Avenues of Deeper Engagement

Through the Consumer Lens: Exploring the Motivations for Engagement and Consumer Experiences of Djerf Avenue's Online Brand Community Members - A Qualitative Study.

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ABSTRACT

With the rapid social media technologies persisting to impact the fashion industry, fashion marketers, brands and marketing researchers aim to comprehend the newfound opportunities these advancements create in attracting consumers, one of them being the emergence of Online Brand Communities (OBCs). To understand and leverage from this marketing phenomenon, firms must grasp consumers motivations to engage in these communities, and their consumer experiences within them. Thus, this thesis explored the OBC dynamics through the consumer perspective. This contributes to research on OBCs, given that understanding the behaviors within them is beneficial, both to marketing researchers and the fashion industry, as these communities reshape the traditional brand-consumer relationship. Additionally, as OBCs have become integral to their members' daily lives, attracting new ones consistently, it is very relevant to explore the members perspective. With a novel approach, the research focused on members of an established and successful OBC, of the Swedish fashion brand Djerf Avenue. Employing a qualitative research design, eleven semi-structured interviews were conducted, exploring the perspectives of OBC members. Findings from the thematic analysis demonstrated themes of motivations for engagement, aligning with the framework of Wirtz et al., (2013), while consumer experience themes revealed OBC's relevance in members' lives and personal identities, corresponding to the Consumer Culture theory (CCT) research. Furthermore, results did provide unique consumer perspectives, highlighting they value genuine consumer-to-brand communication, brand care, acknowledgment, and appreciation. The importance of these elements in consumers' motivations to engage and their experiences was notable across data and proven to facilitate positive consumer brand perception and community resilience. Fundamentally, this study makes a significant contribution to the literature on OBCs, by examining a successful OBC performing in the fashion market. This OBC was particularly relevant to research due to its prominence and the recent brand crisis it experienced, and as revealed by the findings, successfully overcame because of community solidarity. Therefore, this thesis provides invaluable insights for marketers, especially those in the fashion industry, and for (fashion) brands utilizing OBCs as part of their marketing strategy. Ultimately, it demonstrates effective OBC management and offers practical implications for sustaining brand resilience through OBC community engagement.

KEYWORDS: Online brand communities, consumer engagement, engagement motivations, consumer experience

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1. Introduction

In the contemporary global market, competition is compelling firms to seek innovative business approaches. This is due to technological advancements such as social media platforms, which have facilitated the shift from physical to virtual business establishments (Brogi, 2014, p. 386; Bilro & Loureiro, 2021, p. 61). Transforming consumer-to-brand communication, these platforms have accelerated consumer interaction, fostering participation (Borgi et al., 2013 p. 1). To leverage on the advantages of these communication channels, brand marketers must re-invent their marketing efforts using social media marketing strategies (Borgi et al., 2013, p. 1). The customary quality of such strategies is the facilitation and exploitation of word-of-mouth occurrences. In the social media realm, this beneficial phenomenon is enhanced, because consumers perceive information and recommendations from fellow users as incredibly relevant (Ho & Dempsey, 2010, pp. 1000-1006). Hence, embracing this digital transition offers companies new opportunities, with online brand communities (OBCs) emerging as a promising advantage (Brogi, 2014, p. 386).

OBCs are the revolutionized format of traditional brand communities, blending their features with Web 2.0 technologies, thus based on relationships among brand admirers, but not limited by geographical boundaries (Brogi, 2014, p. 386; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, pp. 412-432). These communities provide brands with a wide array of benefits, allowing companies to greatly enhance their understanding of customer needs, preferences, and desires (Brogi, 2014, p. 386). They serve as channels for information dissemination, fostering enduring relationships between brands and customers, connecting members through shared interests such as brand goods or services (Islam et al., 2018, pp. 23-24). Within these communities, consumers form meaningful connections through interactions, sharing their consumers experiences with brands, unrestricted by time and place (Islam et al., 2018, pp. 23-24).

OBCs have become particularly prominent in the fashion industry because fashion marketers appreciate them to be "powerful instruments for influencing consumers purchasing behaviors," thus adapting their marketing strategies to facilitate the growth of OBCs (Brogi et al., 2013, pp. 1-2; Helal, 2019, p. 143). Their growing importance is evident, with 76% of global Internet users engaging in OBCs in 2019, signaling a shift towards an interactive era in marketing (Bilro & Loureiro, 2021, p. 61; Hao & Liu, 2021, p. 1; Izogo and Mpinganjira, 2020, p. 19).

According to marketing scholars, this offers an unexplored opportunity for firms seeking to analyze consumer data by understanding engagement and its motivations (Bilro & Loureiro, 2021, p. 61, Kelley & Alden, 2016, pp. 790-791). Since the landscape of interactive marketing continues to evolve, understanding the reasons behind customer engagement in OBCs becomes increasingly relevant (Wang, 2021, pp. 6-7).

Thus, this study focuses on exploring the motivations behind consumer engagement and consumer experiences within a specific OBC, of the Swedish fashion brand Djerf Avenue. Researching this brand is particularly relevant due to the widespread use of OBCs in fashion marketing, and the magnitude of the brand's success, popularity, and OBC. This is echoed in impressive brand profits, with more than $2 million in revenue during its first year, $8 million in 2021 and $34.5 million in 2022 (Lundberg-Toresson, 2022, para. 3). Further contributing to the brands' relevance is its unique inception, crafted to meet the needs of a community rather than identifying a market gap, and its representation of the currently vastly influential "Scandinavian wave" in the global fashion market (Cochrane, 2023, para. 12; Forsberg, 2023, para. 2; Lundberg-Toresson, 2022, para. 3; Paton, 2022, para. 8). This prosperity is credited to their community-focused strategy, involving their committed OBC of *Djerf Angels*, engaged primarily through social media platforms, particularly Instagram, amassing over 684, 000 followers (Forsberg, 2023, para. 9). Fundamentally, through their customer-centric approach, Djerf Avenue manages to cultivate authentic word-of-mouth promotion, contributing to brand resilience (Deka, 2022, para. 5; Paton, 2022, para. 10). This is showcased in the turbulent times of brand crisis in 2023, during which OBC members served as loyal supporters, passionately defending the brand from negative sentiments on social media (Ware, 2023, para. 1). Consequently, the crisis was short-lived, rapidly disappearing from social media discourse, and the brand continued to prosper, embarking on new product development, and a multitude of successful collaborations (Martin, 2024, para. 8; Sangster, 2024, para. 2).

These achievements demonstrate the expanding success of Djerf Avenue, attesting to the resilience and strength of its OBC and their effective customer-focused approach. Therefore, it is imperative to explore the members of this OBC and examine what motivates them to engage, and how they describe and interpret their experience within the OBC. To research this OBC and the motivations behind consumer engagement and experiences within it, this study utilizes a qualitative

research approach, employing eleven semi-structured interviews with Djerf Avenue OBC members. To investigate the research topics, the following research question is established:

What are the motivations for engagement and consumer experiences of Djerf Avenue Online brand community members?

Academic relevance. As the literature highlights, due to the contemporary interactive era of marketing, it is incredibly relevant to better understand consumer engagement and consumer experiences in OBCs. Particularly crucial to explore are the motivations behind consumer engagement (Bilro & Loureiro, 2021, p. 61; Hamzah et al., 2021, para. 1; Heerden & Wiese, 2021, p. 354; Santini et al., 2020, pp. 1211-1228; Wang, 2021, pp. 6-7). There is a notable lack of literature exploring the consumer experience within specific OBCs (Heerden & Wiese, 2021, p. 354; Waqas et al., 2021, para. 98). Therefore, to fill this gap, this study intentionally focuses on one OBC and the motivations behind consumer engagement and experiences within it. Moreover, this study attends to the Marketing Science Institute's 2018–2020 Research Priorities that highlight the necessity of empirical research specifically on consumer experiences in the social media advertising environment (MSI, 2018; Waqas 2020, p. 187). Additionally contributing to academic discourse, this research utilizes a nuanced theoretical approach, applying the Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) perspective, Witz et al.'s (2013, p. 230) theoretical model of consumer motivations, and Schau et al.'s (2009, p. 36) model of consumer engagement practices in its investigation. Furthermore, a qualitative approach is employed, for an in-depth understanding of consumer motivations and experience within the chosen OBC. This methodology adds a novel approach to previous research on OBCs, which predominantly employed quantitative methodologies.

Societal Relevance. Even though social media has provided fashion brands with new pathways for consumer interaction, they consequently shifted the control from brands hands into the consumers, through influencers, online blogs and reviews, tags, and other consumer content creation formats. These formats have the power to significantly impact the brands reputation both in positive and negative ways and is out of the brand's command (Amed et al., 2017, p. 35; Gensler et al., 2013, pp. 242-256; Kochhar, 2020, p. 11; Mazzoli et al., 2019, pp. 33-49). Given these challenges, it imperative that brands not only establish a presence on social media, but effectively position themselves, in ways beneficial both for them and their consumers (Amed et al., 2019, p.

33). Thus, this study holds substantial business significance for fashion brands, offering insights for brand marketers utilizing social media for their branding. Because of the contemporary highly competitive market, where new fashion brands emerge daily, it is incredibly relevant to research a brand which showcases success and resilience in their social media brand positioning (Helal, 2019, p. 147). Moreover, this research provides valuable insights and implications for marketers who are investing in OBCs to achieve positive brand outcomes. The findings from this study contribute to the enhancement of brands' understanding of their consumers, thereby improving their brand engagement and community creation strategies.

Furthermore, since fashion brands are not in absolute command of their marketing strategies, because of consumers newfound power of content creation which shapes brands development in the social media realm, consumers voices must not be disregarded (Gensler et al., 2013, pp. 242-256; Kochhar, 2020, p. 11; Quach & Thaichon, 2017, pp.163-172). Therefore, this study's societal relevance lies in prioritizing the consumer's perspective. With the new interactive role of consumers in the marketplace, it is imperative to understand their digital engagement from their experiences (Eigenraam et al., 2018, p. 102, Heerden & Wiese, 2021, p. 354). This study captures this, through the exploration of consumers' active involvement in OBCs, by understanding their motivations for engagement and their experiences. It offers deep and valuable insights from the consumers' side, thus enabling brands to tailor their marketing strategies effectively. Also, the study highlights consumer brand perception and the role community solidarity play in building resilient brands, and the importance of community support in crisis management. Therefore, it guides brands like Djerf Avenue, in building and maintaining OBCs. Insights from this research can improve marketing strategies, inform strategic community-building efforts, aid brands in fostering an engaged community, and facilitating long-term brand loyalty. The study provides relevant insights for brands seeking to enhance consumer engagement, build stronger communities, and achieve long-lasting growth in the social media era.

This thesis is structured as follows. The upcoming chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the literature regarding the foundations of OBCs, from their inception to their current form, following their impact on the fashion industry. Consequently, the concepts in the research questions are presented, and relevant studies that previously examined these concepts are explored. Following this, the Djerf Avenue OBC characteristics are explained. In Chapter 3, the research process is thoroughly explained and justified. Following this, the findings are presented, with

relevant discoveries emerging from the data. Finally, a conclusion and an answer to the research question are provided in the last chapter, followed by a discussion on the findings offering implications for marketers, and limitations of this study and future suggestions.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Community

The idea of community was initially confined to geographical boundaries, formed around interpersonal trust and shared emotional and familiar values, often within rural conditions (Borgi, 2013, p. 385-386; Lopez et al., 2016, p. 1; Wiegandt, 2009, p. 1). Despite the many definitions of community, sociological literature highlights three core components (Muniz & O'Guin, 2001, p. 413). The first and most crucial element is what Gusfield (1978) calls consciousness of kind, the intrinsic connection members feel towards one another and the sense of distinction from non-members. This transcends shared attitudes or perceived similarity, representing a collective sense of belonging (Weber, 1978). The second component is the presence of shared rituals and traditions, and the third is a sense of moral responsibility and duty towards the community and its members (Muniz & O'Guin, 2001, p. 413).

In comparison to the past, communities of today are vastly different. This is a result of the profound transformations in societies and economies of the world since the nineteenth century (Wirtz et al., 2013, p. 223). According to early sociologists, it is the depersonalization of the urban society in the nineteenth century that led to the disappearance of the traditional communities due to the impact of commerce, since the rise of consumer culture was the driving force of modernity (Muniz & O'Guin, 2001, p. 412-413). Because individuals became sensible of societies and their individual consumerist essence, they began actively engaging in consumer culture (Amine & Sitz, 2004, p. 1) resulting in "communities of consumption" (Boorstin, 1973). This type of community accumulates individuals with shared values and norms shaped by their common consumption of the same store, brand, or product (Amine & Sitz, 2004 p. 1). This form of community was first introduced to marketing literature by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001, p. 412) as a brand community, "a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand".

With the advent of the Internet, brand communities started taking place online, galvanizing the gathering of people with shared interests and from different backgrounds (Amine & Sitz, 2004, p. 3). Consequently, new technologies provided individuals the ability to share their common identity beyond borders, giving rise to online brand communities (OBCs) (Amine & Sitz, 2004, p. 1-10; Brogi, 2014, p. 386). Key to the expansion of such communities are social media platforms,

broadly defined as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (Hilde, 2019, p. 19; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). Specifically, the inception of social media platforms such as Instagram, laid the groundwork for user-generated content, initially utilized by individuals, now embraced by corporations and industries (Helal, 2019, p. 148; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010 pp. 38-52; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2012, pp. 56-68). Nowadays, Instagram-based OBCs draw a considerable portion of the population (Brogi, 2014, p. 387) due to the platforms' growing influence on consumers' daily lives (Dewing, 2010, p. 2). This is exemplified by research, which highlights users spending approximately 135 minutes daily on these platforms (Hilde, 2019 p. 14).

Because of such engagement, users contribute and participate in social interactions on social media capable of impacting other individuals, consumers, and organizations (Helal, 2019 p. 148; Parameswaran & Whinston, 2007, pp. 336–350). Consumers' increasing impact through the voice of social media and proficiency in using these platforms incentivized companies to engage consumers through OBCs (Islam et al., 2018, p. 2). This spurred the growth of these communities in the last decade, with around 50% of the leading global brands utilizing OBCs as a marketing strategy (Islam et al., 2018, p. 2). However, this marketing phenomenon presents brands with both challenges and opportunities (Bellman et al., 2006, pp. 21-29), since their success and status are hugely conditioned by the engagement within the OBCs (Lopez et al., 2016, p. 2)

OBCs can be instrumental in enabling companies to obtain their goals (Kim & Jin, 2006, pp. 44-51) and in improving the efficiency of the development of products and providing the brand with novel ideas (Okazaki, 2007, pp. 31–48). Thus, by leveraging social media like Instagram, OBCs facilitate member engagement, empowering consumers to co-create brand meaning and content, exchange information and express brand passion, (re-)shaping consumer-brand relationships (Brogi, 2014, p. 2; Veloutsou & Liao, 2022, p. 432). Studies of Dessart & Veloutsou, (2021), Habibi et al., (2014), Huang et al., (2022), and Laroche et al., (2012) argue OBCs contribute several brand benefits, such as marketing suggestions, positive word-of-mouth, brand loyalty and trust, maintenance of consumer–brand relationships and influence consumer (re-)purchasing intentions (Veloutsou & Liao, 2022, p. 432). Given OBCs reported beneficial outcomes, academics, and organizations have shown a growing interest in implementing OBCs, and consumers'

engagement on these platforms (Islam et al., 2018, p. 24; Kelley & Alden, 2016, pp. 790-808; Naidoo & Hollebeek, 2016, pp. 3113-3121; Zhou et al., 2014, 69-79).

2.2. Fashion OBCs

The fashion industry is among those with a growing interest in OBCs (Helal 2019 p. 143). This is expected, due to the changes in the global fashion market. Two decades ago, fashion brands were supported by brand assets and reliable loyal customers (Borgi et al., 2013, p. 3). The growth of the market and the competition caused changes (Borgi et al., 2013, p. 3). Particularly evident are the changes the Internet and social media platforms made to the industry, making fashion goods more accessible than ever and allowing consumers to purchase them via social media, simultaneously exchanging their fashion brand experiences with other consumers (Borgi et al., 2013, p. 3). This change transformed the average fashion consumer into a well-informed, hard, and demanding one (Borgi et al., 2013, p. 3).

The technological renaissance is experienced by both fashion companies, and their customers, enabling novel formats of marketing, such as social media marketing (Borgi et al., 2013, p. 3). This shift is unsurprising, given studies indicate consumers' preferred informant for fashion news is social media (Helal, 2019, p. 145). By adopting social media as their primary fashion source, consumers gain control, becoming crucial players in exchanging fashion information. This is exemplified by relevant events such as the 2016 Milan Fashion Week generating over 60 percent of Instagram traffic from users and bloggers (Statista, 2016; Helal, 2019, pp. 145-146). These statistics highlight Instagram's impact on translating fashion trends, sustaining consumer attention through interaction, and disseminating real-time content to viral audiences, guaranteeing brands a universal presence. Accordingly, fashion giants such as Chanel and Louis Vuitton, and fast fashion brands like Zara and H&M gathered high visibility over social media due to Instagram, featuring a 98 percent penetration rate (Statista, 2016; Helal, 2019, p. 145). This incentivizes brands to transform the consumer experience through this platform, leading many fashion brands to create their own OBCs (Borgi et al., 2013, p. 5).

Fashion OBCs are defined by emotional and socio-cultural factors consisting of a shared brand passion and social integration where members share a common fashion style and an emotional relationship with the fashion brand (Borgi et al., 2013, p. 5). Two primary types of OBCs exist: official OBCs and spontaneous OBCs. Both are of great interest for their managerial

implications. The spontaneous OBCs are consumer-made communities built by fashion brand enthusiasts. Official OBCs are created by the brand itself, aiming to proactively cause members to interact with the brand and exchange brand information with other members (Borgi et al., 2013, p. 2-3; Okonkwo, 2010, p. 100). OBCs enable fashion brands and their consumers to facilitate unrestricted, real-time communication, transforming traditional one-way marketing into interactive dialogues--an inventive, direct two-way communication format unrestricted by place and time (Borgi et al., 2013, p. 3).

Fundamentally, OBCs have an immense impact on brand reputation, therefore fashion brands that do not utilize social media platforms in their marketing are most certainly losing a competitive advantage (Borgi et al., 2013, p. 3; Kim & Ko, 2010, pp. 1480-1486). Thus, fashion marketeers are particularly interested in comprehending the motivations fashion consumers must join and engage in a fashion OBC. In 2011, global OBC memberships totaled 90 million, indicating a rising trend. Recognizing the substantial influence of OBCs in contemporary society, fashion companies must grasp their impact on consumers (Brogi et al., 2013, p. 5; Helal, 2019, p. 143-147).

2.3. Online brand communities from the consumer lens

OBCs offer consumers several benefits (Veloutsou & Liao, 2022, p. 431). Previous studies of Carlson et al., (2019) Essamri et al., (2019) Füller et al., (2008), Sanz-Blas et al., (2019) Schau et al., (2009), and Huang et al., (2022) note that in OBCs, the relationship among members, and members and the brand, as well as brand-centric interactions, cater to many personal needs and facilitate social benefits. Further, OBCs foster a shared ground for consumers to share their experiences both personal and brand-related, through expressions of feelings, comments, obtaining advice, or giving advice themselves (Veloutsou & Liao, 2022, pp. 431-432). By engaging in an OBC, consumers aim to derive value from the community and the brand. Their engagement results in enhanced positive consumer experiences, thus strengthening their relationship to the brand, and connection with each other (Algesheimer et al., 2010, pp. 779-781; Wirtz et al., 2013, p. 2). This enhancement of consumer experience present in OBCs is instrumental as it leads to the realization of purchasing intentions, all through consumer engagement (Akram & Kortam, 2020, p. 27). Thus, marketing strategies evolved to prioritize attracting actively engaged consumers through unique

experiences within OBCs (Akram & Kortam, 2020, p. 27; Park & Kim, 2014, pp. 460-467; Simon et al., 2016, p. 419)

2.3.1. Consumer Experience in OBC

Consumer experience has become recognized as a relevant phenomenon in managerial practice with imperative implications for relationship-building with consumers (Waqas et al., 2020, para 2). Ever since 1998, this concept has been extensively utilized in the marketing discipline, making it a growing priority for research (Waqas et al., 2020, para 5). The initial definition of consumer experience emerged with Schmitt's (1999) study, an extension of the work of Pine and Gilmore (1998) (Waqas et al., 2020, p. 189). Schmitt (1999) proposed that such experiences encompass sensory, relational, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive values that emerge during interactions or decision-making processes with a brand (Waqas et al., 2021, para. 966). In an online setting, customer experience encompasses a comprehensive reaction to stimuli within a website environment (Morgan-Thomas & Veloutsou, 2013, pp. 21-27). For instance, online stimuli influence experiential outcomes by emphasizing usability and functionality (Flavian et al., 2006, pp. 363-375) and by providing hedonic stimulation through entertainment and enjoyment (Bridges & Florsheim, 2008, pp. 309-314). Therefore, online customer experiences involve both rational, goal-oriented aspects and emotional, affective elements (Rose et al., 2011, pp. 24-39; Waqas et al., 2021, p. 966).

Novel communication technologies such as social media, bring divergent consumer experiences, since they enable marketers to create real-time consumer experiences (Fujita et al., 2018, pp. 55–71), and allow consumers to interact easier than ever with each other and brands. Thus, understanding the consumer experience within these platforms, is deemed more important than ever (Brodie et al., 2011, pp. 252–271; Hsu & Yen, 2016, pp. 689–709; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016, pp. 69–96; Mathur, 2018, pp. 19–39; Muniz & O'guinn, 2001, pp. 412–432; Muniz & Schau, 2005, pp. 737-747; Solem & Pedersen, 2016, pp. 223–254; Waqas et al., 2020, p. 185). Traditionally, companies were the primary creators of consumer experience meanings, which were then communicated to consumers (Hoffman & Novak, 1996, pp. 50–68). Nowadays however, with the rise of consumer communities on social media such as OBCs, consumers have the power to co-create, adapting the company-generated experiences and creating their meaning of those experiences (Gensler et al., 2013, pp. 242–256).

Therefore, companies/brands have lost their power as the exclusive creators of the meanings of consumer experience (Kuksov et al., 2013, pp. 294–309). This is because social media platforms have allowed consumers to incorporate their meanings of experiences and distribute them to other community members (Waqas et al., 2020, para. 11). Hence, companies must examine how their consumers understand the brand's communication of products and offerings, and consumers process of giving meaning to them, because brands can include these meanings in formulating an improved consumer experience. This study aids this by examining the consumer experience in a specific OBC within a social media context. To do so this study adopts the lens of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), which in recent years has emerged as an adequate theoretical lens to research consumer experience (Waqas et al., 2020, para 9).

CCT proposes that consumers collaboratively create the meanings of their experiences by harnessing the stimuli developed by the brand (Gensler et al., 2013, pp. 242–256). Many researchers have applied CCT to comprehend consumer experiences in various contexts. A notable trend in research is the exploration of consumer experience with social media, specifically with brand social media pages (Tafesse, 2016, pp. 927–943; Waqas et al., 2020, para 9). Some scholars (Waqas et al., 2020, p. 190) claim the academic literature on the exploration of consumer experience with brand social media pages through the CCT lens is limited, thus this study aims to fill this gap through its investigation.

More specifically, CCT regards a family of theoretical perspectives that elaborate how brand-related interactions between consumers allow individuals to "infuse" their thoughts and meanings into brand interactions (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, pp. 868–882; Gensler et al., 2013, pp. 242–256; Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012, pp. 189–197; Waqas et al., 2020, para. 10). The consumer culture term refers to the system of commercially formed images, discourses, experiences, objects, and signs that a specific social group utilizes to form their meaning of the environment and their social experiences and identity (Kozinets, 2001, pp. 67–88; Waqas et al., 2020, p. 190). Fundamentally, CCT views consumer experiences defined by co-creation of meanings "mutually" between consumers, who "assign and adopt meanings to market generated artefacts" (Geertz, 2008; Nairn et al., 2008, pp. 627–640; Waqas et al., 2020, para. 10).

Moreover, CCT addresses how consumers use brand-created objects such as advertisements, products, or in the contemporary lens, social media branded content, to construct a sense of self (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, pp. 868–882). According to Branch (2007, pp. 79-99), self-identity

is shaped by how individuals connect with their purchases, and the symbols said purchases represent, and this connection between material possessions and their meanings is constantly strengthened over time. This self-identity reinforcing consumption can enhance customer experiences with the object of consumption (Escalas et al., 2013, pp. 15–18 Waqas et al., 2020, para. 38).

Further, CCT concerns how consumers give meanings to their consumer experiences collaboratively, establishing unique cultural environments to fulfill common consumption goals, like in an OBC (Kozinets, 2002, pp. 20-38; Waqas et al., 2020, para. 39). Hence, social bonds are formed between consumers, as they pursue their desired experiences engaging in various activities centered on shared lifestyle interests to create unity and solidarity amongst each other (Belk & Costa, 1998, pp. 218–240; Waqas et al., 2020, para. 38).

Additionally, CCT emphasizes that consumers attribute meaning to their experiences on a humor basis and aesthetic traits of the objects of consumption or branded content (Sherry & Kozinets, 2007, pp. 119–147; Waqas et al., 2020, para. 38). According to CCT consumers further seek for sensory gratifying experience with the brand (Turner, 2017, pp. 109-130), and such experiences are produced by "aesthetically pleasing stimuli in the form of well-designed products and creative advertisements" (Waqas et al., 2020, para. 39; Shimp & Andrews, 2013, p. 57). As mentioned by Hatcher (1999) these aesthetically pleasing objects strengthen the social bonds between the community members, offering them aesthetic enjoyment. Thus, aesthetically pleasant, and humorous stimuli can result in positive consumer experiences, which are beneficial for the brand, as they lead to consumer engagement (Waqas et al., 2020, para. 40).

Overall, CCT illustrates that individuals interact with marketing materials of brands, defining meanings of their experiences, namely meanings associated to their *self-identity* (Borgerson & Schroeder, 2018, pp. 103-136; Patterson & Schroede, 2010, pp. 253–267), *social bonding* (Calder et al., 2016, pp. 321-331; Phelps et al., 2004, pp. 333-348; Wolf et al., 2016, pp. 322-337), *aesthetic* (Lavie & Tractinsky, 2004, pp. 269-298; Parmentier & Fischer, 2007, pp. 23-39; Sredl, 2007, pp. 187-205), and *humor* (Alden et al., 1993, pp. 64-75; Lee & Lim, 2008, pp. 73-84). These experiences, although perhaps not resonant with a greater culture in society, are possibly fundamental to a brand community's culture (Waqas et al., 2020, p. 190). Thus, the CCT framework not only aligns with the context of OBCs, where consumer engagement involves collaborative brand content meaning-making (Waqas et al., 2021, p. 956), but also serves as a

valuable tool in addressing the research question, centered around consumer experience. Moreover, it is beneficial as this study focuses on consumer engagement, and the concept of consumer experience has become integral to the academic discourse on amplifying consumer engagement (Mollen & Wilson, 2010, pp. 919–925; Waqas et al., 2020, para. 40).

2.3.2. Consumer Engagement in OBCs

Literature of several marketing scholars (Bitter & Grabner-Kräuter, 2016, pp. 219-231; Islam and Rahman, 2016, pp. 40-58; Islam et al., 2018, p. 24; Khan et al., 2016, pp. 588-606) note the need for inquiry about consumer engagement in OBCs to better understand it. In that context, scholarly research has particularly been emphasized (MSI, 2016), and thus this study aims to further expand the discourse on this topic.

The concept of consumer engagement (CE) has been explored in special issues of esteemed academic journals such as the Journal of Service Research (2010), the Journal of Strategic Marketing (2010), and the Journal of Product and Brand Management (2014) (Dessart et al., 2015, p. 28). In marketing literature, CE is characterized as a mental state arising from interactive and collaborative experiences with a central entity such as a brand (Brodie et al., 2011, pp. 252-271; Dessart et al., 2015, p. 28). Emerging from relationship marketing (Fournier, 1998, pp. 343-353), CE builds upon existing theories of consumer-brand relationships, emphasizing interactive and experiential values (Dessart et al., 2015, p. 28; Vivek et al., 2012, pp. 122-146). In an online context specifically, CE is defined as "the cognitive and affective commitment to an active relationship with the brand as personified by the website or other computer-mediated entities designed to communicate brand value" (Mollen and Wilson, 2010, p. 5; Wirtz et al., 2013, p. 235). Due to the advent of social media, CE, initially transactional, has evolved to emphasize relationships and co-creation with consumers in recent decades, signifying a change in marketing objectives toward engaging consumers in meaningful ways (Cuevas-Molano et al., 2021, p. 143532). OBCs serve as a transparent brand strategy for such engagement (Kumar & Pansari, 2016, p. 294-311). CE in OBCs is defined as a sense of belonging translated into active participation within the community (Brodie et al., 2011, pp. 252-271).

There are several outcomes of CE in OBCs for consumers (Wirtz et al., 2013, p. 234). This includes continued participation, satisfaction, and increased trust and commitment (Witz et al.,

2013, p. 234). Numerous studies affirm that OBC participation positively influences community commitment and intention to remain members (Casaló et al., 2007, pp. 57-80; Jang et al., 2008 pp. 57-80; Wirtz et al., 2013, p. 234). By engaging in OBCs consumers aspire to acquire knowledge and enhance their social interactions, leading to satisfaction when said goals are met or exceeded (Wirtz et al., 2013, p. 234; Woisetschläger et al., 2008, pp. 237-256). Satisfaction with the OBC directly impacts consumers' intentions to engage in positive behaviors such as advocating for the brand and remaining loyal in their purchasing decisions (Schouten et al., 2007, pp. 357-368; Wirtz et al., 2013, p. 234). Stronger community engagement correlates with continued membership (Algesheimer et al., 2005, pp. 19-34) suggesting that high OBC engagement positively influences satisfaction and loyalty (Wirtz et al., 2013, p. 234). Constant consumer engagement in OBCs also enhances the strength of the brand through the facilitation of brand commitment, brand satisfaction and loyalty, and spirited brand engagement (Helal, 2019, p. 146; Wirtz et al., 2013, p. 234). Consumers who have a deeper OBC commitment also often tend to have stronger brand commitment, and they become invested in brand failures and successes (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, pp. 20-39; Kim, J.H. et al., 2008, pp. 357-376; Wirtz et al., 2013 p. 235). Thus, as Wirtz et al., (2013, p. 235) conclude, individuals who are committed to an OBC are most likely to develop positive attitudes toward the brand.

The consumer's perspective of their engagement within OBC is therefore relevant to explore, given that the sustainable growth and success of OBCs depend heavily on the members, their continuous participations, and their commitment. This is especially important in the online realm since members can easily alternate to different communities (Wirtz et al., 2013, p. 234). Thus, to holistically grasp the understanding of consumer engagement within the OBC of its focus, this study seeks specific insights into the members' engagement practices. The meaning of practices has been understood in the context of the definition as "anything people do" (Holebeek et al., 2017, p. 6; Ortner, 1984, pp. 126-166). Social practice theory specifies it as repeated actions constitutive of shared meaning among users, and consumption opportunities or the (co-)creation of value (Holt, 1995, pp. 1-16). Practices are autonomous, repeated actions or behaviors characterized by general procedural understandings and rules and activities through which emotional commitment is expressed (Hollebeek et al., 2017, p. 7; Schau et al., 2009, p. 30). The activities carried out within OBCs become specific brand-related practices through repetition and ritualization (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 243).

To explore the engagement practices of Djerf Avenue OBC members, this study adopts the pioneering model of CE practices within brand communities of Schau et al., (2009, pp. 32-40) which identifies 12 practices across four themes. The first theme, *social networking practices*, highlights the homogeneity of brand communities and strengthening of social bonds. It includes the practices of *welcoming*, (greeting/assisting newcomers in the community), *empathizing*, (providing emotional support) and *governing* (articulating behavioral expectations of members) (Schau et al., 2009, p. 32). The second theme, *impression management practices*, emphasizes the creation of favorable brand impressions beyond the community (Schau et al., 2009, p. 33). These encompass *evangelizing* (sharing positive brand stories) and *justifying* (expressing brand devotion). The third theme, *community engagement practices* reinforce brand community heterogeneity and provide social capital for members. These include *staking* (acknowledging variance within community members) milestoning, (celebrating brand milestones) *badging* (celebrating through symbols) and *documenting* (consumer narration of journey with the brand). The final theme, *brand use practices*, relate to enhancing brand use, *grooming* (brand care or care for a brand product) customizing (customizing brand to suit needs), and *commoditizing* (expressing behaviors related to the marketplace, either directed at other members or the brand itself) (Schau et al., 2009, p. 39).

2.3.3. Consumer motivations for engagement in OBC

Despite the prevalent discourse on consumer engagement in marketing, there is a necessary need for further clarity on the motivations behind consumer engagement, as current research lacks coherence (Eigenraam et al., 2018; Heerden & Wiese, 2021). Literature by Herdeen & Wiesse (2021, p. 355) highlights that empirical research on the antecedents of engagement is scarce (Baek et al., 2011, pp. 2243-2248; Romero, 2017, pp. 293-306). As defined by van Doorn et al., (2010, pp. 253-266) consumer engagement motivations encompass goals, resources, and expectations of value outcomes, extending beyond mere purchases (Matute et al., 2019, p. 362). "Motivation" is defined as the influential factors shaping human behavior, either driving individuals toward specific actions or redirecting them away from others (Heerden & Wiese, 2021, p. 355).

This study, aiming to understand the motivations behind consumers engagement in the chosen OBC, adopts Wirtz et al.'s (2013) widely recognized conceptual model, which identifies three key drivers of consumer engagement in OBCs. These include brand-related drivers such as *brand identification*, (consumers linking identity with brand meaning) and *brand symbolic function*

(consumers motivated to engage due to brand symbolic meaning) (Wirtz et al., 2013, p. 230). The former entails consumers identifying with the brand motivates them to engage with it and similar consumers who relate to their ardour. The latter particularly pertains to the brands such as Harley-Davidson, Nike, and Apple, whose community members fortify the brand meaning and form a meeting ground where they can showcase their commitment (Ouwersloot & Odekerken-Schröder, 2008, pp. 571-585; Wirtz et al., 2013, p. 230).

The second set are social drivers, such as *social benefits*, (bonding, assistance), and *social identity* (deriving self-esteem from group membership) (Wirtz et al., 2013, p. 230-231). The community interaction within the OBC parallels that within the traditional community, with certain affect-based and socially relevant benefits for members (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001, p. 413). This may simply be asking help from other members, promoting ties among OBC members, and their sense of belonging, while consolidating the social benefits (Wirtz et al., 2013, p. 231). The studies of OBCs looking at the interactions among consumers, particularly focusing on the collective self (Lam et al., 2010, pp. 128-146), emphasize the significance of identifying with the same brands for the formation of a social group. What is more, steadily running consumer communities encourage commonality among their members, which results in members' personal identity being heavily premised on brand identity (Wirtz et al., 2013, p. 231; Lam et al., 2010, pp. 128-146).

The final set encompasses functional drivers: *functional benefits* (information-based support, recommendations, issue resolutions, tips), *uncertainty avoidance* (easing purchase decision through community reassurance about product quality), *information quality* (brand-related information exchange ensuring high information credibility) and *monetary* (loyalty points, price promotions) and *explicit normative incentives* (calls to adhere to community norms). OBC members provide relevant information to fellow members, recommending products or purchases, possible product issues, and advice on usage (Dholakia et al., 2009). According to Ouwersloot and Odekerken-Schröder (2008, pp. 571-585), OBCs can manage the problem of uncertainty about the quality of the product. Reducing uncertainty through these channels helps even experienced OBC (Adjei et al., 2010, pp. 634-653; Mattila & Wirtz, 2002, pp. 214-230; Wirtz et al., 2013, p. 231-232). Participation and engagement in OBCs are frequently encouraged through various forms of monetary incentives including loyalty points or price promotions (Wirtz et al., 2013, p. 232).

2.4. Djerf Avenue Online Brand Community

Founded in 2019 by the Swedish model turned content creator Matilda Djerf and her partner Rasmus Johannson, Djerf Avenue is a clothing brand, selling sustainable ready-to-wear pieces including blazers, jeans, slippers, and bathrobes, as well as accessories, home furnishings and most recently, beauty products. The Djerf Avenue website states it aims to embody the essence of a "confident, chic, and laid-back person on the go" inspired by "a love for vintage and essential basics" (Djerf Avenue, 2023). The label operates exclusively online through its website and prominent social media platforms. Notably, Instagram currently numbers 684,000 followers, TikTok with 410,000 followers and a hashtag which amassed over 40 million views (Forsberg, 2023, para. 3; Paton, 2022, para. 4). Much of this online virality can be attributed to the brand's co-founder, having generated a strong follower base before creating the brand.

Born and raised in Sweden in 1997 in the small town of Borås, Matilda Djerf has risen to online fame, counting 3 million Instagram followers and almost 300,000 YouTube subscribers (McInerney, 2024, para. 1). In relevant fashion and lifestyle media outlets she is most recognizable for her fashion sense and prominent hairstyle often dubbed as the "Scandinavian princess," "European It Girl" (Widjojo, 2022, para. 1), and the "Brigitte Bardot of the Nordics" (McInerney, 2024, para. 1). Besides her fashion impact, Matilda's uniqueness among social media influencers, is the distinctive online communication style with her followers (Paton, 2022, para. 8). Through her Instagram profile, @MatildaDjerf, she shares moments in her personal life ranging from cooking and leisurely walks to personal confessions. These snippets of her everyday are captured realistically, often addressing weighty topics such as mental health, and her adolescent battles with anorexia and orthorexia (Paton, 2022, para. 27). This consolidates her sincerity and authenticity as she claims to "help raise awareness, so people feel less alone" (Paton, 2022, para. 27).

The brand reflects the same type of values, and sincere personal approach, communicating an authentic personality to consumers (Chan, 2024, para. 1). This has been present since the brand's very inception, set to meet the needs of a community rather than identifying a market gap, as Matilda stated in an interview with Vogue Scandinavia (Forsberg, 2023 para. 3). In another interview, with the New York Times, Johansson and Djerf claimed they "try to be more than just a brand" and that they "are just as focused on building a community" (Paton, 2022 para. 3). Defining the brand as her "safe space," Matilda fortifies this authentic and community-oriented approach in her statement on Djerf Avenue's website, where she expresses hopes that this sense of

security reaches consumers through the products and content created by Djerf Avenue (Djerf Avenue, 2024).

Although relatively new, Djerf Avenue's substantial success offers a plethora of insights for researchers, especially fashion brand marketers utilizing social media for their branding (Lundberg-Toresson, 2022 para. 3). Significant media such as the New York Times note the brand's significance in the fashion market dubbing it as a "multimillion-dollar lifestyle empire" which successfully caters to the "TikTok generation" (Chan, 2022, para. 2; Paton, 2022, para. 1). Fashion media outlets, such as Vogue, highlight that Djerf Avenue is transforming the standards within the fashion industry through its sustainability and transparency focused philosophy, and inclusive marketing and sizing (Forsberg, 2023, para. 1). Sustainability is manifested in Djerf Avenue aiming to create clothes which "stand the test of time" utilizing high-quality materials to create timeless clothing pieces, instead of following fashion trends (Lundberg-Toresson, 2022 para. 2). Accordingly, their website highlights commitment to ethical production of lasting fashion items. They claim to be a vegan brand and member of the Fur Free Retailer program, manufacturing in Portugal, Italy, and Sweden, and collaborating only with certified factories to ensure ethical labor practices (Djerf Avenue, 2024).

Moreover, Djerf Avenue's website and social media channels communicate their full commitment to inclusivity and authenticity. Their marketing campaigns, website, and social media branded content feature mostly customers and employees as models reflecting the diversity of individuals who wear their clothes (Djerf Avenue, 2024). The brand never retouches photos of models or clothing items, thus displaying authentically different body types, ethnicities, and disabilities, including models in wheelchairs or with colostomy bags (Forbes, 2023). They offer a wide size range from XXS to 3XL and capture their products in all eight sizes on all their channels, thereby addressing various body types. According to Matilda Djerf, the brand's aim to showcase how their products fit on diverse bodies is "the bare minimum" (Forsberg, 2023, para. 11).

This strong commitment to sustainability, transparency, authenticity, and inclusivity clearly resonates with consumers. Demonstrated with more than $2 million in revenue during its first year, $8 million in sales in 2021 and $34.5 million in 2022 and a global expansion to New York with a Pop-Up in September 2023, the rapid success is undeniable (Lundberg-Toresson, 2022, para. 3). Their prosperity is credited to their community-focused strategy, involving the loyal and committed Official OBC the brand-named *Djerf Angels* (Forsberg, 2023, para. 9). The centrality of OBC is

evident from Matilda Djerf crediting the mastery of branding management to the loyalty and trust of their OBC members (Forsberg, 2023, para. 9). The OBC is engaged primarily through social media platforms, particularly Instagram – the largest, and most active community channel. Regarding the size and composition of the OBC, according to Djerf Avenue, the OBC officially includes all their six hundred seventy-two thousand followers (currently) (Djerf Avenue, n.d.).

Their Instagram OBC encompasses several unique characteristics that enhance both consumer engagement and consumer experience. The brand actively engages consumers and facilitates co-creation of branded content by reposting consumer made content, featuring individuals wearing Djerf Avenue clothing. This is presented in Djerf Avenues branded content, including reels stories and posts on social media, which prioritizes authentic customers wearing their pieces. This type of content establishes a relatable bond, setting the brand apart from other influencer-driven labels (Paton, 2022, para. 8). Furthermore, the natural user-generated content provides valuable insights for the brand, enabling them to see which items customers are purchasing and how they are styling them, helping direct product development (Deka, 2022, para. 6). The brand also includes the OBC in their campaigns and promotional activities by showcasing them as models, thereby fostering a consumer-centric approach.

The nature of their OBC communication is indeed personal. Namely the brand, and the OBC members discuss both on brand-related topics such as sizing and styling tips, addressing consumer or fellow members queries, and other matters, from sharing recipes through the *Djerf Avenue Dining Club,* to giving encouraging mental health advice. The brand also interacts with members via direct messages, Instagram stories, lives and threads, and comments compliments on members personal posts which tag Djerf Avenue. Moreover, the brand provides consumer rewards on the OBC, such as *Angel of the Week,* rewarding and highlighting certain members and *DA Bucket List*, an Instagram story highlight where members can express what products they want to purchase from the brand next. Additionally, the brand actively celebrates the community through an annual virtual Christmas party "*Djerfmas*" (Djerf Avenue, n.d.).

Ultimately, this customer-centric approach stimulates genuine word-of-mouth promotion, contributing to the brand's success and resilience (Deka, 2022, para. 5; Paton, 2022, para. 10). This is demonstrated even during a brand crisis in October of 2023 (Ware, 2023, para. 1). Following the New York September Pop-up in 2023, the brand experienced a brief setback. The crisis began on TikTok, as fans, having purchased knockoffs of Djerf Avenue prints and clothing, received

copyright infringement notices on the app (May, 2023, para. 4). This resulted in some of the fan profiles being removed from the app, consequently leading to a period of discontent among brand followers, expressing negative sentiments on both the brands and Matilda Djerf's Instagram and TikTok and several Reddit treads (Ware, 2023, para. 2). In response to negative sentiment, Matilda temporarily deactivated her TikTok account, and the brand shared a statement on Instagram, stating a surge in websites selling products with their prints (Ware, 2023, para. 4). The brand's team clarified that they used an external firm to monitor copyright infringements and took corrective measures once individual accounts were unintentionally affected (May, 2023, para. 6). However, during this turbulent period, the OBC highlighted strength, supporting the brand through the crisis and defending them across all platforms (Issawi, 2023, para. 4).

Since then, Matilda Djerf reactivated with her TikTok, the incident quickly faded from public discourse, and the brand continued to release new products, with strong support from OBC members who passionately defended them (Issawi, 2023, para. 8). Just a few months later, the brand announced its first big collaboration with Internet sensation beauty influencer Sofia Richie Grainge, for their Christmas collection (Forsberg, 2023, para. 1). The collaboration sold out in minutes and following this the brand announced its expansion into beauty, launching their first ever beauty line which fashion media warned would sell out shortly too (Martin, 2024, para. 8; Sangster, 2024, para. 2). These achievements highlight the continuous success and growth of Djerf Avenue attesting to the resilience and strength of its OBC, which not only weathered a crisis but continues to flourish. Therefore, it is imperative to explore the perspectives of the members of this OBC and examine what motivates them to engage, and how they interpret their experience within the OBC. Understanding their experience and continued engagement and support will provide valuable insights into the dynamics of this community, and essential managerial implications for leveraging OBC as a marketing strategy.

3. Methodology

As mentioned in the introduction, the investigation of this research aims to answer the research question: What are the motivations for engagement and consumer experience of Djerf Avenue Online brand community members? This chapter details the methodological approach employed to answer the research questions.

3.1. Research Design
3.1.1 Data Collection

The data collection method employed for this study was semi-structured interviews, allowing for a thorough examination of participants' thoughts, interpretations, feelings, and perspectives, and aligning well with the study's emphasis on understanding the consumer's subjective experiences (Bryman, 2012, p. 418). Fundamentally, interviews are employed because at the core of the researcher's inquiry lies an interest in the narratives individuals must share (Birkman, 2020, p. 75; Seidman, 2002, p. 7). They serve as ways of listening and gathering an understanding of people's stories, and stories have historically served as a way humans have made meaning of their experiences. Thus, adequate for utilizing to answer the second research questions of this study regarding consumers experiences (Brinkmann, 2020, p. 68, Seidman, 2006, p. 7). Furthermore, the advantage of interviews in research is that this method enables participants to express their opinions privately, without the predetermined research-imposed structure. Moreover, interviews allow for flexibility, as depending on the type of interview, the researcher can align the questions to explore topics which arise during conversation – an ability not possible in survey research (Brinkmann, 2020, p. 68). This approach is particularly utilized in semi-structured interviews as within this format, the questions are predetermined, however, the researcher can follow the interviewee's line of thought, allowing for new topics to arise. Additionally, the researcher might rephrase questions and the way of asking in accordance with the individual interviewee (Birnkmann, 2020, p. 68). This approach is invaluable in gaining insights into why consumers choose to join OBCs, and what benefits they experience from them, providing a deeper understanding of their motivations. This allows for the answers to the first part of the research questions regarding consumer motivations to emerge (Karatsareas, 2022, pp. 31-66). Given the

favorable detailed nature of answers stemming from this method and its adaptability, allowing for questions to evolve based on interviewee responses, as well as its inherent capacity to gather participants' thoughts, feelings, and perspectives on topics, the use of semi-structured interviews is deemed beneficial (Hammarberg et al., 2016, pp. 498– 501).

3.1.2. Sampling criteria and strategy

Regarding the data sample used for semi-structured interviews, the participants for this study were chosen through purposive sampling criteria. This type of sampling refers to the researchers' deliberate selection of participants who fall under a certain demographic (Brinkmann, 2020, p. 68). For this study, the participants were chosen by the following sampling criteria: being current and active members of Djerf Avenue Instagram OBC and being part of the OBC for at least a year. The respondents needed to fulfill these criteria to provide accurate and insightful data on the OBC of the case study. Moreover, it was invaluable that they have spent enough time as a member of the OBC, to be able to describe their experience and explain their motivations for joining. Due to the criteria, this sampling strategy is purposive sampling, given that participants must obtain these characteristics to be utilized in the data sample (Bryman, 2012, p. 418). Concerning the sampling criteria, the selection of interviewees was facilitated through Instagram, specifically by identifying individuals who actively engaged with approximately 50 Djerf Avenue posts in the platform, by commenting and/or liking the posts. Considering this consistency of their engagement and interaction with other members of the brand is relevant because the sample must include genuinely active OBC members and not just followers of the Djerf Avenue Instagram page. Furthermore, this allowed for a more diverse sample of members according to the frequency of engagement - from occasional participants to those more involved. This approach ensures that the study includes members with diverse engagement, and consequently insights into why different consumers engage.

Once identified, around 300 prospective participants were contacted and invited to partake in the study via Instagram direct message from the researchers Instagram profile. The message provided the participants with a brief on the study's objective, the format of the research (interview time), and the important information on the confidentiality of their responses, personal information, and the voluntary nature of the research. The final sample of this study consisted of twelve Djerf Avenue OBC members. These individuals were interviewed for this study's data sample, during

the period of 30th of March until the 21st of May 2024. The link to the Microsoft Teams Interview platform was provided via Instagram direct message, and a consent form to ensure confidentiality was provided to all the interviewees. All interviewees were asked for permission to voice record prior to the interviews. Furthermore, internal validity and ethical issues were considered in the interviewing process. All interviewees were encouraged to express their perceptions and opinions freely and honestly. Additionally, to ensure the minimization of biases, the respondents were asked objective non-leading questions, and none of the interviewees had any relationship with the researcher before the interview.

Seven out of eleven interviews were conducted online via the conference platform Microsoft Teams and were voice and video recorded. Three interviews were conducted face-to-face, in the Netherlands due to interviewees' living situation. After the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed into text, more specifically 271 pages. Appendix B displays the background information and relevant characteristics of the interviewees. Notably, three interviewees were from the United States, one from the United Kingdom, one from Italy, one from Mongolia, two from Turkey, one from Germany, one from Romania, and one from Norway.

3.1.3. Operationalization

To explore consumer motivations for engagement, engagement practices, and experiences within the Djerf Avenue OBC through the method of semi-structured interviews, the interviews were thematically structured using an Interview Guide. The guide is organized by three main themes, which are informed and formulated based on theories presented in the theoretical framework. Further examples of questions operationalizing each framework are found in Appendix A (Interview Guide).

Motivations for engagement. To operationalize the concept of consumer motivations for joining and engaging in the Djerf Avenue OBC, the first theme in the Interview guide was guided by Wirtz et al's (2013) framework of three brand-related motivational drivers of consumer engagement. These include brand-related drives such as *brand identification, brand symbolic function*, and social drives, such as *social benefits*, and *social identity* (Wirtz et al., 2013, p. 230). The final set of drivers encompasses functional drivers*: functional benefits, uncertainty avoidance, information quality,* and *monetary* and *explicit normative rewards* (Wirtz et al., 2013, p. 230). To guide the exploration of consumer motivation in Djerf Avenue OBC, open questions such as "What

motivated you to join the community?", "What motivates you to engage in the community", "What motivates you to engage with the brand in the OBC?" and "What motivates you to engage with other members in the OBC?" were asked. Additionally, more structured questions that identify the motivational drivers suggested by Wirtz et al., (2013, p. 230) were asked such as "Have you ever experienced receiving rewards in the OBC?" or "What kind of information are you looking for when joining an OBC?".

Consumer engagement. The second theme of the interview guide was focused on consumer engagement within the OBC, encompassing a set of questions aimed at consumers sharing their engagement practices. This concept was operationalized utilizing the four-component model of brand community engagement practices of Schau et al., (2009), which identifies four themes of engagement: *social networking, impression management, community engagement* and *brand-use* practices. Encompassing all themes, the participants were first asked to describe how they engage within the OBC, defining their engagement practices, both with the brand and fellow members. Further they were asked to elaborate on how often they engage, and how engagement with the OBC, both the brand and fellow members, makes them feel. More specifically, the first theme of *social networking practices*, was encompassed through questions asked to members such as: "How do you engage with fellow OBC members?" or "How have you felt since joining the community?". The second theme, *impression management practices*, was explored through questions such as: "What do you perceive to be your role in the OBC?". The third theme, community engagement practices was identified through questions such as: "Have you ever experienced badging within the community?", "How do you go on about documenting your time in the community?" "What is your experience with milestones in the community?" were asked (Schau et al., 2009, p. 32). Lastly, the fourth theme, brand use practices was explored through questions like:" How do you personalize your brand products to make them uniquely yours?" or "How do you take care of your brand products?" (Schau et al., 2009, p. 39).

Consumer experience. To operationalize this concept, Waqas et al.'s (2020) CCT-based conceptual framework of customer experience was utilized. This framework argues that consumers attribute meanings to marketer-generated artifacts, contributing to experiences such as *self-identity*, *social bonding, aesthetic appreciation*, and *humor* (Waqas et al., 2020, para. 39). The third theme in the Interview Guide enabled the discussions on such consumer experiences within Djerf Avenue OBC, through open questions such as "How would you describe your experience being part of the

Djerf Avenue OBC?" to more structured questions, which aim to identify *self-identity*, *aesthetic*, *humorous*, and *social bonding* experiences defined in the CCT framework. However, ensuring no leading questions, respondents were first asked to elaborate on their experiences in as much detail, and then possible prompts were asked such as "How do feel about the brand's aesthetic?" (*aesthetic experience*) or "How has your experience with the OBC possibly shaped your perceptions of yourself? (*self-identity experience*). Finally, towards the end of the interview, the interviewees were asked about their experience with the brand crises of last October, and their interpretation of it to provide an even deeper understanding of their experience within Djerf Avenue OBC.

3.1.4. Data Analysis

For the data analysis procedure, voice recordings of all interviews were transcribed, and thematic analysis, particularly Braun and Clarke's (2006 p. 16) six-step framework were utilized as a universally recognized method in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2006 p. 4-28). This approach involved identifying patterns leading to emergent themes that encompass crucial data relevant to the research question. This includes familiarizing yourself with the data, generating codes, creating themes, reviewing potential themes, defining, and naming themes, and finally, producing the report. This method proves suitable for extracting patterns, themes, or meanings from textual material, ensuring a comprehensive analysis and an accurate answer to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 4).

Thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 16), consists of five phases. The first phase involves familiarizing the researcher with the data, a vital step for understanding and comprehending the data's depth. This was achieved through conducting the interviews, forming each transcript, and listening to all the audio recordings. Following transcription (271 pages), all interviewee transcripts were re-read multiple times, in a constant search for patterns and meanings to improve familiarity with the data before the coding phase.

In the second phase (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 18), codes were generated. The initial/open codes were applied to each line of data manually highlighting, thus reducing data. Codes were distributed systematically throughout the data set, with complete and equivalent attention given to each data item, to identify relevant aspects within the data that established the basis for recurring themes across interviews. Some themes were more theory-driven, (e.g., *Motivations for Engagement*) with the data was approached with specific questions in mind, such as what

motivations for engagement in the OBC are, whilst others were data-driven (e.g. *Community Resilience*), depended solely on data. Thus, some codes were initially identified based on the theoretical framework, such as *brand identification, brand symbolic function, social identity, social benefits, functional benefits,* and *uncertainty avoidance.* Other codes, like *resilience to negative information*, and *protective behavior* were identified solely through data, not previously informed by literature. After being identified, all codes were paired with data extracts indicating that code. This process encompassed duplicating data extracts from independent interview transcripts and then gathering them within each code (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 19). According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 18-19) this coding process is vital to the analysis, as the data is organized into coherent groups.

In the third phase, after all the data had been coded and gathered, relevant data was organized into themes and subthemes based on the codes, with, for example, codes related to *brand-related, social*, and *functional drivers* of engagement forming the *Motivations for engagement in OBCs* theme. Some codes were more aligned with the topics explored in the theoretical framework, formulating themes of *Motivations for Engagement, Engagement Practices,* and *Consumer Experience*, whilst others informed themes and subthemes which emerged in the interviews, such as the theme *Community Resilience* and the subtheme of *Consumer Experience – Validation Experience.* Those codes which did not form main themes or subthemes, were discarded. During this phase, several visual tables were made with potential overviews of themes to ensure they are organized precisely.

During the fourth phase, the established themes were reviewed and refined (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 20). Themes were deconstructed or grouped based on their relevance. For example, *Community Resilience* theme was further divided into the subthemes of *Community Solidarity* and *Brand perception*. This phase involved reflection on the data's alignment and correspondence with the theory. More specifically, in accordance with Braun and Clarke's (2006, p. 20-21) framework, this step of thematic analysis involves two levels. In the first level, all identified extracts for each theme were re-read multiple times to ensure they formed a strong pattern across data. During this period, several thematic code books were made manually in table form. During the second level, the same action was performed but applied to the whole data set, and each theme was checked against the entire data set to ensure it accurately represents the overall data. This ensures that the identified themes made sense within the context of the whole data set.

In the fifth phase, themes were refined and defined for coherence, eliminating overlap. This involved identifying the essence of each theme by revisiting the gathered data, ordering it into a logical and internally cohesive account, and providing a narrative to accompany it (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 22). A thematic book was created manually in table form once more, to ensure consistency in addressing the research question. Irrelevant themes and codes unrelated to the research question were eliminated.

In the final sixth phase, the final report was produced. Themes were reported with exact illustrating examples which showcased sufficient evidence for the identified themes, outlined in the coding book (Appendix C) (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 23). Themes, such as *Motivations for Engagement, Engagement Practices, Consumer Experiences*, and *Community Resilience*, were interpreted. The codes were structurally presented in themes connecting to answers to the research question via the findings.

3.2. Validity & Reliability

Validity and reliability were aspects the researcher was attentive to during the study (Kirk & Miller, 2011, pp. 9-14; Vargas, 2021, p. 29). While validity is concerned with the degree to which the findings are interpreted correctly, reliability is concerned with the degree to which the findings are independent of accidental circumstances (Kirk & Miller, 2011, pp. 9-14; Vargas, 2021, p. 29). Given that this research focuses on the exploration of consumer engagement motivations and experiences within the Djerf Avenue OBC, the researcher acknowledges the complexity and multidimensionality of these concepts. Thus, to capture the complexity the interview guide was structured and guided around frequently utilized frameworks in the field of research concerning OBCs, particularly Witz et al.'s (2013) framework for consumer motivations, Schau et al.'s (2009) model for engagement practices and CCT framework for consumer experiences (Gensler, 2013, pp. 242–256). Prior to employing these frameworks in the research, a thorough examination of relevant sources on OBCs was conducted to reinforce validity of the operationalization of the relevant concepts discussed in the theoretical framework chapter. These frameworks provided the established indicators to research for in the data, enhancing the validity of the research, thus guiding the themes to derive from these validated frameworks. For example, engagement motivations were explored using themes like brand identification and social benefits, whilst consumer experiences were framed within concepts such as self-identity and social bonding.

Additionally, before starting the data collection, the interview guide was pilot tested using OBC members to ensure it consisted of questions capable of collecting in-depth and valuable responses. The feedback and notes from the pilot interview were used to refine the Interview guide once more. Additionally, to ensure internal validity, the study maintained a proper structure and robustness in its results. To achieve external validity, the research included OBC members with varying levels of engagement as previously notes, from occasional participants to those who engaged daily, ensuring a comprehensive representation of the community members. Regarding reliability, to ensure the consistency of the research findings and process, several measures were taken. One of those ensures consistency in the interview process. The pilot interview helped create a consistent framework whilst the nature of the semi-structured interview forma still allowing the flexibility of possible interview questions, thus all the interviews addressed the key concepts in the research exploration. Furthermore, regarding credibility, the research made sure to align with the qualitative principles of Tracy (2010) and Silverman (2011), ensuring reliability by providing a clearly defined, detailed step-by-step description of the data analysis process utilizing Braun and Clarke's step by step framework of thematic analysis. Fundamentally, the research process is exceptionally transparent, with detailed descriptions of data sampling and analysis, enhancing overall credibility.

3.3. Reflexivity

An important notion to explore in conducting qualitative research is that of reflexivity. According to Korstjens and Moser (2018, pp. 120–124) reflexivity regards the process of the research's self-reflection (Vargas, 2021, p. 30). This indeed is a necessary process for the researcher to address their own biases, preferences, and preconceptions because qualitative research is constructed from the research interpretation of the data primarily. Thus, a reflexivity process was rigorously followed during this study. To minimize the researchers' cultural bias, the study's operationalization was informed through the previously mentioned diverse literature and well-established frameworks. Fundamentally, theoretical transparency is evident in results and operationalization.

4. Results

In this chapter, the research findings are presented thematically following the analysis and coding of the interviews to answer the research question: What are the motivations for engagement and consumer experience of Djerf Avenue online brand community members? The four themes are presented as follows: *Motivations for engagement in Djerf Avenue OBC, Consumer engagement in Djerf Avenue OBC, Consumer experience in Djerf Avenue OBC,* and *Community resilience of Djerf Avenue OBC.* The first set of themes is more aligned with the topics presented in the theoretical framework, while the last theme emerged in the interviews. Every theme is explained through the subthemes that it consists of. A summary of the findings and their implications is presented in the Conclusion and Discussion chapter.

4.1. Motivation for engagement in OBC of Djerf Avenue

This theme is explored through the subthemes of *brand-related*, *social*, and *functional motivational drivers* of engagement. Examples of each set of drivers are presented per subtheme.

4.1.1 Brand-related motivational drivers of engagement

In accordance with Wirtz et al., (2013) framework, one of the key set of drivers of engagement in the OBC of Djerf Avenue are brand related drivers. These involve factors such as *brand identification, shared brand identity,* and *brand symbolic function.*

When asked to elaborate on their motivations for engagement with the community, all the respondents claimed that their identities are shaped, motivated, and similar to the identity of the brand, to some extent. From a superficial standpoint, interviewees (10, 6, 3,) shared how the brand's identity in terms of style, fashion, and products resonates with their identity, because the style of the clothing connects to their personality and the ways they want to portray it, which in turns motivates them to engage. Respondent 10, exemplified this by sharing that she, "from more of a surface level perspective, if we're just talking about, like colors and textiles" relates with the brand style, stating it resonates with her "more bubbly, sometimes outgoing personality, but I also love that there's, um, a feeling of calmness that's evoked through the pieces". Respondent 11 also shared the same view claiming that the personality the brand "give[s] off with their clothes" is the

personality she "find [herself] in", which she describes to be "the personality that I feel like I can express myself the best".

Brand identification as a motivator of engagement extended beyond superficial expressions of personal fashion sense through brand products. Evidence from the interviews demonstrates brand identity has also played an important role in the formation of members' identities, which in turn enhanced their motivations to engage in the community. Multiple respondents (9, 10, 5, 3, 2) conveyed how Djerf Avenue and its OBC have helped them shape their own identities. As respondent 3 explained: "It's silly to say but it sorts of almost like gave me like a piece of my identity. Like it, nurtured something in me that I almost didn't realize was there."

Data evidenced *shared brand identity,* as another relevant motivator of engagement. Responses of all interviewees demonstrated that Djerf Avenue OBC members perceive they have a shared identity**,** which in turn motivates them to engage within the community, and with each other. This is exemplified in the answer of Respondent 8, when asked what motivates her to engage with other members of the OBC, she shared that "because we all have fairly, like, again, similar interests that also goes into, like, the identity, the way you carry yourself". She stated these similar interests are "also a big part of your identity" and therefore "if you try to portray the values of the brand with the way you portray yourself, you're also gonna have similar identity to other people that do the same."

Regarding the *brand's symbolic function* as a motivator*,* although the theoretical framework informs Djerf Avenue is a brand symbolic of inclusivity, sincerity, transparency, and sustainability, respondents were asked to provide their perceptions of Djerf Avenue's *symbolic meaning.* Many consequently affirmed this aspect motivates their engagement. Respondent 7 shared the brand is symbolic of sincerity, and "friendliness towards users" which in turn motivates her to engage, as she perceives the brand to be "always responsive, always nice" which, she asserts is "something that you don't see very often in fashion brands". Respondent 9 attested she perceives the brand's symbolic meaning to be inclusivity, even going so far to claim the brand as "a symbol of her accepting herself". She professed the brand's *symbolic meaning* of inclusivity, particularly evident in their branded content promoting "different body types" helped live up to that message and accept her own body. She shared that this is a particularly strong motivator for her, stating it is "a part of my personal motivations not only because they have trendy and nice stuff, and they are relatable but also because I personally have these [body] issues". She claimed the branded content in the

OBC helps with these issues as it "highlights that it's okay to have them you know?". She goes on to say she believes the brand symbolic meaning is very personal to her, because of the "journey that [she has] been through."

4.1.2. Social drivers of engagement

The second subtheme illustrating the theme of motivations for engagement is social drivers, namely *social benefits,* and *social identity*.

Interview findings inform respondents perceive social benefits as key motivators for engagement, as many shared, they enjoy giving or receiving advice and communicating with the brand and other members within the OBC, in their daily routines. Exemplifying this, Respondent 11, who claimed the interaction with fellow members is part of her daily life and that she aims to talk to her OBC friends every single day. Respondent 7 highlighted she particularly appreciative of the social benefits, as she gains assistance and aid attesting it is "super cool [to be a member]" because of *"*the styling tips and everything that you can see there and um, the inspiration and the mood boards". She affirmed these social benefits are facilitated by the members, which really motivates her to engage, declaring:

Everyone starts posting on there and everyone talks about their experiences and stuff, that's something when I am really motivated to join a community because I want to be part of like a dynamic community that talks and not only that listens to the brand.

Many respondents shared how these *social benefits* also foster trust among the members, as highlighted by Respondent 8: "when someone asks me you know do you have any tips on how to style this it's also nice when someone comes to you and asks you because it's kind of a feeling of, like, trust". The assistance and help that consist of these *social benefits*¸ regard topics which are beyond Djerf Avenue, spanning from members sharing cooking recipes, to them exchanging advice on personal matters. Respondent 7 shared that she is particularly fond of the latter, expressing that "everyone just is super loving to each other not only when it's about Djerf Avenue". She further voiced her view on the exceptionality of *social benefits* in this OBC, insisting she thinks that" that is something that's super special" as it "could just connect with people that had the same passion that I have, have like these supportive online friends, not only for Djerf Avenue matters but also

for personal matters." Respondent 7 is not the only one who perceives her social connection with fellow members to be constitutive of a friendship, as many (11, 9, 10, 1, 2) shared the community "feels more like a family" to them. Respondent 8 made an elaborate point these interactions cultivating a family-like feeling:

Also, these friends that you've made, you just, you can go and ask them, and they will respond to you. They will understand you. There's not much judgment. There's a lot of looking out for each other in a way, a bit of like a family feeling almost.

Social identity also emerged as a common motivator of engagement, with many respondents sharing their engagement with the brand, and fellow OBC members have enhanced their perception of themselves. This is exemplified in Respondent 8 observations, that engaging in the community made her feel "really special" after she started getting "attention back and started making friends". Another example is the confession of Respondent 5 who shared he got a "confidence boost" from being reposted on the OBC by the brand when he posted a story with a brand product. He went on to elaborate on the impact of this interaction stating it made his day as he "really, really, really enjoyed that day for the day that the story was up."

4.1.3. Functional Drivers of Engagement

The final subtheme of the motivations for engagement consists of functional drivers, which comprise of functional *benefits, uncertainty avoidance, information quality,* and *rewards*.

Regarding *functional benefits*, members shared their engagement is often motivated by the direct support they receive from fellow members and the brand on product characteristics, and tips on purchase, such as sizing. Respondent 1 stated she observed another community member struggling with sizing due to struggles with anorexia, who was "in constant communication with the [brand's] team to get accurate sizing because she was trying to put weight back on because she had lost so much". She said the member received helpful information from the brand about sizing and answers to questions such as "What would be like the best sort of size and centimeters?" According to Respondent 1 the brand helped her enormously and seeing that type of brand behavior led Respondent 1 to appreciate the brand even more. As she puts it: "they're dealing with thousands of customers. The fact that they take the time out to like deal with one

person who is having like a struggle, that's really, really cool." This emphasizes members are motivated to engage with the brand to retain *functional* information about the products, whilst highlighting their appreciation brands approachability, and honest and human exchange in these matters, which in turn makes them more motivated to engage.

Moreover, respondents shared *information quality* is also an engagement motivator, claiming they often turn to the OBC for up-to-date brand-related information, they acquire and share themselves with fellow members, motivated to engage and spread quality information regarding the brand, as they want to help each other. Exemplifying this is the response of Respondent 2, who states she engaged in the community to share her own tips that she can "can share with people". She claimed she often shares sizing advice, exemplifying: "I would say, if you think you're a medium, I've ordered a small. Like, if you're similar to me, I'm 5'4 like, then, I would say order a small". She shared she feels that her advice is helpful to fellow members, claiming "it's been helpful, especially for girls that like, see my posts and like, oh my gosh, these are so cute, what size did you order?".

Another common motivator according to the respondents is rewards. Respondent 9 praised Djerf Avenue for "really rewarding their consumers" accentuating that the brand "reposts their consumers". Many other respondents shared the same view, remarking they were motivated to engage more as it led to the same *reward* of being reposted on OBC Instagram stories or posts by the brand. Respondent 9 further explained her appreciation of this form of reward, stating she "always tags them and they repost [me] multiple times". She concludes that this type of reward feels "reassuring" because she feels "like they [the brand] listen to [her]" and are "well aware that I [she] exist". Respondent 8 shared how this type of reward system of Djerf Avenue to the consumers does not apply to other brands. She shared how Djerf Avenues founder "will herself also be reposting [the OBC members]" and how that "makes you feel a little bit more special". She went on to compare it to other fashion brands stating this type of attention to consumers "doesn't really apply to Zara". Respondent 3 (a social media content creator) voiced Djerf Avenue's rewards to be: "really satisfying" as they lead to "getting that exposure [on social media]". She further elaborated that it made her feel like the brand acknowledges her stating "like they see that you're posting, they see you're a part of the community, they want you to represent the community, so that felt like a reward."

Another form of *reward* in the OBC is brand gifting. Respondent 3 contended she "got gifted*" a* PR brand package of the "angels in the city collection". She defined this as "a big driving factor" for her engagement in the OBC. Respondent 10 highlighted that the brand rewarding the consumers in this way is inspiring and uncommon to her, declaring she can see "how much they pay attention to that" type of rewarding. She sees it to be a "beautiful thing" because it shows that the brand is "invested in [their] community from day one."

Several respondents (5, 10, 3, 9) also stated they perceive being part of the community as a reward, as Respondent 3 puts it, "a reward is just being part of the community, the friends that I made from it".

4.2. Engagement practices

The second theme of findings encompasses the engagement practices of Djerf Avenue OBC members, consisting of the following subthemes: *social networking, impression management, community engagement,* and *brand use practices*. As elaborated on in the operationalization chapter, these practices were identified with the aid of Schau et al (2009) framework.

4.2.1. Social networking practices

When asked what kind of practices they engage with or witness in the OBC, interviewees highlighted several practices that foster a *welcoming* atmosphere. Respondent 10 noted the brands' engagement, specifically the founder's personal engagement with members, such as responding to messages, is a key factor in creating a *welcoming* environment. According to several respondents (10, 9, 1, 2, 3) this personal touch from the brand's founder sets the *welcoming* tone for interactions within the community. Respondent 10 shared she was shocked to see the founder being so responsive within the OBC: "Oh my goodness, Matilda actually takes time to respond to her messages". She claimed this is something that drew her in the community instantly, stating that if you "have someone who's orchestrating a company with that mindset, you're going to have a tier of people underneath that also have that same mindset, which is going to make a really beautiful atmosphere". Respondent 6 also emphasized the welcoming reception she received from fellow members upon her joining the OBC, stating: "Like the minute I wrote my first comment and people started liking my comments, […] I knew this is a very welcoming community".

Moreover, *empathizing* practices were revealed to be quite prominent within the OBC. Members suggested they foster mutual understanding, and emotional support through engagement. This is exemplified in the story of Respondent 9, who shared she engaged in the OBC by confessing her personal experience with an eating disorder. She claimed she felt confident to share this part of her life, and that the community responded to her with *empathy* and without judgement. The same respondent also shared that engaging in the OBC "really enabled [her] me to feel some sort of empathy towards other people" and that she believes the brand themselves "really enjoy the empathy and love that everybody creates it".

Another common practice is *governing*, which is found to be characterized by a combination of explicit and implicit rules that promote solely positive interaction within the OBC (Schau et al., p.33). Evidencing this is Respondent 1 who shared that she believes there are "unspoken rules" within the OBC against "trolling" fellow members, claiming the community naturally creates a supportive environment. Respondent 9 elaborated on this, sharing how members collectively choose to behave against negativity stating: "All of us angels pretty much have this common understanding that we don't bash each other under these comments". She further affirmed, "there is some sort of governance because as soon as one person is attacked all the other people, they immediately comment like why are you attacking that's just so literally uncool." Furthermore, Respondent 2 asserted she trusts the brand is also involved in some form of governance within the OBC, sharing: "I'm not gonna lie, they [the brand] probably have someone monitoring the comments".

4.2.2. Impression Management Practices

The second subtheme consists of *impression management* practices, which illustrate the members frequently spread favorable impressions of the brand within and outside the OBC. This involves two types of practices: *evangelizing* and *justifying*.

Members frequently shared they *evangelize* the brand both within and outside the OBC, serving as free promoters of the brand constantly advocating for it. One example is the story of Respondent 10, who discussed a specific moment at her gym, during which she encouraged a stranger to join the OBC, telling them about the inclusivity and positivity in the OBC. According to her, the motivation behind advocating for the brand is driven by her positive interactions and desire to share this experience with others, stating: "if it makes me feel something and that

something was positive like I want other people to know, be a part of this, be a part of this, be a part of this." Another example of *evangelizing* is the response of Respondent 6 response, which stated she enjoys the brand products so much that she feels compelled to share her positive experiences with others: "You want to talk about it because you want them to have that bag as well. Cause it's really good."

Many members also shared how they find themselves spreading the word about the brand outside of the community. Respondent 6 attested she naturally spreads the word about the brand and considers her role in the community to be a promoter for the brand saying: "it automatically happens I kind of, like, assumed this role, uh, naturally". Respondent 10 insisted she promotes the OBC as a valuable community, in which the brand gives back to members, stating she often tells strangers "If you invest, they [the brand] will invest back." Another interesting perspective is that of Respondent 8, who shared she talks about the OBC and the brand so much, that people "might think [she is] a little crazy". Her confession perfectly illustrates the practice of *justifying*, as she goes as far as to compare her devotion to the brand to a smoking addiction, arguing:

I mean, like same way a smoker will feel like they have to justify themselves to non-smokers whenever it comes into the conversation. You know, it's just kind of like one of those things when you're very passionate about something and you really enjoy something, and other people don't understand it. You just tend to get a little defensive about it, even if it's not really necessary."

4.2.3. Community engagement

Interview data revealed several community engagement practices, including *milestoning*, *documenting*, *badging,* and *staking*.

When asked about OBC *milestones*, many respondents shared they feel a part of all brand milestones, stating they feel like relevant participants in these events. Respondent 3 shared she felt particularly proud to be present at the first New York City Djerf Avenue pop-up in Manhattan. She stated she felt part of the milestone because she "Is educating people in the United States about it." Another example of this practice is the testimony of respondent 10, who reminisced about the Dream Launch Event in Stockholm. She explained how special she felt to be a part of this milestone,

stating: "They [the brand] can take the big spaces and make them small and intimate... they wanted us to be a part of something that... they know that we've invested in."

All respondents said they document their OBC membership in some format. Respondent 10 claimed she often journals and scrapbooks her memories in the OBC, as well as notes down her feelings about the brand milestones: "I'm a big journal girl... I love to screenshot little messages and reread those little glimpses." Respondent 9 shared she documents her experiences through photos and vlogs, sharing her opinions and interactions within the community: "I always take pictures when I vlog, I tell them [her followers] about these things, about the community, about the brand."

Throughout the interviews, it was evident that members engage in badging, referring to themselves exclusively as *"Djerf Angels."* Badging is not only reinforced through the members, but also by the brand throughout the OBC content, when re-posting the consumers on the OBC page, always referring to them as "*Djerf Angels"*. Respondent 3 verified this claiming she, to be recognized as wants as a *"Djerf Angel"*, is "just constantly like organically tagging them to be like a creator that's at the forefront of their minds".

The last practice in this subtheme is *staking*, illustrated in respondents frequently sharing how they recognize distinctions between certain groups within the OBC. Respondent 1 shared that there are two types of groups within the OBC, depending on diverse types of motivations for engagement. She seemed hesitant to share that she thinks "some people buy I'm gonna just say it […] I think some people buy because they're like, they could get like pushed on social media, which is, which is great, which is nice. Um, some people they try and do it for work." She however engages for genuine reasons:

Personally, for me, I'm not trying to make money off my account. Like I truly do just blog because I want to blog if they want to post me. Brilliant. But my, that's not really why I engaged to see if they can, like, share my stuff. I just love their clothes. I just love what they have to offer.

4.2.4. Brand use practices

The final subtheme concerns brand use practices, particularly *customizing* brand products. Members revealed they constantly adapt and integrate the brand products to fit their personal styles and needs. Respondent 8 shared how she personalizes her products by adding a personal touch to

her items with initials: "I have experimented a little with initials... it adds a little touch of a personal touch." Respondent 9 affirmed she customizes her bathrobe with her initials, whilst, for example, Respondents 1 and 3 talked about how they inject their own style into brand pieces, making them individually unique.

4.3. Consumer experience

The third theme specifically focuses on the findings regarding the consumer experience within the OBC of Djerf Avenue. Informed by the lens CCT theory (Waqas et al.) (2020) on consumer experience, the following seven subthemes of consumer experience were formulated: *Self-identity, Social bonding, Aesthetic,* and *Validation experience.*

4.3.1. Self-Identity Experience

When asked to describe their experience in the OBC, almost all respondents (1,2,3,5,6,7,8,9,10,11) shared how their experience as a member can be defined by personal growth. Some respondents (5,9) stated the brand helped them embrace their own identities and combat struggles in their personal lives. Respondent 5 (a 22-year-old male), also a member of the LGBTQ+ community, shared the story on how the experience he had in the community helped him embrace his own identity, allowing him to express his true authentic self. He shared that "growing up as a closeted queer person," he did not have the "opportunity or the luxury" to authentically express himself, as his surroundings were very strict growing up in Turkey, and he "didn't really want to raise any eyebrows." He describes himself as "a bit reserved from putting myself out there" due to the context of his upbringing. Given that Djerf Avenue only offers female clothing, it is of relevance that Respondent 5, a gay male, shared his unique perspective. He goes on to elaborate that before his first encounter with Djerf Avenue, he had not "really had any incentive to join a community or try to interact with the brand" because he thought "brands were very unreachable and kind of impersonal." This, however, is not the case with Djerf Avenue, in his eyes. He even went on to claim, that the experience provided him with an insight into his personality traits, claiming that prior to joining the OBC he was: "a person who has held myself back in towards my interests, I really feel like that was a bright opportunity [joining the OBC] that I could take."

Respondent 9 also shared an inspiring story, stating the experience shaped her perception of herself, "in a good way, because for example, when I remember when Djerf Avenue reposted

one of my, um, styling videos everybody commented wow, she's so gorgeous". She claimed that was "reassuring" to her, "especially because I got bullied back in the day". Moreover, Respondent 3 recognized the progress she has made in being more extroverted in communication, and how the experience made her perceive herself in a better light. Further, Respondent 6 emphasized self-acceptance through her experience in the OBC, arguing that the inclusivity of the brand, and the representation of different body types made her less insecure about her own body: "I felt really included because the brand values as I said all shapes and sizes which is really good like it never in a moment I felt insecure about the way I look". Respondent 6 is not the only one with this outlook. Another example is the confession of Respondent 9 who proclaimed this inclusivity aspect of the OBC and the OBC branded content made her come to accept her body, and combat her eating disorder, as they do not edit their photos, and this makes her "confronted with the natural physique of everyone".

Furthermore, Respondent 10 admitted that the experience in the OBC for here has been self-fulfilling. She stated it made her realize that she can achieve her dreams and express her uniqueness and creativity claiming the "the creative pursuit is the biggest thing" in her OBC experience. She shared that this is because she felt her dreams, were accepted within the OBC, in contrast to other interactions with people in the real world who would "look at you like you're crazy and they'll say, that's not possible that doesn't make sense." Truly illustrating how fulfilling and important this experience has been for her, she goes on to describe it as: "being a part of something bigger than myself".

4.3.2. Social bonding experience

When elaborating on their experiences further, all respondents mentioned they formed *social bonds* with fellow members throughout their journey in the OBC. Respondent 9 exemplifies this in her remark, professing she has managed to create "quite good friends through the OBC", who give her "*lot of tips*" and that whenever she sees them at any "Djerf Events" it is "very comforting". Respondent 6 exemplified how deep these bonds can become stating she communicates to her OBC friends every day:" I text them like on a daily basis. They became my friends basically." These bonds, however, go beyond OBC membership. Respondent 6 shares that even though "the brand is the reason that I became friends with many people" she feels that "my friendships go beyond the brand" as her and fellow members "feel personally connected to each

other at this point". She further claimed that it "is always good to be under the roof of something that gathers people around, and our roof right now is the Djerf Avenue community." Even though these bonds are established online, some respondents shared they also communicate to their fellow members outside of the OBC. Respondent 5 asserted he "has made some friends I have made up in with in real life".

4.3.3. Aesthetic experience

Another important part of the respondent's experiences was revealed to be the *aesthetic experience.* Some of the participants, like Respondent 9, emphasized the aesthetic experience with brand products as a part of their consumer experience claiming she particularly enjoys "the simplistic, chic, Swedish style" and the "little cute patterns, very simple, basic colors". She stated the brand aesthetic evokes a "cozy feeling in the countryside house in summer, just enjoying your life" within her. She went to state that she adores the aesthetic to that extent she "want[s] to keep all year round". Respondent 5 also agreed with this view claiming that the "one thing she really enjoys" is the brand aesthetic and style. Additionally, other respondents openly shared that they enjoyed the aesthetic branded content in the OBC Instagram page. Respondent 3 praised the brand's aesthetic, stating it is what "drew [him] to the brand because it's very aesthetically pleasing, and it fits [his] style". Specifically, he stated the "way that they take the pictures, like the ensemble of the, like, beautiful aspects, it's really catchy to [him]". Respondent 1 asserted this is a very important aspect of the Djerf Avenue OBC experience, as it is a key element of the brand itself: "And obviously that is all what Djerf is. It's very aesthetically pleasing. It's a lot of, um, detailed sort of imagery". Respondents (5,4,6) shared they derive inspiration from the aesthetic aspects of the branded content, one of them (6) describing the branded content as "wonderful, like as I said, I get inspirations from their pictures".

4.3.4. Validation experience

The last subtheme identified from the interviews is the *validation experience*. Throughout the interviews, all members shared how their consumer experience has been *validating* for them in some sense. All of them shared how they felt the brand is *appreciative* of them for being OBC members and supporting the brand, as suggested by Respondent 4, the brand "obviously they verbalize [the appreciativeness] a lot, like being appreciative of and the community and, uh, what

people are doing". She went on to elaborate that the brand is "very aware of the fact that every person kind of counts because it's the sum of every person supporting the brand, buying from the brand", and that herself and the brand acknowledge this to be the " the reason why this brand is living in the first place, they wouldn't be anything, without, their [...] community members".

Respondent 1 shared a particularly interesting outlook, stating that the brand does not make a distinction between themselves and the consumers when appreciating their successes, "Um, it's never just like, oh my god, look how far *we've* come". She claims the brand ensures their success is "always reflected back" on the OBC members, and that she is very keen of this brand attitude. She claims that the brand never states that they "as a business have come this far", but rather states that they reinforce the idea that "we as a community have got this far", truly exemplifying brands recognition of their consumers. She carried on comparing Djerf Avenue to other brands, stating that they often have a "really salesy" approach to celebrating their accomplishments, whilst Djerf Avenue is "really thoughtful" and acknowledges the OBC members, or as she puts it "acknowledge us, that we're part of that journey".

Many respondents (7,6,2,1,4) shared they felt like the brand frequently showcases they recognize them through acknowledgment. Respondent 7 shared she is particularly appreciative of this, expressing she "always appreciate[s] those little gifts, you know, or like those little gift cards that they give or the fact that they share my pictures on their social media is nice." Further elaborating on this sense of being acknowledged within the OBC, is the confession of respondent 6, who claimed the brands appreciation for its consumers "the appreciation is very big, I think the thanks go out a lot". She noted the brand consistently showcases OBC members in their branded content, and that she perceives this to be "a form of appreciating the customers", because "by reposting them, it's a way of appreciating, the people posting content about their pieces, but also showing to their bigger community like, yeah, we, we love your content, so, we wanna repost you". She went on to state that consumer inclusion in branded content is the brand's way of acknowledging the members, and claimed she is very appreciative of this as the brand chooses to "show real people online instead of, I just like the models of any photo shoots". She said this format of branded content "is so much nicer because it's real people and real life that wear the pieces".

Respondent 8 highlighted the care the brand has for its members is characterized by them "actually building connections" with its consumers. She compared this to other brands, stating "they just try to copy what they see from Djerf" as they "don't make the effort [Djerf Avenue

does]". She went on to affirm this type of brand care is something Djerf Avenue pioneered, "Djerf started it I think to this extent they started it, and then other brands are just trying to copy that". The depth of brand care in this OBC, and the appreciation the members have for is exemplified in the confession of Respondent 2, who shared she experienced life-threatening health problems last fall, and that the brand helped her through this tough period, stating that they are what "got her through that" because of "knowing that like the brand actually cared about me". This vulnerable story truly attests to the care Djerf Avenue provides for its members. She went on to further elaborate, that during this period, as she was not active on the OBC, the brand "reached out to her", asking if she was okay. Moreover, she stated that, the brand was "unbelievably kind" to her during this process, and that she believes "you would never get this on any other brand".

Furthermore, many respondents (3,6,7,9,1) professed they highly value the *supportive environment* they experience within the OBC, evoking a sense of validation. Multiple respondents define the OBC environment to be a "same space," and the reason for that being the brand. Respondent 6 highlighted two particularly important aspects of the community, namely *inclusivity* and *approachability*. She stated the OBC is not "a closed community, you can whenever you want to" which she believes "makes it super nice because it's not like an exclusive place, it's super inclusive for everyone" which makes it a "special experience for people but making it approachable for everyone".

Many respondents claimed they feel a *sense of belonging* to the OBC, which makes their experience even more unique. Respondent 7 disclosed the *sense of belonging* makes her feel like the brand and her are one, stating: "I like have a sense of belonging to the brand, you know so their success feels like my success actually". Respondent 11 claimed the brand provided her with a "home" and truly made her feel like she "finally belongs somewhere", as she joined the community in a time of personal struggle, moving from her family home to university. Respondent 1 went on to claim she feels constitutive of the brand, even though she might be "a million miles away, I still feel part of it". She compared the consumer experience of being in the Djerf Avenue OBC to the consumer experience she has with fashion giant Zara, claiming: "like I love Zara, but like, I do not feel part of it in one way, shape or form".

4.4.Community Resilience

The final theme of the findings explores Djerf Avenue's OBC resilience, through the subthemes *Community solidarity* and *Brand perception.* This theme emerged strictly from data and was not previously informed by literature.

4.4.1 Community solidarity

When questioned on their experience with the brand crisis last fall, all respondents shared they perceive the community helped the brand recover from the crisis. When discussing their thoughts on the crisis, many respondents (1,2,3,5,9) shared they felt empathetic towards the brand. Respondent 9 stated she "felt sorry" for the brand, whilst Respondent 3 particularly highlighted the "empathy" she felt towards the founder, claiming "I understand Matilda, why she was upset". The same respondent even went on to justify the brands' response during the crisis, stating the founder was understandably upset because a "a custom print that they worked hard on like was being knocked off which like if I put myself in like the brand shoes I would obviously like also be super upset". Respondent 2 disclosed why the community felt empathy for the brand, admitting the members feel that the brand is theirs too, the community is bound together by such powerful relationships. She stated:

"The brand, it's like theirs [the community's], they feel a part of it and it's almost like somebody stole something from them too, they felt stolen from too, they felt like they were being targeted as well because of how tight knit the community is".

Responses exemplified the community was in *unity*, defending the brand throughout the crisis through community support. Respondent 7 attested that during crisis, members would "constantly share information" between each other, and were "trying to tell people on social media that this [the negative accusations] is not true". She stated she and others did this because they believe that "Djerf Avenue is actually a genuine brand" and that therefore people should not "believe all this misinformation". Thus, her and fellow members aimed to "do our best to defend our community", testifying to the community's strong defense of and belief in the brand, even during turbulent times. Many other respondents (9,7,2,10,11) shared they were also protecting the brand. Respondent 9 insisted this type of support from the OBC was to be expected, stating because of the strong relationship between the members and the brand, attesting she protected the brand because "you protect your friend, you protect the people you love, right?". She compares the love

and protection one feels for a friend to the feelings she and fellow OBC members have for the brand saying that the "same goes for like, companies that you value" because "you don't want this company to go bankrupt or become, go a completely different way just because of a few comments, you want it to stay the way it is or grow even better."

Respondent 4, however, shared a particularly interesting viewpoint, given that she was not as involved in defending the brand as the rest of the interviewees during the crisis. She observed the crisis and shared she thinks "people are defending it is because they feel like they are a part of the […] brand and it resonates with them". Therefore, according to her, they take it personally if the brand is under scrutiny, because "they are kind of intact [with the brand] psychologically". She claims this is because of the *appreciation* and the *brand care* the brand showcases the OBC, stating "the brand has done so much good right that people" and that is why "they believe in it, and they believe they are honest and good, and they kind of believe that that's the case, even though this crisis has, uh, arisen."

When asked how they react to negative brand information, all interviewees shared they are *resilient to negative information* about Djerf Avenue. Respondent 9 stated it "does not influence my opinion on the brand because I know who they are and what they stand for". She claimed she has "been such a loyal customer for such a long time" that the brand does not need to "convince her" to be on their side, as she is "already convinced". She was not alone in this viewpoint, as Respondent 2 proclaimed this crisis only strengthen her bond with the brand: "these were all like people were trying to cancel Djerf Avenue and trying to cancel Matilda Djerf but I don't think that changed my perspective at all, I think I like grew to like them even more". Respondent 3 even went on to say she is "I'm blind to, like, anything negative that Djerf Avenue". Even Respondent 4, the least engaged in the OBC, stated that the negative information "did not affect me negatively".

4.4.2. Brand Perception

Notably, all respondents attested they are very loyal to the brand. They claimed the reason for this to be the *emotional attachment* they have to the brand. Respondent 4 stated her relationship to the brand is "pretty strong" because to her and fellow members, "they have no real competition". Respondent 3 illustrated her attachment and loyalty sharing that on "the level of strength" she is "definitely up there with some of like the most hardcore Djerf Avenue Angels." She chuckled as she stated she does not "wanna call it an obsession" but that she is "obviously, like, I'm a very big

fan" and would be "upset" if she could not buy from them anymore, because she appetites "to be part of the community." Some respondents shared their loyalty is attested to their deep connection to the brand, as it has helped them overcome personal issues. Namely, Respondent 9 stated her relationship with the brand is "very strong" because the OBC is "the reason why I've overcome my eating disorder or I'm overcoming it right now. Also, the reason why I started content creation". The strength of loyalty within the community is perfectly illustrated through the confession of Respondent 7 who claims she "will shop from the brand forever", and even if she does stop shopping, she will not leave the OBC.

Respondents also shared their perception of *brand resilience*. When asked how resilient they believe the brand to be, all of them described the brand as very resilient and shared similar reasons why, mostly proudly attributing this resilience to the OBC. Respondent 7 stated she believes the brand is resilient because "they have a big community" and that without the OBC "it would be very difficult for them [to survive the scandal]". From her perspective, the reason behind this is because the OBC's voice is a powerful one, as she puts it "when you let the audience speak for you it's like having a witness, you know?". Respondent 2 further supported this notion that the brand resilience is attributed to the community, claiming the brand is resilient because "they've got a strong following behind them and whatever they do, they have 600, 000 supporters that would do anything for them". She stated this is because the brand has "created such a good community of people that are all, they love the brand and what they stand for, and their values." She affirmed the community "would like never turn their backs on it" because they "are so inspired by the brand". This clearly attests to the resilient nature of the relationship between OBC members and the brand, which consequently contributes to the brand's resilience.

5. Conclusion & Discussion

This chapter presents an overview of the findings alongside a general theoretical discussion of their implications, offering several recommendations for managers, brands, and the fashion sector. Furthermore, an overarching conclusion is drawn and the research question "What are the motivations for engagement and consumer experience of Djerf Avenue OBC members?" is answered. Finally, the study's limitations are highlighted and recommendations for future research are provided.

5.1. Overview of findings, discussion and implications

Overall, the findings highlighted consumer motivations for engaging in the Djerf Avenue OBC to be brand-related, social, and functional, thus aligning with the motivational drivers of the engagement model of Wirtz et al., (2013). Additionally, the results demonstrated that members are motivated to engage as they perceive fellow members identify with the brand in similar ways. This highlighted a new *brand-related* motivator of engagement, namely *shared identity* or *shared brand identification*, not identified by Witz et al., (2013). Other scholars affirm that this motivator leads to collective consumer engagement (Sturmer et al., 2003, p. 72). Further literature observes that *shared brand identification* cultivates positive consumer perspectives on OBC engagement, leading to brand-supportive behavior. This claim is supported by the findings, coinciding with other research on *brand identification* in Twitter-based OBCs, which revealed members personify brands as reflections of their own identity, consequently engaging in brand-supporting behavior (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013, pp. 371-383; Lopez et al., 2017, pp. 21-51). Additionally, *brand identification* is argued to result in consumer retention. This is supported by interview data, presenting consumers remained OBC members throughout the brand crisis, with *brand identification* as one of the reasons (Bhattacharya et al., 1995, pp. 46-57; Sharma et al., 2022, p. 19). Given *group brand identification* enhances group engagement, brand loyalty and devotion among members, as evidenced by both the findings and supporting literature, this is a relevant finding to (fashion) OBC managers (Lopez et al., 2017, pp. 21-51; Sharma et al., 2022, p. 18; Scarpi, 2010, pp. 14-21; Zhou et al., 2012, pp. 890-895).

Moreover, the findings' revealed consumers are motivated to engage due to the *brand's symbolic function,* providing brands with several implications. Researchers claim this concept is

relevant for consumer engagement, given that consumer desires are often driven by symbolic motivations, connecting to results of self-imagery (Bhat & Reddy, 1998, p. 33). This is also exemplified in the case of Djerf Avenue, as members consistently acknowledged and celebrated Djerf Avenue's messaging of body inclusivity in branded content and highlighted it to be a motivator of engagement (Bhat & Reddy, 1998, p. 33). Consumers perceived the brand to be symbolic of inclusivity, sustainability, transparency, and sincerity, consistent with the theoretical framework. Importantly, they highlighted the brand to be exceptionally friendly and responsive to consumers, symbolic of approachability, an aspect highly praised by members, considering they found it was not recognizable in the communication of other fashion brands. Thus, it would be beneficial for brands operating in the social media realm to apply the same practice, aiming to be more approachable to consumers. An exceptional customer service approach is advised here, as it has been accentuated by members throughout the findings. Therefore, brands should focus their customer service efforts on prioritizing responsiveness and approachability, adopting a friendly tone in communication, and asserting a friendship-like relationship between themselves and the consumers.

For many respondents, the brand serves as a symbol of self-acceptance, because of its body inclusivity in messaging, especially for those struggling with body-image issues, who particularly appreciate the brand's efforts in representing diverse bodies. This personal connection to the symbolic meaning fostered consistent engagement amongst members, demonstrating the depth of the connection they feel to the brand. Thus, to facilitate consumer engagement, brands are advised to use these symbolic motivations by developing their own "brand concept" - a method that distinguishes a brand (Park et al., 1986, 135-145). Researchers recommend brands formulate the concept at the brand's inception, and introduce it to their marketing mix, reinforcing it throughout the brand's life, providing customers with a distinctive message to attain. Djerf Avenue succeeds in this, as members consistently celebrated their messaging of body inclusivity in branded content and highlighted it to be a motivator of engagement. This applies to fashion brands operating in the social media realm, because of the inclusion of diverse body types in their product marketing. (Bhat & Reddy, 1998, p. 33). Inclusivity in branded content, however, is not groundbreaking given that in recent years, fashion brands have participated in the body positivity movement, highlighting diverse body types in their marketing strategy (Caldwell, 2021, para. 3; Estrina, 2021, p. 14).

Nevertheless, the findings of this research emphasize the crucial factor in making such strategies positively perceived by consumers is being genuine and sincere in messaging inclusivity.

As stated by Aaker (1997, pp. 347-56) brand sincerity is a part of the brand's personality, associated with honesty, consideration, and care. These are all traits of the members according to the brand, highlighting what Djerf Avenue does differently is utilize OBC members in their marketing and campaigns, instilling the feeling of sincerity in messaging further. Thus, it is understandable why their consumers perceive their message to be sincere and are motivated to engage, given they accurately recognize themselves in the marketing message. This provides insights into how other brands can utilize a similar strategy, especially those who wish to expand their consumer base to accommodate individuals with different body types and be perceived as sincere. They must understand their marketing has to resonate with consumers and may attain this notion by utilizing the approach of Djerf Avenue. This is a notable discovery since researchers assert brand sincerity to be the most powerful determinant of consumer-brand relationship quality. In addition, it leads to brand trustworthiness and enhances the growth of the consumer-brand relationship (Aaker, 1997, pp. 347-56; Puzakova et al., 2015, p. 220). Other fashion brand marketers should adopt this method, as research shows that consumers identify brands that do not sincerely partake in marketing campaigns oriented toward body positivity (Caldwell, 2021, para. 4). These findings are relevant to all brands trying to communicate their messaging to consumers, highlighting the significance of an earnest demonstration of said message by utilizing actual consumers in communication.

Furthermore, the findings on *social drivers,* namely *social benefits,* and *social identity* as motivations of engagement are also consistent with the claims of Wirtz et al., (2013). Findings showcased members are motivated to engage, give and receive advice from fellow OBC members, highlighting that for some, this is a part of their daily routine. This underlines the significance of this motivator, given it drives daily consumer engagement. Moreover, members were found to derive positive self-esteem from group interactions. These motivators can be attributed to the nature of said engagement, once more owing to the brands' inclusive and sincere approach to consumers. Members attested they frequently engage in *empathizing* and *welcoming* engagement practices within the OBC, aligned with the theory of Schau et al., (2009). These practices foster *social benefits,* and the *social identity* within the OBC, as the positive encouraging nature of these practices enhances the self-confidence of members. Additionally, governing *practices* identified

within the community likely contribute to this, since respondents highlighted the absence of any negative interactions between members. This type of *governing* is an incredibly relevant engagement practice, to ensure a positive environment for engagement and the emergence of motivators within their OBCs.

Functional motivational drivers, namely *functional benefits, uncertainty avoidance, information quality,* and *rewards*, align with the theoretical framework. Expanding the literature, findings revealed the nature of *functional benefit*s, encompassing sizing tips, exchanged between members and the brand, are also characterized as sincere brand-consumer interactions. Members who struggle with eating issues, specifically anorexia, attain constant guidance on sizing from the brand, which displays the brand's continuous assistance, and support in aiding members' struggles. Since members highlighted such assistance is uncanny in brand-consumer communication with other brands, this finding demonstrates the value sincere brand assistance has to consumers, and how it drives their engagement. Moreover, data disclosed a key reward in the OBC is the brand reposting members on branded content, an incredible motivator of engagement, evidenced by members' appreciation. Another reward form is PR gifting from the brand, while several respondents perceive just being members of the OBC as a reward, displaying how much they value their membership, and Djerf Avenue's success in satisfying members. These findings are imperative for brands seeking effective ways to reward consumers and boost engagement. This research suggests utilizing Djerf Avenue's reward system, featuring brand consumers/OBC members in brand marketing, or brand content on social media. Brands using social media for visibility can target consumers who tag them on social media and reward them, which not only motivates further engagement but also simultaneously grows their community.

The exploration of consumer experience revealed interesting findings with several contributions to the literature. Firstly, findings demonstrated four themes of consumer experience within the OBC, namely *self-identity, social bonding, aesthetics,* and *validating experience.* The first three themes identified experiences are aligned with the theoretical framework of CCT (Waqas et al., 2023). The findings of this research however did not identify *humorous* experiences within this OBC, thus diverging from the literature. One of the contributions of this study is the identification of the *Validation Experience*, characterized by members feeling acknowledgement, recognition, and appreciation from the brand. Consumers experience the brand expressing gratitude towards them, proactively thanking them for their engagement, and acknowledging and celebrating

their OBC membership. Members perceive the brand genuinely cares for them, demonstrating they feel consistently valued as consumers, defining the OBC as a supportive/safe environment, where they feel a sense of belonging. These findings correlate with the outcomes of consumer engagement introduced in the theoretical framework (Wirtz et al., 2013, p. 234).

Reflecting on these findings, it is evident members genuinely enjoy their experience with the community, and that *brand care* plays a crucial element in this. This is important, as sources confirm satisfaction with the OBC directly impacts consumers' intentions to engage in positive behaviors such as advocating for the brand and remaining loyal in their purchasing decisions (Schouten et al., 2007, pp. 357-368; Wirtz et al., 2013, p. 234). This was confirmed in the case of Djerf Avenue since members were highly appreciative of brand care and were therefore motivated to engage in brand advocacy exemplifying brand loyalty. These findings offer a new perspective on the consumer-brand relationship, highlighting the importance of brand care for consumers, in line with the research of Wunderman (Abramovich, 2017, para. 3) which argued that consumers desire to feel seen by the brands and require brands to demonstrate care.

Finally, the findings revealed the *community resilience* of the Djerf Avenue OBC, which according to members aids the brand's overall resilience. The study's insights on the consumer experience with the brand crisis last fall showed members were unified in brand defense through positive word-of-mouth on social media during that time. This is an interesting discovery since literature informs only a small number of consumers actively engage in defending their favored brands, without the promise of benefits (Habibi et al., 2014a, pp. 123-132; Habibi et al., 2014b, pp. 152-161; Marticotte et al., 2016, pp. 538-549; Sharma, 2022, p. 19; Vanmeter et al., 2018, pp. 83-97). However, Djerf Avenue members were passionately defending the brand, personally affected by the negative backlash, because of their strong emotional attachment to the brand. These feelings are logical, given consumers who consider brands central to their identities, perceive threats to the brand as personal thus engaging in defensive behavior (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013, pp. 371-383; Khalifa & Shukla, 2017, pp. 156-162; Sharma et al., 2022, p. 19). Notably, members admitted to being resilient to negative brand information, essentially not accepting of negative brand sentiment (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003, pp. 46-57). This resilience was attested to stem from brand loyalty, as members view themselves as extremely loyal to the brand.

Notably, members attributed the brand resilience to the power and resilience of their OBC, thus incredibly beneficial for brands considering current challenges in the sector. Given the

growing space for negative brand sentiment on social media, engaged loyal and consumers are particularly impactful for brands (Colliander & Wien, 2013, pp. 1733-1757; Dalman et al., 2019, pp. 875-891; Fierro et al., 2014, pp. 343-373; Marticotte et al., 2016, pp. 538-549; Monga & John, 2008, pp. 320-332; Sharma, 2022, p. 19). Strikingly, a large number of brands find it particularly challenging to respond to crises, specifically those transpiring on social media (Sharma et al., 2022, p. 19; Tsimonis and Dimitriadis, 2014, pp. 328-344). In these conditions, the role of brand consumers is fundamental (Sharma et al., 2022, p 19). Therefore, the findings on *community resilience* are beneficial as they provide marketers with an understanding of consumers perspectives on positive word-of-mouth engagement (Massa et al., 2017, pp. 461-499; Swimberghe et al., 2018, pp. 171-178). Fundamentally, this research provides important insights into OBC members' perspectives, both by providing a comprehensive understanding of consumer experiences, and their motivations for engagement, as well as highlighting their resilience to negative information, and brand loyalty. This is of great interest to (fashion) brands, fashion marketers, and those aiming to utilize OBC for beneficial results. Overall, the findings suggest that the role of the consumer is crucial and must not be underestimated.

5.2. Conclusion

In summary, this study has aimed to investigate consumers' motivations for engagement, and consumer experiences within the OBC of fashion brand Djerf Avenue. The relevance of researching this OBC lies in its prominence and success, and the implications it provides for OBC management, (fashion) marketeers, the fashion sector, similar brands, and firms utilizing social media marketing in general. The study used a qualitative research design of semi-structured interviews with eleven Djerf Avenue OBC members, and the findings revealed four main themes, namely *Motivations for engagement, Engagement practices, Consumer experience,* and *Community resilience.*

To answer the research question, motivations for the engagement of Djerf Avenue OBC members include *brand-related*, *social*, and *functional* motivational drivers. The first subtheme, *brand-related drivers*, affirmed *brand identification, shared brand identity*, and the *brand's symbolic function*, as motivational drivers of engagement. Furthermore, *social drivers*, such as *social benefits* and *social identity* were also found to be motivators. Finally, several *functional* motivational drivers were identified, namely *functional benefits, uncertainty avoidance,*

information quality, and *rewards*. Regarding consumer experience, the findings demonstrated *self-identity, social bonding, aesthetics,* and *validating experience* in the OBC. Results also revealed *consumer engagement* practices present in the OBC, encompassing *social networking* practices such as *welcoming*, *empathizing*, and *governing*, *impression management practices,* including *justifying* and *evangelizing*, *community engagement* practices, counting *staking*, *documenting* and *milestoning*, and finally *brand-use* practices involving *customizing*. Additionally, the findings provided insight into the members' *consumer experience* with the brand crisis last fall, illustrating the OBC's resilience, which according to members contributed to the brand's resilience and quick crisis recovery. These findings demonstrated the final theme of *community resilience*, including the subthemes of *community solidarity* and *brand perceptions*. These informed the Djerf Avenue OBC members perceive the brand and the community to be resilient in crisis due to the unified defense of the OBC members, the members to be loyal to the brand, and resilient to negative brand information.

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into consumer motivations and experiences within the Djerf Avenue OBC, offering relevant practical implications for (fashion) brands aiming to leverage social media in their marketing efforts or manage OBCs. By prioritizing consumers' perspectives, this study revealed that a brand's customer-centric approach, characterized by genuine consumer care, brand attentiveness and appreciation, is highly valued by consumers and OBC members, and facilitates community solidarity and resilience, enhancing brands' overall resilience and enhancing consumer engagement and experiences.

5.3. Limitations

The possible limitations of this study could stem from its homogenous sample of mostly females, however, this is to be expected, given that Djerf Avenue is a fashion brand selling female attire. The homogeneity of the sample however enables high credibility. Moreover, the study relies on a small sample size of eleven participants, which although provides a consistent dataset, may not fully translate the possible divergent consumer experience within the chosen OBC. Furthermore, the participants' demographics indicate an age range of up to thirty-four years old, reflecting a predominantly younger demographic. Consequently, the findings may not be entirely generalizable to older OBC members, as age differences can lead to varying perceptions and experiences. Further regarding generalizability, the findings of this study, given that it is focused solely on the OBC of

Djerf Avenue, may not be generalizable to other OBCs, particularly those not focused on fashion goods. The use of academic literature however enables replicability to different OBCs. This is because different industries may have consumers joining OBCs for diverse motivations. Concerning the study's qualitative research design employing thematic analysis, there is a level of subjectivity in interpretation that may occur, although the research frequently relied on reflexivity to avoid bias. Finally, an important limitation is that of the temporal context of the study, as in the future OBCs have the potential to take on different shapes or exist on divergent and novel platforms, and thus must require an original approach to research, quantitative.

5.4. Recommendations for future research

Future studies on OBCs are advised to first examine a bigger number of OBCs and compare those operating on different social media platforms with a more balanced sample regarding gender. Additionally, they could examine different industries, beyond just the fashion sector, which may alter the motivations for engagement, and consumer experiences within the OBC. Moreover, the researcher suggests the use of qualitative research in such studies, as well as future studies on OBCs in general, to better grasp the presence these communities have in the lives of its members, and the depth of the attachment members have to the OBCs. Furthermore, future studies may focus on the notion of OBCs throughout crises, examining the viewpoints of members who remained in the OBC and comparing them to those members who left the OBC, using quantitative research. These studies could offer practical insights for crisis management and provide relevant data on the impact of OBCs' brand resilience. Such studies could benefit the longevity of brands in the ever-changing fast-paced consumer market. Finally, it would be interesting to further research community resilience and its direct effect on brand resilience in the chosen market.

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7. Appendices

Appendix A – Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Welcome to this research interview and thank you so much for giving some of your time to be here. My name is Maja and I'm doing research on the Motivations for engagement within OBC of Djerf Avenue and the experiences consumers have in this OBC, for my thesis at Erasmus University Rotterdam's Master program in Media and Business. This interview is completely voluntary, so feel free to stop at any time you feel the need to. I will now proceed to ask you some questions, and I would appreciate you answering them in honesty. Be assured that this interview is solely conducted for academic purposes only, with your personal information being kept anonymous. For the sake of transcribing the interview later, I will need to record this interview. Do you give permission for this? The transcripts will only be shared with the thesis supervisor and nobody else.

Introduction Questions:

- What is your age, gender, and occupation?
- How did you find out about Djerf Avenue?
- How long have you been part of Djerf Avenue OBC?

Follow-up Qs:

- How would you describe your relationship/connection to the brand?
- How would you describe your knowledge of the brand?
- What makes Djerf Avenue stand out to you from other fashion brands?

Theme I – Motivations for engagement in OBC - Witz et. al (2013) Three key OBC engagement drivers

- What drew you to the community? Why did you join?
- What motivates you to engage with the brand in the community?
- What motivates you to engage with the other members in the community?

Follow-up Qs:

- In what ways do you think brands and personal identities are linked? (Self

- In your case, how do brand and your identity connect?

- How does this aspect motivate your engagement?

- What do you think about brands having symbolic meanings to consumers?

- In your case, what does the meaning of Djerf Avenues mean to you?

- How does this aspect motivate your engagement?

- What do you look for when you join OBC?

- What kind of information are you interested in when joining an OBC?

Theme II - Engagement Practices within OBC - Schau et al., (2009) - Four themes of engagement practices

- How would you describe your engagement practices within the OBC?

- How often would you say you engage with the community on Instagram?

- How would you describe the brands' engagement with its consumers on the Instagram OBC?

- How does engaging with the brand make you feel? (Empathizing, Welcoming)

- How does engaging with other members of the community make you feel? (Empathizing, Welcoming)

- What would you say your role is as a member of this community? (Justifying, Evangelizing)

- How have you engaged with others outside of the community to share information about the brand, and what motivated these interactions? (Justifying, Evangelizing)

- How do you bring the brand into your everyday life use? (Customizing, Grooming, Commoditizing)

Follow-up Qs:

- Can you recall any instances where you felt particularly welcomed by fellow community members?

- Additionally, do you observe and express empathy within the community, and do you notice others demonstrating empathy towards you and each other?

- Lastly, do you believe there is any form of governance within the community, and have you ever participated in any governing activities?

- Do you remember any time you actively contributed to the community's shared identity? (Staking)

- Do you remember any instance where the community/brand celebrates or acknowledges milestones, and do you see yourself as a part of these milestones? (Milestoning)

- Do you remember any instances of earning or utilizing community rewards/badges, and what do they mean to you? (Badging)

- Do you document your experiences within the brand community in any shape? (Documenting)

Theme III - Consumer experience - Waqas et al., (2021) framework of types of consumer brand experiences

- How would you describe your experience being part of the Djerf Avenue OBC?

- How do you feel about the overall experience you've had in the Djerf Avenue OBC?

- What have been the main parts of your experience with the Djerf Avenue OBC?

- How is this experience different from traditional fashion brand engagement?

- What is your experience with the brand crisis last fall?

Prompts:

- What do you think about engagement with brands shaping consumers perceptions of themselves? (Self-Identity experience).

- In your case how would you describe the engagement with the OBC that has shaped your perception of yourself?

- Have you ever experienced deriving pleasure from visually pleasing elements in branded content within the OBC? (Aesthetic Experience)

- Have you ever experienced instances where you felt a sense of belonging and connection with other community members through your engagement in the OBC? (Social bonding experience)

- How would you say engagement with the content enhances your awareness of product benefits, features, and quality? (Utilitarian experience)

- Can you recall instances of engaging with humorous branded content in the OBC? (Humor Experience)

- Do you remember any instances where you felt that the branded content in the OBC delivered wonderful, astonishing, or overwhelming experiences? (Awe Experience)
- In your experience, how do you go about understanding branded content in the online brand community? (Discerning experience)

Theme IV – Consumer experience with crisis

- How do you react to negative information about Djerf Avenue?
- How do you think the brand feels about you?
- How strong would you say your relationship is with the brand? Why is it that strong?
- How do you interpret the relationship the brand has with their consumers?
- How would you describe the attachment Djerf Avenue consumers have to the brand?
- Would you interpret Djerf Avenue to be a resilient brand?

Appendix B – Sample Overview

Respondent#	Age	Country of nationality	Time in OBC	Gender	Occupation	Date of interview	Duration	Execution
Respondent 1	26	Wales, United Kingdom	1.5 year	Female	Digital marketing exec	01/04/2024	1h26mins	Microsoft teams
Respondent 2	22	Alabama, USA	3 years	Female	Student	04/04/2024	1h8mins	Microsoft teams
Respondent 3	28	New York, USA	4 years	Female	Fit Model and content creator	11/04/2024	1h4min	Microsoft teams
Respondent 4	34	Norway	5 years	Female	Digital marketing exec	09/04/2024	1h1min	Microsoft teams
Respondent 5	22	Istanbul, Turkey	3 years	Male	Student and part-time music producer	15/04/2024	55minutes	Microsoft teams
Respondent 6	21	Ankara, Turkey	1 year	Female	Saleswoman	18/04/2024	45mins	In-person
Respondent 7	21	Frankfurt, Germany	3 years	Female	Student	11/04/2024	1h10mins	Microsoft teams
Respondent 8	21	Sardinia, Italy	1 year	Female	Student	20/04/2024	48mins	In-person
Respondent 9	21	Mongolia	4 years	Female	Content creator	22/04/2024	50mins	In-person
Respondent 10	24	USA	5 years	Female	Marketeer at Medical office & Patient assistant	24/04/2024	1h2mins	Microsoft teams
Respondent 11	22	Romania	4 years	Female	Student	21/05/2024	46mins	In-person

Appendix C – Code Book

Concept	Theory	Theme	Subthemes	Codes	Quote	Description
Motivations for Engagement	Wirtz et al., (2013) Motivational drivers of engagement	Motivations for engagement in the OBC of Djerf Avenue	Brand related drivers	Brand identification	R10: Um, I, so from more of a surface level perspective, if we're just talking about, um, like colors and textiles, that was something immediately where I was like, I, this resonates with my more bubbly, sometimes outgoing personality, but I also love that there's, um, There is a feeling of calmness that's also kind of evoked through the pieces that are being worn. Um, I think within their brand, it's nice because there's that cohort consistency of, um, Simplistic design that's also ties hand in hand with how you want to add your own expression on top of it, if that makes sense. R7: Um, well, I always, uh, have, uh, based on my style, like in the context of my style, I always want to look put together, nice, but also not too extra. And Djerf Avenue provides this, uh, vibe, if I may say, to, uh, to my wardrobe. Um, and yeah, my identity in the context of my style, uh, made me choose Djerf Avenue because it was very suitable for what I wanted to go for. R5: I feel like I personally also connect with the brand on a personal level besides that. I have always been interested in fashion, but, um, didn't get to explore it much, uh, through my, uh, life. So, I do really feel like, uh, this is giving me the platform and the opportunity to dig into that more, you know? So, I really do enjoy, um, just spending time on it and just being there. Oh, um, well, well, growing up, um, as a closeted queer person, I didn't really have the opportunity to, um, or the luxury to really express myself, especially through fashion because it was very strict for me growing up and I didn't really want to raise any eyebrows. I'm coming to a foreign country to study from Turkey uh kind of helped me open up that box, but more so online communities played a very big role in this, uh, which brings me to Djerf Avenue now.	Respondent shares they identify their self-identity with the brands' identity
				Shared identity	R5: So. I think, uh, shared interests would be the correct answer for that because they, I mean, I've been lured by the, uh, the vibe of the community of the brand, and then to find out that it has the community that I can be a part of, it really, yeah, set the in stone for me. Uh, I think it's just creating a very nice space for us, especially, um, all of us sharing this, uh, common interest towards fashion and in this specific brand. I, um, I think it's just a very uplifting relationship that, um, I have with the other members as well, because everybody, as I said, has this shared common interest in fashion and that we can all learn from each other. So, um, I can comment something on that. Djerf avenues Instagram, and then somebody will reply or in other platforms as well. It's just a very two-sided relationship. I feel like we all learn from each other, and we all share this interest and it's yes, it's if it does feel like a community. I feel like it is because of this shared interest that we have. R8: Because we all have fairly, like, again, similar interests that also goes into, like, the identity, the way you carry yourself, which I think is also a big part of your identity. Um, if you try to portray the values of the brand with the way you portray yourself, you're also gonna have similar identity to other people that do the same R7: Yeah, definitely. And I see that, like, not only do we share a sense, a same sense of style, but as you get to know people, you realize that you actually share more than that. Like, most of us have very similar music tastes, for example, or like movie tastes.	Respondent shares they feel the presence of shared identity within the group which motivates their engagement

			Once you're interested in one aspect, they bring other aspects that might be similar to other people as well. R3: I feel like it could be like a sorority in that way. Like how like, I feel like some sorority girls like will like dress similarly, like their sisters, like they're, there's like a very similar vibe going on there. And I do think that, um, Djerf Avenue angels have a similar vibe in that way.	
		Brand's symbolic function	R7: Uh, definitely it's sincerity. This is sincerity within the community, the friendliness of the brand towards its users. And they're always responsive, always nice, you know, uh, that's something that you don't see very often in fashion brands. R9: Yeah, it's it's it's [the brand] the symbol of me accepting who I am. R10: I would say symbolic to me because I'm like, once again, it's going to be from that same big umbrella of connection because that just stands out automatically to me. But I think underneath that, um, symbolism can come from a place of like, once again, empathy, because I think that that's something that they express through the creation that's being done. I think that's just, that's the key one for me right off the bat is because when I'm like, when I, anytime I put those pieces on, it's not just empathy for the surrounding people, but it's also empathy for myself. Um, and so when I'm kind of tackling my day and I put those pieces on and sound sometimes silly, but it's so real because I'm like, there is That deeper level of connection and not just putting a piece on it. And so, symbolism, once again, that same theme of connection, um, but then empathy being tied into that, um, motivates my engagement. I think there's just a home feeling that comes from those symbolism, those same pillar themes. You just feel like it, you just feel at home. And so, it's like, why would you not wanna be a part of a place that feels like home? And also once again, like challenging you in the things that matter to you. R9: I think that's also part of my mode like personal motivation not only because they have trendy and nice stuff and they are relatable to that scent but also because I personally have these issues and she kind of highlights that it's okay to have them, you know? I think because I have such a personal connection to Djerf Avenue, um, with my journey that I've been through with what Matilda Djerf stands for, I really admire her all the, um, all the critique that she used to face and now she has one of the most, um, successful brands in today's day and age, you know? That's such a, that's such a crazy development and I really, I really support that feminine energy. R5: I feel like, um, this brand just means, uh, a leading example as to what clothing brands are capable of doing, especially when it comes to customer service and human relations, you know, because, uh, the thing that again, set them apart for me was their interactiveness. And if you have this big platform that you ultimately use to sell products, well, you already kind of have this community build up because everybody's interested in that. And I really enjoyed that Djerf Avenue is kind of leaning more into this community and trying to make it, uh, into a real tangible thing. Uh, cause it, there is a potential there always, especially when a lot of people who are interested in the same thing are, you know, uh, kind of, in the same place, you already have the grounds for it. And Djerf Avenue really invested in this community aspects and kind of exploited it in the best way possible.	Respondents describe what they perceive the brand to be symbolic of, and how that motivates their engagement
			R10: The foundation of a brand is established on good core values. You're going to have lots of other good humans who resonate with that come into the brand. And so, um, that was	

	Social drivers	Social identity	something I noticed immediately with connection with other girls is that, um, they also had similar drive passions to do something bigger, not only for themselves, but also for their surrounding communities and just people in general. Um, and it's not the same mundane, um, Conversations, not the same mundane outlook on life. Like, um, I think the mentality of slowing down, but then also working hard to achieve the things that each of us uniquely desire, um, makes me definitely still want to be a part of that community, not only because, um, it's fun and purposeful and just sweet to engage with humans like that, but also because it pushes me and I feel challenged in my own life, um, to then keep tackling those things, even though we're all spread out through countries and states and whatnot. Um, but that definitely is what keeps me wanting and motivates me to be a part of the brand. R9: I joined in the first place because, um, actually I saw other people's comments under each post and, um, I don't know. It was, you don't really see negative comments under these posts. They're always positive, always heartwarming, um, supporting. And for some reason, I love the idea of spreading support and love that I thought like, why not do something good? Because a small message like that can really make someone's day. So, then I like to comment on other people's comments like, oh, I agree or like it, or I, um, support the actual new launch that they just posted about and show Drift Avenue that, you know. What they're doing, it's being successful, and we love it, you know? I think it has shaped it very, um, in a good way, because for example, when I remember when jerk Avenue reposted one of my, um, styling videos Everybody commented. Wow. She's so gorgeous. Wow. This is such an amazing outfit. Like where did you get this from? Oh, I never thought of like combining these colors like that's crazy That's reassuring to me, especially because I got bullied back in the day and um this constant critique and also how I told you, my friends, they would make fun of me and even though they would Like say it in a joking manner I would take it personally And, um, these people under the posts just show me that, you know, even if one person doesn't like it, there's so many others that will like it. R5: Efe: I do feel like, um, Djerf Avenue in their social media stuff creates a very much like a safe space for, uh, just like a confident space for everybody to [00:04:32] talk to each other and gain from each other because everybody has different perspectives, especially towards fashion and styling and these types of things. And we can all learn from each other. And I feel like Djerf Avenue is very successful at creating a platform that we can all do that and be motivated to do that each and every time we visit their social media, we visit, um, different platforms that they are on. Yes, I think they are [00:05:00] investing in that truly.	Members explain Gathering self-esteem from group membership

		Social benefits	R7: But on top of that, uh, they have this, uh, as I said, the sincerity that drives people in it, and that personal connection, sharing, What you're wearing with other people, being a part of a group, those are all, um, nice feelings, you know, and I wanted to be a part of that. Because it's based on my personality. I know that other people Choose this brand because of their personality as well. Uh, or like at least identity, as you said. And, uh, if we share that common ground, it means we have similar interests and similar, um, yeah, similar interests, nothing else. And, uh, that makes me think, okay, well then, I can get along with this person or I can get along with this brand. I can be open to them, you know, communicating with them and their being communicative back to me, strengthens the relationship. R5: And they're also reposting a lot of their, their consumers, uh, and customers, uh, own posts as well, which furthermore gives everybody a platform, uh, and I think really like strengthens this community that they're building up. So, I really have felt lots of personal connections from the beginning and as a conscious, um, customer, uh, self-proclaimed, I feel like, uh, we really clicked me and the brand. R9: My connection to the brand and relationship, I think what this brand really enabled, and it sounds super cheesy, but I think it really enables me to feel some sort of empathy towards other people around me.Um, I feel like kind of the support of all the people that are also part of this community and the brand really embodies such a nice body positivity and such nice, um, How would you call it? Like they just take you the way you are. Um, so yes, I do meet up with them also on different launch events in general. Um, or sometimes when, sometimes they're like little parties, I recognize the people that I've met before and I'm like, hey, you know, like, I think I've commented under one of your pictures.	Members explain what social benefits they gain through OBC membership, and how this motivates their engagement
	Functional drivers	Functional benefits	R5: Because it is not only a clothing brand, but they also share lots of valuable information online. For instance, how to style] this, how to do, how to approach this type of look and style or aesthetic. R9: I think a nice thing about their feed, especially in all the things that they post, is they don't only post about their, um, clothes. They also post about, for example, cooking, cooking tips. R7: So yeah, and when I have specific questions about the products, like how I can style this, for example, with what do you suggest, or if it's a personal care product, I text them, like, basically every question that I have and I get immediate responses. R9: I think their content on Instagram is well rounded. They are very transparent with what is happening, with the quality, the, um, The, uh, how do you call it? The fabric and the different discounts they have or different offers or new launches. They're very transparent. So, I think I'm well aware of everything what they post on. R5: I do like to research the products that I am purchasing or spending my money on. So, I do think it has made me more conscious. And yes, they're quite transparent with their own products as well. So, you always know what you're getting. And I don't think I have come across any instances where people were disappointed with their products. [00:42:35] Especially, you know, sometimes you order something and then it comes to your house, and it shows up to be something totally unexpected. I don't think that happened to me or to anybody I know from this community.	Members share the functional benefits they receive from consumer engagement which motivates them to engage

	Information quality	R9: I think a nice thing about their feed, especially in all the things that they post, is they don't only post about their, um, clothes. They also post about, for example, cooking, cooking tips R1: I was suffering from like Anorexia like she was in constant communication With the team to get accurate sizing because she was trying to put weight back on because she had lost so much and she was in, I don't know, she was in rehab and she was trying to get her weight to a normal, like, like, weight number and she was constantly talking to them like, look, I'm trying to put on weight. What would be like the best sort of size and centimeters? I don't know what it's, what it's going to be like when it does come. And they were really good to her. So, seeing that as well, they're dealing with thousands of customers. The fact that they take the time out to like deal with one person who is having like a struggle, that's really, really cool. So, I was like, whoa that, that, that impressed me. It did impress me. R6:I think uh, especially the styling tips are like so yeah, they just provide so much value to me because I'm really sometimes just standing in my room and be like ohh what can I wear today and how can I wear it and how can I combine it. And that's really something that the brand tries to do and just provide you with so much inspiration. Umm, that is really valuable when it comes to me and also just showing like, yeah, that's what our product is about and that's that's what we want to do with it. R5: Um, well, my role, I think, uh, it would be somewhere in between, uh, a viewer and, um, I don't know how to name my role, but given I also sometimes comment and ask for advice and give advice to people within the community, I think it would be kind of like, uh, an active discuss, discussive member.	Members share the quality of information they get on brand-related topics motivates their engagement
	Rewards	R9: Um, I think I just do it because I, I love showing them that what they're doing is being like, it's perceived really like, positively. And I also, the, the thing is Drift Avenue really, um, rewards their customers as well. They repost their customers, like outfits, like for example, I, I told you, I'm starting to do content creation, um, for whenever I wear their outfits or their products, I always tag them, and they have reposted me multiple times. And that's so reassuring to me because I feel like they listen to me. They are well aware that I'm, that I exist and, um, all these comments under each other, they're like positive and nice. R10: Yes, I think when I go when I kind of talk about like with how much you invest it's like they stay pay attention to that and so I think Like getting the invite for like the dream launch I would view that as like a form of like reward so to speak of like I was in Stockholm. I was able to be like I messaged Matilda. I was like I'm in Stockholm like Um, what are your favorite recommendations? And then immediately she was like We're doing a dream launch on Friday. You better be there like you're I can't believe you're here Like you better be there and so I that was like a sweet reward moment Um the same thing with like an invite to the fashion show like there's a cluster of us Um That have been a part of the brand from the very beginning. And I know they said that they pulled names at random, which I think maybe to a certain extent they did, but there was a cluster of us that have been there since day one and like, we're all present at that event. And so, I think, and that's a beautiful thing because it shows that they have invested in our community from day one. Like they need to be in this space. Um, and then the same thing with like, Djerf Avenue Beauty, like being sent the products for that to like try and advance, um, was so special. And so, I feel like those are all like little rewards that are tied in with the connection component.	Members share rewards present in the OBC which drive their engagement

					R6: It always feels rewarding being seen, uh, from the brand, for example, when they answer, uh, my comments or when they comment under my videos here and there, I think that always feels super rewarding. But for example, I've already seen, uh, a few TikTok's of my online friends. Um, yeah, that got to be got a bit bigger on the internet and then Um, uh, they sent them like, uh, a gift here and there. I think that's something that the brand really tries to do and, um, yeah, also like taking care of their community members and rewarding them for being so loving and supporting. R3: I mean, I think for me personally, um, like a type of reward, was like, When I finally, Got like gifted, By them. That was definitely like, it felt like a reward. It felt like, oh, like they recognize you. Like they see that you're posting, like they see that your part of the community, they want you to represent the community. So that felt like a reward. I think also like, even when like, they like will repost me on like their, like Instagram or something like that feels like a reward. Like it feels like, like, yeah, like, like they see me, like they like what I'm doing. Like they see me as a good representative of them. So, like, that feels very rewarding. I feel like also just like. A reward of being part of this community is definitely, [00:39:00] like, the friends that I can make from it, and that I have made from it, and just, like, seeing my friends, like, my, like, my friends, like, from, like, my personal life, um, when they, like, Start you like utilizing the brand and like wearing some of the clothes and like loving it. It makes them feel good That feels rewarding for me as well	
Consumer Engagement	Schau et al., (2009) typography of engagement practices in brand communities	Consumer engagement in Djerf Avenue OBC	Social networking engagement practices	Welcoming	R10: Um, I remember it being like, oh my goodness, Matilda actually takes time to like to respond to her messages. Like that was something that clued me in right off the bat that I'm like, if you have someone who's orchestrating a company like that with that mindset, you're going to have a tier of people underneath that also have that same mindset, which is going to make a really beautiful atmosphere. Um, and so I've never not felt welcome. I think it's one of the most inclusive spaces for, um, anyone to step into because you find your style, like within the pieces that they create. And on top of that, like, there's so many people in the community that like, you're gonna find your, you can find your human, so to speak, within it. R9: Oh, they, they were like very positive. They were also very supportive. And I told, I immediately started with, oh, I just started doing with my content creation. And they would never be like, Oh, that's such a bad idea. Or like, oh, you don't belong there. They'd be always. Giving tips saying, oh, if you need any help, let me know, maybe we can collaborate on a post together. Maybe we can do this. It's always like very networking. R7: Yes. Like the minute I wrote my first comment and people started liking my comments, um, or like just agreeing with me. I like I knew this is a very welcoming community.	Members sharing welcoming practices they perform/witness in OBC
				Empathizing	R10: Um, and so that would be like the initial engagement was kind of getting to learn the other girls, um, having just really sweet combos with Matilda as well as other people that work for Drift Avenue. I have, I'm in several group chats with some of the girls that I've gotten really close with, and we're lo, we're located all over, but we talk almost every single day. Um, I, like Matilda and I will pop in on each other and just check in, um, some of the other girls within the team who have gotten close with like, we'll keep tabs on each other. R9:I also think with Jeff Avenue, especially that, um, you know, they really enjoy the empathy and love that everybody creates it. Like with Jeff Avenue, like the consumer group, let's say like this, um, all the angels, it's a different kind of positivity with	Members sharing empathizing practices they perform/witness in the OBC

		them. Um, they're very understanding. There's, um, no criticism whatsoever. And if there is, you are criticized for being critical, you know, I don't know how to explain it else, but definitely, they're all with Djerf Avenue.	
	Governing	R9: All of us angels pretty much have this common understanding that we don't bash each other under these comments. The comments are not meant to criticize people you or give them like tips on doing this better or whatever. Yeah, in a negative way Of course if you want tips and you're asking for that we can give you like hints whatever. Um, but there is some sort of governance because as soon as one person is attacked all the other people, they immediately comment like Why are you attacking that's just so Literally uncool, you know. R7: Like, people being nice to each other, either adhering to, you know, the rules, you know, um, is there any offensive language used in a group chat? Am I being felt comfortable at any point in my communication with anyone? Those are the important things for me. R1: I'm not gonna lie, they [the brand] probably have someone monitoring the comments.	Members share governing practices they perform/witness in the OBC.
Impression management	Justifying	R10: And also like the longevity of it, because I think when, um, brands start to get bigger and bigger and bigger, you think they're going to forget about you. They're going to forget about you. You're just a number. And I think that's something else with them where I'm like, every time that I think that that's going to happen, like. More devotion just comes later, and someone reaches out or the team reaches out and wants you to be a part of something. So, um, I think they've really, really shown that if you invest, they will invest back. And so, it's like, why would you not want to be a part of that? And so, I tried to. Um, happily talk about that anytime the opportunity is present, or if I'm rambling to friends that aren't a part of the community butt are kind of intrigued by what I've been doing, um, then I happily talk about that because I believe so much in all the positivity that's come from it. R7: My role is, uh, spread the news to other people who might be interested in. : It feels natural at this point because I'm so excited about it and I love it a lot that I want to share it with the people that I love that I would, I think would also be interested in this. So, I don't see it as like a responsibility that I need to do, but it automatically happens. And, uh, I kind of, like, assumed this role, uh, naturally. R9: Um, well, they see my clothes for example, and then they ask, Oh, what a nice top. And then I go, Oh, my bathrobe, especially. And then I go like, yeah, my bathrobe, that's from Matilda. Um, and then they asked me, oh, like, and do they have other products? And I, of course tell them and it's easy to justify even if I would have to, because they have amazing quality and you know, the message in itself is there in the company as well.	Members share how they justify their loyalty to the brand to people outside the community.
	Evangelizing	R10: Yeah, um, absolutely. I think, um, once again, like the main stimulus for me wanting to talk about this is always like going to be with people in mind. And so, um, if it makes me feel something and that something was positive, like I want other people to know, be a part of this, be a part of this, be a part of this. Um, I actually remember there was one day at, um, My local gym that I go to, and I was, you know, checking out, getting food out of the Life Cafe, and one of the girls saw my Joe Fabbany bag, and this was like, prior to, um, the first New York pop up, and like, the fashion show and whatnot, and I remember her being like, Oh my goodness, you can tell that she was like, sort of familiar with [00:37:00] the community, but like, not really, like, had just moved in. And in that moment, it immediately becomes	Members share how they evangelize (share positive perceptions/promote the brand) within and outside the community.

			kind of advocating for the brand of like, oh my goodness, you should try to come if you can make that happen or just try to be more involved in the community because I'm like, there is a home for every single person. I'm convinced. Um, and I think the reason that I wanted to do this, and fine to be open and talk about all of that, um, is because I've just experienced so much positivity and light from every single interaction.	
			R5: I send my friends posts from, from Djerf Avenue all the time. Mm. Uh, uh, I, I, uh, that's because I find it valuable and that's because I, I think that they would really benefit from being a part of the community as well	
			R9: I mean, we're all there for the same reasons in terms of, we like their clothes. It's good quality. We love Matilda Jerf. We like what the company stands for. So just commenting under each other's suppose is pure, like positivity. And I think in today's world, especially with social media, there's so much toxicity and so much negativity. Like, why do you have to spread that? You know, you can just, you can just be positive, share the good things, which is what social media is supposed to be for, I think, rather more than hating other people. So, I really liked that kind of message.	
			R7: Um, well, if, like, obviously if I like the style, I say how much I like it. Or if I have a question about the product, or the, uh, like, or the clothing item, I ask, like, you know, how can I style this or stuff like that? It's questions. And also, if I have practical questions, like, how much is this? You know, do you ship to this? Um, I like it so much that I want people to benefit from this as well. Like, when you have something nice, for example, like, let's say you got a bag and the bag is really good, and people, when people ask you, oh my god, your bag is really good, like, you know, like where'd you get it from?	
			R3: You want to talk about it because you want them to have that bag as well. Cause it's really good. You know, it's that feeling that I want to share it with, share it with people. Like, it's so good that why don't you get in, get in it? Like, why don't you have a couple more friends share this feeling with other people, uh, be a part of a community.	
			R9: Yeah, I Think are us as a community because in the end we do buy their products. We do promote their product and I think the most Successful way of marketing things is through the word of mouth And, um, that's what we've all been doing. And I think other companies should definitely take that seriously. That online brand communities do. Um, Raise your brand awareness as well amongst other people.	
	Community engagement practices	Documenting	R10: Um, so, obviously, photos off the bat but even more than that, um, I'm a big journal girl. Like, journal that I love to write. Um, cuz I know that every single time that I reflect back, I'm I'm so thankful that um I have those scripts and those things to read and re feel what I was experiencing in that moment. Um, and not always like perfect about the timing of it but I'm like when I know that I need to brain dump all these thoughts of a really incredible experience. That's one of my outlooks. And then, um, scrapbooking photos as well. And so, I love to, um, print like my favorites from whatever was experienced. And then also still kind of do like a visual journal, so to speak. And so, the photos with written documents. And then, um, I love to screenshot like little messages and then like [00:44:00] keep them all in a little folder, um, from just. Commentary following an event of like people that I shared space with, um, cause I think that we forget like that's the most important part. And so, I love to hold on to like the little snippets of that. And so, if there's a day where I'm like feeling down or I miss my humans that are spread all over the	Members share how their documenting practices

			world, I'm like, they're still near, they're still here. And so, I go back and, you know, kind of reread those little glimpses. R9: Yeah, when I'm at these events for instance, I always take pictures because that's also part of the job, of course You Um, I also, when I vlog, I tell them about these things, about the community, about the brand. For example, I tell them about just my daily opinions. For instance, when I comment, I'd be like, oh yeah, I just commented on this picture and this girl, like, she said this. And that made me realize that's so true.	
		Badging	R9: They are not real Djerf Angels R3: Like recognizing each other, real Djerf Angel girls R10: […] Us Djerf Angels	Members share perceptions on Badging within OBC
		Milestoning	R10: Um, yes. And I think a huge, uh, definitely like a, a big turning point was for sure the Dream Lunch in Stockholm because, um, they were, I mean, that was fall of 22 and that they've grown so much even since then, but, um, they were still definitely on the rise during that time too. And I think it goes to show that they can take the big spaces and make them small and intimate. Um, and so I think that was truly one of my favorite experiences because it was just like 15 of us, like Matilda, some of the team and like all just sit in there like we've been friends since we were kids. Um, because it's just that rest of the space. And then the other one definitely would be the fashion show because that was a huge milestone for them. Um, and the fact that they included and like invited, you know, their community, what another brand is doing that? Like no one, it's just, it's the elite, the elite, so to speak. Um, that comes to those things, but it's like, they cared so much that they wanted us to be a part of something that, um, they know that we've like invested in and then same thing with girth Avenue beauty, like immediately Ida, who she runs a lot of their social media stuff there. Um, and I got close to her in Stockholm as well. And she had reached out and was like, let's make I want you to be a part of this. And so, they create opportunities for the people that want to invest and stay consistent in investing. Like they see that, and they care about you as a person, not just a customer. R9: Yeah, with milestones, um, how I just mentioned the New York Fashion Week, um, I was there, which was amazing post a lot about that, and that content also went viral. Um, also their collection there was amazing. Also, their new launches, for example, the launch with Sofia Richie. That was amazing. Loved that and especially because shortly after that she announced that she was pregnant. Mm hmm. That was even better. Yeah, those are like big milestones when you join these kinds of things and you're apart from it at the beginning and you know about them. It's just amazing. , So yeah, and even if you're in, for example, with the milestones, even if you're not there at the different events and I still feel part of it because they also live stream it, there are different video clips being uploaded and also different influencers or whatever that are invited go to these shows. So, you're also always kind of part of it. R7: Yeah, well, the, uh, their following number, I think, should be one of the milestones. And I'm obviously a contributor to that because I follow them myself and I brought a lot of followers to them as well. Uh, yeah, that's all I can think of right now is milestones. R3: But yeah, like I feel like, um, even milestones, like the first pop up in Manhattan and like the first billboard in Manhattan, like it, I felt part of it because it's a brand that like, obviously it's like, they're based in Sweden and like, they're like, So just them branching out, like I felt a part of it because like, I'm educating	Members share how they experience milestones (celebrate seminal events)

					people around me in the United States like about it. So I felt like I was like, because they have a big presence in New York and I feel like any Drove Avenue Angel who is located in New York and like talks about it is part of why they have a presence here in the first place and why they're able to like, come here and have a pop up. With very little, um, marketing surrounding it and it has lines that circling the block.	
				Staking	R1: I think some people buy I'm gonna just say it […] So I think some people buy because they're like, they could get like pushed on social media, which is, which is great, which is nice. Um, some people try and do it for work. So, I get it. So, I think that's some other people's reasons. But personally, for me, I'm not trying to make money off my account. Like I truly do just blog because I want to blog if they want to post me. Brilliant. [00:14:00] That's, uh, thank you. Love that. Thanks for posting me. But my, that's not really why I engaged to see if they can, like, share my stuff. I just, I just love their clothes. I just love what they have to offer. Like, I just haven't really come across a brand that is that great. Sort of unique and it's like a lifestyle It's not just the clothes like while they have while they sort of present and what they sort of showcase our social media is is literally like They romanticize like the little things and that's what we all try to do in our day to day life So I think it's just like I engage because they inspire me So I, I just naturally do engage.	Members share how they recognize variance within the OBC, creating a distinction within the group.
			Brand use	Customizing	R2: I've incorporated that into my life... it's now part of my hair routine. R8: I have experimented a little with initials... it adds a little touch of a personal touch R3: I feel like styling it in a way like for me, I guess personalizing it would be like using like injecting it with my own personal style And I feel like I do that in like a way of like getting it out of like just like the business casual realm and into like like maybe like more like edgy or like different type of vibe. R7: Like I, uh, for example, I'm also into sewing and the other day, I finished sewing a skirt and I matched it with one of the, uh, shirts that I bought from Djerf Avenue. And I personalized it in a way. You know?	Members share how they customize and personalize their products to suit their needs

Consumer experience	CCT Theory Waqas et al., (2023) CCT-based framework of branded content experience	Consumer experience in Djerf Avenue OBC	Self-identity experience	Personal growth	R1: I'm like, yeah, wow. They have, they actually have a huge influence on my day-to-day thinking. And, um, just living that slow life as well. I've always done that before Djerf, but the way that Djerf sort of document it. And they, and they take, they, they sort of, the way that they capture the sort of slow life is so thoughtful. And I'm like, I, I love a slow life. I like to really calm things down because I am quite energetic and I'm always on. If I have a moment where I can just breathe and really slow things down so I can try and achieve a very balanced life, I will do my utmost to do that. And like. I've inspired me to like document that a little bit more. It's good for your well-being, and you don't realise it. Until you see a lot of other people do it, and you're like, yeah, it is really, really important. Because, like, life has gotten a lot more serious, it's become a lot more stressful, and the, and the fact that you see so many people really diving into, like, the more mindfulness. R1: Yeah. I mean, yeah, cause of what I see other people go through and how they connect with Djerf, it gives me that sense of connection because I think when I was growing up, I felt quite like. I think every kid does, really. I don't feel like I'm unique in saying this. But when I was growing up, I did feel a little bit of an outsider. My mum tells me to this day, like, I was so girly. I was so into my princesses. I was so, like, elegant. And I just	Members share how their experience in the OBC has made them grow as a person.

handled things with care. I looked like a tomboy, though. I looked like Annie. Um, from like the musical Annie, I had really orange hair, tight curls stuck to my hair. I, I, all I wanted was to be like Cinderella with my long, with like long blonde hair. Um, I've dyed my hair now blonde because I just, I've always wanted to have blonde hair. But yeah, I felt like an outsider growing up. Um, so like for, for, I'm an adult now and I feel so comfortable in my skin. Like I don't. I don't love myself in a vein way, but I have a healthy amount of love for myself. So, I can't imagine people struggling, um, with their identity. And then there's brands out there that don't acknowledge them. Like that's even more of like a slap in the face than like. They're, they're outside of, like, society when they shouldn't be, they're not. Um, so, I, I feel like, I feel for them, and I'm so glad that they connect with the brand because they're so inclusive, but then it's also, like, a little part of, like, the little me where I'm like, yeah, I couldn't imagine going through that, so, like, I really respect the brand in a lot of ways. Laser, for instance, like that's like totally a comfort piece for me that like I keep returning to and like when in doubt and like when I'm not feeling confident, I can go back to that.

R5: Oh, um, well, well, growing up, um, as a closeted queer person, I didn't really have the opportunity to, um, or the luxury. To really express myself, especially through fashion, because it was very strict for me growing up and I didn't really want to raise any eyebrows. Hence why I have kept myself a bit reserved from putting myself out there. Uh, which ultimately led me to kind of not lean into exploring this or trying to develop on that much, but instead just, um, yes. Yeah. Keeping that box closed for a very long time and it kind of continued on towards my academic life as well because for a very long time. I really wanted to study something very artistic and especially I was very interested in fashion and fashion houses and ateliers. I loved all the movies. I really just when I was small, I would just grab some magazines and from the rack and just like kept looking at them in bookstores and stuff. So, it was very [00:08:00] personal to me um, but uh given the circumstances that I grew up in I didn't really get a chance to do much about that. So, it was unfortunate when I was growing up and I do feel like I'm coming to a foreign country to study from Turkey uh kind of helped me open up that box, but more so online communities played a very big role in this, uh, which brings me to Djerf Avenue now. Um, well, before Djerf Avenue, I had didn't really have any incentive to join the join a community or try to interact with a brand because I thought brands were something very brands or something that was very unreachable and kind of impersonal. Uh, like, for instance, uh, birth, creation, and pull and bear, nobody's replying to any of whatever. Anybody's saying in the comments of those, uh, but it's really shifted my perspective with Djerf Avenue because I really did see what a brand could do, uh, in terms of, uh, valuing their customer and treating them as people. And me as a person who has, uh, kind of held myself back in towards my interests, I really feel like that was a bright opportunity that I could take. Uh, so yes, and very gainful, I feel like. I do feel like it helped me, uh, open up a bit more because again, I didn't, these were my first times exploring back this thing that I kept, um, low key for so long. Uh, that's why I didn't really have much experience with expressing my fashion sense, expressing my opinions, hearing constructive criticism before. But Djerf Avenue has opened the store up for me in terms of my confidence in terms of my Outgoing personality, especially when it comes to fashion and through a fashion my life I feel like because clothing in general is something that we put on every single day and as it progresses in

				our, as our fashion sense progresses, um, I feel like we also kind of change as people. I became more confident. I feel like I became more, uh, somebody who I would want to be if I compare it with five years prior. But Djerf Avenue has opened the store up for me in terms of my confidence in terms of my Outgoing personality, especially when it comes to fashion and through a fashion my life I feel like because clothing in general is something that we put on every single day and as it progresses in our, as our fashion sense progresses, um, I feel like we also kind of change as people. I became more confident. I feel like I became more, uh, somebody who I will want to be if I compare it with five years prior.	
	Social bonding experience	Establishment of social bonds	R7: Brand is like the reason that I became friends with many people. Um, but my friendship goes beyond the brand, you know? We feel personally connected to each other at this point. Like it's always good to be under the roof of something that gathers people around and our roof right now as of Djerf Avenue community, you know? R9: I, I found a really good friend through the comments. Of the one of the Djerf Avenue posts where I commented on her post Um that they have reposted from her and she immediately commented like tech dm'd me and was like, oh, that's such you know Love your comment. Thank you so much And um, we started texting and now we're actually quite good friends and she's a content creator as well So she's giving me a lot of tips and um whenever I'm at a Matilda Djerf event I also see her there, so it's just very comforting and, um, you know, you have a good person here as well. R5: Oh, uh, well, I have actually made a couple of friends through the community. Now that I think of it, I think, um, it was, I think it was in a, under like some comments that I left and then somebody just replied to me through a private messaging and then, yeah, it just bloomed into a friendship. So, I think it's very, uh, beneficial for everybody and, yes, I have, uh, uh, I have made some friends that I met up with in real life. Mm. Uh, all rooted back to Djerf Avenue's, um, platform, I think. I'm gonna pull the card that I have made friends through this, uh, this, uh, company through the community building because it has been a very big part of my life, uh, friends that ultimately came to be because we were a part of the same community, you know?	Members share the bonds they have experienced throughout their experience in OBC.
	Aesthetic experience	Visual appeal of branded product	R5: Uh, well, one thing is I really do enjoy their, um, aesthetics, the style. I think it really fits with what I do like in fashion and, uh, clothing. R8: Um, I think the fact that they also very much represent the whole Scandi aesthetic, the European Stockholm style, um, I think is, um, very representative of, like, again, Matilda, but also me growing up, um, in, like, Northern Europe, living still in Northern Europe, and just, um, I just love the, how they meet, like, the aesthetic with the quality, the style, the functionality. And it's all stuff that you could actually wear in the cold Scandinavian weather. Which doesn't really go for a lot of other brands	Members share that they derive pleasure from visually pleasing elements in branded products in their consumer experience.
		Visual appeal of branded content in OBC	R5: I do think they have a very, very strong social media, um, uh, branding style. It's very strict, not so strict, but very true to their essence and whatever they present at the time. Of course, I mean, styles change and their, their seasons change. You know, every time I go through their Instagram, I know what I will get, but I want to have that. R8: Um, I personally find the whole aesthetic of the brand very soothing. Like I really enjoy like that. Genuinely, like the	Members share they derive pleasure from visually pleasing elements of branded content in OBC.

			aesthetic of the Instagram account and the people that are part of it. I think it's very clean very yeah, very soothing. I think is the best word to describe it.	
		Artistic inspiration from branded content	R5: Um, well, it's, uh, I get inspired from it. It's very, um, the community really allows me to be in an open space where I can learn from other people. I can get inspired from the posts. I can have discussions in the comment section and then apply that to my everyday life, to my fashion sense. R4: Inspiration, I would say. That's the main thing for me because, um, I, yeah, I'm, I get, I love being inspired and I love giving inspiration myself. So, I kind of want to get something in as well. Um, but that's, um, I think that's the main thing, like for instance, social media, people follow people for different reasons, some follow because they want to be entertained or humored or whatever it is. R6: Yeah, yeah, mostly when it's Wonderful like as I said, I get inspirations from their pictures, you know, and like when I'm clueless sometimes like I like a piece a lot for example And but the problem is that I don't know how to style that piece or I don't know how it will look on me But I still want to buy it because it's beautiful But I have no idea how I'm going to use it. Uh, I look at their contents and I see like several, um, Or I ask the community, like I'm, uh, I do that many times. I'm like, this is so beautiful, but I don't know how to use it. Uh, and they helped me, you know, that always leaves me in awe. Or when they post pictures about their, uh, items or videos.	Members share they derive inspiration from branded content.
	Validation experience	Brand gratitude (recognition and acknowledgment)	R7: But I always appreciate those little gifts, you know, or like those little gift cards that they give or like whole, uh, the fact that they share my pictures on their social media is really nice. R6: I think, uh, appreciation is something that is very big. I think the thanks go out a lot. think my perspective on it is that that's a form of like appreciating the customers and just in a sense of like showing real people online instead of, I don't know. Yeah, just like the models of any photo shoots is just so much nicer because it's real people and real life that where the pieces are. So, by reposting them, it's a way of appreciating, first of all, the people posting content about their pieces, but also showing to their bigger community like, yeah, we, we love your content. So, we wanna repost you and we wanna show the real people in real life wearing our pieces. R2: Yeah, so I feel like they appreciate me again just by engaging with my content Um, and recognizing me, like I want to pop up. They recognize me from my post, like just understanding who I am and like actually taking the time to learn me and learn me as a consumer and ask about me and like asking questions about who I am. It just like definitely respect me in that way. R1: Like, I thought it was the most incredible thing ever, like a big brand commenting on your posts. But like now, every time that I post, and I see GERF have commented on my posts, I don't, it's not that I don't batter an eyelid, but I'm like, yeah, of course they're gonna post, because they, uh, of course they're gonna comment, because they do every time. Yeah. So it's like, It's like a friend. Do you know what I mean? Yeah. Without that sounding really cringe, because they're not my friend. But it's kind of like that back and forth. You get that back and forth. And you know, you're going to get that back and forth. R4: I feel that, um, obviously they verbalize it a lot, like being appreciative of. and the community and, uh, what people are	Members share they feel acknowledged, recognized, and appreciated by the brand.

			doing, for example, finding together and creating their own friends and such. Um, and I think they're very aware of the fact that every person kind of counts because it's the sum of every person supporting the brand, buying from the brand and so on. That is the, Reason why this brand is living in the first place, uh, they wouldn't be anything, uh, without, uh, their followers or customers or community members, I think. R6: Because the brand just really tries to. And yeah, stay in touch with all their customers. R9: think I mentioned earlier by them liking the posts, my posts, they're commenting on it. They're sharing it on their stories. They're reposting my posts on their actual feed. They send me PR packages. They invite me to either virtual or offline events. So definitely there's some sort of like, not some sort of, there is definitely some reassurance from the company. I think [other brands in the market] I think they're just, um, underestimating the power of making a consumer feel like they're part of it. Even though I'm not invited to many things, the amount of stuff they post on it, I feel like I was there, you know? And I think when many companies, especially big companies, um, underestimate is making the consumer just feel…Like they're part of it.	
		Brand customer care	R3: Even just the way like the Derf Avenue will take care of its members, at something like the pop up. There are [00:46:00] plenty of pop ups that go on in Manhattan and you're waiting on lines for hours and you're in the rain and they don't give you a single thing and they don't give you any like reassurement of like, when it's going to like, how long the line is going to take anything. But like when I went to the pop up for Djerf Avenue, like when we were standing in like a super sunny spot, they brought over umbrellas to us so that we could have shade. Like they had people passing out. Protein bars. They had people passing out waters constantly. Like so much so to like the fact that like they had like extra at the end of the day, like they, like, it wasn't like ever a shortage, like no one was ever like feeling sick in the line or like they were going to pass out. R1: They really care about what the audience like and wants. I mean, how many times have they restocked the, um, Summerberry pajamas? I think that's been going on. I know that that has been going on for A good couple of years. Whereas a lot of brands they'd be like, well, that was our collection. We've moved on now. Whereas they're like, right, well, if you guys like t, we'll keep pushing it. And there's so many more people that come to Djerf for the first time and they're like, I love those pajamas. And they're like, yeah, fine. We'll keep, we'll keep restocking them. We'll keep pushing them. Whereas you don't get that with many brands. They don't care. They're like, well, we've moved on from them. We're going to push something else now. So there's that as well. They are definitely. Want to know what we think they want to know what we like and you feel like you are being heard. R9: And I think because she has such a close relationship to her brand and she designs every piece of clothing, she, um, reposts all her angels. She, um, she's in such close contact with what her customers want and what she also feels like she herself would wear. I think that's what makes her stand out. R8: I think, I think other brands just try to copy. What they see and Djerf just kind of tries to actually build the connection with the people. Like other brands, they don't really make the effort and they just I'm not to explain it. It's just Djerf who started it I think to this extent they started it and then other brands are just trying to copy that.	Members share how they feel valued, appreciated and acknowledged by brand.

| | | | | Supportive environment | R3: They fostered like a safe environment for us as well as the fact that Matilda herself literally would walk around the block and like come and say hi to all of us like so they definitely care like you can just tell in the way they do things that they care like you could bring your dog with you like to the pop up like you could like they just like they genuinely [00:47:00] want you to have a good experience.

 R6: And also with the community just being a very, very much a safe place for me. Umm yeah, it's something that the brand really provides for me. So, I think that is just super, yeah, important. So, it's not like a closed community like you can enter whenever you want to, which I think makes it super nice because it's not like an exclusive place. It's super inclusive for everyone that wants to join and wants to be part of it. So yeah, it's like, umm, doing this special experience for people but making it approachable for everyone.

 R7: A sense of belonging, having a social support circle, uh, being able to share your interests with other people, security. Those are the important things for me. I Like to have a sense of belonging to the brand, you know so their success feels like feels like my success actually.

 R9: What they stand for and the sense of belonging they radiate Naturally, not even like trying to impose it like Victoria's Secret or something. Which is, um, very, you know, you, you look at this brand and you kind of feel at home almost because they, um, radiate a sense of belonging.

 R1: Again, yeah, it just makes me feel like I'm part of it. I don't feel like an outsider. I feel very much included in something, even if it's a million miles away. I still feel part of it. Um, yeah, cause like, like I said before, there's other brands that are out there and they're really, really cool. Like I love Zara, but like, I do not feel part of it in one way, shape or form. Like a sense of belonging kind of. | |

| x | x | | Community solidarity | Unity in defense through community support | R7: We constantly share information within us. So, during those times I remember like we were trying to tell people on social media as well like this is not true. You know, uh, like Djerf Avenue is actually a genuine brand, like you shouldn't believe all this misinformation. Kind of doing our best to defend our community.

 R9: like maybe they felt like that we were shaming them for not purchasing something that's a bit more on a pricey side or not following the general trend or that we're shaming people who get like off branded things, but it's not that case. Like they just don't understand the true community of the angels probably. They [other Angels] were all of the same opinion as me. They were like Yeah, you know, like, guys, careful of the dupes if they're bad quality. Um, Matilda Durst is amazing. And maybe some of them were more like, oh, yeah, you can get the dupe, whatever for much less of a price. But that's again, like this unnecessary critique, like, why are you commenting on that? And then we, as angels would say, because of this, this and this better quality. | Members share they defended the brand in unity |
| | | Community resilience | | Empathy for brand in crisis | R3: I understand Matilda, why she was upset, she was just more like upset that like a custom print that they worked hard on like was being knocked off which like if I put myself in like the brand shoes I would obviously like also be super upset.

 R9: I felt empathy for them, I felt sorry for them that this was that this is what was happening.

 R2: feel like again it's just like they feel like community is like theirs like they feel a part of it and It's like almost like somebody stole something from them too. Like it wasn't It was | Members sharing, they felt sympathy for the brand in crisis |

		more again, like it's just like they felt stolen from too They're like this isn't like this is like they felt like they were being targeted as well Because of how tight knit the community is	
	Resilience to negative information	R4: Negative information about the brand, uh, it didn't affect me, uh, negatively, I would say. R3: I feel like people could say something negative about all the stuff I've just said about how, like, I'm blind to, like, anything negative that Djerf Avenue. R7: It didn't change my view because I knew that it was misinformation. Um, but I was just sad because I knew that it wasn't true. Could have changed some other people's opinions especially if they're not very acquainted with the brand because I was sure of it You know, like I know that I know what I'm into. R2: I feel like again, these were all like people were like trying to cancel Djerf Avenue and trying to cancel Matilda Djerf but I Don't think that changed my perspective at all I was just like I feel like people are just getting really upset for no reason And I still I think I like grew to like them even more Honestly, I feel like they stood their ground and they were like, this is our product. It's literally being stolen, And I respected that. R9: Um, first of all, does not influence my opinion on the brand because I know who they are and what they stand for. Like I've been such a loyal customer for such a long time. They don't have to convince me. I'm already convinced. And, um, what was the first question? What, what, what does it make you feel when there's negative information? Um, it just, it makes me furious because. You know, nowadays, there are not many brands that are so truthful and honest. It makes me curious that they want to corrupt the last few brands as well, you know?	Members share how resilient they perceive they are to negative information about Djerf Avenue
	Protective behavior	R9: Yeah, of course, because you protect your friend, you protect the people you love, right? And that goes the same for like, companies that you value. You don't want this company to go bankrupt or become, go a completely different way just because of a few comments. You want it to stay the way it is or grow even better. R7: Mostly the people who are defending are already acquainted with the brand and within the community, but the people who, uh, were accusing Djerf Avenue wasn't really, uh, uh, wasn't really into the community, didn't really know what they were doing, you know? Uh, they just heard some misinformation on the internet and said, well, this must be true, and then they attacked. Uh, so that's the difference, like being a part of community or not. R2: I feel like the people that were buying these products weren't a part of the community and they just liked these pieces because they were trendy, and like, everybody knows it because of those items. Um, but I feel like a lot of people from the community, like, understood why they did what they did. R4: "I was just watching I think why people are defending it is because they feel like they are a part of the […] brand and it resonates with them. So, if the brand is attacked, they are kind of intact in like […] psychologically and the brand have done so much good right that people have They believe in it, and they believe they are honest and good and, uh, not like a mean brand, if that makes sense. So, they kind of believe that that's the case, even though this crisis has, uh, arose.	Members share protective behavior during crisis

		Emotional attachment to the brand	R4: I would say [my relationship to the brand] it's pretty strong, yes, um, because I don't think. they have any real competition. And for other members, their attachment to the brand, as far as I can say, it's fairly strong. R3: I mean, I would say on like, the level of strength, I'm like, definitely like up there with like some of like the most. Hardcore Djerf Avenue Angels. Like, I, like, I don't wanna call it an obsession. I obviously, like, I'm a very big fan and like I would be upset if I couldn't buy from them anymore because it, the clothes genuinely do make me feel good and I do like to be part of the community. I feel like once you're in a community, like you just become attached to it. Like it, like, let's say you're on like a dance team for five years. Like you would miss that after it was gone. You would miss the costumes. You would miss. Going to dance at the competition, you would miss your team members. So, I feel like Djerf Avenue feels like that in a way, like I've missed the clothes, I've missed the community. Like I would miss like all of those aspects because like, it's like a comforting thing when you're like part of something for like a couple of years. R9: Um, very strong. I use it every day. Um, it's also the reason why I've overcome my eating disorder or I'm overcoming it right now. Also, the reason why I started content creation. So yeah, I feel very, very, very strong towards them. R6: I'd say I can say that I have a very strong connection to the brand and strong relation also because of following and being in the Community for so long, I think that is something that just, yeah, you just uh taking your heart because. Just being in it for so long and so to say, experiencing everything with the brands and every success just yeah, makes it stronger and stronger, so to say umm. And so, I think it really depends on the people and I think the community has a very strong attachment to the brand, but also other consumers can have that because the brand really tries to, yeah, open up also for other people. R7: Like, um, Like I feel personally connected to them, you know, like once that personal connection is formed. It's not very easy to break it. R2: I would say it's definitely strong because again, like I've created connections with people more behind the scenes of like, I've spoken to the girls that like do the social media and do the community management and like speak with the people and they recognize me, they're familiar with me and they just like overall like know who I am and I feel like it's just a very positive experience.	Members share how attached they are to the brand
	Brand perception			
		Brand loyalty	R2: I am blind to, like, anything negative that Djerf Avenue does because I'm very loyal to them and I love them so, like, I'll never be able to see them clearly. R4: It seems like people are very loyal. R7: Like, I would shop there forever [00:42:00] if I keep the same style, basically. Like, if at any point in my life I decide to change my style, then I would stop shopping from there, probably, like, move on, you know? But being a part of this community, like, feels nice in general. Like, I wouldn't want to leave this community, even if I maybe don't shop there as much because, like, I'm interested in other types of things. I would still be a part of the community, still like their posts, you know, still appreciate their content. I already have a loyalty to their products to the to the people I became friends with the people and they're the reason why I became friends	Members share how loyal they are to the brand

	Resilience of brand reputation	So it's meaningful it occupies a space in my life that I wouldn't be able to forget very easily.	
		R7: Uh, yes, I think they are resilient because they have a big community. Um I think [without the community] I think it would be very difficult for them [to survive the scandal] Because You know, like, when you let the audience speak for you, it's a very powerful voice, you know? Like, Djerf Avenue saying that, oh, this is misinformation is not the same as people using Djerf Avenue saying that this is misinformation. Uh, it's, it's like having a witness, you know? R9: […] because they got rid of the, again, like the trend people, and kept only the genuine fans and fans. Followers. So by extension, now they're stronger. R2: I feel like they're resilient because I feel like they've got a strong following behind them and whatever they do, they have 600, 000 supporters that would do anything for them and like are so all into the brand and would like never to turn their backs on it. I just think because they've created such a good community of people that it's like they are all so They love the brand and what they stand for and their values and I don't think that they would ever yeah, I just think that they're so inspired by the brand. R7: Um, And the more the merrier in this sense, you know, like once you have more supporters, it means that, uh, they're going to reach to a bigger audience, uh, like more people are going to be aware of the brand, more people are going to be more personally connected to the brand, which is a strong connection, especially when you think of a fashion brand where everything is like cold and, and not much, not much communication is going on, you know? But with Djerf Avenue, that's not the same because It's like, I don't know, it's, it's like they have, they have it safe just like we do. Cause they know that they can count on the, uh, it's, it's a two-way relationship when you think about it. Like they can count on us to be loyal customers and we can count on them to provide the best service to us. So, it gets both, it goes both ways. That's why I think they're very resilient. Um, if, if another crisis like this happens in the future. I would still defend them. I know that my friends would still defend them. I know that the whole community would still defend them. So even if they, like, in the future have to, I don't know, even if they have to change their name, for example, for some type of, like, legal problem or something, the community would still be there, you know? R4: Yeah, I think they can tackle when shit hits the fan. Um, because I see the following, I see how engaged and committed the following, uh, are. And, uh, I've seen what they've built in such short a time, uh, and I've seen like, uh, the one major crisis they had and how that kind of, you know, off. Uh, so I'm not worried. R3: The followers, they want to see it [the brand] succeed. Like the people that work there, along with the people who buy from it. Like, I think that it's just like a general vibe of like, we all want it to work because it's something that we cherish and like something we believe in. So, like, I think. Even like Matilda, like with the instance of like the dupes, I think it showed a bit of resilience of the brand. Cause like they could get through like, um, some sort of like catastrophe, I guess, like relatively, well, all pretty much relatively unscathed, they got like a couple of negative videos made about them and then that's sort of it, but I don't think that like hurt them in like a major sense.	Members share how resilient the brand is from their perspective

| | | R5: I think it's really fitting with what I do like in fashion and, uh, clothing. But besides that, also, I do think there's a community building that they really invest in that some companies don't really do. It's, it gives a really personal touch. I feel like, I think they really, um, engage with their customers a lot, uh, much more than other companies do. And I do feel like that's very, they are valuable and that sets them a little bit apart from everything else that's out there.

R2: Like, they're doing so much better, and they just had like a whole new launch and everything. Like them, I feel like again, it didn't affect them. I think it just, it just. The people that love the brand are never, again, they're never going to leave the brand and they have that strong community that they've built and they're not, people aren't going to turn their backs, people that are turning their back to the people that got, got offended, didn't get what they wanted and were just like, Upset the prices of the product. So, the people that got upset not the people that love the brand understand it | |