Aalto-yliopisto
Aalto-universitetet
Aalto University

Bachelor's Programme in Marketing

A disambiguation of the role of consumer communities in fashion consumption

A typology of consumer motivations tied to membership in consumer communities in the context of fashion

---

Kalle Remes

Bachelor's thesis
2024

Aalto-yliopisto
Aalto-universitetet
Aalto University

Author Kalle Remes

Title of thesis A disambiguation of the role of consumer communities in fashion consumption

Programme Bachelor of Science (Economics and Business Administration)

Major Marketing

Thesis supervisor Kseniia Lashkova, MSc

Date 31.12.2024 **Number of pages** 68 **Language** English

Abstract

The many ways that social consumers interact in the marketplace have been a major interest in international marketing research in the past few decades, and have been used to explain some of the social aspects of fashion consumption. However, the findings of this research appear fragmented, with the academic field missing a clear typology of the effects that membership in consumer communities have on consumer behavior in the context of fashion, with which to compare consumer behavior between different communities. The writer of this thesis aims to help streamline future marketing research by providing a comprehensive typology on the effects of membership in consumer communities on fashion consumption by adapting the fashion self-concept -framework to explain different dimensions of consumer motivations.

In this thesis, the three distinct kinds of consumer communities are defined by the author, along with a set of defining characteristics which affect consumer behavior within those groups. Then, the concepts of symbolic consumption and extended self are addressed to lay a foundation for understanding the way that consumers use fashion to construct their personal and social identities. The framework of the fashion self-concept is then introduced, and used to address the lack of a comparative framework for analyzing fashion consumption. Finally, the author uses the four key areas of fashion self-concept to create a comparative analysis on how membership in different consumer groups affects different dimensions of consumer motivation.

In concluding this thesis, the findings are outlined in a visualization of the typology of effects consumer communities have on fashion consumption. The managerial implications and academic uses for this framework are then discussed, and the limitations of research alongside opportunities for future research are identified.

Keywords consumer culture theory, consumer communities, symbolic consumption, fashion consumption, fashion self-concept

Table of contents

1 Introduction

Throughout our lives, we are a part of many different communities. These communities are a large part of what shapes our identities and makes us… us. While in a traditional sense, these communities are formed around inherent qualities about ourselves and the world around us, such as our national identity or socioeconomic status, there also exists a dimension that's rooted in our activity as consumers (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). These groups of people, also known as consumer communities, choose to base aspects of their identity around their activity in the marketplace, creating newfound cultures, social groups and shared senses of self that are based on their consumption habits (Canniford, 2011). In an era where consumer behavior is becoming increasingly shaped by social dynamics and cultural narratives embedded in marketplace activity, as opposed to the aforementioned traditional senses of self, the understanding of these social groups has become a critical area of inquiry for both academics and marketers alike.

One of the most significant ways that humans communicate their allegiances to different social groups is through their choices in fashion. While historically, clothing has been used as a means for the expression of social differentiation, in the Western world the role of traditional, fairly homogenous class cultures has largely diminished in favor of new, heterogeneous groups of consumers with varying interests, tastes and habits regardless of socioeconomic background (Crane & Bovone, 2006), instead finding a shared sense of identity through habits of consumption. This newfound 'democratization', or accessibility of fashion has led to it becoming a tool for the creation and communication of consumers' personal and shared identities all around the world.

For members of consumer communities, fashion is a way to communicate allegiance to, and membership of their community. Aesthetic codes play a major role in creating and maintaining a sense of shared identity between members of these communities (Bennett, 1999; Crane & Bovone, 2006; Schofield & Schmidt, 2005), and thus, the existence of these communities cannot be ignored when investigating fashion consumption.

While the relationships between fashion and consumer communities have been researched on case-to-case levels (see Bennett, 1999; Goulding et al. 2002; Schofield & Schmidt, 2005; Burnasheva et al. 2019 for examples), there surprisingly exists no unifying piece of research or academic literature comparing the effects of different consumer community allegiances on fashion consumption.

This thesis aims to fill this gap, and to create a coherent and unifying framework with which to approach and analyze what effects membership in consumer communities might have on the motivations and consumption habits of fashion consumers. To understand the relationship between consumer communities and fashion consumption, this thesis aims to answer the following research questions:

1. ***What are the different kinds of consumer communities?***

Research question 1 aims to supply the reader with an understanding of the different types of consumer communities along with their defining characteristics, and is answered through chapters 4-6.

2. ***Which aspects motivate fashion consumption, and what are their effects on consumers' need for community?***

Research question 2 in turn aims to explain which factors motivate fashion consumption, and their connection with consumer communities, and is answered in chapter 7.

3. ***How does fashion consumption differ within the contexts of different consumer communities***

Research question 3 ties the findings of the prior research questions together to create a comprehensive framework of how fashion consumption manifests in different consumer communities, and is answered in chapters 8-9.

2 Methodology

Since this thesis will be conducted in the form of a literature review, documenting the process of acquiring the most relevant articles for this thesis is an important step. I decided to document my inclusion and exclusion process for the literature I used as my sources by conducting a bibliographic analysis into the themes of my thesis.

The aim of this bibliographic analysis is to map out existing academic literature surrounding the topic of consumer communities as well as prevalent CCT theories surrounding the subject. On top of that, the other goal of this bibliographic analysis is to explore the literature surrounding the identity -and community building aspects of fashion consumption. By analyzing the most relevant pieces of academic literature surrounding these subjects, I aim to supply the reader with a cohesive understanding of the prevalent themes and frameworks that will be required in understanding the contents of this thesis as well as providing context for the timeline and geographical biases in this field of academic research.

2.1 List of relevant keywords

To find literature that suits the needs of this thesis, I compiled a list of relevant keywords, that I used in my search process. These keywords were:

consumer culture theory, consumer identity, consumer community, brand community, subcultures, neotribes, consumer tribes, consumer identity, fashion community, fashion consumption, symbolic consumption

2.2 Formulation of the inclusion and exclusion criteria

I started my search by using the keyword “consumer community” on EBSCO. The amount of search results as well as the information regarding the articles, such as the amount of citations dates to the 30th of October, 2024. From this search EBSCO provided me with an initial number of 2611 results. After this, I applied search filters “peer-reviewed” and “full text” into my search. This narrowed down the results from 2611 to 706 results, excluding 1905 results. I then decided to further narrow down the search results by applying the filter “academic journals”. This excluded all publication types other than academic journals from my search results. The amount of results narrowed down to 640, an exclusion of 66 results. After this, I decided to filter out all literature

that wasn't published in English by using the filter "language - English". My results narrowed down to 566 results, an exclusion of 74.

After this preliminary process of elimination I applied my second key-word: "AND tribes". This excluded a total of 561 results, leaving me with 5 articles. I then manually filtered through these articles by reading the article abstracts as well as going through the listed keywords for each article. After my manual filtering I was left with 4 relevant articles.

In order to find more relevant sources, I repeated the same process, this time replacing my earlier secondary keyword with "AND identity". This excluded a total of 531 articles, leaving me with 35 results. I repeated the same process of manual filtering on these 35 articles, although this time around I didn't read every single article's "abstract" as this wouldn't be efficient with such a large number of results, and instead immediately left out some articles which I deemed irrelevant from their keywords and title alone. After manually filtering through my results I was left with 3 relevant results.

Next up, I repeated the aforementioned process and replaced the secondary keyword with "AND brand". This excluded a total of 443 articles, leaving me with 123 results. After utilizing the previously established method of manual filtering, I was left with 9 relevant results.

Finally, I followed the aforementioned formula and replaced the secondary keyword with "AND subculture". This excluded 562 articles, leaving me with 4 results. After manually filtering through the remaining articles, I found 2 articles that were relevant to my research. Both of them, however, I had already found earlier through my earlier searched keywords of "AND identity" (Beverland, L., Farrelly, F. & Quester, P. (2010) *Authentic subcultural membership: Antecedents and consequences of authenticating acts and authoritative performances*) and "AND tribes" (Thomas, T., Price, L., Schau, H. (2013) *When differences unite: Resource dependence in heterogeneous consumption communities*). I will be including these duplicate articles under the search terms that I first discovered them under. Therefore, this part of my search through EBSCO yielded no unique results.

Overall, through EBSCO I gathered a total of 16 relevant articles.

Because my subject is not very prominent in the field of business research and leans more on the sociological side, I didn't put a lot of weight into the FT top 50 Journals -list when filtering through articles. However, I did try to gather all relevant articles which were published in a FT Top 50 journal. From the 16 articles that I gathered through EBSCO, 3 were in FT Top 50 journals, all 3 of them published in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

Instead of the FT Top 50, I focused on trying to find articles published in journals with an AJG rating of 3 or higher. From the 16 articles I gathered through EBSCO, 8 were published in journals with a ranking of 3 or higher. The journals that had an AJG rating of 3 or higher were *Journal of Consumer Research, Psychology and Marketing, Journal of Interactive Marketing and Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication.*

In my case, using the AJG rating as a filter over the FT Top 50 was a lot more sensible, as finding enough relevant articles in FT Top 50 Journals would be nearly impossible. However, even when using the AJG rating over FT Top 50 when ranking sources, I found it difficult to find all of the information I require from these journals alone. Thus, I decided to include some articles which were released in less renowned journals in order to get a better foundation for my topic.

After reviewing my articles so far, I noticed some big gaps of information regarding some essential themes for my research. To find this more specialized information I turned to Google Scholar, as its databases are more vast than EBSCO, at the cost of a less fine tuned search engine. The Google Scholar database gave far vaster results when looking for information on the more niche areas of research regarding my topic.

From the list of keywords I had gathered beforehand, I recognized 4 of which I wasn't able to find sufficient information on through EBSCO: *consumer culture, neotribes, subcultures* and *fashion communities/fashion consumption.*

This part of my information gathering process was a lot more manual and free-form, as Google Scholar doesn't have a lot of depth as a search engine. I found all of my articles by searching for relevant keywords and manually reading through the results.

My first keyword was "consumer culture theory". I filtered the results by "most relevant" and went through the first 5 pages of results. I used the same kind of manual filtering process as with my EBSCO search results (identifying possibly relevant articles through the title and keywords, and then further identifying relevant articles by reading the abstracts), and identified 4 articles that were most relevant for my topic.

Then, I used the keyword "neotribes" to search for information on neotribes. However, I quickly decided to widen the amount of search results by editing the keyword to "neotribes AND consumer tribes" in order to find more

business related articles. I yet again went through the first 5 pages of results. After manual filtering, I was left with 6 articles.

Third, I used the keyword "consumer community AND subculture" to find more relevant articles about subcultures. I added "consumer community" in addition to my original keyword of "subculture" to frame my search through a more marketing oriented lens, as solely searching for subcultures gave me results from more disconnected fields of research such as anthropology and sociology. After manual filtering, I was left with 6 articles.

Lastly, I decided to search for articles regarding fashion communities and fashion consumption. In order to broaden my search results I used the keyword "fashion communities AND fashion consumption", as these both are topics that do not have vast amounts of research, and are limited to a relatively small amount of publications and researchers. With this search, I managed to identify 6 relevant articles from the first 5 pages of search results.

Out of my 22 Google Scholar findings, 4 were published in a FT 50 Journal. The journals in question were *Journal of Consumer Research* and *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*. However, I used the same logic as with my EBSCO findings, valuing a high AJG rating over being listed in the FT 50. Out of 22 articles, 11 had a rating of 3 or more. Notably, almost all of the articles found under the keywords "consumer culture theory" and "neotribes AND tribes", were from journals with an AJG rating of 3 or higher (3 out of 4, and 5 out of 6 respectively). Articles found under the keyword "consumer community AND subculture" had a 3 out of 6 articles be published in journals with an AJG rating of 3 or higher. A very noticeable disparity could be noticed from the fashion related articles. Only 2 out of the 6 journals were even ranked in the AJG ranking (*International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management, AJG rank 2 & International Journal of Consumer Studies, AJG rank 2).* This hints at a disparity in the amount and quality (or at least the stature) or fashion related research compared to more standard fields of research (i.e. Business).

Overall, I compiled a database of 38 articles, 16 from EBSCO and 22 from Google Scholar. I have illustrated my inclusion and exclusion process in Figure 1. Table 1. shows the full list of all of my articles including details on authors, journals of publication, journal rankings, number of citations and years of release. It also illustrates which platform and using which keywords each article was found.

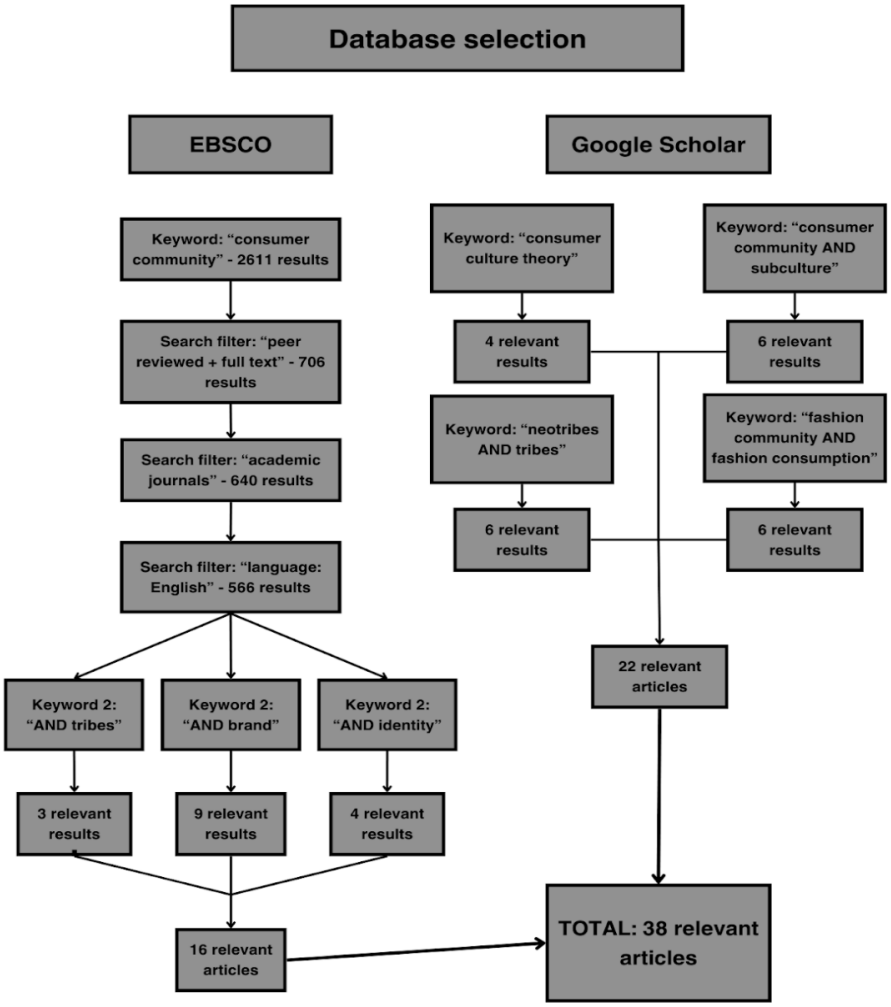

Figure 1: Visualization of the inclusion exclusion process

Name of article:	Author:	Journal:	FT top 50:	AJG rank:	Citations:	Year published	Database
How to manage consumer tribes.	Robin Canniford	Journal of Strategic Marketing	No	2	154	2011	EBSCO - consumer community AND tribes
The marketplace management of illicit	Goulding,	Journal of Consumer Research	Yes	4*	349	2009	
When Differences Unite: Resource	Chalmers, Price,	Journal of Consumer Research	Yes	4*	495	2013	
Determinants and Outcomes of Online Brand	Badrinarayanan,	Psychology & Marketing	No	3	87	2014	
Brand Community Development Through	Heere, Walker et	Journal of Marketing Theory &	No	2	274	2011	EBSCO - consumer community AND identity
It takes a marketplace community to raise	Jae Wook Kim;	Journal of Marketing Management	No	2	557	2008	
Authentic subcultural membership:	Beverland,	Psychology & Marketing	No	3	171	2010	
A moderated mediation model of consumers'	Hsiu-Yu Yung; Ting-	Asia Pacific Management Review	No	-	24	2015	EBSCO - consumer community AND brand
How to Make Brand Communities Work:	Woisetschläger,	Journal of Relationship Marketing	No	1	343	2008	
Brand Community.	Muniz Jr., Albert;	Journal of Consumer Research	Yes	4*	9182	2001	
Consumers' Role Performance and Brand	Yi He; Qimei Chen;	Journal of Interactive Marketing	No	3	49	2017	
Qualitative Study on Brand Passion: The Role	Rohra, Dikhsa;	South Asian Journal of Management	No	-	19	2016	
An Explorative Study of Korean Consumer	Sung, Yongjun;	Journal of Global Marketing	No	1	274	2010	
Netnography as a marketing research tool in	Xharavina,	International Journal of Market	No	2	22	2020	
Brand community: Drivers and outcomes.	Stokburger-Sauer,	Psychology and Marketing	No	3	439	2010	
Becoming Friends in Online Brand	Zhou, Zhimin; Su,	Journal of Computer-Mediated	No	3	47	2016	
Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) - Twenty	Eric J.	Journal of Consumer Research	Yes	4*	6156	2005	Google Scholar - consumer culture theory
Studying Consumption Behaviour through	Annamma, Joy;	Journal of Business Anthropology	No	-	181	2012	
Towards an epistemology of consumer	Askegaard, Soren;	Marketing Theory	No	3	875	2011	
Myth and ideology in consumer culture	Fitchett, James;	Marketing Theory	No	3	149	2014	
Maffesoli and consumer tribes: developing	O'Reilly, Daragh	Marketing Theory	No	3	44	2012	Google Scholar - neotribes AND tribes
Club culture, neotribalism and ritualised	Goulding C, Ankar	Annals of Tourism Research	No	4	144	2011	
Subcultures or neo-tribes? Rethinking the	Bennet, Andy	Sociology	No	4	2106	1999	
Learning to be tribal: Facilitating the	Goulding C;	European Journal of Marketing	No	3	324	2013	
In Defence of Neo-tribes: A Response to	Bennett, Andy	Journal of Youth Studies	No	-	181	2005	
Formalizing consumer tribes: Towards a	Mamali, Elizabeth;	Marketing Theory	No	3	27	2018	
The Protean Quality of Subcultural	Kates, Steven M.	Journal of Consumer Research	Yes	4*	631	2002	Google Scholar - consumer community AND subculture
Working Weeks, Rave Weekends: Identity	Goulding,	Consumption Markets & Culture	No	2	429	2002	
We do not live to buy: Why subcultures are	de Burgh-	International Journal of Sociology and	No	1	134	2007	
Subcultures of Consumption: An Ethnography	John W.	Journal of Consumer Research	Yes	4*	3898	1995	
Regaining control through reclamation: how	Schiele, Kristen;	Consumption Markets and Culture	No	2	42	2016	
The consumer quest for authenticity: The	Leigh, Thomas W.;	Journal of the Academy of Marketing	Yes	4*	1005	2006	
Fashion and clothing: The construction and	Schofield. K;	International Journal of Retail and	No	2	95	2005	Google Scholar - fashion community AND fashion consumption
Approaches to material culture: The	Crane, Diana;	Journal of Empirical Research on	No	-	355	2006	
Fashion Design as a Means to Recognize and	Williams, D.	The Journal of Design, Economics and	No	-	32	2018	
A Theory on Fashion Consumption	Fang Ma; Huijing	Journal of Management and Strategy	No	-	78	2012	
Use of the need for uniqueness scale to	Workman, Jane;	Clothing and Textiles Research	No	-	209	2000	
Identity, self-concept and young women's eng	McNeill, L.; Venter,	International Journal of Consumer Stu	No	2	260	2019	

Table 1: Full list of articles

2.3 Analyzing the articles through specific metrics

In order to provide additional context for my selection of articles I elected to analyse them through different metrics. These metrics include information regarding the number of citations, years of publication, most prevalent journals of publication, geographical concentration of research and most relevant theoretical frames.

2.3.1 Most cited articles

I have sorted the articles in table 2 by citation, descending from highest to lowest. From the table we can see that the most cited article is *Brand Community* by Muniz Jr. et al (2001) with 9400 citations. The article with the lowest amount of citation is in turn *Qualitative Study on Brand Passion: The Role of Admiration and Experience.* by Rohra & Sharma (2016) with 22 citations. I tried to avoid completely uncited articles in my inclusion and exclusion process, but I didn't have any other preliminary criterion when choosing my articles regarding the number of citations. The range in the

amount of citations is very wide. The average number of citations is 805, although this number is quite bloated by the 4 most cited articles which include the lion's share of the citations. The median number of citations is 201, which I find to be a more accurate figure for analyzing the amount of citations. There is also a noticeable correlation between the AJG and FT top 50 ranks, and the general number of citations. This can be explained by the size, noteworthiness and reach of these big journals compared to the smaller, less highly ranked ones.

Name of article:	Author:	Journal:	FT top 50:	AJG rank:	Citations:	Year published
Brand Community.	Muniz Jr., Albert;	Journal of Consumer Research	Yes	4*	9400	2001
Consumer Culture Theo	Eric J.	Journal of Consumer Research	Yes	4*	6156	2005
Subcultures of Consump	John W.	Journal of Consumer Research	Yes	4*	3898	1995
Subcultures or neo-tribe	Bennet, Andy	Sociology	No	4	2225	1999
The consumer quest for	Leigh, Thomas W.;	Journal of the Academy of	Yes	4*	1005	2006
Towards an epistemolog	Askegaard, Soren;	Marketing Theory	No	3	930	2011
The Protean Quality of S	Kates, Steven M.	Journal of Consumer Research	Yes	4*	631	2002
It takes a marketplace	Jae Wook Kim;	Journal of Marketing	No	2	589	2008
When Differences	Chalmers, Price,	Journal of Consumer Research	Yes	4*	495	2013
Brand community:	Stokburger-	Psychology and Marketing	No	3	470	2010
Working Weeks, Rave W	Goulding,	Consumption Markets & Culture	No	2	429	2002
Approaches to material	Crane, Diana;	Journal of Empirical Research	No	-	417	2006
Learning to be tribal:	Goulding C;	European Journal of Marketing	No	3	369	2013
How to Make Brand	Woisetschläger,	Journal of Relationship	No	1	362	2008
The marketplace	Goulding,	Journal of Consumer Research	Yes	4*	349	2009
Brand Community	Heere, Walker et	Journal of Marketing Theory &	No	2	296	2011
An Explorative Study of	Sung, Yongjun;	Journal of Global Marketing	No	1	290	2010
Identity, self-concept	McNeill, L.; Venter,	International Journal of Consume	No	2	260	2019
Use of the need for	Workman, Jane;	Clothing and Textiles Research	No	-	217	2000
In Defence of Neo-	Bennet, Andy	Journal of Youth Studies	No	-	186	2005
Studying Consumption	Annamma, Joy;	Journal of Business	No	-	181	2012
Authentic subcultural	Beverland,	Psychology & Marketing	No	3	180	2010
How to manage consum	Robin Canniford	Journal of Strategic Marketing	No	2	171	2011
Myth and ideology in cor	Fitchett, James;	Marketing Theory	No	3	162	2014
Club culture,	Goulding C, Ankar	Annals of Tourism Research	No	4	153	2011
We do not live to buy:	de Burgh-	International Journal of	No	1	134	2007
Fashion and clothing:	Schofield. K;	International Journal of Retail	No	2	107	2005
Determinants and	Badrinarayanan,	Psychology & Marketing	No	3	96	2014
A Theory on Fashion Co	Fang Ma; Huijing	Journal of Management and	No	-	88	2012
Consumers' Role	Yi He; Qimei Chen;	Journal of Interactive Marketing	No	3	56	2017
Becoming Friends in	Zhou, Zhimin; Su,	Journal of Computer-Mediated	No	3	55	2016
Maffesoli and	O'Reilly, Daragh	Marketing Theory	No	3	53	2012
Fashion Design as a	Williams, D.	The Journal of Design,	No	-	43	2018
Regaining control throu	Schiele, Kristen;	Consumption Markets and	No	2	42	2016
Netnography as a	Xharavina, Natyra;	International Journal of Market	No	2	35	2020
Formalizing consumer	Mamali, Elizabeth;	Marketing Theory	No	3	34	2018
A moderated mediation	Hsiu-Yu Yung;	Asia Pacific Management	No	-	29	2015
Qualitative Study on	Rohra, Dikhsa;	South Asian Journal of	No	-	22	2016

Table 2: Most cited articles

2.3.2 Years of publication

The publication year of the articles varies from 1999 in the earliest to 2020 in the latest. The oldest article is *Subcultures of Consumption: An*

Ethnography of the New Bikers by Schouten, W. & McAlexander, J., which was released in 1995. The newest one in turn is *Netnography as a marketing research tool in the fashion industry in Southeast Europe* by Xharavina et al. which was released in 2020. This helps illustrate that this is a relatively young area of research. There also is a slight trend in popularity starting from 2010, when interest towards this area of research increased. However, this selection of 38 articles is hardly sufficient in looking at the research landscape as a whole. I have created an illustrative graph (Figure 2) of the amount of articles published each year between the publishing year of the oldest article (1995) and the newest one (2020).

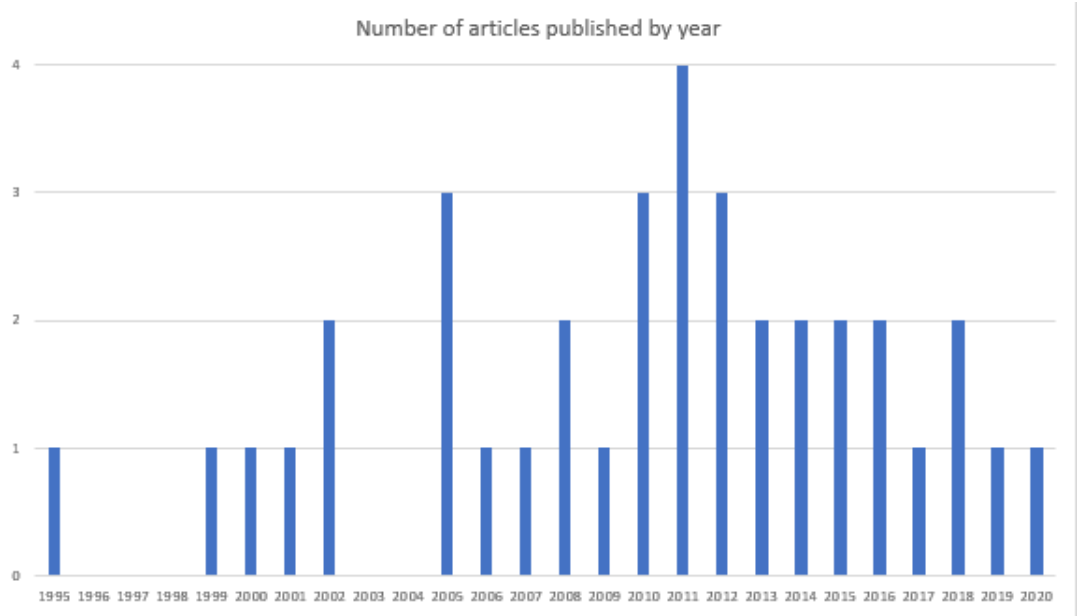

Figure 2: Number of articles published by year

2.3.3 Journals of publication

Table 3 shows a list of all the journals included in this bibliographic analysis along with the amount of publications under each journal as well as the journals' AJG ranks and FT Top 50 statuses. The journal with the most publications is *Journal of Consumer Research*, with 6 publications. Other journals with multiple publications are *Marketing theory with 4 and Psychology, Marketing* with 3 and *Consumption Markets & Culture* with 2 publications, while the rest of the 23 journals have one publication each. Only two of the journals are a part of the FT top 50, those being the *Journal of Consumer Research* and the *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*. The two are also the highest ranked journals on the AJG rankings, with a rank of 4*. Other highly ranked journals are *Sociology* and *Annals of Tourism Research (AJG Rank 4), Marketing Theory*, *Psychology and Marketing*, *European Journal*

of Marketing, *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal, Journal of Interactive Marketing* and *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication (AJG Rank 3).*

Academic journal	Amount of publications	FT top 50:	AJG rank:
Journal of Consumer Research	6	Yes	4*
Marketing Theory	4	No	3
Psychology & Marketing	3	No	3
Consumption Markets & Culture	2	No	2
Annals of Tourism Research	1	No	4
Asia Pacific Management Review	1	No	-
Clothing and Textiles Research Journal	1	No	3
European Journal of Marketing	1	No	3
International Journal of Consumer Studies	1	No	2
International Journal of Market Research	1	No	2
International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management	1	No	2
International Journal of Sociology and	1	No	1
Journal of Business Anthropology	1	No	0
Journal of Computer-Mediated	1	No	3
Journal of Empirical Research on Culture, the Media and the Arts	1	No	-
Journal of Global Marketing	1	No	1
Journal of Interactive Marketing	1	No	3
Journal of Marketing Management	1	No	2
Journal of Marketing Theory & Practice	1	No	-
Journal of Relationship Marketing	1	No	1
Journal of Strategic Marketing	1	No	2
Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	1	Yes	4*
Journal of Youth Studies	1	No	-
Sociology	1	No	4
South Asian Journal of Management	1	No	-
The Journal of Design, Economics and Innovation	1	No	-
Journal of Management and Strategy	1	No	-

Table 3: Most prevalent journals

2.3.4 Countries of publication

To gain an understanding of the geographical contexts of research on the topic of my thesis, I analyzed the countries associated with either the author, their institution or the publication of each article. I then created a table based on the data I gathered from looking through the authors and publications, which can be seen in table 4 (in case the authors were from different countries or associated with institutions from different countries). The table

shows that articles associated with 13 different countries were featured in my selection. The frontrunners in academic research regarding my topic are the United Kingdom and United States, with 11 and 5 articles associated with them respectively.

Country	Author / Institution
UK	11
USA	5
South Korea	2
Canada	2
China	2
India	2
Finland	1
Denmark	1
Austria	1
Italy	1
Germany	1
Australia	1
Taiwan	1

Table 4: Countries of publication

2.4 Qualitative thematic analysis of prevalent themes

After reading through my assortment of articles I concluded that my topic is best understood through researching the following themes: *(1) consumer culture*, *(2) consumer communities and (3) communal fashion consumption and identity building*. I then grouped the relevant papers for each theme together as seen on tables 5, 6, and 7. I have sorted these papers by citation count, from highest to lowest. The most cited paper for theme 1, is *Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) - Twenty Years of Research*, by Arnould et al. (2005), with a citation count of 6156. For theme 2, the most cited article is *Brand Community* by Muniz Jr. et al. (2001) with 9182 citations. Finally, for theme 3, the most cited article is *Approaches to material culture: The sociology of fashion and clothing*, by Crane et al. (2006) with 355 citations.

The understanding of theme 1 (visualized in table 5) offers the reader the prerequisite CCT frameworks to understand the contents of theme 2. Theme 2 explores the concept of consumer communities (visualized in table 6). Theme 3 (visualized in table 7) then offers insights for understanding how the concepts tackled in theme 2 can be applied in the contexts of fashion and fashion consumption.

Consumer Culture				
Name of article	Author	Publication	Citations	Year
Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) - Twenty Years of Research	Eric J. Arnould; Craig J. Thompson	Journal of Consumer Research	6156	2005
Towards an epistemology of consumer culture	Askegaard, Soren; Linnet, Jeppe Trolle	Marketing Theory	875	2011
Studying Consumption Behaviour through Multiple Lenses: An	Annamma, Joy; Eric Ping Hung Li	Journal of Business Anthropolog	181	2012
Myth and ideology in consumer culture theory	Fitchett, James; Patsiaouras,	Marketing Theory	162	2014

Table 5: Theme 1: Consumer culture

Consumer Communities				
Name of article	Author	Publication	Citations	Year
Brand Community.	Muniz Jr., Albert; O'Guinn, Thomas	Journal of Consumer Research	9182	2001
Subcultures of Consumption: An Ethnography of the New Bikers	John W. Schouten; James H. McAlexander	Journal of Consumer Research	3898	1995
Subcultures or neo-tribes? Rethinking the relationship between	Bennet, Andy	Sociology	2106	1999
The consumer quest for authenticity: The multiplicity of meanings within the	Leigh, Thomas W.; Peters, Cara; Shelton, Jeremy	Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	1005	2006
The Protean Quality of Subcultural Consumption: An Ethnographic	Kates, Steven M.	Journal of Consumer Research	631	2002
It takes a marketplace community to raise brand commitment: the role of	Jae Wook Kim; Jiho Choi; Qualls, William; Kusepook Han	Journal of Marketing Management	557	2008
When Differences Unite: Resource Dependence in Heterogeneous	Chalmers, Price, Jensen	Journal of Consumer Research	495	2013
Brand community: Drivers and outcomes	Stokburger-Sauer, Nikola	Psychology and Marketing	439	2010
Working Weeks, Rave Weekends: Identity Fragmentation and the	Goulding, Christina; Shankar, Avi; Elliott, Richard	Consumption Markets & Culture	429	2002
The marketplace management of illicit pleasure	Goulding, Christina; Shankar, Avi; Elliott, Richard	Journal of Consumer Research	349	2009
How to Make Brand Communities Work: Antecedents and Consequences of	Woisetschläger, David; Hartleb, Vivian; Blut, Markus	Journal of Relationship Marketing	343	2008
Learning to be tribal: Facilitating the formation of consumer tribes	Goulding C; Shankar A; Canniford R	European Journal of Marketing	324	2013
Brand Community Development Through Associated Communities:	Heere, Walker et al.	Journal of Marketing Theory & Practice	274	2011
An Explorative Study of Korean Consumer Participation in Virtual Brand	Sung, Yongjun; Kim, Yoojung; Kwon, Ohyoon; Moon, Jangho	Journal of Global Marketing	274	2010
In Defence of Neo-tribes: A Response to Blackman and Hesmondhalgh	Bennet, Andy	Journal of Youth Studies	181	2005
Authentic subcultural membership: Antecedents and consequences of	Beverland, Michael; Farrelly, Francis; Quester, Pascale	Psychology & Marketing	171	2010
How to manage consumer tribes.	Robin Canniford	Journal of Strategic Marketing	154	2011
Club culture, neotribalism and ritualised behaviour	Goulding C, Ankar A	Annals of Tourism Research	144	2011
We do not live to buy: Why subcultures are different from brand communities	de Burgh-Woodman, Hélène; Brace-Govan, Jan	International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy	134	2007
Determinants and Outcomes of Online Brand Tribalism: Exploring Communities	Badrinarayanan, Sierra, Taute	Psychology & Marketing	87	2014
Consumers' Role Performance and Brand Identification: Evidence from a	Yi He; Qimei Chen; Lee, Ruby; Yongqui Wang; Pohlmann, Attila	Journal of Interactive Marketing	49	2017
Becoming Friends in Online Brand Communities: Evidence From China	Zhou, Zhimin; Su, Chenting; Zhou, Nan; Zhang, Nin	Journal of Computer-Mediated communication	47	2016
Maffesoli and consumer tribes: developing the theoretical links	O'Reilly, Daragh	Marketing Theory	44	2012
Regaining control through reclamation: how consumption subcultures preserve	Schiele, Kristen; Venkatesh, Alladi	Consumption Markets and Culture	42	2016
Formalizing consumer tribes: Towards a theorization of consumer-constructed	Mamali, Elizabeth; Nuttall, Peter; Shankar, Avi	Marketing Theory	34	2018
A moderated mediation model of consumers' role behaviors in brand	Hsiu-Yu Yung; Ting-Ling Lin	Asia Pacific Management Review	29	2015
Qualitative Study on Brand Passion: The Role of Admiration and Experience	Rohra, Dikhsa; Sharma, Dinesh	South Asian Journal of Management	22	2016

Table 6: Theme 2: Consumer communities

Communal fashion consumption and identity building				
Name of article	Author	Publication	Citations	Year
Approaches to material culture: The sociology of fashion and	Crane, Diana; Bovone, Laura	Journal of Empirical Research on Culture, the	355	2006
Use of the need for uniqueness scale to characterize fashion	Workman, Jane; Kidd, Laura	Clothing and Textiles Research Journal	209	2000
Fashion and clothing: The construction and communication	Schofield. K; Schmidt RÄ	International Journal of Retail and Distribution	95	2005
A Theory on Fashion Consumption	Fang Ma; Huijing Shi; Lihua Chen;	Journal of Management and Strategy	78	2012
Fashion Design as a Means to Recognize and Build	Williams, D.	The Journal of Design, Economics and Innovation	32	2018
Netnography as a marketing research tool in the fashion	Xharavina, Natyra; Kapoulas,	International Journal of Market Research	22	2020

Table 7: Theme 3: Communal fashion consumption and identity building

3 Definitions

3.1 Consumer culture theory

The subject of this thesis is deeply rooted in the research field of consumer culture theory (CCT). Therefore, in order to understand the significance of different ideas and frameworks introduced later on in this thesis, one must understand the groundwork for these concepts, which has been established through research in CCT.

According to Arnould & Thompson's highly influential 2005 article titled *Reflections - Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research*, consumer culture theory refers to *"a family of theoretical perspectives that address the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meanings."* In other words, CCT conceptualizes different dynamics within marketplaces in order to understand the underlying motivators for consumer action from within the marketplace, instead of from outside factors. The aim of consumer culture theory is to contextualize consumer behavior through the creation of different cultural frameworks that stem from the marketplace. By widening the lens of research from viewing culture as a fairly homogeneous system associated with things like nationality or socioeconomic status, towards the exploration of the heterogeneous distribution of meanings that stems from globalization and market capitalism, one can better understand the dynamics of modern day consumption. CCT at its core, explores different cultures, communities and consumer projects that are born from within the marketplace, as opposed to geographical, historical or socioeconomic contexts (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

The term "consumer culture" suggests collective action within the marketplace, where groups construct personal and collective identities through the practice of consumption. These groups use consumption as a vessel for creating collective meanings by which to orient their lives and experiences (Kozinets, 2001; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). CCT illuminates the motivations behind these actions, and aims to deconstruct the variety of contextual, symbolic and personal aspects behind these patterns of consumption (Joy & Li, 2012).

CCT research emphasizes the productive aspects of consumption (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). CCT research has explored how consumers rework and transform symbolic meanings encoded in advertisements, brands, products et cetera to manifest their personal identity and lifestyle goals (Canniford, 2011).

Arnould & Thompson divide the research of CCT into four different groups: *(1) consumer identity projects, (2) marketplace cultures, (3) the sociohistoric patterning of consumption, and (4) mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies.* Out of these four groups, the subject of this thesis falls between group 1: *consumer identity projects* and group 2: *marketplace cultures*.

3.1.1 Consumer identity projects

The concept of consumer identity projects is based on the phenomenon of the marketplace becoming a source of symbolic and mythic resources which people use to construct narratives of identity (Holt, 2002; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). This act of identity building is not tied to the consumer's ability to participate in the purchase and consumption of certain products or brands, but can also assume a more ephemeral form of aspirational consumption (Shrivastava et al. 2020; Larsen & Patterson, 2018). Consumers use consumption as a way to pursue personal goals of identity, and through personal choice, are able to pursue fulfillment, autonomy and freedom (Larsen & Patterson, 2018). Consumer identity projects emphasize the productive dimensions of consumption and examine how consumers project and craft consumption practices into extensions of their identities and create cohesive, collective ideas of culture using the marketplace as its foundations. (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

Consumer identity projects' purpose is to *"produce a coherent narrative of the self from marketplace resources that connects the past, present and future"* (Larsen & Patterson, 2018, p. 198). This activity of consumerist identity building is a very fluid one, that changes along consumers' sense of identity. This ambivalence of consumer choice makes this field of research a very diverse one, housing different frameworks and concepts to tackle a plethora of different consumer action phenomena.

3.1.2 Marketplace cultures

The study of marketplace cultures stems from the question of how the emergence of consumption as a major driver of human action affects cultural blueprints for action, and vice versa (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). In other words, the study of marketplace cultures explores how the act of consumption has started to create unique cultures within the marketplace - these cultures aren't tied to classical understandings of culture (such as nationality, language, heritage etc.) but instead stem from consumers creating ideological and practical customs and practices tied around the act of consumption.

This branch of CCT research is predominantly concerned with examining how consumers forge feelings of social solidarity, and create distinctive cultural groups through the pursuit of common consumption interest (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). These groups can be self-selected (Bennett, 1999), fragmented (Goulding et al. 2002) and transient (Canniford, 2011; Schiele & Venkatesh, 2016). These groupings have been dubbed by researchers as consumption communities (sometimes referred to as: consumer communities or marketplace communities), and are at the heart of this thesis.

3.2 Consumption communities

The combined findings of researchers in the fields of consumer identity projects and consumer culture have created a need for a conceptual framework to explain the phenomenon of consumers creating collective identities from marketplace based cultures. This conceptual gap has been filled by the idea of consumption communities (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

The study of consumption communities has been used to explain the various ways that consumers establish meaningful and personal relationships in consumer culture (Canniford, 2011). These relationships enhance the utilitarian nature of the consumed product or service, and create new value for them. This newfound value lies in the social aspects surrounding the act of consuming said product or service, and work in addition to the classical utilitarian value derived from the acts of buying and consuming (Canniford, 2011; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

When consumption is linked to sociality and a sense of community, consumers find that they gain more value from the things they consume, as consuming these products now rewards the consumers with a heightened sense of communal identity and social capital. This inherent mechanic in the marketplace that rewards pursuing the social aspects surrounding consuming has led consumers to create different types of communities within the marketplace. CCT research surrounding consumption communities has generally concluded that these communities manifest in three different forms with differing traits surrounding concepts of membership, values, commitment and social position (Canniford, 2011). These three forms of consumer community are subcultures, brand communities and consumer tribes (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Maffesoli, 1996).

4 Subcultures

The concept of subcultures was originally coined in sociological research to help identify and position various marginalized and deviant groups. The roots of subculture lie in urban youth movements that formed around an ideological code and shared culture (Shankar & Elliott, 2002). These early subcultural movements are often attributed to be based around music, notable examples of early subcultures are the Teddy Boy movement of the 1950s, hippie movement of the 1960s and the punk movement of the 1970s. The focal point of subcultural movement is subverting mass culture. Subcultures were formed by youths who fell outside of the cultural norms, and pursued individuality through nonconformist acts of rebellion.

While originally subcultures were framed as "*small-scale community solutions to unfavourable and alienating living conditions"* (Canniford, 2011, p. 59) their academic significance grew as research found subcultures to display robust internal frameworks of shared rules, norms, values and social ties. Subcultures were also found to exhibit intricate internal social hierarchies based on social status and subcultural capital (Goulding et al. 2002). Subcultural membership was found to supply its members with a feeling of community that united them through subversion of traditional social institutions such as family, work or schooling (Canniford, 2011). This inherent complexity also exhibits itself as consumer action - a phenomenon that has attracted the interest of CCT researchers and spawned its own school of research: the conceptual framework of subcultures of consumption (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). For the sake of this thesis, I will be focusing on the consumerist side of subcultural research, and thus focusing on subcultures of consumption rather than its sociological counterpart of classic subcultural research.

4.1 Subcultures of consumption

The concept of subcultures of consumption refers to viewing subcultural membership as an offshoot of consumerism. This viewpoint sees members of subcultures as *'unruly bricoleurs' who express personal sovereignty and claims to personal authenticity through nonconformist acts of consumption and thereby place the marketplace and its symbols at the center of their identities* (Holt, 2002; Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 873). This framing creates a new narrative of consumption that isn't tied to more traditional factors of identity such as one's nationality, age, gender or social class, and replacing them with ideas of nonconformism, rebellion and shared (anti)-social values. Schouten & McAlexander in turn define subcultures of consumption as a "*distinctive subgroup of society that self-selects on the*

basis of a shared commitment to a particular product class, brand, or consumption activity" (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995, p. 43).

This narrative is where the significance of subcultural membership lies in terms of understanding consumer action. Subcultural membership is something that the consumer chooses themselves - whereas nationality, age, gender or social class are factors that the consumer is either born into, or shaped into by classical social institutions - and thus allows them to shape their identities through the act of consumption (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Kates, 2002). In other words, the existence of these self-appointed consumerist groups molds consumption into an act of communicating and exercising one's chosen identity and expands the concept of consumption from a utilitarian act of acquiring products and services into an act of social solidarity.

4.2 Defining characteristics

Since subcultures are not the only branch of consumption communities that we'll be going over in this thesis, it's important to establish a clear set of defining characteristics for this subset of consumption based communal membership. Subcultures of consumption were the first type of consumption community to have a clear definition in CCT research: the earliest significant accounts of tying consumption practices into the existing theories of subculture were drawn by Schouten and McAlexander's 1995 article "*Subcultures of Consumption: An Ethnography of the New Bikers"* where Schouten and McAlexander researched the subculture around biker culture, more specifically focusing on the subculture formed around the ownership of Harley-Davidson motorcycles. In their findings, they concluded that a subculture of consumption is formed through people identifying with objects or acts of consumption and using these objects and acts of consumption as a conductor for identifying with other people. In turn, these like minded people form groups based on a unique ethos or a set of common values associated with these products or activities. This process is generally not influenced by brand action, but instead by consumers taking existing brands or products and transforming them into vessels of counter-cultural identity play (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

When it comes to associating characteristics with subcultures of consumption, the way CCT literature defines subcultures varies in the focus of each piece of research. However, after going through the most notable articles associated with subcultures of consumption, one can start to notice a pattern of characteristics that researchers seem to agree upon. The list of most prominent defining characteristics found through CCT research is as follows: defiance (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Bennett, 1999; Kates,

2002; Goulding et al. 2002; Canniford, 2011), dedication (Canniford, 2011; Goulding et al. 2002; Kates, 2002; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; de Burgh-Woodman & Brace-Govan, 2007), cohesion (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; de Burgh-Woodman & Brace-Govan, 2007; Canniford, 2011; Bennett, 1999) and authenticity (Leigh et al. 2006; de Burgh-Woodman & Brace-Govan, 2007; Beverland et al. 2010).

4.2.1 Defiance

Possibly the most commonly attributed characteristic of subcultures of consumption is the trait of defiance. Subcultural theory heavily emphasizes the rebellious, anti status-quo nature of subcultural membership (Canniford, 2011). Subcultural members are associated with deviance, outlaw status, defiance of societal norms and freedom from authority and social institutions (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Bennett, 1999; Canniford, 2011). Partaking in subcultural activity often requires the individual to let go of the rules of normal everyday society and to embrace the deviant internal rules of these groups (Bennett, 1999). Ideology is at the core of subcultures: each subcultural group has its own set of values and ideology that its members follow and identify with. These values deviate from those of mainstream society and attribute to the deviant nature of subcultural membership. The enacting of these values can be achieved through acts of political, hedonic and stylistic practices (Canniford, 2011).

Subcultural membership has traditionally often been associated with a marginalized, political or subversive agenda. However, some stances of modern research argue that subcultures do not require these to legitimate their existence (de Burgh-Woodman & Brace-Govan, 2007). Through this lens, subcultures are not solely associated with radical subversiveness, but in turn can also exist solely through the act of shared identity, activity or consumption. This inclusion widens the margins for defining a group as a subculture by enabling less traditionally “deviant” groups to fall within the framework.

4.2.2 Dedication

Members of subcultures feel a higher sense of dedication to their respective subcultures than members of other respective consumer groups (Canniford, 2011). The level of commitment varies from member to member with some devoting large chunks of their lives and identities to their respective subcultural groups, with subcultural activity spilling over to their daily lives outside direct forms of subcultural activity, as well as more passive members who adhere to their subcultures rules and norms but devote less of their time

and smaller chunks of their identity to subcultural membership (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). On top of this, subcultures have also attracted consumers who exist within the periphery of subcultural membership, preferring to participate in subcultural activity in occasional contexts, but who don't adhere to the subculture's ideology outside of these select occasions. These three groups have been dubbed as hard core, soft core and peripheral members respectively (Fox, 1987; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995).

Acculturation into subcultures is often a lengthy process, as consumers slowly gain more subcultural knowledge, delve deeper into subcultural ideology, participate in subcultural rituals and form deeper interpersonal relationships. The lengthy process of accumulating into a subculture allows members to form a deeper connection to the group and serves to engrain subcultural membership deeper into consumers' identities. For many members, subcultural membership becomes a dominant part of their identities, leading to them developing a long-term devotion to the group (Canniford, 2011; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Goulding et al. 2002; Kates, 2002).

4.2.3 Cohesion

Subcultures of consumption follow similar patterns of structure as their more sociologically inclined counterparts. Membership entails following the social hierarchies within the community, partaking in shared rituals of expression, adhering to shared values and ideologies (Canniford, 2011). Membership is rigid when it comes to how people follow subcultural codes: by our earlier attribution of high levels of commitment being important in authentic membership, subcultures require consumers to mold their consumption patterns to match the shared values of the group. This, for example, applies to things like visual aesthetic, choosing which brands to consume or the highlighting of different ethical values behind consumer decisions (Goulding et al. 2002). Adhering to the group's values and 'being in the know' increases one's subcultural capital, which in turn betters their position in the subculture (Thornton, 1996).

Subcultures have a clear inner hierarchy based on dedication and subcultural capital. This entails subcultural leaders and tastemakers (hard core members), less committed members who mimic the activities of subcultural leaders (soft core members) as well as peripheral members who pick and choose which aspects of subcultural membership they wish to adhere to (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). The concept of peripheral membership has

later been detached from subcultures of consumption and incorporated with consumer tribes as CCT literature has broadened its focus from subcultures to consumer tribes (Bennett, 1999; Goulding et al, 2002).

Essentially, subcultures of consumption are structured around a set of shared values, rituals and hierarchies, with members' commitment and adherence to cultural codes determining their position within the group. This nuanced structure is what sustains subcultural identity and cohesion and distinguishes membership.

4.2.4 Authenticity

Authenticity is crucial for constructing social identities within subcultures (Leigh et al. 2006). Members of subcultures of consumption invest considerable time and effort into learning about, maintaining and restoring their products (Beverland et al. 2010). This effort fosters a deepened understanding of the subculture's values in consumers, as personal investment of time and effort deepens the bond between the consumer and their possessions, turning their often mass-produced items into unique non commoditized objects (Beverland et al. 2010).

Authenticity in a subculture can be cultivated through both individual and collective avenues. An individual sense of authenticity can be sought after by acts of self authentication. Self authentication refers to "*self-referential behaviors that reveal or produce the 'true' self*" (Beverland et al. 2010. p. 701), and in other words, individual pursuits where members seek to affirm their authenticity through engagement with the community's values and practices. A collective sense of authenticity in turn can be gained through acts of authoritative performance. Authoritative performances are different public, collective displays of shared social identity, such as shared fashions or languages. These acts affirm and communicate the individuals' desired social identities as committed members of the subculture (Beverland et al. 2010; Goulding et al. 2002).

Members of subcultures communicate their authenticity through storytelling, shared experiences and subcultural knowledge. Reinforcing and communicating one's authenticity helps to improve members' status and sense of belonging in the community (Leigh et al. 2006; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Kates, 2002).

The pursuit of authenticity influences members' consumption behaviors. Members of subcultures gravitate towards brands that they perceive as 'authentic partners' of the subculture, and avoid those that do not align with

their values. The values that define authenticity differ from subculture to subculture (Leigh et al. 2006; Goulding et al. 2002).

The role of authenticity in subcultures is so important, that the presence of inauthentic members (i.e. 'posers') who don't engage in nor understand the subculture's values endanger the entire community. The overwhelming presence of 'posers' might make authentic (i.e. dedicated) members feel like their efforts are undermined, if anyone can claim authenticity by mimicking the subculture's consumption patterns without understanding their cultural significance (Beverland et al. 2010; Leigh et al. 2006). The disruptiveness of inauthenticity within a subculture can lead to its demise, as the original values alongside the authentic members slowly fade out of the subculture after it hits the mainstream (Leigh et al. 2006; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Canniford, 2011). Inauthenticity can also have smaller effects, such as certain brands losing their position as 'authentic partners' through them gaining a mainstream position in the market (e.g. the fashion brands Supreme and Thrasher losing their positions as totemic brands within skateboarding subcultures after becoming a part of mainstream trends (Adegoke, 2021).

All in all, authenticity serves as a cornerstone for subcultural identity, shaping members' values, behaviours and consumption choices (Leigh et al. 2006). Both individual and collective acts of authenticity reinforce the social bonds within a subculture, while the presence of inauthentic members or brands can threaten the subculture's integrity (Beverland et al. 2010).

5 Brand communities

Brand communities are perhaps the most popular conceptualization of marketplace communities in marketing literature (Canniford, 2011). According to Muniz & O'Guinn in their widely acclaimed article *Brand Community (2001)* which is most often associated with the modern understanding of brand communities, a brand community is a "*specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand" (page. 412)*. Brand communities are bound together by a shared admiration for a certain brand. Consumers belonging in these communities create structured social relationships among themselves, which are based on collective experiences and emotional ties linked with the brand and its values (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al, 2002; Schau et al. 2005). These communities produce strong, but rarely extreme levels of commitment from their members (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Unlike more traditional understandings of community, brand communities are based on a branded good or service which serves as the focal point for social interaction and sense of shared and personal identity as opposed to things normally associated with traditional communities such as geographical proximity, cultural heritage or shared lifestyles (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

Brand communities are explicitly commercial. This consumerist sensibility is fully acknowledged by the members of brand communities, creating a self-conscious and self-reflecting community of people who base parts of their identity around the act of marketplace consumption (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). This fully self-conscious act of explicit, consumerist ideology is one of the key separating differences that Muniz & O'Guinn draw between brand communities and other consumption communities such as subcultures or neotribes. Like subcultures, a brand community offers a dedicated and cohesive sense of community for its members, but unlike its subcultural counterparts, brand community is not centered around a defiant and marginalized form of social activity, but rather one that's centered around shared consumption of brands (Canniford, 2011).

5.1 The role of brand-customer relationships in brand communities

In brand communities the general power structures and values of the community are in most cases established and communicated through the brand itself through brand-values and products. These power structures and values are more centralized and conservative than in other types of consumption communities as they're spearheaded through brand action as

opposed to consumer action (McAlexander et al. 2002; Canniford, 2011). However, this power is not solely held by the brand itself, but also wielded by a hierarchy of core community members. In other words, the hierarchy of power within the brand community is held in a balanced mix of brand action and consumer action. However, what separates a brand community from a normal customer-brand relationship is the addition of interpersonal relationships between customers that the brand itself is not directly influencing, but rather acting as a platform for. This relationship between the brand, its customers and the interpersonal relationships between customers is a distinctively unique feature of brand communities (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al. 2002).

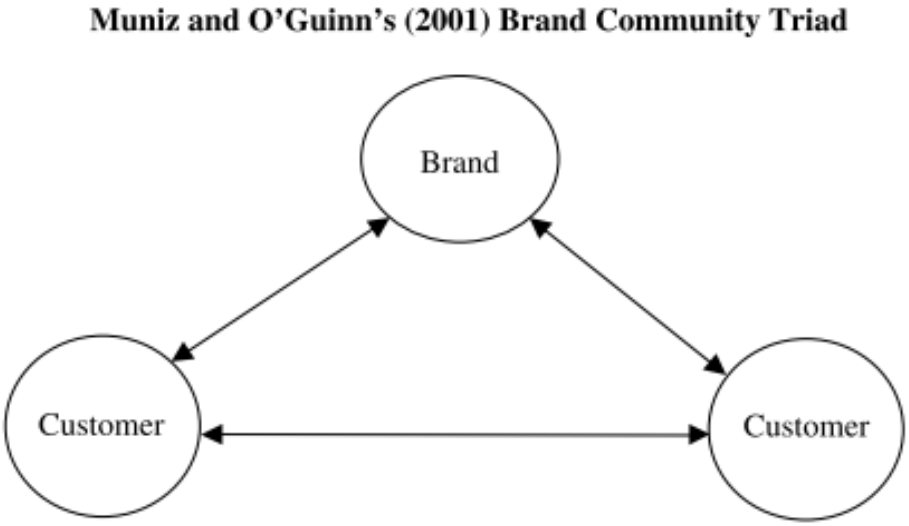

Figure 3: Muniz and O'Guinn's Brand Community Triad (McAlexander et al. 2002. p. 39)

Muniz & O'Guinn visualize this structure of key relationships within brand communities with a framework they call the 'Brand Community Triad' (Figure 3: McAlexander et al. 2002. p. 39). This triad explains the two avenues of relationships on brand communities: the one between a brand and its customer, where the meanings and values associated with the relationship is mostly dictated by the brand itself, with the customer choosing which aspects of the brand values they wish to adapt as a part of their identities, and the relationship between customers inside brand communities, where customers create communities based on interpersonal relationships, shared values, rituals and marketplace activities which are partly dictated by the customers' relationship with the brand itself. These two

relationships contribute to how brand community membership dictates its members' process of identity building.

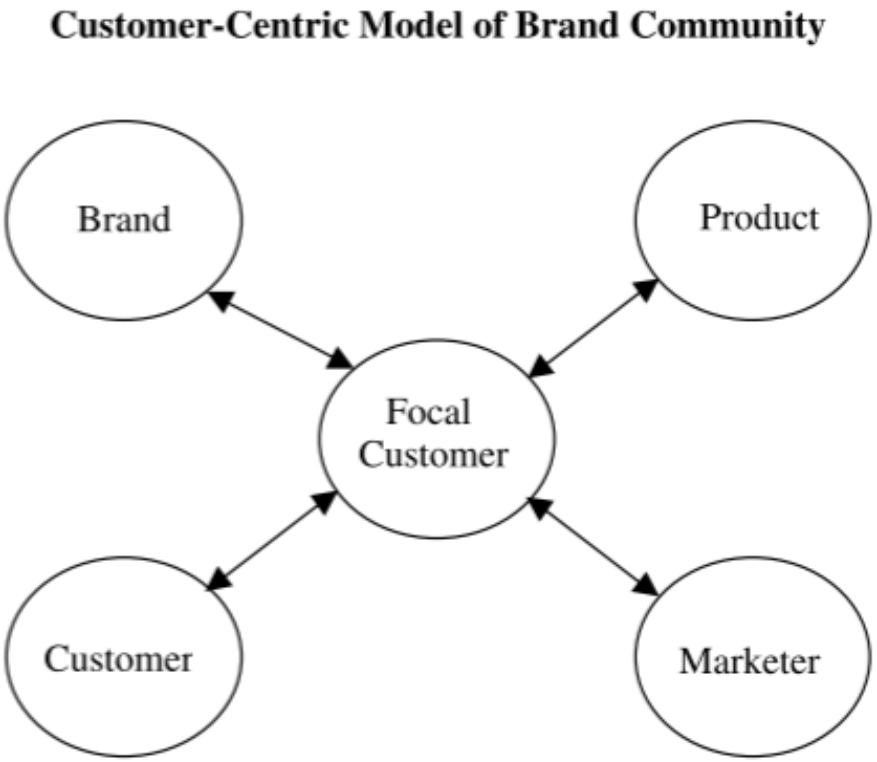

Figure 4: The Customer-Centric Model of Brand Community (McAlexander et al. p. 39)

McAlexander et al. expand on the concept of the 'Brand Community Triad' by taking a more customer-centric outlook on brand communities. In their 2002 article *Building brand community*, they argue that the original brand triad -model overlooks the importance of *"other relationships that supply brand community members with their commonality and cultural capital*" (p. 39). These relationships are the customers' relationships with branded products, the institutions surrounding the brand, as well as the marketing agents of the brand. This web of relationships is visualized through the 'customer-centric model' (Figure 4: McAlexander et al. 2002. p. 39). This perspective argues that the existence and meaningfulness of a brand community is rooted in the customer experience surrounding the brand instead of the brand itself. This outlook is one that I will also be adopting for this thesis, as it offers more depth to brand communities as a whole.

5.2 Defining characteristics

In order to later efficiently compare brand communities with its contemporaries, it's yet again necessary to identify a set of defining characteristics for brand communities. Compared to subcultures, CCT research in the field of brand communities has a much more centralized definition on the characteristics of a brand community. The general consensus within literature examining brand communities is that brand communities exhibit three key characteristics - originally established by Muniz & O'Guinn in their 2001 article *Brand Community* - which at their core have remained relatively unchanged through the years: shared consciousness, shared rituals and traditions and a sense of moral responsibility (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al, 2002; Schau & Muniz, 2002). In this thesis, I'll also be applying these three characteristics as the basis for the evaluation and comparative analysis of these communities.

5.2.1 Shared consciousness

One of the core characteristics of brand communities is the phenomenon of their members developing feelings of collective identity that develops through their connection to a specific brand. This shared consciousness manifests as a sense of "we-ness", where the consumers' bonds between each other transcends those they have with the brand. Shared consciousness occupies a significant place in consumers' lives - although the level of commitment varies between members - and provides them with a heightened sense of identity and belonging. Through membership in these communities, consumers can develop feelings of unity even if they have never met face-to-face (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). This characteristic of shared consciousness allows brand communities to transcend typical geographical limitations associated with traditional communities. Brand communities can exhibit different levels of closeness and involvement, based on the platform of communication they're based on: face to face, mediated by electronic media platforms or as a function of corporate mass media (McAlexander et al. 2002). Membership in brand communities can also heighten individuals' feeling of belonging in other related communities. For example, German owners of a BMW can feel like their identity as a BMW owner also heightens their national identity (Heere et al. 2011).

Moreover, the phenomenon of shared consciousness leads to a demarcation between members of a brand community and users of a different brand. Members often feel a heightened sense of uniqueness, or being 'special' which reinforces their identity as members of these unique groups. This shared consciousness is explicitly commercial, and rooted in a commitment to a brand as opposed to a category of a product (e.g. being a Harley-Davidson owner vs. being a biker) (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Heere et al. 2011).

Membership in brand communities manifests itself in a heightened sense of brand loyalty and commitment (Schau et al. 2009), but also as oppositional brand loyalty (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Shared consciousness can lead to an "us vs them" mentality between members of a brand community and consumers of a competing brand. Through this act of opposition, members of a brand community can delineate "*what the brand is not, and who the brand community members are not*" (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001. p. 420) and define their inclusion and exclusion from different lifestyles (Hogg & Savolainen, 1997).

Overall, shared consciousness is a defining trait of brand communities, fostering a sense of unity and belonging among members that transcends both geographic and social boundaries (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). The sense of collective identity present in brand communities not only strengthens members' loyalty and commitment to the brand, but also reinforces oppositional dynamics with other brands Hogg & Savolainen, 1997).

5.2.2 Rituals and traditions

Rituals and traditions serve as vital processes that help reproduce and transmit the communities' culture. These rituals can take many forms that range from informal gatherings or online discussions to local or global organized events centered around the brand. Participation in these brand-related activities reinforces members' shared identity and brand commitment. Rituals and traditions create opportunities for members of these communities to come together, create social relationships and celebrate their common interests (McAlexander et al. 2002; Schau et al. 2009).

The scope of different rituals and traditions can vary. Some rituals and traditions are widely recognized and practiced by all members of a brand community, while others remain more localized or unique to certain branches or sub-groups of a brand community (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

Rituals and traditions also play a key role in the acculturation of new members. They provide members with meaningful opportunities for socialization and learning about the customs of the community. This process allows new members to learn about the community's norms, values and practices as well as provides existing members with opportunities to share their knowledge with new members: a practice that reinforces both new and old members' feelings of belonging and solidarity with the group (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al. 2002; Sung et al. 2010).

Essentially, while rituals and traditions may vary in scope and significance, they play an essential role in fostering shared identity and social bonds in brand communities. They provide existing members of the community with opportunities for socializing and celebrating their bonds with the brand while simultaneously facilitating the acculturation of new members (McAlexander et al. 2002; Schau et al. 2009).

5.2.3 Sense of moral responsibility

In the context of brand communities, the sense of moral responsibility refers to a sense of duty or obligation towards the community as a whole, and to its individual members. In times where the community is under threat, the sense of moral responsibility produces collective action in the community. These cases can be things like hostile brand action (the brand making changes that go against the brand community's values, such as price point or country of origin), marketplace competition (competing brands taking over market share and threaten the brand's existence) or even singular community members' personal plights (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Moral responsibility also contributes to group cohesion, as the shared feelings of camaraderie lead consumers to grow more attached to their community (McAlexander et al 2002; Heere et al. 2011).

In their 2001 article *Brand Community*, Muniz and O'Guinn identified two critical and traditional community missions that stem from the sense of moral responsibility that consumers carry towards their brand community. These missions are: (1) *Integrating and retaining members* and (2) *Assisting in the use of the brand.*

Mission 1, *Integrating and retaining members* revolves around ensuring the survival and future of the brand community. This involves converting new members (e.g. convert a PC user into a Mac user) as well as ensuring long term membership through insisting on feelings of social and moral solidarity in remaining loyal to the brand and its products as well as towards consumers' fellow brand community members. In other words, loyalty towards the brand is seen as loyalty towards the group as well (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

Many consumers in brand communities see the consumption of competing products or brands as morally reprehensive (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Heere et al. 2011). This overlap in the brand's position in consumers' personal identities as well as their social relationships is another aspect of oppositional brand loyalty. In an effort to conserve the brand community and dissuade potential defectors, brand communities are very vocal about communicating the reasons to stay with the brand, as well as the repercussions of 'jumping

ship' to a competing product and/or brand (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al. 2002).

Mission 2, *Assisting in the use of the brand* is centered around helping other consumers in using the brand. This can manifest in for example, assisting with new features (prominent in technology based brand communities), tutorials in how to fix mechanical issues (prominent in vehicle based brand communities) or things like sizing guides (prominent in fashion based brand communities) (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). This mission is motivated by the sense of togetherness felt through shared experiences, such as dealing with similar issues with the product and wanting to provide others with the knowledge one might have wished to have at the time (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Another motivator is the satisfaction of getting to use the knowledge and skills acquired through tenured membership in the brand community, and the social capital that's yielded from positioning oneself as a 'mentor' or 'community leader' within the brand community (Schau & Muniz, 2002; McAlexander et al. 2002; Heere et al. 2011).

To conclude, the sense of moral responsibility is the driving factor behind collective action, group cohesion and loyalty within brand communities, and acts as a way to build solidarity and loyalty while enabling the sharing of knowledge and the strengthening of social bonds within the community.

6 Consumer tribes

The concept of consumer tribes is based on Michel Maffesoli's concept of neotribalism. Maffesoli argues that the combined effects of globalization and postindustrial socioeconomic transformation have resulted in the decay of traditional social collectivism in society, which in turn has been replaced by an ethos of "radical individualism". This societal change has influenced how consumers value and prioritize membership in different communities. In response to these societal changes, consumers balance ever-changing personal identity projects with more ephemeral collective identifications as opposed to long-term subcultural commitments (Maffesoli, 1996; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). These short-term, low commitment stints in consumer tribes allow individuals to experiment with different aspects of their identities more fluidly, possibly balancing multiple tribal memberships at once whereas - from the viewpoint of communal activity - relatively similar subcultural commitments would oftentimes dominate the everyday lives of their members (Canniford, 2011). Consumer tribes offer consumers a more fluid way of experiencing communal acts of consumption: unlike subcultures, tribes do not subvert dominant institutions or defy popular culture, and unlike brand communities they do not base their practices around the values of brands (Goulding et al. 2013). Consumer tribes can be thought of as a middle ground between subcultures of consumption and brand communities, combining aspects of both communities of consumption with postmodern individualistic sensibilities.

6.1 Defining characteristics

Defining tribal communities is not a very straightforward task as their fluid nature makes them more complex and multifaceted than their subcultural and brand oriented counterparts. Research concerning these communities is a lot less centralized in terms of having a single set of clear, well-defined set of characteristics to identify these communities with. However, there seem to be four characteristics which tend to get mentioned whenever tribal theory is defined in CCT literature. Those characteristics are: transcience (Canniford, 2011; Cova et al. 2007; Goulding et al. 2009), playfulness (Bennett, 1999; Goulding & Shankar, 2011; Goulding et al. 2002; Schofield & Schmidt, 2005), overlapping membership (Goulding et al. 2009; Bennett, 1999; Canniford, 2011) and entrepreneurialism (Goulding et al. 2002, Goulding et al. 2009; Canniford, 2011).

6.1.1 Transience of community

Consumer tribes are the most transient type of consumer community. A new tribe can emerge in a very short period of time, transform and then die out or evolve into another tribe as new combinations of people and resources cycle in and out of these communities (Canniford, 2011). Consumer tribes offer consumers a low-commitment, short-term option to alleviate the isolating and individualizing effects of modern societies and find solace in a community of like minded people (Goulding et al. 2009). This low bar for entry acts both ways, allowing members of tribes a simultaneous ease of entry and exit.

The impermanent nature of consumer tribes makes these communities very unpredictable. A once stable community can go through a sudden transformation when predisposed to an unpredictable change in its domain. These unpredictable effects are heightened by the fact that different people, companies, places and objects that constitute the tribal experience can have divergent strategic goals (Canniford, 2011; Cova et al. 2007). For example, the decision of a city council to install skateboarding-restricting architecture in a certain public area might lead the local skateboarding tribe to migrate to a different part of the city, leaving behind once-relevant hotspots of cultural activity such as the local skateboard store or a café that was adopted as a meeting spot for skateboarders (Canniford, 2011). While the goal of the hobbyists is partaking in the activity of skateboarding, the more entrepreneurial tribe members' goals are oriented around running successful businesses. This rift in goals and sensibilities constitutes to tribes' ever-changing cycle of existence, as they adapt into new values, locations, icons, rituals and other similar factors that might constitute a change in a tribes' domain (Cova et al. 2007).

6.1.2 Playfulness

Members of consumer tribes partake in what CCT researchers have dubbed 'active play'. Active play refers to the deconstruction and reassembly of marketplace resources into different experiences and identities (Goulding & Shankar, 2011). Due to tribal membership oftentimes requiring minimal moral responsibility from its members - a phenomenon stemming from the low-commitment and short-term nature of these communities - value is placed on the "*possibility to invigorate passion and generate social links*" through active play (Goulding & Shankar, 2011. p. 1437). In other words, consumer tribes generate value through tailoring marketplace resources, such as aesthetics, emotions, discourses, institutions, material culture, brands, fashion, music, places, spaces and media (Canniford, 2011. p. 63), into unique experiences, activities and identities.

Participation in these experiences, activities and identities is often short-term and doesn't necessarily bleed into everyday life. However, like in other consumption communities, tribes also consist of more active and involved members as well as more peripheral members, who limit their tribal identities exclusively to their corresponding contexts (Goulding et al. 2013).

The activities and rituals surrounding membership are often performative and ephemeral (Goulding et al. 2002). In these 'tribal activities' consumers adopt a tribal identity while partaking in whatever activity, hobby, aesthetic or ritual the tribe is based around. An often cited example of 'tribal activity' is clubbing and raving (see: Bennett, 1999; Goulding et al. 2002; Goulding et al. 2009; Goulding & Shankar, 2009; Schofield & Schmidt, 2005). In these articles, club-goers and ravers, or members of the 'clubbing tribe' or the 'rave tribe' describe the process of adopting their tribal persona for the duration of one night through partaking in different ritual-like acts. In this example, adopting the tribal identity of someone in the 'clubbing tribe' or 'rave tribe' involves a change in behavior that deviates from social norms such as taking drugs (Bennett, 1999; Goulding et al. 2002; Goulding et al. 2009; Goulding & Shankar 2009) and dressing in deviating, often provocative ways (Bennett, 1999; Goulding et al. 2002; Schofield & Schimdt 2005).

Consumer tribes use different marketplace resources to enhance their tribal experience through active play (Canniford, 2011). For example, in theory all you need for the activity of skateboarding is a skateboard and a 'skateable' location, but 'skater tribes' tend to favor certain brands of skateboards, wear a very specific type and model of skate shoes, listen to a specific genre of music and dress in a relaxed, baggy silhouette of clothing. While some of these marketplace resources serve a utilitarian purpose (ease of movement, better durability), others derive their value from purely aesthetic and value based purposes. Tribes combine hobbies and activities which by themselves could be viewed as subcultural (e.g. skateboarding and clubbing), and modify their experience through the appliance of different marketplace resources, creating a more fluid and interchangeable consumer experience (Goulding et al, 2002; Canniford, 2011).

All in all, consumer tribes thrive on the fluidity and creativity of active play, transforming marketplace resources into unique, ephemeral experiences and identities. While these tribes may lack the deep moral responsibilities seen in other consumption communities, they excel at fostering passion, connection, and innovation in their activities. This dynamic and adaptable nature highlights the diverse ways consumers in these groups engage with and derive meaning from their shared practices and resources (Canniford, 2011; Bennett, 1999; Goulding et al. 2002).

6.1.3 Overlapping membership

Tribes do not dominate everyday life, but rather represent occasional deviations from the routines of the working week (Goulding et al. 2009). Membership of one kind of tribe doesn't exclude consumers from membership in other tribes - in fact the opposite is true - tribal theory stresses the significance of the free-flowing, fluid nature of different personas and identities that consumers might adopt under different circumstances (Bennett, 1999; Canniford, 2011).

In consumer tribes, consumers don't feel the same type of long-term responsibility and devoted passion towards a brand as they would in brand communities. Neither do they feel the same level of veneration towards social hierarchies and totemic products as members of subcultures (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Canniford 2011). This general lack of concrete commitments toward a certain tribe affords consumers with an augmented level of freedom to simultaneously pursue different tribal commitments at their own leisure, as well as the freedom to abandon these commitments at will (Cova et al. 2007).

6.1.4 Entrepreneurialism

Members of tribes are very open-minded to being active in the marketplace. They don't share the same anti-commercial sensibilities as subcultures, and instead recognize and fill gaps in the marketplace to fulfill any missing marketplace resources they might need for tribal identity play. Tribes are likely to found their own brands and create their own products to further enhance their tribal experience. Whereas brand communities interact with existing - often well known - brands, tribes make their own brands (Canniford, 2011; Goulding et al. 2009). In their 2009 article '*The marketplace management of illicit pleasure'* Goulding et al. cite British club culture as an example of tribal entrepreneurialism. 'Club culture' or the act of clubbing emerged in response to the government's illegalization of raves. Club promoters, many of whom had beforehand been core members of the 'rave tribe' , sought to recreate the rave experience through legal, commercial means. This meant renting out disused warehouses, and later regular nightclubs and emulating the tribal rave experience through things like similar lighting, redecorating of the spaces, the hiring of local DJ's, word of mouth, flyer based marketing and strict door politics (Goulding et al. 2009. p. 762). These grassroot movements eventually grew to hold a significant and permanent position in the entertainment market of Britain. As the commercial significance of club culture grew, it slowly started getting integrated into the mainstream, and the cultural practices of clubbing started to move away from their countercultural

roots towards "*the realm of mass cultural orchestration*" (Goulding et al. 2009. p. 762). This entrepreneurial streak and the subsequent embracement of the mainstream is one of the key features distinguishing tribes from subcultures and plays a major role in the process of evolution of local subcultures' transformation into tribes (Goulding et al. 2002).

7 The sociology of fashion consumption

This thesis will be looking at consumer communities through the lens of fashion consumption. Therefore it's important to identify which aspects motivate fashion consumption as a whole. In this chapter of the thesis I will be examining various facets of consumer psychology that affect the decision-making of fashion consumers, as well as the role of fashion in communicating connections to different social groups. This knowledge can then be applied to inspect how membership in these various consumer communities affects consumer sensibilities as well as consumer action.

Fashion is often used by consumers as a form of visual storytelling - a way to convey messages about one's identity through purely visual means - which is why it's important to understand its connection to its symbolic contexts (Crane & Bovone, 2006). Therefore we must begin this chapter by identifying the different ways that consumers' search of meanings and identity affect their consumption of fashion through examining the phenomenona of symbolic consumption and the extended self.

7.1 Symbolic consumption

Consumption is an important aspect of creating a meaningful life in modern society. It's used not only to sustain the self, but also as a signifier of one's place in society (Wattanasuwan, 2005). Individuals use goods as materials for the construction and development of their identity (Piacentini & Mailer, 2004). Products, activities and value-based decision making within the marketplace can all be used to tell stories about oneself's identity as well as to signify with whom one identifies (Wattanasuwan, 2005).

All consumption carries either conscious or unconscious meanings (Wattanasuwan, 2005; Banister & Hogg, 2004). For example, consciously buying a more valuable piece of clothing that's made sustainably over the cheaper, non-sustainable option communicates that one places more value on the sustainability of the product than its price point. On the other hand, buying the cheaper option - even without making a conscious effort of thinking about either option's sustainability - communicates the consumer finding value in frugality and an affordable price point. This serves to highlight the fact that consumption is always meaningful, even if there is no conscious goal of communicating a certain self-concept behind every single consumption decision people make.

In order for products and brands to serve as tools and symbols of communication, their meanings must be *"socially shared, and continuously produced and reproduced during social interactions"* (Banister & Hogg, 2004. p. 851). While marketers can attempt to supply brands and products with meanings and symbolisms, the meanings that consumers end up associating with said brands and products might differ from those communicated by the brand or manufacturer. Consumers might adapt certain brands as signifiers of affiliation to different groups, as totems of individuality and uniqueness or symbols of autonomy and social distinction (Banister & Hogg, 2004; Bennett, 1999; Schofield & Schmidt, 2005).

Consumers prefer - if possible - to consume goods that carry a meaning they identify with, and aim to resist those which represent things that they do not wish to associate themselves with (Piacentini & Mailer, 2004; Wattanasuwan, 2005). This phenomenon of consumers' aversion to associating themselves with some products is called consumption resistance, and can be defined as the "*abandonment, avoidance or aversion of particular consumption*" (Wattanasuwan, 2005. p. 182). In practice, this could for example, be a man refusing to wear steel-capped Doc Martens boots due to their affiliation with skinhead subculture or a wealthy businessperson refusing to smoke a brand of cigarettes affiliated with the working class. This act can also be thought of from a broader perspective when we look at subcultures of consumption. The members of subcultures of consumption aim to deviate from the mainstream, and proudly reject consuming in the way that society expects them to (Goulding et al. 2002). For the members of these communities, this defiance of consumption is possibly an even more significant part of their subcultural identities than the acts of consumption they partake in (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Therefore, the act of consumption resistance is an equally powerful way of communicating one's identity as the act of consumption itself (Wattanasuwan, 2005; Banister & Hogg, 2004).

Consumption is a powerful way to bridge the gap of 'betweenness' between oneself and society. Through shared symbolic meanings, consumption can be used to connect with people and create positive relationships that shape people's social lives and identities. Possessions can be used as a part of one's self-creation project (i.e. the pursuit of a sense of meaning and 'being') and are an effective way to pursue symbolic meanings for our lives (Wattanasuwan, 2005). This makes possessions a key part of social communication. On top of creating and demonstrating social connections, consumption can be used in creating cultural notions of self, acquiring and sustaining different lifestyles and promoting and accommodating changes in self and society (Schau et al. 2009; Wattanasuwan, 2005).

People consume numerous products and brands to construct a body image that matches their ideas of personal identity (i.e. self-concepts). Through symbolic consumption, people can highlight their values, parts of their personal identities, hobbies and interests, as well as their social connections, or in other words, communicate their self-concepts (Wattanasuwan, 2005). As we previously established, product symbolism is not absolute or rigid, but fluid and flexible. Thus consumption can be used in a 'mix and match' fashion to aestheticize the self-creation project through *"re-appropriating and re-contextualizing consumption meanings"* (Wattanasuwan, 2005. p. 180) dictated by brands and products to create lifestyles that supply their practitioners with a sense of satisfaction, comfort, belonging and pleasure (Newholm & Hopkinson, 2009). Through the process of self-creation, products become objects of fantasy and desire (Wattanasuwan, 2005; Schofield & Schmidt, 2005). These objects might not hold one intrinsic meaning, but rather can be given a meaning through personal or collective choice. For example, in an interview conducted in Schofield and Schmidt's 2005 article *Fashion and clothing: The construction and communication of gay identities*, one interviewee discussed how an outfit consisting of blue jeans and a white t-shirt had become code in for looking for a sexual partner within the gay community. In the context of the gay subculture, an outfit that within mainstream contexts can be viewed as a working man's everyday uniform has been given an entirely new, sexually charged meaning.

As people's self-concepts undergo changes, so do their possessions. Because possessions are such a significant component of people's identities, they tend to associate these products as extensions of these aspects of themselves (Belk, 1988; Newholm & Hopkinson, 2009). When pursuing a new lifestyle, consumers often abandon the possessions they affiliate with their old lifestyles and dated versions of self. Through consumption resistance (i.e. aversion or abandonment of certain consumption habits) consumers disassociate from possessions that once symbolised their identity in order to make room for new possessions which symbolize their newfound self-concept (Wattanasuwan, 2005). For instance, someone might throw away an object that symbolized a failed relationship, or throw away clothes they wore when partaking in a hobby they grew out of.

This never ending process cycling through possessions allows consumers to attach a seemingly infinite amount of different symbolisms to different objects they possess within their lifetime, and creates a relationship between consumers' and their possessions where these objects serve as extensions of their social affiliations and self-concepts.

7.2 Extended self

The concept of extended self was originally contextualized by Russel Belk in his 1988 article *Possessions and the Extended Self*. The idea behind extended self is the phenomenon of consumers thinking of their possessions as extensions of themselves. Belk argues that possessions are not just functional items, but essential tools for self-expression, identity formation and creating meaning in people's lives. Possessions are both significant contributors to and reflections of people's identities, and thus influence how we express ourselves, manage our identities and navigate our experiences throughout different stages in life. This idea highlights the emotional and symbolic importance of possessions in consumers' lives and shifts the focus from transactional aspects of consumer behavior to deeper psychological connections that consumers form with their belongings (Belk, 1988; Belk, 2013).

This phenomenon manifests itself in many different ways in consumers' lives. Upon the loss of a valued possession, many consumers can feel a diminished sense of self (Belk, 1988). The loss of an object deemed important to one's self can cause feelings of grief and a reduced sense of self-worth, highlighting how strong the emotional connection between the consumer and their belongings can be.

The extended self also encompasses collective identities, where possessions can represent family, cultural or national identities (Belk, 1988). On top of these more traditional ideas of collective identity, the framework of extended self can also be applied to all of our previously discussed consumer communities (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Maffesoli, 1996). Many possessions that people consider 'special' often symbolize their relationships with others (e.g. photographs and gifts from loved ones). This suggests that belongings not only reflect consumers' personal identities, but also serve to symbolize their connections with others, further reinforcing the role that possessions serve in people's social identities (Belk, 1988).

In the context of fashion, clothing can be a representation of personal identity, such as sexual and gender identity (Schofield & Schmidt, 2005), values of sustainability (Turunen & Leipämaa-Leskinen, 2018; McNeill & Venter, 2019) or the desire for individuality (Newholm & Hopkinson, 2009). On top of personal identity, clothing can also be used to represent belonging to, and understanding the values of a community (Bennett, 1999; Piacentini & Mailer, 2004).

In his original conceptualization of extended self in 1988, Belk couldn't have predicted the effects that digital media and social media would have on society. In his 2013 reconceptualization '*Extended Self in a Digital World*' Belk discusses the ramifications of digital and social media on extended self. According to Belk, digital media allows consumers to have multiple context-dependent selves that they can adopt and play into at will. Social media then provides consumers with the perfect 'playground' for experimenting with and presenting these identities. In the same way, with influences and the clothes themselves so readily available through digital means consumers can easily access and construct these context-dependent senses of self (Adegoke, 2021). Digital media further emphasises the role and importance of community within extended self as people are more 'in touch' with each other through constantly observing others and presenting themselves via their online presence (Belk, 2013).

7.3 Fashion as a signifier of individual and shared identity

With our understanding of symbolic consumption and extended self we can understand the underlying motivations behind the consumption of fashion. Outside of its purely utilitarian contexts (e.g. protection from weather, carrying tools or everyday items or improving athletic performance) fashion can be thought of as a prime example of the creation and attribution of symbolic values to possessions (Crane & Bovone, 2006). From this perspective, the sociology of fashion is interlinked with ideas of symbolic consumption and the extended self.

As previously established, symbolic consumption is used to convey meanings about one's individual and collective identities. Clothes serve as semiotic, non-verbal means of communication (Schofield & Schmidt, 2005). Dressing up allows consumers to dictate which parts of their identity are visually communicated to others. It's a way to control first impressions and draw in like minded people, and in some cases, a way to repel people one might not want to associate with (Goulding et al. 2002; Schofield & Schmidt, 2005). Clothes can be a signifier of personal ideals, class, nationality, sexual and gender identity, hobbies, lifestyles, subcultural membership and much more (Bennett, 1999; Schofield & Schmidt, 2005; Crane & Bovone, 2006). They can be used to stick out or blend in and as markers of individuality or collectivity (Workman & Kidd, 2000).

Brands and manufacturers of clothing can attempt to set symbolic values for the clothes they produce. These values can be communicated through brand communication (i.e. marketing), production processes or media presence. In contemporary fashion, '*images in the media that attribute symbolic values to clothing styles have become as important as the clothes themselves*'

(Crane & Bovone, 2006. p. 322). Through advertisements for their products, fashion brands can build an image that transmits a certain ideology or specific lifestyles (Crane & Bovone, 2006).

Fashion's historical roots in homogenous class cultures have largely diminished in modern society, and instead have been replaced with different 'niches' consisting of consumers from different backgrounds coming together through a variety of different choices and habits which enable them to make choices that create a meaningful self-identity (Crane & Bovone, 2006). When examining these 'niches' one can notice a striking resemblance between these groups that Crane and Bovone describe and consumer communities.

Consumers draw enjoyment from experimenting with different aspects of their identity through consuming fashion. Consumers might dress in a single aesthetic that remains unchanged in all aspects of their everyday lives, or adopt a certain aesthetic or dress code for different occasions (e.g. clubbing). Fashion can be a very fulfilling way of consumption, as consumers generally get a lot of value from being able to implement their self-concepts.

Members of different consumer communities use fashion as a way of defining and communicating membership. Fashion is used purposefully to make it easier for members of a community to recognize each other, as well as to communicate community values (e.g. musical taste, sexual identity, anti-establishment sensibilities) as well as member's roles and place within the community (i.e. social capital) (Goulding et al. 2002; Bennett, 1999; Schofield & Schmidt, 2005).

The concept of individual identity that consumers communicate through fashion consists of different 'levels' of belonging, which constitute to different permanent and ephemeral aspects of their identities. For example, within the gay community, fashion can be used to firstly, communicate a shared identity of 'gayness', secondly a neo-tribal level of showing one's commitment to their social sub-grouping (e.g. aesthetic tribes, such as the 'leather' or the 'rent boy' tribes in the United Kingdom's gay community) and thirdly, an ephemeral and situational identity such as dressing in an outfit that within the context of their community or tribe symbolizes the act of seeking out a sexual partner. In total, the combination of these levels forms individual identity (Schofield & Schmidt, 2005; McNeill & Venter, 2019). Schofield and Schmidt visualize these different levels of fashion identity in *Figure 5* (Schofield and Schmidt, 2005. p. 314).

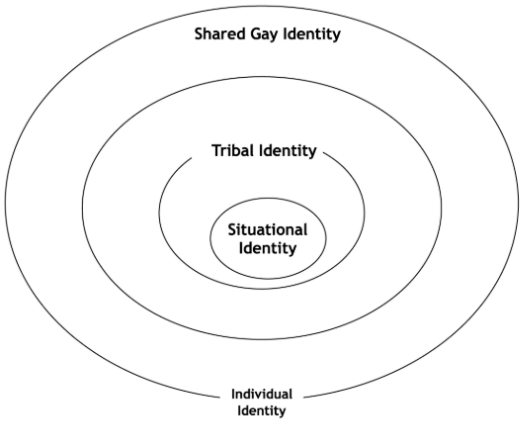

Figure 5: The different levels of identity expression in gay consumers (Schofield & Schmidt, 2005. p.314)

7.4 Fashion identity and self-concept

In order to use our findings of the underlying motivation of fashion consumption in an efficient and concise manner, a framework is needed. For this thesis, I will be adopting McNeill and Venter's framework introduced in their 2019 article *Identity, self-concept and young women's engagement with collaborative, sustainable fashion consumption models* that takes the notion of the self-concept that was discussed in this thesis in chapter 7.1, and modifies it to fit into the context of the fashion consumer.

Borrowing McNeill and Venter's framework of the fashion identity and self-concept, fashion identity and its subsequent self-concept can be broken into four key areas: (1) *the hedonistic emotional experience*, (2) *fitting in with general and personal groups* (3) *expressing individuality* and (4) *social implications*. These 4 areas of self-concept can essentially be used to describe the sensibilities of the fashion consumer, and act as a base for creating a set of easily comparable characteristics that can be used to compare how different consumer groups act in the marketplace.

Key area 1, *the hedonistic emotional experience* refers to the emotional - specifically pleasure sensations and hedonistic experiences - experiences that consumers feel when acquiring new clothes. These experiences encompass the positive feelings that consumers experience when purchasing or seeking out clothing that matches or improves their self-concept. In this aspect of the fashion self-concept, consumers use fashion to experience the feelings of euphoria through the acquisition of fashion items they deem exclusive or through the emotional value they assign to these items.

Key area 2, *fitting in with general and personal groups, covers* consumers' desire to fit in with their peers, as well as with the embedded norms of fashion consumption, such as prevalent trends, norms set by social institutions (i.e. dress codes) or geographically bound identity (such as the dressing in the style of the city they live in). Fashion is used to feel confident, good looking and to feel like one fits in with their surroundings. Fashion can be a means to forming new social- and friendship groups, and in gaining status in existing social groups. Consumers might buy certain brands or styles of clothing to change their self-concept to better fit in with their friends, associates and role models, or to enhance their feelings of place identity (i.e. identifying with the style of the city they live in).

Key area 3, *expressing individuality, focuses* on consumers' need to exercise their individual identity and stand out from the mainstream social norms of fashion. For some consumers, the differentiation of oneself from others plays a major role in their fashion self-concept. For these consumers, dressing in a non-confirmative manner allows them a stronger statement of expressing who they are. However, not all consumers are motivated by the act of radically differentiating themselves from wider social groups, and instead find value through self-consistency - such as consistently dressing in a certain aesthetic or consistently wearing the same brand of clothing - which nets them a similar feeling of self-expression and individuality while not deviating from the social norms of fashion.

Finally, key area 4, *social implications* focuses on the role of societal values and attitudes embedded in brands and products affect consumers' decision making. For some consumers, expressing sustainable and ethical values and attitudes motivates them to choose 'alternative consumption channels' for fashion goods. In practice, this means making a conscious effort to avoid large brands and fast fashion stores, as well as other brands which carry the stigma of unethical values even if the clothes are made in relatively sustainable circumstances (e.g. Dolce and Gabbana, whose brand has been sullied by a history of racism and homophobia despite being known for their craftsmanship (Pauly, 2023)) in favor of brands and goods that match the values of the consumer.

8 Comparative analysis on the effects of membership in consumer communities on fashion consumption

Overall, subcultures of consumption, brand communities and consumer tribes all offer different outlooks on understanding and theorizing how social consumers interact in the marketplace (Canniford, 2011). To gain a better understanding on how these different consumer communities can be assessed with the framework of the fashion self-concept, some dynamics between consumer communities and their habits of fashion consumption need to be addressed.

Subcultures are based on marginalized groups' reclamation of esteem and validity through shared marginal values and deviant behavior (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). However, subculture's reliance on marginal and deviant 'radical subversiveness' has been questioned in more recent subcultural studies (de-Burgh Woodman & Brace-Govan, 2007). On top of this, the long-term, committed degree of membership has also been disputed in CCT literature (Goulding et al. 2002). This brings to question the validity of using subcultural theory to analyze many postmodern consumer groups.

In addition to academic literature, this phenomenon has also been discussed in contemporary fashion literature (Adegoke, 2021; Johnson, 2024), which attributes internet and social media as the culprits behind this shift in consumer behaviors. The ease of access that the internet and social media grant consumers leads to fast cycles of aestheticization, where the aesthetics of a subculture are adopted by the greater public while the inherent subversive values and ideologies are disregarded. While subcultures are by no means 'dead' nor irrelevant, within the context of fashion and modern trend-cycles, their traditional roles have largely diminished (Robinson, 2023).

Tribal theory offers a new outlook on understanding modern consumers' relationship with fashion. When a subculture loses its defining values of cohesion, dedication and resistance, it may cease to be a subculture (Bennett, 1999). Many modern consumer communities still derive their foundations from subcultures, however most modern consumers prefer the ease provided by the loose, part-time 'subcultural' membership offered by consumer tribes (Goulding et al. 2002; Schofield & Schmidt, 2005). The rigid and dedicated nature of subcultural membership doesn't interest post-internet consumers the same way it did during the height of subcultural movements between the 1950s and 1990s. Social media and the internet offer consumers a newfound

freedom of pursuing instant gratification through a plethora of aesthetic tribal identities that the consumer can freely move between.

In brand communities, community activity is focused around a brand, and the community's values are largely dictated by brand communication (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). In some cases, brand community is a remarkably useful tool to describe and understand how consumers use products and services to interact with each other and form collective identity (McAlexander et al. 2002). However, in many cases community activity does not focus around a brand (Canniford, 2011). This is especially apparent in fashion, since fashion consumption is so immersed in symbolic meanings and communicating one's personal identity (Crane & Bovone, 2006). In many cases in fashion consumption, the consumption of fashion brands is the byproduct of the community's activities, and used as a signifier of membership or as a way to enhance one's communal experience (Bennett, 1999; Goulding et al. 2002). In cases like these, tribal theory can be utilized to offer an alternative way to understand how consumers use different brands to create transient social bonds and shared identities (Canniford, 2011).

When examining consumer communities, it's vital to understand that different consumer communities can and will overlap at times. The boundaries '*within and between all kinds of communities are permeable and contested*' (Canniford, 2011. p. 70). Different types of consumer groups are not completely separate entities, and exhibit some shared characteristics as well as overlap between their members. For example, members of subcultures can share similar admirations towards a totemic product as brand communities (e.g. the Harley-Davidson biker subculture and the Harley-Davidson brand community), or the mixing of hard-core, subcultural bikers and tribal, part-time bikers in activities surrounding biker culture (Canniford, 2011). The same logic can be applied in fashion consumption too, with different totemic brands being adopted as signals of subcultural membership and subsequently overlapping with brand communities formed around the fashion brand, or the dedicated members of subcultures and part-time members of tribes based around the same activities sharing an aesthetic identity in contexts of these activities. Understanding this overlap is important in having a nuanced approach to understanding the dynamics behind membership in different consumer communities. *Figure 6* below illustrates the overlap in the boundaries of consumer communities.

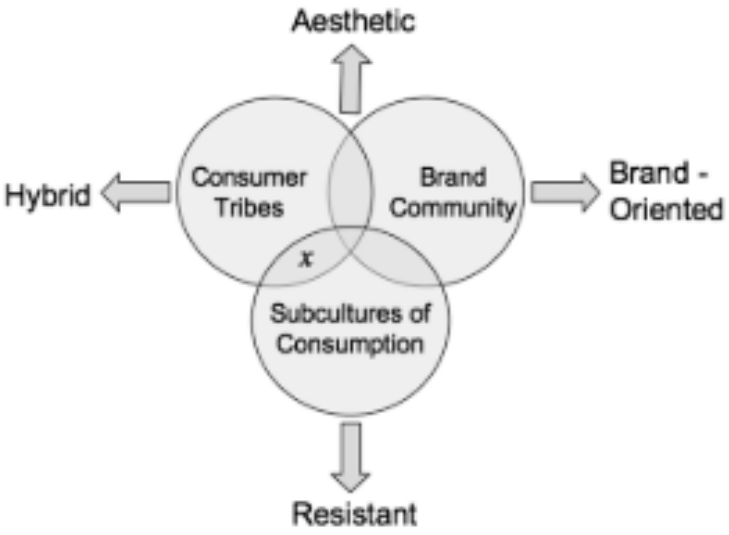

Figure 6: A visualization of the different permeable and contested borders between consumer communities. The sector marked with the figure 'x' refers to the overlap between hard-core subcultural consumers and part-time tribal consumers (Canniford, 2011. p. 71)

8.1 Fashion self-concept within consumer communities

The goal of this thesis is to create a tool for marketers to use to understand the significance of membership in different consumer communities on individuals' fashion consumption. In order to highlight the different psychological aspects behind fashion consumers' choices in the marketplace, I have decided to use the framework of fashion self-concept (McNeill & Venter, 2019). The fashion self-concept describes four different aspects that motivate consumers to purchase and consume fashion. The four aspects are the *hedonistic emotional experience, fitting in with general and personal groups, expressing individuality* and *social implications*. Using these four dimensions of consumer motivation, we can assess the underlying thought process behind acquiring clothing and compare how different characteristics of consumer communities might affect this process for consumers belonging to those groups.

8.1.1 Subcultures of consumption

The *hedonistic emotional experience* is comparatively not in a major role when it comes to the fashion consumption choices of the members of subcultures. Subcultures of consumption are the least consumption and marketplace oriented consumer communities. They're consumption communities where a major part of communal activity is generally not

centered around the marketplace, but rather, consumption habits are derived from the core activities and ethos of the subculture (Canniford, 2011; de Burgh-Woodman & Brace-Govan, 2009). Therefore while consumers might derive some hedonistic value from acquiring clothing, the enjoyment received from the act of purchasing, seeking out or otherwise acquiring the clothing is rarely tied to subcultural activity or identity itself (de Burgh-Woodman & Brace-Govan, 2009).

Fitting in with general and personal groups on the other hand plays a major role as a motivator for fashion consumption within subcultures. Subcultures have very 'strict' codes of dedication and visual cohesion that consumers are expected to uphold (Goulding et al. 2002). Understanding and actualizing the subculture's visual codes through fashion rewards consumers with social and subcultural capital, improving their standing within the internal power structures of the subculture, as well as allowing members of subcultures to feel more connected with each other (Goulding et al. 2002; Kates, 2002). Knowing and following the subculture's fashion codes is also one of many authoritative performances that consumers can use to increase their authenticity within subcultures (Beverland et al. 2010). At the same time, not following or understanding these aesthetic codes might negatively affect one's subcultural capital, authenticity and position in the subculture (Kates, 2002; Beverland et al. 2010).

Expressing individuality and standing out from the mainstream is at the forefront of subcultural activity, and naturally also extends to fashion consumption (Kates, 2002). In subcultures, the defiance against social norms also carries over to these groups' visual sensibilities (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Members of subcultures embrace their marginal and deviant status in society by dressing in a way that visually separates them from mainstream norms of fashion. By being authentic and consistent in their subculture's fashion aesthetic, consumers are rewarded with a sense of uniqueness as well as a shared connection with other members of the subculture that's achieved through collectively going against the norms of mainstream fashion (Goulding et al. 2002; Veenstra & Kuipers, 2013).

The *social implications* of fashion consumption are something that subcultures are very specific about. Subcultures are built around a set of values and ideologies that their members must follow, and take into account when making decisions in the marketplace (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). This behavior carries over to fashion consumption as well (Goulding et al. 2002). Members of subcultures will generally avoid buying and wearing clothing that goes against their beliefs, and a failure to comply with the ideology of the subculture when consuming fashion will result in the loss of subcultural capital (Kates, 2002).

8.1.2 Brand communities

In the case of brand communities, the *hedonistic emotional experience* is at the forefront of consumer motivations. Brand communities are deeply rooted in consumption and commercial activity, and members of brand communities derive a lot of value from buying products from the brands they identify with (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Schau & Muniz, 2002). Members of brand communities harbor strong emotional connections with the brands they adore, and through acquiring clothing from brands they love and identify with, consumers can feel closer to their ideal self-concept (Rohra & Sharma, 2016; McNeill & Venter, 2019).

Compared to subcultures and consumer tribes, fashion brand based brand communities are a bit of an outlier when it comes to the importance of *fitting in with general and personal groups*. In a brand community, owning product(s) from the brand is the threshold condition for potential membership (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Thus, in the context of fashion, in order to even be a part of a brand community one must own and wear the clothes that the brand manufactures. Since owning the brand's products is the preliminary condition to be in a brand community, it can be assumed that the consumption of the fashion brand is in this case the unifying factor behind fitting in with the group. In other words, in fashion based brand communities, fashion isn't a byproduct or one aspect of the community's activity, but the source of the community itself.

Buying and wearing the clothes from the brand the brand community is based around allows members of the brand community to 'fit in' and connect with other members of the community. Participation in a brand community can also increase consumers' sense of belonging in other groups that make up their identities if the brand's values and ethos align with them (Heere et al. 2011). For example, queer, POC, New Yorkian consumers of the fashion brand Telfar might feel more connected with their place identity as New Yorkers, as well as their ethnic-, gender- and sexual identities through participating in the brand community surrounding Telfar (Ojo, 2022). On top of consumption habits, being knowledgeable about the brand (e.g. knowing the brand's history, ethos, production methods or practical things like the sizing) can reward focal members with social standing within the brand community (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al. 2002).

Expressing individuality in the brand community is largely dependent on the brand. While members of a brand community can derive a sense of personal identity through membership and activity (Schau & Muniz, 2002), the role of individuality and uniqueness in members' values depends on those of the brand. Brand communities are outliers in this aspect of the fashion self-concept as well, as many of the community's values are communicated by the brand itself (McAlexander et al. 2002). In fashion contexts, the values of 'uniqueness' and nonconformity to social norms of fashion are communicated visually through the design of the garments and brand communication. Some fashion brands aim to build an image of 'radical uniqueness' through nonconformity (e.g. designer brands who create clothes in the stylistic genres of avant-garde or anti-fashion). In other cases, fashion brands take less radical approaches to their design process, and opt to offer their consumers feelings of uniqueness through self-consistency by creating clothes that follow the mainstream social values of fashion, but offer a cohesive and constant aesthetic direction that consumers can follow (e.g. the aesthetic genres of 'elevated basics' or 'quiet luxury').

In brand communities, the role of *social implications* is largely dictated by the brand itself. A brand community derives a large part of their values from what is communicated by the brand (Canniford, 2011). For example, if a brand is based on climate conscious values, they will draw a brand community that also values climate conscious consumption choices. Meanwhile consumers who won't share the same values of climate consciousness most likely won't be willing to pay the price premium attached to goods made with those ideals, and won't be a part of the community to begin with. Essentially, the importance that consumers assign to different social implications of consumption differ depending on the values of the brand that the community is based around.

8.1.3 Consumer tribes

The *hedonistic emotional experience* is very apparent in consumer tribes' consumption of fashion. Consumer tribes are very fluid, and allow consumers a vast freedom for cycling through different tribal identities at will (Canniford, 2011; Goulding & Shankar, 2011). The freedom provided by the fluid nature of consumer tribes allows consumers a readily available opportunity for instant gratification as they can swap their aesthetic allegiances at a low threshold. Members of consumer tribes can experiment with different aesthetics, try their hand with consuming different brands and styles of clothes without necessarily having the same level of attachment to them as they would in subcultural or brand community -contexts (Canniford, 2011). This allows for a lot of room for hedonistic consumption of clothing, as tribes can in a way, 'purchase an entire aesthetic identity' without having

to necessarily conform to the normal restrictions that membership in subcultures or brand communities would bring by picking and choosing which sensibilities of subcultures or brand communities they wish to absorb in their self-concept.

Because membership in consumer tribes can be multiple and overlapping, tribes give the consumer a lot more freedom to change their stylish and aesthetic allegiances as they wish (Goulding et al. 2002; Schofield & Schmidt, 2005), making *fitting in with general and personal groups* easier. Consumer tribes are not tied to ideas of nonconformity, and as such can partake in either mainstream or subversive ways of consumption (Canniford, 2011). Members of tribes can ephemerally adopt a tribal persona along its aesthetic profile when partaking in an activity (e.g. clubbing) in order to fit in with the both the subcultural 'clubbers' and the 'club tribe', and later shed that persona alongside its aesthetic in favor of another tribal identity (Goulding et al. 2002; Goulding & Shankar, 2011). Fashion is a sort of a social 'performance', which allows tribal consumers to adopt a different persona for short durations of time without having it dictate their entire identity (Schofield & Schmidt, 2005).

Consumers might also take on the aesthetic tribes of people they're socially close to. For example, consumers might start mimicking the way their friends dress alongside other aspects of their aesthetic tribe (for example, taste in music and art or hobbies) (McNeill & Venter, 2019; Goulding et al. 2002).

Consumer tribes enable their members a lot of chances to *express their individuality*. Tribes allow a lot of flexibility in the different aesthetic styles that consumers might choose to incorporate with different aspects of their tribal identity (Canniford, 2011). The multiplicity of tribal memberships also allow consumers to shape their personal aesthetic preferences by cross-referencing different stylistic sensibilities from different tribes that shape their personal identity (Bennett, 1999). Members of consumer tribes are not by default necessarily interested in dressing in ways that stand out from the mainstream like subcultures nor are they bound to brand-derivative messages of individuality, but instead through active play can use and mold these marketplace resources to fit whatever identity or role they wish to indulge in (Canniford, 2011; Bennett, 1999). These aesthetic identities can at times be defiant and nonconforming while at other times trendy and mainstream.

Tribes are not as concerned with the *social implications* of the clothes they consume as their subcultural counterparts. Consumer tribes don't show the same level of cohesion and dedication to a central ideology (Canniford, 2011), and thus are not as concerned with the social implications of consuming

fashion. While tribes do have their own internal sets of values and ideologies, consumers' comparatively lower level of commitment to these values - due to identity being situational and short-lived - makes them less concerned about upholding them in their day to day lives. Due to the performative nature of tribal identity (Schofield & Schmidt, 2005; Goulding & Shankar, 2011), members of consumer tribes are less concerned with the loss of social capital and identity that would follow from failing to adhere to the ideological codes of the tribe in their day to day lives.

9 Conclusions and discussion

9.1 Conclusions

To conclude this thesis, in *table 8*, I have created an illustration of the manifestation of the fashion self-concept (McNeill & Venter, 2019) in members of different consumer communities. This framework can be utilized by marketing professionals and researchers alike, to classify different characteristics of fashion consumption behavior that consumers from different consumer communities might exhibit. In this section of the thesis, I will summarize my findings by walking through the typology of the effects of consumer community membership on fashion consumption exhibited in table 8.

	Fashion self-concept in consumer communities		
Type of consumer community	Subculture of consumption	Brand community	Consumer tribe
Hedonistic emotional experience	Noncommercial, minimal	Brand oriented, emotional	Gratification driven, experimentative
Fitting in with general and personal groups	Cohesive, authentic, dedicated	Consumption based, enhancive	Ephemeral, multiple, adaptable
Expressing individuality	Deviant, marginal	Communicated by brand, consistent	Flexible, playful, exploratory
Social implications	Ideological, strict	Based on brand values	Detached

Table 8: A typology of the effects of consumer community membership in fashion consumption

Subcultures of consumption

The members of *subcultures of consumption* are remarkably noncommercial, and the role of the *hedonistic emotional experience* tied to the process of acquiring these items is minimal in these communities. Members of subcultures find little intrinsic value from the acquiring of new clothing, but instead draw value from the function that fashion serves as a visual marker of subcultural ethos and activities (McAlexander et al. 1995; de-Burgh Woodman, Brace-Govan, 2007).

Subcultures tend to have strict and cohesive visual codes and identities, and the way their members dress reflect those values. *Fitting in with other members* of the subculture acts as a marker of dedication to the community,

and understanding and executing different aesthetic choices through fashion rewards members of subcultures with social capital and provides them authenticity (Kates, 2002; Goulding et al. 2002; Beverland et al. 2010).

Subcultures are based on nonconformity and deviancy, which extends to their members' choices of fashion consumption. Members of subcultures dress in ways that defy social norms of fashion, and use fashion to communicate their marginalized position in society. Deviating from cultural norms of fashion helps these consumers to *express their individuality* and awards them a sense of uniqueness, while also providing them with a collective identity that they can communicate through fashion (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Kates, 2002).

Subcultures are based on a shared ideology that its members are expected to respect and follow. Thus, the *social implications* of consumption are relevant in consumers' choices of fashion. Members of subcultures purchase and wear clothing from brands that align with their values, and avoid clothing from brands that go against them. The failure to dress according to the ideology leads to a loss of subcultural capital and authenticity (Leigh et al. 2006; Beverland et al. 2010).

Brand communities

The members of *brand communities* get *hedonistic and emotional* value from the process of acquiring goods from brands they identify with. For these consumers, the act of acquiring and wearing fashion items from brands they harbor an emotional connection to is a powerful way of realizing their self-concept (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Rohra & Sharma, 2016).

For brand communities, the process of using fashion to *fit in with general and personal groups* is immediately tied to the ownership of branded goods, as compared to subcultures or consumer tribes, in brand communities consumption of the branded goods is the base for the community itself, as opposed to being in a tertiary position of adding to the subcultural or tribal experience. On top of being the basis for their respective brand communities, branded goods can also be used to enhance feelings of belonging to other dimensions of personal identity, such as cultural or placebound identities (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Heere et al. 2011).

The role of *expressing individuality* varies from brand community to brand community, as the values of 'uniqueness' and nonconformity to social norms are dependent on what is being communicated through brand communication and design choices. However, regardless of the subversiveness of a brand's designs, consumers can also have feelings of

uniqueness through consistent usage of the brand, as the consistency in aesthetic direction exhibited by most fashion brands allows consumers a high level of self-consistency (McAlexander et al. 2002; McNeill & Venter, 2019).

The significance of the *social implications* of fashion consumption in brand communities is dictated by the brand's values. Because many of the brand community's values are communicated by the brand itself, consumers within these communities generally align their values with those of the brand. Consumers whose values do not align with the brand will not form emotional ties with the brand, and thus won't become members of the community in the first place (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Schau et al. 2002).

Consumer tribes

For members of *consumer tribes*, the *hedonistic emotional experience* is tied to the gratification that consumers seek from experimenting with different tribal identities. Consumers can derive near-instant gratification from adopting different aesthetics from different tribal identities - a phenomenon further bolstered by the internet and social media - and consuming brands and products linked to those aesthetic identities (Bennett, 1999; Goulding et al. 2002).

Consumer tribes give the consumer much more freedom to temporarily change their aesthetic identities, which in turn makes *fitting in with general and personal groups* easy. Consumers can simultaneously be members of multiple consumer tribes, and adopt situational, ephemeral aesthetic identities to fit in with different groups. Consumers might also adapt their style to match those of the people close to them, effectively taking on a new tribal identity (Schofield & Schmidt, 2005).

Consumer tribes leave a lot of room for *expressing one's individuality*. Membership in consumer tribes is very flexible, and allows consumers to experiment with different aesthetic styles from different tribal communities. Tribes are not bound by values of subversiveness nor mainstream, but instead make use of both subcultural and mainstream marketplace resources (i.e. active play) to create and enhance different tribal and aesthetic identities (Bennett, 1999; Goulding et al. 2002; Canniford, 2011).

The *social implications* of fashion consumption do not concern members of consumer tribes the same way they would members of subculture, nor are tribal consumers as attached to values communicated by brands as members of brand communities. Generally, consumer tribes do not require the same level of dedication to value-based consumption as subcultures and brand communities, and instead pick and choose which meanings they assign

different styles, products and brands when consuming fashion (Canniford, 2011).

To conclude, the typology of meanings introduced here through the application of the fashion self-concept -framework, can be a powerful tool for simplifying and understanding the different effects that membership in consumer communities might have on consumer action in the highly symbolic context of fashion consumption.

9.2 Managerial implications

The findings of this thesis, more explicitly, the different consumer motivations associated with consumer community membership outlined in the 'typology of fashion self-concept in consumer communities' can be used in two prevalent ways by marketing professionals and researchers:

1. ***Understanding which aspects of fashion consumption motivate different consumer communities***

Understanding consumer motivations and how to influence them is one of the key aspects behind excelling in the field of marketing. The field of fashion marketing is no exception, and naturally can greatly benefit from being aware of which elements influence the consumption habits of different kinds of consumers.

Consumption of fashion is a form of communication comparable to photographs and advertisements (Crane & Bovone, 2006). Clothing worn by different consumer groups contributes to our understanding of how members of these groups express meanings and values tied to their social identities. The role that these social identities play in people's fashion consumption highlight the need for a unified understanding of how membership in consumer communities affects consumer motivations as a whole. The usage of the fashion self-concept -framework helps marketers create clear, easily comparable distinctions for the different dimensions of consumer motivations in the context of fashion, and acts as a way to bridge the gap between the findings of academic research in the fields of CCT studies and studies dealing with the sociological aspects of fashion consumption.

The typology of consumer motivations offered by this thesis can help marketers in the field of fashion to have a specialized understanding of which aspects of communal membership play a role in fashion consumption explicitly, as opposed to having a more general idea of how consumer communities function in the marketplace in general, non-specialized

contexts. This allows marketers to identify and target members of these communities more effectively, leading to better results and more efficient use of marketing resources. By understanding which aspects of fashion consumption motivate consumers in different consumer groups, brands and marketers can make conscious efforts to communicate values which better engage and target consumers within these groups.

2. ***Creating a set of clear and unified distinctions between the ways different consumer communities consume fashion***

The other use for the findings of this thesis is in the academic context of marketing. The typology provided by this thesis helps to streamline further research by compiling the most prominent findings of two different fields of academic research into one comprehensive framework. The framework provided by this thesis disambiguates the relationships between consumer communities and fashion consumption, and identifies both differences and common attributes between these communities and their relationships with fashion, as well as helping to gauge the symbolic meanings attributed with fashion and consumer identity.

Overall, this thesis combines the findings of prominent research in the fields of fashion and marketing, and combines them in a comprehensive framework specialized for fashion marketing, that disambiguates and illustrates the key dimensions of fashion identity and self-concept, and demonstrates their occurrence in the contexts of different consumer communities.

9.3 Discussion

There are various limitations to my research. First off, this thesis is purely a literature review, where all of the findings have been made through interpreting various separate pieces of academic and contemporary fashion and CCT literature. Thus, no empirical research has been used to support whether or not the typology of meanings associated with communal membership's effects on fashion consumption is entirely accurate in practice. This gap could be addressed by future research made into the topic. Secondly, the literature chosen for this thesis does not encompass the entire field of research on the topics of consumer communities or fashion consumption - especially in the field of consumer community studies - but instead represents either the top journal articles or literature specifically hand-picked by the author for this thesis. Thus, some key findings made in literature not addressed in this thesis might be amiss. Especially some of the critical approaches to consumer community theories, such as the one's

regarding tribal theory (see Bennett, 2005 and O'Reilly, 2012) have been mostly ignored for the sake of simplicity.

Other limitations of research had to do with existing academic literature. There is no generally agreed upon framework for illustrating the motivations behind fashion consumption, so for this thesis, I took the liberty of adapting the framework of fashion self-concept (McNeill & Venter, 2019) to illustrate these motivations in a way that is easily comparable and replicated. Because the fashion self-concept might not be an all-encompassing approach in all contexts, the results of this study might vary depending on if a different framework would be used in its place. Another limitation that stemmed from existing literature was the lack of literature discussing the 'big picture' of consumer communities in a comparative manner. The only piece of existing literature to create a comparative typology of consumer communities is Canniford's 2011 article *A typology of consumer communities*, which has its main focus on tribal theory, and thus doesn't offer the same level of depth to addressing brand communities or subcultures as it does consumer tribes. More research into these topics could greatly broaden the current landscape of fashion marketing.

The limitations of subcultures of consumption and brand communities identified in this thesis could be addressed in future research. The postmodern and post-internet 'death of subculture' addressed in academic and contemporary CCT and fashion literature (Bennett, 1999; Goulding et al. 2002; Adegoke, 2021; Johnson, 2024) would offer interesting avenues for future research. Fashion is also an interesting context for brand communities, as the phenomenon of oppositional brand loyalty discussed by the likes of Muniz & O'Guinn (2001) and McAlexander et al. (2002) might not occur the same way as in the contexts of those articles (e.g. communities based around brands of vehicles or electronics) due to consumers often owning and using several of pieces of clothing in their day to day lives, as opposed to one or two products (i.e. most consumers only owning one car or computer at a time).

Tribal theory offers many potentially insightful avenues for researching the different phenomena happening in modern fashion consumption. First off, the aestheticization of subcultures mentioned by contemporary fashion literature (see Adegoke, 2021) could be examined by using tribal theory as a way to explain the shift in post-internet consumer behavior and the shortcomings of traditional subcultural theory in these contexts. Secondly, the overall evolution from dedicated subcultural communities towards ephemeral and multiple consumer tribes discussed by the likes of Bennett (1999), Goulding et al. (2002) and Canniford (2011) could be used as a

potential explanation for the fast-paced modern-day trend cycles that have been at the forefront of discussion in contemporary fashion literature.

Additionally, further research into the overlap between different consumer communities discussed by Canniford (2011) would also broaden our understanding of these communities, and possibly bring about new ways to understand modern consumer sensibilities and the new patterns of consumption and communal allegiances these sensibilities might bring about.

All in all, the findings of this thesis offer one way to bridge the gap in research between CCT oriented studies into consumer communities, and the sociologically oriented studies into fashion consumption and consumer identity. The framework introduced gathers the findings of prominent research in both fields into a concise typology and adapts the psychology behind consumer motivations in fashion contexts into a clear set of groupings that can be used and transformed by further research into the topic.

References

Adegoke, Y. (2021). Yomi Adegoke: Has The Internet Killed Subcultures? *British Vogue*. https://www.vogue.co.uk/arts-and-lifestyle/article/yomi-adegoke-subcultures

Arnould, E.J. and Thompson, C.J. (2005) 'Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research', Journal of Consumer Research 31(4): 868–82. https://doi.org/10.1086/426626

Banister, E.N. and Hogg, M.K. (2004), "Negative symbolic consumption and consumers' drive for self-esteem: The case of the fashion industry", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 38 No. 7, pp. 850-868. https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560410539285

Belk, R. (1988) Possessions and the Extended Self, *Journal of Consumer Research* 15(2): 139–68 https://doi.org/10.1086/209154

Belk, R. W. (2013). Extended self in a digital world. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *40*(3), 477–500. https://doi.org/10.1086/671052

Bennett, A. (1999). Subcultures or neo-tribes? Rethinking the relationship between youth, style and musical taste. *Sociology*, *33*(3), 599–617. https://doi.org/10.1177/s0038038599000371

Bennett, A. (2005). In Defence of Neo-tribes: A Response to Blackman and Hesmondhalgh. *Journal of Youth Studies*, *8*(2), 255–259. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676260500149402

Beverland, M. B., Farrelly, F., & Quester, P. G. (2010). Authentic subcultural membership: Antecedents and consequences of authenticating acts and authoritative performances. *Psychology & Marketing*, *27*(7), 698-716. https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20352

Burnasheva, R., Suh, Y. G., & Villalobos-Moron, K. (2019). Sense of community and social identity effect on brand love: Based on the online communities of a luxury fashion brands. *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing*, *10*(1), 50–65. https://doi.org/10.1080/20932685.2018.1558087

Canniford, R. (2011). A typology of consumption communities. *Research in Consumer Behavior*, *13*, 57–75. https://doi.org/10.1108/S0885-2111(2011)0000013007

Crane, D., & Bovone, L. (2006). Approaches to material culture: The sociology of fashion and clothing. *Poetics*, *34*(6), 319–333. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2006.10.002

Cova, B., Kozinets, R. V., & Shankar, A. (Eds.). (2007). *Consumer tribes*. Routledge.

de Burgh-Woodman, H., & Brace-Govan, J. (2007). We do not live to buy: Why subcultures are different from brand communities and the meaning for marketing discourse. *International Journal of*

Sociology and Social Policy, *27*, 193–207. https://doi.org/10.1108/01443330710757230

Goulding, C., & Shankar, A. (2011). Club culture, neotribalism and ritualised behaviour. *Annals of Tourism Research*, *38*(4), 1435-1453. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2011.03.013

Goulding, C., Shankar, A. and Canniford, R. (2013), "Learning to be tribal: facilitating the formation of consumer tribes", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 47 No. 5/6, pp. 813-832. https://doi.org/10.1108/03090561311306886

Goulding, C., Shankar, A., & Elliott, R. (2002). Working Weeks, Rave Weekends: Identity Fragmentation and the Emergence of New Communities. *Consumption Markets & Culture*, *5*(4), 261–284. https://doi.org/10.1080/1025386022000001406

Goulding, C., Shankar, A., Elliott, R., & Canniford, R. (2009). The marketplace management of illicit pleasure. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *35*(5), 759-771. https://doi.org/10.1086/592946

Heere, B., Walker, M., Yoshida, M., Ko, Y. J., Jordan, J. S., & James, J. D. (2011). Brand community development through associated communities: Grounding community measurement within social identity theory. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, *19*(4), 407–422. https://doi.org/10.2753/MTP1069-6679190404

Hogg, Margaret K. and Maria Savolainen (1997), "The Role of Aversion in Product/Brand Choice," paper presented at the Association for Consumer Research Conference, Denver.

Johnson, N. (2024). What Ever Happened to Fashion Subcultures? *GQ Global*. https://www.gq.com/story/what-ever-happened-to-fashion-subcultures

Joy, A., & Li, E. P. H. (2012). Studying consumption behaviour through multiple lenses: an overview of consumer culture theory. *Journal of Business Anthropology*, *1*(1), 141-173. https://doi.org/10.22439/jba.v1i1.3550

Kates, S. M. (2002). The protean quality of subcultural consumption: An ethnographic account of gay consumers. *Journal of consumer research*, *29*(3), 383-399. https://doi.org/10.1086/344427

Larsen, G., & Patterson, M. (2018). Consumer identity projects. *SAGE Handbook of consumer cultures (pp. 194-213). London: Sage.*

Leigh, T. W., Peters, C., & Shelton, J. (2006). The Consumer Quest for Authenticity: The Multiplicity of Meanings Within the MG Subculture of Consumption. Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 34(4), 481-493. https://doi.org/10.1177/0092070306288403

Maffesoli, M. (1996). The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society. London: Sage.

McAlexander, J. H., Schouten, J. W., & Koenig, H. F. (2002). Building brand community. *Journal of Marketing*, *66*(1), 38–54. https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.66.1.38.18451

McNeill, L., & Venter, B. (2019). Identity, self-concept and young women's engagement with collaborative, sustainable fashion consumption models. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, *43*(4), 368-378. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12516

Muniz, A. M., & O'Guinn, T. C. (2001). Brand community. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *27*(4), 412–432. https://doi.org/10.1086/319618

O'Reilly, D. (2012, September). Maffesoli and consumer tribes: Developing the theoretical links. *Marketing Theory*. https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593112451801

Ojo, O. (2022). https://www.thefashionarchivemag.com/home/why-telfar-clemens-is-the-man-of-the-hour Why Telfar Clemens Is The Man of The Hour. *The Fashion Archive Magazine*.

Pauly, A. (2023). As the Industry Cheers Dolce & Gabbana, Don't Forget Their Not-So-Brief History of Racism. *Highsnobiety*. https://www.highsnobiety.com/p/dolce-gabbana-alta-moda-venice/

Piacentini, M., & Mailer, G. (2004). Symbolic consumption in teenagers' clothing choices. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, *3*(3), 251–262. https://doi.org/10.1002/cb.138

Rohra, D., & Sharma, D. (2016). Qualitative Study on Brand Passion: The Role of Admiration and Experience. *South Asian Journal of Management*, *23*(2), 90.

Schau, H. J., Gilly, M. C., & Wolfinbarger, M. (2009). Consumer identity renaissance: The resurgence of identity-inspired consumption in retirement. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *36*(2), 255–276. https://doi.org/10.1086/597162

Schau, H. J., Muñiz, A. M., & Arnould, E. J. (2009). How brand community practices create value. *Journal of Marketing*, *73*(5), 30–51. https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.73.5.30

Schau, H. J., & Muniz Jr, A. M. (2002). Brand Communities and Personal Identities: Negotiations in Cyberspace. Advances in Consumer Research, 29(1), 344–349. Retrieved from http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=buh&AN=7705770&site=bsi-live

Schiele, K., & Venkatesh, A. (2016). Regaining control through reclamation: how consumption subcultures preserve meaning and group identity after commodification. *Consumption Markets &*

Culture, *19*(5), 427–450. https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2015.1135797

Schofield, K. and Schmidt, R.Ä. (2005), "Fashion and clothing: the construction and communication of gay identities", *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, Vol. 33 No. 4, pp. 310-323. https://doi.org/10.1108/09590550510593239

Schouten, J. W., & McAlexander, J. H. (1995). Subcultures of consumption: An ethnography of the new bikers. *Journal of consumer research*, *22*(1), 43-61. https://doi.org/10.1086/209434

Sung, Y., Kim, Y., Kwon, O., & Moon, J. (2010). An explorative study of Korean consumer participation in virtual brand communities in social network sites. *Journal of Global Marketing*, *23*(5), 430–445. https://doi.org/10.1080/08911762.2010.521115

Thornton, S. (1996). *Club cultures: Music, media, and subcultural capital*. Wesleyan University Press.

Turunen, L.L.M. and Leipämaa-Leskinen, H. (2015), "Pre-loved luxury: identifying the meanings of second-hand luxury possessions", *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, Vol. 24 No. 1, pp. 57-65. https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-05-2014-0603

Veenstra, A., & Kuipers, G. (2013). It is not old-fashioned, it is vintage, vintage fashion and the complexities of 21st century consumption practices. Sociology Compass, 7(5), 355–365. https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12033

Wattanasuwan, K. (2005). The self and symbolic consumption. *Journal of American Academy of Business*, *6*(1), 179-184.

Workman, J. E., & Kidd, L. K. (2000). Use of the Need for Uniqueness Scale to Characterize Fashion Consumer Groups. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, *18*(4), 227-236. https://doi.org/10.1177/0887302X0001800402