Exploring the relationship between customer loyalty, consumer brand engagement and online brand communities in the luxury fashion industry

By Michelle Willis

Student ID: 1811154

Primary supervisor: Dr Raye Ng

Secondary supervisor: Professor Wilson Ozuem

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Cumbria

Word count: 76,751

Year of submission: 2022

University of
Cumbria

Students to complete the sections from Student's Name to Declaration of Intellectual Integrity.

Student's Full Name: Michelle Willis			Student's No: 1811154	
Name of Degree/Diploma/Certificate/Course: Doctor of Philosophy Business and Social Media	Campus/ Site Lancaster	Year/Level of Study:		Group:
Module Code/Title: APL Credits			Module Tutor: Dr Raye Ng and Professor Wilson Ozuem	
Assessment Title: Exploring the relationship between customer loyalty, consumer brand engagement and online brand communities in the luxury fashion industry				
Resources Included - Yes		Word Count: 76,751	No of Pages: 265	
I declare that the work in this thesis is my own work and was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Cumbria. No part of the thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas.				
Signed: .			Date Submitted: 21/11/2022	

Abstract

Customers who have an emotional connection with a brand may illustrate their social identity or lifestyle in reference to the brand through an online brand community (OBC) in which they participate. Consumers differ from customers; although consumers may consume the content presented in OBCs they have not purchased the brand's products, whereas customers have purchased the brand's products.

Previous research emphasised the importance of how customers identify with luxury fashion brands, exploring their loyalty through their active role in OBCs. This study considers millennial consumers and how they are influenced to become loyal customers within OBCs in the luxury fashion industry. Customers within OBCs involved in referencing a brand through word of mouth to other consumers, to demonstrate their potential loyalty to the brand, indirectly contribute to firms' sales. Customers' online activity is then observed by consumers who have not yet developed behavioural or attitudinal loyalty towards the brand.

Drawing on social influence theory, the proposed study aims to develop a conceptual model and theoretical construct that could facilitate the development of effective customer loyalty strategies for luxury fashion brands' OBCs. Social influence is the key theory of the conceptual framework guiding the study, regarding active customers' indirect contribution to generating loyalty. Taking into consideration the different perceptions of millennial consumers, this study aims to adopt a social constructivist perspective following an inductive approach. The aim of this study is not to generate new theory as grounded theory allows, but to understand the process of the phenomenon being studied in a specific setting; for this study, OBCs is the phenomenon under study and the luxury fashion industry is the case setting. This justifies the adoption of an embedded case study research strategy because the strategy restricts studies to specific cases but allows usage of semi-structured interviews to enable a researcher to collect in-depth responses from participants.

Findings indicate that customers and consumers perceive OBCs' effect on loyalty and participation differently; therefore, customers and consumers were categorised into an OBC loyalty typology: traditionalists, inspirers, self-containers and expellers. This study proposes a holistic conceptualisation of OBC characteristics influencing customers' loyalty to, and perceptions of, OBCs comprising four themes: relationship

with the luxury brand, influence of content valence, socially aligned identity and collective community intentions. These are integrated into a framework, combined with a loyalty typology, providing guidance on how customer loyalty is influenced through OBCs, and the levels of online participation customers may conduct and their influence on other customers. The thesis concludes with recommendations for future research on the current research's conceptual framework and loyalty typology and further inquiry into customer loyalty in OBCs.

Dedication

To my father, mother, grandparents and family – my strength. To my close friends, colleagues and supervisors – my inspiration.

Acknowledgement

This thesis was achieved through the contribution of several individuals who contributed in their unique ways. The experience, support and guidance of Professor Wilson Ozuem is the core foundation of this thesis. His balance of motivation and criticism has helped me grow academically and professionally. In particular, Professor Ozuem has provided me the skills on to benefit from criticism and keeping an open-mind, whilst learning to master the art of supporting my own views and findings in the competitive and paradoxical mindset of the academic world.

I am very grateful to Dr Raye Ng who has provided me great opportunities to further myself in my studies and my academic career. I began as a novice research student, and thanks to Dr Ng, I am progressing into a novice researcher who is now able to share ideas and findings to colleagues, students and key institutions. The training and experience facilitated by Dr Ng has been priceless, and has offered me new and exciting opportunities for research and teaching.

A special thanks to Professor Kerry Howell, who has been a great support to my development in the academic writing field and methodology. I have had the privilege of having direct access to his expertise in philosophy of research and methodology that I witnessed through his supportive contribution on independent research projects I conducted with Dr Ozuem, and other research colleagues, for which I am most grateful.

Another special thanks to Linda Dr Linda Free for her proofreading and editorial support, her contribution to this thesis has been a valuable asset. Regardless of the subject of written work, Dr Free has never failed to deliver high quality, and motivates the desire to create more efficient writing styles thus directly contributing to increasing the value of existing work.

Table of Contents

List of tables

List of figures

1.1 Introduction

Online brand communities (OBCs) are different from traditional communities; their core focus is on branded goods or services, and their community members are typically interested and admirers of a brand (Albert, Merunka, & Valette-Florence, 2008). Though each brand community has unique purposes, they are universally considered a marketing investment for firms to develop and maintain long-term relations with their current and potential consumers (Zaglia, 2013) and achieve favourable brand outcomes (Relling, Schnittka, Sattler, & Johnen, 2016, p. 107). According to Baldus, Voorhees, and Calantone (2015), OBCs began as simple text forums where consumers shared thoughts and questions regarding a brand. Yet, as consumers' visits to OBCs increased, companies realised the positive effect of OBCs on company sales compared to product channels that are specialised in providing product information, whereas OBCs facilitate mutual communications between multiple parties building social interaction and social status enhancement between members (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004; Nambisan & Baron, 2007).

OBC literature is directed towards understanding the factors that motivate consumers to engage in online environments and develop loyalty intentions towards brands (Pansari & Kumar, 2017; Harmeling, Moffett, Arnold, & Carlson, 2017; Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). However, the complex nature of consumers in OBCs has led to differing views regarding the generation of loyalty from online engagement (Bleier, Harmeling, & Palmatier, 2019). For instance, researchers have argued that engagement in OBCs occurs following consumers' purchase experiences and brand loyalty is generated following repeat purchasing (Pansari & Kumar, 2017; Kupfer, Pähler vor der Holte, Kübler, & Hennig-Thurau, 2018). Other studies have examined online engagement developed by customers that indirectly contributes towards firms' sales, such as voicing feedback, blogging or circulating word of mouth (WOM), thus encouraging other consumers' purchasing intentions (Bijmolt *et al.*, 2010; Pham & Avnet, 2009; van Doorn *et al.*, 2010; Verhoef, Reinartz, & Krafft, 2010).

The online activities that indirectly contribute to firm's sales mentioned in the previous paragraph are connected to customers who have purchased products from the brand and have attitudinal as well as behavioural loyalty towards the brand. Other consumers may exhibit consumer brand engagement (CBE), which refers to individuals' interactive behaviour linked to a brand (Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić, & Ilić, 2011) in which loyalty to a specific brand has not developed but is a possible outcome following engagement (Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014). Although an individual may consume the information and content generated within online communities, it does not necessarily mean they have purchased from the brand, thus making them information or content consumers. Purchasing outcomes may follow engagement (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014; Pansari & Kumar, 2017), but encouraging consumers to become loyal customers may require the involvement of loyal customers. Customer loyalty is linked to individuals who have a purchasing history making them customers; customers who have an emotional bond with a brand, rather than simple satisfaction following a purchase, are likely to indirectly contribute to the brand's sales by influencing consumers' brand usage intentions.

Customers and consumers within online communities can be referred to as active customers and passive consumers based on their behavioural and attitudinal loyalty towards a brand. Dick and Basu (1994) argued that repeat purchasing does not necessarily reflect true loyalty. They defined true loyalty as a combination of favourable purchasing behaviour and positive attitudes regarding the brand, which may motivate customers to refer the brand to other consumers. They linked false loyalty with individuals with no emotional bond with the brand; thus, they might not refer the brand to others regardless of their own purchasing history (Kanakaratne, Bray, & Robson, 2020). Ozuem, Thomas, and Lancaster (2016) adapted Dick and Basu's (1994) framework to define customer segments based on the level of active or passive loyalty and behavioural and attitudinal loyalty they practiced. The importance of Ozuem *et al.*'s (2016) study is twofold, it suggests the need to consider: (1) whether customers who showcase behavioural and attitudinal loyalty towards a brand through OBCs perceive OBCs as relevant to their loyalty to luxury fashion brands; and (2) whether they socially influence the loyalty intentions of observing consumers through their engagement in OBCs. The rest of this chapter presents a synopsis of the thesis and explanations of the

research problem and the research aim. Additionally, research objectives and research questions are explained. The chapter ends with the rationale for the study.

1.2 Synopsis of thesis

The first chapter introduces the background of the current study. It begins with a discussion of the research problem, describing the limitations of OBC literature, the contradictions across findings on customer loyalty and the generalisation of customer groups within extant literature; the work of Meek, Ryan, Lambert, and Ogilvie (2019) is the starting point of the current study. The chapter addresses the need to examine specific consumers, that is, the millennial generation, describing their distinctiveness from consumers of other generations. The chapter discusses the research aim, objectives and questions, and describes the rationale for the study.

The second chapter summarises the extant literature related to OBCs and customer loyalty. First, the chapter examines the development of the definition of OBCs and the characteristics associated with OBCs. Next, the chapter examines customer loyalty, profiling concepts of behavioural and attitudinal loyalty (Dick & Basu, 1994) and their implications for customer attitudes, purchasing and online behaviours. This is followed with a discussion on the constructs of social influence theory, and relevant concepts from the theory (Kelman, 1958) are taken to direct further investigations undertaken by the current study. Literature related to online customer engagement is discussed to enhance the discussion that reveals typologies and numerous types of online engagement behaviours and their association with other variables, including social influence theory and customer loyalty. The chapter concludes by explaining the nature of the luxury fashion industry as a feature of online experiences and customer behavioural and attitudinal loyalty.

The third chapter explains the methodological approach applied in the study. It begins with the researcher's justification for choosing social constructivism as the epistemological paradigm for the study rather than alternative paradigms, which is followed by a justification for choosing an inductive research approach. The case study approach is introduced as the research strategy, and the context of the current study's case is briefly addressed, including the decision to focus on the luxury fashion industry, the experiences of consumers from the millennial generation, and the need to distinguish between OBC customers and consumers. Details regarding the pilot study that was

conducted prior to the data collection are briefly discussed. Following this is an explanation of the sample selection and size, and the employed data collections methods, and their appropriateness for the current study. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the reflexivity of the research, and the validity and generalisability of the current study's findings.

The fourth chapter provides the rationale for selecting the thematic analysis structure provided by Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton (2013) as the appropriate data analytical technique. The chapter reveals and analyses the responses of the interviewed millennial participants, and the four major themes that emerged, namely relationship with luxury brand, influence of content valence, socially aligned identity and collective community intentions, which were supported by the interview responses and the researcher's reflexive positioning.

The fifth chapter presents the conceptual framework, which was the major aim of the current study; this is referred to as the traditionalists, inspirers, self-containers and expellers (TISE) framework. This chapter elaborates the construct of the loyalty typology (traditionalists, inspirers, self-containers and expellers) and the connection with the four themes discussed in Chapter four. The discussion of the typology synthesised key findings from the literature review related to customer loyalty and engagement, social influence and OBC characteristics, and the findings from the interview responses.

The sixth chapter presents a conclusion for the findings of the study, including the theoretical contributions and managerial implications of the research project. The chapter re-emphasises the extant literature and its limitations, how the application of the researcher's chosen methodology supported the generation of the study's theoretical framework and conceptualisations. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the current study's limitations and suggestions for further research projects.

1.3 Research problem

Research into OBCs emerged from a strong stream of past studies on brand communities (e.g., Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Albert *et al.*, 2008; Baldus *et al.*, 2015); over the past century, studies have evolved from investigations of the physical environment to investigations of the virtual environment, which makes OBCs a topical and relevant area of study (Parreño, Mafe, & Scribner, 2015, p. 90). For the past two

decades, OBCs have been recognised as powerful tools by marketers and scholars because of the benefits they provide brands, including customer commitment and loyalty (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Cheng, Wu, & Chen, 2020). Luxury fashion brands have invested heavily in the use of external resources, including digital technology platforms and collaborations with loyal customers through OBCs (Hsiao, Wang, Wang, & Kao, 2019; Scuotto, Del Giudice, Della Peruta, & Tarba, 2017). Yet, despite research into loyalty within OBCs, there are gaps in research regarding how OBCs directly motivate and maintain loyalty towards a brand and the difference between loyal active customers and observing passive consumers.

Although prior literature has tested the effects of several antecedents of loyalty, including customer engagement and identification, within online communities, researchers have isolated explanations of how OBCs directly generate specific aspects of loyalty, namely attitudinal loyalty, behavioural loyalty and repurchase intentions. The type of loyalty individuals deliver illustrates their level of genuine loyalty towards a brand (Dick & Basu, 1994; Ozuem *et al.,* 2016; Wilkins, Livingstone, & Levine, 2019), for example, through behavioural loyalty, including repeat purchasing, and through attitudinal behaviours, such as referring the brand to others (Shukla & Drennan, 2018; Pansari & Kumar, 2017). However, prior research has traditionally regarded OBC customer members as homogeneous, resulting in authors applying generic descriptions to members' online loyalty behaviour (Algesheimer *et al.,* 2005; Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Pearo, 2004; Cheng *et al.,* 2020; Wilkins *et al.,* 2019). Consequently, OBC members are generically defined as either customers or consumers despite arguments supporting the differences between customers and consumers in regard to loyalty. A certain "delight" from experiences with OBCs is likely to motivate attitudinal and behavioural loyalty, whereas satisfaction from observing the content of OBCs might not have a strong effect on firms' sales (Chandler, 1989; Hall & Haslam, 1992; Dick & Basu, 1994; Kwong & Yau, 2002).

Researchers' perceptions of the loyalty of OBC members as homogeneous can arguably be linked to their use of identification theory. Several researchers have explored the value of luxury fashion brands to customers, emphasising customers' integration of a brand's personality showcased through OBCs into their own social identity through OBCs (Ranfagni, Crawford-Camiciottoli, & Faraoni, 2016; Fuchs, Prandelli, Schreier,

& Dahl, 2013; Crawford-Camiciottoli, Ranfagni, & Guercini, 2014; Wang, Stoner, & John, 2019b; Helal, Ozuem, & Lancaster, 2018). The literature on OBCs has addressed the importance of individuals' identification within online communities; however, research has tended to investigate individuals' identification with brands and individuals' identification with other individuals within online communities separately, which has led to the question of why individuals join OBCs: to connect with other community members (Dholakia *et al.,* 2004; Ellemers, Kortekaas, & Ouwerkerk, 1999; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Ren, Kraut, & Kiesler, 2007) or to develop or maintain a personal connection with the brand (Algesheimer *et al.,* 2005; Fuchs *et al.,* 2013; Crawford-Camiciottoli *et al.,* 2014; Fang & Zhang, 2019). The aforementioned identifies a theoretical pattern of OBC research, implying the dominance of brand or consumer identification and social identity theory.

Yet, the literature on identification with OBCs reveals the complexity and contradictions of how OBCs affect individuals' loyalty towards brands in the luxury fashion industry. Studies have highlighted the importance of identification with brands as a key indicator of loyalty within OBCs regarding individuals who have past behavioural purchasing as well as preference towards the brand (Algesheimer *et al.,* 2005; Wilkins *et al.,* 2019; Harmeling *et al.,* 2017; Pansari & Kumar, 2017). However, there are distinct differences between individuals who either actively or passively use social media platforms. Individuals who practice passive use, known as "lurkers", are unlikely to express social identity or personally engage compared to active users who are more certain and expressive in their online identity and role within OBCs (Pagani, Hofacker, & Goldsmith, 2011; Pagani & Malacarne, 2017). Passive users therefore cannot be studied using social identity theory or be considered actively loyal within OBCs until they progress beyond the simple consumption of content they observe in OBCs (Khan, 2017).

As mentioned earlier, consumers may develop satisfaction from observing content or activity within OBCs, but this does not guarantee they will act on their identification and generate sufficient return to the brand through sales. In contrast, loyal customers may benefit the brand's sales both directly and indirectly (Pansari & Kumar, 2017). Loyal customers have been subject to many studies involving identification theory, causing social influence theory to be overlooked (Dubois & Paternault, 1995). Furthermore, although social influence theory has been applied in research of OBCs,

research into luxury fashion has focused more on individuals' self-reference within luxury brand OBCs (e.g., Carlson, Suter, & Brown, 2008; Crawford-Camiciottoli *et al.,* 2014; Helal *et al.*, 2018). In research of OBCs related to the luxury fashion industry, the use of social influence theory to investigate differences between active loyal customers and passive observing consumers within OBCs from the in-depth perspective of consumers and customers is significantly limited with minor exceptions (Gentina, Shrum, & Lowrey, 2016).

Meek *et al.* (2019) suggested that social capital enhances the quality of interactive relationships, which influences the ongoing success of OBCs. The internal activity within OBCs has been subject to mass research as the involvement of active members is important for the continuation of OBCs (Parreño *et al.*, 2015, p. 90). Members' participation will take different forms (Eigenraam, Eelen, Van Lin, & Verlegh, 2018), including information sharing (Wiertz & de Ruyter, 2007) and user-generated content (UGC) (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Koivisto & Mattila, 2018). Investigations into the consequences of customers' participation in OBCs have primarily focused on the value it provides for the brand (Koivisto & Mattila, 2018; Ferraris, Santoro, & Bresciani, 2017), the antecedents that motivate individuals to engage, and its importance to the brand (Ibrahim, Wang, & Bourne, 2017; Garrido-Moreno, García-Morales, Lockett, & King, 2018). Meek *et al.* (2019) indicated that social capital in an OBC environment is a multidimensional construct determined by the level of shared language, shared vision, social trust and norm of reciprocity that exists within the structure of the community. Meek *et al.*'s (2019) research provided insights into the role that interactions between community members play in developing passive members into active members. They argued that through social capital, information seekers develop stronger network ties and evolve into socialisers in OBCs, which is a predictor of participative behaviour within OBCs and customers developing a sense of belonging. However, Meek *et al.*'s (2019) study undermined differences between customers from the millennial generation and those from other customer segments and how their loyalty is affected by OBCs and the interactive conversations that occur within them. Millennials are conscious of fashion brand choices (Helal & Ozuem, 2019, p. 142) and are extremely involved in online purchasing and social networking (Bilgihan, 2016); therefore, their loyalty response to OBCs will be different from other generations' responses. Arguably, millennial consumers can be adopted as context for a study on loyalty and engagement

within OBCs. The differences between the demographics, perspectives and behaviours of millennials and other young generations emphasise the need to examine the millennial generation as a context (Stremersch, Gonzalez, Valenti, & Villanueva, 2022) for a study on customer loyalty in OBCs and social influence factors.

Meek *et al.* (2019) examined the effect members have on encouraging others to move from information-seeking activities to socialising activities on OBCs. This places emphasis on commitment to socialising with community members; although this provides a valuable starting point of generating loyalty in OBCs, it does not necessarily reflect customer loyalty towards specific brands. Few researchers have explored how the involvement of actively loyal and engaging customers influences the loyalty intentions of consumers towards brands through OBCs (Cheng *et al.*, 2020; Wilkins *et al.*, 2019; VanMeter, Syrdal, Powell-Mantel, Grisaffe, & Nesson, 2018) and even fewer researchers have explored customers' involvement in influencing loyalty intentions through OBCs in the luxury industry (Mandel, Petrova, & Cialdini, 2006), including luxury fashion brands.

Scholars have called for further work on how OBCs impact customer loyalty (Baldus *et al.*, 2015; de Almeida, Scaraboto, dos Santos Fleck, & Dalmoro, 2018; Park, Rishika, Janakiraman, Houston, & Yoo, 2018; Zheng, Cheung, Lee, & Liang, 2015). Several issues can be identified in existing research on OBCs and customer loyalty. For example, Meek *et al.*'s (2019) study is a valuable tool for understanding the pattern of engagement between members in OBCs; nonetheless, it does not capture the distinct loyalty categories that are generated following social interactions between members and whether these online interactions influence loyalty behaviours towards brands. Meek *et al.* (2019) focused on a single category of loyalty that mostly aligns with attitudinal loyalty and disregarded the behavioural loyalty category. Customers' loyalty towards a brand is adapted from actual behaviours, including product or service purchasing as well as electronic WOM (e-WOM) behaviour (Munnukka, Karjaluoto, & Tikkanen, 2015; Dick & Basu, 1994); therefore, it is important to consider loyalty behaviours like purchasing and e-WOM to understand the extent to which OBCs and customer engagement through OBCs impact customer loyalty.

Customers and consumers have different motivations to engage in OBCs, and the influence of other OBC members on their loyalty will differ. Meek *et al.* (2019) in their

study did not distinguish OBC members beyond the motivation to socialise with other members and did not distinguish different types of loyalty intentions, which resulted in customers and consumers being categorised as a single segment; this reduces the characterisation of millennials' loyalty intentions within OBCs. Drawing on social influence theory, the proposed study aims to provide insights into how customers within an OBC impact customer loyalty. Social influence theory examines how individuals influence changes or adaptions in other individuals' behaviours, and while there are studies on OBCs that have examined social influence, few have examined how it impacts loyalty (Henderson, Beck, & Palmatier, 2011; Park *et al.*, 2018; Viswanathan, Sese, & Krafft, 2017). Social influence plays a part in persuading individuals of the benefits of being a member of an OBC (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006). Social influence theory acknowledges that individuals are affected differently by influencers, and their behaviour outcomes will vary depending on their individual characteristics and intentions towards an OBC (Iyengar, Van den Bulte, & Valente, 2011; Park *et al.*, 2018). Social influence theory will potentially provide new insights into how OBCs impact the loyalty of customers and consumers towards luxury fashion brands and how participating customers influence consumers' loyalty intentions. The present study will attempt to examine the effect OBCs have on millennials' loyalty commitments towards luxury fashion brands and extend understanding on how online customers can influence the loyalty behaviours of consumers through OBCs.

Several authors identified that social presence in the online environment is a key source of influence on loyalty within online communities (Cheng *et al.*, 2020; Essamri, McKechnie, & Winklhofer, 2019). However, previous research mainly focused on active contributors within OBCs without segregating the different behaviour processes of passive consumers. Previous studies showed that, although individuals may feel a sense of belonging to a group, this does not necessarily motivate active behavioural participation (Dessart, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, 2016). However, although passive consumers may not actively participate within the community, understanding what they observe and what they perceive are central to appreciating the influence of loyal customers who engage within OBCs.

Pansari and Kumar's (2017) study provided two categories of customer behaviour following a marketing message: direction contribution (purchases) and indirect contribution (customer referrals, influence and knowledge/feedback). Pansari and

Kumar (2017) suggested that customers who only contribute through direct purchasing without referring the brand to others lack an emotional connection with the brand (p. 307). This view is supported by Dick and Basu (1994) and Ozuem *et al.* (2016) who suggested that customers' past or repeat purchasing does not reflect true loyalty. For online engagement to occur, customers must have both behavioural and attitudinal loyalty, so they are motivated to influence other consumers' loyalty intentions. Although Pansari and Kumar (2017) explored how engaged customers benefit companies, they did not consider how potential customers perceive engaged customers or how active engaging customers can influence the behaviour of potential customers. This concept of influencing behaviour is considered by Meek *et al.* (2019); they suggested that the quality of interactive relationships between OBC members is a critical factor that influences an OBC's ongoing success and turns passive consumers into active socialisers. Yet, their study emphasised social capital constructed by shared language, vision, trust and the norm of mutual exchanges through interactions, and assumed that passive members can be motivated to engage within OBCs without considering the different behaviours of customers and consumers that impact the type of loyalty they develop towards OBCs.

Most studies explored the antecedents of engagement and loyalty; for example, Meek *et al.* (2019) examined the effects of engagement on developing loyalty to an online community, and Pansari and Kumar (2017) explored antecedents of loyalty towards brands or products. This thesis examines the influence of OBCs on the loyalty of both customers and consumers and how customers influence the loyalty of other potential customers. Pansari and Kumar's (2017) category of customers' indirect contributions, such as referring the brand to other potential customers, and the interactive relationship between OBC members explored in Meek *et al.*'s (2019) study, are important concepts for this current study in understanding the antecedents of customers' loyalty towards brands in the online setting and are applied to this study, which aims to explore the extent to which OBCs impact customers' loyalty, how consumers perceive OBCs and the extent to which customers develop other consumers' loyalty in OBCs. The investigation of both customers and consumers is likely to generate different results regarding their perceptions of OBCs based on differing experiences and attitudes.

Social identity theory and social capital theory have been frequently used in OBC studies, but these theories were commonly associated with active customers of OBCs

who have a shared sense of identity, trust and values and are highly engaged (Pagani & Malacarne, 2017). Passive consumers' behaviour is more complex to understand as they are more likely to observe engagement and unlikely to express their identity (Khan, 2017) unless influenced to do so. For this reason, this study sets out to understand from a social influence perspective how active engaging customers affect consumers' loyalty towards luxury fashion brands through OBCs. Social influence theory examines how individuals influence others' behaviour and attitudes, and how individuals' differing attitudes and intentions cause them to be affected differently by influencers.

Luxury fashion brands are defined as brands that demand the highest level of quality and are premium priced (Berthon, Pitt, Parent, & Campbell, 2009; Hansen & Wänke, 2011; Silverstein & Fiske, 2003). Luxury is largely driven by social motives, such as status signalling, social approval and communicating social identity to others (Bloch, Bush, & Campbell, 1993; Hoe, Hogg, & Hart, 2003; Wilcox, Kim, & Sen, 2009; Wang, Noble, Dahl, & Park, 2019a), which are traits that can be applied to active customers within OBCs. However, it is unclear whether customers' loyalty is influenced by OBCs linked to luxury fashion brands, and whether customers' influence observing consumers' loyalty towards OBCs linked to luxury fashion brands. This thesis suggests that aside from active OBC members' engagement, OBCs may impact customers' and consumers' loyalty, and customers conducting social influence through OBCs may impact consumers loyalty.

The positivist stance of OBC literature generalises the loyalty of active customers and passive consumers as well as how OBCs affect the loyalty of these groups to a brand. The effect of OBCs on consumers' loyalty to a specific brand may differ from the effect of OBCs on loyal customers' loyalty. OBCs might influence individuals through a variety of factors that include, but are not limited to, trust (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), satisfaction (Reynolds & Beatty, 1999), experience (Crosby & Johnson, 2006), intention to connect with community members (Dholakia *et al.,* 2004), intention to connect with the brand (Algesheimer *et al.,* 2005; Fuchs *et al.,* 2013; Crawford-Camiciottoli *et al.,* 2014) or a combination of these factors, depending on the loyalty status of the individual. This reveals the complex and diverse nature of loyalty (Ozuem *et al.,* 2016) and supports the view that active customers' and passive consumers' loyalty will differ from each other. However, this study does not exclude either consumers or customers found in OBCs. This study applies social influence theory to

enhance understanding of how OBCs directly affect the loyalty of both customers and consumers and it specifically explores how customers' participation in OBCs motivates consumers' loyalty intentions.

Following this description of the research problem, the aim of this study is to use a social constructivist perspective, drawing from social influence theory, to develop a conceptual model and theoretical construct that could facilitate the development of effective customer loyalty strategies for OBCs for luxury fashion brands. This aim is directed by the study's objectives and questions, which are now discussed.

1.4 Research aim and objectives

Drawing on social influence theory, the proposed study aims to develop a conceptual model and theoretical construct that could facilitate the development of effective customer loyalty strategies for OBCs for luxury fashion brands. The aim of this study is directed by the following objectives:

1) To critically review extant conceptual models and theoretical frameworks related to OBCs and loyalty in the luxury fashion industry.

The current study starts as an exploratory study of the extant literature. The review includes a classification of OBCs and the development of brand communities from an offline to an online presence. Following the review of OBC literature, the literature related to customer loyalty is critically examined. The literature argues that customer loyalty consists of two key elements: attitudinal and behavioural loyalty characteristics. These are studied in consideration of the various motivations customers have for engaging online. This is followed by an examination of the categories of social influence theory, which offers insights into the impact of individuals and a community on online attitudes and behaviours. The fourth art of the literature review examines extant customer engagement concepts to consider customer participation in online environments. It argues that online consumers can conduct passive or active engagement and are associated with varying types of online activity and varying levels of community interactions. The final section discusses literature that examines the characteristics associated with the luxury fashion sector and its distinction from other industries. Limitations of the extant literature are explored and areas for further exploration are developed, including the need to extend findings generated by studies following the positivism paradigm and the homogeneous classification of customers.

2) To critically evaluate the effect of OBCs on customer loyalty in the luxury fashion industry.

The current study is directed by the research paradigm of social constructivism due to the evolving and multidimensional nature of the current study's phenomenon: OBCs and customer loyalty. Furthermore, the second objective is directed by and examined under research questions 1 and 2.

3) To critically explore whether customers' participation in OBCs motivates consumers' loyalty intentions.

The literature on customer engagement associates social presence within online settings with attracting individuals to engage and participate online. Furthermore, customers' online participation and loyalty influences consumers by varying degrees and determinants. These varying levels and determinants of social influence and their impact on customer loyalty are examined through research question 3.

This study of OBCs and customer loyalty will seek to answer the following research questions:

1) To what extent do OBCs affect customer loyalty in the luxury fashion industry?

This question seeks to answer whether OBCs affect customers' loyalty, including their purchasing behaviour and willingness to share brand-related information with other potential customers. The two main categories of customer loyalty, behavioural and attitudinal, are integrated into this examination to understand the type of loyalty customers will conduct in reference to their encounter with, or usage of, OBCs. To understand the aforementioned, a social constructivist perspective is applied to understand the customers' subjective thoughts and experiences, allowing in-depth conversations related to OBCs and loyalty. This approach overcomes some limitations of the positivist paradigm, in which explanations of loyalty and social influence processes follow specific phases and antecedents. Additionally, similarities and differences across customers are identified, overcoming the main research problem in the existing literature.

2) How do consumers perceive OBCs in the luxury fashion industry?

Consumers' perceptions of OBCs in the luxury fashion industry are examined. This question addresses the individuals who may not yet be active purchasers of a specific

luxury brand, but may be aware of the existence of OBCs and consume information displayed through OBCs; this study refers to these individuals as consumers. Consumers may interpret the usage and impact of OBCs differently from OBC customers of luxury fashion brands. Furthermore, this information is applied to make sense of the interpretations related to research question 3.

3) To what extent do customers develop other customers' loyalty in OBCs linked to the luxury fashion industry?

This question makes reference to the social influence processes between customers and the consequences it has on loyalty in luxury fashion OBCs. This research identifies the key characteristics of OBC customers that influence attitudes and behaviours of other customers, and how these vary across groups of customers. This offers insights into the differentiation between OBC customers who influence and those who are influenced, and whether additional characteristics impact the social influence process of individual customers.

1.5 Rationale for the study

OBC literature is directed towards understanding the factors that motivate consumers to engage in online environments (Pansari & Kumar, 2017; Harmeling *et al.*, 2017; Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). However, the complex nature of consumers in OBCs has led to a degree of confusion regarding the taxonomy of loyalty; it has been argued that loyalty is generated to an extent following online engagement (Bleier *et al.*, 2019). Researchers have argued that a consumer's purchasing experience motivates engagement, which is expected to increase sales through repeat purchasing (Pansari & Kumar, 2017; Kupfer *et al.*, 2018). Several researchers have proposed that customers' purchasing activity within online communities is key to generating an experience, thus motivating engagement (Shukla & Drennan, 2018; Bleier *et al.,* 2019; Pansari & Kumar, 2017), which eventually influences consumers to develop a loyalty attachment to the brand through OBCs.

This study considers customers' purchasing history with a brand to be a significant indicator of customer loyalty within OBCs as it identifies customers' acknowledged brand choice in the long term. However, this study argues that to understand customer and consumer loyalty in the luxury fashion industry, it is important to understand forms of online behaviour in OBCs other than past or repeat purchasing. A key issue addressed

by this study is distinguishing customers from consumers based on their active or passive behavioural and attitudinal loyalty through OBCs. This distinction has been addressed by several authors who stress the importance of identifying individuals who have genuine loyalty towards brands (Dick & Basu, 1994; Ozuem *et al.,* 2016; Wilkins *et al.*, 2019).

Customers and consumers within online communities can be referred to as active customers and passive consumers based on their behavioural and attitudinal loyalty towards a brand. Dick and Basu (1994) argued that repeat purchasing does not necessarily reflect true loyalty if customers do not generate enough positive attitude to the brand to feel motivated to refer the brand to other consumers. Dick and Basu (1994) proposed that individuals with a purchasing history but no emotional bond with the brand exhibit false loyalty; thus, they may not refer the brand to others regardless of their purchasing history (Kanakaratne *et al.*, 2020). Ozuem *et al.* (2016) adapted Dick and Basu's (1994) framework to define customer segments based on the level of active or passive loyalty and behavioural and attitudinal loyalty they practice. Ozuem *et al.*'s (2016) and Dick and Basu's (1994) findings link to the rationale of this study: to investigate whether OBCs have the influence to maintain the loyalty of customers who have purchased from the brand. As customers and consumers generate different behaviours in OBCs, it is also important to consider the influence of customers who showcase behavioural and attitudinal loyalty towards a brand within OBCs, which socially influences observing consumers' loyalty intentions. Therefore, this study of loyalty in OBCs in the luxury fashion industry extends beyond purchasing intentions to investigate how social influence within OBCs motivates customers to remain with a luxury fashion brand and how social influence develops consumers' loyalty intentions.

One of the key elements within online communities is social influence; several authors clearly identified that social presence in an online environment influences loyalty within online communities (Cheng *et al.*, 2020; Essamri *et al.*, 2019). Social influence affects factors such as consumers' sense of belonging and identity within a community (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005; McAlexander, Schouten, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002), a "we" community culture, which increases its perceived value (Fournier, 1998; Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000; Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006), and bridging and bonding social capital (Cheng *et al.*, 2020); all these are key components within online communities. Social influence has been associated with individuals' modification of their opinions, attitudes,

beliefs and behaviour to reflect those of others they interact with (Flache *et al.*, 2017). The process for the alteration of consumers' opinions, for example, based on social influence involves several behavioural characteristics, including being persuaded following convincing arguments and a satisfying experience (Myers, 1982), an intention to adjust so they can be perceived as similar to others (Akers, Krohn, Lanza-Kaduce, & Radosevich, 1979), following others' perceptions or actions because of feelings of uncertainty (Bikhchandani, Hirshleifer, & Welch, 1992) or feeling pressured to conform with socially accepted norms (Festinger, Schachter, & Back, 1950; Wood, 2000).

Kelman (1958) identified three levels of influence that impact individuals' attitudes and behaviours: compliance, identification and internalisation. The importance of how social influence can shape individuals' attitudes, beliefs and actions has motivated extensive studies on the impact of social influence on information systems acceptance (Davis, Bagozzi, & Warshaw, 1989; Karahanna, Straub, & Chervany, 1999; Lewis, Agarwal, & Sambamurthy, 2003; Malhotra & Galletta, 2005; Mun, Jackson, Park, & Probst, 2006; Li, Zhang, & Sarathy, 2010; Cheung, Chiu, & Lee, 2011). However, Kelman's social influence model has received criticism that commonly cited the difficulty of categorising a sample of online users as influenced by identification and internalisation when the users are part of a variety of online communities (Cheung *et al.*, 2011) and being part of online communities is now a common trend, or subjective norm, regardless of motivations (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000). Therefore, investigations into information systems adoption have primarily situated social normative compliance as the focus, thereby overlooking identification and internalisation processes. Luxury fashion upholds a high-end social style, but economic restraints and social image limit consumers' compliance with associating with such brands. This identifies a need to investigate identification and internalisation and is supported by previous studies that have placed great emphasis on consumers' online social identity and fashion associations, exploring their need to be recognised for their social uniqueness through the brands they consume (Helal *et al.,* 2018; Carlson *et al.,* 2008; Nowak, Szamrej, & Latané*,* 1990; Wang *et al.*, 2019b).

The majority of studies on the luxury fashion sector have focused on how OBCs enable consumers to connect with fashion brands that complement their social identity (Fuchs *et al.*, 2013; Crawford-Camiciottoli *et al.,* 2014; Ranfagni *et al.,* 2016; Helal *et al.,* 2018) and how consumers' published content develops an exchange of knowledge

between consumers and luxury fashion brands (Ferraris *et al.*, 2017; Scuotto *et al.,* 2017; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011; Koivisto & Mattila, 2018). In addition, as well as studies that emphasised the importance of the effect of an association with a luxury fashion brand on consumers' "self-image", several authors noted the importance of social approval for individuals showcasing their social identity through their association with a luxury brand in online communities (Bloch *et al.*, 1993; Hoe *et al.*, 2003; Wilcox *et al.*, 2009; Wang *et al.*, 2019b).

The millennial generation have been the subject sample in various studies, however, there are conflicting definitions of the characteristics of millennials in the literature (Luo *et al.*, 2020; de Kerviler & Rodriguez, 2019). Luo *et al.* (2020) generally defined millennials as individuals born between 1979 and 2002. However, Helal *et al.* (2018) associated millennials with a demographic cohort born between the early 1980s and early 2000s (p. 980). In defining millennials, this study builds on Helal *et al.*'s (2018) three distinct sociocultural dimensions: tech-savvy, socially conscious and active social media users (Azemi, Ozuem, & Howell, 2020). The aforementioned rationalises the need to conduct a study with a specified context centred on millennial individuals. In the current study, the millennial generation is the context guiding the report's contents. Stremersch *et al.* (2022) indicated that populations, including individual generations, can be defined as contexts for studies, and that researchers can extract data specific to that context for their particular studies. Past research that recruited young consumer-based samples have generalised their behaviours and characteristics without differentiating them by their subpopulation status (Cheng *et al.*, 2020; Mandel *et al.*, 2006; Kim & Ko., 2012). Extant researchers have contextualised their studies using the millennial population, distinguishing millennials from other young generation consumers, and identified potential differences across groups of millennials (Azemi *et al.*, 2020; Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2020; Ozuem, Willis, Howell, Lancaster, & Ng, 2021a). A millennial-context lens will enable the researcher to explore and generalise the perspectives of, and behaviours towards, luxury fashion OBCs specific to the millennial cohort while also considering differentiation between members of that specific generation (Stremersch *et al.*, 2022).

Millennials are the dominant users of online platforms and have an elevated inclination to participate and engage in social interaction (Azemi *et al.*, 2020; Danias & Kavoura, 2013), and they exercise the highest level of involvement in online socialisation,

information sharing and online purchasing (Bilgihan, 2016; Ozuem, Ranfagni, Willis, Rovai & Howell, 2021c). Additionally, millennials are described as highly conscious regarding fashion brand choices (Helal & Ozuem, 2019, p. 142); thus, retailers now use digital platforms to empower consumers (Hur, Lee, & Choo, 2017; Patten, Ozuem, & Howell, 2020). Millennials' mass involvement in social media has motivated various studies to investigate aspects of millennials' usage of social media, including loyalty (Purani, Kumar, & Sahadev, 2019; Bi, 2019), brand identification (Sashittal, Hodis, & Sriramachandramurthy, 2015; de Kerviler & Rodriguez, 2019) and online purchasing (Flecha-Ortíz, Santos-Corrada, Dones-González, López-González, & Vega, 2019; McCormick, 2016). Millennials are more influenced by the symbolic aspects of luxury brands (Shin, Eastman, & Mothersbaugh, 2017) and are significantly motivated to consume status compared to older generation customers (Eastman & Liu, 2012). Additionally, they are more eager to exercise social influence (Butcher, Phau, & Shimul, 2017), which effects their purchase intentions towards luxury brands (Soh, Rezaei, & Gu, 2017).

Researchers have shown a great interest in understanding millennials' consumption behaviour in the luxury industry, focusing on their social identity, status and response to luxury brand experiences (Gentina *et al.*, 2016; Mundel, Huddleston, & Vodermeier, 2017; de Kerviler & Rodriguez, 2019). However, there is a paucity of research on whether millennials' usage of OBCs and customers' participation within OBCs affect their loyalty intentions. Furthermore, despite the acknowledged importance of social influence on the millennial generation (Butcher *et al.*, 2017), there have been limited investigations into whether social influence through OBCs affects millennials' attitudinal and behavioural loyalty within the luxury fashion industry. Interestingly, although millennials are the generation that are the most experimental with luxury fashion brands, they are also the most challenging group in which to encourage strong emotion and psychological attachment to luxury brands (de Kerviler & Rodriguez, 2019). This could be arguably linked to economic concerns and uncertainty regarding trust towards potential purchases from luxury brands (Kong, Wang, Hajli, & Featherman, 2019). Social identity is less likely to have a major impact on uncertain or less expressive millennials within OBCs (Pagani *et al.,* 2011; Pagani & Malacarne, 2017), causing them to rely more on the information posted within OBCs (Khan, 2017) by active and loyal customers. The limitations of social identity theory in explaining

passive and uncertain millennials supports the need to further investigate social influence within OBCs. Furthermore, there are gaps in previous studies on customers' social identity through OBCs, such as understanding how OBCs affect the loyalty of customers who demonstrate behavioural and attitudinal loyalty, and whether they influence other consumers' loyalty in the luxury fashion brand industry.

Previous studies have explored customers' identification with online communities and how social influence impacts community membership. Dholakia *et al.*'s (2004) study identified that members of a group-based network stay connected with members with whom they have formed close relationships, which differs from communities based on networks that are focused on achieving functional goals (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002). Thus, members will consequently identify with a specific group or groups of individuals rather than the online channel. Dholakia *et al.*'s (2004) study predicts that an online community will be perceived as useful if participants find another participant with a compilatory motivation to share information, and strong mutual agreement and social identity generate motivation to participate. Mandel *et al.* (2006) emphasised the importance of consumers seeing other consumers from similar segment groups being depicted and referencing the brand within published content. Mandel *et al.* (2006), who recruited university students found that they accepted influence from other students who studied the same major. Mandel *et al.* (2006) made it clear that their recruited participants for their study had no direct relationship or past interactivity with the individuals featured in marketing material presented to them, indicating that shared characteristics can be influential on consumer behaviour including purchasing. Studies on social influence between community members have generally focused on the close engagement between consumers. However, Dholakia *et al.* (2004) found that social interactivity had no significant effect on participation, contradicting the concept that consumers need to form relationships.

In contrast, Algesheimer *et al.* (2005) indicated that rather than a consumer being attracted to an OBC based on identification with community members, individuals join OBCs based on their pre-existing relationship with a brand, including loyalty and preference towards the brand, which further influences community participation and membership continuation. Fuchs *et al.* (2013) equally emphasised the importance of the brand association itself in the luxury industry. However, Algesheimer *et al.* (2005) did not exclude community engagement, instead they situated it as a mediating variable that

prolongs brand identification and loyalty intentions. These studies revealed the importance of brand identification, but they did not consider how loyalty is developed in OBCs by active and passive users. Previous studies that compared passive and active users showed that identification does not prompt online behaviour that is favourable to a brand, such as expressing positive preference for a brand through OBCs, from passive users compared to active users (Pagani *et al.,* 2011; Pagani & Malacarne, 2017; Khan, 2017). This highlights a need to examine how OBCs affect these individuals' loyalty without applying individual-related behaviour theory frameworks, such as social identity theory and brand identification theory, as passive consumers may not yet have the self-expressiveness to promote their identification with a brand. Therefore, rather than focusing on the individual process of brand identification and how millennials are motivated to showcase their social identity, this paper adopts the theory of social influence to examine how consumers' loyalty is developed through OBCs as well as how OBCs affect customers' loyalty.

The differences in community members' behaviour within online communities in the mentioned studies (Algesheimer *et al.,* 2005; Dholakia *et al.,* 2004; Mandel *et al.,* 2006) highlights the importance of distinguishing active loyal customers from passive consumers. However, both groups are equally important to this study; although passive consumers may not actively participate within OBCs, understanding what they observe and how they perceive it, is important in relation to the social influence of loyal customers referencing brands through OBCs in the luxury fashion industry. Although it is expected that non-active observing consumers will mostly seek information, they may develop a sense of symbolic connections with brands in online communities in the way active individuals do (Pagani & Malacarne, 2017). For this reason, this study finds the need to understand how the activity of "self-image" conscious customers, seeking social approval, affects observing consumers' loyalty towards the luxury fashion brand itself.

In their recent study on customer engagement in social media platforms, Pansari and Kumar (2017) focused on a customer's value addition to a firm through either a direct or indirect contribution (p. 295) and the consequences following co-creation. According to their conceptual framework, loyalty is a consequence of engagement; customer loyalty can be defined in terms of repeat purchasing or through consumers' brand attitude (Kumar, Dalla Pozza, & Ganesh, 2013; Kamran-Disfani, Mantrala, Izquierdo-Yusta, & Martínez-Ruiz, 2017). Although measuring loyalty through repeat purchasing

is practical, theoretically it complicates understanding of past behaviour from psychological variables, implying an a posteriori attempt to measure behavioural loyalty (Monferrer, Moliner, & Estrada, 2019). Dick and Basu (1994) contended that repeat purchasing does not necessarily reflect true loyalty; they defined true loyalty as a combination of favourable behaviour and attitudes, and false loyalty as consisting of repeat purchasing but without favourable consumer attitude (Kanakaratne *et al.*, 2020). The majority of studies on loyalty outcomes in online communities have focused on purchase intentions following co-creation and customer engagement (Mende, Bolton, & Bitner, 2013; Choi, Ko, & Kim, 2016; Chen, Teng, Yu, & Yu, 2016; Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017; Shukla & Drennan, 2018).

Overcoming the positivist position of a generic loyalty outcome, Pansari and Kumar (2017) perceived consumers as heterogeneous and emphasised the individual-level relationship between emotions and indirect contributions as well as the relationship between satisfaction and direct contribution (pp. 300–301). They segregated consumers' loyalty outcomes on the basis of satisfaction and emotion, which separated direct (purchasing) and indirect (customer referrals, influence and knowledge/feedback) contributions. This epistemological orientation allowed researchers to conceptualise how consumers respond differently to brand experiences. Consumers' responses were not limited to repeat purchases as an outcome of loyalty, rather, Pansari and Kumar (2017) implied that two pathways determine consumers' level of motivation to refer brands to other consumers. Pansari and Kumar (2017) further implied that although consumers are heterogeneous, they must be both satisfied and emotionally connected to initiate the stage of engagement (p. 295); this approach identified the importance for firms to attain consumers who are what they called "true love" cases compared to another category of consumers who are satisfied with the products but have no emotional connection with the brand itself (p. 307). With the aforementioned contribution in mind, the current study will develop the work of Pansari and Kumar (2017) on consumers' indirect contributions.

This current thesis suggests that the effect of consumers' indirect contributions, such as consumers' brand references, on loyalty through social media can be best understood from the perspective of observing consumers and active customers. In the context of Pansari and Kumar's (2017) study, the consequences of engagement are limited to purchase-related experiences and the improvement of the firm's performance. Taking

the influence of consumers into account, Pansari and Kumar's (2017) explanation of how referrals from active participating consumers are perceived by consumers observing the online engagement is partial. The current thesis examines the effect of attitudinal loyalty towards brands (Pansari & Kumar, 2017), depicted by brand identification within published content, on the loyalty intentions of an observing consumer. Emphasising an epistemological philosophy, a majority of past research on social influence and loyalty in online communities provided a context-free and highly structured position on consumers' loyalty outcomes and engagement behaviour in OBCs. This methodological approach has similarly been applied to studies on social media and fashion (Thomas, Peters, & Tolson, 2007; Phillips & McQuarrie, 2010; Kim & Ko, 2012; Wolny & Mueller, 2013; Chae & Ko, 2016; Kupfer *et al.*, 2018), providing useful yet structured perspectives of online consumers.

Consumers' and customers' loyalty intentions in online settings are complex; therefore, it is important to understand the social realities of customers and consumers and the structure of such realities (Helal *et al.,* 2018). Furthermore, the methodical approach adopted in this study considers the complex nature of the luxury fashion industry; a positivist approach isolates the researcher, which hinders understanding of consumers responses' in online communities. The limitation of studies linking the social influence of active community members with the passive followers of luxury fashion brands not only needs to be explored, but also requires the application of a social constructivist methodology that allows an in-depth investigation to understand the consumers' perspective of whether online interactions and content posting from other community members impact their loyalty. The concept of social influence in the luxury fashion industry is no longer limited to celebrities and iconic fashion experts, indicating a need to further understand the effect of alternative sources of influence on individuals in online communities. Thus, this study adopts a social constructivist stance to enable the researcher to explore responses and understand meanings of experiences.

1.6. Summary

This chapter reveals an overview of the research study. It summarises the theoretical foundations of OBCs and customer loyalty to introduce the research problem. The research aim, objectives, and questions are introduced and explained together with the current thesis's selected research philosophy and design. Additionally, the rationale of

the research is discussed. The next chapter provides a critical analysis of the existing literature, including themes, debates and gaps that address the need to theoretically enhance literature of OBCs and customer loyalty.

Chapter two
Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a critical analysis of OBCs and customer loyalty. It begins by providing a synopsis of early definitions of communities and how they are related to recent studies of online communities and their development from physically orientated communities to online technology-based communities. It then develops a starting point of the types of online communities, the social influence characteristics that impact loyalty towards a brand through the mediating variable of engaging activities within online communities. The chapter considers the consumers who mostly observe the online activity within OBCs and the loyal customers who actively contribute content within OBCs. In OBCs, the loyal customers are considered more reliant regarding their referencing of brands than passive consumers due to their attitudinal and behavioural loyalty towards a brand, which makes them a significant source of social influence within OBCs. The chapter explores literature on customer loyalty within online communities based on different characteristics, from loyalty to the brand, commitment to the community itself and its members, the functional and symbolic goals consumers aim to achieve as well as their level of contribution and, most importantly, the social influence that motivates loyalty retention.

The intention of this chapter is to critique the existing literature, which offers different findings, theories and models, from a range of perspectives. The literature on generating loyalty in online communities has provided useful and impressive theoretical contributions, yet there are contradictory views on the practical applications of community activity and loyalty retention. Current understanding of consumers and their rationale to join online communities and actively engage with them is based on several key behavioural characteristics. The literature on OBCs has typically focused on consumers' motivations to join OBCs and remain with them. The core objective of this chapter is to understand the stance of consumers and when and how social influence through online activities impacts their decision to remain loyal to a brand. Debates within the chapter can possibly inform future research by conceptualising the mental

perceptions of customers involved in luxury fashion communities to better comprehend the meaning and construction of customer loyalty in OBCs.

2.2 Development of OBCs

Historically, a "community" was thought to be a geographically bounded, diverse population with multiple organised differences, including age, gender, religion, ethnicity, wealth and even power (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995; Navarro, 1984). "Imagined community" is a concept developed by Anderson (1983) to understand and analyse nationalism. According to Anderson's theory of imagined communities, described in his early studies, the main causes of nationalism are: (1) the increased acceptance of a universal language by large populations over a language that is accessible based on privilege; (2) the movement to eliminate the idea of "rule by divine right"; and (3) the emergence of printing press capitalism. Anderson depicted a nation as a socially constructed community, and as something that is not material orientated but exists in between culture and psychology.

Although Anderson focused on the historical concern for state-building within communist societies, his concept has been applied to a limited number of studies to understand behaviour in online communities (Danias & Kavoura, 2013; Kavoura, Pelet, Rundle-Thiele, & Lecat, 2014; Beck, 2011; Cayla & Eckhardt, 2008; Gruzd, Wellman, & Takhteyev, 2011; Coles & West, 2016). Gruzd *et al.* (2011) used the imagined community concept as a starting point to understand the environment and behavioural patterns within Twitter. Anderson (1983) stated: "*the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion*" (p. 6). Gruzd *et al.* (2011) applied this logic to the argument that in online communities, members will most likely not know everyone but would be aware of their presence. The imagined community concept has also been applied to justify an individual's conscious recognition that they are following similar events with others and that they share common affects with each other (Beck, 2011).

Yet, despite its significant link to sociology studies, Anderson's concept of imagined community has not been without criticism. One of the most cited shortcomings of the concept centres around the book's title "*Imagined*" in the context of defining imagined communities. Anderson's concept that any community beyond face-to-face interactions

has to be imagined has been commonly misinterpreted for imaginary, an issue that other authors have noted (Jones, 1997; Baym, 1998, p. 38; Jenkins, 2002; Breuilly, 2016). Anderson made it clear that the concept of imagined is linked to an invention of a community based on creation, and one that is not fabricated or falsified (p. 6). This provides the understanding that though we may not visibly see an actual community, users can still envision it as a group of people bound by similar goals (Jones, 1997) making it nonetheless real. An additional critique was made by Partha Chatterjee (1993) in Chapter 1 "Whose Imagined Community?" of his book *The Nation and Its Fragments*, in which he suggested that the imagined idea of a nation (in other words, imagined community) is not universal and if it is imagined, then it is imagined differently in different nations. Though Anderson made no reference to a universal community, Chatterjee's (1993) point is justifiable as communities are established based on groupings of individuals who are similar while excluding those perceived to be different. Anderson's (1983) concept raises the issue that a nation state can bind people through a bond of unity but also expel and reject (Spivak & Butler, 2007), which raises the question of how belonging to a community is deliberated and taken away.

Arguably, Anderson's concept opened the pathway to academic understanding of how social influence theory affects individuals within an individual community, segregating the behaviour of individuals within that community from that of other communities. The points provided by Gruzd *et al.* (2011) and Chatterjee (1993) regarding imagined communities highlights the nature of individuals within each individual community, which is socially constructed by the behavioural patterns of its members, who may never personally know each other, yet, are socially influenced by shared variables, such as goals and interests. Anderson's concept of imagined community brings to light the complex nature of loyalty within the online context, as many imagined communities can be found on one generic technology platform, as allowed by the mass transformation of social media. The development of mass media and telecommunications platforms transformed people's ability to share an identity because they were not restricted by geographical boundaries. Researchers have argued that virtual media can create an imagined community among groups (Grudz *et al.,* 2011; Danias & Kavoura, 2013; Kavoura, 2014). Within social media, the imagined community concept can break down a generic population of individuals into smaller groups whose community is based on their association with specific brands.

Technological developments, such as social media, contributed to the emergence of brands becoming part of consumers' identities through social media as consumers' access to firms became less restricted and cheaper (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). The increased involvement of brands within communities attracted a variety of scholars who examined online communities and their connections to consumers (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Albert *et al.,* 2008; Baldus *et al.,* 2015).

Brand communities are different from traditional communities; their core focus is on branded goods or services, and their community members are typically interested in, and admirers of, a brand (Albert *et al.,* 2008). Though each brand community has unique purposes, they are universally considered a marketing investment for firms to develop and maintain long-term relations with their current and potential consumers (Zaglia, 2013) and to achieve favourable brand outcomes (Relling *et al.*, 2016, p. 107). According to Baldus *et al.* (2015), brand communities began as simple text forums where consumers shared thoughts and questions regarding a brand; they have since evolved to offer unique interactive brand experiences. These online interactive experiences have expanded beyond the simple search for products and services to include other factors, such as learning how to use products and having fun, and more psychological mechanisms, including social interaction and social status enhancement (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004; Nambisan & Baron, 2007).

These different interactive activities predict intentions to engage and become loyal; however, understanding the source of influence that encourages consumers to engage and develop loyalty intentions is complex because consumers' psychological processing differ. Though activities encouraging consumers to participate in online communities are important, each consumer will exhibit different behavioural traits that influence their acceptance of sources of influence and their motivation to participate. Previous studies of consumers' behaviour in online environments focused on repetitive visits through visiting and browsing behaviours (Chatterjee, Hoffman, & Novak, 2003; Moe & Fader, 2004a) and the depth of search (Johnson, Moe, Fader, Bellman, & Lohse, 2004). While purchasing is a vital factor for many brands' online environments, it is important to distinguish online environments that focus on product or service information searches from those that encourage interactive engagement to maintain loyalty.

2.2.1 Context of online communities

Li, Wang, and Lin (2018) demonstrated a distinction between online communities and product channels, stating that product channels are specific information sites whereas online communities facilitate mutual communications between multiple parties. Using empirical data collected from databases indicating consumer visits on real estate websites, compared with local offline housing sales data, Li *et al.* (2018) concluded that visits to online communities had a positive effect on company sales compared to product channels. Though the study leaned more towards an empirical approach, its findings can be arguably linked to uses and gratifications theory (UGT). UGT considers individuals' use and choice, stating that different people can use the same mass medium for different purposes (Ko, Cho, & Roberts, 2005; Severin & Tankard, 1997). The purpose of UGT is to explain the psychological needs that shape why people use a media and motivates them to engage (Rubin, 1994). Li *et al.* (2018) investigated two activities in online communities: communication between consumers and product searching. This provided some insight into the possible reasons why consumers choose to visit online communities over product channels as product channels do not facilitate high levels of interactivity compared to online communities; thus, identifying the intrinsic needs of consumers.

However, Li *et al.*'s (2018) study only explored the surface of UGT in regard to the usage of online communities compared to product channels, focusing more on the positivist ontological relationship between firms' sales and consumer interaction. Li *et al.* (2018) found that interactions between consumers on both platforms negatively affected sales. The limitation of their study is the lack of context regarding the interactions occurring between consumers, which restricts understanding of how they negatively affected firms' sales or the identification of consumers' motivations for visiting online communities over product channels. Without a clear idea or an in-depth examination of the interactions that occur in online communities, this makes applying a key relevant theoretical framework such as UGT complex. Additionally, the study's methodological approach defined groups of consumers as homogeneous, including groups of loyal customers who may participate in CBE that may indirectly contribute towards a firm's sale. As well as differentiating interactions in online communities, loyal customers and observing consumers need to be differentiated as the two groups

will generate different messages in CBE, and consumers are more likely to observe and consume information in contrast to loyal customers who may actively participate.

Li *et al.*'s (2018) conclusion on online interactions contradicted the findings of other studies that placed consumers' interactions as a core element affecting businesses' outcomes. Social interactions between brands and consumers in OBCs are identified as a key characteristic that attracts consumers to online platforms (De Vries & Carlson, 2014; Carlson, Rahman, Taylor, & Voola, 2019). Carlson, Wyllie, Rahman, and Voola's (2018a) study explored the effects of online interactions on brand relationships rather than sale outcomes. They used empirical data from 584 consumers to build a theoretical model, which extended the co-created functional value that both consumers and firms receive to include emotional value, relational value and entitativity value, which then affect brand relationships. The model was based on service-dominant logic, which supports the integration of customers' and firms' resources to generate value that benefits both parties, and on consumption value theory, which argues that consumer behaviour consists of multiple mental and pleasurable experiences (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). The general results from Carlson *et al.*'s (2018a) study, reflecting the value consumers generated from their active interactions with brands in the online community, were similar to those reported by Davis, Piven, and Breazeale (2014).

Davis *et al.* (2014) developed the work of Fournier (1998) on relational interaction between consumers and brand in social media. Davis *et al.* (2014) developed The Five Sources Model, which was based on consumers' lived experiences derived from empirical data collected from interviews using the grounded theory approach. Both Davis *et al.* (2014) and Carlson *et al.* (2018a) noted consumers' need for personalised interactions (Merz, Zarantonello, & Grappi, 2018; Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2016) and activities of "psychically" connected consumption, but Davis *et al.* (2014) maintained that the economic relevance of social consumption is key. Davis *et al.* (2014) and Carlson *et al.* (2018a) provided the foundation of how consumers' interaction with a brand in online communities impacts them, but they provided minor differentiation on the effect of social interaction on consumers' values. Though these studies are useful and the studies' samples are individuals who follow brands through OBCs, there are issues regarding the samples similar to those of Li *et al.*'s (2018) study.

Although Davis *et al.* (2014) and Carlson *et al.* (2018a) investigated individuals following certain brands, making each individual separate from others, an issue stems from establishing whether the sample are active customers or passive consumers of the brand. Although individuals who are current active customers with established loyalty to the brand have the ability to participate in CBE, it cannot be assumed that when passive consumers are given the opportunity to co-create value they will be able to initiate value co-creation in interactions. The two studies are holistic regarding the value that customers and consumers look for in an online community; despite determining that entitativity value has the strongest relationship with customer participation, the studies are restricted to determining whether consumers will participate in online communities if there is something in it for them, with little regard for the ways in which existing loyal customers could influence consumers' loyalty intentions. In other words, the studies provide limited understanding of how an online community attracts consumers to the community and motivates them to take the initiative to participate within the community with other members.

Some previous studies investigated the antecedents and consequences of CBE and the perceived value consumers and customers receive from interacting in online communities, whereas other research looked at how to develop loyalty towards an OBC. Cheng *et al.* (2020) provided a useful insight into various antecedents and motivations for individuals to remain with OBCs; yet, their study was arguably made complex by the presence of more than two theoretical concepts relevant to individuals' online behaviour in OBCs. They considered a variety of theoretical concepts and described how information quality, social capital needs, emotion and perceived critical mass are significant and influential factors of customer satisfaction and relationship commitment, which result in loyalty intentions to the OBC. Their data was collected through online questionnaires from a total of 627 participants who, prior to the questionnaire, were directed to one of two selected OBCs representing a wrist band or facial mask brand product, identified as search and experience products. The complex nature of the study was due to the nature of the two product types and the summarised factors that were taken from a variety of separate and earlier studies.

A key antecedent that Cheng *et al.* (2020) explored was information quality. The importance of information quality has been explored by several authors (Ho, Lin, & Chen, 2012; Klein & Ford, 2003; Azemi, Ozuem, Howell, & Lancaster, 2019); in Cheng

et al.'s (2020) study, information quality is given four dimensions: completeness, believability, timeliness and amount. The summarised dimensions in Cheng *et al.*'s (2020) study are similar to those summarised in an earlier study by Wang and Strong (1996). Another study on information quality by Kim and Niehm (2009) gave information quality five dimensions: ease of use, online completeness, entertainment, trust and interactivity. Cheng *et al.* (2020) focused on the outcome of loyalty linked to information quality from the perspective of consumers' intentions to purchase products, particularly the ones selected in their study. The flawed element of Cheng *et al.*'s (2020) study comes from the theoretical and practical link between the dimension emotion and the general sample of participants.

The taxonomy of emotion has been noted by many authors as a key indicator of consumers' behavioural patterns (Smith & Bolton, 2002; Holbrook & Batra, 1987; Sui & Baloglu, 2003; Mazaheri, Richard, & Laroche, 2012; Mazaheri, Richard, Laroche, & Ueltschy, 2014). However, Cheng *et al.* (2020) identified that emotion attributes for experienced products are too complex to be delivered though OBCs. Though Cheng *et al.*'s (2020) data indicated this to be the case, the nature of the experience product, facial mask, selected for their study opens this assumption to disagreement. Luxury fashion is arguably both a search product and an experience product; therefore, this study perceives the influence of emotion to be significantly important in understanding how it impacts loyalty intentions within communities.

Cheng *et al.*'s (2020) theoretical model is too simple to apply to consumers' decision making about joining a community because consumers have a complex range of characteristics; whether different customer segments would respond differently to the dimensions would require further investigation. Cheng *et al.*'s (2020) summarised dimensions are arguably placed separate from each other, resulting in making it difficult to conclude whether the model can be applied to an industry like the luxury fashion industry. Though the study provides practical information on factors that build brand relationships and customer satisfaction and lead to loyalty intentions, it lacks a theoretical basis, which makes it hard to understand how loyalty is built on the different dimensions. Despite Cheng *et al.*'s (2020) approach to link a range of dimensions to social behaviour that possibly generates loyalty within an online community, the decision to adopt a positivist paradigm for the study limited understanding of the effects of social behaviours on loyalty, narrowing it to the consumers' motivation to connect

with other community members, thus emphasising the effect of relationship commitment on loyalty.

The following studies provided useful empirical data showing the significant effect of OBCs on firms' sales through online interactions (Li *et al.,* 2018; Carlson *et al.,* 2018a; Davis *et al.,* 2014; Cheng *et al.,* 2020). Though the importance of sales generated from online community interactions should continue to be acknowledged, an investigation into how long-term loyalty in online communities is maintained requires a more in-depth focus on social influence between customers and consumers, because loyal customers can influence consumers' perceptions of brands and increase the likelihood of continued brand association in the luxury fashion industry compared to direct purchase outcomes. Furthermore, significant usage of the positivism paradigm enabled authors to link social presence to loyalty intentions, but did not enable an in-depth exploratory examination of how consumers perceive social presence and its effect on their loyalty intentions towards brands. This study considers social interactions and their social influence on observing consumers by using a social constructivist approach to examine the link between social influence and loyalty intentions through indirect engagement between consumers within the luxury fashion sector.

2.3 Conceptual clarification: customer loyalty

Customer loyalty has been used as a key indicator of marketing success of firms in various industries, including the luxury fashion sector. Previous studies on customer loyalty have examined marketing concepts, such as service quality (Hsu, Oh, & Assaf, 2012; Nam, Ekinci, & Whyatt, 2011), perceived value (Ryu, Han, & Kim, 2008; Petrick, 2004), and consumer satisfaction and trust (Laroche, Habibi, Richard, & Sankaranarayanan, 2012; Han & Jeong, 2013) as key influences on customers' loyalty towards brands. Sales through customers' purchasing is the greatest concern for all firms; researchers have explored the antecedents of engagement in OBCs following a purchase, finding that engagement is likely to increase the likelihood of repeat purchases (Pansari & Kumar, 2017; Kupfer *et al.,* 2018). Whereas other studies have examined activities of online engagement initiated by customers that indirectly contribute towards firms' sales, including voicing feedback, blogging or circulating WOM, thus encouraging other consumers' purchasing intentions (Bijmolt *et al.*, 2010; Pham & Avnet, 2009; van Doorn *et al.*, 2010; Verhoef *et al.*, 2010).

Loyalty can be measured through customers' individual purchasing histories or through the online actions of engagement developed by customers in OBCs. Previous studies have explored a range of activities involved in purchasing, including the effects of visiting and browsing behaviours and repeat visits (Chatterjee *et al.*, 2003; Moe & Fader, 2004a) and purchase conversion rates (Moe & Fader, 2004b). These studies reflect characteristics of behavioural loyalty which determines customers' purchase behaviour for products or services from specific brands. In contrast, other studies have explored the engagement of customers within OBCs (Cheng *et al.,* 2020; Carlson *et al.,* 2018a; Vohra & Bhardwaj, 2019). Customer engagement within OBCs is related to attitudinal loyalty, which is associated with customers' emotional affiliation with a brand. The cited studies indicate common approaches to studying either attitudinal or behavioural loyalty within OBCs or other online environments. However, other studies have examined the two types of customer loyalty together (Dick & Basu, 1994; Shukla & Drennan, 2018; Ozuem *et al.*, 2016).

Attitudinal loyalty refers to positive attitudes held by consumers towards a brand, whereas behavioural loyalty refers to repeat purchases by consumers (Dick & Basu, 1994). It is important to consider this difference as consumers' attitudes may not necessarily lead to repeat purchases as desired by firms. Behavioural loyalty has been argued to be more important as it directly impacts retailers' net income (Bemmaor, 1995; Chandon, Morwitz, & Reinartz, 2005; Liu, 2007); yet, attitudinal loyalty has been found to be a precursor of behavioural loyalty, and it is argued that an absence of positive satisfaction and trust in a brand makes it harder to motivate consumers' purchasing intentions (Kamran-Disfani *et al.,* 2017). While some authors debate which type of loyalty is more effective than the other, others suggest that examining both attitudinal and behavioural loyalty is more efficient that purely focusing on one (Baldinger & Rubinson, 1996; Terblanche & Boshoff, 2006). The most notable study that applied this perspective was carried out by Dick and Basu (1994), they suggested that customers' loyalty should consist of attitudinal and behavioural elements, and developed a model illustrating the relationship between relative attitude towards brands and customers' repeat purchasing activity.

Dick and Basu's (1994) study explored how consumers who practice one type of loyalty over the other may deliver less favourable loyalty outcomes compared to customers who practice both. They developed four types of brand loyalty: true loyalty, no loyalty,

spurious loyalty and latent loyalty; these were defined based on customers' level of repeat patronage and relative attitude towards a brand. For example, a customer who practices spurious loyalty may frequently repurchase from brands without much thought about committing to a specific brand, therefore, they are the least likely to promote the differentiation of brands to other consumers. Though Dick and Basu's (1994) research did not clarify motivations for either high/low repeat patronage or high/low relative attitude, their study provided a clear distinction between customers who deliver more favourable loyalty outcomes than other customers or consumers, based on their delivery of both attitudinal and behavioural loyalty.

Adapting Dick and Basu's (1994) loyalty categories, Ozuem *et al.* (2016) applied the concepts of attitudinal and behavioural loyalty to develop four customer segments: true loyals, fake loyals, ambivalent loyals and indifferent loyals. Ozuem *et al.* (2016) defined these categories of loyal customers based on active and passive loyalty behaviour. They then described the customer segments based on customers' self-described behaviour regarding their loyalty intentions, attitude to the brand and their actual behaviour. For example, fake loyals described positive loyalty intentions but it did not match their actual purchasing activity compared to true loyals, who displayed loyalty through described and actual behaviour. Ozuem *et al.* (2016) extended Dick and Basu's (1994) study by determining how active or passive individuals' loyalty was towards a brand, which helps the current study determine the difference between active loyal customers and passive consumers. The determined importance of the relationship between attitudinal and behavioural loyalty has motivated other researchers to explore how to develop the loyalty of potential customers who have limited experience with a brand. In this instance, the fundamental question addressed is whether attitudinal or behavioural loyalty occurs first when developing consumers' loyalty towards a brand.

Nyadzayo, Matanda, and Rajaguru (2018) highlighted key activities that support the development of attitudinal loyalty which, in turn, will encourage customers' behavioural loyalty. Though the study looked at business-to-business franchise relationship building, it considered how to build customers' behavioural loyalty from attitudinal loyalty. They provided a nomological network model that identified that a franchisor's perceived competence and level of information sharing were key determinants in building emotional brand attachment and perceived relationship value. These activities led to the evolution of consumers' loyalty intentions towards the brand

franchise, which reveals the importance of developing attitudinal loyalty before behavioural loyalty. The study emphasised the significance of information exchanges when aiming to generate brand value from the customers' perspectives, especially if the brand is foreign to the market it has emerged in, which is crucial for brand loyalty (Pedeliento, Andreini, Bergamaschi, & Salo, 2016).

Following on from Nyadzayo *et al.*'s (2018) perspective on firms' capabilities and information sharing, Kamran-Disfani *et al.* (2017) contended that in order for behavioural loyalty to occur, consumers must be satisfied and trust in the brand, which are key characteristics of attitudinal loyalty. However, even with satisfaction or trust, attitudinal loyalty without purchases from a specific brand makes it difficult for firms to predict consumers' intentions to remain with a specific brand (Wolter, Bock, Smith, & Cronin Jr, 2017). Furthermore, for individual consumers, the online environment evokes a multidimensional experience that goes beyond a basic search for, or exchange of, information (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Bleier *et al.*, 2019). Within OBCs there is a higher level of interaction compared to product search platforms (Li *et al.,* 2018). Product channels are limited to providing specific information, whereas OBCs enable customers' participation, which is relevant for customers with attitudinal as well as behavioural loyalty. Therefore, the understanding of loyalty needs to go beyond the concept of information sharing and company competency. Although information sharing and showcasing brand equity in OBCs are key practices that affect brand choice in the short term, the ability to maintain brand choice in the long term can be linked to social presence within OBCs, a key characteristic that can impact attitudinal loyalty in luxury fashion brands' online communities.

Research shows that social presence within websites can potentially increase perceived reality and feelings of emotional closeness to a product (Darke, Brady, Benedicktus, & Wilson, 2016), can increase positive emotions during online shopping (Wang, Baker, Wagner, & Wakefield, 2007) and can maintain customer loyalty (Cyr, Hassanein, Head, & Ivanov, 2007; Brakus *et al.,* 2009). Across 16 experiments involving 16 products from 11 brands, Bleier *et al.* (2019) concluded that informativeness, entertainment, social presence and sensory appeal can affect consumers' purchasing. The results reflecting on social presence and information quality are similar to those reported by Cheng *et al.* (2020), but extend them by providing managers with clear strategic

guidance on how to build effective webpages. However, Bleier *et al.*'s (2019) study focused on the webpage content that firms generate; although the content indicated elements of the firm's social presence within an OBC, there was no reference to the involvement of customers. Social presence arouses emotion in online communities; therefore, the involvement of community users, and the level of interactivity a brand allows between users, may impact consumers' usage of the webpage content and the dimensions summarised by Bleier *et al.* (2019) and Cheng *et al.* (2020). Additionally, consumers' involvement in activities could potentially extend the possibility of ensuring that consumers continue to visit online communities and develop loyalty intentions.

Moreo, Woods, Sammons, and Bergman (2019) conducted a study to examine the relationship between emotional labour, service quality, purpose of consumption, satisfaction and customer loyalty from a customer's perspective. Using eight scenario settings based on service linked to the food and beverage industry, with survey data collected from 400 respondents, Moreo *et al.* (2019) found that the purpose of the consumers' consumption, regardless of whether dining for leisure or business, had no significant impact on their satisfaction or loyalty. However, they found that the interaction of service quality and emotional labour did have a significant impact on satisfaction, whereas for loyalty, emotional labour had the most impact. Though service quality is considered a contributor to loyalty (Groth, Hennig-Thurau, & Walsh, 2009), it is not the sole indicator. This is relevant to understanding loyalty in online communities as task-orientated procedures involve a significant level of interactivity, which can be linked to the emotional appeal of the brand and customers' involvement in the online community. However, Moreo *et al.*'s (2019) study is a hypothetical study with limited investigation into customers' real-life encounters of emotional labour. An issue to be addressed on emotional labour, emphasised by Moreo *et al.* (2019), is the extent to which it is relevant in consumer-to-consumer interactions and consumer-to-brand encounters. In OBCs, firms desire more interaction content to be contributed by customers than by the brand itself, to make the brand more appealing to consumers through OBCs. Therefore, it is important to consider how the emotional labour from active community members can socially influence observing consumers' loyalty intentions.

Theoretical and empirical studies of loyalty in the offline environment have advanced from descriptions of loyalty being generated by information exchanges between

consumers and firms (Nyadzayo *et al.*, 2018) to social presence in OBCs signifying a higher likelihood of reaching potential customers and the development of loyalty (Bleier *et al.*, 2019; Moreo *et al.*, 2019). As the studies based on empirical data indicate, the service quality delivered by a firm does not solely determine loyalty, which shows the need to understand social presence in OBCs, particularly between customers and consumers. Though social presence is a key dimension in OBCs, consumers' behavioural and attitudinal loyalty are likely to differ from customers' behavioural and attitudinal loyalty, as consumers may not have developed an attitude towards a brand. While consumers may be satisfied with the information they consume through OBCs, customers "delight" in a brand is likely to have a stronger effect on firms' sales compared to consumer satisfaction (Chandler, 1989; Hall & Haslam, 1992; Dick & Basu, 1994; Kwong & Yau, 2002). Consumers are arguably not customers until they go beyond the activity of consuming information through OBCs and purchase from the brand. This identifies the importance to the current study of understanding how OBCs in the luxury fashion industry impact consumers' loyalty development from pure attitudinal to attitudinal and behavioural loyalty. Furthermore, with the identified difference between loyal customers and passive consumers, the current study considers the extent of customers' involvement in OBCs. Loyal customers' involvement in OBCs is relevant because it could influence consumers' psychological attachment towards the brand, as customers have the relative attitude to motivate consumers to consider purchasing from a specific brand. For the purpose of this study, it is important to understand community members' influence on loyalty intentions.

2.4 Social influence theory

Individuals who have an existing association with a brand often seek community membership within OBCs (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005), but some consumers and customers seek community membership not solely for the brand but to develop a harmonious connection with community members and collectively socialise and interact (Ellemers *et al.*, 1999; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Ren *et al.*, 2007). This can be considered the starting point of social influence within OBCs. Social influence theory provides a context that outlines individuals' social behaviour through their communicated identities (Kelman, 1961; Becker, Randall, & Riegel, 1995). Social influence considers how the influence of social networks enforces individuals to imitate principle community behaviours (Venkatesh & Brown, 2001; Venkatesh & Davis,

2000). An early study of social influence was conducted by Kelman (1958). Kelman (1958) identified three levels of influence that impact individuals' attitudes and behaviours: compliance, identification and internalisation. Compliance involves adapting behaviour in order to gain rewards or avoid negative consequences, such as community disapproval. Identification refers to individuals' acceptance of sources of influence to maintain a desired relationship (Kelman, 1958, p. 53; Warshaw, 1980) and internalisation reflects an individual's adoption and actual acceptance of behaviours and values within a community (Kelman, 1958).

Kelman (1958), through an observational approach with questionnaire data collected from college students, found that attitudes under the compliance category were expressed only under conditions of surveillance by the communicator who had means of control. Attitudes for identification were expressed under salience condition of the participants' relationship to the communicator whose power was based on their positive appeal (attractiveness) to the participants. Whereas for internalisation, the communicator was judged based on their credibility, measured in terms of the relevance of the issue being communicated to participants, regardless of conditioned surveillance or salience (Kelman, 1958, p. 53). The importance of social influence and how it can shape individuals' attitudes, beliefs and actions motivated extensive studies on the impact of social influence on information systems acceptance (Davis *et al.*, 1989; Karahanna *et al.*, 1999; Lewis *et al.*, 2003; Malhotra & Galletta, 2005; Mun *et al.*, 2006; Li *et al.*, 2010; Cheung *et al.*, 2011). However, Kelman's social influence model has received criticism, which commonly cited the difficulty of categorising a sample of online users into identification and internalisation categories when the users are part of a variety of online communities (Cheung *et al.,* 2011). Furthermore, research into consumers' and customers' acceptance of information systems, including OBCs, found that acceptance significantly followed normative behaviour or subjective norms, concluding that certain behaviours are to be expected as part of OBCs (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000). Therefore, in regard to Kelman's (1958) theory, the theorising of information systems adoption has primarily situated social normative compliance at the centre, thereby overlooking identification and internalisation processes.

However, other researchers have argued that applying a single category of Kelman's (1958) social influence theory reduces the accuracy of illustrations of individuals' usage behaviour of an OBC, therefore limiting in-depth understanding of the influence

individuals encounter within OBCs. Thus, authors have attempted to integrate all three of Kelman's social influence processes and investigate their effect (Wang, Meister, & Gray, 2013; Malhotra & Galletta, 2005; Dholakia *et al.,* 2004). These studies identified that compliance-based social influence is relatively short term compared to identification and internalisation, to such an extent that compliance-based social influence was viewed as irrelevant in virtual communities based on the argument that members' ability to exit groups reduces the need to deliver compliant behaviour (Dholakia *et al.,* 2004). Though it is relevant to link compliance with acceptance of online systems, the vast number of online communities linked to different brands or industries makes social compliance far too vague to apply to users' behaviour, as each community has varying behaviours and beliefs that motivate users to join different online communities revolving around particular brands.

Following on from definitions of social influence, researchers have attempted to determine what influences individuals' loyalty within OBCs. For example, some researchers' studies have focused on the connection between community members, identifying a "we" culture in which there is a shared feeling of belonging among users of a specific OBC that separates them from other OBCs (Fournier, 1998; Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000; Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; He, Chen, Lee, Wang, & Pohlman, 2017; VanMeter *et al.,* 2018). Dholakia *et al.*'s (2004) study explored social identity theory and group norms illustrating a dual pathway involving identification and internalisation influence that leads to OBC loyalty. They conducted a survey-based study of 545 participants representing 264 different virtual communities and concluded that community participation is determined by how relatable community members' normative behaviour is to an individual's social identity. Dholakia *et al.*'s (2004) study on virtual communities distinguished small group-based communities (SGBCs) from network-based communities (NBCs). SGBCs consist of specific individuals who form close relationships with each other, whereas NBCs have a larger quantity of members and bigger social distances between members, therefore, relationships in NBCs are short term and members use an NBC to achieve functional goals (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002). Thus, within OBCs, members will identify with a specific group of individuals rather than with the online channel itself.

Dholakia *et al.*'s (2004) study is useful, however, its positivist approach to the empirical data limits understanding of social influence in virtual communities. The study provides

a generic process for social influence between members within a variety of communities. However, with a wide range of communities related to different industries and with different behavioural characteristics, it becomes difficult for individuals to identify with even a small group of community members (Cheung *et al.,* 2011), especially when specific values, such as purposive or entertainment values, are defined differently by consumers. The empirical data Dholakia *et al.* (2004) obtained was based on consumers' experiences from a variety of virtual chatrooms based on different topics. Though chatrooms are a form of online community, they are more likely to be generic compared to OBCs, which are dedicated to a brand. When conversations are almost limited to the brand itself, it is important to reconsider processes of social influence that impact consumers' and customers' decisions to remain and partake in those types of communities.

The brand that an OBC is centred on can itself affect the degree of interactivity members are willing to deliver and the fulfilment value they wish to achieve. Dholakia *et al.*'s (2004) study identified five fulfilment needs: purposive value, self-discovery, social enhancement value, maintaining interpersonal connectivity, and entertainment value. How consumers and customers relate to each of these fulfilment needs could vary from one brand community to another and whether the group-orientated environment relates to their social identity would also vary. Fang and Zhang's (2019) study investigated the factors that motivated users to continue participation, specifically in online social question-and-answer (Q&A) communities. This type of community was found to reflect three motivations: functional, social and psychological. Applying the theory of planned behaviour as their theoretical basis, Fang and Zhang (2019) associated motivational antecedents with the users' attitude towards continued participation in a community where interactivity between members occurs regularly. Similar to Dholakia *et al.*'s (2004) study, Fang and Zhang (2019) partially explored the perceived usefulness of community members to other members based on their contributions to the community. However, in contrast to Dholakia *et al.*'s (2004) generically defined group of virtual community members, Fang and Zhang (2019) divided their study's respondents into community lurkers, askers and answerers. Fang and Zhang (2019) identified that lurkers, askers and answerers have different attitudes towards participation, with askers seeking knowledge in contrast to lurkers and answerers who were more socially committed and shared-language orientated, yet had varying characteristics that affected

continued participation intentions. Although Fang and Zhang's (2019) study extended understanding of the different roles community members adopt and of their motivations for participation in online communities, it is limited in enabling an understanding of how community members influence each other's decision to remain within a community that centres on a specific brand. This limitation can be linked to Fang and Zhang's choice of community selected for the study; Q&A identifies a clear type of online activity with the purpose of asking and answering questions that are generic when it comes to topic conversations. While a majority of online social communities have Q&A activities, conversations within OBCs often centre around a brand; therefore, interactions between community members are likely to be less informational and less motivated by functional goals (Mathwick, Wiertz, & de Ruyter, 2008; Tseng, Huang, & Setiawan, 2017). As mentioned earlier, individuals' desire for community membership may be based on existing members of the community, however, another perspective explores how the brand itself is the mediating factor within online communities.

While Dholakia *et al.*'s (2004) study explored the relationship between community members, Algesheimer *et al.* (2005) explored community members' relationship with brands in online communities. As mentioned earlier, Dholakia *et al.*'s (2004) study identified five purpose values that shaped group norms and social identity. In contrast, Algesheimer *et al.* (2005) indicated that consumers' relationships with a brand is the function behind the mass individualistic factors of consumers in online communities. Though Algesheimer *et al.*'s (2005) framework focused on social influence, it arguably integrates brand identification theory: brand identification can cause individuals to become psychologically attached to a brand and motivate commitment (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Rather than being attracted to the community on the basis of identification with community members, Algesheimer *et al.* (2005) proposed that behavioural and attitudinal loyalty were motivations for community members to join brand communities. Prior research supports the view that brand identification may produce favourable customer outcomes on brand loyalty and commitment (Brown, Barry, Dacin, & Gunst, 2005; Kim, Han, & Park, 2001; Tuškej, Golob, & Podnar, 2013). Thus, Algesheimer *et al.* (2005) argued that customers' purchasing history with a brand impacts their loyalty intentions to the brand, which further influences community participation and membership continuation. Loyal customers are likely to

have strong associations with a brand (Keller, 1993; Krishnan, 1996), which may be strengthened by vivid memories of direct experience (Baumgartner, Sujan, & Bettman, 1992). Therefore, thoughts and feelings about specific brands are more easily generated by loyal customers than non-loyal consumers (Alba & Chattopadhyay, 1986; Yoo & Donthu, 2001; Park, Eisingerich, & Park, 2013).

The empirical data collected by Algesheimer *et al.* (2005) was taken from members associated with communities linked to European car clubs, thus, the study focused on a specific industry, whereas Dholakia *et al.* (2004) selected a variety of communities. Dholakia *et al.*'s (2004) model illustrated a dual pathway of social identity and perception of community group norms as a starting point of social influence to motivate loyalty based on an individual's intention to practice collective behaviour with others. In contrast, Algesheimer *et al.*'s (2005) model, based on an elaborate theory, showed no direct path between brand loyalty intentions, brand relationship quality or community identification to community-related behavioural intentions; yet, they situated community engagement as a mediating variable. Though Algesheimer *et al.*'s (2005) study makes it clear that engagement is necessary to prolong membership continuation, it has no direct effect on loyalty. This implies that online communities are suitable for customers with more behavioural and attitudinal loyalty experience with the brand than passive consumers who have not yet developed loyalty to the brand.

Wilkins *et al.* (2019) following a quasi-experimental design with 147 participants, tested the participants' contribution to an online campaign one week after its introduction. Similar to Algesheimer *et al.*'s (2005) study, Wilkins *et al.*'s (2019) findings showed that individuals who were already active prior to the study and valued their volunteered contributions to the campaign were more likely to practise future involvement. Wilkins *et al.*'s (2019) study emphasised internet-enabled action rather than compelled participation, which is based on community pressure or subjective norms; yet, they identified that social influence was exerted by the main subject the community revolved around. Wilkins *et al.* (2019) focused on how individuals feel they can contribute their social capital to a community. However, Wilkins *et al.* defined these members generically in comparison to Fang and Zhang (2019), who defined the different behaviours of different community participants who contributed differently from each other.

Though both Wilkins *et al.*'s (2019) and Fang and Zhang's (2019) studies argued that community members are influenced by the perceived usefulness of the online community for them individually, the studies did not explore how these members may impact others' development of loyalty intentions. Furthermore, they did not consider whether users' participation affects their loyalty to the community. This is a significant issue for the current study which investigates how OBCs affect the loyalty of loyal customers and passive consumers of luxury fashion brands. While knowledge-seeking goals are relevant predictors for usage of information systems, OBCs linked to luxury fashion brands emphasise a shared concept of brand symbolism, and the community culture they develop among their members is more likely to have a greater social influence than informational exchanges in the community (Tseng, Yeh, & Tang, 2019) as argued by Algesheimer *et al.* (2005) and Dholakia *et al.* (2004).

Algesheimer *et al.* (2005) and Wilkins *et al.* (2019) argued that consumers apply individualistic behaviour in their decision to join a community, yet they may participate in collective conversations and an interest in the brand or topic is a significant variable that maintains loyalty through online communities. However, Algesheimer *et al.*'s (2005) study restricted the examined sample to followers of brands, specifically, actual purchasers of brands; novice consumers may be more passive compared to loyal customers, but it is important to consider how OBCs can motivate consumers to become loyal customers of brands. Furthermore, when considering OBCs and loyalty to luxury fashion brands, it is important to note that customers' and consumers' collective and individualistic behaviours will vary under different circumstances. For example, while customers may use the brand as their source of influence within OBCs, consumers might not be influenced by the brand due to their passive loyalty relationship with the brand, but they might be influenced by community members who are able to reference the brand. So aside from the influence of the brand, it is not possible for individuals to be purely independent from the influence of other members as engagement can reinforce brand relationships (Gummerus, Liljander, Weman, & Pihlström, 2012). For this study, instead of investigating consumers' motivations to participate in OBCs, the aim is to investigate how the social influence of OBC members, particularly active customers, impacts consumers' decisions to remain loyal to the brand.

From the studies on the effect of social influence in online communities a mixture of compliance, identification and internalisation with the brand and community members

can be identified. Though compliance behaviour cannot be directly observed, identification and internalisation can be identifiable in the context of online community interactions (Yu & Hu, 2020). The existence of identification centres on an individual's desire to continue relationships with influencers (Kelman, 1958; Dholakia *et al.,* 2004); however, the impact of influencers on developing the loyalty of consumers within OBCs is an open debate. Consumers' motivation to connect with customers through OBCs might be linked to their identification with the brand; thus, they are likely to connect with loyal customers with existing involvement with the brand (Algesheimer *et al.,* 2005; Wilkins *et al.,* 2019). Consequently, this study considers how loyal customers socially influence consumers' loyalty towards a brand through OBCs. The study argues that OBCs may not be necessarily used by customers and consumers for social bonding, but to maintain or develop loyalty with the brand; thus, the study considers how loyal customers' develop consumers' loyalty in OBCs linked to the luxury fashion industry.

2.5 Influence of CBE in OBCs

Online CBE has provided innovative steps to enhance brand–consumer relationships by affording brands economic and social expansion of interactions into wider markets (Adjei, Noble, & Noble, 2010; Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004). Customer engagement has been described as "behavioural manifestations" that enables customers to display their loyalty to a brand through OBCs. Other than direct purchasing of a brand's products or services, customers can present loyalty through CBE in OBCs, such as voicing feedback, blogging or circulating WOM (Bijmolt *et al.,* 2010; Pham & Avnet, 2009; van Doorn *et al.,* 2010; Verhoef *et al.,* 2010). Though conceptual and exploratory studies have explored consumer engagement, there remains a lack of agreement on how to define CBE (Hollebeek, Srivastava, & Chen, 2016; Pansari & Kumar, 2017). Brodie *et al.*'s (2011, p. 260) service-dominant logic-based perception defined it as a mental state that occurs through interactive and co-created experiences between the customer and a central service agent. In contrast, Sashi (2012, p. 260) defined it as a process of building customers' emotional bonds through interactive exchanges. In online communities, communication is likely to be interactive and intended to provoke participative experiences (Gill, Sridhar, & Grewal, 2017). These interactions can potentially impact the loyalty intentions consumers may have towards the brand and motivate them to remain with the brand through the community. According to van Doorn *et al.* (2010), the greater a consumer's participation in the engagement process,

the stronger their emotional bond, thus increasing their connection with the firm even before purchasing activities have taken place.

Ibrahim *et al.* (2017) argued that OBCs can significantly affect consumers' perceptions of a brand's image, and the way in which companies engage with social media and manage customers' online participation can influence consumers' opinions. They provided valuable insights into the role that participation and customer engagement play in enabling opportunities for firms to develop closer relationships with customers in online communities. Yet, their research did not take into consideration the potential impact of customers' involvement and customers' perceptions on the development of online engagement. This an important issue as customers' involvement and engagement vary because individuals have different insights and levels of participation due to several contextual factors (Gruzd *et al.*, 2011; Cayla & Eckhardt, 2008; Coles & West, 2016; Ozuem, Howell, & Lancaster, 2018). Ibrahim *et al.*'s (2017) study remains a valuable tool for understanding patterns of engagement between companies and customers on social media platforms; however, it fails to explore the complexity of customers' involvement and characteristics in OBCs.

Studies on online community activities have primarily focused on consumers' intentions to engage in OBCs (Garrido-Moreno *et al.*, 2018), the importance of firms encouraging community engagement (Carlson, Rahman, Voola, & De Vries, 2018b; Xiang, Du, Ma, & Fan, 2017) and how social participation builds consumers' trust and brand loyalty (Hajli, Shanmugam, Papagiannidis, Zahay, & Richard, 2017; Kamboj, Sarmah, Gupta, & Dwivedi, 2018). Other studies on online community activity have focused on UGC and its impact on community participation and the visualisation of consumers' brand loyalty (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Koivisto & Mattila, 2018). The reliance firms have on customers' involvement in online media platforms to encourage or interact with other customers within a community identifies the need to understand how social influence from OBCs motivates loyalty.

The increase in UGC has changed the dominance of firm-generated content (FGC) in the communication of online communities (Hewett, Rand, Rust, & van Heerde, 2016; McQuarrie, Miller, & Phillips, 2012). The marketing literature implies that facilitating FGC and UGC exchanges in OBCs motivates customers to communicate messages referencing the brand. Thus, firms need to monitor their customers' content to deliver

effective FGC-UGC strategies to achieve desired returns. Wang *et al.* (2019a) explored customers' creation of their origin stories related to consumption experience; this is a form of UGC that is created and published externally from the firm that allows customers to express their creativity. This form of UGC differs from firms' persuasive marketing messages, which are often linked to promotions and reasons for consumers to purchase a product or service; authentic created narratives allow customers to self-create content of their experiences. According to Hewett *et al.* (2016) and Kumar, Bezawada, Rishika, Janakiraman, and Kannan (2016), firms that integrate UGC and FGC into their marketing communication strategies may obtain better results by converting customers' social capital into economic capital.

Wang *et al.* (2019a) drawing from motivation-creativity theory proposed a framework illustrating the value of allowing potential customers to self-reference their own needs, wants and experiences through CBE. Their study stressed that using a single source, such as FGC, is not enough to generate authentic content, thus encouraging firms to use both FGC and UGC within OBCs and to connect their persuasive message strategy with customers' authentic self-created narrative content. Mismatch theory was identified in Wang *et al.*'s (2019a) study: firms should design persuasive messages that avoid being mismatched with customers' motivation to enhance consumers' adoption of co-created innovations. Research has supported the view that consumers require sufficient mental capability to understand narrative stories (Phillips & McQuarrie, 2010). Without sufficient understanding, narrative adverts are unlikely to activate consumers' self-referencing in online community conversations or produce persuasive social influence effects (Nielsen & Escalas, 2010). Customers often direct their attention to information that is more relevant to them personally (Hamilton, Sherman, & Ruvolo, 1990; Srull, Lichtenstein, & Rothbart, 1985) and search for similar messages with that specific information to establish an associatory link, which does not occur for events or information they have less memory of or feel is less relevant to them (Srull *et al.,* 1985). Wang *et al.*'s (2019a) findings outline the conditions as to when and which consumers to target to motivate co-creation. Though their study focused on co-created FGC and UGC product information, the study showed that self-referencing has a greater impact on co-creation than customers simply endorsing FGC. This provides further detail on how loyal customers differ from passive consumers in OBCs. This current study aims to enhance understanding of how loyal customers may influence passive consumers'

brand perception through OBCs, and how OBCs influence customers' loyalty. Specifically, this study focuses on the consumers who observe content within OBCs and on how customers who actively publish content can socially influence other consumers to develop or maintain loyalty towards a brand.

Vohra and Bhardwaj (2019) developed a nomological network model of active participation within a brand community as a starting point that generates consumers' trust and community commitment, which are two mediating variables that influence and result in CBE within an OBC. They collected data from 209 questionnaires, which were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. They measured the validity of active participation against a four-item scale adapted from Casaló, Flavián, and Guinalíu (2010), which caused the results to be structured. Vohra and Bhardwaj's (2019) study did not explore how customers' participation within OBCs impacts consumers' trust in a brand, which limits understanding of consumers' motivation to participate in online communities and how participation would influence consumers' loyalty development. Furthermore, Vohra and Bhardwaj (2019) focused only on active participants in online communities; though active participants with CBE are important, the current study considers how they influence passive participants in OBCs. Several types of participants can be identified within online communities with different types of interactions (Fang & Zhang, 2019), thus there is a need to explore in depth how customers influence loyalty within OBCs.

VanMeter *et al.* (2018) explored the involvement of consumers in online engagement, specifically how they differ from each other based on the likelihood they would promote a brand to others. They applied attachment theory, which is used to study consumers' attachment to objects, places and brands (Mende *et al.*, 2013; Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005), using attachment as a predictor of social media behaviour, including advocating or spreading e-WOM about a brand. They investigated brand attachment using three studies; each study used a new sample. Though the findings of each study were analysed together, the methodology creates issues about the validity of consumers' perceptions of brand advocacy through user engagement. Furthermore, study one focused on a particular industry of a brand, whereas study three involved eight national brands across four product categories, one of which consumers could choose to respond to, based on a Likert scale. Though there was an attempt to provide a generic conceptual framework, the choice of methodology leads to questions of whether the same

respondents linked brand attachment to the motivation to advocate the brand through e-WOM. However, VanMeter *et al.*'s (2018) findings provide useful information on how attachment to a brand can motivate consumers to advocate the brand to other social media users and they showed that the public visibility of social media as well as the social risk cause consumers to be careful or avoid advocating brands (King, Racherla, & Bush, 2014; Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci, 2010b). This identifies that loyal consumers are not limited to users who actively participate in user engagement, supporting the view that passive consumers can be socially influenced by active members' contributions in OBCs.

Chen and Yen (2004) declared that a two-way communication process between firms and their customers plays an essential role in interactivity; however, online participation is not restricted to firm–consumer interaction. A study by Chae and Ko (2016) extended this category to include two other types of interactions as perceived by online users: user–user and media–system users. Park, Shin, and Ju (2015) expanded the roles adopted by different users in communities, identifying the different levels of interactivity between users and how users' behaviours and interactivity influence other users' behaviour. Park *et al.* (2015) defined online users as versatile users, self-expression users, pass-along users and introvert users. Each of these represent different levels of social surveillance and self-surveillance; surveillance itself refers to the monitoring of other individuals' behaviours or activities for the purpose of influence and direction (Lyon, 2001). Kumi and Sabherwal (2018) applied social capital theory to address how social capital influences exchange and combination behaviours in online communities. They found that cognitive capital, which emphasises shared understanding, language and collective action, is a stronger predictor of exchange and combination behaviours than relational capital. Kumi and Sabherwal (2018) presented the online environment as complex in nature, consisting of individuals who generate different levels of interaction and who impact the behaviour of other users. However, the focus of their study was on specific online communities in particular industries and online activities, and one may ask if the same practice applies in the luxury fashion industry. However, their study provided insightful points about the variation in online users, which is a useful contribution to the current study. Furthermore, the question of whether passive and active participants are socially influenced by the same interactivity

requires further investigation, making this exploration in relation to loyalty within OBCs worthwhile.

Shukla and Drennan (2018) studied the interactive effects of individual-level and group-level variables on virtual purchase behaviour in online communities. Community influence was a major key variable mentioned in the study, supporting the view that strong relations between community members encourage active participation within the community. According to Wasko and Faraj (2005), increased identification improves human capital, encouraging users to interact more within the online community. Wasko and Faraj (2005) support the view that developing community members' sense of belonging and identity within a community is important to encourage consumer engagement (Algesheimer *et al.,* 2005, McAlexander *et al.,* 2002; Dholakia *et al.,* 2004) and having a "we" community culture can increase its perceived value (Fournier, 1998; Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000; Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006). Shukla and Drennan (2018) additionally emphasised the importance of consumers' intrinsic motivations for engaging online, including the enjoyment they obtain from online activity (Verhagen, Feldberg, van den Hooff, Meents, & Merikivi, 2012) as well as the feeling of individualism within the community. However, this current study aims to explore behaviour beyond the purchasing behaviour within online communities; luxury fashion brands consist not only of purchasing intentions, but also of the social influence of interactivity generated by users who advocate a brand.

Community interaction is vital to maintaining long-term relationships between customers and the brand as customers advocate a positive sentiment of the brand's community, though, inevitably, consumers will also encounter content that attacks the brand. Ilhan, Kübler, and Pauwels (2018) indicated that brand fans will not only indicate support of a brand on the brand's social media pages, but will also post content on social media pages concerning rival brands, initially damaging the rival brand (Fournier & Lee, 2009). Even consumers who have a weak association with a brand will react to e-WOM that criticises a brand (Ho-Dac, Carson, & Moore 2013). Ilhan *et al.* (2018) developed their findings from Facebook content and pages, including posts, number of likes, shares and comments for each post and the number of likes of each comment linked to the post. A similar approach was undertaken by Kübler, Colicev, and Pauwels (2019), who studied firms' usage of support-vector machines and linguistic inquiry and word count to examine sentiment based on UGC within online communities.

Kübler *et al.*'s (2019) investigation is based on a single network; they studied whether firms should rely on methods for sentiment mining and consumer mindset prediction. Kübler *et al.* (2019) maintained a clear separation among positive, negative and neutral sentiments, whereas Ilhan *et al.* (2018) extended the use of sentiment and content analysis to reveal the positive-negative sentiment that consumers use to support a brand. Hewett *et al.* (2016) emphasised that brands adjusted their communication approaches in response to negative e-WOM (p. 1). Ilhan *et al.* (2018) challenged the assumption that negative e-WOM leads to negative results for brands (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Kähr, Nyffenegger, Krohmer, & Hoyer, 2016), proposing that consumers' online engagement, regardless of positive or negative sentiment, can influence observing consumers' perceptions of the brand. Ilhan *et al.*'s (2018) study is a major contribution to this study because consumers' brand sentiment is a vital element in identifying consumers' perceptions of brands, which is identified by observing consumers, making this important for understanding how social influence impacts future loyalty outcomes. Additionally, Ilhan *et al.*'s (2018) study provided further insight into how consumers may react when they encounter negative e-WOM and how it affects their brand loyalty within online communities. The current study emphasises the need to understand how less active users are affected by highly active users who regularly comment on the brand and on other users' posts in online communities, including the perceived sentiment they develop from observing the content.

Community interaction is also related to community appraisals among members, even when individuals may not be consciously collective in their attitude towards a community. In group-level studies, there is often a hierarchical system of groups and interactions between individuals that indicate social influence (Algesheimer, Bagozzi, & Dholakia, 2018), signifying individuals' dependence on each other, thus they are likely to cooperate or connect with each other (Kenny, 1996; Kenny & la Voie, 1985). A group of individuals with similar backgrounds, shared demographics and outlooks are likely to form similar evaluation measures, which may differ from those of other groups (Algesheimer *et al.,* 2018) and even sometimes among the members of the group. While communities emphasise the members' collective behaviour, there are different levels of commitment of members to a shared intention. Though a group of individuals have a conscious commitment to the group, the group does not present an obvious collective consciousness of shared intentionality as such. Each community

member can each be represented as an independent source of information that can be used to construct strength within the community group. In Algesheimer *et al.*'s (2018) model of group-level variables, community members can go through a three-tier appraisal process in which an individual self-judges the community, followed by discussing appraisals from other members individually, to finally an evaluation of the common collective appraisal of the whole community. While some brands may benefit from being directly involved in an OBC, some generate higher online engagement from consumer-to-consumer interaction. Yet the differences among users, as identified earlier, show that users who do not actively participate in online communities should not be ignored; differences within groups of online users' attitudes towards community engagement will generate different levels of online interactivity, therefore levels of social influence directed towards community members will differ across different interactions.

2.5.1 User engagement taxonomies

It is clear that the growth of research into consumer engagement reflects the importance of the impact it has on business success (Venkatesan, 2017). Several papers provide a definition of consumer engagement and developed theoretical frameworks identifying the drivers and consequences of consumer engagement (Pansari & Kumar 2017; Harmeling *et al.,* 2017; Homburg, Jozić, & Kuehnl, 2017). Hollebeek and Macky (2019) developed a conceptual framework of digital content marketing and its role in fostering consumer engagement. The taxonomy begins with the consumers' functional, hedonic and authenticity-based motives, which drive their decision to interact online (Calder, Malthouse, & Schaedel, 2009). However, unlike the other taxonomies of engagement that involved empirical data involving consumers, Hollebeek and Macky's (2019) taxonomy took evidence from previous literature; the model provides a multidimensional perspective that conceptualises customer engagement into three dimensions: cognitive, emotional and behavioural. The taxonomy has not yet been tested empirically, and Hollebeek and Macky (2019) did not segregate users, arguing that online users have a combination of motivation and mental responses that can be generated from the same activity, which over time develop into brand identification.

Pansari and Kumar's (2017) framework illustrates the drivers of consumer engagement, it is organised in the following manner: (1) the concept of customer engagement and its

components (direct and indirect contribution); (2) the antecedents (satisfaction and emotion) and the elements that control the connection between satisfaction, emotion and customer engagement; and (3) the consequences of customer engagement. Pansari and Kumar's (2017) framework considers the tangible (purchased product or service) and intangible (experience and satisfaction) outcomes consumers obtain following from customer engagement; consumers who are true loyalists of a brand will remain with a brand despite not receiving all the desired outcomes from online interaction. Pansari and Kumar (2017) demonstrated that consumers who are emotionally attached to a brand can contribute indirectly through feedback, referrals, social media interactions and influence, indicating the long-term role of online engagement in non-transactional relationships (Brodie *et al.*, 2011). The major focus of the current study is on consumers' referencing of brands and their influence over other consumers. This form of activity has been empirically proven, though through limited studies, to contribute to a firm's revenue, as referred customers are typically more profitable than non-referred consumers (Van den Bulte, Bayer, Skiera, & Schmitt, 2018). Though this thesis does not primarily focus on online engagement activities, indirect contribution activity is important when considering how consumers perceive activities generated by referring consumers and how this affects their attitudinal loyalty towards a luxury fashion brand.

Harmeling *et al.* (2017) presented a typology of two forms of customer engagement marketing and offered specific strategic elements for customer outcomes and firm performance; they concluded that engagement marketing effectiveness arises from the formation of psychological ownership and brand associations which, the authors argued, are enhanced by the strengthening of existing mental bonds, known as task-based engagement initiatives, or the building of new mental bonds, known as experiential engagement initiatives, to enrich customers' experience. They developed the taxonomy using literature of the two pathways to customer engagement. The taxonomy was empirically tested around a specific event; results before and after the event were compared. They used a quasi-experimental design to test the effects of experiential engagement initiatives on customer engagement within a physical setting that involved task-based initiatives, which followed a pay-per-engagement structure, whereas experiential engagement followed proactive incentives. Although many consumers are likely to be inactive in online environments, they are still involved in the surveillance of online interactivity. Therefore, the sentiment of online activity practised

by consumers emerges as an important element of social influence, which is worth exploring.

Task-based engagement involves guiding customers to provide voluntary contributions to online communications, such as writing reviews or referring customers to other customers to support each other, which can potentially increase revenue and lower costs (Fuchs, Prandelli, & Schreier, 2010; Fuchs & Schreier, 2011). In contrast, experiential engagement initiatives emphasise gamified activity more than work-orientated activity; gamified activity often evokes positive emotions and enjoyment. A major difference between the two mental bonds is that task-based initiatives focus on a specific type of customer engagement, whereas experiential initiatives centre on motivating customer contributions to the engagement process so that they develop psychological and emotional connections with the brand and other customers (Harmeling *et al.,* 2017). Consequently, experiential engagement may influence consumers' long-term memory and attitudes to the brand, prompting emotional attachment and long-term customer engagement (Schouten, McAlexander, & Koenig, 2007). It can also make people feel a sense of belonging to a community, thus creating a desire to contribute to the engagement process (Pink, 2011; Schouten *et al.,* 2007) and go beyond the economic expectations of consumers (Harmeling, Palmatier, Houston, Arnould, & Samaha, 2015). Though Harmeling *et al.*'s (2017) study is structured and focuses on single behavioural dimensions, the finding that experiential initiatives are more effective at obtaining long-term customer engagement than task-based initiatives (because experiential initiatives motivate self-directed consumer contributions, whereas task-based initiatives are more single-based and mostly directed by the firm) is useful. This is a major online activity that is relevant to the behavioural outcomes of the engaging consumer, which for this study is a relevant secondary factor impacting the social influencing of other consumers.

According to Van Dyne and Pierce (2004, p. 440), psychological ownership is the feeling of "what is mine", whereas as self-transformation involves "who am I". Both are important to engagement marketing as they motivate customers to: (1) engage beyond the economic transaction benefits; (2) use their own resources to enhance the firm; and (3) view the brand's requests as more relevant than competitors' requests (Harmeling *et al.,* 2017). Self-transformation differs from psychological ownership: self-transformation requires a significant level of cognitive resources (Markus &

Kunda, 1986), which can benefit the brand if consumers' perceive the brand or other customers as the main source of sparking emotional connections (Dodson, 1996; McAlexander *et al.*, 2002), whereas as psychological ownership decreases if consumers' control over contributions decreases, resulting in a reduction of online engagement or possibly an increase in e-WOM. However, Van Dyne and Pierce's (2004) study focused on specific self-created activity and the individuals' perceived ownership and responsibility for positive outcomes. Van Dyne and Pierce's (2004) and Harmeling *et al.*'s (2017) taxonomies emphasised the importance of consumers' voluntary resource contributions, including tangible and intangible assets (Barney & Arikan, 2001), but their explorations of the different forms on online activity consumers can undertake are narrow. This study considers that users will participate in different categories of activities based on different purposes that will generate different levels of interactivity (Chae & Ko, 2016; Shukla & Drennan, 2018; Kumi & Sabherwal, 2018) and considers the impact of this activity on consumers' loyalty to the brand.

Eigenraam *et al.* (2018) provided a taxonomy that reveals consumers' different experiences in digital engagement practices. The taxonomy reveals 17 digital practices that were divided into five different types of general practices: (1) for fun, (2) learning about the brand, (3) provide customer feedback, (4) talk about a brand and (5) work for a brand. The taxonomy demonstrated that consumers separate hedonic practices from utilitarian ones, and clearly distinguish practices as being introduced by the brand (for fun and learning) or by consumers (work for the brand, give feedback and talk about the brand). Eigenraam *et al.* (2018) followed common scale development procedures to predict a consumer's differential attention (Sprott, Czellar, & Spangenberg, 2009; Vandecasteele & Geuens, 2010) from a multidimensional perspective. The engagement practices of the taxonomy were developed from a methodological content analysis of customer engagement literature and examined responses from 108 participants through a sorting task, commonly used in marketing and consumer behaviour research (Alba & Chattopadhyay, 1986; Irwin & Naylor, 2009; Ülkümen, Chakravarti, & Morwitz, 2010), to identify how consumers categorise different online practices.

Eigenraam *et al.*'s (2018) taxonomy provides a set of activities that illustrates the differences in how individual consumers perceive online engagement activities, shifting the focus from specific online platforms (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014; Azar, Machado, Vacas-de-Carvalho, & Mendes, 2016) and specific OBCs (Schau, Muñiz Jr, & Arnould,

2009) to the activities themselves. Other authors' taxonomies proposed that positive customer engagement complements brand identification and UGC (Pansari & Kumar, 2017; Harmeling *et al.*, 2017), providing this study with a theoretical understanding of customer engagement. Yet, with limited empirical data and the selection of the positivism paradigm, the studies provided generalised classifications of customers' characteristics and online activity in online communities. The restrictions of the positivism paradigm resulted in the overlooking of consumers who indirectly contribute to a firm's performance through engagement in OBCs (Pansari & Kumar, 2017; Brodie *et al.*, 2011), and limited their empirical investigations' understanding of how customers affect the loyalty of observing consumers. Therefore, this study aims to explore these customers and consumers from the perspective of social influence in the luxury fashion industry using the social constructivist paradigm to explore the extent to which customers' influence consumers' loyalty.

2.6. Sources of influence and community engagement

Muller and Peres's (2019) study considered consumers' individual characteristics, the attributes of the social ties connecting consumers together and the structural properties of consumers' social networks. They reviewed previous literature to summarise the characteristics of consumers' network structures into three groups: cohesive, connected and concise. Muller and Peres's (2019) favoured a quantitative investigation into the relationship between a social network value and product innovation performance. This is in contrast to other measures of social networks, such as the numbers, speed and influence strength of network members with certain characteristics (Valente & Davis, 1999; Van Eck, Jager, & Leeflang, 2011) and interpersonal impact (Nair, Manchanda, & Bhatia, 2010). However, though a firm gains value from social interactions (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Godes & Mayzlin, 2009; Libai, Muller, & Peres, 2013), social value is not generated directly by past purchases but rather by interactions between individuals that probably add to the purchasing experience. Though Muller and Peres (2019) explore a range of network characteristics that can influence loyalty towards a brand, the categories of cohesive, connected and concise are highly generalised, which makes it difficult to associate every consumer with the collective framework. To fill this gap in understanding, this thesis emphasises the need to identify the specific characteristics of social influence that impact real-time consumers' perception of luxury fashion brands in online communities.

Essamri *et al.*'s (2019) study emphasised the importance of maintaining socially negotiated processes in brand identity and co-creation with a brand community; they introduced a model that visualises the context in which a firm's management participates in brand identity and strongly emphasised the need to maintain "bridges" and "bonding" between the members of an online community. The model illustrates brand identity as socially constructed through a series of social influence processes between multiple stakeholders, recognising that the brand's "fans" and consumers continuously reflect and validate each other's perception of the brand's identity. The empirical data was collected using in-depth interviews with marketing managers and netnographic data was collected from an OBC organised by Aston Martin, including 215 posts and 35,000 comments, obtained from a six-month timeline. The study provides insightful points on how the social influence generated from the community impacts perception of the brand. However, data from in-depth interviews came from managers instead of customers, which potentially restricts the understanding of how consumers perceive social influence attempts or how they deliver social influence through their online activity.

Kupfer *et al.* (2018), using power theory, which has been applied in marketing strategy and organisational theory (Gaski, 1984; Homburg, Jensen, & Krohmer, 2008), explored the impact of a brand creating alliances with external brands with strong social media presence on monetary outcomes. Managers frequently include social media activity in their strategies to build their online presence (Saboo, Kumar, & Ramani, 2016) and gain potential returns from the activity. Traditionally, firms created alliances with other brands with the purpose of obtaining their expertise and resources (Rao, Qu, & Ruekert 1999; Rao & Ruekert 1994). However, Kupfer *et al.* (2018) proposed that firms can benefit (increase sales of products) from alliances with brands with a rich online presence by strategically using their brand allies' network of followers within social media channels. Kupfer *et al.*'s (2018) framework details the partner brand's social media power potential, including the size and activity of the social network, the power exertion of the partner brand, the response comments and level of interaction. Kupfer *et al.* (2018) provided three types of product-related social media power exertions:

1. *Authentic social media power exertion* – this is established if consumers perceive the brand to be genuine towards its fans (Morhart, Malär, Guèvremont, Girardin, & Grohmann, 2015), which can be judged through the brand's

communication style, eventually leading to emotional brand attachment (Thomson, 2006).

2. *Exclusive social media power exertion* – this is when a resource or information is available only to a particular group (Barone & Roy, 2010), which is of great value to consumers as it may lead them to feel special to have access to such exclusive information (Balachander & Stock, 2009; Collins & Miller, 1994).

3. *Persuasive social media power exertion* – direct requests and types of assertive behaviour can influence consumer response (Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980). A partner brand can openly ask or persuade followers to act, which may obtain a positive response if followers have a strong social connection or it could cause a negative outcome if consumers feels decisions are being made for them.

Brand partners that have a strong social connection with their followers can motivate potential consumption of a brand's products if consumers are encouraged by the sources or celebrities they follow. Kupfer *et al.* (2018) identified that by strengthening the referent power base, firms can use their partner brands as an opportunity to encourage consumers to purchase their products. However, though the three types of power exertion identified by Kupfer *et al.* (2018) may be useful to guide brands on how to use their strategic partners, the selection of a positivist methodology limits in-depth explanations regarding the external brand partner's network size and activity from a consumer's perspective. Kupfer *et al.* (2018) proposed that network sources need to be of a high status in order to effectively motivate consumers' response; however, their data was taken from the motion picture industry from a selection of movies that created a brand alliance (Luo, Chen, Han, & Park, 2010) combining the brand with the actor. However, despite the celebrity status, questions arise on how a influencer builds a referent power if showcasing the brand for the first time. Identification studies have shown that brand-influencer matching is important to obtain acceptance within online communities (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005; Tseng *et al.*, 2019), but Kupfer *et al.* (2018) did not address any valid criteria of brand-influencer matching. They explored how the mismatch of online information with consumer groups can negatively impact their identification with the information (Wang *et al.*, 2019a; Srull *et al.*, 1985); therefore, it

can be argued that a mismatch of influencers could also negatively impact consumers' identification with the brand through online communities.

Lanz, Goldenberg, Shapira, and Stahl (2019) addressed seeding policies in UGC networks by examining the impact of influencers for unpaid endorsements. In social network literature, the level of status of an individual can be assigned through rank or popularity and can be determined by the number of social ties an individual has (Muller & Peres, 2019). Scholars suggest that marketing managers should attract individuals with high status as part of their seeding strategy (Hanaki, Peterhansl, Dodds, & Watts, 2007; Hinz, Skiera, Barrot, & Becker, 2011). However, obtaining a connection with sources with high online status and a large follower base does not necessarily mean that firms will obtain responses from consumers in online communities. In contrast, others propose low-status seeding, particularly for information sharing content in social interactions, arguing that high-status individuals do not necessarily have high influence on other networks (Galeotti & Goyal, 2009; Watts & Dodds, 2007; Trusov, Bodapati, & Bucklin 2010). This contradicts Kupfer *et al.*'s (2018) argument that targeting networks with high status and a large fan base would benefit firms' return outcomes. However, Kupfer *et al.* (2018) focused on the encouragement of product purchases by key influencers, whereas Lanz *et al.* (2019) focused on influencers expanded their follow base through non-paid endorsement.

Lanz *et al.* (2019) indicated that it is not effective to gain status by trying to form ties with high-status individuals in the hopes of an endorsement to influence other consumers. According to Seo and Park (2018), brand equity is positively associated with positive e-WOM, though they also mention the importance of having strong influential links between consumers but do not imply that they need to be of high status. Therefore, brands need to establish an image that consumers can identify with before including high-status social networks as part of their strategy to attract followers. Social media platforms, such as YouTube and Instagram, are used by firms interested in promoting their products and brand equity status (Goldenberg, Oestreicher-Singer, & Reichman 2012; Mayzlin & Yoganarasimhan, 2012). With such activities, brands can attract potential followers and generate a seeding programme (Haenlein & Libai, 2017). An important point mentioned in Kupfer *et al.*'s (2018) study is keeping brand posts authentic, which involves firms generating communication that feels genuine to the consumer and is directly influenced by the consumers' identities. This supports the view

that using high-status individuals as forces of influence does not necessarily mean the firm will obtain a higher return either financially or socially. If consumers do not have a social connection with the brand there is a likelihood of a low return. Firms can potentially build a connection by publishing their own content, including messages and conversations started by them or their current loyal fans. Lanz *et al.* (2019) suggested that online community creators, or brands, should build their status by targeting low-status users rather than "jumping" by targeting high-status ones.

However, identifying sources of influence based on high and low status can cause firms to restrict sources of influence simply because their status may not make a positive impression on other individuals. Understanding the significance of how social influence affects consumer behaviour requires attention towards the source of the influence. Studies have focused on the effect of source credibility on receivers of information (Luo, Luo, Xu, Warkentin, & Sia, 2015), yet few have focused on how different characteristics of source credibility influence consumers' active behaviour (Ismagilova, Slade, Rana, & Dwivedi, 2019). Previous studies suggest that messages from a source who has expertise, perceived authenticity and trustworthiness and is similar to others are perceived more positively (Chaiken, 1980; Filieri, 2015; López & Sicilia, 2014; Luo *et al*., 2015; Teng, Khong, Chong, & Lin, 2017). An issue that emerges from source credibility is the diverse and conflicting perceptions of consumers; in different industries, consumers are likely to have various criteria of what makes sources credible (Ismagilova *et al.,* 2019), which can challenge the social influence the source exerts on consumers' behaviour.

A source of influence perceived to be highly credible might not exert stronger persuasion than a source with low credibility (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982; Tormala, Briñol, & Petty, 2006). Organisational members as sources of influence can signal greater expertise compared to personal sources, thus can be classified as more accurate (Wilson, 1983, p. 15). However, that perception can be easily contradicted by individuals with a strong bias that organisations lean towards their own interests rather than those of the consumers. Though there is no dispute that high-quality information is vital in social media, the credibility of the source of the content has a significant impact on the perception of the online content (Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983; Sussman & Siegal, 2003; Shan, 2016) and the sharing of content in online communities (Cheung, Sia, & Kuan, 2012). If an individual trusts the source of information, then it increases

the likelihood that the information will be perceived as useful (Cheung, Lee, & Rabjohn, 2008; Hussain, Ahmed, Jafar, Rabnawaz, & Jianzhou, 2017; Dedeoglu, 2019). Defining what consumers perceive to be a trusted source remains complex as individuals apply their own criteria to measure a source of influence. For the fashion industry, traditional social influencers were, and still are, consumers' personal peers (Shim & Koh, 1997), brands (Kaiser, 1990) and to an extent an individual's own initiative. In the current online environment, users' style choice can be seen by many people through shared pictures and populations of OBCs. Thus the characteristics of social influence go beyond the traditional social influence of fashion brands' designers and content delivered by a brand's personnel.

Chen *et al.* (2016) investigated how information and its source can impact consumers' acceptance of it; though information from online communities may not directly impact loyalty, community members can impact its perceived value, which influences individuals to remain actively connected with the community and can eventually lead to loyalty. Chen *et al.*'s (2016) study emphasised the importance of community influence in relation to the types of network through which consumers receive information via e-WOM. They drew attention to the fact that different sources of information will have differing effects on consumers' perceptions of the information provided to them. There are two contrasting arguments: when information is shared or exchanged between people with no knowledge of each other it may be perceived as unreliable and untrustworthy, therefore it will not affect decision making (Mathwick *et al.*, 2008), whereas customer-to-customer information exchange is perceived as more credible as it usually excludes corporate information and commercial motives (Bickart & Schindler, 2001). However, rather than formulating one defined type of influence, Chen *et al.* (2016) stated that a consumer's level of susceptibility will impact their acceptance of a source of information. To understand how susceptibility impacts the perceived value of sources of information, the individualistic or collectivistic nature of consumers can be considered. Individuals who rely on their participation with other community members are likely to follow the leads of others, which can be linked to high susceptibility, whereas individuals with behavioural traits associated with feeling independent and unique are likely to develop their own judgements, aligning with Chen *et al.*'s (2016) low susceptibility.

Individuals' desire to remain independent from group social influence can be based on their conscious awareness that being socially dictated to by an online community is not appropriate (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005). Individuals may desire to reaffirm their freedom (Brehm, 1966) and may move in a direction opposite to the influence of others (Clee & Wicklund, 1980, p. 390). Different groups of consumers have varying interests in luxury fashion, consumers with a high level of fashion innovativeness and opinion leadership (Bailey & Seock, 2010) and consumers with less interest in a luxury fashion brand will respond differently to an opposing influencer. This does not mean consumers will change brand preference, but it indicates that individuals may react to social influence if they perceive it to be controlling, unreliable or even dissimilar. Kim, Moravec, and Dennis's (2019) study found that perceived believability of sources impacts the usefulness and trustworthiness of information (Kim & Dennis, 2019) and additionally found that confirmation bias is vital to social influence. Individuals and groups are likely to develop a common view if they agree with a community view or join groups to segregate themselves from individuals they perceive to be dissimilar. Believability of information and confirmation bias combined will thus strongly affect actions such as reading, liking, commenting and sharing online content (Kim *et al.*, 2019). Even if several sources deliver a message that challenges pre-existing opinions, individuals' behavioural traits or prior experience will have an impact on whether they comply with the sources of influence. Regardless of the source of information, every consumer will respond to the source's influence differently (Muller & Peres, 2018) as each consumer has their own behavioural traits that will individually affect the perceived value of each source.

Filieri, Hofacker, and Alguezaui (2018) focused on the perceived credibility of reviews: they found that a reviewer's expertise positively influenced the perceived usefulness of e-WOM, and that the length of a published review was also a factor. It can be argued that the length of reviews can signal the committed involvement of the individual (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010) but Filieri *et al.* (2018) found that long reviews can be less helpful if they are not relevant and factual. Consumers of the millennial generation are not likely to desire a lengthy review in the online environment if it is not relevant and authenticated. As for the case of luxury fashion brand content, though e-WOM is expected, a long individual review is not likely to appeal as much as brand appeal. Filieri *et al.* (2018) provided useful additional insight into how consumers might perceive

content published by consumers who have experience with a service, but they used a positivist methodological approach and as a result were unable to understand in depth the information consumers look for and whether source credibility is relevant in certain social media activities.

2.7 The luxury fashion sector

Researchers have recognised a need for a more relational perspective in conceptualising computer-mediated marketing environments (Ozuem, Howell, & Lancaster, 2008; Moon & Sprott, 2016), which are formed and shaped by interactions (Da Silveira, Lages, & Simões, 2013; Fournier, 1998; Cova, 1997). Fashion is a powerful social symbol used to create individual and group identities (Ahuvia, 2005); fashion is also adapted according to users' norms, values and preferences, and, arguably, trends are co-created by consumers who both preserve and adapt them along the way (Wolny & Mueller, 2013). If a trend is adopted by a significant number of people, the product's perceived value will be affected, either positively or negatively, depending on social references. Fashion is categorised as a high-involvement product, which implies careful consideration of how the item links to an individual's identities or what social risks are involved. Gambetti and Graffigna (2010) argued that consumers will focus more on promotions than on brand equity. However, consumers who visit online communities may have socialisation motivations and not necessarily purchase-related goals. Traditionally, luxury fashion brands were limited to niche markets; since then, consumers' demands for product ranges that extend more towards accessible luxury items has increased (Nueno & Quelch, 1998; Brun & Castelli, 2013). Though a majority of consumers who purchase luxury fashion brands today are still perceived to be from high social and economic classes, the fan base consists of various segment groups that desire an association with a luxury brand. Therefore, luxury fashion brands are more likely to consider how they can use their online communities to maintain communication between followers about the brand to maintain loyalty through interactivity.

According to Gu, Park, and Konana (2012), high-involvement products attract high amounts of online conversations. This may be due to the complex process of evaluating the value of individual fashion brands and their products, particularly their social value (Wolny & Mueller, 2013). Fashion brands are often described in terms of human

personality traits (Thompson & Haytko, 1997) that may possess an emotional component that evokes strong attitudes. Online users share information related to their stylistic choices with their peers to obtain feedback on their choices (Lin, Lu, & Wu, 2012); this supports the view that consumers are highly conscious of their fashion brand choices and the feedback from placing their image on online communities contributes to their decision making. The complexity of the fashion industry has attracted several authors to explore its presence in the online community, including brand personality (Wolny & Mueller, 2013; Ranfagni *et al.,* 2016) and social identity (Helal *et al.,* 2018; Carlson *et al.,* 2008; Nowak *et al.,* 1990).

A luxury fashion brand is defined as a brand that demands the highest of quality and is therefore premium priced (Berthon *et al.*, 2009; Hansen & Wänke 2011; Silverstein & Fiske 2003), whereas mainstream fashion brands are of reasonably low quality which makes them more affordable (Lee, Motion, & Conroy 2009). The perception of luxury brands has led many consumers to seek counterfeit luxury goods; to better understand this, research examined consumers' attitudes and motivations linked to this desire to acquire luxury brand counterfeits and found that it is largely driven by social motivations, such as status signalling, social approval and communicating social identity to others (Bloch *et al.*, 1993; Hoe *et al.*, 2003; Wilcox *et al.*, 2009; Wang *et al.*, 2019b). Behind the need to maintain social identity through fashion (Helal *et al.,* 2018; Carlson *et al.,* 2008; Nowak *et al.,* 1990) is the need to feel socially accepted within environments that others can see (Wang *et al.*, 2019b). Still, the question remains whether consumers aiming to showcase their social status through luxury brands influence the observers' perception of them, and, equally, whether showcasing social status through luxury brands socially influences the observers' perception of the showcased luxury brands. As mention earlier, several researchers have explored the importance of social influence on information acceptance (Davis *et al.,* 1989; Karahanna *et al.,* 1999; Lewis *et al.*, 2003; Malhotra & Galletta, 2005; Mun *et al.,* 2006; Li *et al.,* 2010; Cheung *et al.,* 2011); yet, because of the nature of the fashion industry, which is unique to different individuals, it is worth exploring how members who contribute content within online communities influence observing consumers' loyalty to a luxury fashion brand. Though several papers have explored the nature of fashion, mainstream and luxury, in the online environment (Kim & Ko, 2012; Wolny & Mueller, 2013; Ranfagni *et al.,* 2016; Helal *et al.,* 2018), they have focused more on the online

platforms that enhance customer equity for fashion brands and how the online platforms complement consumers' social identity.

Kim and Ko (2012) described luxury fashion brands' social media marketing efforts as consisting of five dimensions: entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customisation and WOM. They empirically examined the influence of social media activities on 362 luxury fashion brand users' loyalty. Their survey questionnaire findings revealed a positive significant relationship between purchase behaviour and social media activities. Kim and Ko (2012) focused on the impact of social media activities on customer equity complementing the long-term profit and value they generate for firms (Kumar & George, 2007; Kim *et al.*, 2010; Lemon, Rust, & Zeithaml, 2001). Furthermore, they investigated the impact of social media activities on purchasing intentions; though purchasing intentions are a significant indicator of loyalty, this current thesis aims to explore the effect of online environments on the loyalty of a sample of online users who had either purchased a luxury brand or followed a luxury brand through online communities. Kim and Ko's (2012) studied sample consisted of individuals who had previously purchased products of luxury fashion brands or had previous experience of viewing the social media site of a selected luxury brand, Louis Vuitton. Kim and Ko's (2012) sampling strategy was suitable for the chosen studied variable, purchase intentions, the current thesis study argues the need to further understand the influence of members' interactions, including e-WOM, which have been found to positively affect brand image and purchase (Tsang & Tse, 2005; Alhidari, Iyer, & Paswan, 2015; Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017). Therefore, this thesis aims to explore how individuals perceive interactions and content delivered by other loyal customers.

Previous studies have demonstrated that brand-related experience can encourage interactions among consumers (Klein, Falk, Esch, & Goluknovtsev, 2016) and motivate co-creation engagement (Choi *et al.*, 2016; Tynan, McKechnie, & Chhuon, 2010). Likewise, previous research has demonstrated that the mentioned social media marketing activities can benefit luxury fashion brands (Godey *et al.*, 2016; Kim & Ko, 2012). However, the majority of these studies were based on the analysis of brand-generated content, with rare exceptions that analysed UGC (Lee & Watkins, 2016; Koivisto & Mattila, 2018) including content developed by loyal customers. Furthermore, consumers concerns of content control and authenticity has influenced the trend of co-created content publishing in luxury fashion marketing (Annie-Jin, 2012)

shifting the control over brand experience from marketers to consumers (Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013, p. 1513). Social media has allowed firms to directly engage with their customers and has provided customers with convenient ways of sharing information with other consumers (Quach & Thaichon, 2017). Customers have the ability to share their brand-related experiences with similar online users using rich and vivid media content (Hajli *et al.*, 2017) created by themselves, which is referred to as UGC (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). The motivations for engaging in this form of created content include self-presentation, information broadcasting, enjoyment, community participation and social interaction (Belk, 2013).

Luxury fashion brands have invested in the use of external resources, including big data, digital technology platforms and collaborations with external sources including customers (Hsiao *et al.*, 2019; Scuotto *et al.*, 2017). The interactivity of social media has facilitated active collaboration between customers and luxury fashion brands enabling brands to identify customers' tastes, preferences, compliments and criticisms. Koivisto and Mattila's (2018) study demonstrated that brand exhibitions facilitate co-creation of visual content. They used visual frame analysis of co-created UGC from Instagram to organise selected photos and videos into thematic categories to highlight the meaning of the content. The collection of customers' online content by luxury fashion firms has enhanced luxury fashion firms' internal knowledge of customers and enabled the flow of knowledge between customers and brands (Ferraris *et al.*, 2017; Scuotto *et al.*, 2017; Kietzmann *et al.*, 2011). Koivisto and Mattila (2018) provided a unique approach to analysing real-time content published by followers of a brand event, providing clear insight into brand followers active involvement and engagement in a luxury fashion OBC. Koivisto and Mattila (2018) solely focused on a visual analysis of the media content collected and emphasised the importance of brands obtaining knowledge of their customers and interaction resource allocation. However, an in-depth understanding of consumers' reactions to the UGC is required, such as how it affects their brand perception, interaction and loyalty intentions. Therefore, this thesis aims to explore how this example of user-generated interactivity is perceived by consumers and how it affects their online behaviour.

Heine and Berghaus (2014) provided a classification of eight digital platforms, including OBCs, to aid luxury brand managers' understanding of online tools and social media sites so that they can manage their information and marketing activities

effectively. They collected data from semi-structured interviews with 23 CEOs or managing directors of luxury organisations, identifying management's role to develop activity that creates a social response. However, although their choice of sample (management level) provides useful guidance on brand community activity, the sample may not necessarily reflect the nature of consumers regarding the luxury industry. When considering brands, every consumer will define a brand differently.

Ranfagni *et al.*'s (2016) study, which focused on online communities linked to fashion, with consideration of consumer–brand alignment and various types of text analysis software analysed raw frequencies of common adjective words in a blog's database for consumers who conducted brand-related conversations in these blogs. Ranfagni *et al.*'s (2016) study identified the need to refresh existing brand personalities or identify new ones to maintain an alignment between company-defined and consumer-perceived brand personality. In other words, there should be a fit between individuals' self-image and the perceived brand personality (Aaker, 1997; Sirgy, 1982). A major issue that causes issues for this approach is the diverse personality traits of consumers within online communities. This emerges from the sample limitations of Ranfagni *et al.*'s (2016) study: they selected a range of brands that may represent different social groups; a large population of individuals, of which social background could not be verified; and analysis of the language used revealed varying levels of alignment. They linked their results to the brand's capability to communicate intended brand personalities, but did not consider whether groups of consumers with diverse personality traits within the community fitted the brand's described personality. Crawford-Camiciottoli *et al.* (2014) narrowed their focus to three leading fashion brands, (Valentino, Dolce & Gabbana and Giorgio Armani) linked to three separate iconic personalities. They used similar text mining analysis software to identify broad categories of brand associations in the fashion blogs. The desire for the presence of a specific designer's name suggests the need for a specific fashion category. Though Crawford-Camiciottoli *et al.*'s (2014) study is similar to Ranfagni *et al.*'s (2016) study, their focus on specific brands enabled a clear association between a brand's community page and the consumers participating in it. However, the lack of an in-depth investigation into the relationship between fashion brands and online interaction behaviour reflects both studies' choice of an objective text analysis approach, relying on the briefest words of online comments, which provided limited insight into consumers' individual associations with the brand.

The dynamic nature of online marketing has caused companies to be constantly seeking development in their activity (Jayachandran, Gimeno, & Varadarajan, 1999; Lusch, 2007; Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Webster, 1992). The fashion industry is known for establishing the concept of embracing individuality among the consumer population. Thus, consumers seek to individually establish their unique manner of behaviour, speech and appearance that is noticeable and significant but also within presumed group norms (Helal *et al.,* 2018). Helal *et al.*'s (2018) study drew from social identity theory and sought to examine how evolving social media platforms have impacted perceptions of brand in the fashion and accessories industries. Using a constructivist approach, Helal *et al.* (2018) emphasised that users in online fashion communities, rather than maintaining an identity independent from the brand, positively associate with published content that is relevant and aligns with the brand and the social circle to which they belong.

The mentioned studies present a pattern on the impact of social identity, signalling it as a key element that maintains loyal customers' intention to remain with a brand. For this study, though it is acknowledged that social identity is key element affecting loyalty in online communities, the concept of social identity is seen as a significant indicator of the social influence that can impact the perception of other online users observing content depicting social identities. Therefore, is it worth studying how these members who visualise these identities can have an impact on other online users' intention to remain loyal to a brand in online communities. The concept of brand–consumer personality alignment is a significant predictor of brand loyalty retention as identified by the mentioned studies; however, the diverse consumer personalities linked to fashion in the online environment of online communities raises the question of how community brand members respond to individuals who appear to differ from the community culture and brand's personality. Dholakia *et al.*'s (2004) model illustrated a direct path between social identity and group norms formed from values that group individuals together prior to participation. This implies a desire for relevant social groups rather than a non-defined social community setting, especially if it revolves around a specific luxury brand that reflects particular personality and style characteristics.

As mentioned earlier, luxury is considered an exclusive privilege for the elite who use a luxury branded product or service as a sign of distinction and as a statement of their status (Han, Nunes, & Drèze 2010; Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012; Ordabayeva &

Chandon, 2011). While consumers may develop new hedonic and experiential motivations (Berger & Ward, 2010; Dion & Arnould, 2011), status display remains an important driver for luxury consumption (Han *et al.,* 2010). According to Asatryan and Oh (2008), consumers who experience a service as "mine" are willing to pay extra for the service, identifying the influence of psychological ownership in consumers' purchase behaviour (Jussila, Tarkiainen, Sarstedt, & Hair, 2015). Therefore, as a product becomes part of the consumer's "self" they will consume the product regardless of price. However, purchase behaviour may be different for consumers with a less positive self-image and the need to enhance "self" based on luxury brand association (Fuchs *et al.*, 2013). The emphasis of brand association in the luxury sector links to the impact of perceived quality on brand equity (Yoo, Donthu, & Lee, 2000), which supports the differentiation between brands (Bao, Bao, & Sheng, 2011).

Fuchs *et al.* (2013) provided empirical evidence that luxury brand products labelled as user-designed can reduce the preference towards luxury items. Four studies explored the participants' positioning of different brands from the luxury and mainstream fashion industries; the results indicated that consumers desire company-designed products with high social relevance more than user-designed ones. Therefore, through the experience of evaluating brand quality, the perceived quality of luxury fashion brands reinforces the sense of self (Fuchs *et al.,* 2013). Fuchs *et al.*'s (2013) study provides a contrasting argument about UGC and its influence on consumers' brands perceptions in OBCs. However, the content provided to the studies' participants were images of popular company-designed brand products that were chosen based on users' selections of their favourite product designs, which was enabled through an online voting system in social media platforms (Fuchs *et al.*, 2010; Hoyer, Chandy, Dorotic, Krafft, & Singh, 2010; Ogawa & Piller, 2006). Though Fuchs *et al.* (2013) found that demand for luxury brand products was reduced when users were involved in the selection process, the studies leave the question open on whether the same outcome of observing consumers' preference towards a brand would apply when observing content of popular luxury brand products published by other consumers.

Mandel *et al.* (2006) conducted a pilot study with 394 university students taking a degree major to measure the effect of exposure to similar others on their preference for luxury brands. The study indicated that related individuals, in this case, past students from the selected university major, can influence consumers to prefer the luxury brand

being showcased by the individual, whereas individuals from opposing majors reduced consumers' preference. Although they are not directly linked, the studies of Mandel *et al.* (2006) and Fuchs *et al.* (2013) imply the importance of brand product showcasing by a network of individuals linked to the luxury brand, so long as the products centre on the brand itself, which, ultimately, opposes the high power UGC alone has on consumers' loyalty to luxury fashion brands; yet, the studies emphasise the importance of products being company designed, but the social influence of consumers' brand-related content in OBCs is still a major factor for this study in understanding how loyalty is maintained.

2.8 Summary

This chapter has summarised key literature relevant to the understanding of social influence in OBCs. The aim of the current study is to develop a conceptual model and theoretical construct that could be a foundation for developing effective customer loyalty strategies for OBCs for luxury fashion brands. The first objective to meet this aim is to review extant models and frameworks related to OBCs and loyalty. OBCs and customer loyalty are concepts that have been easily conceptualised with models and taxonomies provided by authors who applied specific characteristics related to specific environments and consumers. However, the theoretical and practical concepts of these studies are subject to debate based on the subjective nature of individual consumers. Numerous papers have explored the important interactions between firms and customers (Chen & Yen, 2004; Ibrahim *et al.*, 2017; Nyadzayo *et al.*, 2018), the profit they generate (Li *et al.*, 2018; Carlson *et al.*, 2018a; Davis *et al.*, 2014; Cheng *et al.*, 2020), and firms' desire for social presence in OBCs to generate customer loyalty (Bleier *et al.*, 2019; Moreo *et al.*, 2019).

Regardless of the discipline, online communities and online interactions have been examined along similar theoretical grounds, including informational quality, and social identity and social influence, to understand the online environment. Several pathways of social influence have emerged, most commonly the influence exerted by a brand and by community members. Several authors situated brand identification as the central source of community commitment and loyalty (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005; Fuchs *et al.*, 2013), focusing on the impact of FGC within online communities. Yet, individual OBC customers and consumers respond differently to OBC content and other members. Thus,

social influence is a key theory to explore when considering how OBCs develop or maintain loyalty within the luxury fashion industry, while considering holistic factors including degrees of loyalty and engagement and the relationship between customers and brands, and between customers and consumers. The majority of prior research used a positivism paradigm, which has caused empirical data concerning social influence to be structured without an explanatory understanding of how customers perceive OBCs, and how consumers perceive OBC customers' involvement, and the effect this has on loyalty and engagement in the luxury fashion industry. This methodological theme influenced the researcher's selection of a constructivist paradigm to enable an exploration of the identified themes.

The second objective is to critically evaluate the effect of OBCs on customer loyalty in the luxury fashion industry. With brand identification, loyal customers are expected to follow a specific brand, whereas passive consumers are not considered loyal customers until they purchase from the brand. The literature reveals several themes that inform the methodology and data analysis. One literature theme important to this study is attitudinal and behavioural loyalty; these are interconnected to reveal varying levels of customers' loyalty (Ozuem *et al.*, 2016; Dick & Basu, 1994) and do not align customers into the two common categories of loyalty: active and passive. Social interaction through OBCs is considered an important factor that generates sales (Li *et al.,* 2018; Carlson *et al.,* 2018a; Davis *et al.,* 2014; Cheng *et al.,* 2020). However, studies highlight social interactions' inefficiency if there is a perceived mismatch between the sender and the receiver (Wang *et al.*, 2019a; Srull *et al.*, 1985). The perceived characteristics, personality, and qualities of a brand and OBC may be critically judged by customers (Ranfagni *et al.*, 2016; Crawford-Camiciottoli & Faraoni, 2016; Fuchs *et al.*, 2013); these are therefore considered in the current study in reference to the second objective.

The third objective of this study is to critically explore whether customers' participation in OBCs motivates consumers' loyalty intentions. A key trend that emerged from the literature review is the effect of visual OBC content on the customers and consumers observing it. Many studies considered the perspectives of customers who actively participate in OBCs; some explored customers' motivations to create and contribute content within an online community, building on their social identity and desire to be recognised (Helal et al., 2018; Szamrej, & Latané, 1990; Wang *et al.*, 2019b). However, scholars have isolated the understanding of how OBCs impact customers' loyalty from

how customers' involvement in OBCs, including their references to the brand, directly affects consumers' loyalty within online communities. The literature reveals a tendency in academia to conduct research on co-creation and the effects of brand association on consumers' "self-image", commonly associated in studies on fashion brands, without considering the effects of these forms of visual content on the consumers observing the content. Furthermore, consumers are perceived as passive and inexpressive of their image and identities within OBCs (Meek *et al.*, 2020; Pagani *et al.*, 2011; Pagani & Malacarne, 2017). However, it can be argued that passive individuals can still engage with content they encounter within OBCs; thus, their developing relationship or connection with a luxury fashion brand and other OBC customers could potentially motivate consumers' loyalty.

Building on the critical review discussion of the predominant usage of the positivism paradigm in past research, Chapter three introduces the research methodology approaches used within this study and justifies the choice and relevance of the methods used in this study.

<div align="center">

Chapter three

Methodology

</div>

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology of the study which follows the social constructivist paradigm in contrast to Auguste Comte's positivism philosophy and the interpretivism philosophy. The following section justifies the chosen paradigm, defining the differences between objectivism, subjectivism and constructivism to further justify the decision to adopt the social constructivism paradigm. Section 3.3 discusses the logic behind the choice of a qualitative stance and inductive approach over a quantitative stance and deductive approach (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2016). An explanation and justification for the use of a single embedded case study strategy follows (Yin, 2014). The chapter then briefly introduces details of a pilot study that was conducted in preparation for the data collection on a larger scale. In Section 3.6, theoretical sampling is identified as a feasible sample selection strategy and the data saturation point is discussed. The use of semi-structured interviews as a data collection method is justified. The researcher's stance in the field is presented and validity and generalisability are identified and explained.

3.2 Research philosophy: social constructivism

Existing literature on OBCs and loyalty seems to have an embedded highly objective position resulting in structured and generic findings (e.g., Cheng *et al.,* 2020; Kupfer *et al.,* 2018; Fang & Zhang, 2019). Engagement within OBCs is significantly viewed as a repetitive social phenomenon, and components of interactions and the influence between community members are standardised, causing consumers to be perceived as homogenous in OBCs. Scholars have supported the usage of a functional paradigm, a form of the positivism paradigm, which refers to the consequences of certain regular, standardised and repetitive components of communication (Wright, 1960; Merton, 1957); however, this ontological positioning has generated a "tangible reality" causing social entities to be perceived as external to the social actor (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 21) in OBCs causing contradictions across extant findings (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005; Dholakia *et al.,* 2004; Brodie *et al.,* 2011; Pansari & Kumar, 2017) and the development of generic approaches to consumers in online communities (Heine & Berghaus, 2014;

Kietzmann *et al.* 2011). Scholars have sought understanding of social influence and loyalty in OBCs based on Auguste Comte's positivism concept which comprises the conceptualisation of a phenomenon. Comte's post-positivism concept, which emphasises a position of absolute truth in knowledge, can be contrasted with Popper's theory of falsification. Popper noted that a statement is falsifiable if from observations it is shown to be false, suggesting that existing theories are also falsifiable (Howell, 2013). Considering that the existing literature consists of major contradictions among different consumer groups within OBCs, the positivism concept is not appropriate for this current study. In response to the limitations of applying a positivist approach, such as the scientific structure the paradigm emphasises, researchers have acknowledged the need to examine the social components of OBCs using a philosophy that enables them to explore the different social constructs of consumers' realities in depth (Helal *et al.,* 2018; Azemi *et al.,* 2019). This study is developed around how one assigns meaning to social influence and loyalty within OBCs and how loyalty is greatly influenced by online community members. In contrast to structured research approaches, the adopted epistemological position for this study aligns with social constructivism.

In order to critique and justify the value of social constructivism for this study, it is important to compare the three basic epistemological choices: objectivism, subjectivism and constructivism. Previous academics' preference towards positivism paradigms has restricted understanding of how consumers perceive influence in online environments and how it contributes to loyalty. From a positivism perspective, reality is viewed as independent of human experiences (Schembri & Sandberg, 2002), thus supporting the existence of objective and measurable truth (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Objectivism enables researchers to investigate a social phenomenon as something that already exists, thus they will explore the objective "truth". This leads to searching for regularities and causal relationships in data to create law-like generalisations (Gill & Johnson, 2010). This thinking has led researchers to create models of a social phenomenon, such as engagement and its contribution to loyalty in online communities, which have tended to be from a third-person perspective with regard to how consumers are influenced to remain with a brand (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Pansari & Kumar, 2017; Eigenraam *et al.,* 2018). However, the objective approach is not an appropriate epistemological approach for investigating social influence and its impact on loyalty. Several authors following a positivist approach have noted several types of consumers in online

communities and the various online activities they will participate in (Algesheimer *et al.,* 2005; Fang & Zhang, 2019; Pansari & Kumar, 2017; Eigenraam *et al.,* 2018); however, each has noted limitations in their results, such as not representing a generic segment of consumers or industry, which encouraged further testing of their conceptual models. In social constructivism, humans create reality through participation, experience and action (Azemi, Ozuem, Wiid, & Hobson, 2022; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 206); yet different consumers will have varying experiences within different contexts and they will apply different meanings to their experiences (Schembri & Sandberg, 2003, p. 5). For objectivism to be suitable for social science studies, researchers would have to discover the same dimensions to determine loyalty in OBCs.

Although subjectivism is the opposite to objectivism, enhancing the in-depth exploration of consumers' mindsets, it is still different from the constructivism paradigm. While subjectivism intends to create meaning, constructivism constructs the meaning. When considering the relationship between subjects and objects, subjectivists perceive subjects to be independent from objects, which is a paradox as objectivists perceive the existence and nature of objects to be independent from the subjects themselves (Crotty, 1998; Saunders *et al.,* 2016); objectivists and subjectivists agree that subjects and objects are independent from each other. Specifically, subjectivists will likely determine that perceptions of social influence on loyalty can exist without consumers experiencing it. However, the vast literature on the nature of OBCs and consumer interactions contradicts the subjective perception of an independent relationship between objects and subjects. The philosopher Jürgen Habermas in his book *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 1*, set out to extend the concept of rationality so that it was not limited to a subjective premises of social theory (McCarthy, 1984). Habermas (1987) extended the paradigm of perceived reality as "historical-hermeneutic", meaning that the interpreter develops an understanding after initial situations. The perception of reality will differ depending on the individual, thus reality is treated as being unique in contrast to being viewed as universal (Patel, 2016).

Several authors consider that consumers' active usage of OBCs is necessary for them to build a mental experience process; prior experience or existing loyalty is required for consumers to interact and accept the influence of other parties in OBCs (Algesheimer *et al.,* 2005; Davis *et al.,* 2014; Ranfagni *et al.,* 2016). However, it can be argued that due to the differences in consumers' level of involvement, experiences in OBCs will

create different perceptions and different consumer outcomes will emerge. For example, consumers may observe the content in OBCs but may not actively participate in the discussion. The nature of OBCs creates a complex environment of consumers who may be loyal to a brand community but are passive regarding engagement. It is arguably impossible for consumers to have no encounter with activity commencing in OBCs, and the online content that consumers who are inactive in OBCs encounter might influence their loyalty. This aligns with constructivists' perception that subjects, or people, and objects interlink together, which is the opposite of subjectivism. Furthermore, in epistemological constructivism, meaning is socially constructed, and different people construct meanings of the same phenomenon in different ways (Crotty, 1998, p. 9), thus meaning can be constructed for social engagement which, because of the nature of different consumers' involvement in OBCs, could be either direct or indirect.

As mentioned earlier, extant literature sustains the view that processes of loyalty in OBCs (Algesheimer *et al.,* 2005; Pansari & Kumar, 2017; Eigenraam *et al.,* 2018) are categorised as generalised and absolute truth. However, this study strongly opposes the structured frames scholars have used in association with consumers' perceptions, favouring the usage of social constructivism to develop a holistic understanding of multiple realities based on conceptualisation of individuals' experiences and how subjects interact with others in real-life contexts. That said, the literature on OBCs and loyalty typically associates loyalty and other types of social phenomena with particular and separate variables, such as information exchange or social bonding, which heavily aligns with the positivist approach (Saunders *et al.,* 2016). Furthermore, customers' perceptions are viewed to be predictable and unchangeable (Howell, 2013), narrowing the researchers' focus to a few categories and limiting investigation into various meanings and realities (Creswell, 2007, p. 36). Social constructivism does not adopt objectivity to view the world (Howell, 2013), therefore it aligns more with subjective views of participants.

Following Habermas's (1987) view on a historical-hermeneutic reality of social reality, this study detaches from the idea of interpretivism. Though interpretivism aligns with the unstructured and subjective meanings various subjects apply to a phenomenon (Saunders *et al.,* 2016), interpretivism detaches the interpreter's own view from the subjective world (Schwandt, 2000), which could include the researcher's past experience on the topic. Schwandt (2000) implied the importance of understanding

others on the basis of understanding the context of their experience revealed through conversations. Thus, this study favours the historical-hermeneutic concept, which suggests that an understanding of reality is reliant on the researcher's own perception developed prior to the study (Schwandt, 2000) and, furthermore, with the emphasis that a construction of new knowledge can be developed based on the past experiences of both the subjects and the researcher. How an individual assigns meaning to a phenomenon can be explained by their past experiences, based on their involvement in several social practices, including interactions in OBCs (Tsoukas, 1996). For the researcher, understanding of consumers' social actions can be developed by existing knowledge and new information from interactions with others (Moore & Lewis, 1952). As mentioned earlier, a positivist view on understanding consumers' behaviour is that it can be predicted and will remain unchanged if studied again. However, assuming that all behaviours are predictable, risks generalising a single process of loyalty for all consumers, whereas long term, consumers' mindsets are unlikely to remain the same as they encounter different experiences in different settings. Social norms, rules and processes are not accepted or perceived as acceptable in all circumstances (Garfinkel, 1967; Tsoukas, 1996), therefore consumers will constantly experience multiple realities.

Although this study emphasises the need to understand the constructs of different experiences, it acknowledges the complexity of understanding and conceptualising every consumer's experience. Every new experience a consumer encounters develops a new reality for them (Berger & Luckmann, 1976) and every individual will perceive new experiences differently. The outcomes of consumers' loyalty in OBCs have been limited to purchasing intentions, as a core variable to measure loyalty (Gambetti & Graffigna, 2010; Kim & Ko, 2012; Bleier *et al.,* 2019; Kupfer *et al.,* 2018), yet some studies show that not every consumer will generate loyalty through purchasing activity or demonstrate brand attitudinal loyalty through OBCs despite active purchasing (Dick & Basu, 1994; van Doorn *et al.,* 2010; Pansari & Kumar, 2017). Literature on the process of loyalty outcomes in OBCs has emphasised a structured step-by-step process that influences consumers to change their perception of a brand. However, from a constructivist's perspective, "*change is not understood following a linear, or functional adaptations to new demands in a changing environment*" (Baker, Chiapello, Justesen,

& Mouritsen, 2011, p.164). Instead, it can be viewed as the outcome of historical and adapting processes which form new patterns (Miller, 1991).

Constructivists view consumers' behaviour in OBCs as ongoing, and in various situations similar consumers may change their attitudes and behaviours under different situations and on different technology platforms at particular moments in time (Baker *et al.,* 2011). For example, within OBCs, consumers have a complex mindset that consists of various motivations and attitudes that may influence their perception of online content published in OBCs, and their motivations and attitudes may vary depending on the subject. Additionally, the influence of community members will not always lead consumers to engage or become loyal to the brand through the community, as consumers' identification with sources of influence will vary individually. This identifies the challenges of interpreting consumers' perceptions of online activities and other social actors in OBCs and interpreting how they process these factors and how it impacts their loyalty intentions. This highlights the issue of connecting a specific and isolated reality to every individual involved (Robson, 2011) on a particular variable such as sources of content. When investigating a specific variable, the same studied subjects may change their perspective following new experiences as every new experience generates a new reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1976).

This study suggests that consumers' loyalty intentions are not influenced by a single variable and cannot be collectively grouped. The separation of consumers based on their active and passive efforts to support brands has been addressed by previous papers, yet investigations into how these two basic consumer groups differ in their mental processing have been limited. This aligns with the social constructionism paradigm which assumes that people create social realities collectively (Charmaz, 2006, p. 189) and denies that individuals can derive meaning directly from objects and social interactions (Crotty, 1998). In contrast, constructivism considers multiple views and argues that to achieve an understanding of a phenomenon, participants' direct or indirect experiences connected to a phenomenon should be considered (Charmaz, 2006, p. 187), which includes social interactions in OBCs. The contradictions highlighted in findings of the OBC literature highlight the limitations of ignoring consumers' mental stances in online situations and interpreting social interactions from a universal perspective, which further disconnects the effectiveness of social constructionism. Therefore, in the context of methodology paradigms, this study finds social constructivism to be the most

appropriate epistemological approach, in contrast to the alternative paradigms, because its approach to exploring relationships between loyalty and social influence within OBCs is based on the participants' different experiences. Following the discussion of the application of social constructivism in research, the next section explores and justifies the research approach.

3.3 Research approach: qualitative research and inductive approach

The characteristics of the social constructivism philosophy lead the study towards a qualitative data approach. Quantitative methods apply a numerical data collection approach and follow a fixed process controlled by the researcher, whereas qualitative methods use observational methods and spoken words from social actors (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) applying them to create a framework of phenomena (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Therefore, the researcher interprets the social worlds based on participants' own interpretations of realities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In this study, the researcher considers the experiences of loyalty in luxury fashion OBCs based on the influence of engaged community members through the narratives provided by consumers. The language participants use to explain their experience makes it possible to explore the reality of loyalty in OBCs. Many scholars in OBC studies have inclined more towards a combination of the positivism and ontological paradigms in a objectivist and context-free approach, obtaining highly fixed and directed consumer responses. Though researchers using an positivist ontological stance rely on realities based on relative truth they still maintain an objective outlook of the world in which reality exists regardless of present or absent experience (Lomborg & Kirkevold, 2003). The use of quantitative research reflects the objective stance of researchers who investigate phenomena objectively thereby distancing themselves from the participants' perceptions (Lee, 1992).

However, conducting a value-free scientific approach to a study is arguably impossible based on the various subjective reasons behind individuals' decisions (Al-Habil, 2011). Experience in OBCs and the social culture of millennials are part of the context of the research to understand loyalty and social influence in OBCs. This does not mean that the study instructs the participants to give specific responses based on particular online activities and their outcomes; what is considered a loyal outcome or a source of influence in OBCs will depend on the consumer, thus the concept of axiology does not

need to be disregarded when a study follows a social constructivist approach. The researcher's axiology is thus not to question the validity of participants' responses or measure their indifference, but to maintain their representation in OBCs. Furthermore, the researcher can use their own experience in the field to understand the participants' values regarding loyalty and social influence in OBCs. Therefore, in contrast to quantitative approaches, qualitative researchers aim to thoroughly understand reality from the participants' perspective ensuring that they are fairly represented (Morrow, 2005, p. 254).

In quantitative research, deductive reasoning is typically applied, where the process of data collection begins with existing theories, followed by primary data collection. Whereas in the case of qualitative research, theory emerges following data collection, identifying an inductive approach (Liu, 2016, p. 131). However, this study does not value existing theoretical concepts and literature any less than new emerging themes identified by extant empirical-based data and frameworks. This study aims to develop an appropriate balance of empirical and theoretical concepts while developing a consistent conclusion about loyalty in OBCs and allowing flexibility of interpretation, which is essential for social constructivism studies; according to Dubois and Gadde (2002), learning occurs from a combination of search and discovery, yet anything learned from research, is articulated in to an existing theoretical framework, whereas discoveries cannot be planned or fully predicted. Researchers cannot predict participants' interpreted realities; although a conceptual framework is an effective tool to synthesise literature and explain a phenomenon, hypothesise predictions prior to collecting new data increases the likelihood of researchers missing data they could have obtained from participants through the inductive approach. Furthermore, the hypotheses may not match the language generated by the participants during their interview discussions. This can cause the researcher to reconsider the selected framework (Dubois & Gadde, 2002) or in the case of studies using the positivism paradigm, result in a hypothesis being disproven by collected data, compelling the researcher to reconsider the hypothesis. Social constructivist studies acknowledge that perceptions shift in response to changes in events and experiences (Baker *et al.,* 2011), which is equally characterised in qualitive research (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 317); quantitative research, however, depicts reality as a still image focusing on the relationship between regular and causal variables. This has led researchers to develop generic models of loyalty in

OBCs and simply test the existing taxonomies with new samples of consumer segments and industries to understand their online experience. In contrast, the social constructivist paradigm enables the current study to explore the dynamic nature of loyalty and social influence in OBCs experienced by consumers individually; thus, the study considers the heterogeneous and dynamic nature of consumers.

The current study emphasises the inductive methodological approach; as well as collecting data before generating theory, inductive reasoning draws on the generalising of interpretations from observational methods (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The generalisation of findings must not be confused with the generalisability of findings that can be specifically linked to any population of participants as focused on by quantitative research. Instead, in this study, the generalisation of findings refers to theoretical concepts. In positivist studies, general findings are measured by the extent to which they can be applied to different groups of individuals (Guenther & Falk, 2019, p. 1014), which, as mentioned earlier, reflects the continual testing of generic taxonomies in different studies. Generalisation in qualitative research has been criticised by Miller and Brewer (2003) for its threat to the balance between the reliability of empirical data and the validity of theory, arguing that there is one universal generalisation (Miller & Brewer, 2003, p. 127). Whereas Dahler-Larson (2017) and Stake (1978) credited qualitative research generalisation as a natural flow of debates and arguments without scientific structure. This study develops theory based on information revealed by participants, thus opposing the testing of existing theory as indicated by the deductive approach (Saunders *et al.,* 2016). The aim of this study is not to conceptualise a phenomenon but to understand the cause and effect between social influence and loyalty in OBCs, which is the outcome of an inductive approach than a deductive approach (Saunders *et al.,* 2016). The deductive approach has caused literature on OBCs to be fixed on several objective truths, such as the specific loyalty outcome of product purchasing following online engagement and motivation to refer the brand (Pansari & Kumar, 2017; Kupfer *et al.,* 2018; Shukla & Drennan, 2018; Bleier *et al.,* 2019) and a community member with specific characteristics is a significant influence directing others' loyalty intentions (Lanz *et al.,* 2019; Muller & Peres, 2019). While these studies have established the "what" regarding outcomes of online engagement, this study seeks the "why" and "how" consumers associate social influence with loyalty intentions in OBCs.

Existing literature presents contradictions about social influence and loyalty in OBCs in the context of how individual community members impact other consumers' loyalty, segregating social influencers on the basis of high status (Hanaki *et al.*, 2007; Hinz *et al.*, 2011; Kupfer *et al.,* 2018) or low status (Galeotti & Goyal, 2009; Watts & Dodds, 2007; Trusov *et al.,* 2010; Lanz *et al.,* 2019), providing a limited context on how they are perceived by other consumers. Consequently, this study does not develop hypotheses to test, but rather permits a flexible understanding of the phenomena as enabled by the inductive qualitative approach. With the involvement of various viewpoints of participants, a case study is an appropriate methodological strategy for this study, the following section provides an explanation and justification for the selection of this research strategy.

3.4 Research strategy: single embedded case study

For the current study, which adopts a social constructivist perspective, the case study was adopted as the research strategy to capture the data. Although case studies have often used quantitative data, they differ from other research methods as they seek to study phenomena in their contexts in contrast to keeping the context independent from the study (Pettigrew, 1973). A case study examines a phenomenon in real-life contexts employing multiple methods of data collection from one or a few entities, such as people or organisations, without experimental control or the use of manipulation (Benbasat, Goldstein, & Mead, 1987). Yet there is no standard definition of a case study, which causes confusion when trying to understand the case study approach. The most notable definitions are found in the work of Yin (2014), Stake (1995) and Merriam (2009), who provide procedures on how to conduct case study research. Yin (2014) emphasised the method employed to study a case, whereas Stake (1995) was more concerned about what is studied rather than how it is studied, stressing a more flexible stance on studying a case. Similarly, Merriam's (2009) definition includes what is studied and perceives a case study as an object of the study, implying that research should be focused on a particular topic that is descriptive and experimental in nature (Harrison, Birks, Franklin, & Mills, 2017).

Following Stake's and Merriam's definitions of a case study, loyalty and social influence is the phenomenon investigated in the current study, from the perspective of the millennial generation. This forms the context of the phenomenon being addressed

by the study, with luxury fashion in the online environment as the case. An example of a study that used a case study from a social constructivist perspective is Helal *et al.*'s (2018) study; the setting of Helal *et al.*'s (2018) case was an online platform in which they explored the millennial generation's perception of brands through social media. Whereas the setting of Azemi *et al.*'s (2019) case study was in two Balkan countries, Kosovo and Albania, in which they examined how interactions between the customer and provider impact online service failures and recovery strategies. These examples show that a case study can take a variety of forms, including countries, organisations, industries and environments, and the researcher is able to rationalise their choice with a reflexive approach as suggested by Patton (2015). Reflexivity is a self-examination about how and why both researchers and participants think the way they think (Rashid, Hodgson, & Luig, 2019); thus, becoming aware of how perspectives are shaped by culture, age, gender, social status, personal history, language, values and experiences (Wieringa, Engebretsen, Heggen, & Greenhalgh, 2018).

As mentioned earlier, case studies are not usually tied to an experimental design (Benbasat *et al.,* 1987). The case arguably provides an understanding of interpreting beyond participants' voices that illustrates their experience whilst incorporating the researcher's voice (Ozuem *et al.*, 2008, p. 1065). The adoption of reflexivity reflects the importance of understanding another's or one's own culture, thus researchers cannot enter a case study on an objective stance. In other words, familiarity of a group or culture is essential to the researcher (Rashid *et al.,* 2019) as the interpretation of findings needs to represent the studied case, especially as this study explores a specific consumer segment in the online environment. This study explores the viewpoints of millennial consumers in OBCs to explain the phenomenon of loyalty and social influence and the meanings they give to it. Though defined differently through different stages of terminology, a mutually agreed perception is that the case must be limited within itself (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2015). In other words, using a case that is restricted to specific characteristics provides researchers with a specific setting to situate the study and thus develop a focus. This study focuses on OBCs within the luxury fashion industry with loyalty as the key phenomenon being investigated. So, the case study strategy narrows the study to a specific location within a large online platform that consists of brands from various industries. According to Stake (1995) and Merriam (2009), an understanding of the phenomenon is the essential factor of a case

study and the focus of the case develops the understanding. The researcher as a member of the millennial generation and the researcher's personal understanding of the social culture generated by social media made the setting and context of the case an obvious choice, providing a general understanding to support the development of the study.

This current study applies Yin's (2014) single case study design in preference to multiple case study design. Single case study designs are advised when explanations of a phenomenon are limited and require further understanding (Saunders *et al.,* 2016). The aim of this study is not to create comparisons of loyalty and social influence scenarios across multiple cases, which for this study would include the different industries to which brands belong, because theoretical explanations of a phenomenon would probably lose reliability when faced with counterstatements causing contradictions across the literature. This study follows Flyvbjerg's (2006) argument that it is possible to generalise from a single case, "*following a detailed examination of a single example*" (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 220) empirically enquiring with "how" and "why" research questions (Yin, 2014). Millennials within OBCs are the main target for this study, which is a consumer segment too complex to study generically due to differences in online behaviour in different OBCs. Therefore, the current study focuses on a single group of consumers associated with OBCs linked to the luxury fashion industry, thus narrowing the location and context of the online environment, including the consumer group in the case study.

Thus, the study of a specific or single group makes the single case study a more appropriate choice for this study (Yin, 2014). In single cases, the researcher can fit theory precisely to the details of a particular case, whereas with multiple cases, researchers risk generating a general law creating relationships that are imitated across most of the cases (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p. 30). Tsoukas (2009) pointed out that the more concern there is for understanding the specifics of a phenomenon, then the more descriptive they become; without the specificity of particular cases it is not possible to develop new and clearer understandings (Tsoukas, 2009). Thus, when a single case study is used, the researcher can question old theoretical relationships to explore new ones (Ott & Theunissen, 2015), allowing the researcher to obtain a deeper understanding of the subject (Dyer Jr & Wilkins, 1991). Consequently, though a multiple case study approach would enable the study to explore a wider range of perceptions in different contexts, the aim is to focus on online loyalty behaviour in

OBCs specifically related to the luxury fashion industry, therefore is it relevant to explore loyalty in OBCs as a single study.

A key characteristic emphasised in this chapter that directed the current study towards a case study strategy is that of flexibility/structure in terms of research design and data collection (Robson, 2011). While the current study does not embed characteristics of structured research strategies, such as surveys, archival and experimental, which limit or detach from context (Saunders *et al.*, 2016; Yin, 2014), the study's adopted approach does not offer the level of flexibility associated with grounded theory. The purpose of grounded theory is to generate theories based on collected data to understand the social context (Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019). Grounded theory's roots lie in "symbolic interactionism", which was proposed by Blumer (1937); Blumer's (1937) development of the interactionist approach combined with naturalistic inquiry is the key influence on grounded theory (Heath & Cowley, 2004). Yet, since its development, grounded theory has diversified regarding the approach researchers should take to conduct it. The most notable case of its variation occurred between Glaser and Strauss, the founders of the earliest version of grounded theory. Glaser (1978, 1992) is viewed to have supported the classic definition of grounded theory. Whereas Strauss and Corbin (1998) reformulated the original grounded theory concept developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) to include a conceptual and semi-structured approach, thus diverging away from what Glaser considered grounded theory.

The key major difference between Glaser's and Strauss's approaches to grounded theory in research is the role of existing literature, which in classic grounded theory, researchers are advised to ignore to avoid constructing prior assumptions and beliefs that may cause researchers to become biased (Glaser & Strauss 1967, p. 37), thus there is no fixed theory at hand (Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019). In contrast, Strauss acknowledges the need to examine literature though not to follow but to critically question it in order to generate new theoretical insights. For any study, presearched literature helps frame a research problem in its introduction section (Creswell, 1994, p. 23; Ozuem, Willis, & Howell, 2022); with Strauss and Corbin's (1998) grounded theory approach to literature, presearched literature provides background information (1998, p. 49) and can support observations and interviews (1998, p. 51). For the current study, grounded theory can perhaps be identified as an alternative research strategy because of its flexible approach to generating theory, which can be associated with the social

constructivist paradigm. Specifically, Strauss and Corbin's (1998) grounded theory approach could arguably be appropriate for this study in enabling a systematic method in collecting data relevant to the study and analysing it next to existing theoretical insights that would interplay with the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 47), and be used as a foundation for collected research, which this current study applies using social influence theory.

However, regardless of Strauss and Corbin's (1998) more systematic approach, the main goal of grounded theory is to develop new theory. Grounded theory may be applied to a research phenomenon that lacks sufficient theoretical foundation (Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019). Yet, studies on OBCs and loyalty prove that there is not a lack of theoretical concepts that can explain the processes of the two variables, but they require further investigation in the study's chosen industry, luxury fashion, and the two groups of individuals involved in OBCs: loyal customers and passive consumers. Due to the current study's focus on customers and consumers, the usage of phenomenology can be justified. Phenomenology is concerned about the subjective experience of individuals (Suddaby, 2006; Patton, 2015). The aim of research applying phenomenology is to search for "meaning of units" that reflect other individuals' experiences which can be defined as "typical" experiences (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005, p. 144). While the current study investigates OBCs and loyalty from the perspective of others, as is the purpose of phenomenology (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003), the issue with this approach for the current study is the sole purpose of phenomenology.

The purpose of phenomenology is to clarify how people understand phenomena (Lester, 1999); in practice, researchers apply this both as a philosophy and as a research method (Qutoshi, 2018). The use of phenomenology is applied to understand human experiences that are common within a group of individuals (Creswell, 2014), and phenomenology's sole focus on the individuals' experience requires the researcher to target a niche group of individuals who share an experience. This indicates a single source of information approach compared to case studies that allow multiple sources (Creswell & Poth, 2016). However, the recruitment of multiple sources of information as allowed by case studies does not mean recruitment of just anyone, but individuals who offer diverse experiences that provide different insights but remain relevant to the research questions (Yin, 2011, p. 311). The current study explores loyalty of both loyal customers and passive consumers, who have varying degrees of loyalty, therefore they

cannot be expected to share exactly similar experiences as phenomenology aims to discover (Creswell, 2014), so they cannot be grouped as a single source of information.

From exploring the characteristics of grounded theory, phenomenology and case study strategy, it can be determined that the case study is the most appropriate choice. The current study does not aim to generate new theory or simply clarify the participants' experiences, but to develop an understanding of the process of a phenomenon in a specific setting. As Stake (2005) stated: "*Case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied*" (p. 443). Initially, a case study research strategy aims to specify gaps in knowledge or existing theory with the intention to advance theoretical explanations (Ridder, 2019) to link the existing theory with patterns emerging from the data (Ridder, 2017). Yin (2014) defined the case study as a "*systematic inquiry into an event or a set of related events which aims to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest*" (p. 18). Therefore, the goal is to investigate the real-life context and process of a phenomenon in-depth with social influence theory guiding the understanding of new data. Furthermore, a single case study strategy with embedded units of analysis ensures the current study remains within the barriers of the luxury fashion industry when investigating OBCs and loyalty, whilst analysing a specific group of customers taken from a larger group linked to the single case.

Yin's (2014) explanation of the case study strategy could be perceived as a paradigm that emphasises an in-depth approach to phenomena minimising the conceptualisation and operationalisation of existing theory (Ridder, 2017). The structured approaches of surveys and experiments that align with a positivist strategy (Saunders *et al.,* 2016) in the literature on OBCs and loyalty have generated structured responses from participants without providing in-depth explanations, thus creating contradictory findings (e.g., Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005; Dholakia *et al.,* 2004; Brodie *et al.,* 2011). Therefore, this study considers that an in-depth understanding of the topic is necessary and it places language at the centre of understanding meaning and real-life contexts. This study adopts a single embedded case study rather than a single holistic case study (Yin, 2014). In a holistic case study, the case is analysed as a whole, and a research framework is built that generalises the results for a range of stakeholders, which in this study's case would involve a range of consumers from Generation X, Generation Z as well as millennials. Whereas a single case study with embedded units of analysis

includes exploring a group from within an entire population for a single case, which for this study is the specific consumer group millennials within the luxury fashion industry.

In line with the single embedded case study, the current study is a context-specific study with millennials as the context. Stremersch *et al.* (2022) argued that populations of people are considered a specific context that enables researchers to identify specific findings that could be relevant to a narrower yet engaged audience. Stremersch *et al.* (2022) referenced Lynch's (1999) distinction of generalising subpopulations from within larger populations. The current study selects a subpopulation, the millennial generation, from the entire demographic cohort to investigate the effect of luxury fashion OBCs on loyalty and engagement. The millennial context enables the researcher to explore a cohort with behaviours distinct from previous and future generation cohorts, and explore the heterogeneous perspectives and behaviours within the millennial population. Millennials may engage with luxury fashion brands in a manner that contrasts with that of other generational cohorts. Additionally, an individual millennial's engagement behaviour towards luxury fashion brands may differ from another individual millennial's behaviour. Stremersch *et al.* (2022) argued that a context-specific application allows a researcher to "generalise across" different population segments to enhance rigorous examination of the diverse experiences of individuals; this is applied in the current study to achieve the aim of investigating the extent to which millennial customers and consumers are influenced by luxury fashion OBCs.

A key characteristic that directed the study towards the case study strategy is the flexibility in research design and data collection methods (Benbasat *et al.,* 1987). Although the study is focused on specific subjects it does not adopt structured research strategies that limit conceptualisation (Saunders *et al.,* 2016). With a balance between a flexible and a structured approach, following a specific single case design with embedded unit analysis, the study may obtain deeper understanding of loyalty in OBCs from a specific consumer group from a larger consumer population. The strategy for selecting the data sample for the single embedded case study is justified in Section 3.6, following a brief discussion of the conducted pilot study.

3.5 Pilot study

The researcher felt it necessary to test the feasibility of the planned data collection methods, intended interview questions and to probe the participants' beliefs on the variables of the study before the data collection was conducted on a larger scale. These major concerns emerged from reflecting on whether the interview questions would be clear to the participants or generated results that did not support the research aim and objectives. Pilot studies are considered necessary to minimise the likelihood of the aforementioned concerns and to allow some assessment of the questions' validity and of the reliability of the data to be collected (Saunders *et al.*, 2016, p. 451). Qualitative studies are found to rarely conduct pilot studies, but reasons for the rare use of pilot studies are limited to the suggestion that the process is perceived to be less important to many qualitative researchers (Malmqvist, Hellberg, Möllås, Rose, & Shevlin, 2019). van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001) referred to researchers who suggested that separate pilot studies are not necessary in interpretative inquiry as improvements to interview questions emerge during the data collection process of the main study. While that approach is suitable for obtaining a broad perspective of a phenomenon, studies seeking an in-depth understanding need to ensure data collection instruments and questions are consistent and tested to enhance the researcher's confidence (Bassey, 1999), increase the study's potential success (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001) and ensure high research quality for in-depth understanding (Malmqvist *et al.*, 2019).

Participants for the pilot study were selected based on three previously defined inclusion/exclusion criteria: (1) are of the millennial generation, (2) experience in luxury fashion purchasing, and (3) experience in being influenced by luxury fashion brands' OBCs. These criteria were considered for the pilot study to guarantee the participants met the same criteria as the participants participating in the main study. In accordance with the University's research ethics, the recruited participants were provided with a consent form and an information sheet to explain the research project that were the same as those provided to the participants of the main study. Five participants consented to participate and the intended data collection process was applied to these participants, which took place in February 2021. During the interviews, two of the five participants stated they had not conducted actual product purchases of luxury fashion brands but nonetheless presented positive enthusiasm towards them and in engaging in the OBCs. As an outcome of the pilot study, the researcher added a fourth

criterion to target participants' "luxury fashion enthusiasm" to ensure future interviews were not limited to participants who made purchases, but included individuals with positive attitudes towards luxury fashion and who were influenced by OBCs. Predetermined questions were sent to potential participants for the researcher to determine their appropriateness for the study (Appendix 1), before inviting them to participate in the main semi-structured interviews. The main semi-structured interviews consisted of open-ended questions, which ensured that the current study did not exclude or restrict participants based on their purchasing status (Appendix 2), as explained further in the next section.

3.6 Research sampling selection strategy: theoretical sampling

Individuals from the millennial generation who have experience following a luxury fashion brand through social media were selected through a theoretical sampling strategy. Referred to as a type of purposive sampling, theoretical sampling focuses on the needs of the emerging theory and selects participants who can contribute to the development of the emerging theory (Saunders *et al.*, 2016, p. 186). Theoretical sampling involves the process of collecting data to generate theory, whereby the analyst collects codes and analyses data, following which the analyst will decide what data to collect next to develop theory as it emerges (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 45). The purpose of theoretical sampling is therefore to pursue theoretical lines of enquiry, and once a core theme is identified as the focus of the research, the focus impacts the selection of new participants for data collection and analysis (Saunders *et al.*, 2016, p. 186).

An overview of studies conducting qualitative research identifies that selecting participants who provide knowledge or experience relevant to the focus and theoretical framework of studies is a conventional approach (e.g., Heine & Berghaus, 2014; Davis *et al.,* 2014; Helal *et al.,* 2018; Essamri *et al.,* 2019). In qualitative research, sample selections are based on the richness of information the samples provide, enabling participants to provide in-depth understanding on specific issues that may not be available through random sampling (Reybold, Lammert, & Stribling, 2013). Patton (2015) emphasised this point, that is, the need to select cases based on information-richness in contrast to the statistical cases represented in probability sampling (Saunders *et al.*, 2016).

The current study suggests that loyal customers and passive consumers can reveal information that is necessary to understand OBCs' effect on loyalty in the luxury fashion industry. The approach of differentiating loyal customers from passive consumers in this study emerges from extant literature regarding millennials' active and passive behaviour in OBCs (e.g., Pagani & Malacarne, 2017; de Kerviler & Rodriguez, 2019) and literature on loyalty behaviour (Dick & Basu, 1994; Ozuem *et al.,* 2016; Wilkins *et al.,* 2019). This implies that generalising groups of individuals limits in-depth understanding of how the impact of OBCs on customers' loyalty differs from OBCs' impact on passive consumers' loyalty. Additionally, it limits understanding of how passive consumers are affected by the influence of loyal customers as well as OBCs, as the behaviour exhibited by passive consumers in OBCs differs from the behaviour exhibited by active loyal customers (Khan, 2017). Yet, the study does not limit the sample to active customers or passive consumers; both groups are included in OBCs but have different levels of involvement as well as loyalty towards a brand.

The researcher isolates a selection of OBC individuals using specific sampling criteria, specifically that they have previous experience of being influenced by OBCs linked to luxury fashion brands. Other scholars studying OBCs associated with the luxury fashion industry have done the same thing (e.g., Kim & Ko, 2012; Crawford-Camiciottoli *et al.,* 2014; Ranfagni *et al.,* 2016; Koivisto & Mattila, 2018). Individuals within social media are diverse in terms of how OBCs influence their loyalty behaviour and they are possibly followers of a variety of OBCs (Cheung *et al.,* 2011) that generate different online behaviour depending on the industry (Cheng *et al.,* 2020). As Patton (2015) stated, heterogeneous participants provide a holistic understanding of a phenomenon, which could generate contradictions in a universal conceptualisation. For case studies, when there are identified gaps in the understanding of a phenomenon, sampling is focused on the purpose of the case study (Ridder, 2017); thus, a sample of individuals is selected based on whether their information will provide efficient answers to research questions and help the researcher achieve the study's aims and objectives. Information provided by individuals who have experience with OBCs linked to the luxury fashion industry is likely to generate a more efficient illustration of the phenomenon compared to individuals who do not have experience with luxury fashion OBCs. Therefore, the sample for this study is restricted to individuals who have experienced the influence of OBCs within the luxury fashion industry. However, the sample consists of participants

of the millennial generation from different demographic backgrounds, who commonly engage within luxury fashion OBCs and other users, but harbour a variety of personal experiences that were recorded for this study (Table 1).

Participation	Age (years)	Gender	Occupation
Participant 1	34	Female	University business student
Participant 2	26	Female	University economics student
Participant 3	30	Female	Procurement specialists
Participant 4	26	Female	MSc International business student
Participant 5	28	Male	MSc International business student
Participant 6	32	Female	Credit controller
Participant 7	35	Female	Quality controller
Participant 8	26	Male	Human resource administrator
Participant 9	29	Female	Human resource professional
Participant 10	26	Female	MBA graduate
Participant 11	33	Male	Pricing specialist
Participant 12	32	Male	Assistant manager
Participant 13	25	Male	University marketing student
Participant 14	26	Male	University accounting student
Participant 15	26	Female	University finance and economics student
Participant 16	25	Female	University marketing student
Participant 17	29	Female	Project assistant
Participant 18	26	Male	Sales assistant
Participant 19	29	Female	Teaching assistant
Participant 20	25	Female	Teaching assistant
Participant 21	35	Male	Accountant
Participant 22	32	Female	Accountant
Participant 23	25	Female	University finance and economics student
Participant 24	27	Male	University sports coach

Participant 25	30	Male	Project manager
Participant 26	34	Male	Project assistant manager
Participant 27	25	Female	University marketing and management in fashion student
Participant 28	32	Female	MBA graduate
Participant 29	28	Male	University business and language student
Participant 30	27	Male	Sales assistant
Participant 31	29	Female	Administrator
Participant 32	27	Female	University education student
Participant 33	28	Male	University law student
Participant 34	25	Male	MSc Marketing student
Participant 35	25	Male	Sales assistant
Participant 36	35	Male	Fashion retail manager
Participant 37	27	Female	Creative arts teacher
Participant 38	32	Male	Photographer
Participant 39	29	Male	Software engineer
Participant 40	38	Male	Senior project manager
Participant 41	39	Female	IT test consultant
Participant 42	37	Female	Senior project manager
Participant 43	37	Male	Social media consultant
Participant 44	38	Female	MBA student
Participant 45	38	Male	MBA student

Table 1: List of participants and characteristics (luxury fashion OBC users)

The sample for this study consisted of 45 millennials who are OBC customers or consumers of between 25 and 39 years of age (see Table 1). The first 15 participants were recruited from the researcher's various social network contacts, including ResearchGate, Facebook, and LinkedIn, and contacted using the social media platforms the participants were listed in. The remaining participants were recruited following Azemi *et al.*'s (2019) recommended snowball technique. Each participant from the

researcher's social contact list, referred the researcher to two or more additional participants, and acted as the mediating communicators between the researcher and the participants that were outside the researcher's network. The virtual set-up of the semi-structured interviews facilitated the reach of participants beyond the researcher's physical location. As a result, the researcher accessed participants from various international regions, including Europe (16 United Kingdom, 4 Romania, 6 Finland, 1 Portugal), South America (8 Peru, 4 Chile, 2 Brazil), and Asia (4 Malaysia). Snowball sampling was applied as a strategy to reach potential participants as part of the theoretical sampling procedure. Following respondents' approval and signed consent to participate (see Section 3.9), each respondent was examined in relation to the predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria (Appendix 2).

The criteria were applied to ensure that the researcher was able to obtain relevant data from the selected participants who could refer to existing knowledge and experience (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021a). Several participants of the pilot study revealed they had not purchased a luxury fashion product; these individuals could arguably be perceived as consumers, whereas participants who had purchased a luxury fashion product are considered customers. The researcher established criteria to select OBC luxury fashion customers and consumers whose attitudes and behaviours identified them to be suitable for the current study (Table 2).

Criteria for luxury fashion OBC customers and consumers		
Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Millennial generation	Aged between 18-40 years old and 40	Under 18 years old and older than 40 years old
Luxury fashion enthusiasm	High enthusiasm	Low enthusiasm
Criteria for luxury fashion OBC customers		
Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Experienced luxury fashion customer	At least 1 luxury fashion purchase within the last 8 years	Never purchased a luxury fashion brand

Experienced with luxury fashion OBCs	A member or user of a luxury fashion OBC in the last 12 months	Has never joined or used a luxury fashion OBC
Criteria for luxury fashion OBC customers		
Engaged with luxury fashion OBCs	Regularly visits a luxury fashion OBC more than once in the last 12 months	Has never visited a luxury fashion OBC

Table 2: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for sample of the current study (Willis, 2022)

The main case study context of the current study is luxury fashion customers and consumers of the millennial generation. Extant research has revealed different birth years for the millennial population, including between 1979 and 2002 (Luo *et al.*, 2020) and between early 1980s and early 2000s (Helal *et al.*, 2018). The current study applies the age range of 18 to 40 years, excluding individuals younger than 18 years and older than 40 years. However, the current study mostly follows the sociocultural dimensions criteria provided by Helal *et al.* (2018), which described millennials as tech-savvy, socially conscious and active social media users (Azemi *et al.*, 2020; Ozuem *et al.*, 2021a).

The pilot study revealed the importance of recruiting participants with enthusiasm towards luxury fashion brands. While two of the five pilot study participants may have not been luxury fashion customers, and did not meet other customer inclusion criteria, they reflected a positive attitude towards luxury fashion which influenced the identification of key insights relevant to the study. Participants with less enthusiasm towards the chosen industry were perceived as less likely to provide valuable insights regarding OBCs managed by luxury fashion brands.

Criteria for OBC customers involved their searching and purchasing experience with a luxury fashion brand, and searching for, and engaging with, information on brands through their OBCs. Given the durability and expensive nature of luxury fashion products, it could not be assumed that the participants had conducted more than one purchase in a recent timescale. Thus, individuals were asked if they had conducted one or more purchases in the last 8 years, and if they had used or become a member of an OBC within the least 12 months. Individuals who did not have any purchasing experience with the luxury fashion industry did not meet the OBC customer criteria, but

they were considered under the OBC consumer inclusion criteria. Individuals who confirmed they had visited a luxury fashion OBC regularly were included in the study. However, individuals with no experience of using or visiting luxury fashion OBCs within the last 12 months were excluded from the study. Individuals who were perceived to not meet any of the inclusion criteria were invited by the researcher to discuss this further. Respondents who decided to withdraw were reminded of the ethics procedures and the researcher proceeded to securely destroy data and contact details of the respondents. The participants who met three or more of the inclusion criteria (Table 1) revealed the luxury fashion brands they had purchased from and become OBC members of, or had visited and engaged with (Table 3).

| Armani |
| Balenciaga |
| Burberry |
| Chanel |
| Dior |
| Dolce and Gabbana |
| Gucci |
| Hermès |
| Prada |
| Radley |
| Ralph Laurens |
| Ted Baker |
| Tiffany & Co. |

Table 3: Luxury fashion brands that participants had purchased or were OBC members of (Willis, 2022)

The sample for this study consists of 45 millennials who are OBC customers or consumers of between 25 and 39 years of age (see Table 1). Compared with the sample size in other studies of OBCs, which recruited hundreds of participants (e.g., Adjei *et al*., 2010; Cheng *et al*., 2020; de Almeida *et al*., 2018; Ibrahim *et al*., 2017; Meek *et al*., 2019; Tseng *et al*., 2017; Zheng *et al*., 2015), the present research is based on a small sample size (Saunders *et al*., 2016). Qualitative research is used to achieve an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon compared to the confirmation or rejection of predetermined hypotheses that quantitative studies mostly conduct (Marshall, Cardon,

Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013; Maxwell, 2013). Small sample sizes have been predominantly justified, especially for qualitative studies, through the reasoning that large samples do not guarantee a comprehensive conceptualisation of a phenomenon (Marshall *et al.*, 2013), unless standardised or predetermined findings are expected to be achieved. Though larger samples generate more data, the quantifiable results standardise the findings, creating vague conceptual arguments. In addition, a researcher using a larger sample size may miss specific details from participants, limiting the revelation of profound information on the research phenomenon. In contrast, a small sample size allows more contact time with each interviewee (Thomson, 2010) and provides existing contradictions between participants, which for this study can help distinguish OBC customers' and consumers' perceptions leading to deeper understanding, thus providing justification for a smaller sample size for this study.

Marshall *et al.* (2013) suggested that the sample size for qualitative studies can be justified if the intended sample size aligns with the sample sizes other researchers in the same research area or of other qualitative studies have adopted (pp. 12–13). In the context of OBCs, the sample size for qualitative studies lies between 5 and 45 interviews (e.g., Baldus *et al.*, 2015; Essamri *et al.*, 2019; Ozuem *et al.*, 2021a; Ozuem, Willis, Howell, Helal, Ranfagni, & Lancaster, 2021b) subject to the in-depth level of the interviews. The number range seems to align with the recommended sample size for qualitative researchers although there is no fixed rule to guide qualitative researchers on deciding the sample size. The choice is subjectively decided based on the number of interviews considered appropriate to answer the research questions and achieve the research objectives (Saunders *et al.*, 2016; Patton, 2015). Additionally, qualitative researchers will probably continue to conduct interviews until they encounter the data saturation point, where no new information is generated from new interviews. As well as referring to sample sizes used by existing studies, researchers have estimated their sample sizes using the data saturation points that existing studies claimed to have reached (Marshall *et al.*, 2013). For instance, Guest, Bunce, & Johnson (2006) suggested that in terms of thematic code prevalence, 12 interviews is the most common sample size that reaches data saturation, where 90% of codes are generated. However, data saturation may vary depending on whether the researcher believes it has occurred; the researcher may continue to conduct additional interviews to test whether existing themes and categories identified from previous interviews are sufficient (Thomson,

2010). Indeed, Guest *et al.* (2006) implied that researchers can reach up to 60 interviews to obtain complementary information to support codes generated from the first 12 interviews. The researcher set a figure of between 12 and 60 interviews as the upper and lower reference limit of the sample size. As such 50 participants in this study was considered an appropriate sample size target, 45 which were assigned as participants for the main study, and the remaining 5 for the pilot study previously discussed.

3.7 Semi-structured interviews: justification of data collection method and procedure

The researcher's self-positioning was central to the data collection procedure of this study. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), the inquirer's voice is actively engaged in facilitating the reconstruction of their own construction as well as those of the participants. This stance gives researchers a pivotal role in the design of the data collection, including interview questions, and the arrangement of interviews. The researcher also acts to facilitate changes in the data proceedings when changes to discussion constructions by the participants lead the discussion in a direction away from the aim and objectives of the study. This contrasts with the objective position that positivist studies uphold, causing the researcher to be isolated from data collection actions without improvising during the process to collect important data. In this study, the act of improvising does not mean that the researcher was imprecise in approaching the millennial participants, for the researcher's own status as a millennial and past experience and understanding of social media and OBCs gave them an epistemological advantage when conducting the interviews. Instead, improvising was applied when certain situations emerged. Such situations may involve the researcher having to direct the participants to focus on the intended subject matter or adjust interview questions to ensure that in-depth understanding of the participants' individual responses is achieved. Social constructivists emphasise the joint construct of social actors in shaping reality; thus, the self-position of the researcher and their ability to improvise on the data collection procedure can arguably enhance the conceptualisation of participants' responses (Gioia *et al.*, 2013; Howell, 2013).

The interview guide listed 15 questions that were developed based on critical reflection of the literature in general and the researcher's personal understanding. The questions were structured to enable open conversation with the participants. As part of the ethical

consideration for participants' right to privacy, the open-ended interview questions ensured participants disclosed information they were comfortable sharing. Participants were encouraged to reflect on past experience and to clarify further on key events they mentioned during the interview, subsequently causing discussions to generate more detailed information. Social constructivist research suggests that the language participants use reveals subjective perceptions of a phenomenon. Semi-structured interviews is a useful method to generate more talking (Gioia *et al.*, 2013), thus the present study collected data based on this method. The researcher conducted interviews throughout March and April 2021, all of which were conducted virtually using web video platforms, such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Adobe, Meet, Skype and Blackboard Collaborate, in accordance with the government's social distancing regulations set in place at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. Though web video platforms were used to record data, they were kept strictly voice-recorded to ensure anonymity of the participants in accordance with the prior agreement made with the participants. Interviews lasted between 30 and 40 minutes, which is the ideal length of time suggested for qualitative research interviews as any lasting less than 30 minutes may generate limited data and longer interviews may impact the focus or even patience of the participants (Robson, 2011). As the researcher and participants were geographically dispersed, alternative methods like qualitative surveys could have been applied to circumvent physical barriers like social distance (Braun, Clarke, & Gray, 2017). However, the current phenomenon under investigation relied on the researcher's involvement to ensure detailed information was generated to respond to the research objectives of this study. Thus, in line with Gioia *et al.*'s (2013) suggestion that questions for semi-structured interviews trigger more talk between the interviewer and interviewees within the research topic, the semi-structured interview method was chosen instead of structured or unstructured interviews.

Structured interviews consist of questions that are structured in nature and no adjustment is made to them throughout an interview in contrast to semi-structured interviews where adjustments can be made to interview questions (Robson, 2011; Howell, 2013). Having considered the contradictory findings embedded in OBC literature and the need to enhance theoretical explanations of the phenomena, the researcher adopted semi-structured interviews as close-ended questions would have provided limited insight into the phenomenon. The current study followed the interview

protocol of Ozuem *et al.*'s (2021a) study; the authors emphasised the importance of identifying different social realities across social constructivist studies that focus on context, which rationalises the need for questions that enable participants to demonstrate knowledge and experience with OBCs and were likely to provide theoretical insights. The first set of interview questions focussed on participants' perspectives of luxury fashion brands and participants' willingness to purchase luxury fashion brands' products and engage with their social media content. The interviews revealed the need to include questions related to perspectives of OBCs and the presence of luxury fashion brands within OBCs from the participants' contextual experience (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021a). The researcher of the current study allowed questions to evolve during the interview discussions to gather more precise information that explained the respondents' experience. However, as emphasised by Ozuem *et al.* (2021a), a theoretical and emergent criteria-based procedure was applied to maintain a theoretical construct within the interview discussions, ensuring that theoretical concepts, particularly social influence theory, were facilitated into the discussions, with interview questions redeveloped when necessary.

Additionally, questions were developed partly around the researcher's predetermined ideas (Fontana & Frey, 2000; Howell, 2013). The epistemological stance of the study made the researcher's involvement critical in guiding participants to specific responses. This justified the decision not to adopt unstructured interviews. Unstructured interviews provide the researcher with an opportunity to generate more in-depth data than semi-structured interviews do (Fontana & Frey, 2000). However, unstructured interviews mean no interview questions are prepared prior to the interview (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). While unstructured interviews would give participants full control in the interview, the absence of a researcher's additional or amended questioning to encourage further responses may cause less talk from participants (Gioia *et al.*, 2013) and may even generate responses irrelevant to the research questions and objectives. For example, not all participants had experience of purchasing a luxury fashion brand through OBCs but may have had for other industries. A lack of experience may account for a lack of response or responses that do not answer the study's research question. However, these participants give the researcher an opportunity to explore further to understand their experience and how their perceptions were impacted by their experiences, which, potentially, would not be achieved if following a structured or unstructured approach.

Thus, the engagement of the researcher's self with the participants, combined with the researcher's knowledge of the phenomenon and relatability because the researcher and the participants were members of the millennial generation, helped the researcher successfully utilise questions and stimulate more talk, as facilitated by the semi-structured interviews.

3.8 Reflexivity, validity and generalisability

Observation of individuals' activity through the internet supports the view that customers are heterogeneous in their perceptions of phenomena, which is also supported by the multiple personalities featured in online environments (Azemi *et al.*, 2019; Barwise & Meehan, 2010). This addresses the issue concerning the positivists' and objectivists' view of society, whereby the virtual reality embedded in the internet complicates the separation of the subjective thinking of the participants engaged in discussing OBCs from that of the researcher. According to Ozuem (2004), experience does not exist without the inclusion of one's personal perception. This does not mean that the researcher has to have experienced the same past practice or circumstances as others. Upon reflecting on Herbert Mead's concept of reflexivity, it is a process by which a researcher takes the attitude of others and consciously adjusts their social processing of an experience (Strauss, 1956, p. 211). In other words, a researcher is able to observe and appreciate the feelings and experience of others without having to harbour the same feelings and experience themselves (Salzman, 2002) and their own epistemological self-positioning can support the social processing of a phenomena. For example, OBCs would remain an abstract idea without integrating subjectivity to assign meaning to the platforms from millennials' perspective. Consequently, the researcher integrated their inner self into processing the social construct of the phenomena. The researcher's experience and knowledge of OBCs as well as the upbringing in the digital era they shared with other millennials was a key source in enhancing the conceptualisation of participants' relative realities on OBCs, loyalty and the influence of other OBC users. Contrary to positivists' aim of excluding oneself, the concept of self-inclusion is to enhance understanding in qualitative studies (Robson, 2011; Gioia *et al.*, 2013), thus subjectivity is embedded in this study.

Validity in quantitative research means "*the extent to which a concept is accurately measured*" (Heale & Twycross, 2015, p. 66). However, this meaning does not apply

under the social constructivist paradigm when multiple perspectives need to be taken into account. Similar to the reflexivity of the study, the researcher's epistemological self-positioning was a foundation for the validity of the methodological research process. The self-critique process was integrated into the methodological premises, in this way the researcher's societal experience was integrated. Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2011) referred to rigour when defining validity in qualitative research. They argued for rigour by achieving defensible knowledge claims that are known to the author and reader, thus giving credible salience to one interpretation over another as well as rigour through the application of methods (p. 178). Additionally, Cypress (2017) argued for the need to involve the researcher's skills, creativity and flexibility in verifying the reliability and validity of the evolving study. The generational culture the researcher shared with the participants and the researcher's experience with the research phenomena embedded in the researcher's subconscious addressed the issue on how to generate in-depth data and how to approach participants within the context of the researched setting.

For social constructivists there are multiple realities, and individuals associate meaning and understandings through interactions with others. The multiplicity of perceptions, which can be modified under changing experiences, creates complexity in terms of identifying realities that continue to exist. Modification of realities also indicates the possibility that individuals may embed similar perceptions across different time periods, causing constraints in identifying multiple realities. However, the researcher overcame this concern with a large sample size (45 interviews) that extended beyond the recommended sample size for qualitative research (Guest *et al.*, 2006). Although the researcher developed several criteria to guide the pilot study and the main study, including the sample recruitment process, they maintained inclusivity by selecting participants who have been influenced by OBCs in the luxury fashion sector, thus not limiting the sample to a specific group (i.e., customers who have purchased luxury fashion). Following this approach allowed the researcher to make comparisons across responses, which identified discrepant perceptions that were shared among individual groups within the large sample, overcoming the potential biasness of the data as a whole. In addition, the practice of maintaining the validity of the result occurred early in the data collection stages, thus maintaining rigour through the application of the data methods (Lincoln *et al.*, 2011). This was conducted through the semi-structured

interview questioning process that was styled to construct participants' memories of past experiences, particularly ones relevant to the studied phenomena (Maxwell, 2013), with an embedded clarification concept to validate previous responses and the researcher's knowledge development.

For positivists, generalisability refers to the degree to which findings are valid for other samples or populations (Falk & Guenther, 2007, p. 89). In this study, considering the existence of multiple realities that are subject to modification in different settings, the researcher does not acknowledge that their explanations will reflect every setting. Additionally, while the participants of this study could be categorised as part of the millennial generation, differences in their attitudes towards OBCs and luxury fashion make them a heterogeneous population. Yin's (2014) explanation of generalisability emphasises generalising theoretical propositions rather than seeking to represent statistical frequencies across samples. The researcher aimed to develop a contextual understanding of attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of multiple realities that are analytically generalisable to the phenomenon within the research setting. However, though the theoretical construct was identified under a specific research setting, it would not be confined to that single setting and can be extended to other similar research settings (Lee & Baskerville, 2003). This rationalises the choice of social constructivism over other research philosophies and the epistemological orientation of this study.

3.9 Ethical considerations

The process of implementing research ethics in qualitative studies involves two factors: (1) the higher education institution that facilitates the ethics governance for the researcher to follow (Tammeleht, Koort, Rodríguez-Triana, & Löfström, 2022), and (2) the manner in which the researcher recruits participants and extracts information from the participants (Fisher & Anushko, 2008). The current study followed the ethics guidelines of the University of Cumbria; as part of the process, the researcher informed the university's Ethics department, through a formal application, of the nature of the chosen topic, the intended participants, and the information to be collected (Appendices 3 and 4).

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) argued that the need for moral ethics in qualitative research was essential; they encouraged qualitative researchers to embed care, kindness, as well as shared governance into their ethics proceedings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 911).

This is particularly important for the current study. The participants were required to have been influenced by OBCs within the luxury fashion industry as per the predefined criteria. Participants were selected from the researcher's social network contacts, such as on Facebook, ResearchGate, and LinkedIn. This risked creating a conflict of interest, compelling the researcher to make additional criteria regarding the nature of the topic as well as conducting the standard procedure of distributing information on the study to the participants and obtaining their consent. A critical issue that was considered for this study was the participants' concern over privacy of their shared personal data and content on social media. While social media is considered to be publicly shared content, ethics for digital marketing necessitates setting audience boundaries between the participant and researcher (Hanlon, 2020); thus, in the current study the researcher set the criterion that participants' social media content was not required. To further maintain this ethical consideration of the participants' right to privacy, the open-ended interview questions ensured that participants disclosed information they were comfortable sharing.

If participants met the sample criteria, they were informed of the purpose of the study and the data collection methods, analysis and reporting processes through a email invitation that had a 'Participant Information Sheet' attached (Appendices 5 and 6). Participants who responded and agreed to participate in the study were forwarded a consent form, which they were requested to sign prior to the interview (Appendix 7). Following the completion of their interviews, participants were sent a 'Participant Debrief Form' reminding participants of the purpose of the study and their rights regarding withdrawal, the data they provided, and to request further information (Appendix 8). The researcher practised this process with respondents who did not meet the inclusion criteria discussed under Section 3.6 or who decided to withdraw from the study, ensuring that all data contributed by the participants was securely destroyed.

The ethics process conducted by the researcher addressed the following factors: (1) participation was voluntary and withdrawal was the participants' right at any stage, and any data of participants who withdrew would be securely destroyed. (2) The participants would be anonymous throughout the study. (3) Virtual interviews would be conducted using web video platforms, such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Adobe, Meet, Skype and Blackboard Collaborate, with the video setting turned off to protect the participants' identity and remote setting. (4) The participants' social media content would not be

requested, accessed, or used by the researcher to reduce conflict of interest and to uphold audience boundaries between the researcher and the participants, including those from the researcher's social network. Finally, (5) the participants were informed where interview data would be collected, stored, and reported.

3.10 Summary

This chapter reveals the study's methodological design and process, including the rationale for choosing the methodological construct. It follows the social constructivist positioning of the researcher as the mediator of the strategy, research sampling and data collection methods. The process and outcome of the recruitment and data generation are explained, providing the context in which the researcher and the participants were situated. Validity and generalisability in the qualitative research context are provided, justifying a non-objective stance on data summarising and sample generalisation that is argued for by positivists. In addition, the chapter discusses the importance of subjective perceptions and absolute truth being elements of multiple realities, which builds the quality of theory with social constructivism. The next chapter introduces the data analysis procedure and outcomes of the study. The rationale for applying a thematic analytical approach is provided along with an interpretation of the interviewed participants' responses and the themes generated from the analysis.

<center>**Chapter four**</center>
<center>**Data analysis**</center>

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis and interpretation of the responses from the interviews with luxury fashion OBC customers from the millennial generation. The analysis discussion provides detailed answers to the three research questions developed based on social constructivism, elaborating on four coherent themes that describe perceptions among interview respondents of luxury fashion OBCs. To enhance conceptualisation, the current chapter assigns meaning to the new knowledge: with extant theoretical concepts combined with interview responses to assign meaning to new concepts conceptualised for the understanding of OBCs. The findings extend the work undertaken by Meek *et al.* (2019) which is explained in Chapter one, particularly on how OBCs are perceived and utilised by customers in loyalty and engagement processes. In addition, this chapter provides a rationale for the research's choice of a data analysis framework provided by Gioia *et al.* (2013) and the analysis process leading to the formation of the main themes.

4.2 Rationale for thematic analytic approach

Data of the current study was analysed using thematic analysis (Azemi *et al.*, 2019), involving the grouping of the participants' responses into codes that were developed based on the words most frequently used by participants during the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Codes were then categorised into themes to allocate theoretical meaning to them. Themes support the sensemaking of emergent data (Attride-Stirling, 2001) and are the basis for the construct of research concepts and relationships between data and concepts (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). Following the social constructivist positioning of the study, and relying on inductive reasoning, the researcher collected findings throughout the data collection process. Following the collection of data, the participants' responses were examined to identify key ideas and interpretations. However, ideas and interpretations of the data were not processed purely based on the stated words of the participants, because as well as observing the participants' words, researchers must make their epistemological assumptions clear through the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Holloway & Todres, 2003). Thematic analysis allows researchers to apply their own theoretical and reflective perspectives,

including values, interests and developing insights on the research topic (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017; Ozuem *et al.*, 2022). An individual's perspective can be influenced by their position to remain within their own constructed reality (Brooks, McCluskey, Turley, & King, 2015), causing their perception of a phenomenon to differ from the perceptions of other researchers. However, a researcher's perspective might not necessarily diverge from the participants' perspectives, but rather help the researcher to develop an understanding of the participants' subjective responses that goes beyond their explicit statements to include the implicit ideas behind their worded statements (Gioia *et al.*, 2013).

In line with the social constructivist perspective (Berger & Luckmann, 1976; Corlett & Mavin, 2018; Gubrium & Holstein, 2008), the researcher's voice is present throughout the data collection and analysis process. However, though researchers position their voice in the data collection and analysis process, they maintain an inductive approach in seeking data on the phenomenon. The researcher remained close to the participants' words or explanations given during the interviews, while incorporating their "self-voice" in the analysis. The social constructivist perspective argues that "self-voice" assists the researcher's interpretation of data provided by the interviewed participants to construct major themes. This aligns with the guidance of Gioia *et al.* (2013) who offered a systematic approach noting 1st, 2nd and 3rd analysis levels. Gioia *et al.* (2013) identified the 1st level of analysis, the starting point of the analysis, in which the researcher begins by examining the informants' words or terms to identify themes that categorise the words of the respondents. By the 2nd level of analysis, the researcher's "voice" assisted in interpreting and linking the respondents' words with theoretical concepts to help describe and explain customer loyalty within OBCs (Appendix 9). In the current study, as repeated examination of the data continued, the researcher's interpretations generated four major themes: relationship with luxury brand, influence of content valence, socially aligned identity and collective community intentions (see Figure 1). These themes were developed from the use of extant theoretical explanations and in-depth examination of the participants' responses to support new knowledge and new concepts. The use of extant theoretical explanations to support new knowledge has been supported by qualitative researchers (Eisenhardt, 1989; Gioia *et al.*, 2013), but they have debated the need to include participants' responses to reinforce the new concepts. These concepts are defined and inclusive according to the nature of OBCs

and the engagement and loyalty behaviour have been conceptualised as the absolute truth by the researcher in this study.

Data saturation appeared to have been reached by the 26th interview, which is above the minimum of 12 interview sample size proposed for qualitative research (Guest *et al*., 2006). Yet the researcher continued to reach their intended number of interviews to gather supplementary information, which played a role in the triangulation of data generated during the first 26 interviews. At the beginning of the study, the researcher established a clear distinction between OBC customers and consumers: customers practice active brand purchasing and engagement through OBCs in contrast to consumers who practice a more passive approach to OBCs until they become customers. However, in line with the single embedded case study analysis, responses were analysed from all participants, regardless of their customer status; they were analysed together to conduct a comparative analysis process of both identified groups, from which generated codes were separated resulting in the inclusion of more than one sub-unit of analysis (Yin, 2004). This was to reduce the likelihood of generalising the case study under a holistic perspective, and to generate a more detailed level of inquiry of the context and process of luxury fashion OBCs and loyalty from individuals with varying experiences and perceptions.

Gioia *et al*.'s. (2013) thematic analysis process captures a common theme that acts as an umbrella to sub-themes (Kaur, Gupta, Singh, & Perano, 2019) that share similar concepts with the major themes, but focus on notable specific elements that are separate yet interconnective elements of the main theme. This helped overcome limitations associated with applying the data analysis technique. Thematic analysis as a word-based technique creates limited opportunity for interpretation when isolation within the sub-units creates boundaries around the understanding of the context, limiting the richness of the summary data produced (Guest *et al*., 2012). Prior studies have generally defined OBC users as a homogeneous group (Algesheimer *et al.,* 2005; Dholakia *et al*., 2004; Cheng *et al.,* 2020; Wilkins *et al.,* 2019), considering the perceived similarity in attitudes and activities of the groups of individuals. This approach taken by prior studies risks presenting no clear distinction between OBC users and further limits analysis of the phenomenon of OBC loyalty to a purely word-based data analysis. However, with a prior understanding of the key characteristics that separate customers and consumers, the researcher was able to critically interpret participants' responses with insights

generated from several interviews that helped the researcher to situate the personal voice to generate sub-themes that correlated with the major themes.

Subsequently, several of the participants' responses could be aligned with each theme in accordance to the sub-concepts of each theme. This reflects Turnbull's (2002) idea that suggests that responses from participants of social constructivist studies can support more than one theme. The foundation of the relationship of the major themes with luxury brands, the influence of content valence and the socially aligned identity can be traced back to the responses of customers with an existing loyalty to a luxury fashion brand through OBCs providing answers to the first research question (*To what extent do OBCs affect customer loyalty in the luxury fashion industry?*) and the second question (*How do consumers perceive OBCs in the luxury fashion industry?*) following the generation of sub-themes that detailed separate elements contributed by the differences in experiences and actions between active engaging customers and passive consumers observing OBC activity. Regarding the second research question, the first three themes could be aligned with participants who identified as OBC consumers as well as actual luxury fashion customers. The consumers' responses provided socially constructed experiences that contrasted with those of customers; this enhanced the critical interpretation of the major themes by examining the diverse perspectives that associated meaning to each theme and the distinction between a loyal luxury fashion brand customer and a passive OBC consumer. The final major theme, collective community intentions, provided answers to the third question (*To what extent do customers develop other customers' loyalty in OBCs linked to the luxury fashion industry?*), which could be traced to participants who identified as actual customers of luxury fashion and those who were strongly interested in purchasing from a luxury fashion brand.

The following section presents quotes from interviews with millennial customers of luxury fashion OBCs to illustrate the constructs of codes and themes. This follows Gioia *et al.*'s (2013) recommendation that the reader must clearly understand the generation of themes and the combining of the researcher's voice and participants' responses. This analysis process revealed the connection between the themes, the participants' responses and the researcher's deeper understanding leading to the data saturation point. The chapter then continues with a discussion and detailed interpretation of the themes

with new generated theoretical knowledge, with the support of existing literature and the critical involvement of the researcher's voice.

Figure 1: Data structure

| 1st order codes | 2nd order themes | Aggregate dimension |

- If I'm going to look at or search for product of a brand, I would go to their specific channel.
- The OBC provides specific information.

→ Searches specifically for brand-related information in OBCS

- I know the difference in quality between luxury and mainstream products. The luxury brands are pricy, but when you buy a branded product, you buy the quality.
- The cheaper brands may be more economically available, but they would not last long and it becomes a waste of money.

→ Perceived quality of luxury vs mainstream fashion

- I love the brand's variety of colours, the quality of fabric they use, and I love the style, that I cannot find from other brands, to me they are quite unique from other brands.
- I like my brands, I'm not going to change them.

→ Attitudinal brand preference

→ Relationship with luxury brand

- Online, the item is not tangible, you cannot touch the item in the picture; what you are seeing needs to be perfect.
- The items I wear result from the content I see in OBCs.

→ Enhances the intangible product searching experience

- In the online community it is more "real" – real meaning, seeing everyday people wearing and discussing the brand.
- I have seen my friends post about what they are doing, and I often notice the branded clothes they are wearing.

→ Presence of everyday consumers

→ Influence of content valence

- I was reading a blog…there was a discussion about whether low-paid interns should have expensive purses… it got my attention and I enjoyed reading the blog.
- There's this fashion influencer, she likes branded products, and always creates interesting content … there's always new products to review.

→ Original and unique content that encourages ongoing conversations in reference to brands

- I don't like the comments that badmouth the brand, it makes a bad atmosphere.
- Usually the online reviews are biased opinion, and just because someone had a bad experience it doesn't mean others will have the same experience.

→ Negative response to comments perceived as overly negative

110

Figure 1: Data structure continued

| 1st order codes | 2nd order themes | Aggregate dimension |

- Being in OBCs is like a type of window shopping into a different world... you forget what you can or cannot afford.
- I find it easier to search through OBCs compared to being at the physical store where you feel completely out of place.

→ Perceived access barriers reduced in OBCs

- The company's general website tends to be standardised and unrelated to me as an individual, but with OBCs you can find posts that are related to your personality.
- Luxury brands need to be open-minded to different people and communities.

→ Emphasis on inclusivity through OBC posts

→ Socially aligned identity

- When I buy the item, it feels like "my" item rather than everyone else's item.
- I want to go to a site where there is a community with a shared vision regarding the fashion appearance I am looking for from the brand.

→ Desire for exclusive status, image and information on the luxury brand

- You are promoting a great brand; you feel good about it and it gets people talking to you.
- I am able to tell others that the brand delivers as expected, which is my way of repaying the brand for delivering great quality.

→ Desire to act as a brand influencer

- Others open up and share their experiences, and it gives me a chance to learn about other branded products.
- I have never bought the brand before, so I have to rely on the comments to get some insight into the quality.

→ Engage with other consumers for brand-related learning

→ Collective community intentions

- I don't communicate with others about my preference towards the brand...most of my male friends don't like the colourful variation style of the brand.
- You will encounter people who don't like your brand. It's natural to avoid each other so you don't get into arguments.

→ Connect with likeminded individuals

- If I have no knowledge other than observing, then I wouldn't feel comfortable recommending a brand publicly.
- I don't feel I can contribute towards the OBCs and I am not entitled to have a public opinion about the brand.
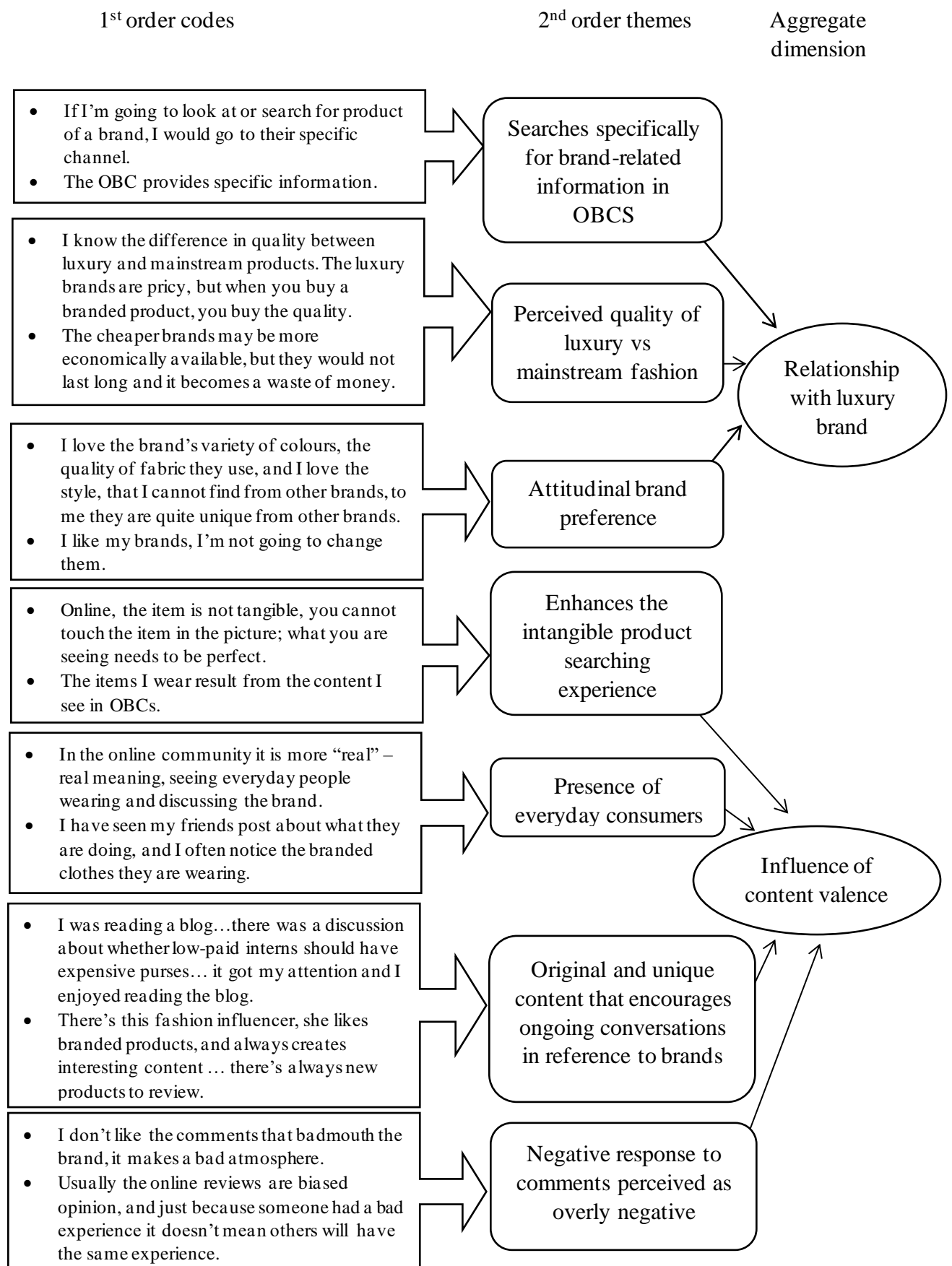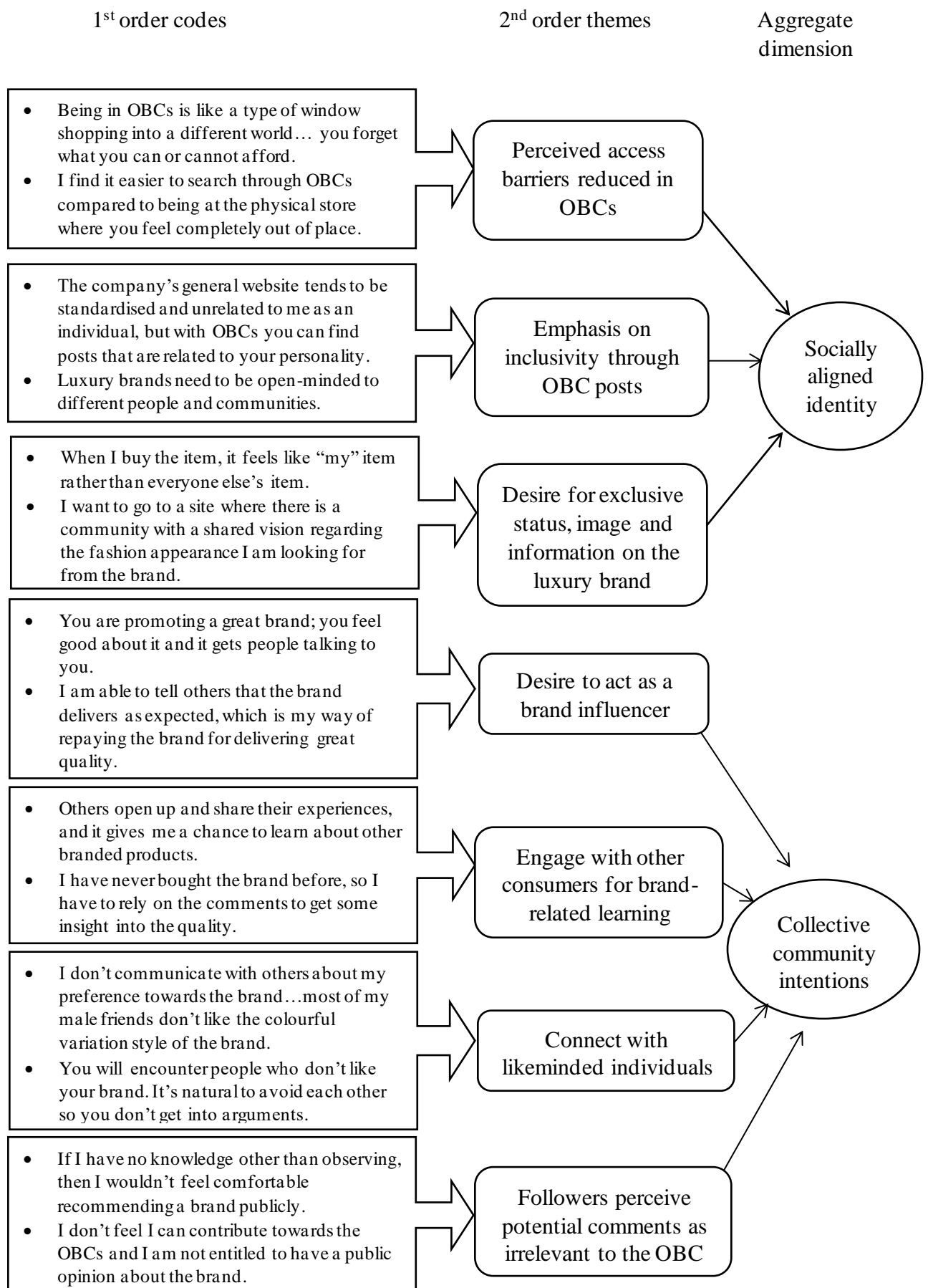
→ Followers perceive potential comments as irrelevant to the OBC

111

4.3 Interpretation of data: respondents' quotes with researcher's voice

4.3.1 Relationship with luxury brand

Relationship with brand refers to the existing relationship millennial customers explicitly or implicitly expressed to have with luxury fashion brands. This theme reflects OBC activity and loyalty characteristics that favour luxury fashion brands, emphasising the customers' perspective of the brands integrated with their motivation to use OBCs. The preference for a specific luxury fashion brand image and experience motivates these customers to search specifically for brand-related information in OBCs. Additionally, the millennial individuals who align with this theme perceive luxury brands to have higher quality compared to mass market and even economic-friendly brands, valuing the equity and experience associated with the luxury brands transferred onto OBCs, thus supporting the millennial customers' attitudinal loyalty towards specific luxury brands.

When customers are motivated to consume a brand, they are likely to search for content in online platforms (de Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012). Studies show that customers are increasingly using OBCs as part of their purchasing experience (Adjei *et al.*, 2010; Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Mahrous & Abdelmaaboud, 2017), which was confirmed by several participants of this study, including this 26-year-old female university finance and economics student:

> I visit the brand's OBC because I am intending to buy from this specific brand. The OBC provides information that you need, including pictures, reviews and links to purchase the product. I've pretty much replaced websites with OBCs to find and purchase products because that's where you find the majority of information now. I guess as well because social media is used more by people in my age group, companies are sharing more information through their OBC.

Another participant, a 29-year-old female human resource professional, extended this point stating:

> Often I search the general Facebook or Instagram timeline to pass time. But, if I see something interesting, like a new dress, then I will travel to the OBC page to check out the product. The brand's sites provide more detailed information so it's easier to visit and shop around on them, because they provide information

on a specific branded product and provide you with direct links to the pages to make the purchase; it's an easy transaction from start to finish.

These participants indicate the effect OBCs have on enhancing customers' purchasing intentions in online environments. One of the basic activities conducted in OBCs is information searching (Meek *et al.,* 2019), which applies to both socialisation and purchasing intentions. The concept of integrating purchasing experiences into OBCs extends the value of basic online activities, such as information searching, online task completion and virtual community participation (Dholakia *et al.,* 2004; Ozuem *et al.*, 2021a), as it can generate increased customer experiences thus potentially leading to higher customer satisfaction in using OBCs.

Customer OBC experiences are further enhanced by the convenience and ease of use of OBCs due to their convenient placement in digital gadgets and platforms, like mobile apps and commonly used social media channels like Facebook and Instagram. These allow customers to access OBCs without physical restrictions and provide the opportunity to personalise the information and activity they seek to engage in (Larivière *et al.*, 2013). Personalisation is relevant to understanding the value customers perceive OBCs to have as personalisation impacts the building of a relationship between customers and brands (Hsieh, Lee, & Tseng, 2021). Most brands face the challenge of ensuring customers encounter their social media posts amidst the mass number of online posts, often compelling brands to repost their content at least three times per week (Myers, 2020). Without personalisation, customers would need to continuously scroll the social media timelines reading through information they may find irrelevant to them (Hsieh *et al.*, 2021). A 32-year-old male assistant manager related their experience in using social media channels that differ on content personalisation:

> Facebook is mostly random and a variety of brand posts, but on Instagram I see pictures, quotes and information I want to see, including my favourite brands, more regularly. There are a lot of posts uploaded onto these platforms, both from the firm and other followers, so having a OBC that can be tailored to what I'm looking for is a necessity if I'm going to keep using it.

The participant's comment indicates the importance of personalised and relevant information for encouraging customer engagement in online environments where information and content are abundant. Brands that set up OBCs, and consist of content

related to the brands' products, customers with an interest in the brand will more likely be interested in channels that provide that relevant information, as supported by this 27-year-old male university sports coach:

> You do see on these online sites nice pictures and interesting worded comments, but because the timeline is nonstop you end up scrolling through a lot and I don't look into each one unless it's something that grabs my attention. Usually, like many people, I scroll through general social media timelines just to pass time but I don't spend my entire day examining all the information. If you're looking for something in particular, like a product update or promotion, you can't expect to find it within the first 20 minutes you scroll the timeline. The information is obviously there, but a lot of posts makes it harder to find. Sometimes, less is more, it leaves you more positive for finding it, the online information is only good if it's useful to you.

This comment reflects the importance of information that harbours specific characteristics that are relevant to an individual's online search expectations (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021b). Online channels that provide information that is personalised to the customers' search intentions create both memorable usage experiences and intention to continue using the channels (Fang, 2019; Ranjan & Read, 2016). In the case of a 27-year-old male university sports management student's comment, OBCs provide the opportunity to find information related to brands they want to purchase from without requiring the customer to invest a significant amount of time to search and find that information. The personalisation that OBCs accommodate enables brands to engage with customers in an individualised manner, which enhances brand relationships and customers' subscription to brand information (Hsieh *et al.*, 2021), as suggested by a 28-year-old male university business and language student:

> I visit social media sites specialised to the luxury brand. Visiting OBCs is a positive experience for me because it feels more personalised to my online searching as I just want to search on the brand I like. You also feel connected and closer to the brand as their sites keep you regularly up to date with their latest information.

An important point that emerges from this comment is the customer's desire to be kept informed of specific brands. Some customers place brands at the centre of their OBC

activity, seeking to retain functional benefits from remaining with specific brands (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021b), such as maintaining updated knowledge of the brand's fashion trends and image, as a 33-year-old male pricing specialist indicated:

> I follow Dolce & Gabbana through OBCs because I can see the new trends for men's fashion. I like to look as fashionable as possible both in the workplace and my socialisation environment and D&G is the one that maintains my professional and stylist image. I equally like to reflect this image on social media, so it is easy to monitor the new styles, so I continue to reflect the image of Dolce & Gabbana.

Another participant, a 32-year-old female credit controller, benefitted from using OBCs to access knowledge on product awareness and maintain relationships with her favoured brands:

> I subscribe to my favourite brand Armani. Any time there is a product promotion offer I always get a notification from their social media site, which comes through my email. I feel like they are doing their best to keep me as a customer, and they manage what they send me quite effectively. For instance, I like Armani coats, always look for updates on those, but I haven't looked for other stuff like their perfume or shoes etc. The people behind the notification sending have probably picked up on that because I don't get a lot of notifications on everything they have to offer me; I don't mind getting updates on other product offers, but it's easier for me and it shows specific care from brands to individual customers.

The participant's description of their specific usage of OBCs indicates the brand as the centre of importance in their online activity. Content that credits or implies a specific iconic fashion brand can attract customers' attention leading them to actively engage in OBCs (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021b). OBCs are set up to showcase the brand they represent, allowing customers to feel a connection with the brand and justify their decision to remain with an online community (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021a). Customers move away from online communities that do not have individual customers' favoured brand at the centre of discussion (Coelho, Bairrada, & Peres, 2019; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001), indicating a strong sense of social identification influence. Thus, OBCs are perceived as an essential

channel for keeping customers connected to brands through personalised brand-related information and to maintain the brand as the central element of the online discussions.

The concept of brand relationships has been applied in several existing studies involving different industries (Carlson *et al.*, 2018a; Coelho *et al.*, 2019; Park *et al.*, 2013; Swaminathan, Page, & Gürhan-Canli, 2007; Tuškej *et al.*, 2013). It is a concept that equally applies to the luxury fashion industry which revolves around important psychological mechanisms including consumers' brand personality (Pham, Valette-Florence, & Vigneron, 2018; Ranfagni *et al.*, 2016; Wolny & Mueller, 2013) and social identity (Carlson *et al.*, 2008; Helal *et al.*, 2018; Nowak *et al.*, 1990). In order to understand the relationships formed between customers and luxury fashion brands in OBCs, it is important to understand how customers perceive luxury fashion brands. This current study's data sample consisted of millennial customers who are considered to be concerned about the return of investment following purchases (Kong *et al.*, 2019). However, millennials are also described as highly experimental with luxury fashion brands (de Kerviler & Rodriguez, 2019) and place major emphasis on being unique and differentiating themselves from others by consuming luxury branded goods (Gentina *et al.*, 2016; Ozuem *et al.*, 2021b), as supported by this 32-year-old female MBA graduate:

> I'm always excited when trying new products, especially the most expensive ones. You feel a sense of thrill in wearing something that not just anyone would or can buy. Not even my friends have the products I have in my wardrobe, so I feel great to have such unique and timeless brands in my ownership. Above all, I like to envision myself as being different from others, not necessarily to make myself the rich-looking person in the group, but someone with a type of individualism you cannot find with brands almost anyone can get.

Millennial customers appreciate not just the social status signalling luxury brands accommodate, but they also identify with the quality of the branded products themselves. As mentioned in the literature review, luxury fashion brands are defined as brands that demand the highest of quality and are therefore premium priced (Berthon *et al.,* 2009; Hansen & Wänke, 2011; Silverstein & Fiske, 2003). In contrast, mainstream or mass market fashion brands are defined to be of reasonably low quality in material but economically affordable (Lee *et al.,* 2009). While some millennial customers may argue that fashion products do not need to be expensive to obtain a desired appearance

or emotional feeling, participants from this study expressed a contrasting perspective. Several identified the noticeable difference between luxury and mainstream fashion on price and quality as expressed by this 26-year-old male sales person:

> I love the style, fabric, and everything about Ralph Lauren…especially the quality, that's very important. I used to work in a fashion clothing factory, so I know the difference in quality between luxury and mainstream products. The luxury brands are pricey, but when you buy a branded product, you buy the quality. You cannot compare a Ralph Lauren's T-shirt with a T-shirt from Primark, it's not the same quality. I know from the fabric, within weeks you put the Primark T-shirt in the bin. With a Ralph Lauren or a Ted Baker, you cannot do that; they are more specific on the quality, which is meant to last longer, hence why their prices are higher.

Another participant, a 29-year-old female teaching assistant, expressed a similar sentiment stating:

> Even with H&M and Next's products, their quality cannot be compared with the more expensive brands. If I could, I would choose Burberry as my purchase choice because their style and quality cannot be compared to the cheaper and more mainstream options. The product line of H&M and Next also changes more regularly compared to luxury fashion, which is created to last forever, not just in the quality of the make, but also in how you feel having the product. Get a scarf from H&M, I'm sure someone else has the same one I've got and I'll probably buy a new one next week or give it away. Get a scarf from Burberry, I doubt many I know will have it or that I'll give it away.

From these responses, it is clear that millennial customers place a clear distinction between luxury and mainstream fashion and embrace the premium price elements as positive factors, as they indicate superior quality that may not be found in mass market fashion brands. Arguably, some millennial customers may perceive luxury fashion products as harbouring higher value for money compared to cheaper product alternatives. Customers are increasingly desiring sustainability in fashion products (Davies, Lee, & Ahonkhai, 2012; Jestratijevic, Rudd, & Uanhoro, 2020). For non-luxury fashion brands, sustainability corresponds with perceptions regarding mass and eco-friendly production and economic effects (Sun, Kim, & Kim, 2014), whereas luxury

brands imply the opposite, emphasising an image of pleasantness, superficiality and ostentation (Achabou & Dekhili, 2013). Consumers' responses to sustainability thus change when luxury fashions are the topic (Kumagai & Nagasawa, 2017). While sustainability that emphasises affordability and eco-friendliness is significant to non-luxury purchasers (Park, Ko, & Kim, 2010a), luxury purchasers may feel that luxury brands have less need for sustainability because it may reduce the products' quality (Kong, Witmaier, & Ko, 2021). These perceptions are indicated by the two following comments:

A 32-year-old female accountant stated:

> I like the brand Gucci. The quality of these brands have value for money. The cheaper brands may be more economically available, but they would not last long and it becomes a waste of money. But with Gucci the quality is outstandingly different, it lasts longer and still holds its uniqueness.

A 26-year-old female MBA graduate commented:

> Not only do luxury brands have the best quality compared to other brands, you can wear the same item for years. I still have my Radley bag bought nine years ago, it has held the weight from my university years and my journeys into work and so far it's not broken apart.

These participants indicate a higher trust in luxury fashion brands in regard to long-term quality sustainability. In the case of luxury fashion brands, sustainability arguably aligns with the long-term duration that customers will have a luxury product, thus matching with the price customers are willing to pay for them. The participants' comments also indicate that if the material of luxury brands' products changed and the price of luxury brands' products was lowered to appear more sustainable, then the perceived quality would reduce and cause luxury customers to respond negatively (Kong *et al.*, 2021). This sentiment towards luxury fashion brands can become apparent even if concerns are raised about defects or issues in luxury products as commented by a 26-year-old male human resource administrator:

> Some people pick on everything when it's a luxury brand. Even if one item had one stitch out of place they would say "this quality is not good for a luxury brand" and that defines the whole brand. The quality of luxury brands is

measured by the exclusive material used to make the product, so I have to ask if these consumers bought the real thing or a counterfeit.

While these participants' comments may not be directly linked to OBCs, they provide insight into the important characteristics that customers identify with luxury fashion brands. As mentioned earlier, luxury fashion brands are integrated into customers' social identity, which can mediate the relationship developed between customers and brands (Coelho *et al.*, 2019), and can be further enhanced through online activities in OBCs that maintain that ongoing relationship (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021a). Thus, understanding how customers perceive luxury fashion brands can impact understanding of how they would respond to OBC activity and other fashion customers through OBCs.

The points discussed on customers' decision to follow specific brand-related information and their comparisons between luxury and mainstream fashion brands reflect characteristics of attitudinal brand preference. Brand preference is formed upon individuals' positive brand memories and attitudes (Biehal, Stephens, & Curio, 1992; Shimp, 1981) and the attributes they associate with luxury branded products. One participant, a 25-year-old female university marketing and management in fashion student, indicated social identification with a specific brand, based on their following comment:

> I am drawn to Dior, I like mostly everything from their bags, clothing, cosmetics, and fragrances. Unfortunately, I don't have the money to buy Dior, but if I did I would get their famous Net Tote handbag. I feel Dior is more feminine and unique than other brands.

Similarly, another participant, a 38-year-old female MBA student stated:

> I buy Ted Baker coats. I love the variety of colours, the quality of fabric they use and I love the style, that I cannot find from other brands, to me they are quite unique from other brands.

According to Ganesan and Sridhar (2014), customers tend to continue purchasing from the same brand they have purchased from previously due to key attributes of the products they associate with the brand, causing them to establish a brand preference (Kim, Lee, & Lee, 2020). The comments provided by the two aforementioned participants reflect the individual attributes they identify with their brand preference,

and can be linked to the factors regarding the presence of the brand and attitudinal loyalty influencing customers' usage of luxury fashion brands' OBCs. Brand and attitudinal loyalty are arguably significant foundations of customer–brand relationships, as they both reflect a customer's decision to remain committed to a brand due to positive feelings towards a specific brand (Ballantyne, Warren, & Nobbs, 2006; Dick & Basu, 1994). Attitudinal loyalty encourages customers to engage in behavioural loyalty, which is customers actually purchasing from the brand, and it builds their emotional attachment to the brand (Nyadzayo *et al.*, 2018). This attachment leads them to have a loyalty towards the brand that is strong enough to prevent them from considering the alternatives that are available to them, as suggested by this 25-year-old female university finance and economics student:

> I see posts of Ted Baker dresses and I'm like "Wow". Their dresses give the "higher quality" feeling and they are so beautiful. I don't feel anything when it comes to those Gucci dresses, to me they are a bit tacky, but Ted Baker has a way of making me feel luxurious with their design and style that I don't see in brands like Gucci.

This participant's comment identifies the sole-loyalty effect attitudinal loyalty has on customers in regard to brand preference. An absence of attitudinal loyalty towards brands makes it difficult to convince customers to purchase from brands (Kamran-Disfani *et al.*, 2017) as indicated by the participant above who indicated a choice of one brand over others, despite all being under the luxury fashion category. Brand preference can heavily influence customers' perspectives regarding the perceived quality and equity of their favourite brand compared to others, making it difficult for OBC managers to convince customers to change their brand preference (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021b). Customers' determination to remain with a specific brand through OBCs can even reduce the influence of other customers' attempts to influence brand choice (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021b). It is argued that the perceived mass within OBCs can influence observing individuals to follow the channels the significant mass are using (Cheng *et al.*, 2020). While perceived critical mass can be used to explain how customers become motivated to use OBCs, it does not guarantee loyalty for the brand through OBCs. According to insights that emerged from the participants' interviews, individuals harbour a desire to follow brands based on their specific preference, as indicated by the example taken from an interview with a 26-year-old male university accounting student:

I have to follow the brands I like through OBCs rather than just joining the "followers trend" which could be for any brand. I know social media sites show how many people are following and liking a brand, but we are not programmed to like and follow that brand just because everyone else is. I wouldn't expect others to feel they need to like or follow brands I like. I have my own reasons for brand preferences and I've been committed to those preferences both in the store and through my social media activity. It wouldn't make sense if I followed other brands I have never consumed before just because of their mass followers.

When considering social influence, a strong relationship between customers and brands reduces the effect of perceived critical mass of OBC followers for brands on observing customers who may not have a attitudinal preference towards them. Instead, they are likely to align with individuals who share a common interest with brands they favour (Dholakia *et al.*, 2004; Ozuem *et al.*, 2021a) and will join OBCs that are specifically linked to the brands they favour (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005), as supported by this 29-year-old female project assistant:

Every person has their own fashion taste, even in luxury brands. Brands within the luxury sector have a unique appearance that differentiates them from each other. Some consumers like luxury brands that have an urban image, or edgy and less traditional looking clothes, while others like the glamourous, sophisticated, office wear or ball gown feel the style brings, which are open to interpretation depending on the individual. For myself, I'm not very keen on specific items from brands like Balenciaga and Gucci. For Balenciaga's evening dresses I find the style choice over the top, and for Gucci, I don't mind their dresses, but the recent shoe designs haven't convinced me to purchase them. I don't find some of the brands' designs attractive, and they do not match the luxury image I envision myself in, so I don't generally intend to search for Balenciaga and Gucci online unless a random picture post of a style they created is attractive to me.

Alvarado-Karste and Guzmán (2020) examined how brand identity–cognitive style fitted with the three levels of social influence, (compliance, identification and internalisation; Kelman, 1958); they found that identification and internalisation influence has a significant positive effect on the perceived value of brands.

Identification and internalisation reflect individuals' willing acceptance of influence, whereas compliance influence indicates a compelled or forced acceptance of influence (Kelman, 1958). Thus, when customers encounter content or messages in OBCs they might accept the influence of brands and other loyal brand customers without feeling compelled to, due to strong commitment to the brand itself (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021a). In turn, they would reject the influence of network peers with contrasting brand preference even if those peers directly recommend alternative brands, as suggested by a 25-year-old female teaching assistant:

> I have a few friends and they don't all like the same brands. Sometimes they say "Why you not buying this? It's cheaper than yours and looks just as good". But I always say, "I like my brands I'm not going to change them, just because another is cheaper". I know what I want and what matches my body and intended look. Even though there are cheap counterfeits of luxury brand products, and cheap brands that provide similar styles, I still wouldn't get those. Firstly, counterfeits would not be same as the real thing and I wouldn't feel good about myself wearing a fake and trying to pass it off as the real thing. Secondly, the luxury brands I like are what make me unique from my friends; it's nice to share styles with each other but you look stupid if your friend's style doesn't suit you and you feel bad for not staying true to your identity.

This statement reinforces the factor of attitudinal brand preference and loyalty: customers with a strong relationship with a luxury brand are motivated to retain a valued relationship with the brand, thus reducing the likelihood of them seeking second opinions from other individuals (Schwartz, Luce, & Ariely, 2011). That is not to say individuals with attitudinal brand preference do not seek second opinions in general, but make particular searches for social networks and channels that align with the brand and recommendations of that brand. This again re-emphasises that a relationship with luxury brands plays a mediating effect in motivating millennial customers to use OBCs, and find specific brand-related information thus reinforcing their existing commitment to luxury fashion brands.

4.3.2 Influence of content valence

Influence of content valence refers to the emotional responses triggered by content individuals encounter within OBCs. For consumers conducting a product search, the

content within OBCs can activate a positive shopping experience similar to physical purchasing and prompt purchasing intentions. Content characteristics like perceived presence of fellow customers within the content, as well as content originality and uniqueness, can stimulate customers' positive valence. In addition, customers can identify positive and negative sentiments related to brands which may influence their own perceptions of brands and OBCs. Thus, the influence of content valence can be enthused by the aforementioned characteristics customers identify in the content; an absence of such characteristics or a presence of excessive negative messages can develop customers' negative valence.

In the field of psychology, valence is a sentimental quality referring to categorised emotions that reflect the emotional attractiveness (goodness) or averseness (badness) of events, objects and situations (Frijda, 1986). In other words, it refers to the emotions customers develop following an experience encountered previously or currently; valence has been a central focus in several customer loyalty studies (Cheng *et al.*, 2020; Holbrook & Batra, 1987; Smith & Bolton, 2002). Valence can develop in various situations, especially in OBC environments that consist of rich content and brand presence; this can be identified in a 25-year-old male university marketing student's comment, who harboured a positive valence from previous visits to OBCs:

> I can't afford luxury brands, so I don't want to get carried away, because if I look at the brands through OBCs for too long, I worry I might get the idea that I should buy from them because the products look so beautiful and the style used in posted pictures makes them even more appealing and desirable.

The content that customers encounter in OBCs can be treated as a source of information that supports customers' purchasing experience (Hsieh *et al.*, 2021) combined with the presence of an interactive community of OBC customers exchanging ideas and feedback (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021a) as emphasised by the following, a 25-year-old female university economics student commented:

> The content you see through online engagement, such as product pictures, others recommendations etc., opens my mind to the products available from the brand. You only get one chance to make the right purchasing choice for luxury brands, so, information from the OBC helps you so you're not making a blind decision that you regret in the long term.

This participant's response identifies the effect content in OBCs has on enticing customers' valence following an online purchasing experience that would commonly occur in the tangible fashion store locations. The tangible presence of luxury fashion products was converted to intangible following the creation of internet shopping environments, where customers have no direct contact with the products yet to be purchased (Peterson, Balasubramanian, & Bronnenberg, 1997). This is captured in a 34-year-old female university business student's response:

> Online, the item is not tangible, you cannot touch the item in the picture or be able to see how it looks before you purchase it. What you are seeing needs to be perfect, the image is important; how it looks, what kind of fabric it is, and what it may look like on me. Description is very important but you need to imagine how this all looks in real life.

In the case of this millennial customer, the intangible nature of online purchasing creates a level of uncertainty for customers who are unable to assess the risk of their online purchase until the product is physically available to them, which underlines the customers' need for product-related information of great quality to reduce their uncertainty (Weathers, Sharma, & Wood, 2007). A key driver that attracts customers' attention and arouses customers' positive valence during online purchasing in OBCs is the vividness of the content of posts (Cheng *et al.*, 2020). A 35-year-old male accountant explained an experience in the context of content influencing their emotional reaction:

> The items I have worn are the result of the content I see in OBCs. For example, I saw an online display of white sunglasses. I've never seen men wear white sunglasses, so my attention was instantly taken by the male model wearing them and I felt I also had to have these. Normally, sunglasses for men are black, but white sunglasses gives you a different personality or feeling on how you dress. Of course I wanted to make sure they looked good on me in real life as they did in the picture, because sometimes what looks good doesn't mean it would look good on me. I was able to use this mobile app to virtually see how I would look with them on, I was honestly impressed with the software because it literally felt like I was already wearing them.

This participant's comment brings attention to customers' ability to achieve an experience that compensates for the loss of senses, which triggers emotional valence,

such as the touch of an object, and he referred to technology that creates online direct sensory experiences supported by rich media (Coyle & Thorson, 2001; Daft & Lengel, 1986). The first factor was the richness of the content that attracted the 35-year-old male accountant's attention to the post, which developed into behavioural intentions for the product displayed in the post (Liu, Li, Ji, North, & Yang, 2017; Liu & Shrum, 2009), which led to a positive valence from consuming the digital media available to conduct an entertaining purchasing experience. Entertainment from OBC content is a vital factor for luxury fashion brands for enhancing customers' valence as it can influence customer commitment to remain with an OBC and engage with other customers (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021b). Thus, millennial customers observing online content, like the example above, can develop a positive valence based on the entertainment generated from observing the content as well as basic product-related learning (Tseng *et al.*, 2017).

The influence of content valence is not limited to content posted by brands in OBCs; customers can take notice of the content posted by other customers, which has the potential to influence observing individuals' valence (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021b). One method customers may enlist to enhance an intangible shopping experience is to engage with comments and reviews posted by customers, to obtain assurance for their purchasing intentions. The following participant, a 27-year-old male sales assistant, explains how the presence of content from other customers makes them feel:

> Buying online can be a little more challenging because you can't be sure if that product will be as it is shown in the picture. Plus, with the product being a luxury brand, you want to be sure you are buying the right product for you. For someone like me, I will be able to afford one luxury product, and maybe in 5 to 8 years' time I may decide to invest in another item; so, getting the right one to love forever is vital. When there are good reviews on the products, that gives me the assurance that other customers felt the product displayed online is as expected. That means whatever I am investing my money in, to buy those products, it is quite fantastic, because you have a beautiful review that makes you feel all the greater for buying that product.

This customer reintroduces the issue of customers' uncertainty in online purchases and addresses the helpfulness of customers' comments provided in OBCs. These can trigger an emotional valence in an individual's current purchase stage and post-purchase stage,

causing customers to develop a positive valence of the experience as a whole. The presence of other humans can have a positive effect on customers' perceptions of online environments (Poupis, Rubin, & Lteif, 2021). In OBCs, customers can encounter content displaying products on actual people, providing customers with an enhanced mental awareness of the products; this is supported by a 35-year-old female quality manager:

> Having an actual person in the post also makes a huge difference. It could be anyone, what matters is seeing how the item looks on them. This gives me help in knowing how a fashion item looks on a real person. Take jeans for example, if you just see a picture post of the jeans alone, you don't know how it looks when worn, including the length and shape it forms. But post a picture of the jeans being worn by someone, I can imagine better how it looks and fits.

The showcasing of everyday people can influence the positive valence of customers, who are then able to imagine the appearance of products on real people presented in intangible environments. Another participant, a 26-year-old female MSc International business student, extended the perception highlighted in the previous comment, mentioning the importance of having relatable everyday people present in OBC content:

> On companies' websites you see the items on the model, but I don't feel they represent the real world, or all consumers. But in the online community it is more "real" – real meaning seeing everyday people wearing and discussing the brand. Models employed by the company portray the image the company wants them to portray, but in online communities people portray the brand in a way that suits them, which makes it more relatable to other consumers.

This highlights the presence of fellow peers that customers are able to relate to; network peers presented in OBC content are able to influence other customers' fashion products purchasing behaviour (Hahn & Kim, 2013; Kong, Ko, Chae, & Mattila, 2016; Ozuem *et al.*, 2021b) and can potentially be more influential compared to individuals employed by companies. Individuals can be attracted to individual they identify with, which links to the social influence identification concept (Kelman, 1958), causing them to be more accepting of information from those sources compared to other sources they do not identify with. The social presence of individuals that customers can relate to can

influence their arousal level (Fortin & Dholakia, 2005) and their positive response to OBC content.

However, the presence of everyday individuals and their content can influence customers' negative valence, leading them to divert away from a purchase as well as encourage purchases through OBCs. Customers can absorb negative sentiment indicated through online comments and develop a negative valence, which can influence their expectations of future results (Niese, Libby, Fazio, Eibach, & Pietri, 2019; Wheeler, Stuss, & Irving, 1997); this occurred in the case of a 34-year-old male project assistant manager during an online purchasing experience:

> I wanted to buy a shirt from the brand. I looked on the OBC and there were comments highlighting a problem with their sizes. Someone commented that the brand labelled an item as large, but it fitted on them like it was an extra-large, and somebody else said they ordered a medium size, but it was too small for them. I wanted to buy that particular shirt, but I already found a problem with that product based on the comments. About seven people made the same complaint, and if a certain number had an issue I felt I could also face the same problem, so I decided to let it go.

This highlights that customer feedback in OBCs can prevent other customers from making decisions they may regret after purchase. However, the valence of customers' responses to content will differ, some will even question the negative and positive comments. Customers' individual brand experiences and identification with other customers commenting in OBCs can change their valence towards online content (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021b), causing them to judge if the content is relevant to their online purchasing experience and to themselves. For instance, fashion customers have different perceptions of how luxury fashion brands and specific products match their personality and body type, which may contradict with the reviews and recommendations provided by other customers. Mentioned earlier was the influence of the presence of everyday customers or peers, and its influence on customers' purchasing behaviour (Kim *et al.*, 2020); arguably, in the luxury fashion industry, the presence of friends or other brand customers does not guarantee a customer's decision to purchase from the luxury brand. The following statement from a 30-year-old female procurement

specialist details a situation in which she observed customers' contrasting experiences of purchasing from the same brand:

> I have seen my friends post about what they are doing, and I often notice the branded clothes they are wearing. I do feel "man they look really good" and I wonder what brands they are wearing. I randomly saw the same item worn by someone else who commented on how it looked nothing like it did on the mannequin as it did on her. But I wasn't honestly surprised, her body shape didn't fit in with the make of the dress. Nonetheless, I felt bad for her, I've liked the look of those dresses that Prada has, and you imagine it looking good on you, only to find the reality hits hard.

This participant's comment demonstrates that customers can develop different valences on the same topic that two separate posts make reference to. One published content may reflect a positive sentiment in contrast to another, whilst the observing individual assesses the different characteristics of those posts. This arguably indicates that social influence identification is a key component that can influence the acceptance of posts. An explanation of this is provided by a 29-year-old female administrator's response:

> In terms of the clothing products I buy, I usually look at celebrities or influencers who have a body similar to mine. I'm quite short and curvy; so, for instance, I look at Kim Kardashian, I'm not necessarily a fan of her personally but I do like how she dresses. She is quite short and curvy like me, as is Meghan Trainor, so I look at people like them to get an idea of what I could wear and how it would look on my body. If I find something similar to what they wear, then I am able to see what I like and suits me due to body shape matching. I wouldn't look at women like Victoria Beckman, Naomi Campbell or Keira Knightley, not because I don't like them, I think they are great, but clothes shopping wise, they wouldn't be good references, they are tall and skinny, the complete opposite to me. Plus, we've seen many slim-looking girls on social media wearing very pretty items, but few body types that fit in with them. So, if you want clothing products to appeal to me, you've got to show me that they would suit someone with my body shape.

Both responses from the two participants demonstrate the scepticism customers can have in observing OBC content, even if it was posted by other customers. While

millennials take influence from other individuals' brand consumption, their independent assessment of content they encounter can cause them to critically assess OBC content even with the presence of everyday customers. A positive or negative review of a luxury branded product will not necessarily cause observing customers to reflect the same sentiment signalled in online content, as they may integrate additional issues, such as whether the customers' information is consistent and similar to the observing customer's. A perceived mismatch between the communicator and receiver of information can reduce the social influence between the two groups (Kelman, 1958); therefore, the influence of content valence is not solely reliant on what content customers encounter in OBCs but also on how they process and relate to the characteristics of the content and the content publisher.

Another important characteristic of content that describes the influence of content that emerged from the interview data was the participants' desire for OBC content to emphasise original and unique conversations related to luxury brands. Customers desire new and enriching experiences; thus, content must highlight new and unique content that triggers new conversations to motivate the customer to return to OBCs. These new experiences can build a positive valence from customers enjoying new and unexpected experiences. OBCs can contain information and stories that attract individuals' attention through different content attributes that differentiates the content post from others (Olmedilla, Send, & Toral, 2019), which can influence customers to develop a positive valence such as feeling surprised, excited or curious by the content as suggested by the experience of this 28-year-old male MSc International business student:

> I was reading a blog about the workplace, and there was a discussion about whether low-paid interns should have expensive purses. They had an example of the Birkin bag from Hermès, they were discussing that around how it impacts employee well-being, image and company status displayed through interns. Out of pure interest I went to the Hermès site to check it out because how great this brand is for it to prompt a work related discussion around it. The part that mentioned $9,000 dollars for a purse, got me thinking "that's crazy", but it got my attention and I enjoyed reading the blog and seeing how others responded to the information. I started thinking about what response might occur at my workplace if my managers told us to align our image in a more luxury orientated style.

This response identifies the inclusion of content that is original and unique to OBCs and the importance of open innovation in the information provided by OBC users who have initiative and enthusiasm to share information ideas (Elia, Petruzzelli, & Urbinati, 2020). The open innovation through content posted by customers, which is enabled by OBCs, is beneficial for other customers who are then able to access vivid information that enhances individual knowledge (Nambisan, Lyytinen, Majchrzak, & Song, 2017). This idea emerged based on the following statement provided by 27-year-old female university education student:

> There's this fashion influencer Lydia Millen, she likes branded products, and always creates interesting content discussing these products. I watched her vlog on 50 of the best and worst luxury handbags that discussed and showed different purses and bags. She explained in detail the function of each bag and purse, what she uses them for, and whether they were as she expected them to be. From watching her Vlog I could tell that out of all the 50 bags she really loves the Chanel classic flap handbag and explained her excitement when she bought it. She also showed a Chanel Vanity Case handbag, along with other branded items that she reviewed and rated. It was really interesting and got me thinking of the various luxury brands in a new light. As a vlogger she always checks out the new products luxury brands have to offer so her reviews are always new, original and exciting, hence she is one of my subscribed YouTubers.

This participant arguably developed a positive valence from observing content created by a luxury fashion brand customer who presented the brands and the emotions in their unique way which signalled emotions that the participant identified as a result from observing the content. With the use of different individuals with diverse knowledge who collaborate within OBCs, this support customers initiative to engage within OBCs and conduct purchasing behaviour (Elia *et al.*, 2020). Arguably, if OBC content is perceived as lacking originality, customers are less likely to return to OBCs or follow content published by luxury brand customers. This issue emerged by the following 28-year-old male university law student's statement:

> I have friends who do wear branded products. Some of them share information about the brands they wear on Instagram, for example they share pictures of the items they have or posts from the brands pages. At first the posts they share were

interesting but after a while, they shared the same stuff way too many times, like for example, they have posted pictures of themselves with the same jewellery, bags or clothes but at different places and filter setting. This became so "sameish" that I become less interested. If the post had new information or images I'll come back to keep looking, I don't need to know that you still have the same watch you wore a year ago.

Based on this participants experience, a lack of perceived originality and uniqueness in posts can reverse the positive valence effect creating more averseness feelings such as boredom, apathy and uninterest in the content leading to a negative valence from observing the content. Olmedilla *et al.* (2019) that examined the value of content posting in virtual communities, argued that the number of posts that references common topics of discussion makes it more complex to distinguish the uniqueness of attributes from online content. This arguably negatively impacts the perceived level of innovative content posting and discourages customers from engaging within OBCs in the long-term. Although, while innovative initiative from customers in content posting is encouraged by brands, it is difficult to expect customers to generate original and unique posts. However, customers have unique needs and expectations in using OBCs and conduct their activity in environments shared with many other customers who are at different information-processing stages. While some may perceive the content as unoriginal, others who may be new to the content may engage with it more than others. As social constructivism emphasises, customers have different experiences and interpret them different (Schembri & Sandberg, 2003, p. 5) thus we cannot determine one single valence emotion for all millennial customers following their encounter with OBC content.

A final important factor of this theme is the potential development of customers negative valence from observing OBC content but a negative valence that can be beneficial for luxury fashion brands. It is well-known that overly-positive feedback can damage the credibility of social media content creating mistrust towards the content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) and negative content can escalate into a crisis that threatens a brands image (Hennig-Thurau, Hofacker, & Bloching, 2013). In this study, the negative content can refer to the negative e-WOM against a brand that emerges from customers comments as explained by this 30-year-old male project manager:

> I've seen some comments talking about the bad quality of a product which has made me hesitant to purchase that product from the brand. But this would be a rare occurrence for luxury fashion, and you may encounter more comments relating to individuals amazement of the expensiveness of luxury brands and that you can find equally high quality from less expensive brands.

This comment can be arguably linked to the customers' choice to accept information as part of their own personal beliefs as social influence internationalisation emphasises (Kelman, 1958). Individuals observing situations from other individuals' perspectives align them with their own self-beliefs (Niese *et al.*, 2019), potentially causing them to form their own expectations of brands through OBCs. However, not all consumers will automatically comply with the influence of negative brand sentiment (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021b) and may direct more salience to the extreme negatively of customers online comments which is supported by this 33-year-old male pricing specialists:

> I sometimes see negative comments from people who don't personally like the designers and say negative things about them. I don't like these kinds of comments, their sole aim is to attack the brand through the people presenting the brand, which is quite personal. Those comments shouldn't be the main endorsement of the brand because the brand itself and the people working behind the brand are two separate issues and shouldn't define whether people like the actual branded products are not.

From this response, a customer's negative valence may arise if they do not agree with the comments provided by other OBC customers. Some customers will tolerate or ignore negative comments if its related to the brand they favour and may even defend it against complaining customers (Wilson, Giebelhausen, & Brady, 2017; Ozuem *et al.*, 2021a). From this arises the effect of individuals social identification influence with brands, which is beneficial for brands when negative sentiment arises against brands through OBCs because these customers may defend the brand against negative online WOM (Wilson *et al.,* 2017; Ozuem *et al.*, 2021a). Customers experience in obtaining information from other OBC customers enables them to consider options or alternatives, but whether they act upon the influence of the information will depend on their perception of the arguments as well as their own existing sentiments (Ozuem *et al.*,

2021a). Thus some customers like this 25-year-old male MSc marketing student, may identify more negative attributes related to other customers comments:

> I don't like the comments that badmouth the brand, its makes a bad atmosphere and I prefer to stay clear from that kind of negativity. So I'll only look at the post rather than the comments that come with the post.

Some customers may seek to diverge away from such online content delivered through social media. Individuals may acknowledge that negatively can impact their emotional well-being even if the content is not directed towards them but towards entities, like luxury brand, and followers of these brands. Additionally, customers may acknowledge other customers comments, but may still not accept them as part of their perception regarding the brand as indicated by this 25-year-old male sales assistant:

> Usually the online reviews are biased opinion, and are written when someone felt frustrated about something and was thus fixated on that. But just because someone had a bad experience it doesn't mean others will have the same experience. I myself have not had any serious issues with luxury brands, and my perception will only change if I face a similar experience.

Customers do not develop brand sentiments solely based on the words of other individuals comments, but their own critical judgement which could be developed from their own affirmative experience with the brand (Ozuem *et al*., 2021a). If they do not have affirmative experience, they may acknowledgement the sentiment expressed by others, if remain undecided until they develop experience. Based on these participants comments, it can be presumed that not every customer will have the same valence with specific situations and events following the encounter of OBC content. In luxury fashion brands' OBCs, customers' pre-existing values and experiences and the OBC content would play a collective role in influencing customers' commitment to remain with or join OBCs rather than solely acting upon the expressed valence of others.

4.3.3 Socially aligned identity

Socially aligned identity refers to the extent to which individuals perceive a match between their identity and the characteristics of the OBC and its members, and whether they feel a sense of belonging to the community. Individuals may identify with a luxury brand but may feel hesitant to showcase this preference due to concerns of not being

perceived as belonging to the luxury category. OBCs have the potential to break down such barriers giving consumers the confidence to interact with the brand and other OBC members. Consumers' feelings of perceived inclusivity or exclusivity can impact perceived source identification, which is a level of social influence (Kelman, 1958). Inclusion of a range of characteristics linked to personal identity, attitudes and values can influence individuals to feel they are able to identify with the brand and follow it through OBCs (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021b). However, some consumers and loyal customers may perceive the OBC as being too inclusive and changing the brand's core identity through its content posting, prompting a desire to retain the brand's original image and seek information exclusive to that image. Absence of either perceived inclusivity or exclusivity can cause consumers to diverge from an OBC.

According to Ozuem *et al.* (2021a), if an individual identifies with a source, they are more likely to remain involved with a community. An important aspect of OBCs is the population of users they attract, which consists of individuals who can be categorised into different behavioural and psychographic groups, including personality, desired lifestyle and brand choice. Followers of specific OBCs can be distinctly defined as core users and non-core users of a brand. Bellezza and Keinan's (2014) study examined how core brand users perceived non-core users, defining them as "brand tourists" and "brand immigrants" based on how core users perceive them. They defined brand tourists as consumers of a brand who do not claim any in-group membership and brand immigrants as individuals who claim to part of the in-group of core users. In OBCs that are dedicated to luxury brands with a perceived exclusivity image, consumers have less restrictions to information related to the exclusive brand, but may still feel psychological barriers to the brand. According to a 25-year-old female university marketing student, concerns regarding how other OBC members perceive them can impact their sense of belonging to the community:

> Consumers need to feel confident in adopting or talking about a luxury brand; online you get that confidence without feeling judged or being labelled as the outsider who doesn't fit membership criteria. In person, some people look at others and think condescending remarks like "how can they pay so much for that" or "they don't seem like a Tiffany customer". When you're online, you choose whether to engage even if you are not an actual customer.

This response highlights the advantage of OBCs that enables users to join with the option of maintaining anonymity as enabled by technology-based services, but likewise emphasises the issue of perceived community membership barriers inflicted by other members, and individuals' internal evaluation of their self-identity and its alignment with the community. According to Bellezza and Keinan (2014), core users perceive individuals who are not core users of a brand as a threat to the exclusivity of the brand and consider they dilute the positive brand image. An individual seeking membership with an exclusive community perceive value in a severe initiation process (Gerard & Mathewson, 1966), thus finding the effort to acquire in-group status important to the self and the acquired membership rewarding and gratifying. However, seeking to claim membership can attract negative sceptics from the community. Individuals can be motivated to achieve and maintain a positive and distinctive identity that separates them from other communities (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and they can feel threatened by the inclusion of individuals who they perceive as different from the community and its representation. Interestingly, Bellezza and Keinan (2014) identified that while brand immigrants were perceived as a threat to identity exclusivity, brand tourists, who do not claim membership, enhance a sense of pride among core brand users; this might be due to the realisation that external groups value the distinct identity and values of the community, thus reinforcing the image and desirability of a brand (Bellezza & Keinan, 2014). A 37-year-old male social media consultant expressed his feelings towards OBC membership:

> You don't have to be part of a particular social group if you don't feel you belong with them. I suspect that luxury fashion is aligned with status and socialisation, but I don't go to OBCs with the intention to join some sort of online society that I probably don't even belong to, but to check out brand-related news.

While strict membership criteria could cause observing individuals to be cautious in their membership disclosure, this does not mean they would be discouraged from visiting OBCs or consuming the information. As mentioned earlier, OBC consumers can come from a range of behavioural and psychographic segments, with a brand being the centre of focus in their decision to join a community (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005), even if they do not align with the identity of others. In addition to the brand being the central attribute of the community, OBCs that build excitement about the luxury brand

can attract even non-owners as experienced by a 27-year-old female Creative arts teacher:

> Being in OBCs is like a type of window shopping into a different world. You feel like its normal to have a bag that costs $10,000, you forget who you are and what you can or cannot afford and you don't feel judged by others. Luxury OBCs are quite addictive because it's about products I don't have financial access to. I find it easier to search through OBCs compared to being at the physical store where you feel completely out of place amongst the people who can afford the brand and you're left observing them and learning nothing about the brand's products.

This response indicates that OBCs arguably reinforce brand recognition by provoking excitement from non-brand owners (Kapferer, 2012) who do not necessarily evaluate the alignment between their identity and those of the OBC members, but still feel a sense of belonging with the community. Likewise, this can help reduce the issue of an exclusive brand image being compromised, thus maintaining a balance between exclusivity and inclusiveness (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009; Liu, Shin, & Burns, 2019). However, reaching a balance between exclusivity and inclusivity in luxury fashion OBCs is complex due to the varying expectations consumers and customers have regarding the social identity alignment between them and the OBC. Individuals who feel that sources within OBCs do not align with their identity can ultimately be motivated to resist the influence of sources and the OBC content (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021a). Some consumers can feel demotivated to engage in OBCs if they perceive the content, and the messengers, to be less inclusive towards the individual's identity, values and interests, even if barriers to engage are lowered by a technology mediator and the brand's attempt to reach outside their exclusive target market. OBCs are known for their customisation and enabling customer involvement in the content creation process (Kim & Ko, 2012; Koivisto & Mattila, 2018; Schembri & Latimer, 2016), which impacts persuasion and identification from the audience (Thompson & Malaviya, 2013). A 38-year-old male MBA student highlighted OBC characteristics in comparison to other company-owned digital platforms:

> The company's general website tends to be standardised and unrelated to me as an individual, but with OBCs you can find posts that are not just dedicated to

the brand but related to your personality and background. If I see features of my day-to-day culture or someone famous from my native country, I'm more motivated to follow that brand. I think it's a good contrast of what we are expecting from the brand, that they target different people.

This response indicates that companies can enhance their OBCs by attracting new members to build the community beyond its expected atmosphere and activities (Veloutsou & Black, 2020). When strengthening existing online communities, organisations need to adopt a model that enables communication, sharing and access to customisable templates (Fournier & Lee, 2009), representing the community outside the in-groups' boundaries to attract new members (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005). New members who are outside the usual in-group network within OBCs can support the development of OBCs and extend the assets and resources brought to the community (Scuotto *et al.*, 2017; Veloutsou & Black, 2020). A 32-year-old male photographer described his involvement in luxury fashion OBCs:

If it was non-fashion related I could participate. Like I could comment on the photography style of the posts because that's my field. I may even comment about whoever is in the post. I like football so when I see footballers like Cristiano Ronaldo I get more interested, and I've found myself talking to others in online communities for Nike, Adidas and even ZALORA because of posts featuring Ronaldo.

Another participant, a 37-year-old female senior project manager, described a similar experience:

The brand is pretty diverse, you get the multiculture feeling and multitopic environment. For example, the brand went through a campaign of showcasing dogs with their collections, which prompted dog adoption charity movement, I have a dog so I found it really interesting. So the OBC is filled with different topics, information, culture features and people, so there is always something new.

According to these participants' responses, OBCs enable individuals to explore ideas or topics that appeal to them without restricting them to the core activity of the established community. Social media is considered synonymous with inclusivity and diversity acceptance (Stewart & Pavlou, 2002) and OBCs are arguably associated with a similar

concept. Luxury fashion brands have been compelled to mediate between exclusivity and openness to evolve their relationship with consumers (Grassi, 2020), but have been met with criticism from consumers who question the authenticity and the truthfulness of the experiences offered by the brands. Cooper, Merrilees and Miller (2020) argued that building authenticity and the truthfulness involves addressing improvements to a brand's core and advancing brand heritage by expressing brand innovation in experiences. A lack of such activity could generate negative perceptions from consumers or a lack of active participation in OBCs, as described by a 35-year-old male fashion retail manager:

> Luxury brands need to be open-minded to different people and communities especially if they are targeting worldwide audiences. They need to change their features, photographers, models and discussion topics, to make it more realistic to the audience and give them something relatable to talk about. Me and one of my friends discussed the African artists' collaborations with Dior. My friend didn't think much of Dior before, but, her being of Moroccan descent, found these specific posts quite interesting.

Based on this and the previous participant's response, OBC activity that facilitates inclusivity and engaging processes can impact individuals' attachment to a community and can build enthusiasm towards the brand. Researchers support the view that attachment develops when individuals predict similarity with others (Becker, 1960; Etzioni, 1961; Gould, 1979; Hall, Schneider, & Nygren, 1970; Kidron, 1978; Meyer & Allen, 1984) which, in this study, can include similarity between an individual and the brand, other OBC members or both. This aligns with the social influence category of identification, which causes individuals to change their personal perspective or behaviours in response to the presence of an individual, group or entity they identify with (Kelman, 1958). Consumers who identify with another, or share attributes with another, can influence the acceptance of information (Thompson, Kim, Loveland, Lacey, & Castro, 2017) in that they internalise the perspectives of those they identify with into their own perspective. OBCs can create engaging environments for individuals to share their passions (Schau *et al.*, 2009), information about the brand (Azar *et al.*, 2016; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001) and provide support to new members (Schau *et al.*, 2009), building emotional relationships among community members (Schembri & Latimer, 2016) and acceptance of community members' perspectives.

Observing consumers who develop an attachment or identify with other OBC members can encounter these members' perspectives through OBCs, and if these perspectives positively represent a brand they can influence the observing consumers to remain attached to a community dedicated to the brand (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021a). Additionally, identification influence can come from the brand as it does from other consumers' and customers' posted content. Strong identification with a brand can positively influence customers' intention to maintain long-term loyalty (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005; Alvarado-Karste & Guzmán, 2020) and customers are likely to resist the influence of negative e-WOM directed towards the brand (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021a). Of course, achieving identification requires actively reaching out to consumers through digital marketing activity. Poulsson and Kale (2004) argued that a marketing experience should be personally relevant, original and be surprising as well as informative and engaging to the customer. Achieving relevancy can be achieved by enhancing the social identification observing consumers harbour with the brand through OBC content as indicated by the previous responses. While the need for inclusivity is emphasised in luxury fashion OBC activity, a 29-year-old male software engineer argued that inclusivity does not mean luxury brands have to change their core identity:

> Dolce & Gabbana have unique posts because they invest a lot in photography. But more importantly they use Latin American models and celebrities which attracts my attention because you don't normally see that in high-end brands who target specific regions. Most luxury brands in the past have desired to preserve their heritage, identity and image which has standardised the luxury fashion image across several countries. This also got reflected through social media, who standardise their post messages to global audiences until brands became more conscious of worldwide consumers' cultural values and heritage. Like Dolce & Gabbana, they have conducted a right balance, they maintain their fashion identity but they adapt their social media posts for each region, so the posts gets a higher following than culturally standardised posts do. For example, this Columbian singer Nicky Jam, he's shown his Dolce & Gabbana collection, which received loads of attention from Latin Americans. So there is a lot of transparency of online posts with Hispanic consumers.

This participant's perception of luxury fashion brands' OBC activity details the positive reception customers have towards brands who continue to emphasise their original

image, heritage and values while enabling non-in-group members to feel included and relevant to the OBC and the brand itself. Though previous research supports the view that social identification with community members and a brand evokes participation within OBCs (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005; Alvarado-Karste & Guzmán, 2020; Dholakia *et al.*, 2004), customers can still positively process luxury fashion OBC content even if their self-identity does not fully and explicitly align with identities within OBCs. Many luxury fashion brands originated from countries which emphasised the country-of-origin influence in addition to the brand quality and status, and communicated these symbolic attributes to the global fashion market. According to Mandler, Johnen, and Gräve (2020), consumer–brand relationships in the luxury industry are built by the following non-personal luxury dimensions: quality, heritage and conspicuousness. Mandler *et al.* (2020) found these dimensions were superior compared to consumers' intention to seek hedonism and extend their self or identity and less noticeable compared to non-personal dimensions. Attributes within content that are more vivid require less cognitive effort and resources (Keller & Block, 1997) to influence individuals' perspectives, thus facilitating higher processing fluency leading to a positive consumer affect (Schwarz, 2004). In response to millennial consumers' concerns about a brand's cultural sensitivity, luxury fashion brands began to integrate social and cultural themes into collections and marketing (Deloitte, 2020), building the relevancy and inclusivity consumers perceived in luxury fashion brands in reference to their identity.

In adapting identities within luxury fashion OBCs, brands must maintain the allure of the brand's exclusivity in addition to facilitating inclusivity (Fuchs *et al.*, 2010; Grassi, 2020). Arguably, this involves maintaining original elements of the luxury brand, including the dimensions listed by Mandler *et al.* (2020), and emphasising a fit between the luxury fashion brand and the OBC followers. Individuals' identities are subject to changes or extensions depending on the environment or experience they previously encountered (Medin & Heit, 1999; Bentley, Greenaway, & Haslam, 2017; Ray, Mackie, Rydell, & Smith, 2008) and individuals are willing to adapt if they perceive a fit between themselves and another entity or person (Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994; Voci, 2006). Luxury brands that maintain key core dimensions can remain vivid and memorable to the customer, who would need to invest little cognitive processing effort (Keller & Block, 1997) into a brand that is already familiar to them. Thus, luxury brands arguably benefit more from facilitating inclusivity that encourages customers

and consumers to extend their identity by incorporating luxury fashion brand attributes. This can be achieved by emphasising attributes such as inclusivity and adaption to uniqueness of individual consumers' (Mandler *et al.*, 2020) in contrast to diminishing the core brand image and values, such as the case described in the aforementioned response provided by the 29-year-old male software engineer.

In a discussion of socially aligned identities, it is important to note the varying levels of inclusivity and exclusivity associated with luxury fashion OBCs that attract positive and negative reactions from individual customers and groups, which is associated with the paradox of the luxury label. While inclusivity and adaptability of OBC content and image is beneficial for attracting new customers, encouraging them to engage with the in-group community (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005), it can potentially alienate existing users (Cennamo & Santaló, 2015), including customers who favour an OBC's core and original image and values. The exclusivity of luxury brands has often been defined by the low accessibility to luxury brands to the mass market (Azemi *et al.*, 2022; Hennigs, Wiedmann, & Klarmann, 2012; Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). Social media is a digital platform that enables significant accessibility (Akman & Mishra, 2017), yet an emphasis on accessibility alone can lead to overexposure that can diminish other exclusivity qualities of luxury brands, such as perceived rarity, prestige and the emotional or hedonic values they bring to customers (Athwal, Istanbulluoglu, & McCormack, 2019; Phau & Prendergast, 2000; Tynan *et al.*, 2010) and perceptions of detachment. This concern has influenced the recommendation to practice a balance between accessibility and exclusivity by maintaining the brand's rarity, exquisiteness as well as high price (DeAcetis, 2020; Ishihara & Zhang, 2017). Arguably, this balance needs to be extended to OBCs in response to the high accessibility enabled by social media where OBCs are predominantly present. An overemphasis on inclusivity in OBCs and their posted content may cause users to perceive the OBC as not harbouring the quality, functionality and relevancy to help customers reach their intended goals. Such a perception was identified by a 25-year-old female university marketing student:

> Right now the brand OBC does not provide the information I want to know. It consists of followers with too many different style ideas, it doesn't provide specific information related to the category I am looking for, so I don't see any point following the OBC. I want to go to a site where there is a community with

a shared vision regarding the fashion appearance I am looking for from the brand.

This response reflects issues discussed earlier regarding the perceived fit between an individual's identity and attributes with another entity like OBCs and community members. For some customers, luxury goods are symbols of personal and social identity (Vickers & Renand, 2003), which can be altered through the inclusivity of customer segments with different fashion tastes and styles. Existing customers may lose the environmental quality in using luxury brands' digital platforms (Riley & Lacroix, 2003), particularly through the brand–consumer engagement on OBCs that can arguably dilute brand value perceptions and decrease psychological distance between the brand and consumers (Park, Im, & Kim, 2020) as suggested by a 26-year-old male human resource administrator:

> When I buy the item, it feels like "my" item rather than everyone else's item. I think posting about my purchased item to the general audience devalues the brand itself and makes me feel like I have a widely available item rather than an exclusive item. You post a picture about your new high-end purchase and just anyone becomes involved in the conversation, losing the illusion of the brand.

While a decrease in psychological distance attracts new consumers to OBCs to generate engaging conversations, it increases the risk of generating conversations irrelevant to the luxury brand and the existing members. If customers perceive differences between them, the OBC or the members, they are likely to resist their influence and potentially decrease further usage of an OBC (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021a) as supported by a 38-year-old male senior project manager:

> Mr Porter is a brand with a suit product line I really like. They have a website and an online brand community. But I think their OBC is rather inactive with their suit category, and the pages are filled with latest fashion trends that do not match the suit product image of the brand, making the information far to generalised than specialised. You see what I think is hip hop-style items, a mix up of different styles and non-suit related items, which does not match the intended style I am seeking from this brand; I would go for the suit category that reflects a professional and luxury style.

Similarly, another participant, a 39-year-old female IT test consultant, stated:

If they were more specific on their core item, including the fine details of the make, fit and alterations, as well as what accessories will match and explanations on how they put the items together. This is the information that is catered to their specific product line and the occasions their products are appropriate for. If they advertised this information, bit by bit, then that would really interest me and encourage me to visit their OBC.

These responses indicate that individuals within luxury fashion OBC in-groups seek to obtain specific information or goals that align with their expectations, which may differ from other OBC customers' and consumers'. In the luxury fashion context, existing OBC customers' expectations may align with a specific style image they perceive the brand should represent, as argued by the aforementioned responses. This supports the view that the desire to maintain brand identity or exclusivity comes from customers as well as from corporate managers, despite the external industry trends that may compromise a brand's image and make adaption or change necessary (Cooper *et al.*, 2020). However, the decreased functionality of an OBC for an existing customer does not mean they will discontinue their loyalty to a luxury brand. OBC customers may acknowledge that change is necessary, and understand brands need to adapt to remain relevant within the industry, as suggested by a 25-year-old male university marketing student:

I can understand they need to move according to the fashion trends, and therefore advertise information that reflects different styles thus attracting followers of those styles, but then they lose that uniqueness and possibly the interest of followers who followed their original luxury status category.

From this response, an additional point can be arguably drawn on the issue of what kind of change luxury fashion brands make through their OBC activity. As mentioned before, brand managers may refuse to comply with industry trends, in favour of maintaining the brand's authenticity. Instead, they could adopt purposeful change that emphasised relevant and evolutionary change (Cooper *et al.*, 2020), in contrast to reversing the brand's structure and image in a short period of time. This approach can support the maintaining of customers' positive perception that the brand aligns with their identity, thus motivating customers to remain with the OBC (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021a). However, regardless of changes in OBC content and image, customers with a strong attitudinal

loyalty are less likely to cease their loyalty towards a luxury fashion brand. Attitudinal loyalty towards a brand reduces the marketing persuasion from other brands (Kamran-Disfani *et al.,* 2017) and can maintain continuing behavioural loyalty towards a brand (Nyadzayo *et al.*, 2018). Additionally, when individuals have a psychological ownership with tangible and intangible objects, they desire to maintain a relationship or attachment with the object (Brown *et al.*, 2005) and seek to protect it if attributes of exclusivity are associated with the object (Lee & Kim, 2020). Thus, while OBCs may lose their purpose due to lowered exclusivity of information and brand status for an existing customer, customers' attitudinal relationship with the brand causes them to be more likely to maintain their loyalty towards the brand compared to new OBC consumers.

4.3.4 Collective community intentions

Collective community intentions refers to individuals' intentions to become active socialisers with other customers through OBCs and the motivations behind such intentions. One group of individuals may hold the brand in such high regard that they feel motivated to promote and discuss it and contribute towards helping new OBC customers learn about the brand. New OBC customers who require further learning to build a relationship with the brand are thus motivated to act collectively with other OBC followers. Some OBC customer groups may prefer a more exclusive audience that shares a mutual brand preference and avoids meeting customers with different preferences. Additionally, some OBC users may prefer not to engage with the intention to avoid negative conflict with members of OBCs, or because they feel they do not have the relevant experience or knowledge that would contribute towards collective conversations, thus they may remain passive observers of OBC conversations.

The motivation to become active socialisers may originate from the commitment individuals develop with a luxury fashion OBC. Buchanan (1974, p. 533) viewed commitment as an individual's biased and emotional attachment to an organisation's goals and values that align with their own. When the goals and values of a fashion brand align with individuals, these individuals are likely to remain committed to an OBC (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021a; Ozuem *et al.*, 2021b). Over time, these individuals may change from information seekers to socialisers, taking a more active role in OBC engagement and becoming brand advocates (Meek *et al.*, 2019). Social media influencers are the

most commonly referred to OBC socialisers, categorised as independent third party endorsers with the ability to shape attitudes through blogs, tweets and the use of other social media sites (Audrezet, de Kerviler, & Moulard, 2018; Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011). Many social media influencers may have started as ordinary people showcasing their everyday life and consumption habits through visual content and then emerged as an intermediary between a brand's advertisers and consumers. Customers seeking to act as influencers are often driven by intrinsic motivation: their involvement in activities is based on personal interest and spontaneous satisfaction (Gagné & Deci, 2005). A 26-year-old female MBA graduate expressed her desire to become an influencer within the fashion industry:

> I plan to blog about beauty, fashion and lifestyle including luxury. I've become interested in informing others of the fashion brands I encounter. I want to inspire other people to enjoy their life and take control over their fashion style, and I want others to be able to come and talk about different fashion ideas to inspire others.

For individuals aspiring to be influencers, social media makes self-branding more attainable and provides them a rare experience generally achieved by elite individuals, like celebrities and socialites, who achieved status prior to becoming involved in digital marketing activity (Khamis, Ang, & Welling, 2017). Some individuals use influencer ability to engage in online conversations related to a specific brand. The intrinsic motivation individuals have in showcasing their product or service consumption is used to describe influencers' authentic passion to endorse brands (Audrezet et al., 2018). A brand may be greatly integrated into a customer's identity; the customer's passion and interest in a brand may motivate them to strongly involve the brand in their online engagement with other customers in OBCs (Ozuem et al., 2021b; Pentina, Guilloux, & Micu, 2018). A 32-year-old female accountant outlined her perception of endorsing a luxury fashion brand through OBCs:

> You are promoting a great brand, a brand that represents the best of things in life and you can encourage to aim for the best of fashion. You feel good about it and it gets people talking to you. In way you become a brand promoter and supporter at the same time. You see a promotion event on social media, you immediately call up your friends and family to get them involved and enjoy the

offers. You see someone comment negatively about the brand, you can argue against their comment and contribute to defending the brand. Or someone comments about potentially buying the same item you purchased yourself, you can become the perfect sales rep.

Customers who become active socialisers within OBCs obtain benefits such as a sense of enjoyment from the engagement and in addition can provide beneficial returns to the brand. Marketers seek influencer customers for the intimate communication they engage in with their social networks (Khamis *et al.*, 2017) as well as the supporting endorsement they can provide if negative e-WOM emerges in OBCs (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021a). New customers may not have the experience or confidence in a brand, including luxury ones, and can be influenced by negative e-WOM, which carries more weight with customers' brand evaluations compared to positive e-WOM (Balaji, Khong, & Chong, 2016; Richins, 1983; Zhang, Feick, & Mittal, 2014), and even may engage in negative e-WOM if they do not have a high-quality relationship with the brand (Kähr *et al.*, 2016). In contrast, loyal customers with a strong relationship with the brand are more tolerant of brand's transgressions (Hess, Ganesan, & Klein 2003; Tax, Brown, & Chandrashekaran, 1998) and are less influenced by the negative comments of other OBC customers (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021a). Loyal customers have the opportunity to restore a brand's equity by responding to negative e-WOM in OBCs; their motivation is mediated by their relationship with, and commitment to, the brand as experienced by a 34-year-old male project assistant manager customer:

> The brand gives me so much in terms of return for my investment. For the quality in life the products have given me, I feel very grateful for the care the company gives to me as a customer. I feel that others need to know what they are missing out on. For other customers doubting the brand's quality I am able to tell them that the brand does deliver as expected, which is my way of repaying the brand for delivering great quality to me as a customer.

This response emphasises a personal satisfaction in giving back to a brand from which an individual had previously received rewarding outcomes from purchases and from associating on OBCs, which, in turn, motivated them to give back to the community by providing information and advice when needed (Liao & Chou, 2012; Mathwick *et al.*, 2008). This online engagement customers deliver can likewise benefit new customers

within OBCs who are yet to build a relationship with a luxury fashion brand. One potential intention that influences customers to visit OBCs is to enhance their brand-related knowledge, which can be done by finding opinions, thoughts and knowledge shared by active socialisers or customers through OBCs (Meek *et al.*, 2019). The perceived value of an OBC and customers' intentions to participate collectively with the community is mediated by the perceived resources and benefits the OBC's social networks bring (Cheng *et al.*, 2020); a sense of feeling welcomed into the community can increase the value of basic online activities, such as information searching (Dholakia *et al.*, 2004), as supported by a 30-year-old female procurement specialist:

> I haven't regularly bought the brand before. I trust the brand but products differ in make and style and I don't trust myself to make a final decision. I have to rely on the comments to get some insight into the quality of new products. I trust these people commenting know what they are talking about and it's more than what I would figure out if by myself.

OBCs facilitate the practice of bridging, which occurs when individuals from different backgrounds or experiences interact with each other (Putnam, 2000) opening opportunities for information and emotional support sharing (Williams, 2006). The level of engagement is an important factor that influences customers' evaluation of service quality (Rezaei & Valaei, 2017), along with the perceived level of informational and emotional support delivered through online interactions (Tan & Yan, 2020), which can be directly provided by conversations initiated by OBC customers, enhancing satisfaction in the digital environment (Gelbrich, Hagel, & Orsingher, 2021). In addition, the response provided by the 30-year-old female procurement specialist specifically highlights the factor of trust in members within OBCs, which can be related back to customers who act as influencers. As mentioned earlier, many social media influencers come from ordinary backgrounds and are actual consumers of products, services and brands. These influencers have a more intimate connection with the audience, some being closely acquainted with their networks, and they share similar traits, personality and goals with their audience (Khamis et al., 2017). Endorsements that come from influencers, or customers engaging with their social network, appear more trustworthy and authentic to the audience compared to FGC (Audrezet et al., 2018; Hewett et al., 2016), increasing the audience's willingness to engage in OBCs as implied by a 29-year-old female administrator:

I feel good talking about the brand with others, because sometimes others open up and share their experiences, and it gives me a chance to learn about other branded products. I always talk with my friends and acquaintances through OBCs, "what do you think of this and that". I always need someone to shop with because it feels good to share the experience and have someone help you choose so you get the assurance you made the right choice.

These responses indicate the importance of new customers feeling part of a collective community that enhances the value of online activities because this helps new customers develop a sense of personal achievement from the activity (Dholakia *et al.*, 2004); this is especially important in an industry that must deliver cognitive customer experience in a digital environment in place of the absent immediate physical availability of the products and luxury fashion stores. However, the motivation to conduct collective community activity within OBCs can be reduced if customers feel that their intended goals and vision do not align with other OBC users'. Researchers have argued that shared outlooks, values and principles bridge the perceived similarity between individuals causing them to identify with each other in a community, which indicates a social influence impact from the community itself (Cheng *et al.*, 2020; Huang, Chen, Ou, Davison, & Hua, 2017; Kara, Vredeveld, & Ross Jr, 2018; Kelman, 1958; Venkatesh & Davis, 2000). However, OBCs can contain users who follow the brand and consume posted information but do not actively participate in the online engagement (Meek *et al.*, 2019). It can be argued that customers follow a range of OBCs from different industries, and may not actively participate in all of them unless they feel a closeness and a belonging to the community (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000; Fournier, 1998). This is supported by the following statement provided by a 28-year-old male MSc International business student:

I do follow luxury brand OBCs but I don't take part in the conversations or content posts. But I do engage within OBCs from other industries and engage with their followers. We talk because we buy products and share an interest in discussing those brands. I feel though that I am a sociable person, so if I develop a liking towards luxury fashion products and ones that my friends like, I see myself engaging within the OBC.

Though this participant stressed they were not an active participant in luxury fashion OBCs engagement, they highlighted the importance of connecting with like-minded individuals with whom they share common interests, values or hobbies, even with OBC members they may not directly know (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021a), as indicated by a 29-year-old female administrator:

> There's this one influencer, Millie Mackintosh, she was in *Made in Chelsea*. I'm not necessarily a fan of hers but I've liked the trends she has promoted, including Chanel. When it comes to fashion, she speaks the same language as me, so I continue to follow her through social media to check any updates she has on her high-end brand purchases.

A 28-year-old male university business and language student described his experience when his social network attempted to influence his decision on brand choice:

> I have some followers, even friends, who will directly comment that I should stop purchasing from this brand and go for another, because they don't like the image and style of the brand I buy from. I appreciate that others think they are giving me good advice on brands, but their suggestions aren't for me. It depends on how their brand suggestion compares to mine; I might think their suggestions are good but do not match what I'm looking for.

Both aforementioned responses indicate a willingness to acknowledge information from others, including non-close acquaintances, without feeling the need to adapt or change their behaviours or attitudes to reflect those of these online networks. Arguably, consumers' attitudes and behaviours will be impacted by Kelman's (1958) identification social influence category, which emphasises the acceptance of information from an individual without changing one's own attitudes and behaviours; however, a consumer can eventually be influenced under the internalisation category, in which case they actively integrate other individuals' attitudes, values or goals as part of their own personal beliefs and goals (Kelman, 1958; Kagan, 1958). Internalisation social influence is achieved when an individual accepts the influence as rewarding (Kelman, 1958), which correlates with customers' acceptance of and identification with message sources within OBCs (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021a) who can support informative brand learning and engaging experiences. In reference to the statement provided by the 28-year-old male MSc International business student, though they are willing to engage,

the value of the OBC is arguably measured by the perceived similarity between them and other OBC members, leading them to accept their influence and build their community engagement intentions. In contrast, a perceived difference between customer groups reduces the likelihood of intentions to engage with each other. A 33-year-old male pricing specialist shared his perspective regarding the differences between his luxury fashion vision and that of his social networks':

> I don't communicate with the majority of friends on and offline about my preference towards the brand. I mean I really like the trends and the style, but I think most of my male friends don't like the colourful variation style of the brand. The brand represents an image that is different from them, they prefer simple designs and single colours that are more greyish, black or white. Whereas the brand I like uses colours that my friends are not used to seeing or trying out. I would only share to others who have a mutual interest in the brand. Some of my male friends may think I'm weird for liking such a brand, so I only tell the friends who won't judge. Because of that I won't include them in my online conversation, I'll only share with my female friends and colleagues who have more interest. It's a dangerous game discussing luxury brands you like on OBCs because you will encounter people who don't like your brand and you may not like their preference. It's natural to avoid each other so you don't get into arguments that get out of context.

This identifies individual social groups that exist in the main in-group of online communities where several opposing customer perspectives can be identified, particularly in the luxury fashion context (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021a; Ozuem *et al.*, 2021b). Fashion itself can formulate individuals' social identities, causing them to create separate groups within OBCs that align with their personality (Crawford-Camiciottoli *et al.*, 2014; Ranfagni *et al.*, 2016). In order for individuals to feel included in a community, a degree of shared language with the majority of the group is needed to encourage their membership (Meek *et al.*, 2019; Williams, 2006). Additionally, a level of perceived similarity is required in order for an identification with members effect (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021a). Consequently, an absence of perceived similarity will probably reduce the social influence a community has on motivating OBC membership. Likewise, the response provided by a 33-year-old male pricing specialist supports the view that active members of an OBC will feel demotivated to engage close networks in

certain topics due to difference in language, goals and vision. Additionally, it is possible that a lack of a supportive environment would reduce individuals' motivation to disclose information online (Lin, Chou, & Huang, 2021), prompting them not to engage with others who oppose their perspectives, as expressed by a 27-year-old female university education student:

> I have observed several boycotts prompted by individuals who saw issues in fashion brands' moral compass. I think the #BoycottDolce is quite well known, with the representatives and marketing material putting the brand in a really bad media light. But for all the company's flaws, I would still purchase from the brand. I don't feel I need to compromise my style, but I'm also mindful of people's frustration with the negative messages the brand representatives' send. Sometimes I worry that others may target me for continuing to follow the brand, so it's nice to know there are others who still support the brand. It's good for us brand supporters because some need confidence that others will defend your brand choice against the trollers through social media.

This response highlights the negative valence individuals develop in response to the concerns they have regarding their intention to conduct collective community activities, such as participating in online conversations. Negative valence can occur following an experience in situations (Frijda, 1986) such as encounters with online conversations that showcase negative brand sentiments that customers may disagree with, thus generating a negative valence towards OBC activity. Therefore, an online community that encourages a supportive environment increases the likelihood that individuals will actively participate, increasing satisfaction in the digital environment (Lin *et al.*, 2021; Gelbrich *et al.*, 2021).

A final issue that can impact customers' collective community intentions is their perception regarding the level of relevancy their potential contribution harbours. This issue can be related to the weak ties that can exist in a community, where the majority of members are anonymous (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001) and do not regularly interact directly with OBC members. While a shared language and regular interactions between members may encourage the development of strong network ties, they do not necessarily increase the quality of information members perceive they feel they can

deliver. A 38-year-old male MBA student addressed their reasoning for being less active in OBC conversations stated:

> I don't see any point posting my own comments or pictures. I don't think anything I post will be taken seriously because lots of people post stuff that is repetitive, so I doubt my post would be noticed. Plus, I'm sure everyone by the time they read comment 25 or something will stop reading.

This participant reflects on the perceived usefulness of their involvement within OBC participation activities. Perceived usefulness is an important factor influencing the acceptance of technology and social platforms (Agag & El-Masry, 2016; Ayeh, Au, & Law, 2013; Joo & Sang, 2013) and can reflect a consumers' belief regarding whether their participation in an OBC improves their experience or the experience of other OBC members. New OBC customers are probably still in the process of learning about the community and forming a connection with it (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021a) compared to more experienced community members who follow their own initiative (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005) and engage regularly within OBCs. A 25-year-old male sales assistant provided his own perception regarding the perceived usefulness of his potential participation:

> If I had bought the product, had used it and thus have a practical opinion of the product, then I would be more than happy to recommend others to use it. But if I have no knowledge other than observing pictures of a product, then I wouldn't feel comfortable recommending it to others. I have an opinion on many fashion items but not solid knowledge to justify such opinions to others. Influencers give in-depth details of the products and the emotional sparks they got. Me? I would just say "I like it, you should get it", some may that say that is very boring and want to be told something they don't know or something exciting.

This statement proposes that the social influence individuals attempt to deliver is considered by receiving customers and by the potential information senders. For new customers, their short-term experience may impact the length or duration of the conversations they will conduct (Geer, 1988), potentially causing them to feel that they cannot contribute to OBC activity. Instead, new OBC customers may prefer to follow experienced community members for security (Chen *et al.*, 2016), thus causing them to be less active in OBCs. While new OBC customers may feel they are unable to socially influence other OBC customers, they are receivers of influence themselves and it

motivates them to remain with an OBC. Eventually, they may also engage in collective community activities when they have developed confidence and shared goals and language with other OBC customers.

4.4 Summary

This chapter began by introducing and justifying Gioia *et al.*'s (2013) systematic approach to thematic analysis as a suitable data analytical approach. Gioia *et al.*'s (2013) approach stands on identifying new concepts that give meaning to humans' experiences and theoretical understanding of those experiences; it correlates with the social constructivist paradigm this study has adopted. The researcher's voice, examination of the new data and theoretical literature played a collective role in identifying four themes: relationship with luxury brand, influence of content valence, socially aligned identity and collective community intentions. These themes illustrate a gradual construct of new knowledge, representing socially constructed perceptions and experiences of luxury fashion OBC customers and consumers and the association of social influence and loyalty with the identified concepts.

The next chapter will discuss a loyalty typology concerning luxury fashion OBCs and its relationship with the four themes, social influence concepts and the impact OBCs have on customers' loyalty and the impact customers have within OBCs. Such explanations will meet the aim of this study, to create a conceptual model and theoretical construct that could be suitable for developing effective customer loyalty strategies for OBCs, in the context of the luxury fashion industry.

Chapter five
Discussion and conceptual framework

5.1 Introduction

This chapter reflects on the findings and the themes that emerged as presented in Chapter four; Chapter four explored and validated the epistemic choices for an emerging theoretical construct that reflects the impact of OBCs on customer loyalty in the luxury fashion industry. This chapter presents a discussion of the traditionalists, inspirers, self-containers and expellers (TISE) framework on the grounds of existing literature and empirical data collected for the current study. First, the chapter introduces the development procedures of the TISE framework, presenting a summary of the key findings from literature related to OBCs and customer loyalty, and the empirical findings from the primary data collection that influenced the formation of the conceptual framework. Four key categories that emerged from the findings – traditionalists, inspirers, self-containers and expellers – are integrated within the TISE framework, and are discussed, revealing a synthesis of psychological and behavioural stances of customers and consumers within luxury fashion OBCs.

5.2 Formation of conceptual framework

The procedure to develop the TISE framework (Figure 2) was informed by extant literature (Appendix 10) and the researcher's involvement in a repetitive data analysis process that generated interpretation of the emerged theoretical insight (Gioia *et al*., 2013) that went beyond the explicitly stated words of the participants (Ozuem *et al*., 2021a). Consideration of existing theory and research associated with the OBC and customer loyalty context revealed perspectives and conceptualisations that informed the researcher of the gaps in knowledge of loyalty in OBCs. These contributed existing theoretical insights and helped the researcher develop new insights, which influenced the formation of the OBC loyalty typology within the TISE framework.
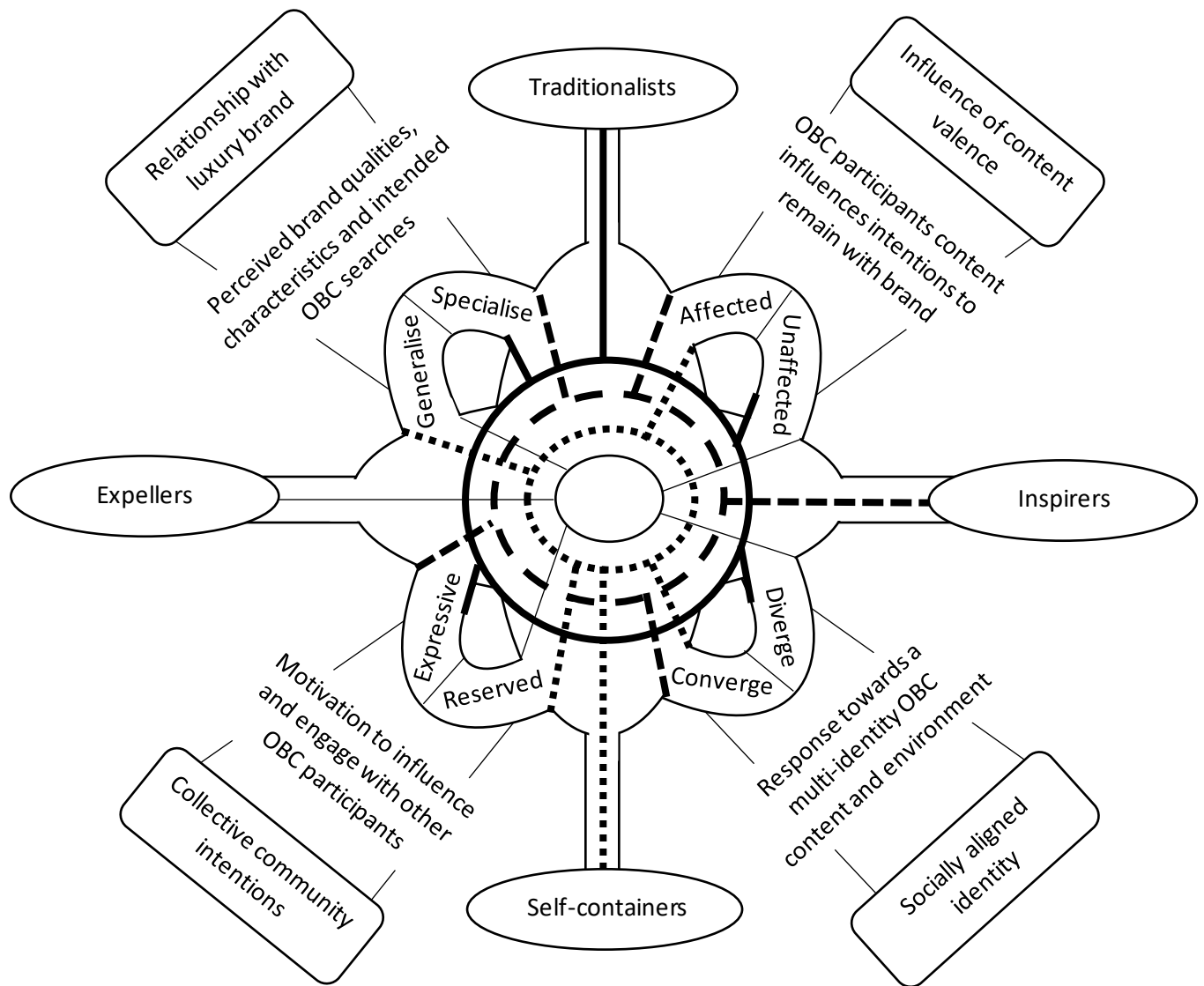
Figure 2: Traditionalists, inspirers, self-containers and expellers (TISE) framework

5.2.1 Existing theory and research

As illustrated in the research problem and rationale for the study (Chapter one), generalised and broad reasoning has been applied in the attempt to understand OBCs and customer loyalty problems, causing both to be conceptualised within a single customer segment. Extant literature on OBCs has particularly examined the active engagement element of customers within OBCs strongly associating it with brand purchasing and loyalty (Harmeling *et al.*, 2017; Pansari & Kumar, 2017) and community membership (Meek *et al.*, 2019). Pansari and Kumar (2017) detailed important engagement factors that indirectly influence customer purchasing, including voicing feedback, blogging or circulating WOM. This is important, given active

members' influence in maintaining OBCs' continuous value (Parreño *et al.*, 2015, p. 90) and interconnects with a separate study conducted by Meek *et al.* (2019), who concluded that active engagement is vital in adapting passive observers into active OBC members. Their findings of the construct of OBC environments is reflected by four conceptually identified dimensions: shared language, shared vision, social trust and norm of reciprocity between OBC members. OBC customers are arguably motivated by the desire to connect with other people (Cheng *et al.*, 2020), but when individuals have weak ties or relationships with a community, a shared language and common goals bridge the psychological distance between them and the OBC, enabling individuals to feel included in the community (Meek *et al.*, 2019). Ongoing conversations between OBC members, with shared common vision and language, contribute to facilitating stronger relationships between members (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001) which can create higher levels of brand loyalty (Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2013). This correlates with the argument that engagement activities, such as the social media conversations that customers practise, can attract potential customers and indirectly contribute value and generate sales for brands (Pansari & Kumar, 2017).

However, though the findings of the aforementioned studies offer valuable insights for understanding patterns of engagement between customers and consumers on OBCs and its impact on loyalty, fail to capture the varying levels of customer involvement, millennials' characteristics within OBCs and the different contextual factors influencing their loyalty towards brands through OBCs. The positivist stance on OBCs and customer loyalty generally aggregates individuals' engagement and commitment towards OBCs ignoring the variance among customers, especially among the millennial demographic cohort (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021b), conceptualising customers within OBCs as objectively measurable and generalisable across digital and industry settings, and as a universal phenomenon. Meek *et al.*'s (2019) adoption of social capital theory focused their study on determining the structure of an OBC, assessing the members' embedded dependence on the community through the concept of parasocial interaction (Sanz-Blas, Buzova, & Pérez-Ruiz, 2021). Embeddedness is perceived as a key determinant of the success of virtual communities (Chiu, Fu, Lin, & Chen, 2019), and of members' proactive behaviour within communities (Kuchmaner, Wiggins, & Grimm, 2019), which Meek *et al.* (2019) define through the factors of trust, reciprocity and common vision. These are important factors in understanding community formation,

emphasising an individual's sense of belonging to the community or a sense of identification (Sanz-Blas *et al.*, 2021).

However, Meek *et al.*'s (2019) findings failed to consider the heterogeneous nature of customers and of OBCs. The unrestrictive nature of online communities can give consumers higher self-esteem to participate, but there can be varying degrees of self-esteem and satisfaction within these communities (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). The dimensions proposed by Meek *et al.* (2019) are arguably relevant variables to conceptualising OBC customers, but they generalise customers without considering the individual levels of influence each of the variables has on different individuals, and the varying social influence between groups of OBC members. Individual groups of consumers and customers may be present within OBCs, with variation in social identities and characteristics. Yet, despite these differences, individuals can be influenced by social networks who share an association with a preferred luxury brand (Mandel *et al.*, 2006; Meek *et al.*, 2019), but they might not necessarily be influenced to adapt their interests and language. In OBCs, members' language can set them apart from other groups (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001), but instead of dissociating from a brand, members may instead integrate their own language into an OBC thus creating sub-communities within the main community. This maintains the relevancy of relationships within communities, and brings attention to the impact of holistic characteristics and activities identified from within OBCs that can inform the levels of social influence between OBC members and the brand. Additionally, it arguably highlights the importance of varying levels and types of interactions that influence customers' and consumers' commitment to OBCs and loyalty towards a brand.

Ozuem *et al.* (2021a) set the foundations for a new understanding of customers' interaction and processing of OBCs and their level of engagement within OBCs. They stated that "*engagement in social media platforms is not merely a stable individual construct but is a dynamic driven process based on individual levels of involvement*" (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021a, p. 774) and that involvement and participation can be interpreted according to an individual's subjective understanding and thus be categorised into different levels. In contrast to the positivism paradigm that holds that there is a single reality, Ozuem *et al.* (2021a) selected social constructivism as a relevant philosophical stance to acknowledge the multiple social realities existing in relation to subjective conceptualisations of epistemological interactions. Their investigation of fashion

customers provided insights into heterogeneous customers' interaction and influence within OBCs, from which they generated a loyalty typology that combined a holistic set of OBCs' characteristics and the customers' and consumers' perception of the OBC environment they engage in. One of the key elements that emerged from Ozuem *et al.*'s (2021a) discussion is the relationship between members and the influence they have on OBC commitment. They noted that customers will accept influence when they can identify with the attitudes, values or goals of the source of influence (Kagan, 1958), but will not necessarily change their own attitude and behaviours to match others'. Instead, customers may observe the information value the OBC brings that can enhance their knowledge and experience through their interaction within OBCs (Cheng *et al.*, 2020; Ozuem *et al.*, 2021b; Kim & Niehm, 2009). Thus, the context of both the relationships between customers and the brand and other OBC members, and the context of the content observed or exchanged within OBCs, are important factors that the researcher integrated into the TISE framework.

5.2.2 Experiential knowledge and exploratory research

As the empirical findings indicate, the perception of OBCs in the luxury fashion industry and their influence on customer loyalty is multidimensional, considering the different attitudes and behaviours individuals conduct in regard to the four identified themes examined in Chapter four. The current study acknowledges Meek *et al.*'s (2019) framework whereby the language and interaction of active members of OBCs can influence or motivate other individuals' commitment to the OBC, and the importance of establishing a structured relationship between members and the brand. However, OBC environments are dynamic with members with various characteristics that can cause individuals to respond to similar OBC encounters and characteristics or features of a luxury fashion OBC differently, reflecting varying types of loyalty. The empirical findings of the current study support the findings from the literature, which argues the existence of different categories of loyalty types that reflect individual customers' type of relationship with a brand or community (Dick & Basu, 1994; Ozuem *et al.*, 2016) and the dimensions that can be perceived as antecedents influencing their level of involvement within OBCs. Additionally, the findings of this study also add to the knowledge proposed by existing literature. The current study identifies four major themes (relationship with the luxury brand, influence of content valence, socially aligned identity and collective community intentions) that describe the behaviours and

attitudes of the categorised groups of the loyalty typology within the TISE framework, reflecting how they individually perceive OBCs, the extent to which the OBC affects their loyalty, and the extent to which the loyalty of each OBC customer category is influenced by other customers.

Regarding the relationship with a brand in the luxury fashion industry, customers may associate qualities and characteristics with a brand that may differ from those that other customers or users of the same OBC associate with the brand. Several researchers have associated consumer–brand alignment with customer commitment towards luxury brand products (Aaker, 1997; Khalifa & Shukla, 2021; Ranfagni *et al.,* 2016; Sirgy, 1982), which, if changed or weakened could cause luxury customers to lose a sense of self (Fuchs *et al.,* 2013). The current study's findings support this conclusion of the aforementioned research; however, the empirical data and interview interactions also revealed the different traits and personalities the millennial participants attributed to a luxury brand or desired to be represented within the luxury brand OBC. Individuals with a strong connection with the brand would associate specific qualities and characteristics with themselves or the brand, which influence them to conduct information searches on OBCs that specifically reflect such qualities and characteristics. Some individuals conducting specialised searches may identify with attributes that align with the luxury fashion brand's original or existing brand personality, whereas others may seek attributes that align with their individual identity when searching within OBCs with the intention of retaining a relationship with the luxury fashion brand. Other individuals who have a low attachment to the brand, or have a generalised view of a luxury fashion brand, may conduct a generalised search through OBCs. OBCs are categorised as being specialised to a specific brand (Albert *et al.*, 2008) and while individuals may form communities separate from others (Dholakia *et al.*, 2004; He *et al.*, 2017; VanMeter *et al.*, 2018), membership of OBCs can still comprise individuals who can be segmented into general or special interest groups. Thus, the TISE framework highlights how an individual's relationship with a brand impacts their perception of the brand's image and online searches in the context of it being specialised or generalised.

The influence of content valence can contribute to motivating OBC participants to remain with a brand or continue engaging within OBCs. This theoretical construct within the TISE framework is informed by Kelman's (1958) categories of social

influence theory (compliance, identification and internalisation), which reflect varying degrees of influence individuals are willing to accept from others, which in the context of OBCs includes either or both the brand and customers who are part of the OBC community. The influence of other participants present within OBCs emerged as a dominant factor from the empirical data of the current study, and the content participants shared through OBCs could have different levels of influence on the individuals who encountered the content. In the TISE framework, individuals are categorised as either "affected" or "unaffected" by other participants' content. The valence of the content reflects the emotions the publishers' indirectly display or that individuals develop from observing the content. The antecedents that can impact an individual's response to the content can include the level of attachment they have with the brand or community prior to observing the content, which may cause an individual to accept or reject the attempted influence of an OBC participant. Additionally, the effect of OBC participants' content can also depend on whether the perceived sentiment or message and other salient characteristics displayed through the content are agreeable or disagreeable to the individual, which will vary depending on what is most salient to the individual.

An important factor implied by the interviewed participants was the range of topics, interests and individuals that could be identified within OBCs. Though OBCs will most likely have a community of members with specialised interest in a brand, and a shared language and vision, the empirical findings of the current study argue that individuals will probably perceive a community of an OBC to consist of a range of identities reflected through the content and environment as a whole. The theme, socially aligned identity, in the analysis of the current study refers to when an individual evaluates a perceived match between themselves and the characteristics of an OBC and whether they feel a sense of belonging. In the TISE framework, the theme is linked to when individuals engage with an OBC environment and content they perceive to reflect multiple identities, and whether that causes them to converge with or diverge from the OBC. Kelman's (1958) social identification and internalisation influence categories influenced this characterisation. The study's participants indicated the presence of several actors who influenced their perception of a luxury fashion brand's OBC, including friends and acquaintances, celebrities, influencers and the brand itself. Social identification influences occur when individuals accept or acknowledge positively the

influence of someone they respect (Kelman, 1958; Warshaw, 1980) or an intangible object like a brand or organisation (Kübler *et al.*, 2019). A strong identification between individuals increases the likelihood of influence acceptance, whereas a weak identification reduces this likelihood. However, for some individuals, though they may identify with another individual, group or object, their private agreement or disagreement with an expressed behaviour or attitude can have a stronger influence on their processing of OBC environments and content; this relates to the internalisation category of social influence (Kelman, 1958). Individuals can have different perceptions regarding a multi-identity OBC, harbouring different attitudes on how a luxury brand and identities should be represented in OBCs. Arguably, this means that identification and internalisation will have varying influence on each individual's decision processing on whether to converge with or diverge from engaging within an OBC.

The final theme, collective community intentions, is referenced in the TISE framework regarding an individual's willingness to influence and engage with other participants, referring to them as choosing to be either expressive or reserved. Although customers have the opportunity to be actively engaged in OBCs, they may choose to be passive engagers and observe OBC activity (Ozuem & Willis, 2021). The decision to be reserved in engagement does not necessarily mean the individual is not a loyal customer to the brand, but are less motivated to conduct collective community behaviour. This is argued by Willis (2021) stating that "*within OBCs, customers who are loyal to the brand may appear emotionless, which is due to their low level of online engagement with other customers*" (p. 166). If an individual is expressive within an OBC, it does not mean they harbour a brand loyalty status, and they may engage in OBCs in ways that do not generate efficient returns to the brand or directly create negative brand sentiments within OBCs (Ozuem & Willis, 2021). As the interview data suggests, customers' relationships with a brand and perspective towards luxury fashion OBCs, along with other varying individual characteristics linked to the four previous themes, can influence the level of collective community behaviour they intend to practice. However, it should be noted that OBC engagement is multidimensional, thus a low level of intention to influence and engage with others does not necessarily coincide with an unwillingness to remain committed to a brand or OBC.

5.3 TISE

The current study presents the TISE framework which comprises a loyalty typology of traditionalists, inspirers, self-containers and expellers. Each customer type is characterised by different behaviours and attitudes they express at varying levels that are related to the four themes discussed in Chapter four; that is, they each have varying responses to the same four themes that reflect significant OBC and customer loyalty characteristics in the luxury fashion industry, making them each embedded units in a single case study (Yin, 2014) relevant to the current study. Further explanation of the four categorised groups and their connection to each theme is provided in the following sub-sections.

5.3.1 Traditionalists

Traditionalist are active customers who are heavily influenced by their relationship with a luxury fashion brand which is embedded by their perspective of the social identity that the luxury fashion industry signals. Their thinking is not necessarily centred around the characteristic of the perceived exclusivity of luxury branded products, which is important to specific consumer segments, but around the language, aesthetics and themes the brand represents and communicates through OBCs that informs the brand's identity. Traditionalists desire the preserving of a luxury fashion brand's core, its original or traditional qualities and characteristics, both offline and online. Consumers with a high global identity, which influences them to perceive the social value of luxury, identify with and desire the characteristics attached to a luxury brand (Ma, Hong, Yoo, & Yang, 2021), which can critically influence their willingness to buy foreign and domestic products (Lam, Ahearne, Hu, & Schillewaert, 2010). Similarly, traditionalists identify with luxury fashion brands that reflect key characteristics, and desire those to be preserved and transferred into OBCs in contrast to the brand adapting its personality or image to match consumers, who may be perceived as being the opposite in terms of the traditional brand image traditionalist customers may uphold. Arguably, traditionalist customers' perspectives reflect that a brand's symbolic value goes beyond simply acting as a socially signalling branding tool, to being utilised by customers as a focal object that symbolises memories of the past that communicate cultural and social meaning (Appiah & Watson, 2021). Symbolic memories, such as a customer's first consumption and experience of a luxury fashion product and a customer's memory of the

characteristics they associate with the brand, would be the foundation of the relationship between the customer and the brand, which, over time, would develop attachment and attitudinal loyalty.

It can be argued that the specific characteristics the brand reflects impact traditionalist customers' behaviours within OBCs. In the TISE framework, traditionalists' online searches are categorised as specialised due to their desire to encounter content that reflects the traditional qualities and characteristics they perceive the brand to have. These customers may have a relatively low search history due to their specialised focus, as OBCs may contain content, themes and topics that do not necessary align with traditionalist customers' expectations. This can arguably reflect a customer's attitudinal loyalty towards the symbolic aspects of a brand, which is argued to be associated with millennial consumers in the luxury industry (de Kerviler & Rodriguez, 2019), and if the symbolic significance of a brand is central to a customer's value system, causing them to remain with a brand (Giakoumaki & Krepapa, 2020; Ozuem *et al.*, 2021b), it is likely to influence their online searches. Customers with a relatively low attitudinal loyalty towards a brand can be referred to as high search consumers, who are defined as having a high search frequency (Furse, Punj, & Stewart, 1984), which may include searches for products and services without having a specific brand preference in mind. Traditionalist customers' search history and frequency may vary between low and high levels, but they are specifically focused on the characteristics that preserve the brand image they harbour; thus, their expectations focus on whether their online searches will align with the brand's traditional qualities and characteristics.

For traditionalist customers, the positive valence they develop from observing OBC content and activity is influenced by their relationship with the brand; thus, key characteristics of the brand reflected in the content are a major positive influence on their cognitive processing. However, in regard to content shared or published by other OBC participants, the influence of content valence on traditionalists will vary. In the TISE framework, traditionalists' intention to remain with a brand is categorised as being unaffected by the influence of OBC participants' content. This position can be argued for by referring to two key attributes: (1) attitudinal loyalty and (2) low level of internalised social influence. As previously stated, attitudinal loyalty reflects an attachment with a brand which can significantly influence customers to remain with a brand, even if the brand becomes a topic of negative e-WOM (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021b).

Traditionalists' strong relationship with a luxury fashion brand impacts their behaviour and attitude; this correlates with identification, a category of social influence, whereby a source of influence is favoured by an identifier and will alter behaviours and attitudes accordingly (Kelman, 1958).

However, traditionalists desire to preserve a brand's traditional image. Some consumers incorporate brands as part of their self-concept (Giakoumaki & Krepapa, 2020); however, if traditionalists perceive that the brand image that reflects their self-concept is adapted or changed through OBC content, then this may cause them to perceive a mismatch, which could potentially cause emotionally negative or neutral-driven valence towards the content. Other OBC participants' published content may be perceived as contributing to altering a brand's image through OBCs. If content or messages of OBC participants conflict with traditionalists' brand-related perspective, the participants' content is likely to have less effect due to the low level of social internalisation influence. When social internalisation influences a change in behaviour or attitude, an individual both publicly and privately agrees with a set of norms, beliefs and behaviours (Kelman, 1958), whereas a lack of private agreement would indicate social compliance. If traditionalists perceive OBC participants' content, and the valence it displays, as not corresponding to the brand, the content is likely to have less social influence on traditionalists' own valence and motivation to remain with the brand. Though traditionalists may develop a negative valence towards content that contrasts with the brand's image, or positive valence if it does not, it is their relationship with the brand and its core and traditional characteristics displayed through OBCs that have more influence over traditionalists' motivation to remain with the brand.

It is a lack of social identification and internalisation that similarly can cause traditionalists to diverge from an OBC if the community is perceived to be less specialised. Having stated that traditionalists desire the maintenance of the brand's original or traditional qualities and characteristics, and a reflection of such within OBC content, their rejection of an OBC seems to be rooted in the perceived lack of a socially aligned identity between traditionalists and an online community. As Kallevig (2021) implied, "*a brand identity rooted in values may be the best way to differentiate*" (p. 134), but if an online community consists of members with a range of identities that contrast with the traditionalists' perception of the brand's identity, then traditionalists may perceive this as a negative influence on the exclusivity of the brand's identity. In

online environments, a shared language, vision and interest bridges individuals into communities (Meek *et al.*, 2019). However, the engagement of some OBC participants may not represent the image of a brand, sometimes even threatening the exclusivity of a luxury brand in its effort to appear inclusive (Kapferer & Valette-Florence, 2018; Ozuem & Willis, 2021). In the case of traditionalists, a lack of shared vision regarding the brand by the majority of OBC members may cause them to diverge from engaging within an OBC; this reflects the low influence that community members have on changing traditionalists' attitude and behaviours through OBCs if the traditionalist customers do not socially identify with them. It is important to note that though a less specialised OBC may cause traditionalists to diverge from the OBC, they will retain their loyalty to the brand because they have a strong attachment to it.

Customers who have a close attachment to a brand are likely to engage in positive e-WOM related to a brand (Ilhan *et al.*, 2018; Seo & Park, 2018; Ozuem *et al.*, 2021b). Traditionalist customers have a strong relationship with a luxury brand, and are willing to engage with OBC activity and be expressive influencers, but their collective community intentions are subject to whether the activity and participants align with the luxury brand and its original image through the OBC. When consumers have a strong identification with a brand, they focus on the fit between the consumers' actual self and the brand, and are motivated to sustain the brand as it authenticates the self (Malär, Krohmer, Hoyer, & Nyffenegger, 2011; Wallace, Torres, Augusto, & Stefuryn, 2021). As individuals with a strong brand identification, traditionalists are less likely to engage in OBCs to obtain guidance and support from others having more confidence in their position regarding the brand. This indicates that OBC participants who attempt to influence consumers' brand-related perspective will have less effect on traditionalists compared to other consumers. Instead, traditionalists may act as influencers and positively benefit the brand. Traditionalists can be expressive when engaging in OBCs, advocating the brand and its qualities and may even engage in negative e-WOM in support of the brand if messages from consumers of competitor brands will negatively impact the brand (Fournier & Lee, 2009; Ilhan *et al.*, 2018). Importantly, they will seek to continue authenticating the perceived traditional image of the luxury fashion brand due to its significance to their identity (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021b). While they may not directly engage with individuals with a different vision of the brand, they will act as

influencers expressing their relationship and fit with the brand, thus promoting the key qualities of the brand through OBCs to other consumers.

5.3.2 Inspirers

Inspirers, as active customers, share some characteristics in OBC behaviour with traditionalists but differ in terms of their attitude towards the brand and their role within OBCs. As the TISE framework illustrates, inspirers, like traditionalists, have a positive relationship with a luxury fashion brand and will conduct specialised searches on OBCs for brand-related information. However, inspirers, while appreciative of the luxury fashion brand's original or traditional qualities and characteristics, and interested in brand-related content that reflects such, do not desire to preserve the image of the brand strictly to the characteristics it reflected in the past as traditionalists do. Traditionalists emphasise the fit between their "self" and the brand, indicating a strong consumer–brand identification, whereas inspirers, while they may likewise identify with a brand, have strong self-enhancement motives that involve adapting the vision and language of a brand through OBCs. Consumers with self-enhancement motives perceive a match between a brand and a self or image they idealise (Malär *et al.*, 2011) or consider to be an extension of their current personality (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Additionally, these consumers are less concerned about changes to the brand or with variance in consumer personalities; a brand may reflect different identities that invoke different consumer behaviours towards the brand (Gaustad, Samuelsen, Warlop, & Fitzsimons, 2019). A change in a brand's image would probably cause traditionalists to respond negatively, but, for inspirers, the idea of adapting a luxury fashion brand to include and represent individual personalities, themes and topics is ideal to enhance their identification with the brand and OBC.

As indicated in the TISE framework, the content inspirers encounter through OBCs plays a significant role in influencing their engagement within OBCs and their intention to remain committed to a luxury fashion brand. Inspirers have a form of attitudinal loyalty towards a brand, but as their identification with a brand is still in the developing stage, they will engage with the OBC with the intention of discovering content that expresses identities, themes or topics inspirer customers personally idolise. Inspirers do not seek to change the image of the brand, causing it to lose its perceived exclusivity, but instead observe the growth of its current and new qualities and characteristics that

extend the brand to be relevant to the inspirer and social groups they may belong to; this is similar to luxury brand managers' concern with balancing creative growth and retaining the brand's exclusivity image (Kallevig, 2021; Kapferer & Valette-Florence, 2018).

OBC content can showcase the personality and interest of the consumers who publish the content. The brand itself may not make direct changes to its image, but by allowing participants the ability to express themselves and their association with the brand, consumers contribute to augmenting the existing brand image, which increases the brand's ability to signal identities ideal to the audience (Gaustad *et al.*, 2019). Inspirers can have an existing association with a luxury fashion brand through a general community, but a stronger signalled association between the brand's image and the consumer's specific self has a meaningful impact on their behaviour (Aaker, 1997; Kleine, Kleine, & Kernan, 1993). When inspirers encounter content in OBCs, they may develop a positive valence if they are attracted to content that reflects images and values associated with the brand that are ideal to inspirers. The vividness and completeness of content can be driving factors for post popularity (Cheng *et al.*, 2020), and perceived social presence on online environments can cause consumers to feel closely connected to others or a brand (Bleier *et al.,* 2019; Moreo *et al.,* 2019). Thus, OBC participants arguably have a social identification influence on inspirers' intention to remain with a brand long term; the presence of individuals who are relatable to inspirers or with whom they share common values and characteristics, can be a key seeding strategy to retain inspirers' attention to the OBC and influence their intention to remain committed to the OBC.

Inspirers' desire for the augmentation of a luxury fashion brand's image, which enhances their identification with the brand and their motivation to engage through OBCs, makes them unobjectionable to OBCs that reflect multiple identities through their content, including content published by other OBC participants. Inspirers harbour a level of curiosity towards OBC members who may differ from them in terms of personality, interests and online language. Research argues that consumers with high curiosity are more likely to conduct exploratory behaviour which is invoked by their desire for acquiring knowledge or new experiences (Okazaki, Navarro, Mukherji, & Plangger, 2019; Silvia, 2005). Such curiosity leads inspirers to positively perceive multi-identity communities, hoping to learn more about the members' interests and

portrayal of a brand through their content. Inspirers are less concerned regarding the perceived fit between the brand and OBC participants' images, as their high curiosity influences them to examine entities outside their usual structure and object-related features (Okazaki *et al.*, 2019) because they find new perspectives and representations of the brand in different content types to be interesting. It is this open interest that influences inspirers to converge with the OBC with the purpose of obtaining new and ongoing brand-related and community experiences.

As individuals who are interested in the advancement of a brand in terms of being more inclusive with a variety of identities, interests and topics, inspirers are highly motivated to influence and engage with other OBC participants, either directly with close networks or indirectly through the content they post or share. As illustrated in the TISE framework, inspirers are expressive and motivated to be actively engaged in OBCs. Research argues that consumers self-expressiveness of brands can have a great effect on brand engagement, trust and other positive brand outcomes (Wallace, Buil, & De Chernatony, 2014; Algharabat, Rana, Alalwan, Baabdullah, & Gupta, 2020); in other words, when individuals have the ability to express a particular image and still feel connected to a brand, there is a greater intention to contribute value to the online engagement and even pay a premium price (Wallace *et al.*, 2021). Inspirers thus take a more proactive role in OBCs, expressing themselves with the intention of displaying their status or relationship in reference to the luxury fashion brand, to encourage OBC consumers to engage within the OBC and potentially exchange information so the inspirer may continue learning new information as well as contributing it themselves. This is a contrast to traditionalists who prefer to engage with like-minded individuals when they have collective community intentions, whereas inspirers are more flexible and are motivated by the dynamic nature of OBCs and the various topics that enhance their brand-related learning and experiences.

5.3.3 Self-containers

Self-container have a slight psychological attachment to a luxury fashion brand but have a relatively weak self–brand connection with them compared to traditionalists and inspirers. Self-containers are arguably passive consumers who mostly observe online engagement of other customers which can influence self-containers become active customers. A strong self–brand connection indicates a consumer who envisions a brand

image that signals specific characteristics that are important to the consumer, but for consumers who feel a low degree of self–brand connection, image is less important (Gaustad *et al.*, 2019). Unlike inspirers who conduct online searches for qualities and characteristics related to the brand and their individual self, self-containers search is relatively generalised. This generalised search is not due to indifference towards a brand and its competitors (Ozuem *et al.*, 2016), but because there is no specific brand-related quality or characteristic they have in mind to search for through the brand's OBC. Additionally, the large volume of online content can make it difficult for them to conduct engagement (Olmedilla *et al.*, 2019) on a specific brand-related topic that would interest them, thus they rely on the customers who actively engage and directly endorse specific content within OBCs.

Self-containers' relationship with a luxury fashion brand is based on the concept that they know the brand and its reputation, and associate positive equity with the brand, but do not consider themselves to be an official member or harbour a status with the social hierarchy they perceive in the brand's community (Dion & Borraz, 2017). Thus, they are not necessarily motivated to disclose their brand preference or actively engage through OBCs, and, like traditionalists, they do not desire to change the brand's image, but, likewise, they do not wish to socially conform to the ideal vision that other OBC members have themselves as a luxury fashion brand customer. Self-containers' search behaviour can be made more specialised if initiative is taken by marketers or OBC participants to deliver characterised content that would be of interest to consumers, thus inclining them to engage (Singh & Pathak, 2020). With a low self–brand connection, the luxury brand itself, though relevant to self-containers' value system, has less social influence on self-containers' motivation to remain with OBCs; instead, the brand acts a mediator connecting self-containers with other OBC participants who share salient information about the brand.

Some self-containers can be categorised as community members who have weak ties with the community (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001), though they maintain an association because of the brand. According to Meek *et al.* (2019), members with weak ties to the community can still feel part of the community through a shared language used by a critical mass, and members' ties to the community can be gradually strengthened through regular interactions. However, self-containers are relatively passive in their engagement and can be characterised as "lurkers" who choose simply to follow or

consume content, rather than contribute content (Fang & Zhang, 2019). This means that they are less likely to directly communicate within OBCs until they feel confident to do so, and will instead passively engage by observing OBC content. As passive engagers this makes self-containers susceptible to the influence of OBC participants' messages and the valence they express through their content. In the virtual space, luxury content is omnipresent through the digital channels; thus, an audience can consume content displaying physical properties of luxury brands and consumers' luxury lifestyle posts (Leban, Seo, & Voyer, 2020) from which self-containers may develop positive valence from observing the content, which may also be signalling emotions from the luxury fashion brand customers who published the content.

The weak ties between community members in OBCs can be strengthened through reciprocation (Mathwick *et al.*, 2008; Meek *et al.*, 2019), and though self-containers do not directly communicate with other members, their observation of online content is a source of learning and entertainment for them. Importantly, the content they observe builds their valence, which gives them a sensory experience of a luxury brand through the online space (Leban *et al.*, 2020) and positively enhances their intention to remain with the OBC. Likewise, the OBC content can influence their intention to remain with the luxury fashion brand itself. Self-containers as passive OBC consumers are likely to be categorised as customers who utilise online content to assist in purchasing decisions. The valence signalled through OBC content, such as product review posts, can have a strong effect on purchase intentions and cognitive processing, more so for novice consumers than experienced customers (Rocklage, Rucker, & Nordgren, 2021). Self-containers with a low self-connection with the brand, but with a high online search behavioural trait, are able to learn more and experience more from the content published on OBCs.

However, negative e-WOM may reduce their behavioural loyalty intention, as they may not yet have as much confidence in the brand as traditionalists and inspirers have, whose purchasing decisions are influenced by their attitudinal loyalty towards the brand. However, the influence of negative e-WOM may be reduced if the self-container consumer has a strong purchasing history or trust in a luxury fashion brand. Customers' positive satisfaction and trust in a brand can reduce the difficulty in making purchasing decisions and are argued to be antecedents of behavioural loyalty (Kamran-Disfani *et al.,* 2017). Thus, more experienced self-containers will critically evaluate content and

valence signals against their experience and they may be less emotionally driven by online content (Rocklage *et al.*, 2021), whereas novice self-containers are more likely to be influenced by other customers. Generally, the level of social influence on both novice and experienced self-containers is subject to their perceived trust in either or both the brand and OBC participants' content.

As mentioned before, self-containers have relatively weak ties with an online community as they do not directly or regularly communicate with other community members, but are instead connected through a shared interest that attracts them to the OBC (Meek *et al.,* 2019). In comparison to traditionalists and inspirers, self-containers are more reserved in their collective community intentions, particularly in their online engagement and interaction. Self-containers prefer to passively engage or observe the activity within OBCs. This does not mean they are less loyal towards a brand in terms of purchasing or brand attitude and preference, as their passive engagement allows them to consume online brand-related information which they may use to practice loyalty-related behaviour outside the OBC environment (Ozuem & Willis, 2021), thus their collective community intentions with other OBC members would be limited to their observing online interactions rather than actively engaging in the interactions.

Additionally, self-containers are less motivated to express an individual personality that extends beyond the brand than inspirer consumers seek to do; self-containers prefer to have a socially shared perspective or image within an OBC. This aligns with the social self-expressive brand perspective, where individuals feel a need to connect with others and internalise a brand in their online communities (Wallace *et al.*, 2021), which translates into social influence behaviours. The individual identities of other community members and the perceived fit between them and the brand are less important to self-containers, and, as the TISE framework indicates, they are more likely to passively converge with a multi-identity OBC in contrast to traditionalists who negatively react towards perceived changes in a brand (Gaustad *et al.*, 2019) and its OBC content. The major source of influence attracting self-containers to OBCs is the luxury fashion brand. Self-containers with a strong purchasing experience with the brand are especially influenced by the brand, and are less concerned with whether the OBC community consists of a range of individual identities. Self-containers who are novice consumers are similarly influenced by the brand, but are mostly attracted by the OBC community members, particularly by the interpersonal synchrony that emerges within the OBC.

Prosocial behaviour can positively impact a consumer's emotional and cognitive state, especially in the luxury sector that is perceived to be shaped by social hierarchy (Kreuzer, Cado, & Raïes, 2020). The multi-identity members bring to OBCs can reduce the psychological distance self-containers perceive between themselves and an OBC. Inspirers in particular can influence self-containers through their content contribution, causing self-containers to develop positive valence from the positive reception signalled through the OBC.

5.3.4 Expellers

Expellers are categorised as passive consumers who have the lowest emotional attachment to a luxury fashion brand compared to the other three categorised OBC customers. Similar to self-containers, expellers may generate high online search frequencies (Furse *et al.*, 1984), as a result of conducting generalised searches between several OBCs of separate brands. The prior discussion on the close psychological relationship between traditionalists, inspirers and self-containers and a luxury fashion brand arguably aligned with research findings that argue that a strong self–brand connection promotes loyalty (Lam *et al.*, 2010; Park *et al.*, 2010b), more specifically attitudinal loyalty, which influences customers' attachment to a specific brand and leads them to disregard the brand's competitors (Dick & Basu, 1994). Additionally, attitudinal loyalty can motivate purchasing behaviour; attitudinal loyalty can develop following a satisfactory experience with a brand and from the trust consumers develop towards a brand (Kamran-Disfani *et al.*, 2017; Nyadzayo *et al.*, 2018). However, an absence of attitudinal loyalty makes influencing consumers' purchasing decisions more difficult (Kamran-Disfani *et al.,* 2017), prompting the need for e-WOM and vivid content from OBCs to influence consumers' behavioural loyalty.

Expellers visit and consume information from OBCs, and may purchase products of particular brands, but their loyalty can be categorised as behavioural and indifferent. According to Ozuem *et al.* (2016), customers with indifferent loyalty display behavioural loyalty traits through their actions, but do not attach themselves to a specific brand unless it is functional to do so. Expellers are not necessarily indifferent regarding differentiation between luxury brands, or the difference between luxury fashion and mainstream fashion. Though some millennial consumers can be the most experimental and conscious consumers of luxury fashion (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021b), other millennials,

like many other consumers of other generations, are likely to deliberate and be careful about purchasing luxury goods due to sustainability and economic and other social values (Danziger, 2021). Expellers will likewise be influenced by such a process when searching OBC information and making purchasing decisions. However, not all expeller customers will be solely focused on the economic constraints of luxury fashion; if the purchase of a luxury fashion product will be beneficial, such as sustainable quality and feelings of confidence, a consumer will proceed with such a purchase (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021b). Thus, expellers can potentially be profitable and purchasing customers, but because expellers have a weak connection with a luxury fashion brand, socially internalised in their cognitive thinking, brands will have low influence over their purchase decision making.

The TISE framework illustrates that expellers are unaffected by OBC participants' content in regard to influencing expellers' intention to remain with a specific luxury fashion. As emphasised earlier, expellers are less likely to develop an emotional attachment to a brand. Likewise, it is unlikely that other OBC participants will have an effect on influencing expellers to develop attitudinal loyalty. However, OBC participants' content can still have an influence on expellers particularly on their purchasing motivations. According to Ozuem *et al.* (2021b), consumers who may prefer to consume OBC content for functional reasons, like product choice and price evaluations, can develop a positive valance in online communities; thus, although expellers have low attachment to a brand, they are not without emotions when consuming online content. Consumers with behavioural intentions, who intend to consume online information, examine the quality and believability of information and whether it supports them in making informative decisions regarding a brand (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021b). As the TISE framework illustrates, expellers are mostly reserved in their collective community intentions, preferring not to actively contribute content or influence other consumers; their core intention is to learn from the online activity. However, like self-containers, expellers still passively engage with the online OBC activity. While behavioural brand engagement is strongly related to brand-related learning, during which individuals mostly consume or observe content (Eigenraam *et al.,* 2018; Hollebeek *et al.*, 2016), expellers can still develop a positive valence from observing the online activity and may feel more satisfied if their search resulted in a beneficial purchase.

It is important to note that while OBC participants' content can influence an expeller's purchase decision of a brand, expellers can also be influenced to switch brands if individuals signal a negative brand-related sentiment online. While a customer's strong attachment to a brand would have influenced them to disregard any negative information about the brand (Gaustad *et al.*, 2019; Swaminathan *et al.*, 2007), expellers do not have a strong attachment to a brand that would motivate them to remain. This makes expellers susceptible to the possible negative e-WOM they may encounter, which can be found even in OBCs, considering the lack of restrictions dissatisfied customers have in sharing such content (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Kähr *et al.*, 2016). While traditionalist customers would most likely be critical towards negative e-WOM directed towards their preferred brands, expellers' lack of attachment to a brand causes them to be more likely to be influenced by the sentiment signalled by other luxury fashion brand customers. This effect will not apply at the same level to all expellers; some may have had a prior purchasing experience with a brand, which may influence their response towards positive and negative e-WOM. If the expeller has brand experience internalised in their cognitive thinking, and OBC participants maintain positive sentiment or endorsements, then expellers may be affected by social internalised influence, whereby they privately agree and perceive benefits in agreeing with a belief or behaviour (Kelman, 1958). Likewise, if the expeller had a negative experience, internalised social influence may occur if they encounter OBC participants who share negative e-WOM. If, however, an expeller has no experience with a specific brand they can be affected by social compliance, where individuals accept influence to obtain benefits or avoid disadvantages despite a lack of agreement with an influencer (Kelman, 1958), or they may resist influence as their weak community ties with other OBC participants can reduce the potential of social influence on expellers' brand-related decisions.

Expellers commit their time to learning about brands and their offers through OBCs, thus they are more likely to passively engage by observing and consuming the online information they encounter (Eigenraam *et al.,* 2018). This indicates that they are less likely to form strong ties with members of an OBC, as regular communication is required to strengthen community ties (Meek *et al.*, 2019). Additionally, while expellers may encounter individuals they know or can relate to within OBCs, they are more likely to diverge from an OBC that is perceived to consist of various identities. The low

connection expellers have with a luxury brand can imply that they consider brand image as less relevant to them (Gaustad *et al.*, 2019; Markus, 1977); thus, they will not closely examine the perceived fit between a brand and the members in terms of identity, image, interests and topics that OBC content displays. OBCs with a multi-identity community may generate sub-communities who communicate using different social languages and they may have different visions of a brand. While expellers may have a perceptual curiosity, which is aroused by visual stimulation (Okazaki *et al.*, 2019), they do not desire to engage in OBC activity or with members who may make their information searching complicated. Expellers are less curious than inspirers are, and are less committed to investing time in exploring an OBC to the extent that inspirers would, unless their intentions extend beyond consuming information to inform purchasing decisions. Thus expellers, though mostly inclined towards behavioural loyalty, can vary in their cognitive reaction towards OBCs and the characteristics illustrated in the TISE framework.

5.4 Summary

This chapter has discussed the emergent theoretical insights illustrated in the conceptual framework labelled the TISE framework. A description of the framework's formation is provided, explaining the role of existing theory, empirical findings and the researcher's own position on the subject. This addressed the existing literature that guided the researcher's understanding, the gaps in knowledge in the literature related to loyalty in OBCs and the key empirical data that informed the four themes integrated in the TISE framework, which are discussed in Chapter four (relationship with the luxury brand, influence of content valence, socially aligned identity and collective community intentions). Following this was an exclusive explanation of the developed OBC loyalty typology (traditionalists, inspirers, self-containers and expellers) that was informed by the current study's empirical findings and evidence from extant literature. This situated new and developed insights within the extant contextualisation of OBCs and loyalty, providing a direction to this study's theoretical contribution and managerial implications for OBC marketing practitioners. A discussion of the theoretical contribution and managerial implications is provided in the next chapter, encouraging further research and application of the TISE framework into managerial practices.

Chapter six

Conclusion and recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a brief synopsis of the research project's findings, contributions and recommendations for customer loyalty in OBCs in the luxury fashion industry. The essential methodological approaches embedded within the present study are integrated in this synopsis, specifically the researcher's chosen research philosophy and strategy, and their own epistemological self-positioning, re-emphasising the reliability of the data in the context of the project's topic. Additionally, the influences of existing conceptual theories as well as new empirical findings are raised in the discussion, making reference to the categories of the TISE framework (Figure 2). These support the discussion and rationale behind the theoretical contributions and managerial implications. Furthermore, this chapter discusses the limitations of the study and recommendations for further research to expand the scope of customer loyalty towards luxury fashion brands in OBCs in future research projects. This section reasons that the limitations of the study did not reduce the validity of the data, and calls for further examination and application of the project's theoretical and managerial contributions.

6.2 Conclusion

OBCs are arguably a significant benefit to organisations in attracting customers who favour their brands to their online communities, creating the expectation that membership of OBCs mostly consists of loyal purchasers and regular users of the brand (Meek *et al.*, 2019). In following the positivist paradigm, scholars have examined OBCs' impact on brand-related consumer behaviours, including increased purchase intention, online engagement, brand recognition, positive WOM and brand loyalty (Cheng *et al.*, 2020; Harmeling *et al.*, 2017; Meek *et al.*, 2019). An additional factor to consider, is OBCs role in attracting individuals to the brand-based community and motivate bridging and engagement between members. This occurs if an OBC's perceived language, goals, vision and signalled trust, expressed by the majority of active members, are similar to those of the individual consuming OBC content (Meek *et al.*, 2019). This not only has the potential to attract potential OBC members, but purchasing behaviour for specific brands. Pansari and Kumar (2017) noted the indirect contribution

of customers in online environments, through customer referrals, influence, knowledge and feedback communicated to online communities, supporting firms' customer acquisition and retention strategies. Cheng *et al.* (2020) stressed the importance of considering a range of OBC characteristics as predictors of loyalty in OBCs, including quality of the OBC content, and the ability of OBC members to bond and bridge for online experience satisfaction and relationship commitment development. Even when individuals have a weak association with other members or a brand through an OBC, the signalled language and attributes of the brand or community can attract individuals to the community (Meek *et al.*, 2019) and eventually facilitate strong associations between active and passive members and loyalty with brands (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Brodie *et al.*, 2013). These existing theoretical insights directed this study towards examining OBCs and customer loyalty, and the influence between customers and consumers of OBCs.

A synthesis of the literature reveals the dominance of the positivist position to understand customer loyalty in OBCs and the influence customers have on other individuals' loyalty within OBCs. Yet, contradictions across extant literature reveal the heterogeneity of customers, implying diverse perceptions across multiple experiences that influence customer acquisition, retention and loyalty through OBCs. For example, Meek *et al.* (2019) and Cheng *et al.* (2020) examined exchange and reciprocity behaviours between OBC members on the grounds of social capital theory, emphasising individuals' need to connect with others. Ibrahim *et al.* (2017) through sentiment analysis examined customers' perceptions of brand image through the mediation of content information quality of communication exchanges between consumers and brands through OBCs. Ranfagni *et al.* (2016) under social identity theory examined consumer–brand alignment to argue the strength of customers' brand differentiation on loyalty and communication through OBCs. While these studies reported valuable insights into understanding patterns of loyalty between brands, customers and consumers, the existing views of scholars is challenged by the complexity of the various levels of involvement and participation individual customers and consumers deliver through OBCs, and the individual characteristics of millennial consumers (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021a) and the luxury fashion industry. This is arguably supported through the construct of loyalty typologies influenced by the behaviours of theoretically documented online users, including lurkers, askers and answerers (Fang & Zhang,

2019), information seekers and socialisers (Meek *et al.*, 2019), and the loyalty categories comprising individual levels of attitudinal and behavioural characteristics (Dick & Basu, 1994; Ozuem *et al.*, 2016; Ozuem *et al.*, 2021b).

Although the aforementioned constructs arguably support the separation of customer loyalty and OBC experiences from absolute reality, Cheng *et al.*'s (2020) positivistic approach limited theoretical insight to specific antecedents of customer loyalty and the various levels of impact OBC characteristics and members had on influencing loyalty. Such an approach is not explicitly evident in Meek *et al.*'s (2019) study, which utilised the interpretivism paradigm and focus groups to investigate predetermined theoretical constructs, noting that they would impact customers' involvement and behaviour across individual OBCs. However, this undermines the individual millennial customers' and consumers' multiple realities within OBCs, which is subject to differences depending on the information and encounters they experience through OBCs. This has directed the present study towards choosing social constructivism as the epistemic choice.

Social constructivism emphasises the researcher's experiential knowledge, rejecting predetermined hypotheses (Maxwell, 2013) and enhancing the construct of new insights. While considering extant theoretical constructs, the adoption of social constructivism and the researcher's voice enhanced the construct of new knowledge (Gioia *et al.*, 2013) and the study was conducted under a specific context and with a cohort of consumers. Having said this, the aim of this study was to develop a conceptual model and theoretical construct that could facilitate the development of effective customer loyalty strategies for OBCs in the context of the luxury fashion industry. Likewise, the current study's context aligned with the millennial generation, a cohort the researcher belongs to, thus bringing a degree of familiarity between the researcher and their participants. Further, in following Yin's (2014) embedded single case study strategy, the semi-structured interviews accommodated heterogeneity across the data sample to generate diverse perspectives towards OBCs, specifically to the luxury fashion industry context. The TISE framework emerged from the analysis of the interviewed data under Gioia *et al.*'s (2013) thematic approach and insights from extant theoretical constructs to reveal theoretical generalisations in the field of customer loyalty in the luxury fashion industry from the millennial cohort, providing a holistic yet particularistic contextual point of view. The findings, however, revealed that luxury fashion OBC customers and consumers are heterogeneous to an extent, displaying

different levels of loyalty and participation through OBCs and varying impacts of social influence on their attitudes and behaviours through OBCs. These findings provide insights relevant to the current study's three research questions, providing theoretical contributions and managerial implications that are further discussed in the following sections.

6.3 Theoretical contribution

The main focus of extant OBC studies has been customer-centred and concerned with investigating the effect OBCs have on individuals' attitudes and behaviours on purchasing and online interactivity, supporting the direct and indirect contributions customers deliver to signal their loyalty to a brand in online environments (Pansari & Kumar, 2017). The studies widely examined the impact of social networks within OBCs using predominant theories to examine OBCs' consumer and customer network structure; these studies can be generally grouped into three streams of research. The first stream indicates researchers' evaluation of OBC consumers and customers using social identity theory, that is, when individuals base their self-concept on their membership of social groups as opposed to individual personal identity (Carlson *et al.*, 2008; Dholakia *et al.*, 2004; Helal *et al.*, 2018; Nowak *et al.*, 1990; Ranfagni *et al.*, 2016; Wang *et al.*, 2019). A second stream used brand identification theory, which offers theoretical foundations for a perspective that integrates and communicates company branding and customer identity (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005; Brown *et al.*, 2005; Kim *et al.*, 2001; Harmeling *et al.*, 2017; Tuškej *et al.*, 2013; Pansari & Kumar, 2017). The third stream reflects other researchers' application of social capital theory to examine the social relationship between OBC stakeholders that yields profitable benefits (Cheng *et al.*, 2020; Meek *et al.*, 2019; Kumi & Sabherwal, 2018; Pagani & Malacarne, 2017; Wilkins *et al.*, 2019).

The current study challenges the usefulness of the aforementioned theories in understanding the extent to which OBCs affect customer loyalty, how consumers perceive OBCs and the extent to which customers affect other customers' loyalty through OBCs in the luxury fashion industry. While the three mentioned theories contributed significantly to the conceptualisation of OBC consumers and customers' membership and participation intentions, the studies did not contemplate potential changes in the behaviour and attitudes of individuals and the extent to which other OBC

actors, including customers, influence such changes (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021b). Furthermore, social identity theory, social capital theory and brand identification theory do not directly distinguish between active and passive engaging online consumers, who exhibit different behaviours in OBCs, particularly in relation to participation and self-expression levels (Khan, 2017; Pagani & Malacarne, 2017). These are the driving motivations for the current study's adoption of social influence theory, which examines how individuals influence adaptations of others' behaviour and attitudes, and distinguishes the levels of social influence (Kelman, 1958). The current study contributes to the existing insights on social influence (Venkatesh & Brown, 2001) by broadening the discussions of social influence, OBCs and customer loyalty (Cheng *et al.*, 2020).

As stated before, researchers have looked at OBCs and customer loyalty through the positivistic paradigm, measuring the phenomenon in an objective manner. These studies generated generic models and insights that were generalisable across OBC settings (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005; Cheng *et al.,* 2020; Dholakia *et al.*, 2004; Pansari & Kumar, 2017). In particular, research conducted on OBCs has been based mainly on quantitative methods; this approach limited extant theoretical insight and directed the current study's epistemological perspective of the phenomenon in a similar setting. Meek *et al.* (2019) provided a more comprehensive theoretical explanation of the phenomenon, including detailed insights into the antecedents motivating individuals' OBCs membership and intentions to remain, clarifying the importance of shared language, shared vision, reciprocity and social trust in OBC environments. However, the current study questions Meek *et al.*'s (2019) interpretivist stance, arguing that their epistemic approach has limited our understanding. Meek *et al.* (2019) do not contemplate the heterogeneous characteristics of OBC customers' behaviours and attitudes within an OBC social network, and how different or new experiences and knowledge may influence change in actions and behaviours following interactions with other actors (Moore & Lewis, 1952). This directed the current study towards social constructivism, investigating the lived experiences and perspectives of an evolving and multidimensional phenomenon. Additionally, the current study focused on the luxury fashion industry, bringing insights into OBC experiences from an industry strongly influenced by consumers' social needs and status individualism, which can be evaluated through multiple perspectives of millennial consumers.

The adoption of social constructivism complemented the social influence theory embedded in the current study, extending understanding of how OBCs influence customers' loyalty and how community members can influence customer loyalty within OBCs. From the study, individual customer's values and the context of their relationship with the brand and other community members emerged, identifying varying attitudes and intended actions towards luxury fashion OBCs. Such findings generated a holistic yet detailed OBC and customer and consumer loyalty conceptualisation, the TISE framework. The TISE framework examines four key dimensions that reflect different elements of the OBC environment: (1) individuals' relationship with the brand prior to engaging in OBCs; (2) the valence of the online content and its influence on consumers' and customers' perspectives; (3) the influence of a perceived majority or minority of an identified social identity and its influence on customer attraction, retention; and churning; and (4) the collective behaviours within OBCs and the intention to actively participate. In adopting social influence theory, the current study contributes insight detailing the varying effects these four dimensions have on individual customers and consumers, revealing the diverse socially constructed experiences that influence their perspectives. Likewise, different customers' situations, such as product purchasing and consumption of online content for entertainment purposes, may influence changes in perspectives regarding the four identified themes in the TISE framework and their influence on loyalty within OBCs. However, though the four themes may have a lower effect on some individual customers or consumers compared to others, they remain relevant in describing a holistic illustration of the impact of the social influence categories applied in the data analysis, and the category of loyalty likely to be practised in an OBC situation. This supported the categorisation of different loyalty levels associated with millennial consumers, which emerged from individual groups of customers' values and behavioural actions that can be linked to the four identified themes.

The main contribution of the current study is to further develop the conceptualisation of customer loyalty within OBCs in the luxury fashion industry. The TISE framework encompasses an OBC loyalty typology (traditionalists, inspirers, self-containers and expellers). The customer-related typologies suggested by Meek *et al.* (2019), Cheng *et al.* (2020) and Pansari and Kumar (2017) emphasised heterogeneous customer behaviours and perceptions in OBCs and loyalty literature. However, they focused on

one type of customer, and did not differentiate between consumers by generation. Millennial consumers, for example, are specifically conceptualised as being tech-savvy and socially conscious about the brands they consume, as well as being highly active social media users (Azemi *et al.*, 2020; Helal *et al.*, 2018); thus, separating them from previous generation consumers in regard to online engaging behaviour and attitudes towards the internet. However, though this study specifically selected millennial consumers, the adoption of the social constructivism paradigm and social influence theory reflects the individually constructed knowledge and experience individual millennials can have, leading them to be grouped into more specific categories of customer loyalty categories (Ozuem *et al.*, 2021b). Additionally, extant customer typologies maintain the stance that a customer remains under a specific category in the typology across different contexts. The current study argues that OBC customers may potentially move from one typology category to another, emphasising the changes in the socially constructed realities customers and consumers may experience over time, and the diverse perspectives they may harbour towards individual luxury fashion brands. Thus, the current study identifies a range of OBC customer loyalty typologies that each critically examine the impact of the four identified themes illustrated in the TISE framework and the varying effects they have on the individual categorised customers and consumers of luxury fashion OBCs. Likewise, the current study enriches and extends understanding of the extent to which OBC members socially influence other individuals' loyalty through OBCs, offering additional explanations as a contribution to the extant literature of the phenomenon.

6.4 Managerial implications

In the broad context, practical implications generated by the current study are grouped within the following concepts: First, this study has developed a framework (TISE framework) illustrating the process of customer loyalty which contains four key themes: relationship with the luxury brand, influence of content valence, socially aligned identity and collective community intentions. Second, from this framework, emerged a customer loyalty typology (traditionalists, inspirers, self-containers and expellers). This loyalty typology characterises OBC customers and consumers in the context of the luxury fashion industry, overcoming generalised classifications of customer loyalty and impact of social influence towards homogenous defined OBC users. Additionally, the typology illustrates how the four themes link to traditionalists, inspirers, self-containers

and expellers expressed perspective regarding OBCs and OBC members' participation within them, and the direct actions conducted within OBCs. Conclusions can be drawn from the components of the framework that provide guidance to digital marketing managers in identifying different types of loyalists and the level of return they generate for luxury fashion brands. Furthermore, important marketing implications can be identified to manage effective customer loyalty programmes in the context of millennial consumers in the OBCs of the luxury fashion industry.

The TISE framework separates individual OBC members using three constructs: (1) the type of loyalty they explicitly or implicitly display, (2) how they participate within OBCs, and (3) the extent to which they influence, or are influenced by, other OBC members and activity. The types of loyalty they display are arguably correlated with behavioural and attitudinal loyalty classifications (Dick & Basu, 1994). The behavioural and attitudinal classifications identify the varying levels of financial return and emotional capital customers will generate. The type of loyalty the customers are associated with will reveal the type of online participation they are likely to conduct within OBCs, and the extent to which their loyalty can be maintained or adapted through the influence of social actors like the brand or other customers. The current study reveals that loyalty within OBCs cannot be defined by a single loyalty category. Some customers will conduct actions and express attitudes that differ from others', and reflect a loyalty that corresponds with the four identified themes. Arguably, the type of loyalty customers practice may reflect overlapping characteristics associated with purchasing loyalty and loyalty displayed through e-WOM. These diverse behaviours and attitudes create various interpretations of customer loyalty within OBCs, supporting the view that customers' and consumers' perspectives and experiences can be shaped by multiple characteristics associated with OBCs.

Each customer has a different relationship with a luxury fashion brand, which influences their perspective of the brand through OBCs and the activity occurring in the brand's online community. The TISE loyalty typology suggests that traditionalists, inspirers and self-containers can have a relatively positive relationship with a luxury fashion brand that they integrate with their perspective and actions directed towards OBCs. In contrast, expellers do not have such a relationship with a luxury fashion brand. However, the relationship these loyalists have with a luxury fashion brand is not limited to their positive or negative perception of the brand. Their experiences with the brand

prior to engaging through OBCs, and the actions they conduct through OBCs, reflect the type of relationship they have which further differentiates the loyalists from each other. The association with the other three themes – influence of content valence, socially aligned identity and collective community intentions – also contribute to understanding the loyalists' relationship with a luxury fashion brand and loyalty, arguably interconnecting the themes with each other.

Traditionalists are more likely to have had a significant history with a luxury fashion brand, and identify with the brand's original or traditional qualities and characteristics displayed through OBCs. They harbour a relatively strong attitudinal loyalty to brands that influences them, leading them to reject marketing efforts conducted by a brand's competitors. Importantly, the content created or shared by OBC members will have less social influence on traditionalists; the content that will potentially influence their online activity is content shared by the brand or other traditionalists, and other content traditionalists perceive to be relevant to the luxury fashion brand. However, while traditionalists can display a positive representation of the brand's core attributes and qualities, their tendency to focus on the traditional image of the brand may hinder attempts to influence them to remain with the online community and attract new potential members to OBCs. If an online community is perceived to emphasise a weak consumer–brand alignment, traditionalists, while retaining their loyalty to the brand, may diverge from the OBC, reducing their level of participation. Similarly, if they perceive OBC members to be signalling messages and images that contrast with the brand's traditional image, they are less likely to accept their influence and engage with them.

In contrast, inspirers, while appreciative of the traditional image and history of the brand, harbour self-enhancement motivations, meaning they will be influenced by new attributes and qualities that may be communicated through OBCs. Inspirers seek new brand-related experiences, including learning of new adaptations or information related to a luxury fashion brand that may relate to their individual character, personality or lifestyle. These experiences impact their degree of participation within OBCs. When a community of a luxury fashion brand is perceived to be inclusive towards a diversity of topics, conversations and community members associated with the brand, inspirers feel a stronger sense of identification which influences their willingness to continue their participation within OBCs.

Digital marketers can take the opportunity to employ both traditionalists and inspirers as promoters of the brand, as they can influence the positive valence towards the brand which can be signalled to existing or potential OBC consumers. However, digital marketers need to identify and segment OBC activity and audiences that traditionalists and inspirers will positively respond to. Traditionalists align strongly with consumer–brand alignment, thus their content search and participation is likely to be influenced by like-minded individuals or other traditionalists. Inspirers will also be influenced by OBC members who are similar to them, but compared to traditionalists, they are more inclusive towards other OBC members who they perceive to reflect different characteristics through their online participation.

Both traditionalists and inspirers prioritise emotional experiences through OBCs, as they had attitudinal loyalty prior to their OBC participation. For them, OBC activity will not influence their brand loyalty purchasing, unless it is for direct product selection or conversations. Instead, digital marketers need to consider how content will impact their online community participation. For traditionalists, digital marketers should take care not to publish too much content that could change traditionalists' perspective regarding the brand's exclusivity image, but enable separate content that accommodates relevant creative enhancement to appeal to inspirers. This may be complicated if luxury fashion marketers adopt a single community strategy, where all members congregate in a single community platform. However, OBCs are not limited to a single digital platform or online location. A brand can have sub-communities; therefore, it is recommended that digital managers consider micro-OBCs that utilise other digital marketing tactics, such as membership types, hashtags or specific social media platforms that allocate individuals to online activity and groups suitable to them. This does not mean that the categorised TISE customers and consumers should be isolated from each other or to specific channels and communities. With varying loyalty groups, customers need to be managed appropriately and marketing strategies need to be altered to attract more attention from these micro-segments and derive loyalty that will generate a positive return for the brand.

The aforementioned is significantly important when considering the development of loyalty of self-containers and expellers. As stated before, self-containers can have a positive perspective of a luxury fashion brand, but their relationship with the brand and other community members is weaker compared to traditionalists and inspirers. As

members who practice passive engagement through OBCs, they are more likely to observe the activity of OBC members which may influence their purchasing decisions and motivation to remain connected to a community and brand. Self-containers conduct generalised searches, and though they may seek OBC members similar to themselves, OBCs that contain a large volume of content activity may cause self-containers difficulty in navigating their searches that would lead them to the desired outcomes digital marketers expect. The present study stresses that the customers presented in the TISE typology can adapt from one category to another, depending on new experiences and the information they process, or towards different luxury fashion brands. In particular, self-containers can be influenced to change to a different loyalist category of the TISE framework if digital marketers appropriately engage traditionalists or inspirers in OBC activity. To achieve this, it is recommended that self-containers be influenced to conduct less generalised searches. This includes segmenting and targeting them with content that would greatly appeal to them, which could be linked to either or both purchasing and online engagement activity, and using traditionalists' and inspirers' online engagement to influence self-containers.

Expellers are more likely to harbour behavioural loyalty towards a luxury brand compared to the three previously classified loyalists. They are less likely to influence other OBC customers' and consumers' loyalty due to their passive engagement on OBCs, thus they are more likely to be influenced through OBCs. However, their low attitudinal attachment to a specific luxury fashion brand reflects their lack of brand commitment, but they are influenced by information communicated through OBCs, for example, the valence displayed through OBC content will influence expellers' intention to remain with a brand for purchasing intentions. Expellers are psychologically indifferent towards luxury fashion brands, meaning they could purchase a variety of luxury branded products; thus, the positive and negative brand sentiments communicated through content will affect their decision to purchase from a luxury fashion brand. Online socialisation is the lowest priority for expellers, and they are less concerned about forming interpersonal connections. However, they are critical of how the information published through OBCs will contribute to their purchase intentions. Digital marketers should emphasise targeting expellers with content that emphasises promotional information, assisted by positive valence signalled by traditionalists or inspirers. Expellers require assurance before they commit to purchasing from a luxury

fashion brand or choose to switch brands; therefore, traditionalists' and inspirers' positive valence can contribute to influencing expellers to remain with a specific luxury fashion brand.

Using the TISE framework, digital marketers can segment the type of loyalty and level of OBC participation their customers conduct. The nature of millennial consumer loyalty is considerably heterogeneous; thus, segmenting a customer base with the TISE categories, and applying the four themes to illustrate the customers' attitude and behaviours, enable a more manageable delivery of loyalty programmes and strategies appropriate for each customer group. It is recommended that digital marketers monitor their groups of customers and consumers, as they may change from one category of TISE loyalist to another. This will allow them to allocate customers within the typology and to understand what influences changes in customers' and consumers' attitudes towards brands and online behaviours conducted through OBCs.

6.5 Limitations and future research

The current study adopted the social constructivist paradigm using case study as the research strategy. The theoretical sampling and the specific criteria used in the sample selection of participants contributed to ensuring rigour in the data and interpretations that were generated for the current study. Therefore, the study has provided theoretically generalisable findings of loyalty in luxury fashion OBCs and linkage of social influence theory constructs. It is, however, noted that the current study is limited to a specific industry and generational consumer segment. Perspectives towards OBCs and consumer behaviours conducted within OBCs may vary between industries, and generations following the millennial generation, like Generation Z, may display different attitudes and behaviours. Furthermore, although the researcher interviewed some participants from outside Western Europe (such as Asia and Latin America), the majority of the data sample were Western Europeans. Customers' and consumers' perspectives and experiences with OBCs may vary depending on the country they reside in and on individuals' cultural characteristics. For further research, it is recommended that ethnography studies be conducted to closely understand the relationship between customer loyalty and OBCs across different industry settings and consumer populations from different global regions including: West, Central and Eastern Europe; Asia; Africa; Mediterranean and Middle East; and the Americas. The limited time available

in the current study made it unfeasible to carry out a comparison of various cases related to OBCs and customer loyalty. Additionally, these ethnography studies could address the different type of OBCs. The current study does not specifically distinguish firm-generated and user-generated OBCs, which, likewise, may influence community members' attitudes and online behaviours differently.

However, as stated, the researcher's social constructivist and epistemological self-positioning justified the choice to adopt an embedded single case study. Thus, the decision not to adopt ethnography for the current study's research strategy does not reduce the validity of the emergent findings. Furthermore, the adoption of the case study allowed the researcher to generate an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in a single industry and consumer segment. Despite the isolation of a specific case study, the current study enhances the conceptualisation of the phenomenon in general. Thus, future researchers who conduct comparative studies to examine potential differences across industries and consumer segments across cultures, can use the current findings as a starting point for future studies.

The current study developed the TISE framework which generated an OBC loyalty typology linking it to four major themes representing the influence of OBCs and their members on loyalty. The TISE framework considers OBC customers and consumers to be heterogeneous, but they can be categorised into four types of loyalists. Future studies may enhance the understanding and generalisability of the framework if it is tested for industry and consumer segments. Specifically, future research could enhance the generalisability of the findings of the TISE loyalty typology (traditionalists, inspirers, self-containers and expellers). Since the current study suggested that customers may adapt from one category of the TISE loyalty typology to another, future research could examine those potential occurrences. This would support the existence of multiple social realities that influence consumers' experience at different times thus potentially influencing changes in attitudes and behaviours. From this, future research may identify other key determinants important to OBC customer loyalty, improving the conceptualisation of the phenomenon in general and of the current study.

6.6 Summary

The chapter presented the conclusions, the theoretical contributions and practical implications of the current research to the area of OBCs and customer loyalty. The

chapter readdresses the rationale of the research and the methodology employed, emphasising the validity of the generated findings. The chapter provides several recommendations for future research, addressing unaddressed aspects, including differences of perspectives across industries and samples of consumers and customers, and the need to test the new perspectives and conceptualisation of the phenomenon generated by the findings.

References

Aaker, J.L. (1997). Dimensions of brand personality. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 34(3), 347-356.

Achabou, M.A., & Dekhili, S. (2013). Luxury and sustainable development: Is there a match?. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(10), 1896-1903.

Adjei, M.T., Noble, S.M., & Noble, C.H. (2010). The influence of C2C communications in online brand communities on customer purchase behavior. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 38(5), 634-653.

Agag, G., & El-Masry, A.A. (2016). Understanding consumer intention to participate in online travel community and effects on consumer intention to purchase travel online and WOM: An integration of innovation diffusion theory and TAM with trust. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 60, 97-111.

Ahuvia, A.C. (2005). Beyond the extended self: Loved objects and consumers' identity narratives. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 32(6), 171–184

Akers, R.L., Krohn, M.D., Lanza-Kaduce, L., & Radosevich, M. (1979). Social Learning and Deviant Behavior: a Specific Test of a General Theory. *American Sociological Review*, 44(4), 636–55.

Akman, I., & Mishra, A. (2017). Factors influencing consumer intention in social commerce adoption. *Information Technology & People*, 30(2), 356-370.

Alba, J.W., & Chattopadhyay, A. (1986). Salience effects in brand recall. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 23(4), 363-369.

Albert, N., Merunka, D., & Valette-Florence, P. (2008). When consumers love their brands: Exploring the concept and its dimensions. *Journal of Business Research*, 61(10), 1062-1075.

Algesheimer, R., Bagozzi, R.P., & Dholakia, U.M. (2018). Key informant models for measuring group-level variables in small groups: application to plural subject theory. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 47(2), 277-313.

Algesheimer, R., Dholakia, U.M., & Herrmann, A. (2005). The social influence of brand community: Evidence from European car clubs. *Journal of Marketing*, 69(3), 19-34.

Algharabat, R., Rana, N.P., Alalwan, A.A., Baabdullah, A., & Gupta, A. (2020). Investigating the antecedents of customer brand engagement and consumer-based brand equity in social media. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 53, p.101767.

Alhidari, A., Iyer, P., & Paswan, A. (2015). Personal level antecedents of eWOM and purchase intention, on social networking sites. *Journal of Customer Behaviour*, 14(2), 107-125.

Al-Habil, W. I. (2011). Positivist and Phenomenological Research in American Public Administration. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 34(14), 946-953.

Alvarado-Karste, D., & Guzmán, F. (2020). The effect of brand identity- cognitive style fit and social influence on consumer-based brand equity. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 29, 971–984.

Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso.

Annie-Jin, S.A. (2012). The potential of social media for luxury brand management. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 30(7), 687-699.

Appiah, D., & Watson, A. (2021). Exploring the Emergence of Luxury Smartphones and Switching Behaviour. In W. Ozuem & S. Ranfagni (Eds.), *The Art of Digital Marketing for Fashion and Luxury Brands*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

Asatryan, V.S., & Oh, H. (2008). Psychological ownership theory: An exploratory application in the restaurant industry. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 32(3), 363-386.

Athwal, N., Istanbulluoglu, D., & McCormack, S.E. (2019). The allure of luxury brands' social media activities: a uses and gratifications perspective. *Information Technology & People*, 32(3), 603-626.

Attride-Stirling, J. (2001). Thematic networks: an analytic tool for qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, 1(3), 385-405.

Audrezet, A., De Kerviler, G., & Moulard, J.G. (2018). Authenticity under threat: When social media influencers need to go beyond self-presentation. *Journal of Business Research*, 17, 557–569.

Ayeh, J.K., Au, N., & Law, R. (2013). Predicting the intention to use consumer-generated media for travel planning. *Tourism Management*, 35, 132-143.

Azar, S.L., Machado, J.C., Vacas-de-Carvalho, L., & Mendes, A. (2016). Motivations to interact with brands on Facebook–Towards a typology of consumer–brand interactions. *Journal of Brand Management*, 23(2), 153-178.

Azemi, Y., Ozuem, W., Howell, K.E., & Lancaster, G. (2019). An exploration into the practice of online service failure and recovery strategies in the Balkans. *Journal of Business Research*, 94, 420-431.

Azemi, Y., Ozuem, W. & Howell, K.E. (2020). The effects of online negative word-of-mouth on dissatisfied customers: A frustration–aggression perspective. *Psychology & Marketing*, 37(4), 564-577.

Azemi, Y., Ozuem, W., Wiid, R. & Hobson, A. (2022). Luxury fashion brand customers' perceptions of mobile marketing: Evidence of multiple communications and marketing channels. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 66, p.102944.

Bagozzi, R.P., & Dholakia, U.M. (2002). Intentional social action in virtual communities. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 16(2), 2-21.

Bagozzi, R.P., & Dholakia, U.M. (2006). Antecedents and purchase consequences of customer participation in small group brand communities. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 23(1), 45-61.

Bailey, L.R., & Seock, Y.K. (2010). The relationships of fashion leadership, fashion magazine content and loyalty tendency. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 14(1), 39-57.

Baker, C.R., Chiapello, E., Justesen, L., & Mouritsen, J. (2011). Effects of actor-network theory in accounting research. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, 24(2), 161-193.

Balachander, S., & Stock, A. (2009). Limited edition products: When and when not to offer them. *Marketing Science*, 28(2), 336-355.

Balaji, M.S., Khong, K.W., & Chong, A.Y.L. (2016). Determinants of negative word-of-mouth communication using social networking sites. *Information & Management*, 53(4), 528-540.

Baldinger, A.L., & Rubinson, J. (1996). Brand loyalty: The link between attitude and behaviour. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 36, 22–34.

Baldus, B.J., Voorhees, C., & Calantone, R. (2015). Online brand community engagement: Scale development and validation. *Journal of Business Research*, 68(5), 978-985.

Ballantyne, R., Warren, A., & Nobbs, K. (2006). The evolution of brand choice. *Journal of Brand Management*, 13(4), 339-352.

Bao, Y., Bao, Y., & Sheng, S. (2011). Motivating purchase of private brands: Effects of store image, product signatureness, and quality variation. *Journal of Business Research*, 64(2), 220-226.

Barney, J.B., & Arikan, A.M. (2001). The resource-based view: Origins and implications. In A.M Hitt., R.E. Freeman, & J.S. Harrison (Eds.), *The Blackwell handbook of strategic management* (pp. 124-188). Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Barone, M.J., & Roy, T. (2010). Does exclusivity always pay off? Exclusive price promotions and consumer response. *Journal of Marketing*, 74(2), 121-132.

Barwise, P., & Meehan, S. (2010). The one thing you must get right when building a brand. *Harvard Business Review*, 88(12), 80-84.

Bassey, M. (1999). *Case study research in educational settings*. Buckingham, England: Open University Press.

Baumgartner, H., Sujan, M., & Bettman, J.R. (1992). Autobiographical memories, affect, and consumer information processing. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 1(1), 53-82.

Baym, N.K. (1998). The emergence of on-line community. In S. G. Jones (Ed.), *Cybersociety 2.0* (pp. 35-68). London: Sage Publications.

Beck, U. (2011). Cosmopolitanism as Imagined Communities of Global Risk. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 55(10), 1346-1361.

Becker, H. S. (1960). Notes on the concept of commitment. *American Journal of Sociology*, 66, 32–40.

Becker, T.E., Randall, D.M., & Riegel, C.D. (1995). The multidimensional view of commitment and the theory of reasoned action: A comparative evaluation. *Journal of Management*, 21(4), 617-638.

Belk, R.W. (2013). Extended self in a digital world. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 40(3), 477-500.

Bellezza, S., & Keinan, A. (2014). Brand tourists: how non–core users enhance the brand image by eliciting pride. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 41(2), 397-417.

Bemmaor, A.C. (1995). Predicting behavior from intention-to-buy measures: The parametric case. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 32(2), 176-191.

Benbasat, I., Goldstein, D.K., & Mead, M. (1987). The case research strategy in studies of information systems. *MIS Quarterly*, 11, 369-386.

Bentley, S.V., Greenaway, K.H., & Haslam, S.A. (2017). Cognition in context: Social inclusion attenuates the psychological boundary between self and other. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *73*, 42-49.

Bergami, M., & Bagozzi, R.P. (2000). Self-categorization, affective commitment and group self-esteem as distinct aspects of social identity in the organization. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 39(4), 555-577.

Berger, P.L., & Luckmann, T. (1976). *The Social Construction of Reality*. New York, Doubleday.

Berger, J., & Milkman, K.L. (2012). What makes online content viral?. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 49(2), 192-205.

Berger, J., & Ward, M. (2010). Subtle signals of inconspicuous consumption. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 37(4), 555-569.

Berthon, P., Pitt, L., Parent, M., & Berthon, J.-P. (2009). Aesthetics and ephemerality: observing and preserving the luxury brand. *California Management Review*, 52(1), 45-66.

Bhattacharya, C.B., & Sen, S. (2003). Consumer–company identification: A framework for understanding consumers' relationships with companies. *Journal of Marketing*, 67(2), 76-88.

Bi, Q. (2019). Cultivating loyal customers through online customer communities: A psychological contract perspective. *Journal of Business Research*, 103, 34-44.

Bickart, B., & Schindler, R.M. (2001). Internet forums as influential sources of consumer information. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 15(3), 31-40.

Biehal, G., Stephens, D., & Curio, E. (1992). Attitude toward the ad and brand choice. *Journal of Advertising*, 21(3), 19-36.

Bijmolt, T.H., Leeflang, P.S., Block, F., Eisenbeiss, M., Hardie, B.G., Lemmens, A., & Saffert, P. (2010). Analytics for customer engagement. *Journal of Service Research*, 13(3), 341-356.

Bikhchandani, S., Hirshleifer, D., & Welch, I. (1992). A theory of fads, fashion, custom, and cultural change as informational cascades. *Journal of Political Economy*, 100(5), 992-1026.

Bilgihan, A. (2016). Gen Y customer loyalty in online shopping: An integrated model of trust, user experience and branding. *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 61, 103-113.

Bleier, A., Harmeling, C.M., & Palmatier, R.W. (2019). Creating Effective Online Customer Experiences. *Journal of Marketing*, 83(2), 98-119.

Bloch, P.H., Bush, R.F., & Campbell, L. (1993). Consumer "accomplices" in product counterfeiting: a demand side investigation. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 10(4), 27-36.

Blumer, H. (1937). *Social Psychology*. In E.P. Schmidt (Ed.), *Man and Society* (pp. 144-198). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Brakus, J.J., Schmitt, B.H., & Zarantonello, L. (2009). Brand experience: what is it? How is it measured? Does it affect loyalty?. *Journal of Marketing*, 73(3), 52-68.

Braun, V., & Clarke. V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology,* 3(2), 77–101.

Braun, V., Clarke, V., & Gray, D. (2017). Innovations in qualitative methods. In B.

Gough (Ed.), *The Palgrave handbook of critical social psychology* (pp. 243–266). Palgrave Macmillan.

Brehm, Jack W. (1966). *A Theory of Psychological Reactance*. Morristown, NY: Academic Press.

Breuilly, J. (2016). Benedict Anderson's imagined communities: a symposium. *Nations and Nationalism*, 22(4), 625-659.

Brodie, R.J., Hollebeek, L.D., Jurić, B., & Ilić, A. (2011). Customer engagement: Conceptual domain, fundamental propositions, and implications for research. *Journal of Service Research*, 14(3), 252-271.

Brodie, R.J., Ilic, A., Juric, B., & Hollebeek, L. (2013). Consumer engagement in a virtual brand community: An exploratory analysis. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(1), 105-114.

Brooks, J., McCluskey, S., Turley, E., & King, N. (2015). The utility of template analysis in qualitative psychology research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 12(2), 202-222.

Brown, T.J., Barry, T.E., Dacin, P.A., & Gunst, R.F. (2005). Spreading the word: Investigating antecedents of consumers' positive word-of-mouth intentions and behaviors in a retailing context. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 33(2), 123-138.

Brun, A., & Castelli, C. (2013). The nature of luxury: a consumer perspective. *International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management*, 41(11/12), 823-847.

Bryman, A., & Bell, E. (2011). *Business research methods* (3rd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Buchanan, B. (1974). Building organizational commitment: The socialization of managers in work organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 19, 533–546.

Butcher, L., Phau, I., & Shimul, A.S. (2017). Uniqueness and status consumption in Generation Y consumers. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 35(5), 673-687.

Cacioppo, J.T., & Petty, R.E. (1982). The need for cognition. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 42, 116-131.

Caelli, K., Ray, L., & Mill, J. (2003). "Clear as mud": Toward greater clarity in generic qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 2(2), 1–23

Calder, B.J., Malthouse, E.C., & Schaedel, U. (2009). An experimental study of the relationship between online engagement and advertising effectiveness. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 23(4), 321-331.

Carlson, J., Rahman, M.M., Taylor, A., & Voola, R. (2019). Feel the VIBE: Examining value-in-the-brand-page-experience and its impact on satisfaction and customer engagement behaviours in mobile social media. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 46, 149-162.

Carlson, J., Rahman, M., Voola, R., & De Vries, N. (2018b). Customer engagement behaviours in social media: capturing innovation opportunities. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 32(1), 83-94.

Carlson, B., Suter, T., & Brown, T. (2008). Social versus psychological brand community: the role of psychological sense of brand community. *Journal of Business Research*, 61(4), 284-291.

Carlson, J., Wyllie, J., Rahman, M.M., & Voola, R. (2018a). Enhancing brand relationship performance through customer participation and value creation in social media brand communities. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 50, 333-341.

Carroll, B.A., & Ahuvia, A.C. (2006). Some antecedents and outcomes of brand love. *Marketing Letters*, 17(2), 79-89.

Casaló, L.V., Flavián, C., & Guinalíu, M. (2010). Antecedents and consequences of consumer participation in on-line communities: The case of the travel sector. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, 15(2), 137-167.

Cayla, J., & Eckhardt, G.M. (2008). Asian brands and the shaping of a transnational imagined community. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 35(2), 216-230.

Cennamo, C., & Santaló, J. (2015). How to avoid platform traps. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 57(1), 12.

Chae, H., & Ko, E. (2016). Customer social participation in the social networking services and its impact upon the customer equity of global fashion brands. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(9), 3804-3812.

Chaiken, S. (1980). Heuristic versus systematic information processing and the use of source versus message cues in persuasion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 39(5), 752.

Chandler, C.H. (1989). Beyond customer satisfaction. *Quality Progress*, 22(2), 30-32.

Chandon, P., Morwitz, V.G., & Reinartz, W.J. (2005). Do intentions really predict behavior? Self-generated validity effects in survey research. *Journal of Marketing*, 69(2), 1-14.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London: Sage Publications.

Chatterjee, P. (1993). *The nation and its fragments: Colonial and postcolonial histories*. Princeton University Press.

Chatterjee, P., Hoffman, D.L., & Novak, T.P. (2003). Modeling the clickstream: Implications for web-based advertising efforts. *Marketing Science*, 22(4), 520-541.

Chen, J., Teng, L., Yu, Y., & Yu, X. (2016). The effect of online information sources on purchase intentions between consumers with high and low susceptibility to informational influence. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(2), 467-475.

Chen, K., & Yen, D.C. (2004). Improving the quality of online presence through interactivity. *Information and Management*, 42(1), 217-226.

Cheng, F., Wu, C., & Chen, Y. (2020). Creating customer loyalty in online brand communities. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 107, p.105752.

Cheung, C.M., Chiu, P.Y., & Lee, M.K. (2011). Online social networks: Why do students use facebook?. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 27(4), 1337-1343.

Cheung, C.M., Lee, M.K., & Rabjohn, N. (2008). The impact of electronic word-of-mouth: The adoption of online opinions in online customer communities. *Internet Research*, 18(3), 229-247.

Cheung, C.M.Y., Sia, C.L., & Kuan, K.K. (2012). Is this review believable? A study of factors affecting the credibility of online consumer reviews from an ELM perspective. *Journal of the Association for Information Systems*, 13(8), 618.

Chevalier, J.A., & Mayzlin, D. (2006). The effect of word of mouth on sales: Online book reviews. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 43(3), 345-354.

Chiu, C.M., Fu, C.Y., Lin, W.Y., & Chen, C.F. (2019). The central roles of embeddedness and engagement in virtual communities. *Online Information Review*, 43(4), 531-550.

Choi, E., Ko, E., & Kim, A.J. (2016). Explaining and predicting purchase intentions following luxury-fashion brand value co-creation encounters. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(12), 5827-5832.

Clee, M.A., & Wicklund, R.A. (1980). Consumer behavior and psychological reactance. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 6(4), 389-405.

Coelho, A., Bairrada, C., & Peres, F. (2019). Brand communities' relational outcomes, through brand love. *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, 28(2), 154–165.

Coles, B.A., & West, M. (2016). Weaving the internet together: Imagined communities in newspaper comment threads. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 60, 44-53.

Collins, N.L., & Miller, L.C. (1994). Self-disclosure and liking: a meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 116(3), 457.

Cooper, H., Merrilees, B., & Miller, D. (2020). The corporate heritage brand paradox: Managing the tension between continuity and change in luxury brands. *Australasian Marketing Journal (AMJ)* (In Press).

Corlett, S., & Mavin, S. (2018). Reflexivity and researcher positionality. In C. Cassell, A.L. Cunliffe, & G. Grandy (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative business and management research methods* (pp. 377-399). SAGE Publications.

Cornwall, A., & Jewkes, R. (1995). What is participatory research?. *Social Science and Medicine*, 41(12), 1667-1676.

Cova, B. (1997). Community and consumption: Towards a definition of the "linking value" of product or services. *European Journal of Marketing*, 31(3/4), 297-316.

Coyle, J.R., & Thorson, E. (2001). The effects of progressive levels of interactivity and vividness in web marketing sites. *Journal of Advertising*, 30(3), 65-77.

Crawford-Camiciottoli, B., Ranfagni, S., & Guercini, S. (2014). Exploring brand associations: an innovative methodological approach. *European Journal of Marketing*, 48(5/6), 1092-1112.

Creswell, J.W. (1994). *Research design: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. London: Sage.

Creswell, J.W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design*. London, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J.W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J.W., & Poth, C.N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage publications.

Crosby, L., & Johnson, S. (2006). Exceptional experience: market tactics that are quickly copied might erode customer loyalty. *Marketing Management*, 15(1), 12-13.

Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. London: Sage Publications.

Cypress, B.S. (2017). Rigor or reliability and validity in qualitative research: Perspectives, strategies, reconceptualization, and recommendations. *Dimensions of Critical Care Nursing*, 36(4), 253-263.

Cyr, D., Hassanein, K., Head, M., & Ivanov, A. (2007). The role of social presence in establishing loyalty in e-service environments. *Interacting with Computers*, 19(1), 43-56.

Daft, R.L., & Lengel, R.H. (1986). Organizational information requirements, media richness and structural design. *Management Science*, 32(5), 554-571.

Dahler-Larsen, P. (2017). Qualitative evaluation: Methods, ethics, and politics with stakeholders. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (eds), *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 867-886). SAGE Publications.

Danias, K., & Kavoura, A. (2013). The role of social media as a tool of a company's innovative communication activities. *The Małopolska School of Economics in Tarnów Research Papers Collection*, 23(2), 75-83

Danziger, P. (2021). Luxury Turns From Conspicuous To Conscientious In 2021: Challenges And Opportunities Ahead. *Forbes* [Online] Available at: https://www.forbes.com/sites/pamdanziger/2021/01/10/luxury-turns-from-conspicuous-to-conscientious-in-2021-challenges-and-opportunities-ahead/?sh=26562b425a9b [Accessed: 29th September 2021].

Darke, P.R., Brady, M.K., Benedicktus, R.L., & Wilson, A.E. (2016). Feeling close from afar: The role of psychological distance in offsetting distrust in unfamiliar online retailers. *Journal of Retailing*, 92(3), 287-299.

Da Silveira, C., Lages, C., & Simões, C. (2013). Reconceptualizing brand identity in a dynamic environment. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(1), 28-36.

Davies, I.A., Lee, Z., & Ahonkhai, I. (2012). Do consumers care about ethical-luxury?. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 106(1), 37-51.

Davis, F. D., Bagozzi, R. P., & Warshaw, P. R. (1989). User acceptance of computer technology: a comparison of two theoretical models. *Management Science*, 35(8), 982-1003.

Davis, R., Piven, I., & Breazeale, M. (2014). Conceptualizing the brand in social media community: The five sources model. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 21(4), 468-481.

DeAcetis, J. (2020). The Perfect Balance: How Luxury Brands Can Maintain Exclusivity And Still Be Relatable Online. *Forbes* [Online] Available at: https://www.forbes.com/sites/josephdeacetis/2020/10/24/the-perfect-balance-how-luxury-brands-can-maintain-exclusivity-and-still-be-relatable-online/?sh=2efee0727e44 [Accessed: 10th May 2021].

de Almeida, S., Scaraboto, D., dos Santos Fleck, J., & Dalmoro, M. (2018). Seriously Engaged Consumers: Navigating Between Work and Play in Online Brand Communities. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 44, 29-42.

Dedeoglu, B.B. (2019). Are information quality and source credibility really important for shared content on social media? The moderating role of gender. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 31(1), 513-534.

de Kerviler, G., & Rodriguez, C.M. (2019). Luxury brand experiences and relationship quality for Millennials: The role of self-expansion. *Journal of Business Research*, 102, 250-262.

Deloitte (2020). *Global Powers of Luxury Goods 2020. The new age of fashion and luxury*. [Online] Available at: https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/at/Documents/consumer-business/at-global-powers-luxury-goods-2020.pdf [Accessed: 10th May 2021].

Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (2000). *The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research*. In: Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S., Eds., Handbook of Qualitative Research, Sage, Thousand Oaks, 1-32.

Denzin, N.K., & Lincoln, Y.S. (2005). *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publications.

Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (2011). *The SAGE Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Dessart, L., Veloutsou, C., & Morgan-Thomas, A. (2016). Capturing consumer engagement: duality, dimensionality and measurement. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 32(5-6), 399-426.

de Vries, N.J., & Carlson, J. (2014). Examining the drivers and brand performance implications of customer engagement with brands in the social media environment. *Journal of Brand Management*, 21(6), 495-515.

de Vries, L., Gensler, S., & Leeflang, P. S. (2012). Popularity of brand posts on brand fan pages: An investigation of the effects of social media marketing. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 26(2), 83–91.

Dholakia, U.M., Bagozzi, R.P., & Pearo, L.K. (2004). A social influence model of consumer participation in network-and small-group-based virtual communities. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 21(3), 241-263.

Dick, A.S., & Basu, K. (1994). Customer loyalty: toward an integrated conceptual framework. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 22(2), 99-113.

Dion, D., & Arnould, E. (2011). Retail luxury strategy: assembling charisma through art and magic. *Journal of Retailing*, 87(4), 502-520.

Dion, D., & Borraz, S. (2017). Managing status: How luxury brands shape class subjectivities in the service encounter. *Journal of Marketing*, 81(5), 67-85.

Dodson, K.J. (1996). Peak experiences and mountain biking: incorporating the bike into the extended self. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 23, 317.

Dubois, A., & Gadde, L.E. (2002). Systematic combining: an abductive approach to case research. *Journal of Business Research*, 55(7), 553-560.

Dubois, B. & Paternault, C. (1995). Observations: Understanding the world of international luxury brands: The" dream formula. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 35(4), 69-76.

Dyer Jr, W.G., & Wilkins, A.L. (1991). Better stories, not better constructs, to generate better theory: A rejoinder to Eisenhardt. *Academy of Management Review*, 16(3), 613-619.

Eastman, J.K., & Liu, J. (2012). The impact of generational cohorts on status consumption: An exploratory look at generational cohort and demographics on status consumption. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 29(2), 93–102.

Eigenraam, A.W., Eelen, J., Van Lin, A., & Verlegh, P.W. (2018). A Consumer-based Taxonomy of Digital Customer Engagement Practices. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 44, 102-121.

Eisenhardt, K.M. (1989). Building theories from case study research. *The Academy of Management Review*, 14(4), 532 – 550.

Eisenhardt, K.M., & Graebner, M.E. (2007). Theory building from cases: opportunities and challenges. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(1), 25-32.

Elia, G., Petruzzelli, A.M., & Urbinati, A. (2020). Implementing open innovation through virtual brand communities: A case study analysis in the semiconductor industry. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 155, p.119994.

Ellemers, N., Kortekaas, P., & Ouwerkerk, J. (1999). Self-categorisation, commitment to the group and group self-esteem as related but distinct aspects of social identity. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 29(23), 371-389.

Ellison, N.B., Steinfield, C., & Lampe, C. (2007). The benefits of Facebook "friends:" Social capital and college students' use of online social network sites. *Journal of computer-mediated communication*, 12(4), 1143-1168.

Essamri, A., McKechnie, S., & Winklhofer, H. (2019). Co-creating corporate brand identity with online brand communities: A managerial perspective. *Journal of Business Research*, 96, 366-375.

Etzioni, A. (1961). *A comparative analysis of complex organizations*. Free Press.

Falk, I., & Guenther, J. (2007). Generalising from qualitative research: case studies from VET in contexts. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 42(2), 88-99

Fang, Y.H. (2019). An app a day keeps a customer connected: Explicating loyalty to brands and branded applications through the lens of affordance and service-dominant logic. *Information & Management*, 56(3), 377-391.

Fang, C., & Zhang, J. (2019). Users' continued participation behavior in social Q&A communities: A motivation perspective. *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 92, 87-109.

Ferraris, A., Santoro, G., & Bresciani, S. (2017). Open innovation in multinational companies' subsidiaries: the role of internal and external knowledge. *European Journal of International Management*, 11(4), 452-468.

Festinger, L., Schachter, S., & Back, K. (1950). *Social Pressures in Informal Groups*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Filieri, R. (2015). What makes online reviews helpful? A diagnosticity-adoption framework to explain informational and normative influences in e-WOM. *Journal of Business Research*, 68(6), 1261-1270.

Filieri, R., Hofacker, C.F., & Alguezaui, S. (2018). What makes information in online consumer reviews diagnostic over time? The role of review relevancy, factuality, currency, source credibility and ranking score. *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 80, 122-131.

Fisher, C. B., & Anushko, A. E. (2008). *Research ethics in social science*. In D. M. Mertens & P. E. Ginsberg (Eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Social Research Methods* (pp. 95-109). Sage.

Flache, A., Mäs, M., Feliciani, T., Chattoe-Brown, E., Deffuant, G., Huet, S., & Lorenz, J. (2017). Models of social influence: Towards the next frontiers. *Journal of Artificial Societies and Social Simulation*, 20(4), 2.

Flecha-Ortíz, J., Santos-Corrada, M., Dones-González, V., López-González, E., & Vega, A. (2019). Millennials and Snapchat: Self-expression through its use and its influence on purchase motivation. *Journal of Business Research*, 125, 798-805.

Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(2), 219-245.

Fontana, A., & Frey, J. H. (2000). The interview: From structured questions to negotiated text. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 645-672). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.

Fortin, D.R., & Dholakia, R.R. (2005). Interactivity and vividness effects on social presence and involvement with a web-based advertisement. *Journal of Business Research*, 58(3), 387-396.

Fournier, S. (1998). Consumers and their brands: Developing relationship theory in consumer research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 24(4), 343-373.

Fournier, S., & Lee, L. (2009). Getting Brand Communities Right. *Harvard Business Review*, 87(4), 105–11.

Freberg, K., Graham, K., McGaughey, K., & Freberg, L.A. (2011). Who are the social media influencers? A study of public perceptions of personality. *Public Relations Review*, 37(1), 90-92.

Frijda, N.H. (1986). *The emotions* (p. 207). Cambridge University Press.

Fuchs, C., Prandelli, E., & Schreier, M. (2010). The psychological effects of empowerment strategies on consumers' product demand. *Journal of Marketing*, 74(1), 65–79.

Fuchs, C., Prandelli, E., Schreier, M., & Dahl, D.W. (2013). All that is users might not be gold: How labeling products as user designed backfires in the context of luxury fashion brands. *Journal of Marketing*, 77(5), 75-91.

Fuchs, C., & Schreier, M. (2011). Customer empowerment in new product development. *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 28(1), 17–32.

Furse, D.H., Punj, G.N., & Stewart, D.W. (1984). A typology of individual search strategies among purchasers of new automobiles. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 10(4), 417-431.

Gagné, M., & Deci, E.L. (2005). Self-determination theory and work motivation. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 26(4), 331-362.

Galeotti, A & Goyal, S. (2009). Influencing the Influencers: A Theory of Strategic Diffusion. *RAND Journal of Economics*, 40(3), 509–32.

Gambetti, R.C., & Graffigna, G. (2010). The concept of engagement: a systematic analysis of the ongoing marketing debate. *International Journal of Market Research*, 52(6), 801-826.

Ganesan, P., & Sridhar, M. (2014). Smart phone attribute choice and brand importance for millennial customers. *Journal of Contemporary Management Research*, 8(2), 71-89.

Garfinkel, H. (1967). *What is ethnomethodology?. Studies in ethnomethodology*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.

Garrido-Moreno, A., García-Morales, V.J., Lockett, N., & King, S. (2018). The missing link: Creating value with Social Media use in hotels. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 75, 94-104.

Gaski, J.F. (1984). The Theory of Power and Conflict in Channels of Distribution. *Journal of Marketing*, 48(3), 9–29.

Gaustad, T., Samuelsen, B.M., Warlop, L., & Fitzsimons, G.J. (2019). Too much of a good thing? Consumer response to strategic changes in brand image. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 36(2), 264-280.

Geer, J.G. (1988). What do open-ended questions measure?. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 52(3), 365–367.

Gelbrich, K., Hagel, J., & Orsingher, C., 2021. Emotional support from a digital assistant in technology-mediated services: Effects on customer satisfaction and

behavioral persistence. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 38(1), 176-193.

Gentina, E., Shrum, L.J., & Lowrey, T.M. (2016). Teen attitudes toward luxury fashion brands from a social identity perspective: A cross-cultural study of French and US teenagers. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(12), 5785-5792.

Gerard, H.B., & Mathewson, G.C. (1966). The Effects of Severity of Initiation on Liking for a Group: A Replication. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 2(3), 278–87.

Giakoumaki, C., & Krepapa, A. (2020). Brand engagement in self-concept and consumer engagement in social media: The role of the source. *Psychology & Marketing*, 37(3), 457-465.

Gill, J., & Johnson, P. (2010). *Research methods for managers* (4th ed.). London: Sage.

Gill, M., Sridhar, S., & Grewal, R. (2017). Return on engagement initiatives: A study of a business-to-business mobile app. *Journal of Marketing*, 81(4), 45-66.

Gioia, D.A., Corley, K.G., & Hamilton, A.L. (2013). Seeking qualitative rigor in inductive research: Notes on the Gioia methodology. *Organizational Research Methods*, 16(1), 15-31.

Glaser, B.G. (1978). *Theoretical Sensitivity*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Glaser, B.G. (1992). *Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis: Emergence Vs. Forcing*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Glaser, B.G., & Strauss, A.L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory*. New York: Aldine deGruyter.

Godes, D., & Mayzlin, D. (2009). Firm-created word-of-mouth communication: Evidence from a field test. *Marketing Science*, 28(4), 721-739.

Godey, B., Manthiou, A., Pederzoli, D., Rokka, J., Aiello, G., Donvito, R., & Singh, R. (2016). Social media marketing efforts of luxury brands: Influence on brand equity and consumer behavior. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(12), 5833-5841.

Goldenberg, J., Oestreicher-Singer, G., & Reichman, S. (2012). The quest for content: How user-generated links can facilitate online exploration. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 49(4), 452-468.

Gould, S. (1979). An equity-exchange model of organizational involvement. *Academy of Management Review*, 4, 53–62.

Grassi, A. (2020). Art to enhance consumer engagement in the luxury fashion domain. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal*, 24(3), 327-341.

Groth, M., Hennig-Thurau, T., & Walsh, G. (2009). Customer reactions to emotional labor: The roles of employee acting strategies and customer detection accuracy. *Academy of Management Journal*, 52(5), 958-974.

Gruzd, A., Wellman, B., & Takhteyev, Y. (2011). Imagining Twitter as an Imagined Community. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 55(10), 1294-1318.

Gu, B., Park, J., & Konana, P. (2012). The impact of external word-of-mouth sources on retailer sales of high-involvement products. *Information Systems Research*, 23(1), 182–196.

Guba, E.G., & Lincoln, Y.S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 105-117). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Gubrium, J.F., & Holstein, J.A. (2008). The constructionist mosaic. In J.A. Holstein & J.F. Gubrium (Eds.), *Handbook of constructionist research*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Guenther, J., & Falk, I. (2019). Generalising from Qualitative Research (GQR): A New Old Approach. *The Qualitative Report*, 24(5), 1012-1033.

Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, 18(1), 59-82.

Guest, G., MacQueen, K.M., & Namey, E.E. (2012). *Applied thematic analysis*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Gummerus, J., Liljander, V., Weman, E., & Pihlström, M. (2012). Customer engagement in a Facebook brand community. *Management Research Review*, 35(9), 857-877.

Habermas, J. (1987). *Knowledge and Human Interests*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Haenlein, M., & Libai, B. (2017). Seeding, referral, and recommendation: creating profitable word-of-mouth programs. *California Management Review*, 59(2), 68-91.

Hahn, K.H., & Kim, J. (2013). Salient antecedents of mobile shopping intentions: Media dependency, fashion/brand interest and peer influence. *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing*, 4(4), 225-246.

Hajli, N., Shanmugam, M., Papagiannidis, S., Zahay, D., & Richard, M.O. (2017). Branding co-creation with members of online brand communities. *Journal of Business Research*, 70, 136-144.

Hall, D., & Haslam, S. (1992). How to achieve–and measure–customer delight. *Business Marketing Digest*, 18(4), 17-20.

Hall, D. T., Schneider, B., & Nygren, H. J. (1970). Personal factors in organizational identification. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 15, 176–189.

Hamilton, D.L., Sherman, S.J., & Ruvolo, C.M. (1990). Stereotype-based expectancies: Effects on information processing and social behavior. *Journal of Social Issues*, 46(2), 35-60.

Han, H., & C. Jeong. (2013). Multi-Dimensions of Patrons' Emotional Experiences in Upscale Restaurants and Their Role in Loyalty Formation: Emotion Scale Improvement. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 32, 59-70.

Han, Y.J., Nunes, J.C., & Drèze, X. (2010). Signaling status with luxury goods: The role of brand prominence. *Journal of Marketing*, 74(4), 15-30.

Hanaki, N., Peterhansl, A., Dodds, P.S., & Watts, D.J. (2007). Cooperation in evolving social networks. *Management Science*, 53(7), 1036-1050.

Hanlon, A. (2020). *Ethics in Digital Marketing and Social Media*. In L. Eagle, D. Stephan, P. De Pelsmacker & C.R. Taylor (Eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Marketing Ethics*, p.424.

Hansen, J., & Wänke, M. (2011). The abstractness of luxury. *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 32(5), 789-796.

Harmeling, C., Moffett, J.W., Arnold, M.J., & Carlson, B.D. (2017). Toward a theory of customer engagement marketing. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 45(3), 312-335.

Harmeling, C.M., Palmatier, R.W., Houston, M.B., Arnould, M.J., & Samaha, S. (2015). Transformational relationship events. *Journal of Marketing*, 79(5), 39–62.

Harrison, H., Birks, M., Franklin, R., & Mills, J. (2017). Case study research: Foundations and methodological orientations. Forum: *Qualitative Social Research*, 18(1). Art 19.

He, Y., Chen, Q., Lee, R., Wang, Y., & Pohlman, A. (2017). Consumers' role performance and brand identification: evidence from a survey and a longitudinal field experiment. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 38(2), 1-11.

Heale, R., & Twycross, A. (2015). Validity and reliability in quantitative studies. *Evidence-based Nursing*, 18(3), 66-67.

Heath, H., & Cowley, S. (2004). Developing a grounded theory approach: a comparison of Glaser and Strauss. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 41(2), 141-150.

Heine, K., & Berghaus, B. (2014). Luxury goes digital: how to tackle the digital luxury brand-consumer touchpoints. *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing*, 5(3), 223-234.

Helal, G., & Ozuem, W. (2019). Social Media Ecosystems: The Millennial Brand Perceptions. In W. Ozuem, E. Patten & Y. Azemi (Eds.), *Harnessing omni-channel marketing strategies for fashion and luxury brands* (p. 142). Universal-Publishers.

Helal, G., Ozuem, W., & Lancaster, G. (2018). Social media brand perceptions of millennials. *International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management*, 46(10), 977-998.

Henderson, C.M., Beck, J.T., & Palmatier, R.W. (2011). Review of the theoretical underpinnings of loyalty programs. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 21(3), 256-276.

Hennigs, N., Wiedmann, K.P., & Klarmann, C. (2012). Luxury brands in the digital age–exclusivity versus ubiquity. *Marketing Review St. Gallen*, 29(1), 30-35.

Hennig-Thurau, T., Gwinner, K.P., Walsh, G., & Gremler, D.D. (2004). Electronic word-of-mouth via consumer-opinion platforms: what motivates consumers to articulate themselves on the internet?. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 18(1), 38-52.

Hennig-Thurau, T., Hofacker, C.F., & Bloching, B. (2013). Marketing the pinball way: Understanding how social media change the generation of value for consumers and companies. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 27(4), 237-241.

Hess Jr, R.L., Ganesan, S., & Klein, N.M. (2003). Service failure and recovery: The impact of relationship factors on customer satisfaction. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 31(2), 127-145.

Hewett, K., Rand, W., Rust, R.T., & van Heerde, H.J. (2016). Brand buzz in the echoverse. *Journal of Marketing*, 80(3), 1-24.

Hinz, O., Skiera, B., Barrot, C., & Becker, J.U. (2011). Seeding strategies for viral marketing: An empirical comparison. *Journal of Marketing*, 75(6), 55-71.

Ho, C.-I., Lin, M.-H., & Chen, H.-M. (2012). Web users' behavioural patterns of tourism information search: From online to offline. *Tourism Management*, 33(6), 1468–1482.

Ho-Dac, N., Carson, S., & Moore, W. (2013). The Effects of Positive and Negative Online Customer. Reviews: Do Brand Strength and Category Maturity Matter?. *Journal of Marketing*, 77(6), 37-53.

Hoe, L., Hogg, G., & Hart, S. (2003). Faking it: Counterfeiting and consumer contradictions. *European Advances in Consumer Behaviour*, 6, 60-67.

Holbrook, M.B., & Batra, R. (1987). Assessing the role of emotions as mediators of consumer responses to advertising. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 14(3), 404-420.

Hollebeek, L.D., & Macky, K. (2019). Digital Content Marketing's Role in Fostering Consumer Engagement, Trust, and Value: Framework, Fundamental Propositions, and Implications. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 45, 27-41.

Hollebeek, L.D., Srivastava, R.K., & Chen, T. (2016). S-D logic-informed customer engagement: integrative framework, revised fundamental propositions, and application to CRM. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 47(1), 161-185.

Hollebeek, L.D., Glynn, M.S. & Brodie, R.J. (2014). Consumer brand engagement in social media: Conceptualization, scale development and validation. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 28(2), 149-165.

Holloway, I., & Todres, L. (2003). The status of method: flexibility, consistency and coherence. *Qualitative Research*, 3(3), 345-357.

Homburg, C., Jensen, O., & Krohmer, H. (2008). Configurations of marketing and sales: a taxonomy. *Journal of Marketing*, 72(2), 133-154.

Homburg, C., Jozić, D., & Kuehnl, C. (2017). Customer experience management: toward implementing an evolving marketing concept. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 45(3), 377-401.

Howell, K. E. (2013). *An introduction to the philosophy of methodology*. London: Sage.

Hoyer, W.D., Chandy, R., Dorotic, M., Krafft, M., & Singh, S.S. (2010). Consumer cocreation in new product development. *Journal of Service Research*, 13(3), 283-296.

Hsiao, S.H., Wang, Y.Y., Wang, T., & Kao, T.W. (2019). How social media shapes the fashion industry: The spillover effects between private labels and national brands. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 86, 40-51.

Hsieh, S.H., Lee, C.T., & Tseng, T.H. (2021). Branded app atmospherics: Examining the effect of pleasure–arousal–dominance in brand relationship building. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 60, p.102482.

Hsu, C.H., Oh, H., & Assaf, A.G. (2012). A customer-based brand equity model for upscale hotels. *Journal of Travel Research*, 51(1), 81-93.

Huang, Q., Chen, X. Y., Ou, C., Davison, R. M., & Hua, Z. S. (2017). Understanding buyers' loyalty to a C2C platform: The roles of social capital, satisfaction and perceived effectiveness of E-commerce institutional mechanisms. *Information Systems Journal*, 27(1), 91–119.

Hur, H.J., Lee, H.K., & Choo, H.J. (2017). Understanding usage intention in innovative mobile app service: Comparison between millennial and mature consumers. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 73, 353-361.

Hussain, S., Ahmed, W., Jafar, R.M.S., Rabnawaz, A., & Jianzhou, Y. (2017). eWOM source credibility, perceived risk and food product customer's information adoption. *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 66, 96-102.

Ibrahim, N., Wang, X., & Bourne, H. (2017). Exploring the effect of user engagement in online brand communities: Evidence from Twitter. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 72, 321-338.

Ilhan, B.E., Kübler, R.V., & Pauwels, K.H. (2018). Battle of the brand fans: impact of brand attack and defense on social media. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 43, 33-51.

Irwin, J.R., & Naylor, R.W. (2009). Ethical decisions and response mode compatibility: Weighting of ethical attributes in consideration sets formed by excluding versus including product alternatives. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 46(2), 234-246.

Ishihara, M., & Zhang, Q. (2017). Balancing Exclusivity and Accessibility: Patterns of Brand and Product Line Extension Strategies in the Fashion Luxury Industry. *Luxury*, 4(1), 31-57.

Ismagilova, E., Slade, E., Rana, N.P., & Dwivedi, Y.K. (2019). The effect of characteristics of source credibility on consumer behaviour: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 53, p.101736.

Iyengar, R., Van den Bulte, C., & Valente, T.W. (2011). Opinion leadership and social contagion in new product diffusion. *Marketing Science*, 30(2), 195-212.

Jaakkola, E., & Alexander, M. (2014). The role of customer engagement behavior in value co-creation: a service system perspective. *Journal of Service Research*, 17(3), 247-261.

Jayachandran, S., Gimeno, J., & Varadarajan, R. (1999). The theory of multimarket competition: a synthesis and implications for marketing strategy. *Journal of Marketing*, 63(3), 49-66.

Jenkins, R. (2002). Imagined but not imaginary: ethnicity and nationalism in the modern world. In J. MacClancy & G. Bennett (Eds.), *Exotic no more: Anthropology on the front lines* (pp. 114-128). University of Chicago Press.

Jestratijevic, I., Rudd, N.A., & Uanhoro, J. (2020). Transparency of sustainability disclosures among luxury and mass-market fashion brands. *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing*, 11(2), 99-116.

Johnson, E.J., Moe, W.W., Fader, P.S., Bellman, S., & Lohse, G.L. (2004). On the depth and dynamics of online search behavior. *Management Science*, 50(3), 299-308.

Jones, S.G. (1997). The Internet and its social landscape. In S. Jones (Ed.), *Virtual culture: Identity and communication in cybersociety* (pp. 7-35). London: Sage Publications.

Joo, J., & Sang, Y. (2013). Exploring Koreans' smartphone usage: An integrated model of the technology acceptance model and uses and gratifications theory. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29(6), 2512-2518.

Jussila, I., Tarkiainen, A., Sarstedt, M., & Hair, J.F. (2015). Individual psychological ownership: Concepts, evidence, and implications for research in marketing. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 23(2), 121-139.

Kagan, J. (1958). The concept of identification. *Psychological Review*, 65, 296–305.

Kähr, A., Nyffenegger, B., Krohmer, H., & Hoyer, W.D. (2016). When hostile consumers wreak havoc on your brand: The phenomenon of consumer brand sabotage. *Journal of Marketing*, 80(3), 25-41.

Kaiser, S.B. (1990). *The Social Psychology of Clothing* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Macmillan.

Kallevig, A. (2021). Maintaining a Creative Brand Image in an Omnichannel World. In W. Ozuem & S. Ranfagni (Eds.), *The Art of Digital Marketing for Fashion and Luxury Brands*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

Kamboj, S., Sarmah, B., Gupta, S., & Dwivedi, Y. (2018). Examining branding co-creation in brand communities on social media: Applying the paradigm of Stimulus-Organism-Response. *International Journal of Information Management*, 39, 169-185.

Kamran-Disfani, O., Mantrala, M.K., Izquierdo-Yusta, A., & Martínez-Ruiz, M.P. (2017). The impact of retail store format on the satisfaction-loyalty link: An empirical investigation. *Journal of Business Research*, 77, 14-22.

Kanakaratne, M.D.S., Bray, J., & Robson, J. (2020). The influence of national culture and industry structure on grocery retail customer loyalty. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 54, p.102013.

Kapferer, J.N. (2012). Abundant rarity: The key to luxury growth. *Business Horizons*, 55(5), 453-462.

Kapferer, J.N., & Bastien, V. (2009). The specificity of luxury management: Turning marketing upside down, *Journal of Brand Management*, 16(5–6), 311-322.

Kapferer, J. N., & Valette-Florence, P. (2018). The impact of brand penetration and awareness on luxury brand desirability: A cross country analysis of the relevance of the rarity principle. *Journal of Business Research*, 83, 38–50.

Kapferer, J. N., & Michaut-Denizeau, A. (2020). Are millennials really more sensitive to sustainable luxury? A cross-generational international comparison of sustainability consciousness when buying luxury. *Journal of Brand Management*, 27(1), 35-47.

Kaplan, A.M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business Horizons*, 53(1), 59-68.

Kara, S., Vredeveld, A. J., Ross Jr, W. T. (2018). We share; we connect: How shared brand consumption influences relational brand connections. *Psychology & Marketing*, 35(5), 325–340.

Karahanna, E., Straub, D. W., & Chervany, N. L. (1999). 'Information technology adoption across time: a cross-sectional comparison of pre-adoption and post-adoption beliefs'. *MIS Quarterly*, 23(2), 183-213.

Kastanakis, M.N., & Balabanis, G. (2012). Between the mass and the class: Antecedents of the "bandwagon" luxury consumption behavior. *Journal of Business Research*, 65(10), 1399-1407.

Kaur, S., Gupta, S., Singh, S.K., & Perano, M. (2019). Organizational ambidexterity through global strategic partnerships: a cognitive computing perspective. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 145, 43-54.

Kavoura, A. (2014). Social media, online imagined communities and communication research. *Library Review*, 63(6/7), 490-504.

Kavoura, A., Pelet, J.E., Rundle-Thiele, S., & Lecat, B. (2014). Experience matters: Exploring the experience behavioral loyalty relationship in wine. *In 2014 Global Marketing Conference at Singapore*, 1757-1762.

Keller, K.L. (1993). Conceptualizing, measuring and managing customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Marketing*, 57, 1-22.

Keller, P.A., & Block, L.G. (1997). Vividness effects: A resource-matching perspective. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 24(3), 295-304.

Kelman, H.C. (1958). Compliance, identification, and internalization three processes of attitude change. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2(1), 51-60.

Kelman, H.C. (1961). Processes of opinion change. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 25(1), 57-78.

Kenny, D.A. (1996). Models of Nonindependence in Dyadic Research. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 13, 279–94.

Kenny, D.A., & la Voie, L. (1985). Separating Individual and Group Effects. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 48, 339–48.

Khalifa, D., & Shukla, P. (2021). When luxury brand rejection causes brand dilution. *Journal of Business Research*, 129, 110-121.

Khan, M.L. (2017). Social media engagement: What motivates user participation and consumption on YouTube?. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 66, 236-247.

Khamis, S., Ang, L., & Welling, R. (2017). Self-branding, 'micro-celebrity' and the rise of Social Media Influencers. *Celebrity studies*, 8(2), 191-208.

Kidron, A. (1978). Work values and organizational commitment. *Academy of Management Journal*, 21, 239–246.

Kietzmann, J., Hermkens, K., McCarthy, I., & Silvestre, B. (2011). Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media. *Business Horizons*, 54(3), 241-251.

Kim, A., & Dennis, A.R. (2019). Says who? The effects of presentation format and source rating on fake news in social media. *MIS Quarterly*, 43(3), 1025-1039.

Kim, C.K., Han, D., & Park, S.B. (2001). The effect of brand personality and brand identification on brand loyalty: Applying the theory of social identification. *Japanese Psychological Research*, 43(4), 195-206.

Kim, A.J., & Ko, E. (2012). Do social media marketing activities enhance customer equity? An empirical study of luxury fashion brand. *Journal of Business Research*, 65(10), 1480-1486.

Kim, J., Lee, H., & Lee, J. (2020). Smartphone preferences and brand loyalty: A discrete choice model reflecting the reference point and peer effect. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 52, p.101907.

Kim, A., Moravec, P.L., & Dennis, A.R. (2019). Combating Fake News on Social Media with Source Ratings: The Effects of User and Expert Reputation Ratings. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 36(3), 931-968.

Kim, H., & Niehm, L.S. (2009). The impact of website quality on information quality, value, and loyalty intentions in apparel retailing. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 23(3), 221-233.

Kim, K.H., Park, S.Y., Lee, S., Knight, D.K., Xu, B., Jeon, B.J., & Moon, H.I. (2010). Examining the relationships among attitude toward luxury brands, customer equity, and customer lifetime value in a Korean context. *Journal of Global Academy of Marketing*, 20(1), 27-34.

King, R.A., Racherla, P., & Bush, V.D. (2014). What we know and don't know about online word-of-mouth: A review and synthesis of the literature. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 28(3), 167-183.

Kipnis, D., Schmidt, S.M., & Wilkinson, I. (1980). Intraorganizational influence tactics: Explorations in getting one's way. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 65(4), 440.

Klein, J.F., Falk, T., Esch, F.R., & Gloukhovtsev, A. (2016). Linking pop-up brand stores to brand experience and word of mouth: The case of luxury retail. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(12), 5761-5767.

Klein, L.R., & Ford, G.T. (2003). Consumer search for information in the digital age: An empirical study of prepurchase search for automobiles. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 17(3), 29–49.

Kleine, R.E., Kleine, S.S., & Kernan, J.B. (1993). Mundane consumption and the self: A social-identity perspective. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 2(3), 209-235.

Ko, H., Cho, C.H., & Roberts, M.S. (2005). Internet uses and gratifications: A structural equation model of interactive advertising. *Journal of Advertising*, 34(2), 57-70.

Koivisto, E., & Mattila, P. (2018). Extending the luxury experience to social media – User-Generated Content co-creation in a branded event. *Journal of Business Research*, 117, 570-578.

Kong, H.M., Ko, E., Chae, H., & Mattila, P. (2016). Understanding fashion consumers' attitude and behavioral intention toward sustainable fashion products: Focus on sustainable knowledge sources and knowledge types. *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing*, *7*(2), 103-119.

Kong, Y., Wang, Y., Hajli, S., & Featherman, M. (2019). In sharing economy we trust: Examining the effect of social and technical enablers on millennials' trust in sharing commerce. *Computers in Human Behavior*, p.105993.

Kong, H.M., Witmaier, A., & Ko, E. (2021). Sustainability and social media communication: How consumers respond to marketing efforts of luxury and non-luxury fashion brands. *Journal of Business Research*, 131, 640-651.

Kreuzer, M., Cado, V., & Raïes, K. (2020). Moments of care: How interpersonal interactions contribute to luxury experiences of healthcare consumers. *Journal of Business Research*, 116, 482-490.

Krishnan, H.S. (1996). Characteristics of memory associations: A consumer-based brand equity perspective. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 13(4), 389-405.

Kübler, R.V., Colicev, A., & Pauwels, K.H. (2019). Social Media's Impact on the Consumer Mindset: When to Use Which Sentiment Extraction Tool?. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 50, 136-155.

Kuchmaner, C.A., Wiggins, J., & Grimm, P.E. (2019). The role of network embeddedness and psychological ownership in consumer responses to brand transgressions. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 47, 129-143.

Kudeshia, C., & Kumar, A. (2017). Social eWOM: does it affect the brand attitude and purchase intention of brands?. *Management Research Review*, 40(3), 310-330.

Kumagai, K., & Nagasawa, S.Y. (2017). The effect of selective store location strategy and self-congruity on consumers' apparel brand attitudes toward luxury vs. non-luxury. *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing*, 8(4), 266-282.

Kumar, A., Bezawada, R., Rishika, R., Janakiraman, R., & Kannan, P.K. (2016). From social to sale: The effects of firm-generated content in social media on customer behavior. *Journal of Marketing*, 80(1), 7-25.

Kumar, V., Dalla Pozza, I., & Ganesh, J. (2013). Revisiting the satisfaction–loyalty relationship: empirical generalizations and directions for future research. *Journal of Retailing*, 89(3), 246-262.

Kumar, V., & George, M. (2007). Measuring and maximizing customer equity: a critical analysis. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 35(2), 157-171.

Kumi, R. & Sabherwal, R. (2018). Performance consequences of social capital in online communities: The roles of exchange and combination, and absorptive capacity. *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 86, 337-349.

Kupfer, A.K., Pähler vor der Holte, N., Kübler, R.V., & Hennig-Thurau, T. (2018). The Role of the Partner Brand's Social Media Power in Brand Alliances. *Journal of Marketing*, 82(3), 25-44.

Kwong, K.K., & Yau, O.H. (2002). The conceptualization of customer delight: A research framework. *Asia Pacific Management Review*, 7(2), 255-266.

Lam, S.K., Ahearne, M., Hu, Y. and Schillewaert, N. (2010). Resistance to brand switching when a radically new brand is introduced: A social identity theory perspective. *Journal of Marketing*, 74(6), 128-146.

Lanz, A., Goldenberg, J., Shapira, D., & Stahl, F. (2019). Climb or Jump: Status-Based Seeding in User-Generated Content Networks. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 56(3), 361-378.

Larivière, B., Joosten, H., Malthouse, E.C., Birgelen, M.V., Aksoy, P., Kunz, W.H., & Huang, M.H. (2013). Value fusion: The blending of consumer and firm value in the

distinct context of mobile technologies and social media. *Journal of Service Management*, 24(3), 268-293.

Laroche, M., Habibi, M.R., Richard, M., & Sankaranarayanan, R. (2012). The effects of social media based brand communities on brand community markers, value creation practices, brand trust and brand loyalty. *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 28(5), 1755-1767.

Leban, M., Seo, Y., & Voyer, B.G. (2020). Transformational effects of social media lurking practices on luxury consumption. *Journal of Business Research*, 116, 514-521.

Lee, S. K. (1992). Quantitative versus qualitative research methods — Two approaches to organisation studies. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 9(1), 87-94.

Lee, A. S., & Baskerville, R. L. (2003). Generalizing generalizability in information systems research. *Information Systems Research*, 14, 221–243.

Lee, S., & Kim, D.Y. (2020). The BRAND tourism effect on loyal customer experiences in luxury hotel: The moderating role of psychological ownership. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 35, p.100725.

Lee, M.S., Motion, J., & Conroy, D. (2009). Anti-consumption and brand avoidance. *Journal of Business Research*, 62(2), 169-180.

Lee, J.E., & Watkins, B. (2016). YouTube vloggers' influence on consumer luxury brand perceptions and intentions. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(12), 5753-5760.

Leedy, P.D., & Ormrod, J.E. (2005). *Practical Research: Planning and Design* (8th ed.), Upper Saddle River, NJ, US: Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall.

Lemon, K.N., Rust, R.T., & Zeithaml, V.A. (2001). What drives customer equity?. *Marketing Management*, 10(1), 20-25.

Lemon, K.N., & Verhoef, P.C. (2016). Understanding customer experience throughout the customer journey. *Journal of Marketing*, 80(6), 69-96.

Lester, S. (1999). *An introduction to phenomenological research*. Taunton, UK: Stan Lester Developments.

Lewis, W., Agarwal, R., & Sambamurthy, V. (2003). Sources of Influence on Beliefs about Information Technology Use: An Empirical Study of Knowledge Workers. *MIS Quarterly*, 27(4), 657-678.

Li, Q., Wang, Q., & Lin, Z. (2018). 'Effects of consumer visit to online community and product channel on local sales of large consumer goods: Evidence from real estate industry'. *Journal of Strategic Information Systems*, 27(2), 191-204.

Li, H., Zhang, J., & Sarathy, R. (2010). Understanding compliance with internet use policy from the perspective of rational choice theory. *Decision Support Systems*, 48(4), 635-645.

Liao, S., & Chou, E.Y. (2012). Intention to adopt knowledge through virtual communities: posters vs lurkers. *Online Information Review*, 36(3), 442-461.

Libai, B., Muller, E., & Peres, R. (2013). Decomposing the value of word-of-mouth seeding programs: Acceleration versus expansion. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 50(2), 161-176.

Lin, C.Y., Chou, E.Y., & Huang, H.C. (2021). They support, so we talk: the effects of other users on self-disclosure on social networking sites. *Information Technology & People*, 34(3), 1039-1064.

Lin, T.M.Y., Lu, K., & Wu, J. (2012). The effects of visual information in eWOM communication. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 6(1), 7–26.

Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Lincoln, Y., Lynham, S., & Guba, E. G. (2011). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Liu, Y. (2007). The long-term impact of loyalty programs on consumer purchase behavior and loyalty. *Journal of Marketing*, 71(4), 19-35.

Liu, L. (2016). Using Generic Inductive Approach in Qualitative Educational Research: A Case Study Analysis. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 5(2), 129-135.

Liu, J., Li, C., Ji, Y.G., North, M., & Yang, F. (2017). Like it or not: The Fortune 500's Facebook strategies to generate users' electronic word-of-mouth. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 73, 605-613.

Liu, X., Shin, H., & Burns, A.C. (2019). Examining the impact of luxury brand's social media marketing on customer engagement: Using big data analytics and natural language processing. *Journal of Business Research*, 125, 815-826.

Liu, Y., & Shrum, L.J. (2009). A dual-process model of interactivity effects. *Journal of Advertising*, 38(2), 53-68.

Locke, K., Feldman, M., & Golden-Biddle, K. (2022). Coding practices and iterativity: Beyond templates for analyzing qualitative data. *Organizational Research Methods*, 25(2), 262-284.

Lomborg, K., & Kirkevold, M. (2003). Truth and validity in grounded theory–a reconsidered realist interpretation of the criteria: fit, work, relevance and modifiability. *Nursing Philosophy*, 4(3), 189-200.

López, M., & Sicilia, M. (2014). Determinants of E-WOM influence: the role of consumers' internet experience. *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research*, 9(1), 28-43.

Luhtanen, R., & Crocker, J. (1992). A Collective Self-Esteem Scale: Self-Evaluation of One's Social Identity. *Personality And Social Psychology Bulletin*, 18(3), 302-318.

Luo, L., Chen, X., Han, J., & Park, C.W. (2010). Dilution and enhancement of celebrity brands through sequential movie releases. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 47(6), 1114-1128.

Luo, J., Dey, B.L., Yalkin, C., Sivarajah, U., Punjaisri, K., Huang, Y.A., & Yen, D.A. (2020). Millennial Chinese consumers' perceived destination brand value. *Journal of Business Research*, 116, 655-665.

Luo, C., Luo, X.R., Xu, Y., Warkentin, M., & Sia, C.L. (2015). Examining the moderating role of sense of membership in online review evaluations. *Information & Management*, 52(3), 305-316.

Lusch, R. (2007). Marketing's evolving identity: defining our future. *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*, 26(2), 261-268.

Lynch, J. G. (1999). Theory and external validity. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 27(3), 367–376

Lyon, D. (2001). *Surveillance society: Monitoring everyday life*. Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press.

Ma, J., Hong, J., Yoo, B., & Yang, J. (2021). The effect of religious commitment and global identity on purchase intention of luxury fashion products: A cross-cultural study. *Journal of Business Research*, 137, 244-254.

Mahrous, A.A., & Abdelmaaboud, A.K. (2017). Antecedents of participation in online brand communities and their purchasing behavior consequences. *Service Business*, 11(2), 229-251.

Malär, L., Krohmer, H., Hoyer, W.D., & Nyffenegger, B. (2011). Emotional brand attachment and brand personality: The relative importance of the actual and the ideal self. *Journal of Marketing*, 75(4), 35-52.

Malhotra, Y., & Galletta, D. (2005). A Multidimensional Commitment Model of Volitional Systems Adoption and Usage Behavior. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 22(1), 117-151.

Malmqvist, J., Hellberg, K., Möllås, G., Rose, R., & Shevlin, M. (2019). Conducting the pilot study: A neglected part of the research process? Methodological findings supporting the importance of piloting in qualitative research studies. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 18, doi:10.1177/1609406919878341

Mandel, N., Petrova, P.K., & Cialdini, R.B. (2006). Images of success and the preference for luxury brands. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 16(1), 57-69.

Mandler, T., Johnen, M., & Gräve, J.F. (2020). Can't help falling in love? How brand luxury generates positive consumer affect in social media. *Journal of Business Research*, 120, 330-342.

Markus, H. (1977). Self-schemata and processing information about the self. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 35(2), 63.

Markus, H., & Kunda, Z. (1986). Stability and malleability of the self-concept. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51(4), 858–866.

Marshall, B., Cardon, P., Poddar, A., & Fontenot, R. (2013). Does sample size matter in qualitative research?: A review of qualitative interviews in IS research. *Journal of Computer Information Systems*, 54(1), 11-22.

Mathwick, C., Wiertz, C., & de Ruyter, K. (2008). Social capital production in a virtual P3 community. *Journal of Consumer Research,* 34(6), 832-849.

Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: an Interactive approach* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.

Mayzlin, D., & Yoganarasimhan, H. (2012). Link to success: How blogs build an audience by promoting rivals. *Management Science*, 58(9), 1651-1668.

Mazaheri, E., Richard, M.O., & Laroche, M. (2012). The role of emotions in online consumer behavior: a comparison of search, experience, and credence services. *Journal of Services Marketing,* 26(7), 535-550.

Mazaheri, E., Richard, M.O., Laroche, M., & Ueltschy, L.C. (2014). The influence of culture, emotions, intangibility, and atmospheric cues on online behavior. *Journal of Business Research*, 67(3), 253-259.

McAlexander, J. H., Schouten, J. W., Schouten, J. W., & Koenig, H. F. (2002). Building brand community. *Journal of Marketing*, 66(1), 38–54.

McCarthy, T (1984). Translators Introduction. In J. Habermas (Ed.), *Theory of Communicative Action, Volume One: Reason and the Rationalization of Society* (pp. 5-37). Boston, Mass: Beacon Press.

McCormick, K. (2016). Celebrity endorsements: Influence of a product-endorser match on Millennials attitudes and purchase intentions. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 32, 39-45.

McQuarrie, E.F., Miller, J., & Phillips, B.J. (2012). The megaphone effect: Taste and audience in fashion blogging. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 40(1), 136-158.

Medin, D.L., & Heit, E. (1999). Categorization. In B.M. Bly & D.E. Rumelhart (Eds.), *Cognitive science* (pp. 99-143). Academic Press.

Meek, S., Ryan, M., Lambert, C., & Ogilvie, M. (2019). A multidimensional scale for measuring online brand community social capital (OBCSC). *Journal of Business Research*, 100, 234-244.

Mende, M., Bolton, R.N., & Bitner, M.J. (2013). Decoding customer–firm relationships: how attachment styles help explain customers' preferences for closeness, repurchase intentions, and changes in relationship breadth. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 50(1), 125-142.

Merriam, S.B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Merton, R.K. (1957). *Social theory and social structure*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.

Merz, M.A., Zarantonello, L., Grappi, S. (2018). How valuable are your customers in the brand value co-creation process? The development of a Customer Co-Creation Value (CCCV) scale. *Journal of Business Research*, 82, 79-89.

Meyer, J., & Allen, N. (1984). Testing the 'side-bet theory' of organizational commitment: Some methodological considerations. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 69(3), 72–378.

Miller, P. (1991). Accounting innovation beyond the enterprise: problematizing investment decisions and programming economic growth in the UK in the 1960s. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, 16(8), 733-762.

Miller, R.L., & Brewer, J.D. (2003). *The A-Z of Social Research*. London: Sage.

Moe, W.W., & Fader, P.S. (2004a). Capturing evolving visit behavior in clickstream data. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 18(1), 5-19.

Moe, W.W., & Fader, P.S. (2004b). Dynamic conversion behavior at e-commerce sites. *Management Science*, 50(3), 326-335.

Monferrer, D., Moliner, M.A., & Estrada, M. (2019). Increasing customer loyalty through customer engagement in the retail banking industry. *Spanish Journal of Marketing*-ESIC.

Moon, H., & Sprott, D.E. (2016). Ingredient branding for a luxury brand: the role of brand and product fit. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(12), 5768-5774.

Moore, O. K., & Lewis, D. J. (1952). Learning theory and culture. *Psychological Review*, 59(5), 380-388.

Moreo, A., Woods, R., Sammons, G., & Bergman, C. (2019). Connection or competence: Emotional labor and service quality's impact on satisfaction and loyalty. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 31(1), 330-348.

Morgan, R.M., & Hunt, S.D. (1994). The commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 58(3), 20-38.

Morhart, F, Malär, L., Guèvremont, A., Girardin, F., & Grohmann, B. (2015). Brand Authenticity: An Integrative Framework and Measurement Scale. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 2(2), 200-218.

Morrow, S.L. (2005). Quality and trustworthiness in qualitative research in counseling psychology. *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 52(2), 250-260

Mudambi, S.M., & Schuff, D. (2010). Research note: What makes a helpful online review? A study of customer reviews on Amazon. com. *MIS Quarterly*, 34(1), 185-200.

Muller, E., & Peres, R. (2019). The effect of social networks structure on innovation performance: A review and directions for research. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 36(1), 3-19.

Mun, Y. Y., Jackson, J. D., Park, J. S., & Probst, J. C. (2006). Understanding information technology acceptance by individual professionals: Toward an integrative view. *Information & Management*, 43(3), 350-363.

Mundel, J., Huddleston, P., & Vodermeier, M. (2017). An exploratory study of consumers' perceptions: What are affordable luxuries?. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 35, 68-75.

Muniz, A.M., & O'Guinn, T.C. (2001). Brand community. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 27(4), 412-432.

Munnukka, J., Karjaluoto, H., & Tikkanen, A. (2015). Are Facebook brand community members truly loyal to the brand?. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 51, 429-439.

Myers, D.G. (1982). *Polarizing Effects of Social Interaction*. In H. Brandstätter, J.H. Davis & G. Stocker-Kreichgauer (Eds.), Group Decision Making (pp. 125–61). London: Academic Press.

Myers, L. (2020). How Often To Post On Social Media: 2020 Success Guide. *Louise Myers Visual Social Media* [Online] Available at: https://louisem.com/144557/often-post-social-media#:~:text=Most%20studies%20agree%20that%20once,Pages%203%20times%20per%20week. [Accessed: 7th April 2021].

Nair, H.S., Manchanda, P., & Bhatia, T. (2010). Asymmetric social interactions in physician prescription behavior: The role of opinion leaders. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 47(5), 883-895.

Nam, J., Ekinci, Y., & Whyatt, G. (2011). Brand equity, brand loyalty and consumer satisfaction. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 38(3), 1009-1030.

Nambisan, S., & Baron, R.A. (2007). Interactions in virtual customer environments: Implications for product support and customer relationship management. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 21(2), 42-62.

Nambisan, S., Lyytinen, K., Majchrzak, A., & Song, M. (2017). Digital Innovation Management: Reinventing innovation management research in a digital world. *MIS Quarterly*, 41(1), 223-238.

Navarro, V. (1984). A critique of the ideological and political positions of the Willy Brandt Report and the WHO Alma Ata Declaration. *Social Science and Medicine*, 18(6), 467-474.

Nielsen, J.H., & Escalas, J.E. (2010). Easier is not always better: The moderating role of processing type on preference fluency. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 20(3), 295-305.

Niese, Z. A., Libby, L. K., Fazio, R. H., Eibach, R. P., & Pietri, E. S. (2019). Does the future look bright? Processing style determines the impact of valence weighting biases and self-beliefs on expectations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 116(2), 193-214.

Nowak, A., Szamrej, J., & Latané, B. (1990). 'From private attitude to public opinion: a dynamic theory of social impact'. *Psychological Review*, 97(3), 362-376.

Nowell, L.S., Norris, J.M., White, D.E., & Moules, N.J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1), p.1609406917733847.

Nueno, J.L., & Quelch, J.A. (1998). The mass marketing of luxury. *Business Horizons*, 41(6), 61-61.

Nyadzayo, M.W., Matanda, M.J., & Rajaguru, R. (2018). The determinants of franchise brand loyalty in B2B markets: An emerging market perspective. *Journal of Business Research*, 86, 435-445.

Ogawa, S., & Piller, F.T. (2006). Reducing the risks of new product development. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 47(2), 65.

Okazaki, S., Navarro, A., Mukherji, P., & Plangger, K. (2019). The curious versus the overwhelmed: Factors influencing QR codes scan intention. *Journal of Business Research*, 99, 498-506.

Olmedilla, M., Send, H., & Toral, S.L. (2019). Identification of the unique attributes and topics within Smart Things Open Innovation Communities. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 146, 133-147.

Ordabayeva, N., & Chandon, P. (2010). Getting ahead of the Joneses: When equality increases conspicuous consumption among bottom-tier consumers. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 38(1), 27-41.

Ott, L., & Theunissen, P. (2015). Reputations at risk: Engagement during social media crises. *Public Relations Review*, 41(1), 97-102.

Ozuem, W. (2004). *Conceptualising Marketing Communication in the New Marketing Paradigm: A Postmodern Perspective*. Boca Raton, Florida: Universal Press.

Ozuem, W., Howell, K., & Lancaster, G. (2008). Communicating in the new interactive marketspace. *European Journal of Marketing*, 42(9/10), 1059-1083.

Ozuem, W., Howell, K.E., & Lancaster, G. (2018). Developing technologically induced environments: the case of the Nigerian banking sector. *Journal of Financial Services Marketing*, 23(1), 50-61.

Ozuem, W., Thomas, T., & Lancaster, G. (2016). The influence of customer loyalty on small island economies: an empirical and exploratory study. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 24(6), 447-469.

Ozuem, W., & Willis, M. (2021). Online Brand Communities, Customer Participation and Loyalty in the Luxury Fashion Industry: Strategic Insights. In W. Ozuem & S. Ranfagni (Eds.), *The Art of Digital Marketing for Fashion and Luxury Brands*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

Ozuem, W., Willis, M. & Howell, K. (2022). Thematic analysis without paradox: sensemaking and context. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 25(1), 143-157.

Ozuem, W., Willis, M., Howell, K., Lancaster, G., & Ng, R. (2021a). Determinants of online brand communities' and millennials' characteristics: A social influence perspective. *Psychology & Marketing*, 38(5), 794-818.

Ozuem, W., Willis, M., Howell, K., Helal, G., Ranfagni, S., & Lancaster, G. (2021b). Effects of online brand communities on millennials' brand loyalty in the fashion industry. *Psychology & Marketing*, 38(5), 774-793.

Ozuem, W., Ranfagni, S., Willis, M., Rovai, S., & Howell, K. (2021c). Exploring customers' responses to online service failure and recovery strategies during Covid-19 pandemic: An actor–network theory perspective. *Psychology & Marketing*, 38(9), 1440-1459.

Ozuem, W., Willis, M., & Howell, K. (2022). Thematic analysis without paradox: sensemaking and context. *Qualitative Market Research*, 25(1), 143-157.

Pagani, M., Hofacker, C.F., & Goldsmith, R.E. (2011). The influence of personality on active and passive use of social networking sites. *Psychology & Marketing*, 28(5), 441-456.

Pagani, M., & Malacarne, G. (2017). Experiential engagement and active vs. passive behavior in mobile location-based social networks: the moderating role of privacy. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 37, 133-148.

Pansari, A., & Kumar, V. (2017). Customer engagement: the construct, antecedents, and consequences. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 45(3), 294-311.

Park, C.W., Eisingerich, A.B., & Park, J.W. (2013). Attachment–aversion (AA) model of customer–brand relationships. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 23(2), 229-248.

Park, M., Im, H., & Kim, H.Y. (2020). "You are too friendly!" The negative effects of social media marketing on value perceptions of luxury fashion brands. *Journal of Business Research*, 117, 529-542.

Park, J., Ko, E., & Kim, S. (2010a). Consumer behavior in green marketing for luxury brand: A cross-cultural study of US, Japan and Korea. *Journal of Global Academy of Marketing*, 20(4), 319-333.

Park, C.W., MacInnis, D.J., Priester, J., Eisingerich, A.B., & Iacobucci, D. (2010b). Brand attachment and brand attitude strength: Conceptual and empirical differentiation of two critical brand equity drivers. *Journal of Marketing*, 74(6), 1-17.

Park, E., Rishika, R., Janakiraman, R., Houston, M.B., & Yoo, B. (2018). Social dollars in online communities: The effect of product, user, and network characteristics. *Journal of Marketing*, 82(1), 93-114.

Park, M., Shin, J., & Ju, Y. (2015). A Taxonomy of Social Networking Site Users: Social Surveillance and Self-surveillance Perspective. *Psychology and Marketing*, 32(6), 601-610.

Parreño, J.M., Mafe, C.R & Scribner, L. (Eds.). (2015). *Engaging consumers through branded entertainment and convergent media*. IGI Global.

Patel, T. (2016). Promoting multi-paradigmatic cultural research in international business literature: An integrative complexity-based argument. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 29(4), 599-629.

Patten, E., Ozuem, W., & Howell, K. (2020). Service quality in multichannel fashion retailing: an exploratory study. *Information Technology & People*, 33(4), 1327-1356.

Patton M. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication.

Pedeliento, G., Andreini, D., Bergamaschi, M., & Salo, J. (2016). Brand and product attachment in an industrial context: The effects on brand loyalty. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 53, 194-206.

Pentina, I., Guilloux, V., & Micu, A.C. (2018). Exploring social media engagement behaviors in the context of luxury brands. *Journal of Advertising*, 47(1), 55-69.

Peterson, R.A., Balasubramanian, S., & Bronnenberg, B.J. (1997). Exploring the implications of the Internet for consumer marketing. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing science*, 25(4), 329-346.

Petrick, J.F. (2004). The Roles of Quality, Value, and Satisfaction in Predicting Cruise Passengers' Behavioral Intentions. *Journal of Travel Research*, 42(4), 397-407.

Pettigrew A. (1973). *The Politics of Organizational Decision Making*. London: Tavistock.

Petty, R.E., Cacioppo, J.T., & Schumann, D. (1983). Central and peripheral routes to advertising effectiveness: The moderating role of involvement. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 10(2), 135-146.

Pham, M., & Avnet, T. (2009). Rethinking Regulatory Engagement Theory. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 19(2), 115-123.

Pham, M., Valette-Florence, P., & Vigneron, F. (2018). Luxury brand desirability and fashion equity: The joint moderating effect on consumers' commitment toward luxury brands. *Psychology & Marketing*, 35(12), 902–912.

Phau, I., & Prendergast, G. (2000). Consuming luxury brands: the relevance of the 'rarity principle'. *Journal of Brand Management*, 8(2), 122-138.

Phillips, B.J., & McQuarrie, E.F. (2010). Narrative and persuasion in fashion advertising. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 37(3), 368-392.

Pink, D. H. (2011). *Drive: the surprising truth about what motivates us*. New York: Penguin Group.

Poulsson, S.H., & Kale, S.H. (2004). The experience economy and commercial experiences. *The Marketing Review*, 4(3), 267-277.

Poupis, L.M., Rubin, D., & Lteif, L. (2021). Turn up the volume if you're feeling lonely: The effect of mobile application sound on consumer outcomes. *Journal of Business Research*, 126, 263-278.

Purani, K., Kumar, D.S., & Sahadev, S. (2019). e-Loyalty among millennials: Personal characteristics and social influences. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 48, 215-223.

Putnam, R.D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Quach, S., & Thaichon, P. (2017). From connoisseur luxury to mass luxury: Value co-creation and co-destruction in the online environment. *Journal of Business Research*, 81, 163-172.

Qutoshi, S.B. (2018). Phenomenology: A philosophy and method of inquiry. *Journal of Education and Educational Development*, 5(1), 215-222.

Ramaswamy, V., & Ozcan, K. (2016). Brand value co-creation in a digitalized world: An integrative framework and research implications. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 33(1), 93-106.

Ranfagni, S., Crawford Camiciottoli, B., & Faraoni, M. (2016). How to Measure Alignment in Perceptions of Brand Personality Within Online Communities: Interdisciplinary Insights. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 35, 70-85.

Ranjan, K.R., & Read, S. (2016). Value co-creation: concept and measurement. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 44(3), 290-315.

Rao, A.R., Qu, L., & Ruekert, R.W. (1999). Signaling unobservable product quality through a brand ally. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 36(2), 258-268.

Rao, A., & Ruekert, R.W. (1994). Brand alliances as signals of product quality. *Sloan Management Review*, 36(1), 87-97.

Rashid, M., Hodgson, C.S., & Luig, T. (2019). Ten tips for conducting focused ethnography in medical education research. *Medical Education Online*, 24(1), p.1624133.

Ray, D.G., Mackie, D.M., Rydell, R.J., & Smith, E.R. (2008). Changing categorization of self can change emotions about outgroups. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *44*(4), 1210-1213.

Relling, M., Schnittka, O., Sattler, H., & Johnen, M. (2016). Each can help or hurt: Negative and positive word of mouth in social network brand communities. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 33(1), 42-58.

Ren, Y., Kraut, R., & Kiesler, S. (2007). Applying Common Identity and Bond Theory to Design of Online Communities. *Organization Studies*, 28(3), 377-408.

Reybold, L.E., Lammert, J.D., & Stribling, S.M. (2013). Participant selection as a conscious research method: Thinking forward and the deliberation of 'emergent' findings. *Qualitative Research*, 13(6), 699-716.

Reynolds, K. E., & Beatty, S.E. (1999). A relationship customer typology. *Journal of Retailing*, 75 (4), 509-523.

Rezaei, S., & Valaei, N. (2017). Branding in a multichannel retail environment. *Information Technology & People*, 30(4), 853-886.

Richins, M.L. (1983). Negative word-of-mouth by dissatisfied consumers: A pilot study. *Journal of Marketing*, 47(1), 68-78.

Ridder, H.G. (2017). The theory contribution of case study research designs. *Business Research*, 10(2), 281-305.

Ridder, H.G. (2019). *Case study research: Approaches, methods, contribution to theory*. Rainer Hampp Verlag.

Riley, F.D.O., & Lacroix, C. (2003). Luxury branding on the Internet: lost opportunity or impossibility?. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 21(2), 96-104.

Robson, C. (2011). *Real world research* (3rd ed.). Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

Rocklage, M.D., Rucker, D.D., & Nordgren, L.F. (2021). Emotionally Numb: Expertise Dulls Consumer Experience. *Journal of Consumer Research* (In press).

Rubin, A.M. (1994). Media Uses and Effects: A Uses and Gratifications Perspective. In J. Bryant & D. Zillmann (Eds.), *Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research* (pp. 417–436). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Ryu, K., H. Han, & T. H. Kim. (2008). The Relationships among Overall Quick-Casual Restaurant Image, Perceived Value, Customer Satisfaction, and Behavioral Intentions. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 27(3), 459-69.

Saboo, A.R., Kumar, V., & Ramani, G. (2016). Evaluating the impact of social media activities on human brand sales. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 33(3), 524-541.

Salzman, P.C. (2002). *On reflexivity. American Anthropologist*, 104(3), 805-811.

Sanz-Blas, S., Buzova, D., & Pérez-Ruiz, P. (2021). Building relational worth in an online social community through virtual structural embeddedness and relational embeddedness. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 162, p.120350.

Sashi, C.M. (2012). Customer engagement, buyer-seller relationships, and social media. *Management Decision*, 50(2), 253-272.

Sashittal, H.C., Hodis, M., & Sriramachandramurthy, R. (2015). Entifying your brand among Twitter-using millennials. *Business Horizons*, 58(3), 325-333.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2016). *Research methods for business students* (7th ed.). New York: Pearson Education.

Schau, H.J., Muñiz Jr, A.M., & Arnould, E.J. (2009). How brand community practices create value. *Journal of Marketing*, 73(5), 30-51.

Schembri, S., & Latimer, L. (2016). Online brand communities: constructing and co-constructing brand culture. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 32(7-8), 628-651.

Schembri, S., & Sandberg, J. (2002). Service quality and consumers' experience: towards an interpretive approach. *Marketing Theory*, 2(2), 189-206.

Schembri, S., & Sandberg, J. (2003). *Understanding service quality through experience: unveiling the consumers' perspective*. Paper presented at the International Critical Management Studies Conference, Lancaster University.

Schouten, J. W., McAlexander, J. H., & Koenig, H. F. (2007). Transcendent customer experience and brand community. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 35(3), 357–368.

Schwandt, T.A. (2000). *Three epistemological stances for qualitative inquiry: Interpretivism, hermeneutics, and social constructionism*. In N.K. Denzin, & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), Handbook of qualitative research (2nd ed., pp. 189-213), SAGE Publications Inc.

Schwartz, J., Luce, M. F., & Ariely, D. (2011). Are consumers too trusting? The effects of relationships with expert advisers. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 48(SPL), S163–S174.

Schwarz, N. (2004). Metacognitive experiences in consumer judgment and decision making. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 14(4), 332-348.

Scuotto, V., Del Giudice, M., Della Peruta, M.R., & Tarba, S. (2017). The performance implications of leveraging internal innovation through social media networks: an empirical verification of the smart fashion industry. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 120, 184-194.

Seo, E.J., & Park, J.W. (2018). A study on the effects of social media marketing activities on brand equity and customer response in the airline industry. *Journal of Air Transport Management*, 66, 36-41.

Severin, W.J., & Tankard, J.W. (1997). *Communication Theories: Origins, Methods, and Uses in the Mass Media* (4th ed.). White Plains, NY: Longman.

Shan, Y. (2016). How credible are online product reviews? The effects of self-generated and system generated cues on source credibility evaluation. *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 55, 633-641.

Shim, S., & Koh, A. (1997). Profiling adolescent consumer decision-making styles: Effects of socialization agents and social-structural variables. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 15(1), 50-59.

Shimp, T.A. (1981). Attitude toward the ad as a mediator of consumer brand choice. *Journal of Advertising*, 10(2), 9-48.

Shin, H., Eastman, J.K., & Mothersbaugh, D. (2017). The effect of a limited-edition offer following brand dilution on consumer attitudes toward a luxury brand. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 38, 59-70.

Shukla, P., & Drennan, J. (2018). Interactive effects of individual- and group-level variables on virtual purchase behavior in online communities. *Information and Management*, 55(5), 598-607.

Silvia, P.J. (2005). What is interesting? Exploring the appraisal structure of interest. *Emotion*, 5(1), 89.

Silverstein, M.J., & Fiske, N. (2003). Luxury for the Masses. *Harvard Business Review*, 81(4), 48-57.

Singh, A., & Pathak, G.S. (2020). The quest for consumer engagement via cause-related marketing: A mixed method study in an emerging economy. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 55, p.102128.

Sirgy, M.J. (1982). Self-concept in consumer behavior: A critical review. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 9(3), 287-300.

Smith, A.K., & Bolton, R.N. (2002). The effect of customers' emotional responses to service failures on their recovery effort evaluations and satisfaction judgments. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 30(1), 5-23.

Soh, C.Q.Y., Rezaei, S., & Gu, M.L. (2017). A structural model of the antecedents and consequences of Generation Y luxury fashion goods purchase decisions. *Young Consumers*, 18(2), 180-204.

Spivak, G & Butler, J. (2007). *Who Sings the Nation State: Language, Politics, Belonging*. Kolkata/London: Seagull

Sprott, D., Czellar, S., & Spangenberg, E. (2009). The importance of a general measure of brand engagement on market behavior: Development and validation of a scale. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 46(1), 92-104.

Srull, T.K., Lichtenstein, M., & Rothbart, M. (1985). Associative storage and retrieval processes in person memory. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*, 11(2), 316.

Stake, R.E. (1978). The case study method in social inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 7(2), 5-8.

Stake, R.E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Stake, R. E. (2005). Qualitative case studies. In Y.S. Lincoln & N.K. Denzin (Eds.), *The handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 443-466). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Stewart, D.W., & Pavlou, P.A. (2002). From consumer response to active consumer: Measuring the effectiveness of interactive media. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 30(4), 376-396.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1994). *Grounded Theory Methodology: An Overview*. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 273-285). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of Qualitative research techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. USA: Sage.

Strauss, A. (1956). *The Social Psychology of George Herbert Mead*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Stremersch, S., Gonzalez, J., Valenti, A., & Villanueva, J. (2022). The value of context-specific studies for marketing. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 1-16.

Suddaby, R. (2006). For the editors: 'What grounded theory is not'. *Academy of Management Journal*, 49(4), 633-642.

Sui, J.J., & Baloglu, S. (2003). The role of emotional commitment in relationship marketing: An empirical investigation of a loyalty model for casinos. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*, 27(4), 470-489.

Sun, Y., Kim, K.H., & Kim, J. (2014). Examining relationships among sustainable orientation, perceived sustainable marketing performance, and customer equity in fast fashion industry. *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing*, 5(1), 74-86.

Sussman, S.W., & Siegal, W.S. (2003). Informational influence in organizations: An integrated approach to knowledge adoption. *Information Systems Research*, 14(1), 47-65.

Swaminathan, V., Page, K.L., & Gürhan-Canli, Z. (2007). "My" brand or "our" brand: The effects of brand relationship dimensions and self-construal on brand evaluations. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 34(2), 248-259.

Sweeney, J.C., & Soutar, G.N. (2001). Consumer perceived value: The development of a multiple item scale. *Journal of Retailing*, 77(2), 203-220.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. (1979). An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict. In W. Austin & M.S. Worschel (Eds.), *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. CA: Brook Cole.

Tammeleht, A., Koort, K., Rodríguez-Triana, M.J. & Löfström, E. (2022). Knowledge building process during collaborative research ethics training for researchers: experiences from one university. *International Journal of Ethics Education*, 7(1), 147-170.

Tan, H., & Yan, M. (2020). Physician-user interaction and users' perceived service quality: evidence from Chinese mobile healthcare consultation. *Information Technology & People*, 33(5), 1403-1426.

Tax, S.S., Brown, S.W., & Chandrashekaran, M. (1998). Customer evaluations of service complaint experiences: implications for relationship marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 62(2), 60-76.

Teng, S., Khong, K.W., Chong, A.Y.L., & Lin, B. (2017). Persuasive electronic word-of-mouth messages in social media. *Journal of Computer Information Systems*, 57(1), 76-88.

Terblanche, N., & Boshoff, C. (2006). The relationship between a satisfactory in-store shopping experience and retailer loyalty. *South Africa Journal of Business Management*, 37, 33–43.

Thomas, J.B., Peters, C.O., & Tolson, H. (2007). An exploratory investigation of the virtual community MySpace. com. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal*, 11(4), 587-603.

Thomson, M. (2006). Human brands: Investigating antecedents to consumers' strong attachments to celebrities. *Journal of Marketing*, 70(3), 104-119.

Thompson, C.J., & Haytko, D.L. (1997). Speaking of fashion: consumers' uses of fashion discourses and the appropriation of countervailing cultural meanings. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 24(1), 15-42.

Thompson, S. A., Kim, M., Loveland, J. M., Lacey, R., & Castro, I. A. (2017). Consumer communities do well, but will they do good? A study of participation in distributed computing projects. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 37, 32–43.

Thompson, D.V., & Malaviya, P. (2013). Consumer-generated ads: Does awareness of advertising co-creation help or hurt persuasion?. *Journal of Marketing*, 77(3), 33-47.

Thomson, S.B. (2010). Sample size and grounded theory. Grounded Theory-Sample Size. *Journal of Administration and Governance*, 5(1), 45-52.

Thomson, M., MacInnis, D.J., & Park, C.W. (2005). The ties that bind: Measuring the strength of consumers' emotional attachments to brands. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 15(1), 77-91.

Tormala, Z. L., Briñol, P., & Petty, R. E. (2006). When credibility attacks: The reverse impact of source credibility on persuasion. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 42, 684-691

Trusov, M., Bodapati, A.V., & Bucklin, R.E. (2010). Determining influential users in internet social networks. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 47(4), 643-658.

Tsang, P.M., & Tse, S. (2005). A hedonic model for effective web marketing: an empirical examination. *Industrial Management & Data Systems*, 105(8), 1039-1052.

Tseng, T., Huang, H., & Setiawan, A. (2017). How do motivations for commitment in online brand communities evolve? The distinction between knowledge- and entertainment-seeking motivations. *Computers In Human Behaviour*, 77, 326-335.

Tseng, H., Yeh, H.T. & Tang, Y. (2019). A close look at trust among team members in online learning communities. *International Journal of Distance Education Technologies*, 17(1), 52-65.

Tsoukas, H. (1996). The firm as a distributed knowledge system: A constructionist approach. *Strategic Management Journal*, 17(S2), 11-25.

Tsoukas, H. (2009). Craving for generality and Small-N Studies: The Wittgesteinian Approach Towards the epistemology of the particular in organization and management studies. In D.A. Buchanan & A. Bryman (Eds.), *Organizational Research Methods*. London: Sage.

Turnbull, S. (2002). Social construction research and theory building. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 4(3), 317-334.

Turner, J.C., Oakes, P.J., Haslam, S.A., & McGarty, C. (1994). Self and collective: Cognition and social context. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 20(5), 454-463.

Tuškej, U., Golob, U., & Podnar, K. (2013). The role of consumer–brand identification in building brand relationships. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(1), 53-59.

Tynan, C., McKechnie, S., & Chhuon, C. (2010). Co-creating value for luxury brands. *Journal of Business Research*, 63(11), 1156-1163.

Ülkümen, G., Chakravarti, A., & Morwitz, V.G. (2010). Categories create mind-sets: The effect of exposure to broad versus narrow categorizations on subsequent, unrelated decisions. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 47(4), 659-671.

Valente, T.W., & Davis, R.L. (1999). Accelerating the diffusion of innovations using opinion leaders. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 566(1), 55-67.

Vallaster, C., & Von Wallpach, S. (2013). An online discursive inquiry into the social dynamics of multi-stakeholder brand meaning co-creation. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(9), 1505-1515.

Vandecasteele, B., & Geuens, M. (2010). Motivated consumer innovativeness: Concept, measurement, and validation. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 27(4), 308-318.

Van den Bulte, C., Bayer, E., Skiera, B., & Schmitt, P. (2018). How customer referral programs turn social capital into economic capital. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 55(1), 132-146.

van Doorn, J., Lemon, K.N., Mittal, V., Nass, S., Pick, D., Pirner, P., & Verhoef, P.C. (2010). Customer engagement behavior: theoretical foundations and research directions. *Journal of Service Research*, 13(3), 253-266.

Van Dyne, L., & Pierce, J. L. (2004). Psychological ownership and feelings of possession: three field studies predicting employee attitudes and organizational citizenship behavior. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 25(4), 439–459.

Van Eck, P.S., Jager, W., & Leeflang, P.S. (2011). Opinion leaders' role in innovation diffusion: A simulation study. *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 28(2), 187-203.

VanMeter, R., Syrdal, H.A., Powell-Mantel, S., Grisaffe, D.B., & Nesson, E.T. (2018). Don't just "Like" me, promote me: How attachment and attitude influence brand related behaviors on social media. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 43, 83-97.

van Teijlingen, E. R., & Hundley, V. (2001). The importance of pilot studies. *Social Research Update, Winter*, ISSN: 1360–7898.

Vargo, S., & Lusch, R. (2004). Evolving to a new dominant logic for marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 68(1), 1-17.

Veloutsou, C., & Black, I. (2020). Creating and managing participative brand communities: The roles members perform. *Journal of Business Research*, 117, 873-885.

Venkatesan, R. (2017). Executing on a customer engagement strategy. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 45(3), 289-293.

Venkatesh, V. & Brown, S.A. (2001). A longitudinal investigation of personal computers in homes: Adoption determinants and emerging challenges. *MIS quarterly*, 25(1), 71-102.

Venkatesh, V., & Davis, F. D. (2000). A theoretical extension of the technology acceptance model: Four longitudinal field studies. *Management Science*, 46(2), 186-204.

Verhagen, T., Feldberg, F., van den Hooff, B., Meents, S., & Merikivi, J. (2012). Understanding users' motivations to engage in virtual worlds: A multipurpose model and empirical testing. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 28(2), 484-495.

Verhoef, P., Reinartz, W., & Krafft, M. (2010). Customer Engagement as a New Perspective in Customer Management. *Journal of Service Research*, 13(3), 247-252.

Vickers, J.S., & Renand, F. (2003). The marketing of luxury goods: An exploratory study–three conceptual dimensions. *The Marketing Review*, 3(4), 459-478.

Viswanathan, V., Sese, F.J., & Krafft, M. (2017). Social influence in the adoption of a B2B loyalty program: The role of elite status members. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 34(4), 901-918.

Voci, A. (2006). Relevance of social categories, depersonalization and group processes: Two field tests of self-categorization theory. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 36(1), 73-90.

Vohra, A., & Bhardwaj, N. (2019). Customer engagement in an e-commerce brand community: An empirical comparison of alternate models. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 13(1), 2-25.

Vollstedt, M., & Rezat, S. (2019). An introduction to grounded theory with a special focus on axial coding and the coding paradigm. In G. Kaiser., & N. Presmeg, (2019). *Compendium for Early Career Researchers in Mathematics Education* (pp. 81-100). Springer, Cham.

Wallace, E., Buil, I., & De Chernatony, L. (2014). Consumer engagement with self-expressive brands: brand love and WOM outcomes. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 23(1), 33-42.

Wallace, E., Torres, P., Augusto, M., & Stefuryn, M. (2021). Outcomes for self-expressive brands followed on social media: Identifying different paths for inner self-expressive and social self-expressive brands. *Journal of Business Research*, 135, 519-531.

Wang, L.C., Baker, J., Wagner, J.A., & Wakefield, K. (2007). Can a retail web site be social?. *Journal of Marketing*, 71(3), 143-157.

Wang, Y., Meister, D. B., & Gray, P. H. (2013). Social Influence and Knowledge Management Systems Use: Evidence from Panel Data. *MIS Quarterly*, 37(1), 299-313.

Wang, H.S., Noble, C.H., Dahl, D.W., & Park, S. (2019a). Successfully Communicating a Cocreated Innovation. *Journal of Marketing*, 83(4), 38-57.

Wang, Y., Stoner, J.L., & John, D.R. (2019b). Counterfeit luxury consumption in a social context: The effects on females' moral disengagement and behavior. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 29(2), 207-225.

Wang, R.Y. & Strong, D.M. (1996). Beyond accuracy: What data quality means to data consumers. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 12(4), 5-33.

Warshaw, P.R. (1980). A new model for predicting behavioral intentions: An alternative to Fishbein. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 17(2), 153-172.

Wasko, M.M., & Faraj, S. (2005). Why should I share? Examining social capital and knowledge contribution in electronic networks of practice. *MIS Quarterly*, 29(1), 35-57.

Watts, D.J., & Dodds, P.S. (2007). Influentials, networks, and public opinion formation. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 34(4), 441-458.

Weathers, D., Sharma, S., & Wood, S.L. (2007). Effects of online communication practices on consumer perceptions of performance uncertainty for search and experience goods. *Journal of Retailing*, 83(4), 393-401.

Webster, F. (1992). The changing role of marketing in the corporation. *Journal of Marketing*, 56(4), 1-17.

Wheeler, M. A., Stuss, D. T., & Tulving, E. (1997). Toward a theory of episodic memory: The frontal lobes and autonoetic consciousness. *Psychological Bulletin*, 121, 331–354.

Wieringa, S., Engebretsen, E., Heggen, K., & Greenhalgh, T. (2018). Rethinking bias and truth in evidence-based health care. *Journal of Evaluation in Clinical Practice*, 24(5), 930-938.

Wiertz, C., & de Ruyter, K. (2007). Beyond the call of duty: Why customers contribute to firm-hosted commercial online communities. *Organization Studies*, 28(3), 347-376.

Wilcox, K., Kim, H.M., & Sen, S. (2009). Why do consumers buy counterfeit luxury brands?. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 46(2), 247-259.

Wilkins, D.J., Livingstone, A.G., & Levine, M. (2019). All click, no action? Online action, efficacy perceptions, and prior experience combine to affect future collective action. *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 91, 97-105.

Williams, D. (2006). On and off the Net: Scales for social capital in an online era. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 11(2), 593-628.

Willis M. (2021). Online Brand Communities and Brand Loyalty: Toward a Social Influence Theory. In W. Ozuem & S. Ranfagni (Eds.), *The Art of Digital Marketing for Fashion and Luxury Brands*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

Wilson, P. (1983). *Second-hand knowledge: An inquiry into cognitive authority*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Wilson, A. E., Giebelhausen, M. D., & Brady, M. K. (2017). Negative word of mouth can be a positive for consumers connected to the brand. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 45(4), 534–547.

Wolny, J., & Mueller, C. (2013). Analysis of fashion consumers' motives to engage in electronic word-of-mouth communication through social media platforms. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 29(5-6), 562-583.

Wolter, J.S., Bock, D., Smith, J.S., & Cronin Jr, J.J. (2017). Creating ultimate customer loyalty through loyalty conviction and customer-company identification. *Journal of Retailing*, 93(4), 458-476.

Wood, W. (2000). Attitude change: Persuasion and social influence. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 51(1), 539-570.

Wright, C.R. (1960). Functional analysis and mass communication. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 24(4), 605-620.

Xiang, Z., Du, Q., Ma, Y., & Fan, W. (2017). A comparative analysis of major online review platforms: Implications for social media analytics in hospitality and tourism. *Tourism Management*, 58, 51-65.

Yilmaz, K. (2013). Comparison of quantitative and qualitative research traditions: Epistemological, theoretical, and methodological differences. *European Journal of Education*, 48(2), 311-325.

Yin, R.K. (2011). *Qualitative research from start to finish*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Yin, R.K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Yoo, B., & Donthu, N. (2001). Developing and validating a multidimensional consumer-based brand equity scale. *Journal of Business Research*, 52(1), 1-14.

Yoo, B., Donthu, N., & Lee, S. (2000). An examination of selected marketing mix elements and brand equity. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 28(2), 195-211.

Yu, S., & Hu, Y. (2020). When luxury brands meet China: The effect of localized celebrity endorsements in social media marketing. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 54, p.102010.

Zaglia, M.E. (2013). Brand communities embedded in social networks. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(2), 216-223.

Zhang, Y., Feick, L., & Mittal, V. (2014). How males and females differ in their likelihood of transmitting negative word of mouth. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 40(6), 1097-1108.

Zheng, X., Cheung, C.M., Lee, M.K., & Liang, L. (2015). Building brand loyalty through user engagement in online brand communities in social networking sites. *Information Technology & People*, 28(1), 90-106.

Appendixes

Appendix 1: Predetermined sample questions

a) Pre-phase demographic details

1) Please tick your age range:

Age	
18–20 years	
21–23 years	
24–26 years	
27–29 years	
30–32 years	
33–35 years	
36–39 years	
40 years and above	

How old will you be on your next birthday?

_____

2) Please state your gender:

a) Female

b) Male

c) other

3) Please state your occupation:

_____

b) Pre-phase luxury fashion and OBCs questions

How would you describe a luxury fashion brand?

How enthusiastic are you towards luxury fashion brands?

Have you purchased at least one product from a luxury fashion brand in the last 8 years? Which brands?

Have you been a member of a luxury fashion brand's social media sites and online communities in the last 12 months?

Have you regularly visited a luxury fashion brand's social media sites and online communities more than once in the last 12 months?

Appendix 2: Guided semi-structured interview questions

1. What is your experience regarding the luxury fashion industry?

2. How would you explain your experience in online brand communities (OBCs) and social media sites (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp) in the luxury fashion industry?

3. What motivates you to follow luxury fashion brands through online brand communities? Please explain.

4. To what extent have OBCs influenced your purchasing intentions for luxury fashion brands?

5. How would you compare a luxury fashion brand's social media site (OBC) to a traditional product website?

6. Explain what type of online content/information appeals to you.

7. How has other customers'/followers' online content influenced your perspective or/and purchasing decisions for luxury fashion brands?

8. How have positive and negative online comments/reviews affected your perspective or/and purchasing decisions for luxury fashion products?

9. Have customers/followers in any way motivated you to keep following the brand online? Explain why.

10. How significant are online followers or customers in influencing your intentions to remain with a luxury fashion brand online?

11. How would you describe your active participation within luxury fashion OBCs?

12. What motivates you to participate or not to participate within luxury fashion OBCs?

13. How do you benefit from online content shared through luxury fashion brands OBCs?

14. How likely are you to recommend your choice of luxury fashion brand to others through OBCs?

15. To what extent do OBCs influence your loyalty towards your choice of a luxury fashion brand?

Appendix 3: Ethics application

No: 1811154

University of Cumbria

**Research Ethics Application for University Staff and
Post Graduate Research (PgR) students
Application for study involving Human Participants**

Please ensure you have carried out a Privacy Impact Assessment if your project involves collection of personal data.

All fields will expand as required.

1. Title of Project: **Exploring the relationship between customer loyalty, consumer brand engagement and online brand communities in the luxury fashion industry**
2. If this is a PgR student project, please indicate what type of project by ticking the relevant box: ▪ **PhD Thesis**   □ PhD by Published Works   □ MPhil
3. Type of study   ▪ **Involves direct involvement by human subjects**   □ Involves existing documents/anonymised data only. Contact the Chair of Ethics before continuing via research.office@cumbria.ac.uk

Applicant information
4. Name of applicant/researcher: Michelle Willis
5. Appointment/position held by applicant   Lecturer in International Business, University of Cumbria (London campus)
6. Contact information for applicant: E-mail: s1811154@uni.cumbria.ac.uk Telephone: Address:
7. Project supervisor(s)/mentor, if different (or applicable) from applicant: Name(s): Raye Ng and Wilson Ozuem   E-mail(s): raye.ng@cumbria.ac.uk wilson.ozuem@cumbria.ac.uk
8. Appointment held by supervisor(s) and institution(s) where based (if applicable):

Raye Ng: Principal Lecturer in International Business, University of Cumbria (Lancaster campus)
Wilson Ozuem: Lecturer in International Business, University of Cumbria (London campus)
9. Names and appointments of all members of the research team (including degree where applicable)
Michelle Willis, Raye Ng and Wilson Ozuem

The Project

NOTE: In addition to completing this form you must submit all supporting materials such as participant information sheet (PIS) and consent form (see checklist below)

To be completed by the researcher	To be completed by the Research Ethics Panel
10. Peer Review *It is expected that all research is peer reviewed before applying for ethical consideration. Please indicate who your proposal has been discussed with (Mentor, Supervisor (s), Expert in field).* The following application and other relevant documents has been discussed with the main and secondary supervisor.	**10**. Has the proposal been peer reviewed? Yes ☐ No ☐ Comment (if applicable)
11. Summary of research project in lay terms Online brand communities (OBCs) are social media sites dedicated to branded goods and services, and the members are typically interested in, and admirers of, a brand. OBCs benefit customers by increasing their knowledge of a brand and allowing them to engage and socially interact with the brand and other brand followers. However, further research is required to understand the extent to which OBCs affect customer loyalty in the luxury fashion industry. Though OBCs provide unlimited access to brand-related information, customers will have varying attitudes and loyalty intentions towards brands through OBCs. Thus, the aim of the study is to develop a model that could facilitate the development of effective customer loyalty strategies for luxury fashion brands using OBCs. To achieve this the researcher aims to find out how consumers perceive OBCs and the extent to which OBCs directly impact their loyalty towards luxury fashion brands. Additionally, this research project aims to investigate how customers	Comment (if applicable)

affect other customers' loyalty in OBCs linked to the luxury fashion industry.	
12. Anticipated project dates Start date: Jan 2021 End date: June 2021	Comment (if applicable)
13. Please describe the sample of participants to be studied (including number, age, gender): *You MUST give the details of age, gender is given in full. Give detail on type of sample; purposeful, etc.* The project intends to follow the theoretical sampling strategy, a type of purposive sampling that focuses on emerging theory and selects participants that support the emerging theory and fit specific sampling criteria. The research project requires participants who have experience in using OBCs and in being influenced by OBCs or by other customers in OBCs linked to the luxury fashion industry. It is anticipated that 50 participants will be recruited, however the researcher intends to select 45 individuals out of that sample to interview. The intended sample for this project will consist of individuals, both male and female, from the millennial generation. The millennial generation is described as a demographic cohort born between the early 1980s and early 2000s, making this age group range roughly between 18 and 38 years. The factors influencing the choice to target millennials is their tech-savvy and socially conscious behaviour, and their status of being the dominant users of social media. Millennials both contribute and observe online information through OBCs making them an appropriate sample to target for this project.	**13, 14**. Has the applicant detailed the participant recruitment strategy? Yes ☐ No ☐ Comment (if applicable)
14. How will participants be recruited and from where? *Be as specific as possible.* It is anticipated that participants will be recruited through the researcher's social network contacts (i.e. ResearchGate, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn). Each participant will be contacted through social media platforms. Following Ozuem et al's (2020) recommendations on the snowball technique, contacts will be initiated through two or more participants, who often play ambassadorial roles to refer the researcher to other potential participants in their networks. More specifically, the snowball sampling technique increases the likelihood of recruiting participants, who are not easy to reach and are outside the network of the researcher.	

15. What procedure is proposed for obtaining consent? The consent and participation information forms will be sent to participants through email. Participants will have an opportunity to discuss their intentions to participate and any details of the project, before signing and returning the consent form through email. Informed consent will be re-confirmed verbally from the participant at the start of the scheduled virtual video interviews. They will be advised that they may withdraw from the study at any time during the study.	**15.** Has the applicant detailed the procedure for obtaining consent? Yes ☐ No ☐ Comment (if applicable)
16. What discomfort (including psychological), inconvenience or danger could be caused by participation in the project? *Please indicate plans to address these potential risks. Please give detail on potential discomfort for participants (consider this as if you were the participant).* It is acknowledged that the topic of social media could potentially cause negative past experiences to resurface, which could cause participants emotional harm. To prevent this from occurring the researcher will use open-ended questions during the interviews that will allow the participants to disclose the information they are comfortable sharing. Participants will be reminded at the beginning of their rights to stop or withdraw from the interview should they feel discomfort. It is expected that interviews will be conducted virtually using video-web platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Adobe, Meet, Skype and Blackboard Collaborate. Under the current living conditions of COVID-19, participants may be concerned regarding the protection of their privacy through virtual interviews which are likely to be conducted in their personal residence. Participants will be advised that they are not required to activate the video screen features so their physical surroundings may be kept private. Additionally, virtual interviews will be conducted individually with each participant and setup to prevent unauthorised attendees entering the interview. Considering the topic of the study, individuals may be concerned about invasion of privacy regarding their social media accounts and information published on them. Potential participants will be informed that any social media accounts and information published within them are not required or sought for the study. If the discussion leads to such information, the information will be disguised with pseudonyms.	**16.** Has the applicant considered potential for discomfort (including psychological), inconvenience or danger, which could be caused by participation in the project and indicated plans to address these potential risks. Yes ☐ No ☐ Comment (if applicable)

Participants will be informed of the aforementioned in the relevant documents including the participation information sheet and participant debrief form.	
17. What potential risks may exist for the researcher(s)? *Please indicate plans to address such risks (for example, details of a lone worker plan, as per the UoC Lone Work Procedures). Do not assume there will be none.* Video settings of the virtual interviews will affect the privacy of the researcher's resident surroundings, so the researcher will be sure to conduct the interviews in a location of their residence considered safe to the researcher. Cloud settings of the virtual video settings may compromise online protection and privacy of recorded data. So the researcher will download recordings onto their personal laptop, which the researcher has sole access to and is password protected, and password protected folders and delete the recordings from Cloud settings.	**17**. If applicable, does the applicant identify potential risks that may exist for the researcher(s) and indicate plans to address such risks? Yes ☐ No ☐ Comment (if applicable)
18. What are the general benefits to the participants? *Whilst we do not generally expect direct benefits to participants due to your study, please state here any that could result from completion of the study*. The participants will be informed that their participation will support the understanding of the topic being investigated and contribute to overall findings of the study.	**18,19.** Are any direct benefits expected by the participants as a result of the research, and has the researcher indicated this in the application form/proposal/PIS? Yes ☐ No ☐ Comment (if applicable)
19. Details of any incentives/payments (including out-of-pocket expenses) made to participants: No financial rewards are being made to participants.	
20. Describe your data collection and analysis methods, and the rationale for their use To support the explanatory nature of the study the researcher aims to use semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions. The semi-structured interviews will allow an open discussion to allow participants to provide responses in their own words. This data collection method reduces the potential ethical risks regarding participants' concern for privacy of information and freedom of expression. They may provide information they feel more comfortable sharing as well as respond with their own words without the interference of the interviewer. The interviewer may only intervene in the direction of the discussion to ensure it remains relevant to the subject. The interviewer will have a set of questions to guide the interview, but will have the opportunity to adapt questions	**20.** Do the data collection and analysis methods raise ethical concerns? Yes ☐ No ☐ Comment (if applicable)

around the discussion with the participant to explore additional points brought up during the interview in greater detail. The study will apply the thematic analysis method; the inductive approach enables flexibility in interpreting the data and sorting them into broad themes. This approach does not require the researcher to develop themes prior to the interview which would prompt specific responses to be generated from the participants. Therefore, themes will be developed based on the data collected from the interviews, ensuring participants are given an opportunity to share their perceptions and experiences in their own words.	
21. Describe the involvement of users/service users in the design and conduct of your research (where applicable*). If you have not involved users/service users in developing your research protocol, please indicate this and provide a brief rationale/explanation.* This study will not involve participants using or receiving primary special care services.	**21**. Does the applicant describe the involvement of users/service users in the design and conduct of your research (where applicable) Yes ⬜ No ⬜ Comment (if applicable)
22. What plan is in place for the storage of data (electronic, digital, paper, etc.)? *Please ensure that your plans comply with the* Data Protection Act 2018 *and University of Cumbria* Research Data Management *Guidelines such as consideration of data archiving, password protection and data encryption.* An audio recording will be made at the beginning of the interview session, recorded using the recording features on the virtual conferencing system, including Skype, Team or Blackboard Collaborate, or by mobile. The recording will be transferred and stored electronically onto a laptop, accessible only to the researcher, which will be password protected. Any recordings saved on Cloud settings following their transfer onto password-protected folders on my personal laptop will be deleted for privacy safety. Recordings of the interview will be typed into a transcript onto a Word document which will be password protected. Any notes taken during the interview will be placed in a security briefcase. Any demographic information, except for age and occupation, is not in the interest of the research project thus it will not be sought. However, if the discussion leads to such information, such details will be disguised with pseudonyms.	**22**. Is there evidence that the applicant has addressed data storage in line with the General Data Protection Regulations (2018) and University of Cumbria Research Data Management Guidelines? Yes ⬜ No ⬜ Comment (if applicable)

23. Will audio and/or video recording take place? □ **no** ▪ **audio** □**video**	**23**. If relevant, is there evidence that the applicant has made arrangements for audio/video data storage?
If yes, what arrangements have been made for audio/video data storage?	Yes ☐ No ☐
Audio-recorded data will be transferred from the virtual conferencing system or mobile and stored electronically on a laptop in a password-protected environment. Copies of recordings and transcripts will be backed up electronically in a USB drive, also password protected, and hard copies will be placed in a security briefcase, this briefcase will be sealed with a three digit rotary lock which the researcher will have sole access to.	Comment (if applicable)
At what point in the research will tapes/digital recordings/files be destroyed?	
After the submission and confirmed pass of the study, all data recordings and recording transcripts will be destroyed under secure conditions. Once the researcher is confirmed by the university to have passed the PhD, the data will be destroyed 6 months after the confirmed pass.	
24. What are the plans for dissemination of findings from the research (reports, transcripts, summaries, publication, conferences)? *Please give detail of how you plan to provide a summary of research findings in lay terms to participants.*	**24**. Does the applicant identify the plans for dissemination of findings from the research?
	Yes ☐ No ☐
The data will be displayed in the final thesis report and will not disclose the identity of participants and will not be used in any further studies. The thesis may be subject to publication by which the findings will be visible, however, participants' identities will not be disclosed. If participants request to see a summary of the data collected during their individual interviews, transcripts of the data of their individual interview will be provided to them.	Comment (if applicable)
25. Has the research received approval from the Health Research Authority (HRA) for NHS Research Ethics Committee (REC) review (please note that HRA Approval is **not required** if there is no NHS care organisation involvement in the study)	**25**. Does the research require an application to the Health Research Authority HRA for NHS Research Ethics Committee (REC) review?
Yes ☐ No ☐	Yes ☐ No ☐
Approval not required	Comment (if applicable)

26. Are there any issues regarding Safeguarding and Child Protection within the research proposal? If so, explain how these are addressed. The study does not require participants under the legal age of 18 years.	**26.** Has the applicant addressed any issues regarding Safeguarding and Child Protection within the application form and/or proposal? Yes ☐ No ☐ Comment (if applicable)
27. Are there any particular ethical problems, not previously noted on this application, in the proposed study? Additional ethical considerations including participants' identity protection, digital store of data and conducting of virtual interviews are discussed in earlier sections of this application (under sections 16, 17, 20, 22 and 23).	**27.** Does the applicant identify and address any particular ethical problems, not previously noted on this application? Yes ☐ No ☐ Comment (if applicable)
Signatures: Applicant: Michelle Willis Date: 22/12/20 Project Supervisor (if applicable): Wilson Ozuem Date: 21/12/20	Signature: Reviewer: Date:

Supportive Materials Checklist

Please attach all necessary supportive materials and indicate in the checklist below.

	To be completed by the Researcher - Please tick as appropriate	To be completed by the Research Ethics Panel
Participant Information Sheet	√	Is the Participant Information Sheet satisfactory? Yes ☐ No ☐ Comment (if applicable)
Consent Form	√	Is the Consent Form satisfactory? Yes ☐ No ☐ Comment (if applicable)
Debrief Sheet	√	Is the Debrief Sheet satisfactory? Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A ☐
Letter of invitation	√	Is the Letter of Invitation satisfactory? Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A ☐ Comment (if applicable)
Other (please state, and explain)		If another document is included, is it satisfactory? Yes ☐ No ☐ Comment (if applicable) needed

Appendix 4: Ethics application approval

University of Cumbria

Michelle Willis
Institute of Business, Industry and
Leadership
London Campus
East India Dock Road

University of Cumbria, Research Office,
Lancaster Campus, Bowerham Road,
Lancaster, LA1 3JD

01524 590804
Research.office@cumbria.ac.uk
www.cumbria.ac.uk

7 January 2021

Request for Ethical Clearance – Our Ref: 20/12
Project: Exploring the relationship between customer loyalty, consumer brand engagement and online brand communities in the luxury fashion industry

Dear Michelle

Thank you for your revised application for research ethics. The panel would like like you to provide a brief sentence or two about regarding point

1 c) Please provide more detail as to the practicalities of the 'snowball sampling' – presumably this will happen within the individual institutions or external ?

Kind regards

Dr Colette Conroy
Chair
Research Ethics Panel

PEOPLE.
PLACES.
PARTNERSHIPS.
BEING. ENRICHED.

University of Cumbria is a charity and a company limited by guarantee,
registered in England and Wales with company number 06033238

MINDFUL
EMPLOYER

disability
confident
EMPLOYER

Stonewall
DIVERSITY
CHAMPIONS

258

Appendix 5: Participant Letter of Invitation

Participant Letter of Invitation

Project title	Exploring the relationship between customer loyalty, consumer brand engagement and online brand communities in the luxury fashion industry
Supervisor(s)	Name: Raye Ng Email address: raye.ng@cumbria.ac.uk Name: Wilson Ozuem Email address: wilson.ozuem@cumbria.ac.uk
Student	Name: Michelle Willis Email address: michelle.willis@uni.cumbria.ac.uk

Date:

Dear Sir or Madam

This is a letter of invitation to participate in the referred research project at the University of Cumbria. This is an individual interview-based participation which, in accordance with the COVID-19 safety guidelines, will be conducted virtually for the safety of the participants.

Before you decide if you would like to take part, it is important for you to understand why the project is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to carefully read the Participant Information Sheet on the following pages. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

If you would like to take part, please complete and return the Informed Consent Declaration form.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Yours sincerely,

Michelle Willis

Postgraduate research student at University of Cumbria

University email: michelle.willis@uni.cumbria.ac.uk

Appendix 6: Participant Information Sheet

University of Cumbria

Participant Information Sheet

Title of Study: Exploring the relationship between customer loyalty, consumer brand engagement and online brand communities in the luxury fashion industry

About the study

The goal of the study is to understand the impact of online brand communities (OBCs) on customer loyalty in the luxury fashion industry. OBCs are social media sites dedicated to luxury fashion brands and are considered an important communication tool for fashion customers. OBCs, like normal social media sites, allow customers to interact with other customers and the brand itself. However, little research has explored whether OBCs influence customers' loyalty to the brands OBCs are dedicated to, and whether customers influence the loyalty of other customers through OBCs. To understand these factors, the study will focus on participants' personal experience of their usage of OBCs dedicated to luxury fashion brands, and the extent that it impacts their choice to remain with a luxury fashion brand. The aim of the study is to develop a model that could facilitate the development of effective customer loyalty strategies for luxury fashion brands using OBCs.

Some questions you may have about the research project:

Why have you asked me to take part and what will I be required to do?

You are invited to participate in an individual interview, expected to last approximately 45 minutes. Under COVID-19 restrictions, the interview will be conducted virtually through video interviews. The interview will involve a discussion of your perceptions regarding OBCs and the extent that they impact customer loyalty in the luxury fashion industry. Your participation will support the researcher's understanding of the extent to which OBCs affect customer loyalty in the luxury fashion industry. The information you give will be a major contribution to the overall conclusion of the study.

Before deciding to participate in the study, you will have the opportunity to request further information from the researcher, whose contact details can be found on the Participant Debrief Form. If you accept the invitation to participate, you will be forwarded a consent form through email to sign and return to the researcher electronically. Agreed consent will be followed with a discussion on an agreed time and date to conduct the interview and you will be forwarded details to access the virtual video interview. You will be provided with a memorable number as a security measure, which you will need to reference when communicating with the researcher.

What if I do not wish to take part or change my mind during the study?

Your participation in the study is entirely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without having to provide a reason for doing so. To seek withdrawal

prior to scheduled interview, contact the researcher through their provided email address, you will be required to cite your provided memorable number for clarification.

Will audio and/or video recording take place during the interview?

Yes, any information you provide will be recorded by audio-recording at the beginning of the interview. While the interview will take place via Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Adobe, Meet, Skype or Blackboard Collaborate, it is only audio which will be recorded and not video content.

What happens to the research data?

The data you provide, and your identity will be kept anonymised prior to storage. The audio data collected will be placed into written transcripts; all recordings and transcripts will be stored electronically in a password-protected environment, any hardcopy notes will be placed in a security briefcase. The researcher of this project will have sole access to the data. The data will be stored until the completion of the researcher's PhD programme, after which the data will be deleted under secure conditions.

If you wish to edit or withdraw any data you provided you may contact the researcher to request this. You will need to cite your memorable number for clarification.

How will the research be reported?

The data will be displayed in the researcher's final thesis report under University of Cumbria ethics approval. The thesis will be subject to publication, but it will not disclose your identity either in the collected data transcripts or in the final report. You are not required to provide any demographic information; however, if the discussion leads to such information, any details you provide will be disguised using pseudonyms.

How can I find out more information?

Please contact the researcher directly using the following details:

Mobile:

Email: michelle.willis@uni.cumbria.ac.uk

What if I want to complain about the research

Initially you should contact the researcher directly. However, if you are not satisfied or wish to make a more formal complaint you should contact Dr Colette Conroy, Chair of Research Ethics: research.office@cumbria.ac.uk

Appendix 7: Participant Consent Form

University of Cumbria

Participant Consent Form

Title of Investigation: Exploring the relationship between customer loyalty, consumer brand engagement and online brand communities in the luxury fashion industry

Please answer the following questions by highlighting and underlining your responses:

Are you 18 years or over?   YES NO

Have you read and understood the information sheet about this study?   YES NO

Have you been able to ask questions and had enough information?   YES NO

Have you been informed how the data will be handled: how it will be kept secure, how will have access to it, and how it will or may be used?   YES NO

Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from this study at any time, and without having to give a reason for withdrawal?   YES NO

Your responses will be anonymised. Do you give permission for members of the research team to analyse and quote your anonymous responses?   YES   NO

Do you agree to your interview being audio recorded?   YES   NO

If you have any further questions regarding the consent form, you may contact one of the investigators supervisors:

Raye Ng (Investigators main supervisor) raye.ng@cumbria.ac.uk

Wilson Ozuem (Investigators secondary supervisor) wilson.ozuem@cumbria.ac.uk

Please sign here if you wish to take part in the research and feel you have had enough information about what is involved:

Signature of participant:... **Date:**................

Name (block letters):..

Signature of investigator:... **Date:**................

Name (block letters):..

Appendix 8: Participant Debrief Form

University of Cumbria

Participant Debrief Form

Title of study: *Exploring the relationship between customer loyalty, consumer brand engagement and online brand communities in the luxury fashion industry*

Thank you for taking the time to take part in this research project.

The research project will investigate the effect of online brand communities (OBCs) on customer loyalty in the luxury fashion industry. Data for the study will be collected through individual virtual web-video interviews. The interview will focus on your personal experience of using OBCs dedicated to luxury fashion brands, and the extent to which OBCs impact your choice to remain with a luxury fashion brand.

The aim of the study is to develop a model that could facilitate the development of effective customer loyalty strategies for luxury fashion brands using OBCs. If you would like any further information about this research project, then please feel free to get in touch with the main investigator:

Main investigator: Michelle Willis

Mobile: Email: michelle.willis@uni.cumbria.ac.uk

If you wish to withdraw from the study in the next four weeks please get in touch with the main investigator through the provided email address and reference the memorable

number provided by the investigator prior to the interview. Please note that your identity was anonymised prior to the interview and that all information you have provided will be secured under password-secured settings. Following the completion of the research project, all raw copies of the original data, including written notes and transcripts, will be destroyed in a secure location. Please note that it may not be possible to withdraw anonymised data from the study.

If any of the issues in this study were distressing and you feel you need additional support, please contact one of the organisations below for help:

Raye Ng (Investigators main supervisor) raye.ng@cumbria.ac.uk

Wilson Ozuem (Investigators secondary supervisor) wilson.ozuem@cumbria.ac.uk

Thank you again for your participation!

Appendix 9: Data analysis coding process

The coding process for the inductive analysis of the current study is guided by the data analysis approach proposed Gioia et al. (2013). Gioia et al's (2013) process consists of three levels of analysis that provides guidelines on how to conduct a consistent and rigorous analysis as shown by the data structure in Figure 1. For the first level, The researchers employed an open coding approach which focused on the interview participants explicitly stated perspective and experiences in reference to luxury fashion OBCs to build the first-order codes. In order to maintain the respondents voice in the analysis process, vivo coding was applied when possible (Locke et al., 2022; Gioia et al., 2013). Critical search meaning was conducted by the researcher at this early stage to obtain an in-depth understanding of the identified emerging codes from the transcribed interview data. According to Ozuem, Willis, and Howell (2022), this encourages researchers to interpret beyond the surface meaning of respondents statements. With significant data volumes, Ozuem et al. (2022) recommend recruiting key terms from extant literature as opposed to a pure open coding process. Similarly, Locke, Feldman, and Golden-Biddle (2022) argue that although the data itself is an important source for identifying ideas to develop codes, engaging with extant literature be beneficial for researchers by informing them of potential definitions and conceptualisations of their data and provide validation to the interpretation of the primary qualitative data (Ozuem et al., 2022).

Following the process of Ozuem et al's (2021c), the researcher transition to the second level of analysis, by combining responses from the participants with concepts identified from extant literature (Gioia et al., 2013; Ozuem et al., 2022; Strauss & Corbin, 1994), which generated fourteen conceptual categories. The final stage consisted of aggregating the patterns that emerged from the first and second-order themes, resulting in the creation of the final core themes representing millennial customer and consumer loyalty and engagement in luxury fashion OBCs. These were: relationship with luxury brand, influence of content valence, socially aligned identity and collective community intentions. Figure 1 illustrates the process of connecting interview transcribed responses

to the last orders of the analysis. For example, data coding identified the first-order concept "The cheaper brands may be more economically available, but they would not last long and it becomes a waste of money" was categorised under the second-order category "Perceived quality of luxury vs mainstream fashion". Another first-order concept was explicitly stated as "I like my brands, I'm not going to change them"; this was categorised under a different second-order category "Attitudinal brand preference". While both first-order concepts are separate, they can be associated with the final aggregated theme "Relationship with luxury brand" (Figure 1).

The final aggregated themes served as a basis for the conceptual framework (Figure 2) which provides, combined with the interview data and extant theoretical insights from literature, led the identification of four OBC customer and consumer types: traditionalists, inspirers, self-containers and expellers (TISE). These OBC customer and consumers are characterised by their distinct relationship with luxury fashion brands, response to OBC content, their alignment with online social identities in OBCs and community engagement intentions. Four aggregated themes were assigned additional key text to depict their association with the four identified customer and consumer groups, illustrating their distinctive perspectives and behaviours towards luxury fashion OBCs (in line with Locke et al., 2022; Ozuem et al., 2021c).

Appendix 10: Development of the conceptual framework

Examiners comment: **5) Detailed discussion required of the development of the conceptual framework. A clearer theoretical explanation of the embedded categories. A table demonstrating the conceptual development to feed into the conceptual model (section 5.2) is recommended. This table may depict underpinning theories and authors, explanation, and key aspects for the thesis.**

Authors' response: Thank you for your comments regarding the development of the conceptual framework; below I have created a table depicting highlights from sections of the data analysis and discussion that address the theoretical development of the conceptual framework, with the page and paragraph number of the highlighted sections. These have also been highlighted in the thesis report.

Quoted section	Page and paragraph no.	Themes connected to referenced paragraphs
Personalisation is relevant to understanding the value customers perceive OBCs to have as personalisation impacts the building of a relationship between customers and brands (Hsieh, Lee, & Tseng, 2021). Most brands face the challenge of ensuring customers encounter their social media posts amidst the mass number of online posts, often compelling brands to repost their content at least three times per week (Myers, 2020). Without personalisation, customers would need to continuously scroll the social media timelines reading through information they may find irrelevant to them (Hsieh et al., 2021).	Page 113 p.3	• Relationship with luxury brand (RWLB) • Specialise (RWLB) • Traditionalists
The concept of brand relationships has been applied in several existing studies involving different industries (Carlson et al., 2018a; Coelho et al., 2019; Park et al., 2013; Swaminathan, Page, & Gürhan-Canli, 2007; Tuškej et al., 2013). It is a concept that equally applies to the luxury fashion industry which revolves around important psychological mechanisms including consumers' brand personality (Pham, Valette-Florence, & Vigneron, 2018; Ranfagni et al., 2016; Wolny & Mueller, 2013)	Page 116 p.2	• Relationship with luxury brand (RWLB) • Traditionalists

As mentioned in the literature review, luxury fashion brands are defined as brands that demand the highest of quality and are therefore premium priced (Berthon et al., 2009; Hansen & Wänke, 2011; Silverstein & Fiske, 2003).	Page 116 p.4	• Relationship with luxury brand (RWLB) • Specialise (RWLB)
For non-luxury fashion brands, sustainability corresponds with perceptions regarding mass and eco-friendly production and economic effects (Sun, Kim, & Kim, 2014), whereas luxury brands imply the opposite, emphasising an image of pleasantness, superficiality and ostentation (Achabou & Dekhili, 2013). Consumers' responses to sustainability thus change when luxury fashions are the topic (Kumagai & Nagasawa, 2017). While sustainability that emphasises affordability and eco-friendliness is significant to non-luxury purchasers (Park, Ko, & Kim, 2010a), luxury purchasers may feel that luxury brands have less need for sustainability because it may reduce products' quality (Kong, Witmaier, & Ko, 2021).	117 p.5-118 p.1	• Relationship with luxury brand (RWLB) • Specialise (RWLB) • Traditionalists
Luxury fashion brands are integrated into customers' social identity, which can mediate the relationship developed between customers and brands (Coelho et al., 2019), and can be further enhanced through online activities in OBCs that maintain that ongoing relationship (Ozuem et al., 2021a).	Page 119 p.2	• Relationship with luxury brand (RWLB) • Specialise (RWLB) • Traditionalists
Brand preference is formed upon individuals' positive brand memories and attitudes (Biehal, Stephens, & Curio, 1992; Shimp, 1981) and the attributes they associate with luxury branded products.	Page 119 p.3	• Relationship with luxury brand (RWLB) • Specialise (RWLB) • Traditionalists
According to Ganesan and Sridhar (2014), customers tend to continue purchasing from the same brand they have purchased from previously due to key attributes of the products they associate with the brand, causing them to establish a brand preference (Kim, Lee, & Lee, 2020).	Page 119 p.7	• Relationship with luxury brand (RWLB)
Brand and attitudinal loyalty are arguably significant foundations of customer–brand relationships, as they both reflect a customer's decision to remain committed to a brand due to positive feelings towards a specific brand (Ballantyne, Warren, & Nobbs, 2006; Dick & Basu, 1994). Attitudinal loyalty encourages customers to engage in behavioural loyalty, which is customers actually purchasing from the brand, and it builds their emotional attachment to the brand (Nyadzayo et al., 2018).	Page 120 p.1	• Relationship with luxury brand (RWLB) • Specialise (RWLB) • Traditionalists

An absence of attitudinal loyalty towards brands makes it difficult to convince customers to purchase from brands (Kamran-Disfani et al., 2017).	Page 120 p.3	• Relationship with luxury brand (RWLB) • Specialise (RWLB) • Traditionalists
Brand preference can heavily influence customers' perspectives regarding the perceived quality and equity of their favourite brand compared to others, making it difficult for OBC managers to convince customers to change their brand preference (Ozuem et al., 2021b). Customers' determination to remain with a specific brand through OBCs can even reduce the influence of other customers' attempts to influence brand choice (Ozuem et al., 2021b).	Page 120 p.3	• Specialise (RWLB) • Traditionalists
They are likely to align with individuals who share a common interest with brands they favour (Dholakia et al., 2004; Ozuem et al., 2021a) and will join OBCs that are specifically linked to the brands they favour (Algesheimer et al., 2005).	Page 121 p.2	• Specialise (RWLB) • Traditionalists
Alvarado-Karste and Guzmán (2020) examined how brand identity–cognitive style fitted with the three levels of social influence (compliance, identification and internalisation; Kelman, 1958); they found that identification and internalisation influence has a significant positive effect on the perceived value of brands.	Page 121 p.4	• Relationship with luxury brand (RWLB) • Specialise (RWLB) • Traditionalists
Several researchers have associated consumer–brand alignment with customer commitment towards luxury brand products (Aaker, 1997; Khalifa & Shukla, 2021; Ranfagni et al., 2016; Sirgy, 1982), which if changed or weakened could cause luxury customers to lose a sense of self (Fuchs et al., 2013).	Page 159 p.2	• Specialise (RWLB) • Traditionalists
OBCs are categorised as being specialised to a specific brand (Albert et al., 2008) and while individuals may form communities separate from others (Dholakia et al., 2004; He et al., 2017; VanMeter et al., 2018), membership of OBCs can still comprise individuals who can be segmented into general or special interest groups.	Page 159 p.2	• Specialise (RWLB) • Traditionalists
In the field of psychology, valence is a sentimental quality referring to categorised emotions that reflect the emotional attractiveness (goodness) or averseness (badness) of events, objects and situations (Frijda, 1986). In other words, it refers to the emotions customers develop following an experience encountered previously or currently; valence has been a central focus in several customer loyalty studies (Cheng et al., 2020; Holbrook & Batra, 1987; Smith & Bolton, 2002).	Page 123 p.2	• Influence of content valence (ICV) • Affected (ICV) • Inspirers

The intangible nature of online purchasing creates a level of uncertainty for customers who are unable to assess the risk of their online purchase until the product is physically available to them, which underlines the customers' need for product-related information of great quality to reduce their uncertainty (Weathers, Sharma, & Wood, 2007).	Page 124 p.3	• Affected (ICV) • Self-containers
To achieve an experience that compensates for the loss of senses, which triggers emotional valence, such as the touch of an object, and he referred to technology that creates online direct sensory experiences supported by rich media (Coyle & Thorson, 2001; Daft & Lengel, 1986) … richness of the content… which developed into behavioural intentions for the product displayed in the post (Liu, Li, Ji, North, & Yang, 2017; Liu & Shrum, 2009).	Page 125 p.1	• Affected (ICV) • Inspirers • Self-containers
Entertainment from OBC content is a vital factor for luxury fashion brands for enhancing customers' valence as it can influence customer commitment to remain with an OBC and engage with other customers (Ozuem et al., 2021b)…can develop a positive valence based on the entertainment generated from observing the content as well as basic product-related learning (Tseng et al., 2017).	Page 125 p.1	• Affected (ICV) • Inspirers • Self-containers
The influence of content valence is not limited to content posted by brands in OBCs; customers can take notice of the content posted by other customers, which has the potential to influence observing individuals' valence (Ozuem et al., 2021b).	Page 125 p.2	• Affected (ICV) • Inspirers • Self-containers
The presence of other humans can have a positive effect on customers' perceptions of online environments (Poupis, Rubin, & Lteif, 2021).	Page 126 p.1	• Affected (ICV) • Inspirers • Self-containers
Network peers presented in OBC content are able to influence other customers' fashion products purchasing behaviour (Hahn & Kim, 2013; Kong, Ko, Chae, & Mattila, 2016; Ozuem et al., 2021b).	Page 126 p.5	• Affected (ICV) • Inspirers • Self-containers
Individuals can be attracted to individuals they identify with, which links to the social influence identification concept (Kelman, 1958), causing them to be more accepting of information from those sources compared to other sources they do not identify with. The social presence of individuals that customers can relate to can influence their arousal level (Fortin & Dholakia, 2005).	Page 126 p.5	• Affected (ICV) • Inspirers • Self-containers
Customers can absorb negative sentiment indicated through online comments and develop a negative valence, which can influence their expectations of future results (Niese, Libby, Fazio, Eibach, & Pietri, 2019; Wheeler, Stuss, & Irving, 1997).	Page 127 p.2	• Affected (ICV) • Self-containers

A perceived mismatch between the communicator and receiver of information can reduce the social influence between the two groups (Kelman, 1958).	Page 129 p.1	• Unaffected (ICV) • Traditionalists • Expellers
OBCs can contain information and stories that attract individuals' attention through different content attributes that differentiates the content of the post from others (Olmedilla, Send, & Toral, 2019).	Page 129 p.2	• Affected (ICV) • Inspirers
Inclusion of content that is original and unique to OBCs and the importance of open innovation in the information provided by OBC users who have initiative and enthusiasm to share information ideas (Elia, Petruzzelli, & Urbinati, 2020). The open innovation through content posted by customers, which is enabled by OBCs, is beneficial for other customers who are then able to access vivid information that enhances individual knowledge (Nambisan, Lyytinen, Majchrzak, & Song, 2017).	Page 130 p.1	• Affected (ICV) • Inspirers
The use of different individuals with diverse knowledge who collaborate within OBCs supports customers' initiative to engage within OBCs and conduct purchasing behaviour (Elia et al., 2020).	Page 130 p.3	• Affected (ICV) • Traditionalists • Inspirers
Olmedilla et al. (2019) examined the value of content posting in virtual communities; they argued that the number of posts that reference common topics of discussion make it more complex to distinguish the uniqueness of attributes of the online content. This arguably negatively impacts the perceived level of innovative content posting and discourages customers from engaging within OBCs in the long term.	Page 131 p.2	• Unaffected (ICV) • Traditionalists • Expellers
Customers' choice to accept information as part of their own personal beliefs as social influence internationalisation is emphasised (Kelman, 1958). Individuals observing situations from other individuals' perspectives align them with their own self-beliefs (Niese et al., 2019), potentially causing them to form their own expectations of brands through OBCs. However, not all consumers will automatically comply with the influence of negative brand sentiment (Ozuem et al., 2021b).	Page 132 p.2	• Affected (ICV) • Self-containers • Unaffected (ICV) • Traditionalists • Expellers
Some customers will tolerate or ignore negative comments if they are related to the brand they favour and may even defend it against complaining customers (Wilson, Giebelhausen, & Brady, 2017; Ozuem et al., 2021a).	Page 132 p.4	• Unaffected (ICV) • Traditionalists • Affected (ICV) • Inspirers

Customers' experience in obtaining information from other OBC customers enables them to consider options or alternatives, but whether they act upon the influence of the information will depend on their perception of the arguments as well as their own existing sentiments (Ozuem et al., 2021a).	Page 132 p.4	• Affected (ICV) • Self-containers
Customers do not develop brand sentiments solely based on the words of other individuals' comments, but on their own critical judgement that could be developed from their own affirmative experience with the brand (Ozuem et al., 2021a).	Page 133 p.5	• Unaffected (ICV) • Traditionalists
Loyal customers with a strong relationship with the brand are more tolerant of brand's transgressions (Hess, Ganesan, & Klein 2003; Tax, Brown, & Chandrashekaran, 1998) and are less influenced by the negative comments of other OBC customers (Ozuem et al., 2021a).	Page 146 p.2	• Unaffected (ICV) • Traditionalists
Kelman's (1958) categories of social influence theory (compliance, identification and internalisation), which reflect varying degrees of influence individuals are willing to accept from others, which in the context of OBCs includes either or both the brand and customers who are part of the OBC community.	Page 159 p.3-160 p.1	• Influence of content valence (ICV)
Consumers' feelings of perceived inclusivity or exclusivity can impact perceived source identification, which is a level of social influence (Kelman, 1958). Inclusion of a range of characteristics linked to personal identity, attitudes and values can influence individuals to feel they are able to identify with the brand and follow it through OBCs (Ozuem et al., 2021b).	Page 134 p.1	• Socially aligned identity (SAI)
Ozuem et al. (2021a): if an individual identifies with a source, they are more likely to remain involved with a community.	Page 134 p.2	• Socially aligned identity (SAI)
Bellezza and Keinan's (2014) study examined how core brand users perceived non-core users, defining them as "brand tourists" and "brand immigrants" based on how core users perceive them. They defined brand tourists as consumers of a brand who do not claim any in-group membership and brand immigrants as individuals who claim to part of the in-group of core users.	Page 134 p.2	• Diverge (SAI) • Converge (SAI)
According to Bellezza and Keinan (2014), core users perceive individuals who are not core users of a brand as a threat to the exclusivity of the brand and consider they dilute the positive brand image.	Page 135 p.1	• Diverge (SAI) • Traditionalists
An individual seeking membership of an exclusive community perceives value in a severe initiation process (Gerard & Mathewson, 1966), thus finding the effort to acquire in-group status important to the self and the acquired membership rewarding and gratifying.	Page 135 p.1	• Converge (SAI) • Inspirers

Bellezza and Keinan (2014) identified that while brand immigrants were perceived as a threat to identity exclusivity, brand tourists, who do not claim membership, enhance a sense of pride among core brand users; this might be due to the realisation that external groups value the distinct identity and values of the community, thus reinforcing the image and desirability of a brand (Bellezza & Keinan, 2014).	Page 135 p.1	• Converge (SAI) • Inspirers • Self-containers
OBC consumers can come from a range of behavioural and psychographic segments, with a brand being the centre of focus in their decision to join a community (Algesheimer et al., 2005).	Page 135 p.3	• Converge (SAI) • Inspirers • Self-containers
OBCs arguably reinforce brand recognition by provoking excitement from non-brand owners (Kapferer, 2012) who do not necessarily evaluate the alignment between their identity and those of the OBC members, but still feel a sense of belonging with the community. Likewise, this can help reduce the issue of an exclusive brand image being compromised, thus maintaining a balance between exclusivity and inclusiveness (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009; Liu, Shin, & Burns, 2019).	Page 136 p.3	• Converge (SAI) • Inspirers
Individuals who feel that sources within OBCs do not align with their identity can ultimately be motivated to resist the influence of sources and the OBC content (Ozuem et al., 2021a).	Page 136 p.3	• Diverge (SAI) • Traditionalists • Expellers
OBCs are known for their customisation and enabling customer involvement in the content creation process (Kim & Ko, 2012; Koivisto & Mattila, 2018; Schembri & Latimer, 2016).	Page 136 p.3	• Converge (SAI) • Inspirers
Companies can enhance their OBCs by attracting new members to build the community beyond its expected atmosphere and activities (Veloutsou & Black, 2020).	Page 137 p.2	• Converge (SAI) • Inspirers • Self-containers
New members who are outside the usual in-group network within OBCs can support the development of OBCs and extend the assets and resources brought to the community (Scuotto et al., 2017; Veloutsou & Black, 2020).	Page 137 p.2	• Converge (SAI) • Inspirers
Cooper, Merrilees and Miller (2020) argued that building authenticity and truthfulness involves addressing improvements to a brand's core and advancing brand heritage by expressing brand innovation in experiences.	Page 138 p.1	• Converge (SAI) • Inspirers

Researchers support the view that attachment develops when individuals predict similarity with others (Becker, 1960; Etzioni, 1961; Gould, 1979; Hall, Schneider, & Nygren, 1970; Kidron, 1978; Meyer & Allen, 1984).	Page 138 p.3	• Diverge (SAI) • Traditionalists
Consumers who identify with another, or share attributes with another, can influence the acceptance of information (Thompson, Kim, Loveland, Lacey, & Castro, 2017).	Page 138 p.3	• Diverge (SAI) • Traditionalists • Expellers
OBCs can create engaging environments for individuals to share their passions (Schau et al., 2009), information about the brand (Azar et al., 2016; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001) and provide support to new members (Schau et al., 2009), building emotional relationships among community members (Schembri & Latimer, 2016).	Page 138 p.3	• Converge (SAI) • Inspirers
Mandler, Johnen, and Gräve (2020) stated that consumer–brand relationships in the luxury industry are built by the following non-personal luxury dimensions: quality, heritage and conspicuousness. Mandler et al. (2020) found these dimensions were superior compared to consumers' intention to seek hedonism and extend their self or identity and less noticeable compared to non-personal dimensions. Attributes within content that are more vivid require less cognitive effort and resources (Keller & Block, 1997) to influence individuals' perspectives, thus facilitating higher processing fluency leading to a positive consumer affect (Schwarz, 2004).	Page 140 p.1	• Diverge (SAI) • Traditionalists
Luxury brands that maintain key core dimensions can remain vivid and memorable to the customer, who would need to invest little cognitive processing effort (Keller & Block, 1997).	Page 140 p.2	• Diverge (SAI) • Traditionalists
Although inclusivity and adaptability of OBC content and image are beneficial for attracting new customers, encouraging them to engage with the in-group community (Algesheimer et al., 2005), they can potentially alienate existing users (Cennamo & Santaló, 2015).	Page 141 p.2	• Converge (SAI) • Inspirers
The exclusivity of luxury brands has often been defined by the low mass market accessibility to luxury brands (Azemi et al., 2022; Hennigs, Wiedmann, & Klarmann, 2012; Kapferer & Bastien, 2009).	Page 141 p.2	• Diverge (SAI) • Traditionalists
Emphasis on accessibility alone can lead to overexposure that can diminish other exclusivity qualities of luxury brands, such as perceived rarity, prestige and the emotional or hedonic values they bring to customers (Athwal, Istanbulluoglu, & McCormack, 2019; Phau & Prendergast, 2000; Tynan et al., 2010).	Page 141 p.2	• Diverge (SAI) • Traditionalists

The desire to maintain brand identity or exclusivity comes from customers as well as from corporate managers, despite external industry trends that may compromise a brand's image and make adaption or change necessary (Cooper et al., 2020).	Page 143 p.2	• Diverge (SAI) • Traditionalists
Social identification influences occur when individuals accept or acknowledge positively the influence of someone they respect (Kelman, 1958; Warshaw, 1980) or an intangible object like a brand or organisation (Kübler et al., 2019).	160 p.2-161 p.1	• Socially aligned identity (SAI)
Willis (2021) stated that "within OBCs, customers who are loyal to the brand may appear emotionless, which is due to their low level of online engagement with other customers" (p. 166). If an individual is expressive within an OBC, it does not mean they harbour a brand loyalty status, and they may engage in OBCs in ways that do not generate efficient returns to the brand or directly create negative brand sentiments within OBCs (Ozuem & Willis, 2021).	Page 161 p.2	• Collective community intentions (CCI)
Over time, individuals may change from information seekers to socialisers, taking a more active role in OBC engagement and becoming brand advocates (Meek et al., 2019).	Page 144 p.3	• Expressive (CCI) • Traditionalists • Inspirers
Customers seeking to act as influencers are often driven by intrinsic motivation: their involvement in activities is based on personal interest and spontaneous satisfaction (Gagné & Deci, 2005).	Page 145 p.1	• Expressive (CCI) • Traditionalists • Inspirers
The intrinsic motivation individuals have in showcasing their product or service consumption is used to describe influencers' authentic passion to endorse brands (Audrezet et al., 2018). A brand may be greatly integrated into a customer's identity; the customer's passion and interest in a brand may motivate them to strongly involve the brand in their online engagement with other customers in OBCs (Ozuem et al., 2021b; Pentina, Guilloux, & Micu, 2018).	Page 145 p.3	• Expressive (CCI) • Traditionalists • Inspirers
Influencers have a more intimate connection with the audience, some being closely acquainted with their networks, and they share similar traits, personality and goals with their audience (Khamis et al., 2017). Endorsements that come from influencers, or customers engaging with their social network, appear more trustworthy and authentic to the audience compared to FGC (Audrezet et al., 2018; Hewett et al., 2016).	147 p.3	• Expressive (CCI) • Traditionalists • Inspirers

A collective community enhances the value of online activities because this helps new customers develop a sense of personal achievement from the activity (Dholakia et al., 2004).	Page 148 p.2	• Expressive (CCI) • Traditionalists • Inspirers
Researchers have argued that shared outlooks, values and principles bridge the perceived similarity between individuals causing them to identify with each other in a community, which indicates a social influence impact from the community itself (Cheng et al., 2020; Huang, Chen, Ou, Davison, & Hua, 2017; Kara, Vredeveld, & Ross Jr, 2018; Kelman, 1958; Venkatesh & Davis, 2000). However, OBCs can contain users who follow the brand and consume posted information but do not actively participate in online engagement (Meek et al., 2019). It can be argued that customers follow a range of OBCs from different industries, and may not actively participate in all of them unless they feel a closeness and a belonging to the community (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000; Fournier, 1998).	Page 148 p.2	• Reserved (CCI) • Self-containers • Expellers
A consumer can eventually be influenced under the internalisation category, in which case they actively integrate other individuals' attitudes, values or goals as part of their own personal beliefs and goals (Kelman, 1958; Kagan, 1958).	Page 149 p.6	• Reserved (CCI) • Self-containers
A lack of a supportive environment would reduce individuals' motivation to disclose information online (Lin, Chou, & Huang, 2021).	Page 151 p.1	• Reserved (CCI) • Self-containers • Expellers
Perceived usefulness is an important factor influencing the acceptance of technology and social platforms (Agag & El-Masry, 2016; Ayeh, Au, & Law, 2013; Joo & Sang, 2013).	Page 152 p.3	• Reserved (CCI) • Self-containers • Expellers
New OBC customers are probably still in the process of learning about the community and forming a connection with it (Ozuem et al., 2021a) compared to more experienced community members who follow their own initiative (Algesheimer et al., 2005).	Page 152 p.3	• Reserved (CCI) • Self-containers
New OBC customers may prefer to follow experienced community members for security (Chen et al., 2016).	152 p.5	• Reserved (CCI) • Self-containers
Although customers have the opportunity to be actively engaged in OBCs, they may choose to be passive engagers and observe OBC activity (Ozuem & Willis, 2021).	Page 161 p.2	• Reserved (CCI) • Self-containers