"Together we can do anything!": A study on fan involvement in pop music marketing

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ABSTRACT

With digitalization and the rise of social media, there are increasing opportunities for fans to be involved in music marketing. However, research on this matter is limited, and it can be observed that the preference of music fans toward engaging media is a challenge for industry workers. This research aims to provide an answer to the research question: *How do music fans perceive their role in co-creational marketing of pop music?* In order to answer the research question, theories on fans and fandoms, artist-fan interactions, consumer's musical engagement, brand communities, and co-creational marketing are discussed. Twelve semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with the aim to gain answers about fans' opinions and experiences in the context of fan-involved music marketing. Through thematic analysis, different perceived roles of fans in the context of music marketing were identified: fans as marketeers, fans as members of the artist's marketing team, fans as content creators, and fans as active listeners. In support of answering the research question, fans' motivations to interact with an artist and their content were explored, which revealed the significance of the feeling of connection with an artist, the connection with music, the experience content gives the fans, and a feeling of belonging. Important takeaways are the potential of fan contributions in combination with the knowledge of a marketing team, as well as fans' motivations that contribute to a higher level of interaction with an artist, which has beneficial outcomes for music sales and artist recognition. Limitations of the study and implications for future research are discussed, which include the advice for a larger, more diverse research sample, and the recommendation for multiple coders during the data analysis stage.

Keywords: *Music marketing, fandoms, fan involvement, co-creational marketing, convergence culture*

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1. Introduction

Over the last 30 years, the digital landscape has continuously been evolving, bringing innovations in digital means such as the internet, mobile devices, and social media (Taylor, 2012). This digitalization induced a major shift in the music industry (Taylor, 2012). Before the widespread availability of digital means, media content and the way in which mass consumption took place in the 20th century was directly influenced by advertisers through radio and newspapers, and later on through television and the internet (Taylor, 2012). The advertisers determined the workings of the media industry, including music play on television and radio, where merely songs with the largest audience attraction were broadcasted. Music was used in radio and television commercials, giving the marketed products and services a sentimental connotation and memorability, which encouraged consumers to create a connection with the brand that was being advertised. The development of the music video included new ways for advertisers to use music as a means of marketing (Taylor, 2012). Still, the distribution of music was regulated and only possible through radio and television channels.

With the development of the internet, technology and digital platforms, the availability and marketing of music shifted from being gatekept by advertisers and certain channels, such as radio stations, to being available for consumers through the internet (Taylor, 2012). Not only did this change the availability of music to consumers, the entire production of music and the promotion around songs, but artists switched from making "Top 40" songs and labels switched from paying for expensive radio promotion, to using the internet as a distribution platform and directly appealing to consumers (Taylor, 2012). The focus on using the internet as a communication platform allowed for artists to gain a larger influence in the marketing of their music and build a stronger connection with their fans (Baym, 2012). What is interesting, is that while industry professionals suspected album sales to drop due to the availability of music on the internet, albums were promoted by fans by discussing the lyrics and sharing their love for the music, which accounted for an increase in sales (Kot, 2009). The shift to streaming music caused difficulties for the music industry in terms of their knowledge and power in promotion, but at the same time, artists and consumers gained control in the sharing and promotion of music (Baym, 2012). Artists were able to connect with their fans and share things about their lives through social media, which largely influenced the promotion of an artist and their music (Baym, 2012).

The availability of social media redefined the way a fandom interacted with each other and with artists (Baym, 2012). With the increase in visibility of fandoms, media outlets gave more attention to music fans. This brought certain stereotypes to light, portraying female music fans as crazy, hysterical young girls who are merely interested in artists for their physical appearance (Millard, 2012). These negative stereotypes of fandoms do not only belittle the impact a fandom can have on the promotion of an artist or a band, but they also affect the image of an artist, as artists whose main audience is female fans are often not taken seriously (Jenkins, 1992). Examples of this are Beatlemania, the fandom of The Beatles, which was referred to as a group of "mindless, pitiable victims, hypnotized by their grotesque idols" (Millard, 2012, p. 29), and later on, the One Direction fandom, which was often criticized and described in degrading and sexual ways (Millard, 2012). Despite the negative descriptions of their fans, both the Beatles and One Direction were some of the biggest bands of their time (Millard, 2012).

What is interesting to note, is the contribution of fans to the marketing and promotion of music that is often overlooked. Social media allows music fans to start creating their own content as well as to share existing content created by an artist, and to connect with other music fans with the same interests (Jenkins, 2006a). An example is the promotion of Harry Styles' sophomore album *Fine Line* (Styles, 2019). The first promotional material was posters only containing the phrase "DO YOU KNOW WHO YOU ARE?" and his record label's logo (Figure 1), spread across large cities all over the world (Tilchen, 2019). While the Columbia Records logo indicated that the posters were linked to music promotion, there was no indication of which artist it was from. Fans recognized the posters to contain one of Styles' catchphrases and spread photos of the posters on social media, discussing a potential music release (Tilchen, 2019). Consequently, media outlets covered the subject (Habbouchi, 2019; Tilchen, 2019), but the fans played the key role in the promotion.

Figure 1: Fine Line promotional poster (Harry Styles Daily, 2019)

With digitalization and the rise of social media and as the distribution and promotion of music moves to mainly online, it is not uncommon for fans to take part in the promotion of music or music artists. The aim of this research is to obtain an understanding of the perspectives of music fans on their role in co-creational marketing. Therefore, this research will explore:

How do music fans perceive their role in co-creational marketing of pop music?

The central research question is divided into two sub-questions that structure the research into discovering music fans' motivations for interacting with an artist and their content, and their involvement in music marketing. Consequently, the sub-questions of the thesis are:

SQ1: What are music fans' motivations for interacting with an artist and their content?

SQ2: How do music fans perceive their role in co-creational marketing of pop music?

The research problem will be explored on the example of singer-songwriter Louis Tomlinson, who was part of the successful boyband One Direction (1D). Despite having been a solo artist for several years now, a large part of Tomlinson's fandom stems from the One Direction fandom who are often described as one of the largest, most dedicated fanbases (Druce, 2020). Since One Direction's participation on the British X Factor in 2010, their fans

took on the responsibility of promoting the boyband (Druce, 2020). Simon Cowell, one of the X-Factor judges that formed the band and head of One Direction's (now dissolved) record label Syco Music, said: "It was something I've never seen before in the music business, which is fans, not a record label, marketing and promoting a band worldwide." (Druce, 2020). After the band's indefinite hiatus in 2016, each band member started solo music projects. Tomlinson's fandom makes an interesting research group for this thesis, as part of the fandom originates from the start of One Direction, making them fans for over 10 years, while others started being a fan during the Covid-19 pandemic. Besides this, Tomlinson's fans are known for their dedication towards the promotion of the music and the artist (Foxwell, 2021).

1.2 Academic relevance

While digitalization and promotional opportunities brought by social media have been widely researched, according to Gamble (2018) there is a gap in the available research on co-creation from the perspective of consumers. The lack of research on co-creation, more specifically in the area of music marketing, constructs a challenge for academics, as music fans often stress the lack of understanding from non-fan researchers (Gamble & Gilmore, 2013; Jenkins, 2006a). Existing research focuses mostly on the perspective of music industry practitioners (Dhar & Chang, 2009) and effectiveness of marketing strategies (Troilo, 2015). Edlom and Karlsson (2021a) support this view by stating that there is a lack of knowledge on the opinions and experiences of music fans and their motivations for contributing to value creation in the music market, as research on fan involvement often excludes experiences and expectations of fans as well as the ethical standards in fandoms. There is a need for conversations with fans with the aim to understand how co-creation emerges in fandoms and how this is connected with their personal value-creation actions (Edlom & Karlsson, 2021a). Taking all of this into account, it is important to shine light on the perspectives of fans on co-creational music marketing, to understand how music fans can stay engaged with the music artists and develop brand attachment.

1.3 Societal relevance

The music industry has shifted towards an online approach to marketing and promotion (Edlom & Karlsson, 2021a). Therefore, it is necessary for the music industry to establish methods for deploying a fandom as a marketing tool (Edlom & Karlsson, 2021a; Gamble & Gilmore, 2013). By gaining an understanding of the ways in which fans can play a

role in the co-creational marketing of music, artists and industry professionals can adapt their marketing strategies to include the involvement of fans (Gamble, 2018). Furthermore, industry employees can obtain information on the perspective of consumers and provide a marketing plan that incorporates fans' capabilities and wishes with regard to co-creational marketing. Findings of this research will provide insights into the consumer perspective on the phenomenon, and therefore, unfold marketing opportunities for effective music marketing (Ferguson, 2008). Furthermore, the findings from this research can be applied to other areas of entertainment, such as the film industry (Gamble & Gilmore, 2018).

1.4 Chapter outline

The intention of this thesis is to investigate and understand how music fans perceive their role in co-creational marketing of pop music. This thesis is constructed of five chapters, divided into subsections.

After the introduction, the theoretical framework is presented in the second chapter. Different concepts relevant to the research are discussed in the following sections, starting with theory on fan and fandoms, followed by artist-fan interactions. Subsequently, literature on consumer's musical engagement is discussed, after which the concept of brand communities and theories on co-creational marketing are presented. Besides this, the context for the research is explained.

Following the theoretical framework, the research design and method is discussed. This chapter includes a description and justification for the use of a qualitative method, as well as an explanation of the process of thematic analysis that is followed for this research. Furthermore, a description of the sampling process and an overview of the participants of the research is given. The operationalization of the relevant concepts is explained, as well as the data collection and analysis procedure which includes sections about the interview setting, sampling, ethics, and reliability and validity.

The fourth chapter discusses the results of the data analysis, including selected quotes to explain and support the findings, in accordance with the qualitative method. The main themes that are present in the data are discussed. The final chapter presents a discussion, which includes a concluding section, as well as limitations of the research and implications for industry professionals and future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

In order to research fans' perspectives on co-creational marketing, it is important to understand the different concepts that can be identified with regard to fandoms, interactions with artists, and marketing. The relevant concepts and theories for this research are presented and discussed below.

2.1 Fans and fandoms

Defining a fan has been an ongoing challenge in the area of fan studies, and the description and image of a fan has changed over the years (Lozano Delmar et al., 2020). The origins of the word *fan*, which is short for "fanatic", stem from the Latin term "fanaticus", which means "devotee" or "temple servant" (Sullivan, 2020, p. 192). While the word originally had religious connotations, throughout the years, the definition of "fanatic" shifted towards being excessively passionate about something (Sullivan, 2020). A fan "enjoys watching or listening to someone" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2017). A fandom can be described as a group of people who are committed to an object or person (Kuhn & Westwell, 2012).

It is important to understand that a factor that makes defining fans and *fandom* difficult, is the fact that fans themselves define fandom differently from each other (Lozano Delmar et al., 2020). Taylor (2015) argues that the identity of fans is often not perceived identically by people who label themselves as fans. For some people, being a fan means, for example, listening to an artist's music, while for other people, being a fan includes buying merchandise, going to concerts, and streaming songs for a high position in charts (Edlom & Karlsson, 2021b).

There is a collective identity between fans and within a fandom, that includes mutual interests, dedication and passion (Fiske, 1992). Central in this sense of unity is the ambition to display their individuality from the cultural standard and their surroundings, which is promoted by the focus on concepts that are generally understood as insignificant (Fiske, 1992). However, fans' individual identities are also shaped as members of a subculture and its consumption of popular culture (Fiske, 1992; Jenkins, 2006). In the case of anonymity in a fandom, fans are given the opportunity to try out different identity representations, which enables a safe and comforting space (Booth, 2010). Being a fan can in this case influence one's identity in real life, for example by showcasing support for certain issues that an artist

feels closely connected to, or by presenting one's minority identity, such as being part of the LGBTQ community, when an artist openly shows their support for this group of people (Wasserbauer & Dhoest, 2016).

While fans have often been portrayed as people who do not contribute to a culture and were subjected to social stigma, Jenkins (2006b) aimed to establish an alternative image of fan cultures, which portrays media consumers as "active, critically engaged, and creative" (p. 1). Furthermore, fans are conceptualized as optimal, devoted and productive consumers, who feel pressured to purchase new products (Jenkins, 2006b). The dedication of a fan is what makes them an ideal consumer, as well as the value they give to products (Edlom & Karlsson, 2021a; Edlom & Karlsson, 2021b). This supports Jenkins' (2006b) views in the sense that fans are not passive consumers, but those who contribute to a culture and actively create content or products (Edlom & Karlsson, 2021a; Edlom & Karlsson, 2021b).

Jenkins (1992) defines a fandom as a form of participatory culture where members engage with each other and the artist, leading to a connection between people who are part of the community. Furthermore, the mutual understanding, sharing and creation of media, which often opposes content from media industries, is crucial (Jenkins, 1992). It is important to understand that a fandom is an empowered community that does not only use existing content from a culture, but also creates their own culture based on symbolism and media (Jenkins, 1992). Over the years, the image of fans has changed immensely to the concept of an active audience that can reshare and edit media content, and participatory cultures are increasingly valued (Jenkins, 2006b). Jenkins' *Convergence Culture* (Jenkins, 2006a) discusses how the media industries view their audiences, which highlights the struggles of understanding the conditions under which audiences participate in popular culture (Jenkins, 2006a). While media companies attempted to manage their audiences as passive consumers, more and more research was conducted in the field of fan participation, the capabilities of fans and online fan communities (Jenkins, 2006a). What is interesting, is that Jenkins (2006a) describes that fans often criticize research on fandoms conducted by non-fans, judging the lack of detail and scholar's misinterpretations.

In the last years, digitalization and the rise of social media have reshaped the way in which fandoms operate and function (Edlom & Karlsson, 2021b). Fandoms have taken over social media, utilizing the platforms to connect with like-minded people who experience similar passion for a fan object, without experiencing the difficulties of geographic distance

between fans (Booth, 2010). Fans gained the ability to adapt to new ways of communicating with each other and with artist, as both fandoms and social media continued to constantly evolve (Booth, 2010). With the development of the internet from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0, consumers gained the ability to not only take in content created by producers, but also create their own content, by using pre-existing media or by producing their own materials such as texts, photos, videos, or designs (Booth, 2010; Booth, 2018; Lule, 2015). Communities could be formed based on mutual interests and by sharing content with one another (Lule, 2015). Therefore, social media allowed fans to connect with people who share the same interests, update each other on new content, and exchange self-made content (Lule, 2015). Fandoms could be seen as *information communities*, with the internet providing more opportunities for collaborating on theories about content or for sharing new content (Jenkins, 2006a). There is a sense of collective intelligence, including, for example, slang that can only be understood by the fandom (Levy, 1997). Oftentimes, fandoms include update accounts (UAs) run by other fans, which provide quick updates on new content, activity of an artist, and other pieces of information. In some cases, UAs are used by an artist's team, as fans are more connected to other fans and are more likely to absorb information from fans than from, for example, a tabloid or a magazine (Lule, 2015).

The innovation in technology has shifted the way in which people within a fandom connect with each other, for example by the increasing opportunities for music artists and fans to interact with each other (Baym, 2012). These increasing possibilities bring advantages for artists, as well as challenges for artists and fans (Baym, 2012). Social media enables artists and fans to interact with each other on a more frequent basis than only during interviews, performances, or meet and greets (Baym, 2012). This has changed the concept of a fandom as mostly online, with musicians feeling the need to build connections with their audiences, and with fans expecting artists to be active and reachable on social media (Baym, 2018).

As this research does not focus on constructing a definition of a fan or a fandom, but rather on how fans perceive their role in co-creational music marketing, anyone who considers themselves a fan for more than one year and who has a fan account on social media, is included in the research. One year of being a fan is required, as that allows participants to have experiences with the marketing of music. Several questions about being a fan and being part of a fandom are asked in the interview.

2.2 Artist-fan interactions

Fans value the feeling of connection with an artist. It is considered a key factor in deciding whether they buy the artist's album if they are already listening to their music (Baym, 2018). However, for artists, it can be difficult to connect with their online audience, as they often do not know what exactly to post (Baym, 2018). Stewart (2018) has developed an artist-fan engagement model, inspired by hedonic consumption and parasocial interaction theory (PSI). Hedonic consumption entails the connection consumers can have to a product through emotions, experiences, and sensory reactions, and how this connection to a product can influence a consumer's behavior (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). PSI is defined as "the illusion of a face-to-face relationship" between audience members and media characters such as artists (Sood & Rogers, 2000, p. 34). These concepts can be used to explain the relationship between musicians and their audience. It is important to examine what influences the engagement between fans and artists, as this can increase music sales (Stewart, 2018). The important variables present in the model are explained below (Figure 2).
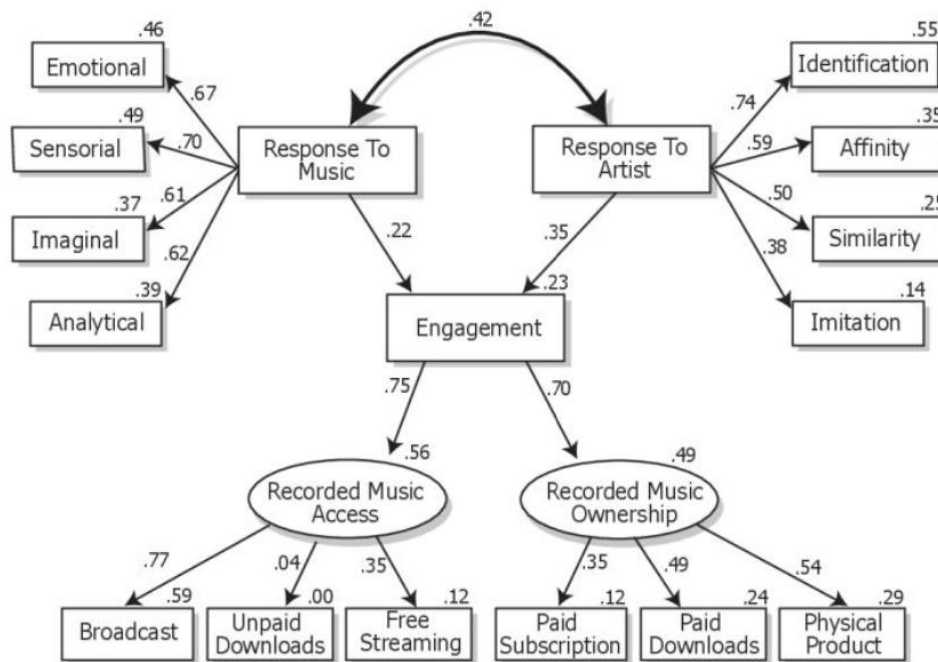
Figure 2: Artist-fan engagement model (Stewart, 2018)

Response to music

This variable is constructed based on the hedonic consumption theory, which focuses on products that provoke emotions (Stewart, 2018). Hedonic consumption can be defined as "facets of consumer behavior that relate to the multi-sensory, fantasy and emotive experience with products" (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982, p. 92). In this research, emotional, sensorial, imaginal and analytical responses to music were included (Lacher & Mizerski, 1994; Stewart, 2018). Emotional response, i.e., the feelings consumers undergo when listening to music, is a determinant in whether fans engage with and purchase music (Lacher & Mizersky, 1994; Ouellet, 2007). Sensorial responses are the physical reactions to listening music (Stewart, 2018). Imaginal responses include memories stimulated by listening to music (Ouellet, 2007) and mental or visual ideas a sound produces (Stewart, 2018). Analytical responses entail the cognitive responses of consumers on different music elements such as pitch and volume (Bruner, 1990; Stewart, 2018).

Response to artist

This variable is constructed by the parasocial interaction theory (PSI), which can be explained as the illusion of a friendship between a consumer (a fan) and a media personage (an artist) (Sood & Rogers, 2000). The aspects of PSI include identification, liking, similarity, and imitation (Shen & Zhou, 2011; Stewart, 2018).

Engagement

The engagement variable indicates the relationship between the fans and the media content (Stewart, 2018). With all the different platforms artist can use to distribute their content, fans can decide on which platforms they interact with the artist or the content, and on which platforms they post content themselves (Stewart, 2018).

Recorded music access

Access can be described by the outcomes of marketing and publicity for the music (Stewart, 2018). Access is characterized by the variables broadcast, unpaid downloads, and free audio streaming. Broadcast includes radio stations, television channels and YouTube; unpaid downloads include illegal downloads; and free audio streaming includes interactive streaming such as Spotify, and online radio stations (Stewart, 2018).

Recorded music ownership

Music listeners often purchase music when they want to be able to manage their listening experience (Stewart, 2018). This variable includes paid subscription such as Spotify, paid downloads such as iTunes, and physical product such as CDs and vinyl (Stewart, 2018).

The artist-fan engagement model explains how and why fans interact with music or with an artist, which brings insights for music marketing (Stewart, 2018). Looking at the factors that relate to *response to music*, especially emotional response and imaginary response can be valuable for fan-involved marketing, as fans will be able to visualize their connection to the music and share it with their fellow fans. Furthermore, being able to take part in the marketing of music by creating own media, fans can strengthen their emotional connection with the music product and with the artist (Gamble & Gilmore, 2013; Stewart, 2018). The artist-fan engagement model is relevant for this research, as it explains fans' motivations for interacting with an artist or with their content. This is useful, because the motivations lay a foundation for the roles as which fans perceive themselves in the context of co-creational marketing of music.

2.3 Consumer's musical engagement

In order to further understand how fans perceive their role in music marketing, consumer engagement theories are helpful in shining a light on the potential motives (Hollebeek et al., 2016) for participating in co-creational music marketing. Hollebeek et al. (2016) utilizes the uses and gratifications (U&G) theory in the context of music in order to conceptualize musical engagement of consumers. U&G theory is a socio-psychological theory that constructs an approach towards the reasons for people to interact with media content (Ruggiero, 2000). The theory proposes that consumers consciously incorporate distinct media content into their lives and are involved in the creation of experiences with media content (Hollebeek et al., 2016). Taking into account U&G theory and different types of engagement concepts, Calder et al. (2009) construct *musical engagement (ME)* as "a second-order construct comprising four types of consumer experiences with music (i.e., identity-, social-, transportive- and affect-inducing experience) that, collectively, comprise ME." (p. 321-322). Identity experience demonstrates one's wish to project their identity through interaction with, for example, music, whereas social experience entails the inclination towards connecting with peers through music (Hargreaves & North, 1997; Hollebeek et al., 2016). Transportive experience includes consumers' wish for evasion or

leisure through listening to music (Wang & Calder, 2009), and affect-inducing experiences are defined as the level to which music can induce emotions in a person (Scherer & Zentner, 2001).

The research from Hollebeek et al., (2016) found that the level of someone's music participation has a positive effect on ME, and that social experience and transportive experience have positive effects on music-related behaviors. Furthermore, a person's ME positively influences the amount of time one listens to music (Hollebeek et al., 2016). This is means that if a person's ME is high, their amount of time spent listening to music is higher. This is an interesting finding for professionals in music marketing, as increasing one's ME, and in specific, social-identity experiences, will increase the consumption of music. Social media allows artists to be responsible for their own media brand, rather than having to depend on media outlets, and by using social media to show more content, the social-identity experiences can be initiated (Hollebeek et al., 2016). Taking ME into account can increase the understanding of listeners' music attitudes, which can increase sales (Hollebeek et al., 2016). Social-identity experiences include being able to express oneself and connect with others through music.

While Hollebeek et al. (2016) propose the use of social media for artists as a way to engage with fans and activate this social-identity experience, allowing fans to engage in the marketing of music can be a way of further ensuring a good social-identity experience.

2.4 Fandoms as brand communities

One characteristic of a fandom activity is the fact that the brand, or in the case of a music fandom, the artist, is economically favored by the action (Edlom & Karlsson, 2021a). It can be beneficial to acknowledge the potential of employing fans in marketing and branding, as this contributes to the development of a connection between a brand (or an artist) and its fans (Edlom & Karlsson, 2021a). A fan community like this can be established as a *brand community*. There are different definitions of brand communities, but overarching concepts include the idea that the group of people has a shared liking for a brand and that there are relationships between members of the group (Edlom & Karlsson, 2021a). A brand community, or a *brandom*, is mainly connected to the movie industry (Marsh, 2014) and the sports world (Guschwan, 2012). However, it is interesting to view a fandom as a brand community, in order to understand the way that fans perceive themselves in the context of co-creational music marketing.

The availability of online spaces for fandoms allows fans to become stakeholders in the music industry, contributing to value creation and acting as investors or sponsors (Edlom & Karlsson, 2021a; Galuszka, 2015). By means of producing fan content, they play an important role in co-creating value for brands as well as for themselves (Edlom & Karlsson, 2021a). Prior research concluded that brand communities bring advantageous outcomes for brands, containing a stronger connection to the brand and a higher willingness to purchase (Algesheimer et al., 2010; Edlom & Karlsson, 2021a). Theoretically, fans can thus be viewed as industry workers providing unpaid work. The analysis of user productivity in the networked digital economy by Terranova (2000) provides an explanation of this phenomenon. The analysis describes that the high availability of content on the Internet, as well as the fact that a lot of work is not perceived as actual work, makes the amount of free labor in the media industry relatively high (Terranova, 2000). This type of labor is described as "relational labor" and allows the brand to use content without financially investing in it (Baym, 2018). The idea of free labor has changed the concept of value towards something that is co-produced as a collaboration with consumers rather than only by the industry and can include emotional and experiential outcomes as well as monetary outcomes (Edlom & Karlsson, 2021a).

Grönroos and Voima (2013) established a model that explains different areas of value creation, including the provider sphere, the joint sphere and the customer sphere. The different spheres demonstrate how resources are combined. In the provider sphere, which can also be called the organization sphere, the organization enables consumers to generate value by combining resources. This is done by, for example, sharing updates about new releases or shows (Grönroos and Voima, 2013). In the joint sphere, the industry and consumers collaborate to create value by exchanging resources and interacting with each other. This is a direct conversation between the organization and the consumer (Grönroos and Voima, 2013). Examples of this are polls, games, and contests to win merchandise. Lastly, the customer sphere shows that value is created by consumers, without the influence of the organization (Grönroos and Voima, 2013). It is important to note that each consumer perceives the product of consumption in a unique way, dependent on the environment it is consumed in and who they are in company of. Therefore, if, for example, a fan listens to music in solitude, they can experience the music differently from when they are listening to the same music with a group of other fans (Grönroos and Voima, 2013).

Taking into account the different types of value creation and co-creation and the way in which social media influences a shift in this value creation, consumers can have different levels of involvement in the marketing of consumption products, such as music (Gamble & Gilmore, 2013; Grönroos and Voima, 2013). These different forms of marketing, differing in the level of involvement of consumers, are discussed below and are assessed in the context of the marketing of music.

2.5 Co-creational marketing

The definition of *marketing* has been widely discussed and is often considered to be a societal process (Gamble & Gilmore, 2013). Troilo (2015) considers marketing an understanding for businesses of how to manage relationships with consumers and other actors in the market. Kotler et al. (2009, p. 7) define marketing as "a societal process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating, offering and freely exchanging products and services of value with others". It is interesting to note that the conceptualization of Kotler et al. (2009) does not divide the people involved in a marketing process into "producer" and "consumer" groups but rather mentions that products and services are exchanged between groups or individuals (Gamble & Gilmore, 2013). Kotler et al. (2009)'s definition of marketing allows for a changing focus towards *co-creational marketing*. Co-creational marketing stresses the focus of businesses on considering the consumers part of a marketing process, alternative to creating a division between one who offers a product or service and one who consumes it (Zwick et al., 2008). Berthon et al. (2008) argue that technological change and progress have influenced and are still influencing the role of the consumer in the marketing process.

Gamble and Gilmore (2013) identify five typologies of co-creational marketing: *viral marketing, sponsored user-generated brand (UGB) marketing, user-generated content (UGC) marketing, vigilante marketing* and *prosumer marketing*. These typologies are explained below and will be used to guide this research.

Viral marketing

Viral marketing entails the spread of existing marketing content by consumers, by strategically positioning this message online (Gamble & Gilmore, 2013). The main intention of viral marketing is to create brand awareness. This type of marketing ensures that marketers manage the control over the campaign and the marketing message and that consumers simply spread the message (Gamble & Gilmore, 2013). While viral marketing allows marketers to be

in control, according to Subramani and Rajagopalan (2003), "success hinges upon the recognition of the strong need for influencers to be viewed as knowledgeable helpers in the social network rather than as agents of the marketer" (p. 306). In other words, consumers are more likely to spread messages that they are involved in. This means that fans are expected to not engage as much with viral marketing as with other types of marketing that allows them to contribute to the content.

Sponsored user-generated brand (UGB) marketing

This type of branding ensures that a consumer has a higher influence in the promotion process, by being able to contribute through, for example, contests or voting campaigns (Gamble & Gilmore, 2013). In this way, consumer control increases, though marketers maintain the control over what is being spread and how the campaign is structured (Gamble & Gilmore, 2013). UGB marketing is a good way for marketers to experiment in what ways consumers can play a small role in the marketing of products or services. However, negative consequences of this fan involvement could be plagiarism by consumers that attempt to receive quick rewards, which could lead to negative brand connections (Hoffbrand, 2007; Gamble & Gilmore, 2013; Lanyado, 2009). In general, the positive aspects of UGB marketing are more significant than the potential negative consequences (Gamble & Gilmore, 2013).

User-generated content (UGC) marketing

UGC marketing is similar to UGB marketing in the sense that it uses consumer creations, but with UGC marketing, the marketing control and content ownership lies with the consumers (Akar & Topcu, 2011; Gamble & Gilmore, 2013; Nutley, 2007). In order to prevent consumers from taking over complete control, it is necessary that consumer motivations and desires are understood and monitored (Gamble & Gilmore, 2013). This can be done by establishing an online presence, so that there are opportunities for developing a relationship between marketers and consumers (Gamble & Gilmore, 2013). This is also a way to regulate content to minimize dangers of inappropriate content and plagiarism (Gamble & Gilmore, 2013). The advantages of UGC marketing are cost-efficiency, opportunities for creative freedom and obtaining information about how to successfully target consumers (Gamble & Gilmore, 2013; Nutley, 2007).

Vigilante marketing

This type of marketing consists of consumers creating a marketing message for a product or service and having complete control, often without the producer's knowledge (Berthon et al., 2008; Gamble & Gilmore, 2013). There is a risk in the fact that consumer's intentions cannot be controlled and may harm the reputation of the brand. On the other hand, consumers that dedicate time to create marketing messages are attached to the brand and are likely to express their connection to the brand with their creativity (Muñiz & Schau, 2007). Besides this, it is cost-efficient promotion as marketers simply share the content that consumers create (Gamble & Gilmore, 2013). Vigilante marketing can be considered the opposite type of marketing compared to viral marketing, as the roles and level of involvement of the marketer and the consumer are flipped.

Prosumer marketing

Konczal (2008, p. 22, as cited in Gamble & Gilmore, 2013) explains prosumers as "a consumer who becomes involved in the design and manufacture of products and services so they can be made into individual specification". This means that prosumers can, in some cases, produce their own items rather than promote a marketer's products or collaborate with a marketer, which can be a risk for sales numbers and the relationship between a prosumer and a marketer (Gamble & Gilmore, 2013). On the other hand, generally, marketers will hold a certain level of control over the products that are produced (Gamble & Gilmore, 2013). Especially with the increase in digitalization, prosumers are becoming increasingly significant and common.

According to Hardley (2011), digitalization and UGC have changed the way in which producers and consumers operate, focusing more on collaboration and transparency. Dhar and Chang (2009) argue that UGC practices are to be more developed and are becoming more prominent in the marketing of music. Therefore, more attention should be paid to the possibilities of fan-involvement and in what ways fans can contribute (Dhar & Chang, 2009). On the topic of audience engagement, Fromm et al. (2015) state that, in order to ensure consumer attachment to a brand or a product, the target audience should be viewed as active participants in the distribution of messages, rather than solely consumers. They should have the opportunity to create content that they consider important, rather than merely sharing what a marketer considers important (Fromm et al., 2015; Lefebvre, 2007; Mangolds & Faulds, 2009; Whelan & Wohlfeil, 2006). These arguments especially contest the

effectiveness of viral marketing as explained by Gamble and Gilmore (2013), as it is argued that fans prefer a more interactive way of marketing (Fromm et al., 2015).

Looking back at the social-identity concept by Hollebeek et al. (2016), co-creational marketing of music can increase a consumer's ME, in this way increasing sales. Especially sponsored user-generated brand marketing, user-generated content marketing and vigilante marketing allow for fans to engage in the marketing of music, while simultaneously being able to engage with the artist as well as ensuring that the marketeers maintain a certain level of control over the media content.

The different marketing typologies presented by Gamble and Gilmore (2013) will be used for this research to guide the research, in order to identify fans' practices in the marketing of music. In this way, fans' perceptions of their roles in co-creational music marketing can be understood.

2.6 Context for the research

As this research will focus on the example of fans of Louis Tomlinson, it is necessary to elaborate more on this fandom, starting from their origins as One Direction fans. One Direction is a British-Irish boyband consisting of members Harry Styles, Louis Tomlinson, Niall Horan, Liam Payne, and Zayn Malik, who left the group in 2015 (Aniftos, 2020). The band was formed in 2010 during the talent show "X Factor", after all members initially auditioned as solo artists (Kelly, 2018). One Direction finished third in the finale of that year, signing with Syco Records, Simon Cowell's record label (Nissim, 2018). In 2011, the group started recording their debut album "Up All Night", which came out in November of that year, including single "What Makes You Beautiful", which became the most pre-ordered single of Sony Music Entertainment in history (Corner, 2018). The album became the UK's fastest-selling album of 2011 (Ayres, 2011). In 2012, sophomore album "Take Me Home" was released, which rose to number one in more than 30 countries and in the Billboard 200 (Caulfield, 2013). The year after, their documentary "One Direction: This Is Us" was released, which was a box office success and became the fourth highest-earning concert film (Box Office Mojo, 2014). In the same year, One Direction's third album "Midnight Memories" was released, once again ending up on top positions in worldwide charts (Caulfield, 2013b). It was the best-selling album of 2013, regardless of being released at the end of the year (BBC, 2014). With the release of their fourth album "Four", One Direction was the first group whose first four albums debuted at number one in the US Billboard 200

(Druce, 2020). In 2015, after Malik departed from the band, single "Drag Me Down" was released. Without any label promotion, the single reached top positions in charts all over the world (Brandle, 2015). One Direction's fifth album "Made In The A.M." came out in 2015, and an indefinite hiatus commencing in 2016 was announced (Iasimone, 2015). Years after, One Direction still won several awards, despite not having been active as a band (Roth, 2017).

One Direction's fandom grew to one of the largest fandoms over the world since the formation of the band, breaking the Guinness World Record for most Twitter followers for a music group in 2015 with more than 23 million followers (Swain-Wilson, 2021). Their world tours sold out in minutes and broke several records of highest-grossing tours (Druce, 2020). From the moment the band was put together during the X Factor in 2010, the group attracted fans who started promoting the band (Druce, 2020). Cowell, X Factor judge and head of Syco Music, stated "from the second it finished, the fans made it their mission that One Direction were going to become the biggest band in the world" (Druce, 2020). It is interesting to see that the group of 200 to 300 fans that started promoting the boyband after the X Factor had a major influence in the fame of the band (Druce, 2020). Cowell later mentioned "I still to this day owe and credit everything to this group of 200–300 fans who just did the most phenomenal job I've ever seen." (Druce, 2020).

One Direction fans based their fandom mainly on social media platform Twitter, which later became the main platform for fandoms (Marwick, 2011). Therefore, the One Direction fans did not only successfully promote the music and the artists, but they also laid a foundation for fandom interaction on Twitter, which would later on be copied by other fandoms, such as fans for K-Pop groups (Naik, 2020).

In 2016, the band started their hiatus, after having released five albums and having toured all over the world throughout four tours, of which two were full-stadium tours (Druce, 2020). After the hiatus was announced, each band member initiated solo music projects, releasing music from 2016 onwards (Unterberger, 2020). Like every other One Direction member, Louis Tomlinson started a solo career, in which he released his debut album "Walls" in January 2020 under a joint release between *Arista Records, Syco Music* and Tomlinson's own *78 Productions* (Tomlinson, 2020). Walls came out at number nine on the US Billboard 200 and was the third best-selling album of 2020 in the United Kingdom, having debuted at number 4 on the UK charts (McFarland, 2021). Eight months after its release, Tomlinson's fans ("Louies") started a streaming project for the album, making the

album rise over one thousand spots in iTunes charts all over the world and reaching top positions in over twenty countries in only a few hours (McFarland, 2021). After the one-year anniversary of the album in February 2021, album track "Defenceless" rose to the top of music charts due to mass buying, streaming with focused playlists, and the promotion towards non-fans by fans through Twitter, Omegle, other social media platforms and out of home promotion (Foxwell, 2021). As a result, the song received a lot of radio play, non-fans discovered the song and started commenting on the YouTube video, and Tomlinson posted multiple thank you tweets telling his fans "You're all incredible!" (Tomlinson, 2021a) and "Never have enough words to thank you all for everything you do!" (Tomlinson, 2021b). It is unusual for a one-year old album track to reach #1 on the worldwide iTunes chart (Foxwell, 2021), but the initiative and dedication of the fans played a key role in the promotion of Tomlinson's music.

3. Methodology

Qualitative methods were used for this research, in order to gain an understanding of the perspectives of fans on their role in the marketing of music and to comprehend the necessities and capabilities of consumers. Qualitative research can shine light on hidden meanings behind concepts in a text (Brennen, 2017) and help the researcher to unfold latent opinions, patterns and representations in texts (Flick, 2014). In this way, information that may not have been taken into account previously can be brought to the surface and can bring new perspectives to the research topic (Johnson, 2011). Qualitative research is most suited for research regarding fandoms, as several concepts regarding fandoms can be interpreted differently among fans and among researchers (Jenkins, 1992). Therefore, researching meanings and opinions is facilitated by qualitative research more so than quantitative research (Brennen, 2017). Furthermore, in order to understand fans' experiences and opinions on the marketing of music, a qualitative approach allows participants to further elaborate on their answers, and allows researchers to ask probing questions (Johnson, 2011).

The research can be defined as exploratory research, because it aims to gain an understanding of concepts rather than support certain theories. Gamble and Gilmore (2013) further state that the perspectives of music fans in the area of co-creational marketing have not been carefully studied before, and therefore, exploratory research is most fitting. Qualitative research aims to describe the meaning of content in a standardized way (Schreier, 2014). It is especially appropriate for analyzing large pieces of text, as it is a way of compressing these texts to only the parts that are essential for the research analysis (Schreider, 2014).

3.1 Research design

Qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted as a data collection method. Interviews are a type of deliberate dialogue between a researcher and one or more participants, with the aim to create a shared comprehension in order to obtain information (Gaskell, 2000; Hermanowicz, 2002). Interviews allow researchers to understand different perspectives on concepts and gives one the possibility to transform the data into findings that can bring new concepts to light (Johnson, 2001). It is a suitable method for seeking deep information such as experiences, personal decisions, values, habits and opinions (Hermanowicz, 2002; Johnson, 2001). The interview method was especially suitable for this exploratory research, as it allowed the researcher to identify multiple perspectives on a

certain topic (Johnson, 2001). Interviews gave the researcher the possibility to use standardized questions, which allowed for the comparison of answers between interviewees (Griffee, 2005). Furthermore, the researcher was able to ask probing questions when answers were vague or ambiguous, or when the researcher wanted to obtain more specific or in-depth information (Gill et al., 2008). Moreover, as a form of face-to-face data collection, they allowed the researcher to document both verbal and non-verbal cues such as body language and emotions, which indicated the level of enthusiasm or discomfort with the question that was being asked (Johnson, 2001). Besides this, a face-to-face data collection method allowed the researcher to make sure that the participant felt at ease, which lowered the threshold for them to give deep and honest answers (Johnson, 2001).

In order to examine how fans perceive their role in co-creational music marketing, semi-structured interviews were conducted. This type of interview provided the researcher with room for probing and asking deeper questions based on a participant's answer (Griffee, 2005). The flexibility of semi-structured interviews was especially useful for this research, as it allowed the researcher to discover information that might not have been considered important in the process of constructing the interview (Gill et al., 2008). Furthermore, it was possible to adjust the order and the form of the questions, depending on the answers of the interviewee and the direction of the conversation (Brennen, 2017). This allowed the researcher to ask for more insights relevant to the answers given by the participants (Brennen, 2017).

3.2 Sampling and sample

As this research was focused on gaining an understanding of the perspective of pop music fans on co-creational music marketing, the sample consisted of fans of Louis Tomlinson ("Louies"). Participants were selected through purposeful sampling, which entails the selection of a group of participants contingent on certain criteria required for the research (Dudovskiy, 2012). Potential participants were selected based on their activity on their Twitter fan accounts, such as sharing and resharing content related to Tomlinson, following related (fan) accounts, attending concerts or expressing a desire to attend a concert, or engaging in other fan activities.. The sample criteria included being a fan for more than one year, as this ensures experience with fan activities, and allowed the fans to have had experiences with co-creational marketing. The aim for the sample was to include participants that have been a fan for a shorter period as well as fans that have been involved in the fandom for a longer period. Different demographics such as nationality and gender were included. It

is argued that cultural differences can influence commitment and cooperation in marketing (Mehta et al., 2006). Therefore, it was desirable that as many different views on the topic as possible were included. As Tomlinson's fandom is female-dominated, the research sample mainly consisted of female fans.

Participants were reached through Twitter, as Twitter offers a platform for fans to easily connect with each other and with the artists they like (Marwick, 2011) and contacted through a private message on their Twitter fan accounts, which included information about the research and the interview process (Trifiro & Gerson, 2019). As this thesis is focused on fan involvement in music marketing, and in specific on Tomlinson's fandom, the sample of this research consists of 12 selected participants that fulfilled the sampling criteria (Table 1).

Participants	Age	Gender	Nationality	Date & time of the interview	Setting
Interviewee 1	21	Female	Italian	14 April, 10:30	Zoom
Interviewee 2	22	Female	Cypriot	14 April, 12:00	Zoom
Interviewee 3	19	Non-binary	French	19 April, 11:00	Zoom
Interviewee 4	21	Female	Turkish & Dutch	20 April, 11:00	Zoom
Interviewee 5	21	Female	German	20 April, 16:00	Zoom
Interviewee 6	19	Female	Irish & American	21 April, 11:00	Zoom
Interviewee 7	21	Female	Dutch	21 April, 13:00	Zoom
Interviewee 8	23	Female	Irish	22 April, 12:00	Zoom
Interviewee 9	21	Female	Brazilian	23 April, 14:00	Zoom
Interviewee 10	20	Female	Dutch	24 April, 12:30	FaceTime
Interviewee 11	21	Male	Dutch	3 May, 12:00	Zoom
Interviewee 12	19	Non-binary	American	3 May, 6:00	Zoom

Table 1. Overview of the participants and setting of the interviews

All participants were students in higher education in various research areas. Reflecting the fandom, most participants identified as female, with two participants identifying as non-binary and one participant identifying as male. The youngest participant was 19 years old, while the oldest participant was 23 years old. Using social media to gather and select participants and the use of video conference services allowed for a sample of diverse nationalities. All interviewees were interviewed in English, giving the Dutch participants the option to elaborate in Dutch if needed. This was, however, not necessary.

3.3 Operationalization

To answer the research question, several concepts in the field of music marketing are to be operationalized. These concepts were used to support the formation of the questions for the interviews for this research. The concepts of fan, fandom, artist-fan interactions, consumer's musical engagement and co-creational marketing were used as a framework for constructing the interview questions. Regarding co-creational marketing, the different types of marketing (viral marketing, sponsored user-generated brand marketing, user-generated content marketing, vigilante marketing and prosumer marketing) that were discussed in the theoretical framework were used. A framework that explains how the interview questions are constructed is presented below. The full interview guide is included in Appendix I.

Theory	**Concepts**	**Key points**	**Question examples**
Fans & fandoms	Fans	Defining fans, motives for being a fan	For how long have you been a fan of Louis Tomlinson? Why are you a fan?
	Fandoms	Defining a fandom	How would you describe a fandom? What is your opinion on Louis Tomlinson's fandom?
Artist-fan interactions	Response to music	Feelings listening to music evoke, motives for listening to music	Does listening to music evoke certain emotions for you? If so, which ones? What are your motives for listening to music? And Louis Tomlinson's music in specific?
	Response to artist	Identification with an artist, liking an artist, similarity with an artist, imitation of an artist	To what extent do you identify with Louis Tomlinson?

			Do you think that being a fan of Louis Tomlinson influences the way you act, the clothing you wear etc.?
	Engagement	Engagement between fans and the media content	How often do you engage with Louis Tomlinson's content? What kind of content do you prefer interacting with?
	Recorded music access	Broadcast, unpaid downloads, free audio streaming	On what platforms do you listen to Louis' music?
	Recorded music ownership	Paid subscription, paid downloads, physical products	Do you own any physical music products, such as CDs, cassettes or vinyl?
Consumer's ME	Social-identity experience	Ability to express oneself through music, ability to connect with others through music	In what ways are you able to express yourself through Louis' music? In what ways are you able to connect with other people through Louis' music?
	Affect-inducing experience	Ability of music to induce feelings	Does Louis' music evoke certain emotions? If so, which ones?
Co-creational marketing	Viral marketing	Repost fixed content	Do you often share or repost content from Louis' social media?
	Sponsored user-generated brand marketing	Engage in voting campaigns or contests	What is your opinion on contests or voting campaigns on social media to promote Louis' content?
	User-generated content marketing	Content created by fans	What is your opinion on using user-generated content for the promotion of Louis' music?
	Vigilante marketing	Fans have control over the message being spread	Have you or your friends ever made content (art, designs, etc.) to promote Louis' music or events?
	Prosumer marketing	Content created and sold by fans	Have you ever bought merch that was made by a fan? Have you ever sold merch that you made yourself?

Table 2: Operationalization

3.4 Data collection and analysis

3.4.1 Setting

The 12 interviews took place from 14 April until 3 May 2022, through video conferencing platforms Zoom and FaceTime. The interview times were discussed with the participants based on their availability. Video conferencing services were used, in order to be able to interview participants from different countries. Audio recordings of the interviews were made with consent of the participants. The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim using transcription program Descript and then edited in order to correct mistakes and to add non-verbal cues such as laughing, sighing or longer periods of silence.

3.4.2 Thematic analysis

The main goal of the research was to gain an in-depth understanding of fans' perspectives on their roles in the co-creational marketing of pop music, and therefore, a thematic analysis was most suitable (Braun & Clarke, 2014). In this way, patterns in the findings were identified and analyzed, in order to reveal systems of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2014). Thematic analysis allowed the researcher to reduce the data through coding, which identified themes and could capture both manifest and latent content (Braun & Clarke, 2014). The thematic analysis consisted of coding the texts in different steps.

First, all the interview transcripts were analyzed, and important concepts were highlighted, compared and categorized. These categories were labelled with codes (open coding) (Boeije, 2010). After constructing the codes, axial coding was conducted, which entailed that the codes were compared and allocated into overarching categories, with the codes from the open coding stage being renamed as sub-codes. Finally, the most crucial themes that were found through the analysis were linked to the literature that supported the research (selective coding) (Boeije, 2010). The selective codes are *feeling of connection with an artist, connection with music, content experience, feeling of belonging, fans as marketeers, fans as members of an artist's marketing team, fans as content creators,* and *fans as active listeners*. The coding tree that resulted from the coding stage is presented in Appendix II. The most relevant concepts from the data were presented by classifying the subsets of codes into themes (*motivations for interacting* and *roles of fans*). In this way, comprehensive answers to the research question were given. The data was analyzed in an inductive manner, which is a data-driven manner of coding the research data without the purpose of classifying codes and themes into a preexisting coding frame (Braun & Clarke, 2014).

3.5 Ethics

In order to ensure that the research was conducted in an ethical way, participants were asked to give informed consent in order to participate in the research. Before the interview, participants were given information about the research, and were informed of the length of the interview and how their data would be used for the research. During the interview, before the start of the audio recording, participants were again verbally informed of the purpose of the interview, the length of the interview, their anonymity in the research and that the data and recordings from their interviews would only be used for this academic research. They were informed about the fact that the questions in the interview were related to their opinions and experiences, and that there were no correct or false answers. Their confirmation to participate in the study and their consent for the audio recording of the interview was asked. The interviewees had the possibility to refrain from answering certain questions or to stop with the interview at any time.

3.6 Reliability and validity

Reliability of the research entails that the method that is used is appropriate for the research question and that external factors do not affect the research findings (Silverman, 2011). In order to attain reliability, it is crucial that transparency about the research process is ensured. This was done by reporting the research method that was used, by demonstrating all steps of the analysis and by focusing on the theoretical perspective that the research was conducted from (Silverman, 2011). The justification for each step in the research established the credibility of the research (Silverman, 2011). To establish the validity of the research, the interview questions were constructed based on the theory provided on fandoms, artist-fan interactions, consumer's musical experience and co-creational marketing. Besides this, the thematic analysis, which included repeated comparison and examination of the data, disclosed the most frequently used codes (Boeije, 2010). To ensure that the coding was consistent throughout the research, the coding was performed twice. The in-depth nature of qualitative research provided that the risks of data generalization were minimized (Silverman, 2011).

4. Results

This chapter discusses the findings from the interviews and the data analysis that was conducted for this research. In order to answer the research question "*how do fans perceive their role in co-creational marketing of pop music?*", the results section is divided into several parts. Firstly, the findings relevant to the sub question "*what are music fans' motivations for interacting with an artist and their content?*" are discussed. Subsequently, the findings that contribute to answering the second sub question "*how do music fans perceive their role in co-creational marketing of pop music?*" are described. The results for these two sub questions contribute to providing an answer to the research question for this thesis.

4.1 Motivations for interacting

In order to provide an answer to the research question, it is important to understand fans' motivations for interacting with an artist and their content. These motivations lay a foundation for the roles as which fans perceive themselves in the context of co-creational marketing of music. From the interviews, it was discovered that fans represent several motivations for interacting, namely *feeling of connection with an artist, connection with music, content experience,* and *feeling of belonging*. These motivations are explained below.

4.1.1 Feeling of connection with an artist

Feeling of connection with an artist is one of the motivations for interacting that was identified. This motivation is constituted from different aspects, including the *artist's character,* how the artist *influences* and *inspires* them, and the *comfort* an artist gives them. Most participants mentioned the importance of the relationship they sense between Tomlinson and themselves as fans, which many perceive as special compared to the relationship they have with other artists: "the relationship (…) we have, like, as a fan base with him, I think that gets very rare for artists to have that with fans" (Interviewee 3). And some interviewees explained that for them this is also a reason to be a fan of an artist in general: "I don't think that I would be as much of a fan if (…) I didn't have this very specific and special bond, that I feel like I only have with him as an artist" (Interviewee 1), and "I'm like, ooh, I'm his friend and, he's not my friend, you know, but I think he's very good at making you feel like you can have like a bit of banter with him" (Interviewee 8). Participants mentioned that "it's (…) super important for like artists, like build a connection with their fans" (Interviewee 3) and that in the case of Tomlinson, "he's really, like, personal with his

fans" (Interviewee 10) and that it "makes you feel connected to an artist" (Interviewee 8). Several interviewees add that the artist involves his fans in every step of his career, which they appreciate.

The *character of the artist* is mentioned as a reason for being a fan several times: "I stayed for the (…) person that he is" (Interviewee 1), "what made me love him so much was (…) his personality that, like, attracted me the most to him" (Interviewee 3). Participants explain that Tomlinson is "very down-to-earth and humble, […] you still never felt like (…) he's too good to (…) talk to his friends and everyone in the band as well" (Interviewee 3), he is a "genuine person" (Interviewee 5). When asked why participants are a fan of Tomlinson, these character traits were often mentioned. They make the fans feel like they can relate to the artist.

What is interesting, is that in most cases, the character of the artist *inspires* the interviewees and *influences* them, which is another connection that they feel with the artist. Interviewee 11 mentioned that "the way he interacts with his fans and the way he just goes for life, it's very inspiring and makes me want to be more like him". Interviewee 12 explained: "(…) him trying to be like really inclusive and to cater to so many different people, and (…) his words of just, sort of, not giving up, like, that's sort of been my own moral philosophy for a really long time". Not only do the artist's personality and morals inspire the interviewees, they also discuss that they have taken over his clothing style and body language: "Louis' typical (…) middle finger, I do a lot" (Interviewee 5) and "I definitely bought a new pair of Vans when (…) I first got into his music" (Interviewee 12).

Participants mentioned that a sense of *comfort* makes them feel like they are connected to an artist, for example: "you know that he's gonna come back and I just feel like there's a sense of comfort that like, you know exactly […] what he's like and what he's doing" (Interviewee 12) and "he's (…) the thing that keeps me like going" (Interviewee 3).

It is important to note that the sense of connection interviewees feel with the artist and the fact that they mention it as a reason to interact with the artist and their content, is in accordance with the parasocial interaction theory, that explains how there can be an illusion of a real relationship between fans and an artist (Sood & Rogers, 2000). The idea of this relationship encourages fans to interact with content and support an artist. Therefore, the artist being open about his work, interacting with fans and appearing down-to-earth has beneficial outcomes. Furthermore, this aligns with the "response to artist" variable in the

artist-fan interaction model (Stewart, 2018), which includes the aspects identification, liking, similarity and imitation (Shen & Zhou, 2011; Stewart, 2018). Participants mentioned that they like the artist, they imitate the artist by means of behavior, mindset and clothing, and they feel a level of similarity with the artist in his character. High levels of "response to artist" correlate with a higher interaction rate, and therefore, these aspects explain why fans are motivated to interact with an artist and their content (Stewart, 2018).

4.1.2 Connection with music

Another aspect of fans' motivations for interacting with an artist and the content is the connection they feel with the artists' music. Most participants mention that they feel a sense of connection with Tomlinson's music, in several ways. For example, Interviewee 4 explains that "it explains me a bit and my music taste, because it's a bit of everything". Besides this, two aspects of connection with music were identified*: identification with music* and *affected by music*.

Identification with music is explained by the interviewees as understanding the lyrics and feeling connected to the lyrics, allowing one to relate to the songs and represent oneself through the music. Affected by music entails feeling a connection with the music on an emotional level, or even feeling physically affected by certain songs. For example, Interviewee 3 elaborated:

> "(…) the thing that like attaches people the most, like when you start like associating things with like your personal life and then it's just like, it's only for you. And then I think that's like the most vulnerable thing. And then just probably like, what makes you- what do you- like the most emotion when you listen to a song is like when, yeah. When it like links in some way to like your own life".

Several interviewees shared this insight into their connection with music, agreeing on the idea that they feel like songs are connected to their personal lives: "a lot of his songs are about growing up (…) that's very relatable as well" (Interviewee 4). Next to this, some participants explained that Tomlinson's music "express things [they are feeling] way better than I could ever say" (Interviewee 5) and "it's much more easy to like, identify your own feelings through those types of songs" (Interviewee 12). Most participants mentioned that they feel a strong connection with Tomlinson's song "Only The Brave", which is often described as a song that a lot of people who are part of the LGBTQ+ community identify with. Interviewee 11 explains "I'm in the LGBTQ community, so that one is just very

special", and Interviewee 1 tells "just listening to it and knowing that that song is out in the world makes me feel really safe for some reason".

Similar to the connections with an artist, fans' connections to music as a motivation for interacting with an artist or interacting with content can be understood through the artist-fan engagement model by Stewart (2018). The model explains that interaction is guided by hedonic consumption, which entails that consumption is guided by emotions linked to the product (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). These include emotional, sensorial, imaginal and analytical responses. Interviewee 1 said "emotion is a big reason why I listen to music (…) there are definitely songs that I listen to because they make me feel a particular type of way" and Interviewee 5 explained "if I feel sad, I kind of listen to sad music too". Multiple participants mentioned that they create playlists based on emotions that songs provoke, that they listen to when they feel that specific emotion. Besides this, Interviewee 12 explained that "certain people (…) have visceral reactions to certain music (…) that is definitely true for me", which supports the sensorial response to music described by Stewart (2018). Furthermore, most interviewees described that listening to certain *music brings back memories* they had connected to the songs. This is in line with the imaginal response explained by the artist-fan engagement model (Stewart, 2018), which includes the images or memories that listening to music evokes (Ouellet, 2007). Besides this, some participants relate to the analytical response: "I get intense feelings of (…) loving songs" (Interviewee 7). Taking all of this into account, the connection that interviewees have with Tomlinson's music is a part of their motivations for interacting with him and with his content. This aligns with the artist-fan engagement model, which explains that the connection people have with music has a positive influence on the level of interaction with an artist (Stewart, 2018). Next to this, emotional and physical reactions to music as a motivation for interacting with musical content can be explained by affect-inducing experiences as an influence in musical engagement, which contributes to the level of interaction with music (Hollebeek et al., 2016).

4.1.3 Content experience

Another aspect of fans' motivations for interacting with artists and their content is the experience that certain content or the interaction with this content gives them. Several ways of content experience were identified in the interviews: *enjoyment*, *reward*, and *self-expression*. For example, participants mentioned that they want to see the "fun stuff (…) like memes" (Interviewee 10) and that they "want to laugh a little, or like, see a meme from a concert" (Interviewee 10). They want to interact with a type of content if it gives them joy.

Another type of content experience is reward, which several interviewees refer to as something that improves content experience. Interviewee 2 said: "it is rewarding to see [a] project succeed and rewarding to see, like, the happiness in other people's faces". Besides this, participants mentioned that they enjoy seeing the artist reply to posts that the fans make or share: "Louis even acknowledged both times" (Interviewee 6) or "you're like, ah, the artist will see me or something" (Interviewee 5). They explain that the artist noticing content the fans post feels rewarding and motivates them to further interact with content: "there's a lot of reciprocity" (Interviewee 12). Next to this, interacting with content is a way of self-expression: "I make jokes about [the music I like]" (Interviewee 3), and "[I interact with] specifically (…) things that relate to me" (Interviewee 7).

Hollebeek et al.'s (2016) theory on consumer's musical engagement explains that certain experiences contribute to someone's motivation to interact with media content. Identity experience entails the extent to which fans want to project their identity through interaction with music, which aligns with the findings that explain that interviewees' motivation to interact with content through self-expression. Next to this, transportive experience is relevant in this case, as it describes leisure as a reason for interacting with music, which is acknowledged by the participants as enjoyment. These experiences contribute to the motivation to interact with musical content.

4.1.4 Feeling of belonging

It is interesting to note that fans' motivations for interacting with an artist and their content are not only influenced by the artist or by the content, but also by the feeling of belonging with regard to the fandom as a *community*, by *interacting with other fans*, and through *collective experiences*. Most interviewees state that the Louie fandom is safe, supportive and caring: "you can, like, always be yourself and respect them, and feel supported by everyone" (Interviewee 5). Participants also mentioned that they made close friends from all over the world through the fandom, with whom they went to concerts with and travelled with. Besides this, the interviewees described that the collective experiences make them feel like they belong, which is a motivation for interaction. As Interviewee 1 expressed: "I see that this person tweeted something and I engage with the tweet and I talk about it with my friends and, you know, I think that it's really more of a collective experience", and:

"It's funny because like, sometimes we don't even have to like, say the words like out loud, because like, for example, there was a little inside joke, uh, and you know what I'm talking about, even like, even if I don't say it. So, I feel like this is one of my favorite parts of being in the fandom is, you know, like just sharing experiences with other people and, you know, experiences that you might not even have to like type out [to explain], because the other person will already know. (Interviewee 1).

Another important note is that most fans are part of the fandom for the same reason, which is because they like the music and to support the artist: "this one big community in which they communicate with each other, share things, and all for the same goal and to make the person they're a fan of successful" (Interviewee 7).

Hollebeek et al.'s (2016) framework for musical engagement explains how social experiences, such as the desire to make social connections through interacting with music, contribute to one's motivation to interact with an artist and with their content. More specifically, social experiences are often connected with identity experiences, which explains the significance of a feeling of community and collective experiences in this context (Hollebeek et al., 2016). Furthermore, Jenkins (1992) describes a feeling of connection between people who are part of a community, including the mutual understanding and sharing of media, as a characteristic of a fandom. The collective intelligence that a fandom has, allows fans to connect with each other and feel part of a community (Levy, 1997).

4.2 Roles of fans

The second part of this chapter focuses on shining light on the identified roles of fans in co-creational marketing of pop music. It was discovered that fans perceive themselves having different roles in the context of co-creational music marketing, with different levels of involvement and different ways of contributing. These roles include *fans as marketeers, fans as members of marketing team, fans as content creators,* and *fans as active listeners.* Each role is explained below, describing the aspects that make up the role and including quotes from the interviewees. Furthermore, the different roles are supported by the literature used for this research.

4.2.1 Fans as marketeers

The first role that was identified is *fans as marketeers.* Some participants mentioned that they feel like they are a marketing team of Tomlinson, meaning that they do more than the label's marketing team that is working for him and that they can perform a better job than

the official team. They feel that they take the lead in the marketing. One reason for this is that participants feel like the fans *know the audience* better than the marketing team. They mention that "fans are the target audience" (Interviewee 1) and they "know what other fans want" (Interviewee 3). Another point that is made is related to the age difference between the marketing team and the fandom: "the team is sometimes (…) older than the target audience, which can make it very difficult for them to (…) tap into the, like, wants and needs of (…) the group that they're providing to" (Interviewee 10). Another argument for fans knowing the audience best is that "some people have been doing this [being a fan and promoting the artist] for 12 years. They know what (…) the fandom wants, or what people their age want" (Interviewee 6). Besides this, participants mentioned that as fans, it is easier to reach other fans, because they are in the same fandom.

Another reason for fans to view themselves as marketeers, is the idea that fans are able to promote an artist and their music in a different, *more genuine* way. When asked if authenticity is important when promoting an artist, Interviewee 3 answered: "Oh, I think for (…) fans it definitely is". Interviewee 7 further explains:

> "Uh, I think it's a very wholesome way of like promoting stuff, I think because you're using your own, uh, your own fans. The people that love you, you're using their stuff to also like spread it (…) someone who isn't a fan gets to see the beautiful things the fandom creates and like the beautiful things that come out of this. Um, so I think it's a wholesome way of promoting".

Interviewee 4 mentioned that "one of the best ways of marketing, mouth to mouth, just telling about it or listening with other people to it". It is described that when fans promote music, it is more authentic than when a team promotes music: "some teams (…) have a specific goal in mind (…) to make the most money, reach the most people. But I think if it's something that the fans do, it's very authentic and organic" (Interviewee 3).

Another aspect of why fans view themselves as marketeers, is the perspective that fans can *provide ideal content* that other fans desire. When talking about points fans find important, *consistency* and *memorability* are mentioned. Interviewees mention that "it's pretty important to keep a fandom engaged (…), any type of content as long as it's there (…), to keep in contact with him" (Interviewee 7). Adding on to this, Interviewee 2 says:

"[fans are] more consistent in, um, updating when stuff happens for Louis. Um, and the continuous updates (…) keep a link between like, in the fandom, like when there are off periods, for example. Uh, all artist have periods that they probably are like writing or taking a break. Those whole periods, the team doesn't (…) put out content or interactions much, but their fandom is still alive, because it keeps getting updates on him, even if it's not like sourced by him.".

Memorability of content is valued by fans, and participants mention that content created by fans is more memorable than content provided by an artist's team: "LTHQ [Tomlinson's team] can just tweet some random thing (…) whereas when it's something like that, (…) the fans are going to remember it, (…) it's just more memorable, isn't it? (Interviewee 8).

One important aspect of fans as marketeers, is that, because fans are situated all around the world, they can take into account *cultural and religious influences* in marketing. Interviewee 4 says:

"Fans are all unique in their own way (…) so it could be affecting, um, what's your religion, your nationality, and that kind of things. [teams] keep forgetting that that part of the world has one of the biggest parts of our fandom. There are so many more fans there than maybe we have, but just because our artists can't be there, they are a little bit forgotten".

These findings can be supported by Edlom & Karlsson's (2021a) idea of a fandom as a brand community, which allows fans to become stakeholders in music, by means of co-creating value. Brand communities have a strong connection to the brand, which is in this case the artist and the music. Looking at the model for value creation by Grönroos and Voima (2013), this role of fans as marketeers would fit in the customer sphere, with fans creating value and promoting the artist and their music, taking into account their dependence on the environment and the size of the fandom. When taking into account the different types of marketing by Gamble and Gilmore (2013), vigilante marketing and prosumer marketing would be most relevant for the role of fans as marketeers, as these types of marketing allow consumers to create their own content and marketing message, with little influence from the team. This is in line with the role that was identified from the interviews. It is important to notice that the role of fans as marketeers presumes that fans take a leading role in the marketing of an artist and their music.

4.2.2 Fans as members of the artist's marketing team

Another role that was identified from the answers of the interviews is *fans as members of the artist's marketing team*. The key difference between this role and the role of fans as marketeers, is the element of fan support and contribution to the team, rather than fans taking the leading role in the promotion of an artist and their music. While some participants explained that they feel like they are doing more than the marketing team, several interviewees mentioned that they recognize that there should be a balance between the team and the fans and that they are able to support the artist's team by providing fan contributions, while recognizing the strengths of a professional marketing team.

It is important to highlight the *strengths of the team* that the participants acknowledge. One of these strengths is the *authority* and *legitimacy* that the team maintains. Interviewee 5 mentioned that when posting about projects or interactive content, "people will do it because it comes from a more legit account, like it's his team". Besides this, the team of an artist has exclusive content, whereas fans use fan-made content or reuse content provided by a team. Interviewee 2 explains: "the content is like, [fans] are using stuff that already has been given out by Louis. So, it's like new material we're getting from Louis. New materials, something we've never seen before, or better quality".

Moreover, fans acknowledge that the artist's team has more *knowledge* and *experience* about certain things, like "people who do marketing, (…) they're so smart. Because they can market to you and you don't even realize they're marketing to you" and "you need professional people, because marketing can be tricky (…) you don't want to do anything wrong, you don't want to offend anybody" (Interviewee 8). Besides this "the marketing team will also do a lot of research" (Interviewee 11). There are certain things fans do not know about the artist, such as "messages and things that we don't know that he would want to put out, there's no way that we would know what they are (…) especially with Louis being cryptic (…) there's always going to be secret messages" (Interviewee 3). Adding on to this, interviewees mention that it is important to take into account the *values of the artist* when deciding what kind of content to post, which is something that only an artist's team can achieve. Interviewee 2 says "I do give more value to the things that his team promotes the most, because that tells me it means more to his career". Other participants mentioned "I think something that Louis really prioritizes at least is a sense of privacy" (Interviewee 12), and "maybe [a lack of posting] is Louis' preference, because he doesn't post that much about

anything too" (Interviewee 4) and "it always has to be fitting to the artist as well" (Interviewee 5).

Participants also mentioned that the artist's team should not be updating on everything that is happening with the artist, because the team is not an update account on everything that an artist does, and that it looks unprofessional. This is where the fans are able to support the marketing team of an artist, for example through *fan-run update accounts*: "as soon as [the artist] posts something, or releases anything, we're up to date" and "they post about the venue, about the venue rules, the capacity, but also what they were saying interviews or what someone said about them in the interviews" (Interviewee 4). While it is discussed that the artist's team should not post updates about everything, several interviewees explain that the team can learn from the activities of update accounts: "they're the blueprint for what Louis' team should do (…) with the Walls anniversary (…) they had, like, word searches, they had, like, competitions, they did a giveaway" (Interviewee 6).

Besides this, many interviewees highlight the value of *fan knowledge*, which can be beneficial for a team. "You can have as many interns as you want, but it doesn't come close to the opinion of an actual fan who knows what other fans are looking for" (Interviewee 3), and "they have like the way of talking to a fandom that sometimes the marketing [team] does not have" (Interviewee 9). One participant shared the idea of fan focus groups:

> "It would be a good idea for them to have (…) a fan focus group, in either different countries or continents and (…) give them a list and be like, oh what's wrong? Do you have any ideas about this? (…) like a pre-check to avoid either disappointing themselves with not enough sales, or disappointing people with like, oh, this is not what we expected" (Interviewee 10).

Another reason why which fans support the marketing team, is because of the *connection* they have with the fandom. Fans are easily able to find fan content to interact with, and interviewees mentioned that they often prefer interacting with fan content, because they want to support other fans: "the stuff that fans made, will probably get a little bit less attention" (Interviewee 11). Using fan content for the promotion of an artist or music is described as a way of giving back to the fans: "feel like when the artists engage with the fandom, like interacts with them. I just, it just shows like how much they, um, appreciate their fans as well" (Interviewee 5). Besides this, it is a way of *encouraging* fans to interact with the artist and to create their own content: "if his team would just engage with fans a bit

more, then we would be a bit more engaging. It keeps us interested" (Interviewee 7) and "it gives you more of a drive to do stuff" (Interviewee 5). Moreover, it "promotes excitement in the fandom" (Interviewee 2).

It is important to highlight that multiple interviewees stressed the *love they have for the artist* and their content as a reason for being able to market the artist and the music well. Several participants brought up a balance between the team and the fans as the ideal situation, because "a lot of fan made content wouldn't exist without what Louis and his social media put out" (Interviewee 1), and that "marketing needs to not be only fan- and fandom-related, but also for the artist" (Interviewee 10).

Some examples of fan involvement in content and marketing were given. For example, multiple interviewees mentioned the campaign for the first anniversary of Tomlinson's album "Walls", where fans were asked to create art, which was used by the team as Spotify canvases for that day: "I still remember the day that everything dropped on Spotify and everyone was so excited about it" (Interviewee 5), and "I'm still thinking of that, that's actually mad (…) I think it's such a lovely way for fans to be involved in an artist's music" (Interviewee 8). Another interviewee described a campaign from a Formula 1 team:

> "They have like Fan Friday where they market more like, um, a piece of art or whatever made by a fan on their platform, which is like inadvertently bigger than the fans' probably is, uh, so that might be a good idea for them to like engage more with the audience and encourage people to, um, make new things and different things instead of like making the same thing all over. Um, so like if I had a say in it, I'd definitely encourage them to do that sort of thing." (Interviewee 10).

Other examples that are mentioned are treasure hunts, word searches, competitions, and fan-designed merch.

Nearly all participants stressed the importance of a *balance between the team and the fandom*, combining the strengths of the team and recognizing how fans can contribute on the points where the team might be weaker. Interviewee 6 mentions: "if Louis' team just took into account just that much more, (…) I think it could be quite beneficial". Besides this, Interviewee 2 explains: "I think it's like a 50/50 thing. The team provides something different; the fans provide something different, and combined it's just perfect". This describes

how fans see themselves as part of the marketing team, supplementing the abilities of the team and contributing on the points that the team lacks.

The findings of this section can be supported by Grönroos and Voima's (2013) value creation framework. In this case, the role of fans as members of the artist's marketing team can be identified in the joint sphere, where the team and fans collaborate by means of providing each other resources (e.g., content, knowledge, and insights) and by interacting with each other (Grönroos & Voima, 2013). This sphere represents value co-creation and therefore portrays the role of fans as members of an artist's team. Both parties can learn from each other and support each other. Looking at the different types of marketing (Gamble & Gilmore, 2013), user-generated content marketing and vigilante marketing are most relevant for the role of fans as members of the artist's marketing team, as these of marketing gives the fans more opportunities to create their own content and support the team with the marketing of content. In this way, the processes of fans supporting an artist's marketing team can be understood.

While most interviewees view themselves as fans with an active role in the promotion of an artist, they describe that sometimes, they feel as if the team of an artist does not take them seriously as people who can contribute. Interviewee 8 explains: "sometimes they can have this idea that like, you're just a fan and like, that's your entity, you're a fan. And there's like, there's not a person underneath" and "they're not just this crazy bunch of people, they (…) have reasons for liking what they like, and they have reasons for being fans". Interviewee 12 adds on to this by saying:

> "Especially, for like male artists, there's like this (…) "oh, all of your fans are going to be like, girls, or they're going to be attracted to you and that's like a large part of your appeal. (…) They don't care about your music. They just think you look pretty or something." And I think that that's like harmful, that's something that really frustrates me. And I get really annoyed that that's like something that people cater to so often. Um, cause it also feels degrading to the artist and the fan.".

Besides this, participants recognize a lack of interaction: a lack of content that fans can engage in, and more specific a lack of interactions with fans. Most of the content that is posted is non-interactive content like tour photos and videos. Additionally, when fan projects were happening, fans collectively asked the artist's team to help them share information about the project and request radio play for the songs, which was ignored by the team: "when

we were doing the Defenceless [fan project] streaming party, people were trying to get it out here to the team, like to join in" (Interviewee 6). Several interviewees describe that this makes them feel as if they are not taken seriously as fans, even though "music in general would be nothing without the fans, because obviously they are the people that listen to it" (Interviewee 5).

4.2.3 Fans as content creators

Based on the insights provided by the interviewees, another role could be identified: fans as content creators. When focusing on the type of content that fans create, there are several aspects in which they differ from content created by a team. Participants highlighted the *authenticity* that is expressed through fan content:

> "It's like fan generated content, I guess that I think it could probably be like the most authentic, 'cause like some teams, like some artists are a bit like they have like a specific goal in mind is of- as you know, like make the most money, reach the most people. But I think if it's something that like the fans do. It's very like authentic and organic with like what we think, like what we like and what we want" (Interviewee 3).

Fan content seems to have a sense of authenticity for the fandom, because fans have a *passion* for the things that inspire their content. Fan content is often created from the love for an artist or a song, rather than with the objective to make money. Fans make video edits, they make art, and make merch designs, in order to "cultivate their creative energy" (Interviewee 2) and show their love for the artist.

Besides this, interviewees mentioned that fan made content brings a *human voice* to the content: "there's always a person underneath that, you know, and these people are artists, they're musicians, and they're creative" (Interviewee 8). With fan made content, you can often see who the content is from, which allows other fans to support them and share their content: "it's always so nice to give a stage to those people as well" (Interviewee 5). Next to this, it is explained that:

> "People really like to see the process, it'd be like some things where like you're sewing clothes, whatever it is that you do. Like, I think people just really love seeing like the behind the scenes of how something is made" (Interviewee 1).

Taking into account the different types of marketing by Gamble and Gilmore (2013), vigilante marketing and user-generated content marketing are most relevant, as these types of marketing allow consumers to create their own content, which can then be shared by the marketing team to spread a marketing message. Interviewees explain that the connection they feel to the artist and to the music inspires them to create content, and consumers that dedicate time to create content feel connected to the brand (Muñiz & Schau, 2007)

4.2.4 Fans as active listeners

While several interviewees viewed themselves as involved in the marketing of an artist and their music, or as content creators, others recognized that they are less actively involved in the promotion of music. Therefore, another role was identified: *fans as active listeners*.

Fans can support an artist by being active listeners, without taking initiative in the marketing of this artist and without creating content. It is important to clarify that the role of fans as active listeners is still connected to the concept of co-creation despite not taking initiative in the marketing, as co-creational marketing stresses the focus on considering the consumers part of a marketing process, for example by encouraging them to reshare content (Zwick et al., 2008). First of all, fans can be active listeners by *regularly listening to the artist's music*, which is a factor that every interviewee listed as a requirement for being a fan. Next to this, several participants mentioned that an interest in the artist or an interest in the music is important for being a fan, rather than just a casual listener. Supporting the artist is further possible by *going to concerts* and *buying and wearing merchandise*, though most participants explained that they do not see this as a requirement for the role of an active listener, because some people might not be able to afford this.

Besides this, fans can be active listeners by *promoting buying music* and *participating in streaming projects*: "there are a bunch of streaming parties" (Interviewee 12), and by interacting with an artist's social media posts, such as liking and commenting on posts: "it isn't necessarily like, you know, communicating with them in any way, but like, for example, being on Twitter, I see that this person tweeted something and I engage with the tweet" (Interviewee 1). Most people mentioned that they often like, retweet and comment on tweets, and that they like Instagram posts which they reshare in their Instagram Story: "any notification I get [about new artist- and music-related content], especially on Twitter, I'm just like, 'like, retweet, like, retweet', and then sometimes I'll share it on my story as well"

(Interviewee 8). While this is not actively participating in the marketing of music by, for example, creating new content, it does bring more attention to the content that is being shared: "on Twitter [a subject or a tweet] gets on trending topics, the more people tweet it" (Interviewee 4) and "even if it's just through a tweet, like people that don't follow you will see that on the timeline. And like, they'll be forced to think about it for at least three seconds" (Interviewee 10). Interviewee 12 explains that even only liking or commenting on TikTok videos is a way that active listeners contribute to marketing:

> "I think there's like sort of an ongoing joke that like, oh, that's a TikTok song, which like has a particularly negative connotation (…) even if they do have that connotation, they still get a lot more streams because people recognize the song."

For the role of fans as active listeners, there are several types of marketing that are most relevant. For example, sponsored user-generated brand marketing allows fans to participate in voting campaigns and contests, creating a very small role in the marketing without giving fans the opportunity to create their own content or spread their own message (Gamble & Gilmore, 2013). This is in line with Jenkins' (1992) definition of a fandom as a form of participatory culture, where members engage with each other and the artist. Therefore, resharing content and participating in projects can be considered co-creational acts. Besides this, viral marketing provides the fans existing content which they can share, hereby allowing marketeers to be in control (Gamble & Gilmore, 2013). This is in accordance with the description of fans as active listeners, as they mostly like, comment on, and reshare content, rather than making their own content. Taking all of this into account, the role of fans as active listeners fits in the provider sphere as explained by Grönroos and Voima (2013), as content is provided by the artist's team and reshared by fans.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The aim of this research was to provide an answer to the research question of "*How do fans perceive their role in co-creational marketing of pop music?*" Firstly, the findings will be discussed, and then the societal and academic relevance of the research will be explained.

In order to understand how fans perceive their role in the marketing, it was important to recognize their motivations for interacting with an artist and their content. The discovered motivations could be classified into different groups: feeling of connection with an artist, connection with music, content experience, and feeling of belonging. Participants explained that they feel a connection with the artist based on the artist's character, the extent to which they are influenced or inspired by the artist, and the sense of comfort that this artist gives them. The idea that fans feel a connection with an artist can be explained by the parasocial interaction theory (PSI), which describes the illusion of a real relationship between fans and an artist (Sood & Rogers, 2000). The fact that fans experience this connection that they have with the artist makes them more inclined to interact with this artist and with their content. Aspects of PSI include identification, liking, similarity, and imitation (Stewart, 2018). From the findings, especially the level of similarity and the level of identification with an artist that fans experience are explained as a motivation for interaction. Besides this, the connection that fans feel with music relates to sensorial and analytical response to music, which increases the level of interaction, as explained by the hedonic consumption theory (Stewart, 2018). Therefore, fans' motivations are explained to be influenced by their connection with the artist and the music.

Besides this, content experience is an important factor for the motivation for fans to interact with an artist and their content. If fans are able to express themselves through music or media content, if it feels rewarding for them to interact with content, and if they are able to interact with music and with content as a form of leisure, they are more likely to interact with the artist. This is supported by Hollebeek et al.'s (2016) framework on musical engagement.

The motivation of a feeling of belonging can be understood through the perspective of the artist-fan engagement model (Stewart, 2018). The social-identity experiences from the model and the relationship with interaction explain the significance of a feeling of community and collective experience that fans discuss. They stress that the mutual understanding within a fandom and the collective intelligence allows them to feel closer to other fans, which is mentioned as a motivation to interact with the artist and with content.

In order to answer the research question, several roles of fans were identified from the findings: fans as marketeers, fans as members of the artist's marketing team, fans as content creators, and fans as active listeners, which include different levels of fan contribution and different types of marketing.

The role of fans as marketeers was identified, as it came to light that fans often experience that they are taking a leading role in the marketing of music. A lack of content and promotion by the team is often mentioned. Fans explain that they know and reach the audience better than the team does, because they are part of the fandom and belong to the target demographic. Furthermore, they perceive themselves as able to promote an artist and their music in a different, more genuine way, and they know what kind of content fans find important and interesting. Understanding this from the perspective of Grönroos and Voima's (2013) value creation model, value is created by the consumers, and therefore the role of fans as marketeers is situated in the customer sphere.

The role of fans as members of an artist's marketing team is most often discussed by the interviewees as how they perceive themselves. They acknowledge that an artist's team has certain knowledge and experience that fans do not have, and that content provided by a team or campaigns initiated by a team have more legitimacy and more authority, which encourages fans to take them seriously, most often because they are linked to the values of the artist. Besides this, there are areas in which fans can contribute, where the team is lacking. For example, it is often mentioned that there is a lack of content and promotion from the team and a need for consistency, whereas the fandom is always active and continuously provides and reshares content. Additionally, fans are easily able to connect with other fans and to find fan content.

Besides this, fans see themselves as content creators. There is an abundance of fan made content, which can be used by the team to promote the artist and the music. Fan content is seen as more authentic than content created by the team, as people can see who the content is from and are able to connect with this person based on their creations. What is interesting, is that, while Terranova (2000) explained that using fan content can be seen as free labor from the fans, fans see the use of their content as a way of giving back to the fans; by recognizing their work and by getting noticed by an artist, they feel like they are rewarded for their work, and it is also a way of promoting themselves and their work.

The findings from this research are relevant for industry professionals, as insights into fan's motivations for interacting can be helpful when the team of an artist wants to increase the interaction from the fans. By presenting the artist as relatable and down-to-earth, as well as by ensuring artist-fan interaction by, for example, interacting with fans on social media, fans feel a stronger connection with the artist and are therefore more likely to interact with

the artist and the music (Stewart, 2018). This can have beneficial outcomes for the artist, including more visibility on social media and higher music sales (Stewart, 2018).

A way for a team to achieve a positive content experience, is to provide enjoyable content, such as memes, or behind-the-scenes videos of concerts, so that fans who visited that concert feel connected with that type of content. Besides this, fans explain that it feels rewarding if an artist recognizes the efforts that fans put into the content they create and share, and that this motivates them to continue interacting with the artist and with their content. Therefore, it is beneficial for the artist if they regularly interact with fans and ensure that fans feel acknowledged by the artist.

A feeling of belonging can be ensured by the artist by being active on social media, so that these platforms can be used by the fandom as well. For example, if an artist is active on Twitter, the fandom will be active on this platform too, not only to interact with the artist, but also to interact with other fans. This motivates fans to interact with an artist and with their content.

It is important for artists' teams to recognize the strengths of a fandom, the knowledge they can provide, and the way that they can reach an audience. However, fans experience that, while they see themselves as marketeers, members of an artist's team, or content creators, they feel that artist's teams do not perceive them the same way. They often feel like active listeners or even like a passive audience, that does contribute to the streaming of music, buys merchandise and goes to concerts, but that does play an important role in promoting the artist and the music and that does not create fan content. There is therefore a mismatch between how the fans perceive themselves, and how they see themselves being perceived by the team. Looking at this from the different types of marketing explained by Gamble and Gilmore (2103), fans prefer types of marketing in which they can engage, such as sponsored user-generated brand marketing, user-generated content marketing, and vigilante marketing. They do recognize that the team should have some influence in the marketing, which is why prosumer marketing is not preferred. However, fans often experience that only viral marketing or sponsored user-generated brand marketing is used, which provides little opportunities for fan contribution. Considering the value creation model from Grönroos and Voima (2013), fans prefer value creation from the joint sphere, whereas they experience that often, value creation from the provider sphere is dominant.

An important takeaway from this study is for marketing teams of artists to recognize the ways in which fans can contribute to the marketing of an artist and their music. Fans stress the importance of a balance between the team and the fans, expressing the need of more fan involvement as a way of giving back to the fans and letting them know that they are valued. This will strengthen the relationship that fans feel with an artist, which gives them a higher motivation to interact with the artist and their content. This in turn has positive outcomes for music sales and recognition for the artist.

This research contributes to academia, as it brings insights into music marketing from the perspective of music fans, which is not widely researched (Edlom & Karlsson, 2021a). Besides this, fans often criticize research on fandoms, as answers and concepts are often misinterpreted and details are often overlooked (Jenkins, 2006a). The researcher of this thesis is part of fandoms, in this way avoiding these criticisms.

5.1 Limitations and implications for future research

This research provides insights into fan involvement in the co-creational marketing of pop music. Nonetheless, the research is not without limitations.

First of all, the fact that fans and their involvement in music marketing is not widely researched, makes constructing definitions prone to bias of the researcher, which can be a threat to validity of the research (Wadams & Park, 2018). Furthermore, there is no consensus on what defines fans or what defines a fandom, which leaves the concept up to interpretation. Besides this, the sample size of this research is limited respective of the size of the fandom that was studied. While the sample consisted of participants from Europe, North America and South America, which made the sample very diverse, only 12 participants were included in the research. Participants were interviewed until saturation was achieved, however, perhaps including fans from a broader population of pop music fans would include more perspectives. Besides this, it could be interesting to conduct a comparative research between different pop music fandoms, or between fandoms of different types of music, to examine whether there are differences between the groups. Moreover, it would have been beneficial if fans from Asia, Africa and Australia were included in the research, as these people constitute a large part of the fandom. However, due to time zone differences and time constraints, it was not possible to find participants from these regions. Besides this, it is advised that future research includes people of younger and older ages as well, to ensure that a larger part of the fandom is represented in the research.

While the researcher being a fan brings advantages to the research, such as easily establishing report during the interviews, understanding fan terminology, it does increase the danger of bias, such as response bias or reporting bias (Wadams & Park, 2018). Additionally, conducting the interviews through video conference platforms caused difficulties for documenting non-verbal language of the research participants, although it did allow the research to include participants from other parts of the world, which would not have been possible with in-person interviews.

There are some limitations connected to the interview methods as a way of collecting data for this research. This includes social desirability bias, which can happen when a respondent does not want to give an honest answer in fear of appearing bad (Larson, 2019). Besides this, an interview can be time-consuming and tiring, which can influence the answers of a participant (Queirós et al., 2017). Furthermore, as the respondents did not receive the interview questions before the interview, it is possible that some participants could not remember certain details that could have been relevant for the research, or that if they had more time to think about certain questions, that they would have given different answers.

Lastly, a limitation related to the data analysis method is that, while double coding was performed, only one researcher analyzed the retrieved data, which could induce bias (Queirós et al., 2017). Therefore, for future research, it is advised that two or more researchers code the interviews, to prevent researcher bias.

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Appendix A: Thesis interview guide

- Thank participant for participating in the research
- Introduce yourself (researcher)
- Explain the goal of the research
- Explain that there are no right or wrong answers
- Inform participant of the length of the interview
- Inform participant of ethics, consent, processing of data
- Ask for permission to record the interview
- Ice breaker question: last concert attended? Nice music memory?

1. **Fans & fandoms**

- For how long have you been a fan of Louis Tomlinson?
- In your opinion, who is a fan?
- What makes you a fan of Louis?
- Are there other reasons besides the music why you are a fan of Louis? (if not answered before)
- How would you describe a fandom?
- What is your opinion on Louis Tomlinson's fandom?
    - o Do you consider yourself part of it?

2. **Artist-fan interactions**

- Does listening to music evoke certain emotions for you?
    - o Which ones?
- What are your motives for listening to music?
    - o Louis' music in specific?
- On what platforms do you listen to Louis' music?
- Do you own any physical music products, such as CDs, cassettes or vinyl?
    - o What are your reasons for (not) owning these?
- Do you use paid or unpaid services more?
    - o Paid = spotify premium, physical products, paid downloads
    - o Unpaid = YouTube, radio, free streaming

- In what ways do you identify with Louis Tomlinson or his music?
- How does being a fan of Louis influence the way you act, the clothing you wear etc.?
- How often do you engage with Louis' content?

- What platforms do you use to interact and engage with louis' non-musical content?
    - What platform do you use the most?
- What kind of content do you interact with the most?

3. **Consumer's ME**

- In what ways are you able to express yourself through louis' music?
- In what ways are you able to connect with other people through Louis' music?
- In what situations do you listen to Louis' music?

4. **Co-creational marketing**

- Do you often share or repost content from louis' social media?
- Why? Why not?
- What kind of content is this?
- What kind of content do you like to share?

- What is your opinion on contests or voting campaigns organized by Louis' team on social media to promote Louis' content?
- Do you engage in these kind of campaigns?
    - Why/why not?

- Do you know what user-generated content is?
- What is your opinion on user-generated content for the promotion of louis' music?
    - Can you elaborate on this?
- Can you give an example of user-generated content for Louis or other artists that you liked?

- Have you or your friends ever made content (such as art or designs) to promote Louis' music or events?
    - If yes, did you use your own content to make this, or did you use Louis' content (pictures, sounds, designs)
- Do you like seeing this kind of content?
    - Do you prefer interacting with this kind of content over content provided by Louis/his team?
- Have you ever bought merch that was made by a fan (e.g. through etsy)?
- Have you ever sold merch that you made yourself?
- Do you think fans can contribute to the marketing of music in a valuable way?

- In what ways?
- Do you think that fans have enough opportunities or resources to engage in the marketing of music?
  - Can you elaborate?
  - What about the marketing of Louis' music in specific?
- In your opinion, does Louis' team use content created by fans enough to your liking?
  - If not, why not?
  - Do you think they are using it to its full potential?
- In times when there is no new music to promote, do you think that a team should still post regularly?
  - Why?
  - Can you give examples of what they could post?
- Do you think fans are able to market Louis' music better than his team?
  - Why?
  - In what ways?
- Do you believe that social media allows fans to express themselves in the marketing or promotion of music that they like?
  - Can you give an example?
  - Any specific platforms?

- Does Listening to Louis' music evoke certain emotions?
  - Which ones?
  - Why?

- Is there anything you would like to add about fan involvement in marketing?
- Is there anything you would like to add in general?
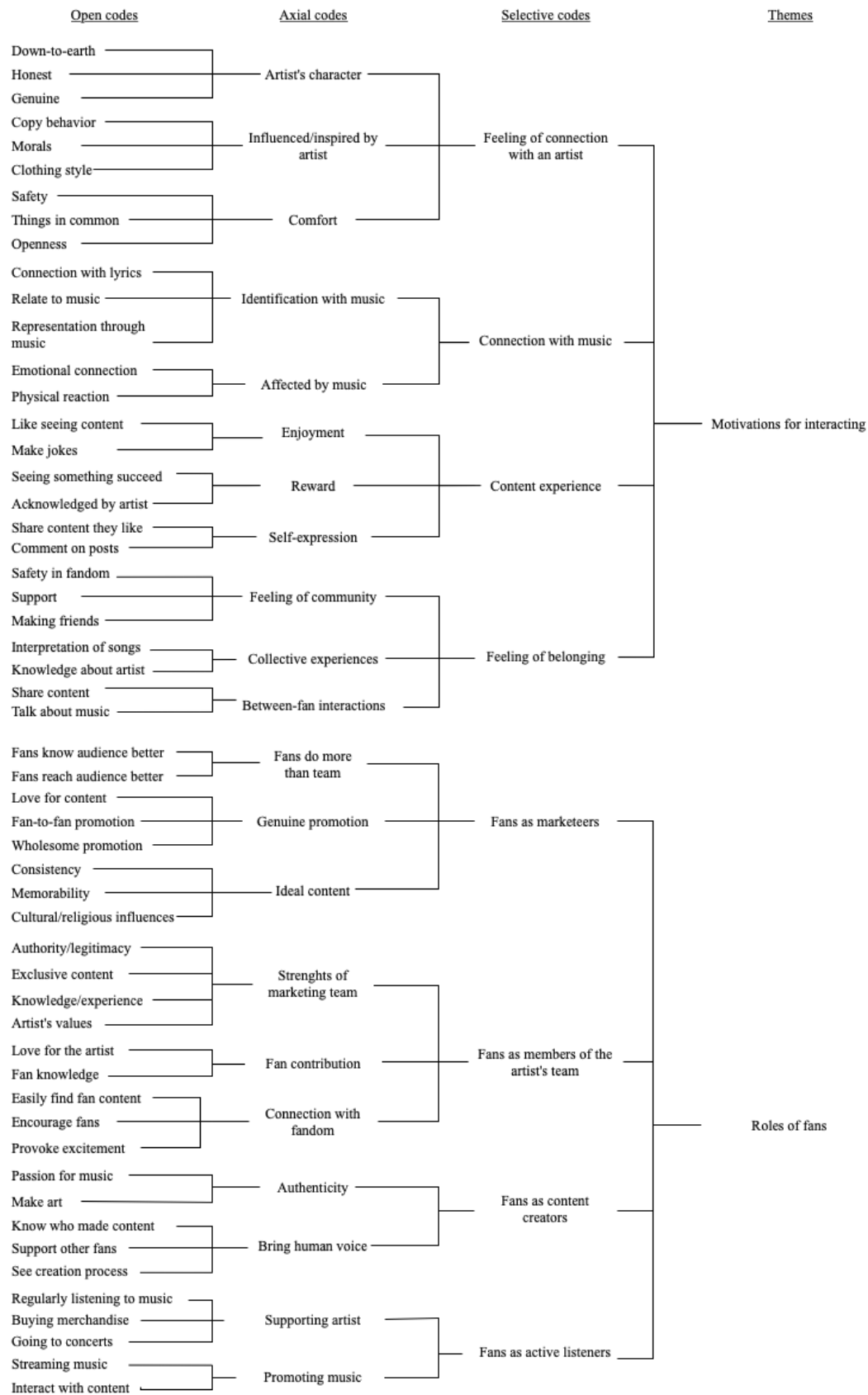
Appendix B: Coding tree

Open codes	Axial codes	Selective codes	Themes

Down-to-earth
Honest — Artist's character
Genuine
Copy behavior
Morals — Influenced/inspired by artist — Feeling of connection with an artist
Clothing style
Safety
Things in common — Comfort
Openness
Connection with lyrics
Relate to music — Identification with music
Representation through music — Connection with music
Emotional connection
Physical reaction — Affected by music
Like seeing content
Make jokes — Enjoyment — Motivations for interacting
Seeing something succeed
Acknowledged by artist — Reward — Content experience
Share content they like
Comment on posts — Self-expression
Safety in fandom
Support — Feeling of community
Making friends
Interpretation of songs
Knowledge about artist — Collective experiences — Feeling of belonging
Share content
Talk about music — Between-fan interactions

Fans know audience better
Fans reach audience better — Fans do more than team
Love for content
Fan-to-fan promotion — Genuine promotion — Fans as marketeers
Wholesome promotion
Consistency
Memorability — Ideal content
Cultural/religious influences
Authority/legitimacy
Exclusive content
Knowledge/experience — Strenghts of marketing team
Artist's values
Love for the artist — Fan contribution — Fans as members of the artist's team
Fan knowledge
Easily find fan content
Encourage fans — Connection with fandom — Roles of fans
Provoke excitement
Passion for music
Make art — Authenticity
Know who made content — Fans as content creators
Support other fans — Bring human voice
See creation process
Regularly listening to music
Buying merchandise
Going to concerts — Supporting artist
Streaming music — Fans as active listeners
Interact with content — Promoting music

Table B1: Coding tree

Appendix C: Informed consent form

CONSENT REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATING IN RESEARCH

For questions about the study, contact: Marloes Joosen, 480176mj@eur.nl

DESCRIPTION

You are invited to participate in a research about fan involvement in music marketing. The purpose of the study is to understand how fans perceive their role in the co-creational marketing of music.

Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you accept be interviewed. In general terms:

- the questions of the interview will be related to your experience as fan of Louis Tomlinson, your perspectives on co-creational marketing of music, and your motivations to interact with content.
- my observations will focus on your perceptions of being a fan and being part of a fandom, your motivations for interacting with content, and your opinions on and experiences with the marketing of music.

Unless you prefer that no recordings are made, I will record the audio of the interview.

I will use the material from the interviews and my observation exclusively for academic work, such as further research, academic meetings and publications.

You are always free to not answer specific questions and/or to stop participating at any point during the interview.

RISKS AND BENEFITS

As far as I can tell, there are no risks associated with participating in this research. I will not use your name or other identifying information (such as your Twitter account handle) in the study. Your age, gender and nationality will be used in an overview of the participants, unless you prefer that these are not disclosed.

TIME INVOLVEMENT

Your participation in this study will take approximately one hour. You may interrupt your participation at any time.

PAYMENTS

There will be no monetary compensation for your participation.

PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS

If you have decided to accept to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. If you prefer, your identity will be made known in all written data resulting from the study. Otherwise, your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS

If you have questions about your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact –anonymously, if you wish— mamedia@eshcc.eur.nl

SIGNING THE CONSENT FORM

If you sign this consent form, your signature will be the only documentation of your identity. Thus, you DO NOT NEED to sign this form. In order to minimize risks and protect your identity, you may prefer to consent orally. Your oral consent is sufficient.

I give consent to be audiotaped during this study:

Name   Signature   Date

I prefer my identity to be revealed in all written data resulting from this study:

Name   Signature   Date

This copy of the consent form is for you to keep.

Thank you so much for participating in my Master Thesis research.

Marloes Joosen