda).

Further, two of the respondents expressed negative feelings towards profiles that have a large number of followers and suggested that they prefer purchasing a beauty product that has been talked about by a regular consumer. Sophie and Maria spoke about being skeptical when it came to reviews from influencers, as she further explained that she is more likely to be influenced by a relatable girl who is similar to herself, and simply shares a product she recently bought or perhaps learned a new beauty technique. Philippa also said the following regarding the matter:

I would say that I trust a person who is not an influencer and is just like a regular person trying out products like me cause I feel like people who have many followers and stuff, they get paid or whatever. They are just looking for profit from the people that are viewing the videos (Philippa).

In addition, Emily spoke about the people who comment as unknown users, more specifically, individuals who are not interested in gaining recognition, and how they are more transparent. Her statement is interesting as she divided influencers and regular consumers in the comment section according to their transparency. These respondents' experiences reflect how they trust recommendations from other consumers and perceive them more trustworthy and authentic.

However, this did not reflect two of the respondents' opinions on the matter. For Jessika and Filippa, it was important that the individual had many followers and could thus be considered an influencer. Jessika said the following about how she evaluates if the person's opinion is worth trusting:

Most of the time like I'll check their channel and see like how consistent they are you know, cause then you know that at least they kind of know what they are doing and just in general like how many likes do they get and comments because then also they can't have a fan base for no reason, that should be based on something you know (Jessika).

Filippa explained that she finds it more credible if a profile has a larger amount of followers when talking about a particular beauty product. Moreover, she explained that if other people trust the person, they are more likely to follow her. Thus, she found the amount of followers a person has as an essential element that affects their credibility.

4.3.3 Interaction within the Community

As previously mentioned, most of the respondents found it important to look at the comment section of the videos to get more confirmation about the quality of a product being spoken about. However, all of the respondents expressed that they did not get involved on the platform themselves, both in regards to commenting on other people's videos or making videos themselves. They all expressed being passive and observing the content rather than taking part in the discussion. For example, Jessika said that she never commented on the videos or spoke to other individuals with the same interest in beauty. Instead, she only gave them a like. She said the following about her interaction on the platform:

I like videos and that gives me a little kind of "oh I'm giving back" feeling because they give me you know the entertainment and like the information (Jessika).

Sophie, Maria and Carla had a similar way of interacting on the platform and stated that they had never commented on any video before. Interestingly, they had previously expressed that they felt a part of a community on Tiktok. The respondents' thoughts are of interest as they are not actively engaged in expressing their thoughts and emotions on the platform, but are still capable of feeling part of a community. It furthermore shows that their interaction with the community is rather passive in terms of commenting and liking the videos. Accordingly, Amanda and Jessika spoke about liking videos of individuals that had randomly come up on their For You Page in order to save them and watch them later, not in a social way. However, after doing some thought, Jessika later mentioned that she felt like she was also thanking the individual in the video for the information by liking the video.

According to the findings, it can be stated that the respondents' interaction on the platform instead frequently happens outside the platform. Many of them did so either through face-to-face interactions with friends or through other social media platforms such as Messenger, Snapchat, or Instagram. Thus, talking to individuals that belong to the same social group outside the platform about experiences and ideas they had from Tiktok was an important factor. This was well reflected in Phillippa's expression regarding her interaction on the platform:

I don't ever like comment on the videos or like talk to others on the platform that are not my friends but I send TikTok videos privately to my friends that I like and who also share the same interest in beauty products like myself (Philippa).

Further, regarding the social aspect of the platform, Amanda explained that she shared a special bond with her friends through the Tiktoks they share with each other. This indicates that the platform is also a mediator for her to feel closer to her friends because of their shared interest in it. Similarly, Maria and Emily both expressed the feeling of missing out on friends regarding trends and topics if they were not active on the platform. Importantly, some of the respondents' expressed the feeling of impressing their friends by showing off beauty products that had become popular on the platform. Andrea mentioned the following about buying products after seeing them on the platform:

I often think it is exciting to try out a product and if I have seen it on Tiktok and I have noticed that I tend to say This is a product from Tiktok when I show it to a friend. I don't know why but it has become like a cool statement (Andrea).

The respondent's statement indicates that she is more willing to try out a product if Tikok is the source of information about it. Furthermore, she regarded buying that product as something she is proud of and wants to show to her friends. Thus, the reflection can be further connected to how consumers are immersed in community-based practices, and sending Tiktok to each other can therefore become an example of how users in the beauty community are maintaining the relationship among the users.

5. Discussion

In the following section, the empirical findings will be further discussed in a broader theoretical context. In the first section, we explain how the respondents draw knowledge and inspiration from members of the beauty community on the platform in relation to their identity construction. Following is the topic of *Communitas* were the respondents' experiences of the social aspect of the platform as well as the beauty community's influence on their identity construction.

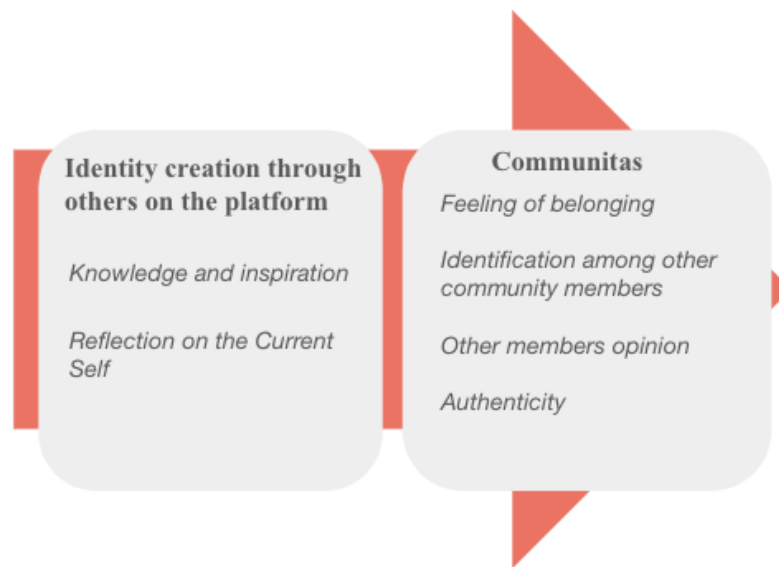


Figure 2: *Overview of discussion*

5.1 Identity construction through others on Tiktok

5.1.1 *Knowledge and inspiration in the context of beauty*

As presented in our empirical findings, the respondents were all seeking new information regarding beauty products as well as learning and being inspired by others on Tiktok. When creating and enhancing their identity, individuals seek information and inspiration from others in regard to their consumption (Klasson, 2017). Based on this, as well as the fact that the respondents spent at least an hour a day on Tiktok, it is evident that the platform is largely involved in the process of their identity construction. Furthermore, due to the algorithm behind the platform's For You Page, this exposure of information and inspiration not only came easily to

them but also came to them when they were not specifically seeking it. This personalization allowed the users to be exposed to content that is aligned with their interests and self-identity and thus, greatly affected their identity creation. This indicates the importance of the feature and the platform can be seen as a medium where the users are able to search for as well as be exposed to content tailored to them.

In accordance with Liu-Thompkins and Rogerson (2012), it was apparent that educational and entertaining content coming from other users was highly attractive to the respondents, often leading to them consuming the products included in those videos (Liu-Thompkins & Rogerson, 2012). Furthermore, in line with Arnould and Thompson's (2018) findings that individuals use knowledge and experiences to construct their identities, the feeling of learning new things in relation to beauty from other users was of high importance.

5.1.2 Reflection on the Current Self

Within CCT, consumption has been seen as a way to express oneself (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Consequently, consumption choices can be seen as the consumers' expression of their current selves. As evident in the findings, the respondents frequently expressed watching individuals they related to and shared the same interest in cosmetics. In accordance with Arnould, Arvidsson and Eckhardt's (2021) findings on online consumer collectives, the respondents spoke about the importance of relating to the others in the video in regards to the same interests and experiences. Furthermore, they often experienced them having similar styles or physical features as them. Hence, they experienced a connection between their self-concept and the individuals they got inspired by. This can further be understood as their feeling of sharing a social identity with these individuals (Dholakia, Bagozzi & Pearo, 2004). Furthermore, these relatable individuals the users enjoyed watching were frequently ones they experienced as having a better style, physical attributes or overall lifestyle and aesthetics. In accordance with Chiu et al (2015), they sought attributes from these other members of the beauty community.

Regarding physical attributes, it was evident that they were highly important to the users and they were drawn to individuals who were in the possession of physical attributes they aspired to have. This confirms the association between physical appearance and identity (Negrin, 2009). As

noted by Negrin (2009), physical appearance has become increasingly important in defining one's identity in today's society. This further inspired them to consume the same beauty products as them with the aim of achieving the same physical looks and enhancing their own identity. Further, when individuals are considered to be admirable by others, it is often based on their appearance (Negrin, 2009). Hence, the participants seemed to draw from the appearance of these individuals in relation to their future possible selves.

Regarding lifestyle, the users seemed to be more inspired to consume the same cosmetics products as individuals in terms of their overall lifestyle, surroundings and aesthetics. Hence, this led to these products having a symbolic meaning to them and made them feel as if they were closer to living the same lifestyle as the individual. This is in accordance with Klasson (2017) who suggested that lifestyles have become highly important in relation to consumption and have thus become the very core of individuals' self-identity (Klasson, 2017). Further, this finding is consistent with Elliott and Wattanasuawan's (1998) explanation that individuals make sense of who they are through adapting the symbolic attributes a product has.

In relation to lifestyle, the individuals that inspired the users often endorsed high-end products they could not afford and thus, it was evident that they often admired brands from a distance. This is in accordance with Cassinger (2017) who found that members of communities do not necessarily need to be consumers of products or brands in order to admire it. Furthermore, some of them spoke about buying those high-end products in the future. As suggested by Ajitha and Sivakumar (2017), consumption of high-end beauty brands can be seen as a way of constructing one's identity and this was well reflected in the findings. This further reflects previous research stating that identity can be described as an ongoing project (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Holt, 2002; Klasson, 2017; Schau, 2018) where individuals create narratives of themselves in relation to their past, present and hoped-for future (Arnould & Thompson, 2018).

In conclusion, the users, either consciously or subconsciously, had an understanding of their current self and chose to seek inspiration and recommendations about beauty products from individuals in possession of attributes of the possible self. Therefore, in line with previous studies regarding future self-identity, these individuals provided assistance in the respondents'

visualization of their future possible self both in relation to physical appearance as well as lifestyle (Markus & Nurius 1986; Zhao, Grasmuk & Martin 2008).

They compared their self-concept with these individuals, who provided them with symbols, able to elevate their current self towards their future possible selves in the development of their desired identity. As the products endorsed by these individuals became more desirable, it can be stated that these products were provided with symbolic meanings. This is in accordance with Belk's theory of the Extended self (1988), which indicates that consumers communicate who they are through their consumption and that possessions provide a symbolic extension of the self.

5.2 Communitas

5.2.1 Feeling of Belonging

The findings suggested that the majority of the respondents felt a sense of belonging to a community due to their shared interest in beauty products and consumption of them with other individuals. This is in accordance with the theory of linking value (Cova, 1997; Cova and Shankar, 2012) which suggests that when consumers engage in consumption collectives, they are often linked by common consumption practices or interests. It can therefore be interpreted that the beauty products are a valuable mediator between the members, and the products contribute to a social value rather than a utilitarian one. Furthermore, as exemplified by Cova (1997), products can contain value beyond their functional properties. They can have the ability to create social experiences and connect consumers with one another.

As some of the respondents stated they became users on Tiktok at the beginning of the pandemic. The platform, therefore, became a ground for social interaction in a time where individuals were isolated from each other in the physical world. This could potentially be a ground for how the sense of community among these users had been evoked. As consumers are constantly searching for links to other people, consumption can thus be a way of forming social connections with others (Cova, 1997). Accordingly, some of the respondents seemed to get involved with the community with the aim of developing social links.

It was evident that the beauty community has characteristics of the traditional concept of consumer tribes. This is visible due to the shared passion for beauty that links the members of the community together. Cova (1997) explained that consumer tribes are fluid and short-term, and that members within the community are gathered due to a common interest that links the members together. Coherently, the beauty community is fluid, as the content is constantly evolving based on what trends are relevant at the given time. Thus, in contrast to the definition of Brand communities, they are not involved due to sharing a strong identification with a particular cosmetics brand or product (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001), but rather, common interests. Similarly, the community members may engage in the community because it is a popular phenomenon at the given moment as some of the respondents claimed that their interest in beauty was evoked after they became users of Tiktok. Consequently, these respondents' commitment to the beauty community might be short-termed and fluid (Cova, 1997).

However, three of the respondents did not experience themselves as part of the beauty community due to the fast-shifting interaction on the platform and emphasis on products and exposure. This indicates that these respondents were searching for more long-lasting features in which it is possible to establish a greater and deeper connection with other members of a community. This reflects attributes included in Arvidsson & Caliandro's (2015) concept of Brand Publics where community members share information with one another and is made of a collection of related items without collective values.

Furthermore, as the respondents experienced the platform to be personalized, it was evident that most of them followed their interest in beauty instead of following specific individuals. As the For You Page often showed individuals with the same interest in beauty as them, most of them did not feel the need to follow them, as it was highly likely that another person with the same interest would come up next time they used the platform. This shows a new type of social bond between individuals with the same interest. They experience specific individuals as being relatable but only for a brief moment. This is in accordance with Firat and Venkatesh's (1995) findings that today's consumers are able to consume in a fluid way, meaning that they do not need to be committed to anyone or anything. Further in relation to their findings, the beauty community members on the platform are not loyal to brands, instead, they are loyal to images

and symbols (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995). They seem to hop from one individual to the other and from one brand to another, depending on the current fast-shifting trend on the platform.

5.2.2 Identification among other Community Members

As previously mentioned, the respondents were inspired by individuals they related to in terms of shared interest in beauty as well as ones they were inspired to look like. This applied both to physical appearance as well as lifestyle attributes. This is in accordance with Ekström (2017), who stated that group members are able to influence the other members' buying behavior with their knowledge, status, experience and style (Ekström, 2017).

Further, this reflects Henry & Caldwell's (2018) findings that individuals feel a connection towards others who they experience as having the same resources and lifestyle and thus, similar consumption preferences. The resources in this context can be seen as the physical appearance and if they felt like they shared some similarities as the person but experienced them to be better than them in some way, they were affected and very likely to buy the things being endorsed. Thus, it was an achievable goal to incorporate attributes from the individual in the video.

Furthermore, in accordance with previous research regarding brand communities, they were able to construct their social identity through others who shared their interest in cosmetics as well as seeking attributes from them in the creation of their own identity (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002; Chiu et al, 2015; Cova & Shankar, 2018; Dholakia, Bagozzi & Pearo, 2004). It can thus be argued that the consumers within the beauty community on Tiktok are adopting the meaning of beauty products, which later can be used to tell who they are, and which community they belong to.

5.2.3 Other Members' Opinions

The importance of other people's opinions in the beauty community was frequently expressed by all the respondents in various ways. Their taste and experience of products were of high importance in order for them to desire them. For some of them, only seeing one individual endorsing a product was enough for them to conclude their feeling towards it, while for some of them it was important seeing many individuals from the community speaking highly about it or

the product going viral. The comment section on the platform was also an important source of other people's opinions for further confirmation on the product. Some of them experienced it to be the most authentic source of information and thus it not only mattered what the person in the video was stating about a product, but also what the members of the community were adding to the conversation in the comment section.

Evidently, the respondents were highly influenced by content including individuals endorsing and using a beauty product rather than material from the brand itself. This is in accordance with previous research regarding brand communities that have shown that content about brands coming from users themselves has a great impact on brand meanings and identity (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). Further, it resonates with Ekström's (2017) statement that individuals can influence perceptions about brands and products without being a part of the brand's branding material.

Furthermore, in line with previous research regarding the consumption of online content, it was evident that the community was highly involved in shaping the respondents' taste and consumption of cosmetics (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013; Hoffman, Novak & Stein, 2012). This is in accordance with Ekström (2017), who concluded that groups that are compelling to individuals take part in shaping the attitudes and behaviors of its members. Furthermore, it shows that members are able to trust and learn from other's experiences, where the information is further used to develop their own opinion of a particular product (Belanche et al., 2019).

This can further be connected to how the community engages in value co-creation which Casinger (2017) describes as the process where community members share information and knowledge with each other about products and brands. The community shares similarities with the theoretical concepts of subcultures, as the members share content through commercial resources, which furthermore results in a type of value co-creation (Arnould, Arvidsson & Eckhardt, 2021). Accordingly, consumption activities regarding beauty products becomes a way of engaging in social interaction that has a symbolic value among the members, which is coherent with what has been previously stated about subcultures (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995).

In contrast, an important factor regarding the community's opinion was also when the respondents saw individuals stating they disliked a product. All of the respondents stated not wanting to try those products, even when it came to products they had previously been excited about. For some, it only took one video to eliminate the product as a possible purchase in the future. This shows the importance of consuming in accordance with the community and this is in line with Henry and Caldwell's statement that taste preferences act as emotional triggers that stimulate acceptance or rejection of products or consumption experiences (Henry & Caldwell, 2018). Not wanting to purchase these products also goes in line with how Klasson (2017) described the concept of community dis-identification. As Klasson (2017) noted, consumers often define themselves by which products they do not like, even more than by products they do like and use symbolic boundaries between themselves and people they dislike. Hence, knowing that those individuals they resonated with did not like the products, they found the need to have the same opinion in order to avoid being associated with "the others".

To conclude, it was evident that specific individuals on the platform took part in shaping their taste and consumption of cosmetics. This reflects Quinton's (2013) statement regarding the shift in the relationship between brands and communities, as consumers are more equal due to their ability to express themselves and their experiences more freely on online platforms. Consequently, the community is able to co-create value for cosmetics brands but at the same time, it is also able to harm their reputation.

5.2.4 Authenticity

The trustworthiness and transparency on Tiktok came up frequently, indicating that it was of high importance to the respondents. Some of the respondents emphasized the rawness, mutual exchange of information and honesty between beauty enthusiasts. This supports evidence from previous observations regarding Brand communities where members maintain a sense of moral responsibility, which becomes a way of increasing the value for the consumers of the community (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). This, in turn, enhances the users' trust in the beauty community. Additionally, this is aligned with previous studies suggesting that brand information and experiences that are shared by consumers on social media can be seen as authentic and trustworthy (Chiu et al., 2012).

As mentioned in the previous section, the authenticity of the platform was evident due to the participants' trust in other members' opinions on products. However, it was further displayed when the respondents had experienced being disappointed by a product they purchased under the influence of Tiktok. They all expressed that it did not affect their trust in the beauty community but rather, some of them stated they would have less trust towards the specific individual or the brand.

Another topic concerned with the authenticity that frequently came up in the findings was the difference in authenticity between regular everyday consumers of cosmetics versus influential individuals in the beauty community. It was evident that the majority of respondents appreciated how, in contrast to other platforms, everyone is able to share their knowledge and recommendations regarding beauty and cosmetics, regardless of how big their platform is and how many followers they have. Thus, in contrast to Ekström (2017), the regular everyday consumers that do not have big platforms are also qualified to be opinion leaders and thus, legitimized as experts regarding their knowledge and experience with beauty. Furthermore, the majority of the respondents trusted these consumers rather than individuals with larger platforms. Some respondents even expressed negative feelings towards those individuals due to them being highly subjective and often motivated to publish videos for their own personal benefits. However, consistent with Ekström (2017), two of the respondents expressed that having a large following legitimized the individual as being an expert and implied that he was more credible and trustworthy in relation to cosmetics.

Lastly, when comparing Tiktok to other social media platforms, all respondents except for one claimed they experienced it to be more authentic. The one particular respondent's reason for this was due to experiencing Tiktok to be able to expose her to individuals she did not recognize and actively choose to watch or follow and thus, stating she experienced Instagram to be more authentic. This reflects the findings of Teichmann et al (2015), regarding how social media has made it easy for individuals to express themselves regardless of skills and knowledge.

5.2.5 Interaction within the Community

An interesting finding regarding the interaction on the platform was that most of the respondents claimed they felt they belonged to a community but none of them engaged in interacting with other members on the platform such as commenting or publishing videos themselves. The only engagement the respondents claimed to take part in was giving the videos a like. However, most of them stated the reason for liking videos was for them to be able to see them again in order to use the information from the videos later.

It can therefore be assumed that the strong sense of belonging to a community also is valid through a passive interaction. According to Kang, Tang, & Fiore 2014; Tonteri et al. 2011, their participation is beneficial for the online community as well as the others' who produce videos as they produce traffic on the beauty related content on the platform (Kang, Tang, & Fiore 2014; Tonteri et al. 2011).

Interestingly, the findings suggest that the social aspect of the beauty community frequently happens outside of the platform itself. Many of the respondents claimed that they engage in sharing both information and knowledge about beauty products with friends after seeing them on Tiktok. Moreover, some noted that it has become a statement to announce that a beauty product is purchased after seeing it on Tiktok, especially if the product is viral on the platform. Thus, some of the products have been given a deeper symbolic meaning by the community on the platform, where messages regarding the products are further shared outside of the platform. Consequently, the interaction with the community is furthermore extended to outside of the platform as well.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Key Findings

The aim of this study was to examine how consumers construct their identities in online communities on social media with the use of the research question: *How do consumers construct their identities through online communities on social media platforms?* In order to answer this question, the study focused on the beauty community that has evolved on the Tiktok platform due to its increasing popularity. We provide qualitative empirical findings built on Scandinavian members' communicated experiences. When analyzing the data, two recurring themes regarding the members' expressed feelings were recognized: (1) Identity construction through the platform, and (2) *Communitas*. The findings of the study demonstrate how consumers of cosmetics on Tiktok are seeking inspiration and recommendations about beauty products from others on the platform in their quest to enhance their own identity. The most influential factor appears to be relating to the individuals they are exposed to, both in regards to shared interests, as well as physical attributes and lifestyle. This can further be linked to how the respondents make sense of who others are by using symbolic attributes in the development of their self-identity. The other users provide the products with symbolic meanings to the consumers, making them more desirable. Notably, the regular everyday consumer of cosmetics is more important in this process than individuals with larger platforms due to the authenticity of their content. Accordingly, Tiktok has changed the scene in regards to inspiration and what individuals are drawing from others in their quest towards their desired identity.

The beauty community on Tiktok cannot be fitted within one category of a consumer collective. Instead, the community shares some characteristics with all of them. It can foremost be described as fluid, due to the fast-shifting content the users are consistently exposed to. In addition, the consumers are linked together by their interests and are generally not committed to specific brands, but the community itself. They are foremost following the trends that are present at a specific time, and therefore, the product is more important than the brand it belongs to. Importantly, even though some individuals do not feel a sense of belonging to a community, the opinion of other community members still matters greatly to them as they seem to trust and count

on the platform for knowledge and inspiration. Furthermore, other individuals within the community appear to be frequently influenced by the taste preferences, that is later influencing what they wish to have and who they aspire to be.

The findings of the study are important in regards to being the first study, to our knowledge, to examine how consumers construct their identity through the beauty community on Tiktok. This is foremost due to the popularity of the platform as well as the beauty community that has evolved there consisting of highly influenced members.

6.2 Practical & Theoretical Implications

6.2.1 Practical Implications

The practical implication of these findings is first and foremost to provide brands with a deeper understanding of members of the beauty community on Tiktok. The influence of the platform on consumption due to users' reflection on their current self versus possible self when watching others in possession of relevant attributes is essential knowledge for individuals in practice in order to utilize the platform and engage with these consumers in the right way.

Furthermore, brands need to be aware of the fact that consumers are searching for authenticity and unfiltered recommendations from relatable individuals sharing their knowledge with other consumers. Thus, they are more drawn to those who embody that instead of individuals in possession of a large number of followers, with some consumers becoming increasingly reflexive towards those individuals. Therefore, utilizing the right individuals is crucial. Additionally, as these consumers are highly motivated to consume cosmetics that have gone viral on the platform, utilizing many relevant individuals and thus, being visible on the platform, is highly important as well. Accordingly, the platform's algorithm seems to be highly important as it is evident that consumers are often exposed to products there for the first time. More importantly, this often seems to lead to consumption of those products

Furthermore, as the study demonstrates, what these consumers seek with their consumption is providing the products with meanings through shared experiences with others, which creates a sense of an emotional bond. Accordingly, this has led consumers to be able to adopt the meaning of the product through consumption to enhance their identity in relation to the community they belong to. This possibility for products being able to provide social links that affect these consumers' self-identity is a crucial implication for brands to be aware of.

In conclusion, the size and spread of online communities is providing brands with new challenges and the growing beauty community on Tiktok is no exception. Therefore, we hope that the qualitative findings in this study can help to gain a deeper understanding of these consumers, leading to improved ways of reaching them.

6.2.2 Theoretical Implications

The paper covers a theoretical framework that consists of the concepts of identity construction and consumer collectives within the field of Consumer Culture Theory in the context of the beauty community on Tiktok. In order to establish a wide theoretical framework, previous research in relation to the concepts of identity construction and consumer collectives has been examined. More specifically, the paper has taken the use of social media into consideration and has thus examined the traditional concepts regarding identity construction and consumer collectives in relation to the online presence.

Furthermore, the findings of this study contribute with distinctive insights into the consumer behavior with regard to the platform Tiktok, which can be useful in order to expand the current theoretical framework in relation to consumers involvement and interaction on the platform.

Previous studies have examined how consumers construct their identities on social media. In addition, traditional concepts regarding identity have moreover been re-examined in relation to the increased online presence. Additionally, previous research has covered traditional consumer collectives concepts in relation to social media. However, previous studies have mainly examined these two concepts separately, and the current theoretical framework regarding how consumers construct their identity through communities on social media is thus rather limited. This study, therefore, contributes to the current gap in the literature.

6.3 Limitations & Future Research

6.3.1 Limitations

In light of our findings and implications, it is important to note the possible limitations of the study as well. As noted by Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson (2015), most student projects have limited resources, and thus, it is important to understand that some things need to be compromised.

First, a possible limitation was the decision to conduct the interviews in English, as the participants were all Scandinavian and thus, English was not their native language. This may have affected the outcome due to miscommunication, different meanings or the participants holding back in expressing themselves. However, we believe this also has some benefits such as gathering data from individuals coming from different countries as well as the videos they watch on the platform mostly being in English. Furthermore, as they were all Scandinavian, they come from similar cultures which makes it hard to generalize the findings in regard to other countries.

Another limitation of the study is the limited research about Tiktok, which reduces the opportunity to gather information about the platform and its users. Thus, it can be more difficult to present information in relation to how the consumers behave on the platform.

6.3.2 Future Research

This study examined how consumers construct their identity through online communities in the context of the beauty community on Tiktok. For future research, one of the major suggestions is to expand the study through a more diverse respondent group, and thus examine the research questions by including more demographics in relation to gender and nationality.

Moreover, the findings of this study encountered indicators of how the users on Tiktok may engage in the community due to their own desire of gaining visibility and publicity on the platform. This can furthermore be connected to theories regarding brand publics. However, the respondents who participated in this study were not publishing any material on Tiktok, and it was therefore not possible to get a deeper understanding of the underlying factors of who users create and publish content within the community. It is therefore of relevance to conduct further research

about Tiktok users who are publishing content, and moreover, understand the identity construction from their perspective and examine if it is aligned with the theoretical framework regarding brand publics.

The findings also suggest that consumers engage in word-of-mouth in relation to beauty products outside of the platform, and it is thus of relevance to examine how consumers potentially can build communities outside of the platform by engaging in word-of-mouth with their peers.

Additionally, the findings of this study can furthermore be implemented in relation to consumers buying behavior. Therefore, it is of relevance to dig further into the buying behavior process that occurs when a consumer purchases a beauty on Tiktok, and moreover, go deeper into the factors that influence the purchase decision.

Furthermore, it can be of relevance to conduct a netnographic study within the communities on Tiktok, with the aim of gaining more knowledge in relation to how the users interact with each other, and around products and brands. This can further contribute to an understanding of the consumer behavior on the platform.

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Appendix A

Interview Frame
Demographics: Can you describe yourself shortly, your name, age, occupation and country of origin?
Involvement with the platform How long have you been using Tiktok for? What is the main reason you use Tiktok for? How often do you use TikTok and how much time do you spend on the platform on average? Compared to other social media platforms, what do you think is different about Tiktok?
Beauty products on Tiktok How would you describe your relationship with beauty products? How do you typically find information about a beauty product? What kind of content draws your attention towards a beauty product on Tiktok? What is it that made you excited about the beauty product you purchased after seeing it on Tiktok? Can you describe an incident where TikTok has made you dislike a beauty product?
Identity creation Can you describe an incident where you felt inspired by someone in relation to beauty on Tiktok? Can you explain the feeling after purchasing the beauty product you had bought? If you didn't know about the product before purchasing, what influenced you to buy it? If you did know about the product before buying it, what convinced you to buy it?
Community How do you feel about the way people engage around skincare products on Tiktok? How do you feel about the social aspect of TikTok? How do you feel about the beauty community on TikTok?

Why did you want to try a beauty product that you saw being talked about on Tiktok?