



**SCHOOL OF
ECONOMICS AND
MANAGEMENT**

From Hybrid Rockstar to Hybrid Collective

How Meaning-Making and Collectiveness Drive the Growth of HYROX

By

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Abstract

Keywords: *HYROX, meaning-making, consumer tribes, brand communities, brand publics, user-generated content, electronic word-of-mouth.*

Thesis aim: This study explores how meaning-making and a feeling of collectiveness among HYROX participants contribute to the growth and visibility of the sport, examining how individual meaning-making, collective belonging, and digital participation operate together to drive organic growth.

Theoretical Perspective: The study draws on three streams: the effects of consumption practices (meaning-making, identity, and value co-creation), consumer collectives (consumer tribes, brand communities, and brand publics), and platform-mediated consumer interaction (platformisation, electronic word-of-mouth, and user-generated content).

Methodology: A qualitative, abductive case study design was adopted, grounded in a relativist ontology and social constructionist epistemology. Fourteen semi-structured interviews with active HYROX participants were analysed through thematic analysis.

Main Findings & Contributions: Meaning in HYROX is grounded in the activity before it attaches to the brand, and belonging is sustained through shared rituals, mutual support, and a value of accessibility that turns members into recruiters. The study extends the meaning-making literature, introduces the concept of the Hybrid Experiential Collective, in which the logics of tribes, brand communities, and brand publics operate simultaneously, and repositions user-generated content and electronic word-of-mouth as constitutive infrastructure. Together these describe participant-driven expansion, a self-reinforcing process through which meaning, belonging, shared values, and digital visibility feed into one another.

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Finally, we want to acknowledge that this thesis is a continuation of the mock thesis that we conducted during the course in Research Strategy and Methods earlier this year. Although this thesis is an extension of that report, we now delve deeper into the phenomenon of HYROX.

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1. Introduction

This chapter introduces the foundation of the study. It begins by situating HYROX within contemporary consumer culture and identifying the dynamics that motivate the research, before turning to the problematisation, research aim, and research question. The chapter then presents the relevance and motivation of the study, its empirical context, and the intended academic and practical contributions. It closes by outlining the delimitations that define the scope of the research and the structure of the chapters that follow.

1.1 Background

What drives over a million people to voluntarily run eight kilometres, complete hard functional workouts, and then post about it online?

HYROX, short for Hybrid Rockstar, has emerged as one of the most rapidly expanding participatory fitness phenomena of the past decade (Rochet, 2025). The sport is closely related to CrossFit but has different exercises, more focused on endurance than raw strength (Rochet, 2025). Combining endurance running with functional workout stations, the standardised race format requires participants to complete eight 1-kilometre runs, each followed by a functional workout station (Hyrox, n.d). Hosted indoors in large exhibition halls, the format creates an immersive and spectator-friendly environment in which athletes are visible and supported throughout the entire competition (Hyrox, n.d). The race structure remains identical worldwide, enabling global leaderboards and an annual World Championship, positioning HYROX not merely as an event, but as a globally scalable sport (Hyrox, n.d).

Since its launch in Germany in 2017, HYROX has expanded across more than 11 countries and over 30 cities (Hyrox, n.d). Participation has grown from approximately 600 racers in 2018 to an expected 1.3 million competitors during the 2025/2026 season (Hyrox, n.d). HYROX reportedly generated approximately €130 million in revenue in 2025, with forecasts suggesting revenues could exceed €200 million in 2026. Additionally, HYROX has gained sponsorships from companies like Puma and Redbull (Staunton, 2026). The rapid growth of HYROX is not only evident at race events, Staunton (2026) explains that the training format has increasingly been licensed by commercial gyms and CrossFit boxes through dedicated

group classes, structured training programs, and race simulations that replicate the HYROX experience.

According to TikTok, 620,400 posts have been published globally under the hashtag #hyrox and 261,100 under #hyroxtraining (TikTok.com, 2026a; TikTok.com, 2026b). Digital platforms enable individual consumers to create and share content related to their experiences, making participation visible beyond the event itself (Daugherty et al., 2008; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In contexts such as HYROX, participants not only take part in the competition but also share and circulate content related to their participation online, as reflected in the large volume of posts under HYROX-related hashtags (TikTok.com, 2026). As social media has become an integral part of everyday life, it increasingly shapes how experiences are documented, shared, and made visible (Berthon et al., 2012; Bolton et al., 2013).

In contemporary consumer culture, consumption is increasingly understood as a means through which individuals construct identity, create meaning, and form social connections around shared practices and experiences (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Kurzman, 2008; Rokka 2021). Within this perspective, consumers are not passive recipients of brand meaning but active participants who shape identities and social worlds through their engagement in consumption (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Grönroos, 2008).

These dimensions become particularly visible in contexts where consumption is both lived and shared. In HYROX, individual involvement unfolds across offline and digital settings, where experiences are continuously documented, circulated, and made visible by participants themselves (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Berthon et al., 2012). Understanding how individuals engage with and express their involvement across these interconnected contexts is, therefore, central to capturing how such phenomena develop and grow.

Against this background, this study examines how HYROX participants make sense of their involvement, how they carry that involvement beyond the event itself, and how, in doing so, they collectively shape something larger than any single participation intends.

1.2 Problematisation and Research Question

Within the literature on meaning-making and identity, scholars have documented how consumers use consumption to construct identity, navigate social environments, and produce

symbolic value (Belk, 1988; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Marketplace resources function as tools for identity construction (Rokka & Ulver, 2023), and value co-creation operates as a process through which consumers and brands collectively generate meaning (Grönroos, 2008; Zwick et al., 2008). This stream has also shown that consumers are not passive recipients of brand meaning but active producers of it, a shift captured in the concept of prosumption (Grönroos, 2008; Zwick et al., 2008; Grönroos, 2011). However, less attention has been directed toward how individual meaning-making connects to collective visibility and growth in emerging, experience-based consumption like HYROX.

Within the literature on consumer collectives, brand communities have been examined as voluntary groups sustaining themselves through shared consciousness, rituals, and moral responsibility (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001; Martínez-López et al., 2016). Consumer tribes are described as fluid, passion-driven groupings characterised by ephemeral gatherings and collective co-creation (Cova & Cova, 2002; Carù & Cova, 2015; Diaz Ruiz et al., 2020). Lastly, brand publics are posed as digitally mediated formations where individuals engage in isolated expressions using hashtags as vehicles for self-representation (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016; Colleoni et al., 2021; Caliandro et al., 2024a). An underlying assumption runs through much of this literature: that the collective already exists, and the research's focus is to explain how they function. Additionally, the different collectives are more or less seen as separate groupings, assuming that they function independently from one another.

Within the literature on platform-mediated consumer interaction, research on user-generated content has identified psychological and social drivers behind content creation (Daugherty et al., 2008). Studies on electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) have shown that peer-to-peer communication is perceived as more credible than brand-generated content (Srivastava et al., 2023) and that consumers who strongly identify with a brand are more inclined to share their experiences (Taylor et al., 2023). Further, research on platformisation has shown how cultural practices have moved onto digital platforms (Caliandro et al., 2024b), and how algorithms reshape how meaning is produced and circulated digitally (Duffy & Hund, 2019; Caliandro et al., 2024b). However, this stream has predominantly treated content creation as a driver of brand engagement and consumer influence (Daugherty et al., 2008; Srivastava et al., 2023), leaving room to explore how digital participation connects to identity construction.

A small but emerging body of work has begun to examine the intersection of these streams. Studies on brand publics have examined the relationship between digital self-expression and

collective visibility (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016; Caliandro et al., 2024a), and research on value co-creation has acknowledged the role of digital platforms in amplifying participant-driven meaning (Zwick et al., 2008; Rokka & Canniford, 2016). Yet these studies have tended to examine either the digital or the collective dimension, and have rarely addressed how individual meaning-making, expressed and shared digitally, affects how collectives grow organically in experience-based consumption (Zwick et al., 2008; Rokka & Canniford, 2016; Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016; Caliandro et al., 2024a).

The lack of research on the effects of the intersection between meaning-making, co-creation, consumer collectives, and the mediation of experience-based consumption is what drives this study forward. This study aims to explore how meaning-making and collectiveness among HYROX participants connects to the growth and visibility of HYROX as a sport. While participation in HYROX takes place across physical training, race events, and digital platforms, these dimensions are often examined separately in existing research. This study will bring them together, explore how individual meaning-making, collective belonging, and digital participation operate as interrelated dimensions of a single phenomenon. The potential organic growth that comes from within a collective is sought to be examined, and it is from this gap that the following research question emerged.

How does meaning-making and a feeling of collectiveness among HYROX participants contribute to the growth and visibility of the sport?

1.3 Research Aim

As presented above, the aim for this thesis is to explore how meaning-making among HYROX participants connects to the growth and visibility of HYROX as a sport.

To pursue this aim, the study will examine how participants construct meaning around their involvement, how this meaning takes shape collectively through shared experiences, a sense of belonging, and how it is expressed and circulated digitally in ways that extend participation beyond the immediate event. The study is exploratory in design, seeking depth of understanding over breadth of generalisation. Its ambition is not to establish universal claims, but to develop grounded insight into how participant-driven dynamics contribute to the growth and visibility of emerging, experience-based consumption.

1.4 Relevance and Motivation

The motivation for this study is both academic and personal. As active HYROX participants ourselves, we have experienced firsthand how involvement in the sport extends well beyond the physical event, shaping identity, fostering a sense of belonging, and generating a natural impulse to document and share the experience. This personal connection sparked an academic curiosity: why do so many participants feel compelled to share their involvement, and how does this collective behavior translate into the growth of participants that HYROX has achieved?

Beyond personal motivation, this study is relevant for several broader reasons. Participatory fitness phenomena such as HYROX represent a growing part of how people engage with health and physical activity in contemporary society. Understanding what drives participation, sustains engagement, and fosters a sense of collective belonging may contribute to broader conversations about how physical activity becomes socially embedded and self-reinforcing. Parallel to the rise of individualism (Cova & Cova, 2002) the need to understand how individuals find meaning and well-being through shared physical activity becomes increasingly relevant.

Furthermore, as people seek meaning in experiences rather than just products, understanding why and how they engage collectively around shared consumption becomes increasingly relevant. This study will offer insight into how individuals find meaning, connection, and a sense of identity through shared physical experiences, and how they carry these experiences beyond the event itself by sharing them online.

1.5 Research Context

This study is empirically grounded in a specific context that reflects both the theoretical focus and the practical conditions under which the research was conducted. The following outlines who are being studied and where the study takes place.

The study is geographically situated in western countries, mainly in Sweden, where HYROX has established a growing presence with competitions held in Stockholm and training spreading across gyms nationwide. Sweden was chosen for several reasons. Practically, it provides a coherent and bounded empirical setting that is both accessible and manageable within the scope of this research. Beyond practical considerations, Sweden represents an

active and still-expanding HYROX market, where the sport is visibly gaining traction through gym culture and training communities, making the growth dynamics of community formation particularly observable. Furthermore, Sweden's high social media penetration and the cultural prominence of health and fitness as lifestyle values make it a particularly relevant national context in which to examine how participation is expressed and shared digitally.

1.6 Research Purpose and Aimed Contributions

This study is intended to be relevant for both academic and practical audiences, and contributes primarily in three theoretical directions.

The first contribution is directed at the literature on meaning-making. While existing research has extensively documented how consumers construct meaning through consumption (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Kurzman, 2008), this study extends that understanding by examining how meaning-making operates in an emerging, experience-based consumption where physical participation and digital engagement are simultaneously present. It explores whether, and how, meaning-making in such contexts functions as a mechanism that extends beyond the individual, connecting to broader processes of collective visibility and growth.

The second contribution is directed at the literature on consumer collectives, encompassing brand communities (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001; Martínez-López et al., 2016), consumer tribes (Carù & Cova, 2015; Diaz Ruiz et al., 2020), and brand publics (Arvidsson & Caliendo, 2016; Colleoni et al., 2021). By delving into participants' experiences on the collectiveness of the activity, we hope to gain understanding on how the collective organises, what drives them, and what the primary glue between them are. This will then contribute to how formations may operate simultaneously and fluidly in an emerging, experience-based consumption. By challenging the assumption that the collectives are distinct and stable formations, and by exploring the formative and growth-oriented dimensions of such collective engagement, we hope to further add to the stream.

The third contribution is directed at the literature on platform-mediated consumer interaction (Caliandro et al., 2024b; Caliandro et al., 2025), specifically user-generated content (Daugherty et al., 2008; van Dijck, 2009) and electronic word-of-mouth (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Srivastava et al., 2023). This study extends that stream by examining UGC and eWOM as meaning-making practices, exploring how digital participation connects to identity

and collective formation rather than functioning solely as a communication mechanism. This will be done by conveying how participants' interactions with HYROX online affect them, their motivation, and their interaction with the sport.

Beyond these individual contributions, the study aims to advance understanding at the intersection of these three streams. By examining how meaning-making, collective formation, and digital participation operate together in an experience-based consumption, it explores a dynamic that each stream has only accounted for in isolation, and in doing so, hopes to open conceptual ground that future research may develop further.

From a practical standpoint, the study also speaks to brand managers, marketers, and organisations in experience-based industries who seek to understand how communities form and grow without relying primarily on paid media or firm-generated communication. As organic, participant-driven growth becomes increasingly central to how brands scale, understanding its underlying social and cultural logic becomes not only academically interesting but practically valuable.

1.7 Delimitations

This study is subject to several deliberate delimitations that define the boundaries of the research and reflect the choices made in relation to its scope, context, and methodology.

First, the study is geographically limited to Western countries. While HYROX is a global phenomenon, the empirical material is drawn from primarily Swedish individuals. This choice was made on practical grounds and to ensure a coherent and manageable empirical setting. Although three people from other western countries are interviewed, their insights that may vary from the Swedish ones can not be generalizable for their specific country.

Second, the study is delimited to individuals who have competed in at least one HYROX event. Perspectives of non-participants, casual observers, or individuals with limited direct involvement are not included. This criterion was applied to ensure that all participants have first-hand experience of the sport, which is central to the study's focus on meaning-making around involvement.

Third, the study does not examine the strategic intentions, marketing activities, or organisational processes of HYROX as a company. The focus is placed entirely on the

participant perspective. The study, therefore, does not aim to evaluate the effectiveness of HYROX's marketing strategies.

Fourth, the study does not seek to provide a comparative analysis across other sports, fitness communities, or brand contexts. While parallels may exist with other participatory fitness formats, such comparisons fall outside the scope of this research. The aim is instead to develop a deep, contextually grounded understanding of HYROX as a specific empirical setting.

1.8 Outline of the Thesis

This thesis is structured across six chapters, each building progressively toward an answer to the overarching research question of how HYROX participants construct meaning and collectiveness around their involvement in ways that shape the growth and visibility of the brand.

Chapter one establishes the foundation of the study. It situates HYROX within contemporary consumer culture, presents the problematisation and research question, and outlines the study's relevance, context, purpose, and delimitations.

Chapter two presents the literature review, which serves as the conceptual backbone of the analysis. The review is organised around three interconnected bodies of knowledge. The first, the effects of shared consumption practices, draws on Consumer Culture Theory to examine meaning-making, identity and value co-creation as central dimensions of consumption. The second, consumer collectives, introduces the theoretical landscape of marketplace cultures and the specific formations of consumer tribes, brand communities, and brand publics through which collective engagement is understood. The third, platform-mediated consumer interaction, examines how digital platforms reconfigure consumer culture through platformisation, electronic word-of-mouth, and user-generated content. The chapter concludes by presenting the conceptual lens through which the empirical material is interpreted.

Chapter three details the methodological choices underpinning the study. Beginning with the philosophical frameworks, the chapter moves through the research design and approach, sampling strategy, and data collection methods, encompassing semi-structured interviews. It then addresses data analysis, including thematic analysis, before turning to ethical considerations, research quality, and methodological limitations.

Chapter four presents the findings and analysis, organised around four themes that emerged directly from the empirical material. Each theme is interpreted in relation to the conceptual framework established in chapter two, allowing for deeper analysis of individual meaning-making, collective belonging, and digital participation.

Chapter five discusses the findings in relation to existing literature, organised around the three theoretical streams introduced in chapter two. The chapter reflects on what the empirical material confirms and adds to current understandings of meaning-making, consumer collectives, and platform-mediated consumer interaction, and considers how these dimensions interact in experience-based consumption.

Chapter six then concludes the thesis by synthesising the key insights, addressing the research question directly, and identifying directions for future research, alongside practical implications and the study's main limitations.

2. Theoretical Background

In this chapter, the chosen literature streams will be presented. First, we will delve into the effects of consumption practices, where meaning-making, identity, and co-creation will be explained. Second, consumer collectives will be introduced, and marketplace cultures, consumer tribes, brand communities, and brand publics will be conceptualised. Lastly, platform-mediated consumer interaction will be examined through platformisation, user-generated content, and electronic word-of-mouth.

2.1 The Effects of Consumption Practices

The stream of literature on the effects of shared practices is foundational for this research, as it shifts the focus from HYROX as merely a commercial event to a social practice where participants actively construct meaning and value. By understanding meaning-making through consumer culture theory, we can review how athletes create and use symbolic and mythic resources to create personal value beyond physical performance (Rokka, 2021; Arnould et al., 2023). Furthermore, the concept of value co-creation, where consumers actively create value towards the brand, is essential for explaining how participants' engagement in HYROX becomes a form of “free labor” that builds the brand’s cultural capital (Grönroos, 2008; Zwick et al., 2008; Grönroos, 2011).

2.1.1 Meaning-Making and Identity

Within the field of Consumer Culture Theory, meaning-making can be understood as a passive perception of marketing messages, but also as a dynamic, co-creating process where the marketplace is seen as the primary source of symbolic and mythic resources (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Meaning-making draws on the human drive to understand the world around us, and our understandings and interpretations of objects depend on the meanings we associate with those objects (Kurzman, 2008). Furthermore, meaning-making is widely constructed through cultural myths and ideologies that work like stories, helping consumers shape meaning, values, and ideals while making sense of their world (Arnould et al., 2023). Myths also play a central role in helping individuals make sense and solve the anxieties they may feel about their identity, for example, regarding femininity or masculinity (Rokka, 2021). Additionally, Rokka (2021) explains the concept of ideoscapes, which is the “symbolic universes” that brands create to provide a base for new meaning systems where identities can form.

Rather than viewing consumption as solely an economic transaction, Arnould and Thompson (2005) explain that consumer culture theory approaches it as a social practice where individuals give objects and experiences meaning to help construct their identities, as well as navigate their social environments. Consequently, the interdisciplinary field of consumer culture is a network in which material, economic, and social possessions function not only as meaning-makers but also as a blueprint of culture (Arnould et al., 2023).

Our way of making sense of the world also plays a crucial role in the way we construct our identity (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Rokka, 2021). Belk (1988) suggests that our possessions are a big part of our meaning systems, and further states that “we are what we have” (p.139). The concept of the extended self explains the process that occurs when individuals incorporate objects, persons, and places into their identity. This often happens through intentional and active processes where knowledge, control, mastery, or creation pave the way for the extension to become part of the identity (Belk, 1988). Within the contemporary view, identity is instead seen as a structured narrative, where attributes are converted from descriptions to linked memories that become a part of a story that creates our identity (Ahuvia, 2005).

2.1.2 Value Co-Creation

Value co-creation has its origin in the concept of co-creation, which is explained as the process where consumers and brands collectively carry out activities that generate value for the brand (Pongsakornrunsilp & Schroeder, 2011; Benson et al., 2021). Further, value is explained as something that results in benefits, but against some kind of sacrifice (Grönroos, 2011). The concept of value co-creation represents a paradigm shift within the field of marketing, where the view of how value is created has moved from the previous belief that value is embedded in products to the view that value is created by customers when they are using the products (Grönroos, 2008; Grönroos, 2011). Grönroos (2008) emphasises that the move from a “goods logic” to a “service logic” is not something new, but that the underlying principles go back to the 1970s, where products were merely seen as resources for value creation.

Current literature explains co-creation through two main fields: service-dominated logic and consumer culture theory (Grönroos, 2008; Pongsakornrunsilp & Schroeder, 2011; Grönroos, 2011; Carù & Cova, 2015). Service-dominant logic states that the consumer has realised their potential to create value through their knowledge (Pongsakornrunsilp & Schroeder, 2011),

and the view follows the model of value-in-use, rather than value-in-exchange (Grönroos, 2008). Further, Zwick et al. (2008) address the service-dominant logic in their article, stating that the concept is used by marketers to take control over consumers and the market. The authors explain that marketers use co-creation and service-dominant logic to control, while at the same time creating the illusion of the consumers as free and independent in their consumption practices (Zwick et al., 2008).

The new approach of customers as active producers of value works with and through the freedom of the customer by providing them with platforms for practice, where they can be creative while still being managed by marketers (Zwick et al., 2008). The market has gone from a goods-dominated logic to a service-dominant one, which Zwick et al. (2008) explain as a market where goods only function as intermediate products used in value-creation processes.

In their article, Zwick et al. (2008) present the theme of free labor that consumers are captured in today's marketplace, where co-creation works like a governmental discourse. Consumers are seen as active producers of value with competencies and knowledge that are captured and exploited through their work. Further, the authors explain that user-generated websites, like Facebook or YouTube, are perfect platforms for free labour when consumers produce content that values the company, but that the free labour can also take shape in ways like self-service (Zwick et al., 2008). In addition, Miao and Yu (2026) also address the co-creation of value online. In their article, the authors take the example of small and medium-sized enterprises and how digital platforms help create value for brands. Digital platforms help businesses reach beyond their initial target group, with expanding geographic coverage, resulting in a larger set of stakeholders being reached (Miao & Yu, 2026).

Within Consumer Culture Theory, prosumption is a central concept. Prosumption is defined as the intertwined view of individuals as both consumers and producers (Arnould et al., 2023). Within marketing, a shift has been seen in how consumers are perceived. Consumers have gone from passive market actors to active co-creators of meanings (Zwick et al., 2008; Rokka, 2021). Through cultural capital (i.e., knowledge, skills), individuals engage in co-creation processes in which they give meaning to products and services (Arnould et al., 2023). Further, Rokka (2021) explains that neither brands nor customers can fully control the production of meaning towards brands, products, and services.

Further, Consumer Culture Theory emphasises the collective co-creation of value that is shared within a group of consumers (Carù & Cova, 2015). In their article about value co-creation in collective practices, Carù and Cova (2015) came to the understanding that value co-creation is not guaranteed, but rather the result of some consumption practices that are both relatively unmanageable and ambivalent. The unmanageable nature of collective social dynamics can create ambivalence in the value creation if the company's and the collectives' practices are not aligned, which can result in value-destruction rather than value co-creation (Carù & Cova, 2015).

On that note, although a big part of the literature on value co-creation views it as an asset for companies, several scholars present a critical perspective (Zwick et al., 2008; Cova & Dallı, 2009; Grönroos, 2011; Carù & Cova, 2015). First of all, Carù & Cova (2015) present value-destruction as a possible outcome of co-creation between producers and consumers, noting that interaction can generate negative consequences following misaligned practices. Furthermore, the working consumer is presented as the dark side of co-creation (Zwick et al., 2008; Cova & Dallı, 2009). The concept of the working consumer works through co-creation and leads to double exploitation (Cova & Dallı, 2009), where firms benefit from the free labor (Zwick et al., 2008) of consumers, while still charging consumers for the co-created values. Lastly, Grönroos (2011) presents his critique against value co-creation, stating that the saying that customers are always a part of the value co-creation is too simplistic. The author explains that the concept of value-in-use emphasises that customers are the sole creators of value through their usage of products, and that brands are rather value facilitators (Grönroos, 2011).

2.2 Consumer Collectives

As this paper aims to explain how individual participation aggregates into a larger social movement that drives the growth of HYROX, it is vital to gain an understanding of consumer collectives. This section allows us to see HYROX within various marketplace cultures, such as consumer tribes, centered on a shared passion (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016; Cova et al., 2023), brand communities, building identities and meanings (Rokka & Ulver, 2023; Martínez-López et al., 2016; Cova et al., 2023), or brand publics, formed through isolated digital expressions (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016).

2.2.1 Marketplace Cultures

Within Consumer Culture Theory, marketplace cultures are an umbrella term for the different systems of meanings, practices, values, and social relationships that individuals engage in with others who share the same consumption practices and interests (Arnould et al., 2023). Further, research on marketplace cultures has had the aim to uncover in what ways people feel solidarity with others, and how they come to create their own cultural world through shared consumption practices (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Cova et al. (2023) and Cova (1997) both state that our marketplace society is built by different, ever-changing, complex marketplace cultures that give rise to, among other things, shared practices and activities. The emergence of these collectives, the *re-tribalisation* of society, builds on neo-liberalism and came as an answer to industrialisation and urbanisation, which resulted in the consumer-centric society we live in today (Cova, 1997; Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Cova et al., 2023). Cova (1997), Cova and Cova (2002) explain that although our society is seen as individualistic and fragmented, it can, in fact, be seen that a reverse movement is taking shape. A movement where the social dynamics within our society are a way of re-creating the social links (Cova & Cova, 2002).

Marketplace cultures originate in a feeling of isolation, thus consumers seek collectiveness and solidarity among others sharing the same interests and passions (Cova, 1997; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Additionally, Arnould and Thompson (2005) explain that “marketplace cultures often define their symbolic boundaries through an ongoing opposition to dominant (i.e., middle-class) lifestyle norms and mainstream consumer sensibilities” (p.874). They further emphasise that research has focused on the youth and that it has been shown how experiential experience-based consumption promotes shared values, meanings, and beliefs (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). The era of marketplace cultures allows individuals to partake in fluid connections through their cultural capital, without any required loyalty to the group (Cova, 1997; Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Cova et al., 2023). Cova (1997) further explains that the need to belong to a postmodern consumer tribe has, for some, become more important than belonging to a certain social class.

Consumer Culture Theory and the concept of marketplace cultures do not see consumers primarily as cultural bearers, but as cultural producers. Within groups, the emphasis lies on the feeling of social solidarity through shared consumption practices and interests (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Depending on the marketplace culture, meaning-making takes form

differently. In consumer tribes, meaning is created through shared passions and results in a feeling of “we-ness”. Brand communities revolve around a specific brand rather than a passion, and meaning is created through shared rituals, parallel universes, values, etc. In brand publics, a certain brand is also at the center, but meaning is created mainly through digital platforms (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Cova et al., 2023).

Cova (1997) presents the concept of linking value, explaining it as the postmodern marketplace culture's way of linking value to product, not for their functionality, but rather for their ability to facilitate social interaction with the group. Further, he presents an alternative view on marketplace cultures, meaning that individuals prioritise “being with” over “consuming with” others, and that product solely acts as totems for the tribe (Cova, 1997).

2.2.2 Consumer Tribes

Cova et al. (2023) explain that consumer tribes are groups of individuals that share a passion for the same thing. Rather than focusing on a specific brand, like other marketplace cultures, consumer tribes often have a passion for a certain activity or practice (Arvidsson & Caliendo, 2016). Consumer tribes are characterised as unstructured, unhierarchical, fluid, and short-lived groupings (Carù & Cova, 2015; Diaz Ruiz et al., 2020). Further, consumer tribes do not require their members to commit; thus, members can join and leave the tribe as they please (Diaz Ruiz et al., 2020). Within our society, tribes are well-suited as they allow individuals to feel liberated while still fostering a sense of social connection. In postmodern consumer tribes, members can freely choose whether or not they want to, first and foremost, partake in a tribe, but they are also allowed to partake in more than one tribe at a time (Cova & Cova, 2002).

Although one of the main characteristics of consumer tribes is their short life span, Diaz Ruiz et al. (2020) state that this is not always the case. The authors explain that there are tribes that have stayed active for decades. Although tribes can stay active for longer periods, the gatherings that they encounter are ephemeral and last for a short period of time (Carù & Cova, 2015; Diaz Ruiz et al., 2020). In their article about co-creating the collective experience, Carù and Cova (2015) share their findings on Arlington Park, a horse-racing track in Chicago. They state that during the race days, people gather to escape the stress of their everyday lives, and that the temporary experience they participate in results in co-creation, rituals, and collectiveness. Further, the authors explain that the temporary and fast-paced nature of the

activity is what makes the experience so intense, resulting in members falling under a “collective spell” (Carù & Cova, 2015, p. 284).

Diaz Ruiz et al. (2020) express that when consumer tribes gather, it is often in new constellations, and that many tribes need external resources for their encounters. They take the example of mountaineers, who are dependent on both equipment and guides to be able to fulfil their experiences. Both Diaz Ruiz et al. (2020) and Carù and Cova (2015) explain how tribes disappear and emerge during time periods, and also, that within the tribes, smaller sub-tribes emerge. The sub-tribes can emerge through shared sub-interests or because they meet during the same time span (Carù & Cova, 2015; Diaz Ruiz et al., 2020). Additionally, the reassembly of tribes can be explained through an entrepreneurial perspective, as Diaz Ruiz et al (2020) explain, creative engagement in the activity of the tribe makes them prosumers of value.

However, Mamali et al. (2018) challenge some assumptions about consumer tribes. The authors mean that the characteristic of tribes being unhierarchical and structureless is rather a fiction than a fact. They mean that in reality, hierarchies often form organically within tribes, based on the effort, competencies, social capital, and the meanings members bring (Mamali et al., 2018). Further, Carù and Cova (2015) express that although value most often is the outcome of tribes, value co-destruction can occur, which either harms the collective or the brands.

2.2.3 Brand Communities

The concept of community came from a place of critique against modernity, and is explained as a voluntary group of people sharing the same interest as well as having a common goal (Martínez-López et al., 2016; Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001). The number of people in a community can range from just a small number to thousands, and within the concept of community, one branch is that of brand communities (Martínez-López et al., 2016). Brand communities are, in relation to neo-tribes, not local, but free from geographic boundaries (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001). Muñiz and O’Guinn (2001) further present findings from their article, noting that brand communities are rather imagined communities than real ones, situated in a specific context of consumption around a single service or product.

Much of the existing body of literature on brand communities explains the concept through identity (Martínez-López et al., 2016; Cova et al., 2023). Martínez-López et al. (2016) use

social identity theory to explain the motivations behind why people engage in brand communities. They state that people develop identities based on the group to which they belong, and that the shared identity helps them identify with others (Martínez-López et al., 2016). Further, consumer culture theory addresses the identity projects that members of brand communities take part in (Rokka & Ulver, 2023). Consumers' identity projects include them using symbolic brand meanings and material products to construct their sense of self (Martínez-López et al., 2016; Rokka & Ulver, 2023).

Within the existing body of literature, three core markers that characterise brand communities are found: consciousness of kind, shared rituals and traditions, and the sense of moral responsibility. Consciousness of kind refers to the feeling of connection that members of a community feel against one another (Martínez-López et al., 2016; Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001; Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016). This is presented as the most important element, and Muñiz & O'Guinn (2001) emphasise that it includes more than just attitudes; it is a shared knowledge of belonging. The second element consists of shared rituals and traditions, which are explained as the social practices that reproduce and transmit the community's culture. Here, celebrating the brand's history, or using specific greeting behaviors among members included. Lastly, the sense of moral responsibility works as a driving mechanism for the community, especially during hard times (Martínez-López et al., 2016; Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001; Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016).

Further, brand communities are to be seen as a business strategy rather than a marketing strategy, something that Fournier and Lee (2009) explain as a fundamental insight that companies need to get in order to gain maximum benefits from the community. The company should ground all of its decisions from the perspective of the community and see them as an extraordinary asset (Fournier & Lee, 2009). If done right, the members of the community will become prosumers of value, which further indicates the shift of focus of decision-makers to the communities (Martínez-López et al., 2016; Arnould et al., 2023).

2.2.4 Brand Publics

The concept of brand publics originates from the concept of publics, which was first introduced by Gabriel Tarde. Tarde explained that the difference between ordinary crowds and publics lies in the attention directed to a certain kind of mediation (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016; Colleoni et al., 2021). Arvidsson and Caliandro (2016) later introduced the concept of brand publics as a type of marketplace culture that occurs on social media. They further

explain that this type of organising of people differs from the more commonly used *brand community* in the way that brand publics are not built on continuous interaction or collectiveness, but rather on isolated expressions (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016). The common denominator between brand communities and brand publics is that they both revolve around a specific brand, but there are three main differences (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016; Cova et al., 2023; Caliandro et al., 2025). Firstly, brand communities focus on interaction, while brand publics focus on mediation. Secondly, brand communities interact through deliberation, while brand publics reflect the individual willingness to share their experience. Lastly, brand communities create shared meanings, identities, and values, whereas brand publics do not (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016; Colleoni et al., 2021; Caliandro et al., 2025).

Brand publics do, as stated before, revolve around a specific brand, but they do not interact with the brand in question. Instead, social media and hashtags are used as a facilitator for people's experiences, thoughts, and feelings about the brand (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016; Colleoni et al., 2021). Brand publics shed light on the importance of social media for brands and how it can be used to ease consumer-consumer-brand interactions, for example, through user-generated content (Cova et al., 2023). Compared to other marketplace cultures, individuals who engage in brand publics do not have their focus on the interaction with others, but rather use the culture as a way of maintaining and managing their self-representation (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016).

Normally, marketplace cultures develop a common identity, shared values, meanings, and practices, although this is not the case for brand publics. Shared identity and a feeling of “we-ness” are often drivers for people to engage in marketplace cultures, but in brand publics, publicity and visibility are the reasons for it (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016). Since individuals' motivations are to share their experience, feelings, and point of view of the brand, brand publics can provide useful insights for brand managers, but could also fragment a strong brand narrative (Cova et al., 2023). Colleoni et al. (2021) explain that for a brand public to develop, the frame (e.g., the hashtag) needs to develop from an empty signifier. The empty signifier is fluid and lacks specified meanings, allowing for multiple interpretations to take place under the same signifier. The empty signifiers can be paired with floating signifiers, which are narrower terms induced with meanings that let individuals create meaning in different contexts depending on their participation (Colleoni et al., 2021).

On this note, Caliandro et al. (2024a) identify three types of participation in brand publics: brand loving, visibility seeking, and everyday storytelling. Brand loving is the participation form where individuals express their appreciation and emotional bond to a specific brand. The second participation, visibility seeking, is explained as individuals hijacking the brand and the hashtag to increase their own visibility. Lastly, everyday storytelling is created when individuals create a narrative around the brand and hashtag, making them meaningful and remarkable for the individual (Caliandro et al., 2024a).

2.2.5 Overview of Key Dimensions in Consumer Collectives

Based on the literature on consumer collectives, table 1 was created, showcasing some of the attributes that characterise consumer tribes (Carù & Cova, 2015; Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016; Diaz Ruiz et al., 2020), brand communities (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001; Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016; Martínez-López et al., 2016), and brand publics (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016; Colleoni et al., 2021).

Table 1 categorises these collectives across several key dimensions, for example core focus, membership structure, and interaction type. We did this to highlight how social bonds and digital mediation differs across each formation type. For instance, brand communities core focus is long-term commitment to a brand (Cova, 1997), consumer tribes focus on shared passions and the temporary belonging (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016; Diaz Ruiz et al., 2020), while brand publics focus on mediation and visibility (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016; Colleoni et al., 2021; Caliandro et al., 2025). This table serves as a conceptual foundation for analysing the HYROX collective.

Table 1. Consumer collectives' characteristics

Category	Consumer Tribes	Brand Communities	Brand Publics
Core Focus	Shared lifestyle, experience, passions, rituals	Long-term commitment to a specific brand	Visibility, mediation, participation in networked publics around a brand
Primary Glue Between Members	Shared passions, experiences, symbolic consumption	Shared consciousness of kind and loyalty to the brand	Attention, content circulation, interaction in public digital spaces

Category	Consumer Tribes	Brand Communities	Brand Publics
Relationship to Brand	A brand may be secondary or one symbolic resource among many	Brand is the central organising force	Brand is a media object/topic around which publics gather
Membership Structure	Fluid, shifting, loosely bounded	More stable, clearer insiders/outside	Open, scalable, algorithmically expanded
Interaction Type	Rituals, gatherings, events, embodied experiences	Ongoing member interaction, support, and traditions	Networked discourse, hashtags, reactions, spectatorship
Typical Spaces	Events, gyms, meetups, races	Forums, clubs, official groups, recurring spaces	Social Media Platforms

2.3 Platform-Mediated Consumer Interaction

Digital marketing is relevant to this study as it provides a context in which contemporary consumer interaction and communication increasingly take place. Digital platforms enable consumers to create, share, and exchange content, which shapes how brands and consumption practices are discussed and made visible (van Dijck, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Caliandro et al., 2025). Therefore, the following sections introduce platformisation, electronic word-of-mouth, and user-generated content to outline the mechanisms through which consumer activity is mediated and circulated in digital environments (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Daugherty et al., 2008; Rokka, 2021; Caliandro et al., 2024b).

2.3.1 The Platformisation of Consumer Culture

Since the turn of the millennium, a transition from traditional digital spaces to contemporary platforms has taken place, something that Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) call Web 2.0. With Web 2.0, social media also entered our world as a group of digital applications built for users to create, share, and exchange content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The rise of social media has liquified consumer culture, meaning that meaning-making and consumption practices have now moved from the traditional marketplace to a digital one (Rokka, 2021).

The transition to a digital marketplace is often defined as the platformisation of consumer culture, which can be explained as the process by which our cultural practices and imaginations have been re-organised onto digital platforms (Caliandro et al., 2024b). The evolution of our lives moving from a real to a digital world is seen as moving into a data infrastructure, where platforms are designed to aggregate, monetise, and govern our interactions with others (Caliandro et al., 2024b; Caliandro et al., 2025). Caliandro et al. (2024b) state that there are three parts of the platformisation of consumer culture. The first one is concentration, which is explained as the personalisation of content on media platforms. The personalisation engages people and concentrates them in one space, which helps with behavior prediction (Caliandro et al., 2024b). Poell et al. (2019) explains this personalisation as part of what they call *re-programmable digital infrastructures* that make and shape interaction between end-users. The second part is the fragmentation, which is a result of the focus of interests and meditation. Lastly is the contingent nature of platforms, which let consumers share their opinions and feelings about something in an ever-changing environment (Caliandro et al., 2024b). Further, Caliandro et al. (2025) explain that the fact that platforms personalise the social environment through algorithms both enhances the concentration and fragmentation of individuals.

The platformisation has also reconfigured how we create meaning. Rokka and Canniford (2016) argue that digitalisation, and social media in particular, have reinforced the co-creation dynamic between brands and consumers. By using personalisation techniques, *hypernudges*, i.e. realities, are created online in real time, each perfect for the end-user (Airoldi & Rokka, 2022). Further, Caliandro et al. (2024b) explain the concept of digital consumer imaginary as a collective way to make sense of new technologies by micro-representing brands, products, and services through content.

With the move to the digital sphere, visibility has become a central concept. Duffy and Hund (2019) state that the prompt for individuals to put themselves out there (on the internet) promotes visibility as a way to connect with others, cultivate one's career, and so on. Although visibility is often presented as something that leads to positive outcomes, the authors point out that it also can lead to a form of visibility labor, where individuals feel like they have to devote a certain amount of time and energy to their self-presentation to remain visible in the algorithm (Duffy & Hund, 2019).

2.3.2 Electronic Word-of-Mouth

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is defined as any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, made available to a multitude of people via the internet (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Srivastava et al., 2023). Traditional offline word-of-mouth has long been recognised as a significant factor influencing consumers' purchasing decisions (Richins & Root, 1988). With the emergence of the internet, consumers have gained greater access to unbiased product information shared by other users, while also being able to contribute their own consumption-related advice through electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

eWOM allows communication across geographical barriers and provides global brands with viable means of connecting with consumers and reaching their target market segments globally (Taylor et al., 2023). Research indicates that eWOM and customer brand engagement operate in a reciprocal relationship, whereby customers' initial brand engagement is often driven by the eWOM generated by other customers, which stimulates further engagement and eWOM generation (Srivastava et al., 2023). Furthermore, customer-to-customer communication is widely perceived as more credible than brand-generated content, as consumers tend to view peer recommendations as more trustworthy than businesses posting about their own offerings (Srivastava et al., 2023).

2.3.3 User-Generated Content

User-generated content (UGC) refers to media content created by the general public rather than by paid media professionals, distributed through digital platforms to audiences extending beyond immediate social networks (Daugherty et al., 2008; van Dijck, 2009). This shift toward a user-centric model reflects a broader transformation in which individuals use digital technologies to express themselves and actively participate in cultural production (van Dijck, 2009). UGC encompasses a wide range of formats, including photographs, videos, reviews, and commentary, and has become a central mechanism through which consumers engage with and communicate about brands in online environments (Daugherty et al., 2008; van Dijck, 2009). While the proliferation of UGC is partly enabled by technological developments, the motivations underlying its creation are primarily psychological and social in nature (Daugherty et al., 2008).

One area of research explores the psychological and social drivers behind UGC creation through the lens of functional theory (Daugherty et al., 2008). Daugherty et al. (2008) found that a consumer's attitude toward UGC is a crucial mediator between the consumption of content and the eventual creation of it. Their study identifies that two specific personality functions, ego-defensive and social, possess the highest explanatory power for why users create content (Daugherty et al., 2008). They describe that ego-defensive function relates to the need to protect one's self-image or minimise internal insecurities, while the social function drives users to engage in activities viewed favorably by others and to seek a sense of community (Daugherty et al., 2008).

2.4 Conceptual Framework

This study does not apply a single overarching theoretical framework. Following Eileen Fischer's notion of emergent theorising, where data is interpreted in light of the research question and the relevant literature rather than through an imported theoretical construct (Figueiredo et al., 2017). The literature reviewed in this chapter serves as a conceptual background that informs the analysis.

Within this approach, the literature on the effects of shared consumption practices serves as the foundational layer of the conceptual lens. The concepts of meaning-making (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Arnould et al., 2023), identity (Belk, 1988; Ahuvia, 2005), and value co-creation (Grönroos, 2008; Zwick et al., 2008) provide the primary perspective through which participant experiences are interpreted, directing attention toward how individuals actively construct meaning, identity, and produce value through their involvement in HYROX, rather than merely consuming it.

Building on this, the literature on consumer collectives offers more specific conceptual tools for understanding how meaning becomes collectively organised. The concepts of marketplace cultures (Cova, 1997; Cova & Cova, 2002; Arnould & Thompson, 2005), consumer tribes (Carù & Cova, 2015; Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016; Diaz Ruiz et al., 2020), brand communities (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001; Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016; Martínez-López et al., 2016), and brand publics (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016; Colleoni et al., 2021) allows us to investigate the HYROX collective without putting a label on the collective as a specific marketplace culture.

This lens is further complemented by the literature on platform-mediated consumer interaction, particularly platformisation (Caliandro et al., 2024b; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Caliandro et al., 2025), electronic word-of-mouth (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Srivastava et al., 2023), and user-generated content (Daugherty et al., 2008; van Dijck, 2009), which provides conceptual grounding for understanding how meaning is expressed, shared, and amplified through digital participation.

Together, these bodies of literature will function as the conceptual background against which the empirical material is read, in line with what Figueiredo et al. (2017) describe as interpreting data in light of the research question and the topic-specific conversation that preceded it.

3. Method

In this chapter, the methodological principles of our research will be motivated and explained. Beginning with the underlying philosophical assumptions and the selection of an abductive, qualitative design, we will later delve into the primary data collection technique chosen to gather the material, sampling technique, and data analysis for interpreting. Furthermore, we will examine the ethical considerations and quality measures applied while recognising the study's inherent limitations. Ultimately, this overview will provide a transparent basis for understanding the logic behind our investigation.

3.1 Philosophical Approach

The philosophical framework is built on ontology and epistemology, which refer to the system of beliefs and assumptions about our world and the knowledge in it (Saunders et al., 2023). Since all research results in new information, Saunders et al. (2023) explain that it is vital for all researchers to underpin their philosophical framework beforehand, so that the assumptions researchers are met with are in line with their view of the world. Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) explain that ontology refers to a researcher's view of what exists in the nature of the world and how reality is constructed and understood. Since this research aims to investigate how HYROX participants construct meaning around their involvement and how these individual processes connect to the growth, the ontology needs to be one that sees the world as subjective. Ontology is divided into four different positions, one of which is relativism. The relativist position argues that there is no single objective truth and that, depending on the observer's viewpoint, results can be interpreted differently (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021). Thus, relativist ontology was the foundation of this research. In this context, the “reality” of HYROX was not an objective, static truth, but was instead composed of subjective perceptions and interpretations shaped by the athlete's personal and social contexts. By acknowledging these multiple, socially constructed realities (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021), we hoped to better understand how individual meaning-making aggregates into the expansion of the sport.

Consistent with this, our epistemology was rooted in the social constructionist view. Epistemology explains the origin of knowledge, and social constructionism is based on the foundation that knowledge is socially constructed through shared interactions, meanings, and discussions (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021; Saunders et al., 2023). We argued that the knowledge

and reality of the HYROX community was formed through shared interactions, discussions, and the collective meaning-making occurred across both physical and digital spaces, which made the social constructionist view suitable for this thesis.

To capture these subjective perceptions and explain how they aggregate into a broader social movement, a qualitative research method was fitting for gaining the required depth of understanding.

3.2 Research Approach

In research, the researcher approaches theories and data in different ways, building frameworks through which the two interact and produce knowledge (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). There are three primary logics: deduction, induction, and abduction (Saunders et al., 2023). Both Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) and Saunders et al. (2023) explain that deductive reasoning is a top-down approach, where specific things are analysed based on certain theories. Deduction further derives hypotheses, which go through a great amount of testing in order to reach a result (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). The inductive approach is a bottom-up approach, where the research instead starts by collecting a body of data in order to explore a certain phenomenon, and then builds a theory or framework based on the observations made (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021; Saunders et al., 2023). Lastly, abduction is placed in the middle of these two, allowing the research to move between theory and data to interpret, analyse, and compare (Saunders et al., 2023).

This study applied an abductive research logic, and Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) emphasise that transferability and reasoning are abduction's main characteristics. Abduction allows for a continuous dialogue to take place between empirical data and theory, which lets remain reflexive in their creation of narratives (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The combination of interpretation and theories means that insights can emerge through the dialogue (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). While the literature streams on shared practices, consumer collectives, and digital marketing presented the initial conceptual lens for this research, abduction allowed for further openness in the analysis of the data. In this research, abduction allowed for theoretically grounded research where context-specific meanings and emergent patterns regarding brand growth and visibility were fully accounted for.

3.3 Research Design

Research design is a strategy that outlines the principles of the research methodology for a given study, articulates methods for all stages of the process, and justifies their appropriateness in relation to both the research question and the specific context (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021). In alignment with this study's philosophical foundations and the exploratory aim to understand the interconnected contexts of offline and digital participation, a qualitative research design was applied. Qualitative research is especially suitable for studies that aim to understand how individuals interpret and make sense of complex social experiences and phenomena (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021). Since this research aimed to uncover how HYROX participants construct meaning around their involvement in ways that shape the growth and visibility of the brand and community, it was essential to capture the subjective interpretations and interactive processes. By prioritising deep understanding over the breadth of generalisation, the qualitative research approach gained interpretive knowledge, meaning that information regarding the subjective perceptions and attitudes (Kaiser, 2024) that the athletes' experienced could be collected.

Within the qualitative method, the aim is to investigate and come to an understanding of a specific social situation, interaction, or group (Creswell, 2009). In order to gain a deep understanding of a specific social context, which Saunders et al. (2023) argue is in constant change, researchers need to study the situation in detail to be able to uncover how the realities are being created and experienced. Since this study sought to uncover the consumer collective of HYROX, and the interplay between physical training and digital participation, the study required a design that can provide a rich insight into these things. This led to the selection of a case study design, which is described as a way of investigating a phenomenon in its real-life context (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

The HYROX community was, in this research, seen as an instrumental case study. Stake (2006) distinguishes between intrinsic and instrumental case studies. He explains that intrinsic case studies have the sole interest in the case itself, while instrumental case studies aim to use the specific case to develop broader insights or general principles (Stake, 2006). Here, HYROX served as an arena to investigate how participant-driven dynamics drove consumer collectives' formation, growth, and collective visibility in experience-based contexts. By choosing to focus solely on one case, which Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) explain fits into the

constructionist epistemology, the study aimed to develop an in-depth understanding of the convergence of meaning-making and co-creation processes within experience-based settings.

3.4 Data Collection

3.4.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

For this thesis, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the primary method for data collection to directly address the research question: *How does meaning-making and a feeling of collectiveness among HYROX participants contribute to the growth and visibility of the sport?*

Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) note that “the main aim of qualitative interviews should be to collect information that captures the meaning and interpretation of phenomena in relation to the interviewees’ worldviews” (p.195). This aligns with our study’s aim to explore the symbolic and experiential dimensions of participation and how these individual interpretations connect to the collective growth of HYROX.

Interviews are categorised into different types, mainly based on the level of structuration of the questions asked. Structured interviews follow a fixed format, where the same questions are asked in the same order for all interviewees. Unstructured interviews allow a freer flow, where questions do not have to be set in advance. Semi-structured interviews offer a mixture of both, with a set topic and some prepared questions, but with room for flexibility (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). This flexibility was essential for our research since the aim was to uncover as much of the participants' meaning-making processes as possible. By acting as data enhancers (Neuman, 2014), semi-structured interviews allowed us to see the key aspects of these specific participants' worldviews more clearly than other methods would permit. Further, semi-structured interviews let us investigate deeply into participants’ perceptions and intentions, uncovering the underlying social and cultural logics that drive the expansion beyond firm-led communication. Furthermore, interviews are uniquely suited to bring forth interpretative knowledge (Kaiser, 2024), which provided us with information about the individuals’ subjective perceptions and interpretations.

As the interviewees were located in different places, some interviews were conducted online. de Villiers et al. (2022) explain that video interviewing has become increasingly accepted in qualitative research, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic. Potential challenges include

technical issues, internet connection problems, and difficulties in interpreting non-verbal cues (de Villiers et al., 2022). To reduce these risks, the connection was tested in advance, interviews were recorded, and participants were informed about the software beforehand.

3.4.2 Interview Guide

When preparing for the interviews, a semi-structured interview guide was developed based on thematic areas derived from the literature streams. A topic guide consists of key themes and suggested questions that allow the interviewer to follow the story of the participant, not in the order of questions (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2018), a semi-structured interview guide should include clear topics with suggested questions while still allowing flexibility. Questions starting with what and how should be used primarily, while questions starting with why should be follow-up questions asked in cases where further explanations are needed (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2018). Following the guidelines, the interview guide was structured around three main themes related to shared practices, collectives, and digital participation, together with warm-up questions and closing questions encouraging reflection.

The interview guide started with acknowledgements about the anonymity and the right of withdrawal from the research at any time, before jumping into the warm-up questions, where the purpose was to build a comfort zone for the interviewees. The warm-up questions also worked as ice breakers with questions touching on when they started with HYROX and their previous relationship to sports and exercise. This also gave us a contextual background that later helped us to interpret their reflections on meaning-making. After the warm-up, we delved into the first theme, meaning-making and personal experiences, linked to the first stream of our conceptual framework. The questions were designed to uncover the use of symbolic resources and how they use them to construct their identity. The second theme focused on the second stream, collective formations, and had the goal of determining whether the interviewees view themselves as part of something bigger. This thematic area was vital for our understanding of how individual participation aggregates into a larger social movement. The second-to-last theme, digital sharing and online engagement, were in line with the last stream of the conceptual framework. This theme set out to uncover whether or not posting on social media functions as a meaning-making practice, questioning motivations in order to uncover possible free and visibility labor. The last theme consisted of growth and visibility, and questions encouraged the interviewees to reflect on their role as “prosumers” who

contribute to the global scaling of HYROX. Lastly, the interview guide ended with a couple of closing questions, where the interviewees got the chance to add additional information if they wanted to.

3.5 Sampling Strategy

For sampling strategy, a combination of purposive and convenience sampling were used, both of which fall within the category of non-probability sampling (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021). Non-probability sampling is a design where the probability of a member in a population being sampled cannot be stated. Non-probability sampling, in contrast to probability sampling, is not random; the participants are selected based on different typicalities (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021).

The participants selected for the interviews needed to fulfill a couple of criteria, which made a purposive sampling method a suitable choice. Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) explain that purposive sampling is used when the researchers need the interviewees to meet certain criteria for the study's purpose to be fulfilled. To be able to gain the information needed from the interviewees to answer the research question and fulfill the aim of the thesis, the participants were chosen based on two criteria: (1) the interviewees needed to have participated in at least one HYROX competition, and (2) they needed to be active participants in the HYROX community. For the purposes of this study, active participation in the HYROX community was defined as currently training with HYROX as a future goal, having competed in at least one event, and maintaining some form of ongoing engagement with the HYROX context, whether through training, social media, or interaction with other participants.

Convenience sampling complemented this approach, as participants were recruited through a combination of HYROX-related communities on social media and the researchers' personal networks. Initial contact was made by direct messaging on Instagram or through personal connections established through gym environments and prior HYROX events. While this introduces a degree of accessibility bias, it is considered appropriate given the practical constraints of the research and the difficulty of accessing a sufficiently specific participant group through other means. Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) acknowledge that convenience sampling is a common and accepted strategy in qualitative research when access to the target group is limited.

In total, 14 people were recruited for interviews. The participants range from early twenties to mid thirties, and include both males and females. No further demographic criteria were applied, reflecting the study's interest in the broader participant experience rather than a specific subgroup. All participants are based in Western countries, and while this limits geographic diversity, differentiation in cultural background, socioeconomic conditions, and personal motivations is still present within the sample and may enrich the breadth of perspectives captured. In qualitative research, sample size is not determined by statistical representativeness but by the potential for rich, meaningful data (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). The sample size of 14 was determined with reference to the concept of theoretical saturation, which suggests that data collection should continue until new interviews no longer generate new themes or insights (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Within the scope and timeframe of this study, 14 interviews were considered sufficient to reach this threshold while maintaining the depth of engagement required by the qualitative approach.

In Table 2, the interviewees are presented through pseudonyms together with information regarding age, duration*, training background, races completed, occupation, and gender. This information provides the reader with a basic understanding of the participants' backgrounds and their connection to HYROX.

Table 2. Participant Overview

Pseudonym	Age	Duration*	Training background	Races completed	Occupation	Gender
Lisa	24	2 years	Gymnastics, CrossFit	2	Real Estate Agent	Female
Sophia	23	1 year	Equestrian, strength training, CrossFit	1	Business Administrator	Female
Jasmine	24	1 year	Gymnastics, strength training, CrossFit	1	Nurse	Female
Elliot	27	3 years	Gym and running, brief CrossFit	3	Teacher	Male
Ella	26	1,5 years	Strength training	2	Marketing Coordinator	Female
Oscar	30	1,5 years	Football, running, gym, CrossFit	1	Insurance Agent	Male

Tess	25	1,5 year	Track athlete, gym	1	Personal Trainer	Female
Johanna	24	1 year	Softball, gym	2	Nurse	Female
Peter	27	1,5 year	Handball, Track and field, gym	1	Pilot	Male
Louise	25	2 years	Handball, gym	1	Aid Officer	Female
Marcus	35	0.5 years	Football, gym, CrossFit	1	Entrepreneur	Male
Leo	27	3 year	Football, gym	2	Software engineer	Male
Josephine	34	1 year	Handball, football, running	1	Biochemist	Female
Elsa	32	1.5 years	Crossfit, gymnastics	2	Police officer	Female

*Duration refers to the length of time the participant has been actively engaged with HYROX at the time of the interview.

3.6 Data Analysis

3.6.1 Thematic Analysis

The collected data from the semi-structured interviews were further analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis can be explained as a way of identifying different themes within the collected data. Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that thematic analysis suits constructionist studies, which aim to uncover realities, experiences, and meanings within society, which suits the case of the HYROX participant in this research. They further emphasise that a theme is not determined by the number of times mentioned, although it can matter, but rather by the importance to the research question. The researcher's judgment on the relevance of the data is therefore crucial (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

For this analysis, Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis structure was used. The structure contains six phases, where the first acknowledges the need to familiarise yourself with the collected data, for example, through transcribing (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this phase, we laid out all of our recordings and transcribed them using the AI tool Whisper. Whisper only stored the audio files locally, which assured us that confidentiality was not compromised.

When this was done, phase two, generating initial codes, could begin. During this phase, codes that seemed interesting were taken out of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Here, we looked for emerging patterns across the interviews, but also other interesting and nuanced points that both reflected the stories told and were relevant to the research question. This resulted in what Braun and Clarke (2006) report, that more and narrower themes emerged in this phase.

Phase four reviews these themes, sees if they are related to the codes, and the overall data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Here, we created mind maps with the emerging themes from the codes, and from that mind map, we could group some of the themes together. During this phase, we grouped codes that felt related to each other together using mind maps. From the mindmaps, we further merged together some of the initial themes, making them bigger and more representable for the stories told by the participants.

During phases five and six, we first defined and named the themes, where the essence, storytelling, and data capture was revised. When naming the themes, which Braun and Clarke (2006) say, are an ongoing process during the whole analysis, we had the participants' stories, as well as our research question, in mind. Finally, the sixth phase contains the writing (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Here, the aim was to conceptualise the complicated story that is told and make the analysis valid and convincing. This involved selecting quotes that illustrated each pattern most clearly and integrating them with our interpretations.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are an integral aspect of qualitative research, and this study followed general research ethics guidelines to ensure that participants were treated with respect and that their privacy is protected (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021). Informed consent was obtained from all individuals before the interviews. They were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw. They were also informed that the interviews would be recorded, transcribed, and analysed.

Anonymity and confidentiality have been ensured throughout the research process. Participants' names have not been disclosed, and all data have been anonymised in the thesis. Interview recordings and transcripts have been stored securely and have only been accessible to the researchers. The collected data were used solely for this study, and we also aimed to represent the participants' perspectives accurately and respectfully.

The choice of conducting qualitative interviews comes with the risk that the researchers unintentionally influence the data gathered (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). To counteract this, interruptions were kept to a minimum, we gave the participants sufficient time to formulate their responses, and our personal opinions were deliberately avoided throughout the conversations. The interview guide was also constructed with open, non-leading questions, and instead aimed at encouraging the interviewees to think freely and reflect on their own experiences. As noted by Bell et al. (2019), one of semi-structured interviews main strengths lies precisely in its capacity to prioritise the respondent's perspective.

Finally, as active HYROX participants ourselves, our positionality inevitably shaped both the formulation of interview questions and the interpretation of the material. While this insider perspective enabled a nuanced understanding of the context and facilitated trust with respondents, it also introduces the risk of projecting our own experiences onto the analysis (Berger, 2015). To address this, we continuously reflected on our positionality throughout the research process and discussed interpretations jointly to challenge assumptions that could stem from personal involvement (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

3.8 Research Quality

In qualitative research, it is very important that the empirical material is approached with a critical and reflective mindset in order to ensure the study's legitimacy and usefulness (Bell et al., 2019; Nowell et al., 2017). As a result, maintaining a high standard of quality has been a guiding concern throughout this research process. There are no universal criteria that exist for evaluating the quality of a study, as this largely depends on how the researcher approaches the inquiry (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). For this reason, this study draws on a framework developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), who proposed four criteria specifically suited to assessing the trustworthiness of qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These criteria have since been reviewed and adapted by several scholars, one of them being Nowell et al. (2017).

The first concept, credibility, can be compared to internal validity, and reflects the accuracy and trustworthiness of the data (Nowell et al., 2017). In this study, this criterion was addressed by adopting transparent ethical practices (as presented in chapter 3.7) and by openly communicating the purpose of the research to the respondents (Bell et al., 2019). Credibility was further strengthened by both researchers being actively involved in

conducting the interviews and in analysing the empirical material, allowing interpretations to be continuously discussed and cross-checked between us.

Transferability on the other hand corresponds to external validity. This concerns the extent to which findings may be applied to other contexts (Nowell et al., 2017). As discussed before, broad generalisation was not the aim of this study, since participants were purposely selected based on their active involvement in HYROX rather than on demographic representativeness. While purposive sampling is beneficial for addressing the specific focus of the study, it simultaneously raises considerations regarding the applicability of the findings to wider populations (Bell et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the insights generated here, even though grounded in the empirical context of HYROX participants in Western countries, could be transferable to other experience-based or participatory fitness contexts, thereby offering value to broader research and practice.

Dependability is the third criterion, compared to reliability, and refers to the consistency in the study's results (Nowell et al., 2017). One of the responsibilities that researchers have is to ensure that the process is clearly documented, logical, and traceable (Tobin and Begley, 2004). To meet this criterion, all of the interviews were recorded and transcribed directly after being conducted to be able to maintain the quality captured. However, since we did some of the interviews alone, follow-up questions were different depending on who conducted the interview.

Finally, the last criterion, confirmability, can only be established once the three criteria above are fulfilled. Confirmability seeks to confirm that the collected data and their interpretation are not primarily shaped by the researchers' subjectivity or imagination, but by an objective and transparent engagement with the material (Nowell et al., 2017). In this study, confirmability was supported by transcribing interviews carefully, by documenting coding decisions throughout the thematic analysis, and by continuously reflecting on our own position as active HYROX participants (as further discussed in chapter 3.7).

3.9 Methodological Limitations

All research methods come with limitations, and being open about them is an important part of transparent research. Some of these have already been discussed in this chapter, but a few remain to be outlined, together with the steps taken to address them.

Concerning our sampling strategy, the study was based on 14 participants recruited through a combination of purposive and convenience sampling. While this approach was appropriate for the exploratory aim of the study, it introduced a degree of accessibility bias, particularly since some participants were recruited through the researchers' personal networks and HYROX-related communities (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Participants may, as a result, have felt a certain inclination to respond in ways they perceived as favourable. The aim of this study was not to generalise findings to a larger population (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021), but rather to explore how HYROX participants construct meaning around their involvement. Nevertheless, the sample is geographically concentrated, with the majority of participants based in Sweden, which limits the cultural breadth of perspectives captured.

A further limitation relates to the use of online interviews. While face-to-face interviews were made when it was possible, some were conducted remotely in order to accommodate participants' availability and geographical distance. Although remote interviews offer greater flexibility in time, they may increase the risk of misinterpretation of participants' responses (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021, de Villiers et al., 2022), or lost internet connection. To mitigate this, we tested the connection in advance, and confirmed that participants were comfortable with the chosen platform before starting.

Finally, the study was conducted within a ten-week timeframe, which shaped both the scope of data collection and the depth of analysis that could be carried out. While the timeframe was sufficient to reach the level of theoretical saturation expected for a qualitative study of this scope (see section 3.5), a longer research period might have allowed for additional interviews, follow-up conversations with participants, or the inclusion of a complementary digital component such as netnographic observation. The limitations of the timeframe were addressed by careful planning, parallel work on data collection and analysis, and a clear delimitation of the research scope to the participant perspective.

4. Findings and Analysis

This chapter presents the findings of the study, organised around four themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of the interviews. Each theme is interpreted and analysed in relation to the conceptual framework established in chapter two, drawing on the literature on shared practices, consumer collectives, and platform-mediated consumer interaction. The first theme examines how participants construct individual meaning, the second turns to how collective belonging is built, the third explores accessibility as both a shared value and a driver of growth, and the fourth examines how digital sharing extends participation beyond the event itself. Each theme is structured into sub-themes, followed by a brief synthesis of how the patterns relate to one another.

4.1 Making HYROX Personally Meaningful Through Challenge

The first theme that emerged from the analysis concerns how participants construct individual meaning around their individual involvement in HYROX. Across the interviews, three interrelated patterns surfaced: a negotiated form of *identification* with the sport, an emphasis on *personal challenge and mastery* as central to the experience, and a strong reliance on *measurable progress* as a source of motivation. Together, these patterns illustrate how individual meaning-making in HYROX operates as a continuous and balanced engagement with the sport, resonating with the view of consumers as active meaning-makers (Arnould et al., 2023) rather than passive recipients of brand-led narratives.

4.1.1 Selective Identification with the Sport

The first pattern throughout the interviews was the way in which the interviewees positioned themselves in relation to the sport. Rather than fully adopting the label of a HYROX athlete, the interviewees described their involvement as significant but bounded. What surfaced in the data can be understood as the participants using marketplace resources to construct their identity and sense of self (Martínez-López et al., 2016; Rokka & Ulver, 2023), but still feeling a need to keep a distance from the sport. This ambivalent identification can be seen as the participants having a scattered or negotiated identity. In this case, participants draw on HYROX as a resource for self-description without letting it define them. This reflects Arnould et al.'s (2023) explanation that consumers give objects and experiences meaning to help construct themselves and navigate their social environments. A couple of the respondents

described HYROX as "a side hobby" and "an easy way to describe what you do", suggesting that the sport functions as a partial identity marker rather than a defining one. Lisa says:

"I do not let it take over my whole life. I am very much about balance. I would not say I am an athlete who dedicates everything to it. It is more like a side hobby. But training in general is something I would include when describing myself." (Lisa)

By calling it a "side hobby", Lisa uses HYROX as a resource for an identity project, but does not let it define her totally. This reflects a tribal logic, where the membership is fluid and low-committing, letting her use the resource without total loyalty (Cova, 1997; Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Cova et al., 2023). This negotiated identification was also visible in the way participants described an awareness of being drawn into the HYROX context despite an explicit wish to keep some distance from it. Tess expresses this by stating that the sport is "addicting", while still identifying herself as a "gymrat" (i.e., someone who is a workout enthusiast and spends a lot of time at the gym). Two more respondents, Oscar and Johanna, reflected on this tension as well:

"I would like to think that I keep some distance from it. I'm probably part of it in some way, but for me, it's not that important to show my results or make it visible that I'm there. But at the same time, when I ran recently, there was still a picture on Instagram of me and my brother with our race time. So you do get drawn into it somehow." (Oscar)

"Not really, because I've always been super active. I could say I enjoy training for it, but I wouldn't say it's part of my identity." (Johanna)

A couple of elements in Oscar's and Johanna's responses are worth noting. Oscar's phrase "I would like to think" and Johanna's "I could say" frame their distance as an aspiration rather than a fact, signalling an awareness that their actual involvement may exceed the preferred level. When Oscar then says "probably part of it in some way," further softens this self-description, indicating that he recognises a form of belonging even as he resists it. Here, we can draw on Belk's (1988) concept of the extended self, where we incorporate our possessions and experiences in our identity. His closing words, "you do get drawn into it

somehow," articulate the experience as something that happens *to* him rather than something he actively pursues.

The pattern across the data suggests that participants engage with HYROX selectively, taking on the elements that align with their personal interests while maintaining distance from full identification with the sport. This can be connected to the postmodern consumer and its ability to partake in fluid connections without having to prove any loyalty (Cova, 1997; Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Cova et al., 2023). Notably, this fluid, low-commitment form of identification sits in tension with classical accounts of brand communities, where strong identification with the brand is treated as a defining feature (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001). The data suggest that participants relate to HYROX more as a resource they draw upon selectively than as an object of unconditional loyalty, a distinction that becomes important when situating the HYROX context within existing literature on collective consumption.

4.1.2 Finding Meaning in Physical Challenge

A second pattern that surfaced strongly across the interviews was the centrality of *personal challenge* in shaping the meaning participants attach to HYROX. The intensity of the race experience, often described in physical and emotional terms, was repeatedly framed as the very reason participants continued to engage with the sport. The way the participants explain the race can be seen through the lens of the myth (Arnould et al., 2023), where the turning of a painful and overwhelmingly tough experience into a transformative one is used to help participants build their identity (Rokka, 2021). It can also be seen as a symbolic universe, an “ideoscapes”, that Rokka (2021) explains brands create to provide consumers a platform for new meaning-systems where identities can flourish. By offering a standardised physical challenge, HYROX can function as a platform for practice where participants use symbolic resources to solve anxieties (Rokka, 2021) about their own capabilities:

"When I crossed the finish line, it was one of the few times I have been that proud of myself. No matter how tough it is during the race, it feels worth it when you cross the finish line. That is why you do it again, you live for that feeling." (Lisa)

Lisa's description of crossing the finish line can be seen as the culmination of her identity project (Martínez-Lopéz et al., 2016; Rokka & Ulver, 2023), where the struggle is transformed into a narrative of mastery. When she further state that it was one of the few times she been that proud of herself, combined with the wish to return because “you live for

that feeling” showcase that it is more than a momentary experience. It becomes a memory she can return to, which aligns with Ahuvia’s (2005) view on identity as a structured narrative where experiences are converted into linked memories that build identity. Although the almost enchanted experience of crossing the finish line was expressed by many participants, a recurring tension was seen: participants described the race as overwhelmingly tough, sometimes painful, yet continued to return. This can be seen in Oscars statement:

"Yes, now I know more about what I'm getting into. That it's going to be extremely tough. But for some strange reason, you still do it." (Oscar)

When Oscar states “that it’s going to be extremely tough”, the pain can be seen as a value-in-use (Grönroos, 2011), the sacrifice required to co-create the high-value feeling of mastery. The feeling of mastery generated by completing a race appears to outweigh the difficulty of the experience itself. This process reflects how the myth (Rokka, 2021), where the painful experience turns into mastery. Several participants captured this tension explicitly, with one respondent describing the experience in terms of a "love-hate" relationship:

"It's a bit of a love-hate relationship. You enjoy the training and the preparation leading up to the race. But when you stand on the starting line, you know what's coming... So yes, it's a love-hate relationship." (Elliot)

Another respondent, Tess, articulated the same dynamic in even more explicit terms, framing the experience as compulsively repeatable:

"It is addictive. You finish one, and you want to go to the next one."
(Tess)

The intensity of the race, the “love-hate relationship” described by Elliot, and Tess’s expression that “it is addicting” can be seen as a temporary escape from everyday life and suggest that during the races, participants may fall under a “collective spell”, something Carù and Cova (2015) found to be exceptional for consumer tribes. For some participants, the role of training extended beyond physical performance and became closely tied to personal well-being. One respondent described training in HYROX as a routine they could no longer be without:

"Now, if I can't train, if I'm sick for a week, I feel like I'm falling apart. Mentally, I can't handle it... It's like a drug." (Jasmine)

Jasmine's statement that she is "falling apart" and "can't handle" not working out indicates that the value-in-use (Grönroos, 2011) of HYROX, where customers create value while using the product (the format), is fundamental to their mental state. Further, Johanna also expresses how HYROX have contributed to her self confidence:

"Oh yeah, definitely. I feel more capable and more confident. I don't care if I finish in two hours, I still did something that most people can't do." (Johanna)

Although the participants described their experiences in different terms, the underlying pattern was consistent: the perceived difficulty of HYROX was not a barrier to engagement, but a source of value and meaning, which allowed participants to navigate their identity and social environment (Arnould et al., 2023).

4.1.3 Measurable Progress as Motivation

A third pattern that emerged from the data was the importance of *measurable progress* as a continuous source of motivation. Several participants described how the structured nature of HYROX, with its standardised format and measurable nature, made personal development tangible and observable:

"Yes, they are time-based. You always want to beat your previous time and get faster and faster." (Lisa)

And a similar statement was made by Oscar:

"It's quite measurable. If you train more, you get a better time. It's easy to see your progress. And it is fun to have a goal, because it increases my motivation to exercise harder." (Oscar)

Lisa's statement, "you always want to beat your previous time", and Oscar's statement, "it's a fun goal to have," emphasise the focus on personal improvement and can be seen as a sign of co-creation and prosumption. Here, we can see connections to what Grönroos (2008; 2011) tells about the paradigm shift from consumers as users to producers of value of products. When individuals simultaneously are consumers of the event and producers of athletic results

that generate meaning and value to the brand, presumption can be seen (Arnould et al., 2023). Further, interviewees describe that rather than competing against others, the goal of beating one's own previous time became a recurring expression of what made the sport rewarding. Ella and Sophia state:

"I have noticed that every time you set a personal goal or have a milestone, the motivation for training becomes even higher." (Ella)

And:

"You know you won't win as a "normal person", so you do it for fun and to compete with yourself. And that's what makes it fun." (Sophia)

When Ella states that "every time you set a personal record...the motivation for training becomes higher", it becomes clear that the measurable nature of HYROX, which provides participants with a clear and continuous feedback structure, is important. The standardised race format provides the participants with a platform for practice and improvement, which can be attributed to what Zwick et al. (2008) explain as a way to control customers through their freedom. This, in turn, reinforces the personal challenge described in Sophia's statement, as participants can directly observe the outcomes of their training efforts. When participants use their knowledge and skills to provide value and meaning for themselves, which in turn generates value to the brand, it can be seen as a form of co-creation (Pongsakornrungsilp & Schroeder, 2011; Benson et al., 2021).

4.1.4 How the Patterns Relate

Taken together, the three patterns within this theme, negotiated identification, personal challenge, and measurable progress, illustrate how meaning-making at both the individual and collective level is constructed through a combination of identification, challenge, and progress. Participants engage with HYROX deeply enough to find it meaningful, yet maintain enough distance to not let HYROX become their full identity. The intensity of the race experience provides the emotional and physical foundation of this meaning, while the measurable nature of the sport sustains motivation over time.

A noteworthy feature of this pattern is that participants' attachment appears to develop primarily around the activity itself, the training, the race, and the physical and mental

experience, rather than around HYROX as a brand. The fact that participants connect to the activity first and to the brand second becomes important when looking at how HYROX fits into existing research on consumer collectives (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001; Cova, 1997; Arvidsson & Caliendo, 2016). These patterns lay the groundwork for the collective dimensions of involvement that are explored in the following themes, where individual meaning-making extends outward into shared belonging, common values, and digital expression.

4.2 Building Collective Connection Through Shared Experiences and Rituals

The second theme that emerged from the empirical material concerns how participants experience and describe a sense of collective belonging within HYROX. While the previous theme focused on the individual dimension of meaning-making, this theme shifts attention to how participants relate to others within the sport. Across the interviews, three recurring patterns surfaced: *a shared sense of "we-ness"* among participants, the presence of *recognisable rituals and atmospheric markers*, and a culture of *mutual support* that extends across skill levels and demographic backgrounds. Together, these patterns illustrate how participation in HYROX is anchored in collective relations that extend beyond the individual experience of training and racing.

4.2.1 A Shared Sense of "We-Ness"

Taken from the data, one pattern was the way in which participants described the feeling as part of a broader collective. This sense of belonging was not necessarily tied to formal membership but emerged through the recognition that others shared the same experiences, references, and commitments. This directly aligns with the concept of consciousness of kind, the most important element of brand communities, where members feel an intrinsic connection to one another (Martínez-López et al., 2016; Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001; Arvidsson & Caliendo, 2016). Several respondents described this connection as something that distinguished HYROX participants from people outside the sport:

"Yes, since it's still quite small, you have something in common. You often have to explain what it is to people, so it feels like a shared thing." (Sophia)

Sophia states that she often has to explain it to others, pointing at participants developing a specialised cultural capital (Arnould et al., 2023), which distinguishes them from the others,

and further strengthens the bond among participants. The phrase “you have something in common” reference a feeling of we-ness among participants, which is common among brand tribe members (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Cova et al., 2023). For some participants, the sense of shared identity extended beyond the immediate HYROX context and was carried into other social settings:

"You recognise people at events or through training at the gym, and there's kind of a shared understanding between people who do it, even in school or at other social events." (Elliot)

When Elliot argues that there is a “shared understanding between people who do it (HYROX)”, Arnould & Thompson’s (2005) and Rokka’s (2021) statement that how we make sense of the world directly affects our identity show how a collective identity is formed through the participants meaning-making. His statement also points to where and when this recognition surfaces and that it is not limited to the gym or the race day, but extends into spaces such as school and other social events. The collective, in this sense, does not need a designated time or place to be activated. It travels with him and becomes available wherever HYROX participants meet, reflecting the fluid and context-independent nature of tribal recognition (Cova & Cova, 2002; Diaz Ruiz et al., 2020). Further, the description of how HYROX involvement carries with it an implicit assumption of recurring contact with others in the sport can be seen as an “imagined community” (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001), situated around a specific event. Jasmine, another respondent, states:

"People assume you'll see each other at races. I'm in an Instagram group chat with people from my gym. People share training times, results, tips, and race plans. Some even organise their own simulation races. So yes, very much a community feeling." (Jasmine)

Through Jasmine's statement about how social media is used as a facilitator for interaction among participants, Instagram can be seen as a platform for practice (Zwick et al., 2008). By organising their own simulation races, they not only co-construct value for the brand, but also provide free labor (Zwick et al., 2008) that keeps the community active. For other participants, this sense of belonging was anchored in the local gym environment, where participants of varying ages and backgrounds gathered around a shared interest. The recurring nature of these encounters was described as central to how relationships developed:

"Everyone is there for the same reason. There is a big age range, but everyone supports each other." (Lisa)

Also said by Lisa:

"You start recognizing people. You chat before and after sessions and things like that." (Marcus)

While the sense of "we-ness" (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Cova et al., 2023) that is expressed above was most often described in inclusive terms, several participants also articulated this collective identity by drawing a contrast with those outside the sport:

"There's definitely a bit of a 'us and them' feeling between people who train HYROX and those who train traditional CrossFit. Some CrossFit athletes don't really appreciate how fast HYROX has grown." (Elliot)

When Elliot describes an "us and them" feeling and notes that some CrossFit athletes "don't really appreciate how fast HYROX has grown," the boundary between insiders and outsiders is articulated. This reflects how communities define their symbolic boundaries when they encounter opposing lifestyles (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

Together, all the citations suggest that the sense of "we-ness" in HYROX is constructed in two complementary ways. On one hand, it emerges from shared experiences, recurring encounters, and common references, which corresponds with both brand communities (Cova et al., 2023; Cova, 1997) and consumer tribes (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016; Cova et al., 2023), that participants recognise across both physical and digital settings. On the other hand, it is reinforced through an implicit boundary between those inside the sport and those outside it. This distinction becomes visible when participants describe explaining HYROX to outsiders or contrasting their experience with adjacent fitness cultures, something that marketplace cultures often encounter according to Arnould and Thompson (2005). Together, these dynamics indicate that HYROX participants experience involvement not solely as individual training but as participation in a shared social context with its own internal logic and external boundary.

4.2.2 Creating Connections Through Rituals and Atmospheric Markers

The second pattern that surfaced in the data concerned the presence of recognisable rituals and atmospheric markers within context. Participants described race days as more than competitions, framing them as events with their own distinct culture, dress codes, and modes of behaviour. One respondent reflected on the strong sense of occasion at her first race:

"It really felt like a big thing. There was a DJ, and it was very well organised. You see all the people in matching outfits. It was a really good atmosphere."
(Ella)

Another participant described the visual and behavioural markers of the HYROX context in more detail, noting how merchandise, gear, and shared behaviours had become recognisable elements of the culture:

"When you arrive, people are often walking around without shirts for some reason. It seems to have become a thing in the community. Many people wear HYROX merchandise or the newest HYROX shoes." (Oscar)

In the viewpoint that both Ella and Oscar bring forward, specific products like matching outfits and HYROX merchandise act as “linking values” or “totems for the tribe” (Cova, 1997). Here, consumption works rather as pathways for interaction and identification with the group. Oscar’s statement that certain behaviors have become a “thing” in the community can be interpreted as shared rituals that are found in brand communities (Martínez-López et al., 2016; Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001; Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016). For some participants, the atmosphere generated through group training and shared physical effort was described as a defining feature of the experience:

"Group classes are completely different. The atmosphere, the pushing, the cheering, it's something else." (Jasmine)

Jasmine's description of "the atmosphere, the pushing, the cheering" points to something that goes beyond the individual experience of training. The energy generated by other people creates an affective atmosphere (Rokka & Ulver, 2023), an environment that is felt before it is articulated and that fundamentally shapes how the activity is experienced. The presence of

others is not incidental here, but constitutive of what makes the group class feel "completely different".

These descriptions point toward a set of shared rituals and markers that participants recognise and orient themselves around. While these elements vary in scale from organised events with music and merchandise to smaller gym-based routines, they appear to function as visible expressions of a collective culture that participants identify with. This can be related to the shared rituals and traditions within brand communities, where social practices reproduce and transmit the culture of the community (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001; Martínez-López et al., 2016; Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016).

4.2.3 Supporting One Another Across Levels

A third pattern that emerged from the data was the consistency with which participants described HYROX as a supportive and inclusive environment. Across the interviews, participants emphasised that the prevailing atmosphere was one of encouragement rather than competition between individuals:

"Very supportive. I haven't experienced anything negative. People help each other and encourage each other." (Elliot)

and:

"There's a very positive atmosphere. I don't feel like there's much competition in the sense of people wanting others to fail. People are very supportive, encouraging, and often share tips with each other about how to improve. I haven't experienced any jealousy about someone getting a better time." (Oscar)

Elliot's and Oscar's descriptions of an environment where "people help each other" and where competition is not directed at making others fail, can be connected to the moral responsibility that Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001) identify as a defining marker of brand communities, where members feel a duty to support one another rather than compete against one another. The peer-to-peer sharing of tips that Oscar describes can also be read through the lens of consciousness of kind, in which the intrinsic recognition of others as members of the same collective produces both empathy and a willingness to invest in their progress

(Martínez-López et al., 2016; Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016). Another statement that can be connected to support within in the group comes from Jasmine:

"People who have been overweight their whole lives and take on this challenge get just as much support as elite athletes. Everyone has their own goals, and everyone respects that. You feel that both at competitions, on social media, and when friends talk about races." (Jasmine)

Jasmine's interpretation that "everyone has their own goals, and everyone respects that" extends moral responsibility beyond simple support, suggesting that the collective absorbs and validates different forms of participation rather than evaluating them against a single standard of performance. This resonates with the way consumer tribes define belonging through shared passions and values rather than through hierarchies of skill (Arnould & Thompson, 2005), and helps explain why both elite athletes and beginners are recognised as legitimate members of the same collective. For some participants, this inclusive atmosphere was directly linked to the absence of judgment experienced during their own first race:

"It really felt like all ages, all bodies, all physiques. It was very mixed. And that made you not feel judged or less good in any way." (Ella)

A subtle form of social accountability was also visible in some descriptions, suggesting that participation generated a degree of mutual responsibility within training groups:

"Sometimes people notice if you do not show up." (Lisa)

Lisa's observation that "sometimes people notice if you do not show up" reflects the moral responsibility identified by Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001) as a key marker of brand communities, in which members hold one another to an implicit commitment to the collective. The accountability is not formalised, but it is felt, and it functions as a quiet reminder that participation is recognised by others. The pattern across the data suggests that the supportive culture in HYROX is not incidental but a recurring and recognised feature of the collective experience. Participants describe an environment in which encouragement, inclusion, and shared effort take precedence over individual competition.

4.2.4 How the Patterns Relate

Taken together, the three patterns within this theme, a shared sense of "we-ness", recognisable rituals and atmospheric markers, and a culture of mutual support, illustrate how collective belonging in HYROX is constructed across multiple settings, from local gym groups to international race events and digital spaces. The data suggest that HYROX participation is not experienced as an individual activity carried out alongside others, but as engagement in a collective context where shared references, behaviours, and values are continuously reproduced. While this collective belonging shows resemblances with the consciousness of kind, shared rituals, and moral responsibility identified in earlier consumer research on collective formations (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001), the data also suggest that participants move fluidly between different forms of collective expression, from intimate gym communities to larger event-based gatherings and digital interactions. This multi-layered collective dimension provides the foundation for the next theme, in which a particular shared value, accessibility, emerges as central to how participants understand and describe HYROX.

4.3 Accessibility as a Driver of Growth

The third theme explores how accessibility and inclusivity function not merely as a practical feature of HYROX but also as a shared cultural value among participants, which results in the facilitation of the sport's rapid growth. By viewing accessibility through the service-dominant logic (Grönroos, 2008; Pongsakornrunsilp & Schroeder, 2011; Grönroos, 2011; Carù & Cova, 2015), it can be seen that value is not just embedded in the race, but is created by participants through their usage, which brings in the concept of value-in-use (Grönroos, 2008). Within this theme, accessibility and inclusivity act as both a way for the community to stay together and as a way for organic recruitment to take place.

4.3.1 Accessibility and Inclusivity as a Shared Value

Among all respondents, HYROX was described through a unified narrative: that the sport truly is for everyone, regardless of age, previous knowledge, and background in the physical sphere. This shared perception can be seen as an ideoscape (Rokka, 2021), a symbolic universe created by the brand, which lets consumers develop identities through the meaning systems provided. In the context of HYROX, the "universal athlete" becomes a cultural myth, a story that helps consumers

shape their values and ideals while making sense of their worldview (Arnould et al., 2023). Josephine and Ella explains:

"There were all kinds of people there... someone competing in a wheelchair, which you maybe wouldn't expect. There were people of all ages, body types, and fitness levels"
(Josephine)

and Ella:

"It really felt like all ages, all bodies, all physiques. It was very mixed. And that made you not feel judged or less good in any way" (Ella)

When Josephine describes how “people of all ages, body types and fitness levels” compete, it can be seen that the importance for the collective lies within the passion for the sport, which corresponds with consumer tribes (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016). At the same time, Ella’s descriptions indicate that the absence of judgment reflects the moral responsibility inherent in brand communities, where members feel a duty to support others within the community (Martínez-López et al., 2016; Muñoz & O’Guinn, 2001; Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016). However, the analysis also reveals a tension between the symbolic inclusion and the material reality of the marketplace. While the sport is physically inclusive, it also comes with a socioeconomic boundary:

“Financially, it’s definitely not inclusive...the tickets alone were \$177 each. Then we added photos, a flex add-on in case one of us got injured, and there were service fees.”
(Johanna)

This perspective provides a critical lens on value co-creation. While a majority of the interviewees described HYROX as inclusive in symbolic and physical terms, Johanna’s reflection on the cost of participation adds a critical layer. Although the HYROX brand functions as a value facilitator (Grönroos, 2011) by providing a standardised platform (the race) on which value and meaning can be created, this facilitation is paired with a structure in which participants invest their "free labour" (Zwick et al., 2008) into building the brand's cultural capital while also paying high fees for access. The result is what Cova and Dalli (2009) describe as double exploitation, where consumers are charged for the very values they themselves co-create.

4.3.2 Prosuming the Expansion

The shared value of accessibility is not just a passive description, but a value participants actively identify with and articulate to others. Participants consistently use keywords like “easier to get into” and “less technical” to differentiate HYROX from other fitness cultures. This differentiation is often made through comparisons with its origin: CrossFit, which is perceived as more technical and has a higher entrance barrier. Jasmine and Oscar notes:

"It feels less scary than CrossFit, less technical, lower risk of injury, easier to start. That lowers the threshold, so more people try it." (Jasmine)

and:

"HYROX is easier to get into. The exercises are simple... I think that accessibility is one of HYROX's strengths." (Oscar)

Accessibility becomes a key driver in contexts where individuals can enter and participate in activities in which values, identities, and meanings are co-created (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Cova et al., 2023). Because of the accessible nature of HYROX, participants also witness how they find themselves recommending the sport to others:

"Absolutely. I'm telling my colleagues every week to come join a session. We have really great instructors...who push you and create amazing workouts...We've also become a little group now, so there's always someone to train with." (Marcus)

Here the organic growth becomes visible through HYROX's linking value as an activity for social interaction (Cova, 1997). As Cova et al. (2023), Arnould and Thompson (2005), and Cova (1997) explain, shared consumption activities create a way for people to relate to others and express who they are. By lowering the barrier to participation, the activity allows for new individuals to engage in and practice the sport and gradually become a part of the community:

"And right now (at the gym) we got just a Saturday HYROX-focused type of workout...You just go there, you feel like you're just in your place. It's just really nice." (Tess)

The feeling of being “in your place” that Tess expresses can be related to consciousness of kind (Martínez-López et al., 2016; Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001; Arvidsson & Caliendo, 2016),

which is seen as the primary glue of the collective, but also a strong sense of “we-ness” and belonging in the tribe (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Cova et al., 2023). This shared feeling also seems to translate into recruitment-like behaviour, which makes the link to organic growth visible:

“I recently convinced a girl at my internship to try a class.” (Jasmine)

When asked whether she had brought others into the sport, Lisa recalled:

“Yes, quite many. For example, my cousin got completely hooked and has competed twice now.” (Lisa)

In conclusion, accessibility in HYROX functions as a dual mechanism; it strengthens the existing collective through shared values of inclusion and support, while at the same time working as a recruiting mechanism by lowering the technical and psychological barriers.

4.3.3 How the Patterns Relate

Taken together, the two patterns within this theme show that accessibility operates as a dual mechanism in HYROX. The shared narrative of the sport as one “for everyone”, expressed across the interviews (4.3.1), reflects a value participants have internalised and that reinforces a sense of inclusion and moral responsibility within the collective. At the same time, this same value is actively articulated outward through comparisons with more technical fitness cultures, everyday recommendations, and direct recruitment of friends, family, and colleagues (4.3.2). Accessibility, in this sense, functions both as a glue that holds the existing collective together and as a threshold that lowers the barrier for new participants to enter. The two patterns describe the same value seen from two directions: one turned inward toward belonging, the other turned outward toward growth.

4.4 Extending Participation Through Digital Visibility

The fourth theme concerns the role of digital sharing in shaping how HYROX is experienced, expressed, and made visible. Across the interviews, two sub-themes were made visible: *digital content as the entry point* through which participants first encountered HYROX, and *sharing as an integrated part of the participation* experience itself. Together, these patterns show that digital participation does not simply come after physical participation, but is part of

how the experience itself takes on meaning and reaches others. This makes the theme a link between individual meaning-making and collective visibility which becomes directly observable for others.

4.4.1 Discovering HYROX Through Digital Content

In many of the interviews, the role of social media as the initial point of contact, or a big inspiration to HYROX, was brought up. Rather than encountering the sport through traditional marketing channels, many participants consistently described having discovered it through User-generated content online (Daugherty et al., 2008; van Dijck, 2009), an exposure framed as recurring and increasingly difficult to avoid:

"That was really through social media and seeing a lot of videos about it. I kind of just jumped on that trend." (Ella)

"I think I first saw it on social media, probably Instagram. It started popping up more and more, and then I had a few friends in school talking about it as well." (Elliot)

These descriptions resonate with and illustrate the concentration dimension of platformisation (Caliandro et al., 2024b), in which algorithmic personalisation channels users toward content aligned with their existing interests, reinforcing engagement through repeated exposure. HYROX content "popping up more and more", stated by Elliot, captures this effect in concrete terms. At the same time, the pattern reflects the contingent nature of platforms identified by Caliandro et al. (2024b). Where the digital environment in which HYROX becomes visible is continually reshaped by users' own evolving interests and expressions, meaning that exposure is not a stable property of the platform but an emergent effect of collective participation.

Further, several interviewees describe their personalised feeds containing HYROX content which illustrate eWOM in operation (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). They encountered HYROX not through traditional brand-generated communication but through statements and visual documentation made by other consumers. Srivastava et al. (2023) argue that peer-generated content is generally perceived as more credible than brand-generated content. No participant referenced HYROX's official marketing as their entry point, while several

attributed their initial curiosity through content that repeatedly surfaced in their feeds. Josephine states:

“Honestly, if I hadn’t seen it online, I probably never would’ve signed up at all...when you see videos and people doing it, it looks really fun and exciting.”

(Josephine)

Interviewees choose to bring up user-generated content instead of brand-generated content. Although this does not exclude the influence of HYROX brand-generated material, it points to a pattern in which user-generated visibility carries particular weight in the early phase of involvement (Srivastava et al., 2023). This parallel is also shown in the pattern observed in Theme 1, where attachment to the activity preceded attachment to the brand: HYROX is approached through other participants' expressions before it is encountered as a brand in its own right.

4.4.2 Sharing as Part of the Experience

When asking the interviewees about their own sharing on social media, a second pattern concerning participants' own meaning-making process and their contribution to the growth came up. Rather than describing sharing as an activity carried out after the race, participants framed posting and documenting as integrated into the experience itself, extending the meaning of participation both inwards as personal reflection and outwards as a contribution to a wider audience. The responses in this section show that sharing operates across all three of the themes in this chapter: it extends the *individual meaning-making*, performs the *collective belonging*, and articulates the *shared value of accessibility*. For Lisa, sharing functioned as a way of preserving the experience and articulating its accessibility to others:

"Partly to show that anyone can do it. You do not have to be extremely fit or have a special lifestyle. Anyone can do HYROX, and also because it becomes a memory for myself that I can look back on." (Lisa)

Lisa's statement illustrates the simultaneous presence of two personal functions. Firstly, her wish to show the world that “anyone can do it”, relates to the willingness to share her experience that is found among participants in brand publics (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016; Colleoni et al., 2021; Caliandro et al., 2025). Secondly, the “memory” that she can look back on relates to Ahuvia (2005) and the view of identity as a structured narrative, where the

participation in HYROX helps create her identity. Further, Jasmine reflects on what motivates her and others to post content:

"People post HYROX more than other training...You're proud, you get professional photos, and you want to inspire others. It looks cool to do hard things." (Jasmine)

Jasmine's reflection that "it looks cool to do hard things" suggests that the shareability of the experience may contribute to its symbolic value during participation. This aligns with the broader argument that consumers are active producers of meaning (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Rokka, 2021). Posting "cool" content can also be seen as a way for Lisa to manage and maintain her self-representation (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016). A similar orientation surfaced in Tess's reflection on why she posted her race video:

"So I did post it. One, for people to see it, and two, just because I liked it. It was really cool. Like it was a hardcore video." (Tess)

Tess's framing combines self-expression with audience-orientation, and the emphasis on the post being "hardcore" and "cool" suggests an attentiveness to the aesthetic and shareable qualities of the content.. Tess saying "for people to see it" reflects the publicity and visibility (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016) that members of a brand community seek. Further, it can also be drawn to Duffy and Hund's (2019) concept of *visibility labor*, in which individuals come to feel implicit pressure to maintain an online presence in order to remain visible.

For other participants, sharing was not a way of preserving a memory after the event but an active part of how they engaged with HYROX in the lead-up to the race itself. Ella and Josephine both described posting as a means of seeking connection, advice, and visibility within the wider HYROX context:

"For community feeling and hopefully to get advice from others since I was a beginner" (Ella)

"I have a TikTok account where I post a lot of fitness and running content. There, I shared some of my training leading up to the race, and also things like a vlog from race day. I used hashtags like #HYROX and #HYROXNice and things like that" (Josephine)

Ella's motivation for posting was to get the "community feeling" and "advice from others", which resonates with what Cova (1997) and Arnould and Thompson (2005) explain about individuals' motivation to seek collectiveness as an answer to feelings of isolation. Further, Ella's willingness to share content to get into the community relates to the social function of UGC that drives users to engage in activities to seek a sense of community (Daugherty et al., 2008). In contrast, Josephine uses social media as a tool for both everyday storytelling (Caliandro et al., 2024a), when she posts "a vlog from the race day", and uses the brand hashtags. The use of strategic hashtags such as #HYROX and #HYROXNice indicates an awareness of how content circulates within algorithmic systems, where reach depends on being visible to both peers and platforms (Caliandro et al., 2024b; Duffy & Hund, 2019). In this sense, Josephine's sharing can be seen as a form of work directed at sustaining her presence in a community that is, in part, constituted through visibility itself (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016; Duffy & Hund, 2019).

The orientation toward sharing also extended beyond individual motivation and was, for some participants, observed as a wider pattern at events. Oscar reflected on what he perceived as a more performative orientation among other participants:

"It feels like some people are also there mainly to take a photo and post it on Instagram to show that they were there. In Stockholm, there were lots of photo walls and places where people could take pictures" (Oscar)

Oscar's framing that some participants are there "mainly to take a photo" reflects Caliandro et al.'s (2024a) description of visibility-seeking participants, who use a brand context primarily as a vehicle for their own self-representation. For these individuals, the participation itself becomes secondary to the act of being seen as having participated. The "photo walls" Oscar describes show that this orientation is not only an individual disposition, but something the event itself is designed to facilitate. Reading alongside Tess's and Jasmine's accounts, Oscar's observation suggests that visibility seeking in HYROX emerges from an interplay between individual motivation and event design .

Across these interviewees, the sharing has different meanings, from preserving a memory, expressing pride and coolness, seeking community and advice, or gaining visibility. It is consistently described as an integral part of the experience rather than separate from it. Specifically, Lisa uses her posts to document race memories for herself while simultaneously

advocating for the sport's inclusivity by showing that anyone can participate regardless of their fitness level. Jasmine incorporates the event's professional photography into her social media activity to express pride in doing "hard things," utilizing her posts to inspire others. Additionally, both Ella and Josephine use their platforms as a tool for documenting their training leading up to the race day. Oscar, observing others rather than describing himself, points to how visibility itself becomes part of the event experience, both through individual motivations and through the photo walls and shareable settings built into the races.

4.4.3 How the Patterns Relate

Taken together, the two patterns within this theme show that digital participation in HYROX is not separable from involvement but constitutive of it. The first pattern (4.4.1) showed that participants first encounter HYROX through peer-generated content rather than through brand-led communication. The second pattern (4.4.2) showed that once participation begins, sharing is woven into the experience itself: posts are not simply afterthoughts but part of how the experience is registered, given meaning, and extended toward a wider audience.

Together, the two patterns show that digital participation is what carries HYROX beyond the people already involved, it is the part of the experience that turns outward and reaches others. The individual meaning-making described in theme 4.1, the collective belonging described in 4.2, and the shared value of accessibility described in 4.3 all become visible at scale through the digital practices examined here. In this sense, the digital should not be seen as an addition to HYROX participation but the medium through which the dynamics developed in the previous themes extend beyond the immediate participant base.

5. Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings from chapter 4 and presents our theoretical contributions in relation to the three literature streams that informed the study: meaning-making, consumer collectives, and platform-mediated consumer interaction. The first part, Achievement as a Source of Meaning and Identity, argues that meaning is grounded in the body and the activity before it attaches to the brand. The second presents the Hybrid Experiential Collective, in which the logics of tribes, brand communities, and brand publics operate simultaneously rather than as separate categories. The third examines digital participation as part of the HYROX experience itself rather than as something that surrounds it.

5.1 Achievement as a Source of Meaning and Identity

The findings of this study offers a nuanced extension of the existing literature on meaning-making and identity construction within Consumer Culture Theory. Traditional perspectives within the stream, established by scholars like Arnould and Thompson (2005) and Rokka (2021), shows how consumers draw on symbolic and mythic resources provided by the marketplace to navigate their world and identity. Within this stream, meaning-making is theorised as something that consumers do with and around brands, brand meanings, brand myths, and brand-mediated identity projects (Rokka & Ulver, 2023). Our results show how this partly is true when participants adopt the myths created. However, our data suggests that in experience-based contexts, meaning-making operates through the physical body and experience rather than the market.

On an individual level, our data shows how meaning-making in HYROX is generated through the physical experience of the activity itself. The training, the suffering, and the eventual triumph of the finish line, analysed in chapter 4.1 show how participants rather produce meaning through personal mastery and measurable progress than through the brand. In each case, the meaning of participation is anchored in what the body has done, endured, and accomplished, rather than in symbolic engagement with the brand. Our findings confirms what Arnould and Thompson (2005) writes about meaning-making, that people give experiences meaning in order to understand themselves and their environment. Importantly, attachment to the HYROX brand, its merchandise, and its visual codes appears to come after attachment to the activity has been established, which in some way goes against the assumption that meaning is created through products (Arnould and Thompson, 2005).

In the literature on co-creation, our findings support what Grönroos (2008; 2011) explains as a paradigm shift that has taken place in how value is created. From the data, we found that the participants acts as value creators when sharing content, running races and creating collectives. Further, our findings confirms that the “working consumer” is governed through their freedom (Zwick et al., 2008) when they are provided with platforms of practice. The standardised race format and the digital spaces where participants share their results function as exactly such platforms, where participants are free to train, compete, and post as they wish, while this freedom at the same time produces value for the brand.

The findings also confirm Ahuvia's (2005) view of identity as a structured narrative, while pointing to when, and on what terms, such narratives may form. Ahuvia argues that attributes become part of identity when they turn into linked memories that build a story of the self. Our findings seem to show this happening around moments of physical culmination, the finish line on race day or a first training session, where a hard experience can become a lasting memory that participants return to as a sense of what they are capable of. What is worth noting, however, is a condition that Ahuvia's (2005) model does not fully address. The memory does not seem to simply become a part of their identity, it appears to run an ongoing internal debate in which participants seem unsure whether they want the experience to define them or not. The same participants who treat the finish line as proof of their capabilities also tend to hold the activity at some distance, describing it as a side hobby and resisting the label of athlete (Theme 4.1.1). This suggests that the memory may be drawn into the narrative selectively, activated when it serves the participant's sense of self and held back when it does not.

Taken together, the findings make three related points about meaning-making and identity in experience-based consumption. First, our findings confirm what Grönroos (2008; 2011) says about co-creation, by showing that HYROX participants create value through training, racing, and sharing, and that this value comes out of the freedom Zwick et al. (2008) describe rather than against it. Second, they confirm Arnould and Thompson's (2005) view of meaning-making, by showing that participants give their involvement meaning in order to understand themselves, while adding that here the meaning comes from the body and the activity before it comes from the brand. Third, the findings adds to Ahuvia (2005) on narrative identity, by suggesting that the memories built from physical experience are not simply absorbed into the self but drawn into it selectively, on terms the participant keeps negotiating. Together these points suggest that meaning-making in this kind of consumption

comes from the body before it comes from symbols, and is negotiated rather than fixed, with participants building identity through what their bodies have done while keeping control over how far they let it define them.

5.2 The Hybrid Experiential Collective

The literature on consumer collectives has developed consumer tribes (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016; Diaz Ruiz et al., 2020), brand communities (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016; Colleoni et al., 2021). In the existing literature, the different collectives are described separately (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016; Arnould et al., 2023), treated as distinct and often alternative categorisations of how consumers organise. Our findings suggest that in an emerging, experience-based consumption, these collectives work together rather than separately. We therefore propose an alternative formation and present the concept of the *Hybrid Experiential Collective* to capture this dynamic.

HYROX does not fit any of the existing consumer collectives, but draws on the structural and social logics of all of them. If viewing the HYROX collective through consumer tribes, the collective is rooted in a shared passion for an activity (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016), the functional workout, rather than the brand HYROX. Participants also seem to engage in the fluid, low-commitment engagement typical for tribes (Diaz Ruiz et al., 2020) and maintains a negotiated identification that allows them to remain part of the collective without fully committing. Furthermore, the intense race-day experience, which participants describe as painful but still addictive, mirrors the collective spell that characterises tribal gatherings (Carù & Cova, 2015).

As a brand community, HYROX demonstrates the “consciousness of kind” and shared rituals that Martínez-López et al. (2016), Muñiz and O’Guinn (2001), and Arvidsson and Caliandro (2016) define brand communities. Our findings show a strong sense of “we-ness” shared among the participants, who recognise one another across different events and gyms. The sense of moral responsibility that works as a driving mechanism for the community (Martínez-López et al., 2016; Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001; Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016), is witnessed by respondents when describing the supportive atmosphere during races and classes. Additionally, the use of HYROX merchandise and specific gear functions as “linking values” or “totems” that facilitate social interaction and group identification (Cova, 1997),

something Martínez-López et al. (2016) and Rokka and Ulver (2023) explain is part of consumers' identity projects.

When looking at brand publics, the HYROX collective functions as one through the digitally mediated expressions aimed for visibility rather than social bonding (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016). The overarching visibility that HYROX creators have online affects both an entrance point and motivation for participants. Alongside this, HYROX participants share their own content after races and gym sessions, often not to influence anyone directly but to show others that they have accomplished something, which corresponds closely to the visibility-driven participation Arvidsson and Caliandro (2016) describe. The findings also point to a more performative form of involvement, where some participants appear to take part in a race partly in order to be seen doing it and to be associated with the activity and the brand. The use of brand hashtags such as #HYROX supports a visibility mode of participation, since participants attach their content to a shared, searchable stream rather than to direct interaction with others. Taken together, these patterns emphasise mediation over deliberation, in line with how brand publics are theorised (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016; Colleoni et al., 2021; Caliandro et al., 2025).

Although HYROX can be connected to all three of the consumer collectives separately, what we found was that these categories do not describe different groups of people, but rather different layers of the same participant's experience. A simplified version of this journey shows how one single individual moves fluidly between these collectives; she works out with her gym-crew at the local gym (tribe), identifies people, rituals, and merchandise during races (community), and posts a finish-line photo that circulates to a global audience (public).

Our key theoretical claim is that in experience-based consumption where activity precedes brand attachment and where digital and embodied participation are deeply interconnected, treating tribes, communities, and publics as separate categories fails to capture the layered and simultaneous processes through which the collective is actually formed. We argue that in this context, they shed light on layers of engagement that operate at the same time.

Our contribution to the literature on consumer collectives is the theorisation of the *Hybrid Experiential Collective*. This formation acknowledges that while embodied experience is the primary glue, the brand provides a standardised infrastructure that allows the experience to be scaled and made visible worldwide through digital platforms. This hybridity allows HYROX to maintain the intensity of a tribe, the stability of a community, while also achieving the

algorithmic reach of a brand public. This contribution is summarised in our proposed fourth column for the collective comparison table:

Category	Consumer Tribes	Brand Communities	Brand Publics	Hybrid Experiential Collective
Core Focus	Shared lifestyle, experience, passions, rituals	Long-term commitment to a specific brand	Visibility, mediation, participation in networked publics around a brand	Shared experiences, and passions
Primary Glue Between Members	Shared passions, experiences, symbolic consumption	Shared consciousness of kind and loyalty to the brand	Attention, content circulation, interaction in public digital spaces	Shared consciousness of kind, passions, experiences, and content circulation
Relationship to Brand	A brand may be secondary or one symbolic resource among many	The brand is the central organising force	Brand is a media object/topic around which publics gather	Brand is central for the infrastructure; but is not the primary object of attachment
Membership Structure	Fluid, shifting, loosely bounded	More stable, clearer insiders/outside	Open, scalable, algorithmically expanded	Open, scalable, fluid, and shifting, but has a clear insider/outsider standpoint
Interaction Type	Rituals, gatherings, events, embodied experiences	Ongoing member interaction, support, and traditions	Networked discourse, hashtags, reactions, spectatorship	Gatherings, events, support, and hashtags
Typical Spaces	Events, gyms, meetups, races	Forums, clubs, official groups, recurring spaces	Social media platforms	Races, gyms, and social media platforms

The *Hybrid Experiential Collective* borrows different characteristics from each existing formation, but the contribution of this study lies in what it gives back to each of the three streams by combining them. We therefore distinguish three separate contributions, one to each literature.

Our contribution to the literature on consumer tribes concerns the relationship between commitment and belonging. The tribal literature already describes membership as fluid and

low-commitment, where members can join and leave as they please (Cova & Cova, 2002; Diaz Ruiz et al., 2020). Our findings confirm this, but they also show something the fluid, low-commitment relationship is not only a feature of how the group is structured, but something participants actively manage in relation to their own identity. They stay loosely attached on purpose, drawing on the activity while holding it at a distance (Theme 4.1.1). What we propose, then, is that the looseness tribes are known for can be understood as a deliberate identity strategy rather than only a structural property of the group. This connects the tribal logic to the negotiated identification discussed in section 5.1.1 and extends the tribal literature by showing that low commitment can coexist with deep personal meaning.

Our contribution to the literature on brand communities concerns what the community forms around. The literature assumes that the brand is the central organising force, and that consciousness of kind, rituals, and moral responsibility develop in relation to that brand (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001; Martínez-López et al., 2016). Our findings show that all three of these markers are present in HYROX, which confirms the literature, but they form around the shared activity first and the brand comes second. The consciousness of kind participants describe comes from recognising others who train and race, not from loyalty to HYROX as a brand. What we add is that the markers the community literature treats as brand-centred can also organise around an activity, with the brand functioning as the structure that makes the activity recognisable rather than as the object members are devoted to. This expands the brand-community concept into experience-based consumption where the brand is infrastructural rather than central.

Our contribution to the literature on brand publics concerns the relationship between visibility and belonging. The brand publics literature describes participation as a series of isolated, visibility-seeking expressions that do not produce shared meaning or social bonds (Arvidsson & Caliendo, 2016; Colleoni et al., 2021). Our findings confirm that this visibility-driven, mediated participation is present, especially in how participants share content and use hashtags to reach a wider audience. What we add is that in HYROX this public-style participation does not replace community bonds but sits on top of them. The same people who post for visibility also belong to tight gym groups and recognise one another in person. This suggests that brand-public dynamics and community dynamics are not alternatives, as the literature tends to present them, but can operate together, with visibility extending a belonging that is already grounded in shared activity.

Taken together, these three contributions support our central claim. The existing literature has tended to treat tribes, communities, and publics as separate ways of organising, each studied in isolation (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016; Arnould et al., 2023). By showing that they operate at the same time as layers of one participant's experience, the *Hybrid Experiential Collective* does more than describe a new case. It suggests that the boundaries the literature draws between these formations may be less fixed than assumed, at least in emerging, experience-based contexts where attachment grows from a shared activity before it attaches to a brand, and where physical and digital participation are closely tied together. The value of the concept is therefore not only that it names a hybrid, but that it offers a way of seeing how these previously separate formations connect.

5.3 Digital Participation as Constitutive Infrastructure

This section discusses the findings in relation to the literature on platform-mediated consumer interaction. Across platformisation (Caliandro et al., 2024b), electronic word-of-mouth (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Srivastava et al., 2023), and user-generated content (Daugherty et al., 2008; van Dijck, 2009) our findings confirm much but also extend them.

Starting with platformisation, our findings confirm the concentration that Caliandro et al. (2025) explains when the participants described HYROX content popping up more and more in their feeds. The personalisation of content channels users toward content aligned with their existing interests and reinforces engagement through repeated exposure (Caliandro et al., 2024b). The fact that the environment in which HYROX becomes visible is continually reshaped by participants' own expressions reflects the contingent nature of platforms (Caliandro et al., 2024b; Caliandro et al., 2025), and the broader liquefied consumer culture that moves meaning-making into a digital space (Rokka, 2021). Our data confirm this, with the standardised race format and the digital spaces where participants share results working together as a single platform for practice, in line with the way digitalisation reinforces co-creation between brands and consumers (Rokka & Canniford, 2016).

Turning to electronic word-of-mouth, participants attributed their early curiosity to content made by other consumers rather than to official HYROX marketing, supporting the view that peer-generated content is treated as more credible than brand-generated content (Srivastava et al., 2023). The literature situates eWOM within a fairly transactional model, as information that supports a decision (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Srivastava et al., 2023), yet none of our

participants described encountering the content as part of a decision-making process. Instead, repeated exposure gradually built a background familiarity until HYROX became something they recognised and associated with people like themselves. What eWOM does is make the sport recognisable rather than inform a deliberate choice between alternatives.

The same pattern holds for user-generated content. Our findings confirm that ego-defensive and social functions drive content creation (Daugherty et al., 2008). In our data, participants express posting to express pride, to inspire others, and to seek community. The pride and inspiration agree with the ego-defensive function of protecting and projecting a self-image, while the wish to seek community reflects the social function of engaging in activities viewed favourably by others (Daugherty et al., 2008). Further, our findings support what van Dijck (2009) is writing about the user-centric model where individuals use media to express themselves and participate in cultural production.

Drawing the three strands together, in each case our findings confirm what the literature says, but in a consumption like HYROX these mechanisms do not sit around consumption as inputs and outputs, they operate inside it. Platformisation supplies the infrastructure through which the experience is made visible (Caliandro et al., 2024b), eWOM makes the phenomenon recognisable before any decision to take part is made (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Srivastava et al., 2023), and user-generated content works as a form of self-expression and cultural participation, driven by the psychological and social functions the literature identifies (Daugherty et al., 2008; van Dijck, 2009).

6. Conclusion

This thesis aimed to examine how organic growth potentially can come from within a collective. Drawing on 14 semi-structured interviews, the findings of this study demonstrate that the rapid growth and visibility of HYROX are the results of a participant-driven process centered on a new type of consumer formation: the *Hybrid Experiential Collective*. This formation succeeds by integrating deep personal significance with a social structure that is simultaneously fluid and highly supportive.

This study was guided by the following research question:

How does meaning-making and a feeling of collectiveness among HYROX participants contribute to the growth and visibility of the sport?

At the core of the expansion is individual meaning-making grounded in personal achievement and mastery. Participants generate a sense of value from the intensive, passionate physical challenge, often reporting that they feel more capable, confident, and proud of themselves after completing a race. This personal transformation provides the foundation of the movement, yet participants maintain a fluid and negotiated identification with the sport. By viewing their involvement as a side hobby, they are able to remain deeply engaged without the pressure of a fixed, all-consuming identity, allowing for a more sustainable and fluid form of attachment.

This individual experience is reinforced by a unique feeling of collectiveness characterized by mutual support rather than hostile competition. The collective is held together by a sense of moral responsibility, where participants prioritize encouraging others over personal winning. This supportive environment is underpinned by the shared value of accessibility, which frames the sport as being "for everyone" regardless of their fitness background. By lowering the barriers to entry, this shared value transforms existing members into active recruiters who drive organic growth through everyday recommendations.

The digital aspects of the sport serve as the infrastructure that makes this internal culture visible to a global audience. Digital participation is woven into the experience itself, as participants use social media to document their achievements, seek advice, and manage their self-representation. This user-generated content makes the sport recognizable to outsiders and

creates a system where participation generates content, and content, in turn, generates new participation.

In summary, HYROX has expanded from 600 racers to over a million because it functions as a Hybrid Experiential Collective. It successfully combines the intense passion of a tribe, the supportive traditions of a community, and the global reach of a digital public. Ultimately, the growth of the sport is not merely a marketing outcome but a result of how participants' search for personal mastery and collective belonging is projected through digital platforms to create a global, self-sustaining movement.

6.2 Practical Implications

For brand managers and organisations operating in experience-based industries, the findings suggest that organic growth is unlikely to be produced through firm-led communication alone. Rather, it depends on designing experiences that are intense enough to be personally meaningful, structured enough to be measurable, accessible enough to be recruitable, and shareable enough to circulate. The Hybrid Experiential Collective combines all four. Practitioners aiming to cultivate participant-driven expansion should consider how their offering enables embodied meaning-making, supports collective belonging across skill levels, and integrates shareable moments into the experience itself, rather than treating digital visibility as a separate marketing function.

At a societal level, where individualism is increasingly prominent, the findings indicate that experience-based activities like HYROX can offer a setting in which people find connection, identity, and purpose through shared physical effort. Understanding how such collectives form and grow organically may therefore be valuable not only for those seeking to build them commercially, but also for communities, public health initiatives, and organisations aiming to foster social connection through physical activity.

6.3 Limitations

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. The empirical material is drawn from 14 participants from Western countries, which limits the cultural breadth of perspectives captured. The exclusively participant-centred focus means the perspectives of newcomers, dropouts, and outsiders are not represented, even though they form part of the dynamic described. The study also relies on interviews alone, without a complementary digital

component, which means that the digital participation dimension is understood through participants' accounts of their own practices rather than through direct observation of content circulation.

6.4 Future Research

Several avenues for future research follow from the findings, but also from the limitations of the study. First, the *Hybrid Experiential Collective* proposed here would benefit from testing across other experience-based contexts, both within and beyond fitness, to assess whether the simultaneous layering of tribe-, community-, and public-like dynamics is specific to HYROX or characteristic of a broader category of consumer formation.

Drawing from the limitations, future research could include a broader scope of people to gain a deeper understanding of how the collective affects different types of participants. It could either include a broader scope regarding their involvement in HYROX, or geographically, since HYROX is competed world-wide. It could also be interesting to do a comparative study where different nationalities and/or cultures are studied to see if the collective dimension differs depending on the cultural and geographical context. Additionally, future studies could combine participant interviews with netnographic or computational analysis of digital content to examine how participant-generated meaning circulates at scale.

By examining HYROX as an instance of participant-driven expansion, this study has sought to open conceptual ground at the intersection of three literatures that have rarely been brought together, and invites future research to develop this terrain further.

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Appendix 1

Interview Guide:

Before the interview:

- Introduce ourselves and the study briefly
- Remind the participant that there are no right or wrong answers, that the interview will be recorded, that participation is voluntary, and that all data will be anonymized

Section 1: Warm-up: Background and involvement

- Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and how and why you got into HYROX?
- How long have you been participating, and how many events have you competed in?
- How does HYROX fit into your everyday life, training, social life, and routines?

Section 2: Meaning-making and personal experience

- What does participating in HYROX mean to you personally?
- Has your involvement in HYROX changed how you see yourself or how you describe yourself to others?
- How does it make you feel when you participate in HYROX?
- Are there specific moments, experiences, or rituals around HYROX that feel particularly meaningful to you?
- Has HYROX changed anything about how you think about your body, your health, or what you feel you should be doing physically?
- Do you feel like being a HYROX participant is part of your identity? In what way?
- Do you ever find yourself talking about HYROX to people who have never heard of it, explaining what it is, encouraging them to try it? What drives that?

Section 3: Collective belonging and community

- Would you say HYROX feels more like a community you belong to, or more like a shared interest you happen to have with a lot of strangers? Or something in between?
- How did that sense of belonging develop? Was it gradual, or did it happen at a specific moment?
- How would you describe your relationship with other people you have met through HYROX? Has that surprised you in any way?

- Do you interact with other HYROX participants outside of events and training? In what ways?
- Have you noticed any shared behaviors, values, or ways of doing things among HYROX participants that feel specific to this group?

Section 4: Digital sharing and online participation

- Do you share content related to HYROX online? On which platforms, and what kind of content?
- Do you tag other participants or use hashtags? Are you a part of any forums or (Facebook) groups?
- When you post about HYROX, do you think about who is going to see it? Who do you imagine your audience is?
- What motivates you to share or not share your HYROX experiences online?
- Have you discovered HYROX or been influenced to participate through other people's content online? Can you tell me about that?
- Do you follow other HYROX participants online, and does that affect your own involvement or motivation?

Section 5: Growth and visibility

- Have you noticed HYROX growing around you, in your gym, social circle, or online? How would you describe that growth?
- Do you think the way people talk about and share HYROX online has anything to do with how fast it has grown? What is your sense of that?
- When you encourage someone to try it, what do you find yourself saying? What do you lead with?

Section 6: Closing reflection

- Do you ever feel any pressure, from yourself or from the HYROX community, to keep improving, keep competing, keep posting? What does that feel like?
- Is there anything about your experience with HYROX or about what we have discussed that you feel is important but that we have not touched on?

Use of AI

In the course of writing this thesis, AI tools have been used in a limited and supportive capacity, in line with Lund University's guidelines for the responsible use of AI in academic work. Whisper (OpenAI) was used to transcribe the recorded interviews, with all audio files processed and stored locally to safeguard participant confidentiality. The resulting transcripts were reviewed and corrected manually by the authors. The transcripts conducted in Swedish were translated into English with Claude (Anthropic), and the resulting translations were reviewed and corrected manually by the authors to ensure they accurately reflected the participants' original meaning.

Claude (Anthropic) was used as an idea generator to support language refinement of individual words, suggest alternative formulations, and discuss the structure of individual sections. It was also used to generate the image on the title page. All suggestions were critically evaluated and rewritten by the authors before being incorporated into the thesis.

MyBib, a free online citation and reference management tool, was used to organise the thesis references. The tool allows the user to enter the relevant details of each source and then formats and structures the references consistently according to the chosen referencing style. All references included in the thesis have been independently verified against their original sources, with MyBib used only to support their structuring and formatting.