

From reputation to community: understanding cultural demand among young consumers in the Netherlands.

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Abstract

This master thesis investigates the influence of online reputation and sense of community on consumer demand for cultural products and events among young adults in the Netherlands, specifically individuals aged 18 to 30. The study aims to add knowledge to existing research by examining the complex interplay between these two social-psychological factors and their impact on consumer behavior within a highly competitive cultural landscape and oversaturated market. Employing a qualitative research design, the study predominantly utilizes semi-structured in-depth interviews to gather nuanced insights into individual perceptions, emotions and motivations related to cultural consumption. A purposive sampling approach was adopted to ensure diversity among participants and a sufficient level of cultural participation and involvement. The data sample consists of ten individuals who are influenced by social aspects, as well online and offline, and regularly participate in cultural events such as festivals or concerts, listen to music or purchase other cultural products. Data was conducted both in person and through online video calls, with interviews lasting between 45 to 60 minutes. The theoretical framework consists of key concepts such as reputation, defined by online and offline perceptions including reviews and word-of-mouth reputation. Furthermore, it includes a sense of community, characterized by online and offline social aspects, the desire to fit in, feelings of belonging and shared values. The research explores how these variables shape the willingness of young consumers to engage with and purchase from cultural businesses. This research does this whilst emphasizing the symbolic, emotional and socially constructed dimensions of cultural consumption. Furthermore, findings suggest that a strong sense of community enhances consumer demand and the willingness to use or participate. This is especially the case when a strong sense of community, in line with the consumer's values and goals, is combined with a positive online reputation. The study provides valuable insights for academics seeking cultural and sociological knowledge about consumer demand and the potential economic effect of an entrepreneur's or business' online reputation and establishment of sense of community. Furthermore, the study provides valuable insights for cultural entrepreneurs and businesses seeking strategies to attract consumers. In conclusion, the research emphasizes that establishing a sense of community in line with the target audience's values, social goals and standards, in addition to establishing and maintaining a positive online reputation is crucial for cultural consumer demand of young audiences in the Netherlands. This thesis contributes to academic knowledge by researching the interplay of the sense of community, online reputation and consumer behavior.

Table of contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Theoretical Framework.....	3
2.1. Cultural Consumption	3
2.2. Sense of community	4
2.2.1. Establishment of a sense of community through social media	5
2.2.2. The dual role of the sense of community	6
2.2.3. Peer pressure.....	7
2.2.4. Cancel culture	8
2.3. Online reputation	9
2.3.1. Definition of online reputation	9
2.3.2. Reviews	10
2.3.3. Social proof	11
2.3.4. TikTok reviews	12
2.3.5. Person behind the brand	13
2.4. Expectations	15
3. Research design	16
3.1. Research method	16
3.2. Interview method and data collection	16
3.2.1. Consumer demand, cultural participation and motivations	17
3.2.2. Perspectives on the feeling of community that cultural businesses promote ...	17
3.2.3. Perspectives on the reputation of cultural businesses	18
3.4. Data analysis	19
3.5. Ethical considerations	19
3.6. Limitations.....	19
4. Results.....	21
4.1. Social aspects.....	21

4.2. Dual role of the sense of community.....	23
4.3. Social proof	26
4.4. Online reputation	27
4.5. The power of repetition	30
4.6. Person behind the brand and influencers	31
4.7. Online reputation: comments	35
4.8. Conclusion of results.....	36
5. Conclusion.....	38
References	40
APPENDIX	45
A Interview questions:.....	45
B Research participants:	46
C Code tree visualization:.....	47

1. Introduction

Academics who have previously studied the sense of community have discovered that in many respects, the 18–30 age range of consumers represents a cultural forefront, influencing larger society trends through their tastes and actions (Akturan et al., 2011). Authenticity, shared values, and social influence are found to be important to this group and are influencing their cultural consumption habits more and more (Croes & Bartels, 2021). At the same time, reputation has become more important and visible than ever before due to the growth of digital platforms (Malik et al., 2025). Consumers may evaluate cultural businesses not only on the caliber of their products but also on their capacity to maintain a favorable reputation and create a feeling of community in a highly competitive and interconnected climate. The scope of cultural sectors discussed in this research include festivals, music, literature, television, fashion and film with a focus on the commercial side of culture as appealing to a broad audience. However, there remain significant gaps in the research, especially the interaction between online reputation and sense of community, how these two concepts connect and how this connection influences consumer demand. Furthermore, the scope of popularity of cultural events among young people in the Netherlands in combination with rising ticket prices, a 5% decline of festival attendants and more than a 100 festivals in the Netherlands being cancelled makes this research particularly interesting (Hanley, 2025). Moreover, there remains room to investigate how and to what extent consumer demand is influenced by the latter. For example, Colbert (2003) emphasizes the requirement for empirical research to get a better grasp of the variables that influence cultural involvement and consumer behavior in the arts (Colbert, 2003).

Although the rising importance of online reputation may be a positive development for consumers, it is an increasingly important factor for entrepreneurs and businesses to consider due to its possible major impact on businesses through the virality and reach of social media. This thesis may be valuable for cultural organizations and entrepreneurs who may use it strategically to draw in and hold on to audiences. As the cultural sector is momentarily in a bad place in the Netherlands, due to increasing costs and decreasing government funds, it is imperative to comprehend these processes for cultural entrepreneurs and politicians looking to make culture viable, relevant, and accessible (Kunsten'92, 2024).

This thesis looks at these issues in an effort to add to broader discussions on the value of culture in contemporary society, the influence of community and reputation on consumers and eventually offer valuable insights for researchers and helpful guidance for cultural enterprises and entrepreneurs. In order to research this, this thesis aims to answer the following research question: “To what extent do the online reputation of a cultural business or entrepreneur and the sense of community influence the purchasing

decisions of 18 to 30 year olds in the Netherlands?” By researching this question, we will gain insight into how online reputation influences consumer behavior and how a sense of community influences consumer behavior. These insights may improve academic understanding of the subject. This will eventually lead to a better understanding of the relationship between consumers, businesses, and the online sphere, which leads to valuable knowledge for businesses and entrepreneurs. For the purpose of answering the research question, the study will analyze the factors that influence young adults' cultural consumption. By studying the consumers directly through in-depth interviews, we are able to reveal underlying meanings and incentives from consumers and make meaning of their answers. These results may be valuable to academics looking to research consumer behavior as these results are elaborate and specific. By understanding a consumer's underlying incentives and motivations, the influences on consumer demand can be partially uncovered. Furthermore, by comprehending a consumer's influences and values, businesses can use these results to attract their target audience more efficiently and successfully.

What if the most profound assumption about the influence on consumer demand is wrong? Our findings suggest that research participants are not influenced by online reputation in the form of values and goals, but by pure social media engagement, the reputation derived from that and the mutual experiences of peers. From a scientific standpoint, this study adds to the expanding body of multidisciplinary research at the intersection of sociology, marketing, and cultural economics. It clarifies how non-material elements influence cultural demand by fusing theories of community, reputation, and consumer behavior among other theories. These findings are especially relevant for scholars like Kowalczyk & Mitchell (2022) whose subfields are marketing, Wang (2017) whose subfield is management, Flanagin and Metzger (2013) whose subfields are communication, White and Dahl (2006) whose subfields are business. Thus, this study will explore how the perception of younger audiences in the Netherlands of businesses and entrepreneurs is influenced by a community focused business approach and businesses' and entrepreneurs' reputations.

2. Theoretical Framework

In order to scientifically support this thesis and reach the highest possible academic caliber, I will research previous studies done on the concepts and view the subject from various perspectives. For the purpose of clarity, I would like to restate the research question: “To what extent do the online reputation of a cultural business or entrepreneur and the sense of community influence the purchasing decisions of 18 to 30 year olds in the Netherlands?”

2.1. Cultural Consumption

In general, consumer demand describes the willingness and desire to buy products or services in a certain market at a specific price (Colbert, 2003). This idea includes people's preferences and actions while purchasing and consuming cultural goods and experiences. In addition to non-material incentives like cultural capital, identity, and social values, economic considerations like price and income also have an impact on cultural consumption (Colbert, 2003). Throsby (2001) argues that both the intrinsic and instrumental worth of cultural experiences are frequently reflected in cultural demand. Instrumental value links to more general social and symbolic advantages like community involvement or status signaling. For example, the experience of visiting a music festival with a group of friends. Intrinsic value is related to individual enjoyment, education, or emotional connection. For example, visiting a museum in order to enjoy art and learn more about it (Throsby, 2001).

According to Bourdieu's theory (1984) of cultural capital, social standing is reflected in and reinforced by cultural consumption. According to him, the preference for and knowledge about high-status items, like fine art or classical music, serve as indicators of distinction and are representative of social position. Consuming these products and learning about the products helps people develop or exhibit cultural capital and indicates participation in privileged groups, which enforces social inequality (Bourdieu, 1984). In addition to Bourdieu's theory, research conducted by Kowalczyk & Mitchell (2022), shows that the consumer's personal assessment of an item's worth or importance is based on the knowledge and understanding of these luxury brands, accessibility and the influence of social circles. The latter is enforced by people's tendency to seek approval from others and the establishment of their own reputation in a certain community or in line with its values (Kowalczyk & Mitchell, 2022). Thus, by using their reputation, cultural organizations may attract audiences looking to increase their cultural capital. A solid reputation conveys authority and the high symbolic worth of a company's products, which appeals to those who want to convey sophistication or exquisite taste. By giving participants access to unique, high-

status cultural experiences, exclusive events or programs featuring well-known artists may enhance this attraction and raise participants' perceived social status even further. Furthermore, reputation creates trust in the quality and authenticity of cultural objects, reassuring audiences in their consumption choices (Bourdieu, 1984). Additionally, this corresponds with the experience economy concept by Pine & Gilmore (1999), which suggests that customers are increasingly looking for memorable, meaningful experiences rather than just goods or services (Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

2.2. Sense of community

According to Croes & Bartels (2021) community-based strategies increase perceived loyalty and authenticity. In addition to this, the patterns of cultural engagement among young adults are probably influenced by more than just the content of cultural items, since they are known to be experience-oriented, socially conscious, and technologically connected (Croes & Bartels, 2021). Their experience-oriented nature in combination with the experience economy as explained by Pine & Gilmore (1999) highlight the value of the establishment of community for consumer demand.

According to McMillan (1996) the sense of community is the feeling of belonging that individuals receive from belonging to a group and can be defined by 4 key principles: spirit, trust, trade and art. Whereas spirit indicates the relationships that contribute to a feeling of community, trust is the belief of reliability in the society. Trade strengthens ties between community members through its advantages. Art is described as a representation of the collective expressions that give a community its identity.

In the context of cultural products, McMillan argues that the sense of community is particularly important in terms of their success and longevity due to several reasons. Firstly, customer loyalty is fostered by a strong feeling of community. McMillan argues that people are more inclined to regularly support a cultural company or entrepreneur, when they identify with them and their goals. For cultural businesses, this loyalty is important for word-of-mouth advertising and repeat business. Secondly, people may connect with and share their roots with others when they feel a sense of community, which raises the emotional worth and appeal of the things being sold. Thirdly, cultural businesses frequently produce events that unite people. McMillan argues that these shared group experiences may improve the perceived worth of the goods. Fourthly, cultural companies that enhance or establish a feeling of community tend to be more resilient.

McMillan argues that cultural businesses may stand out from the competition in a crowded market due to their fostered sense of community. Establishing a sense of community may develop a brand identity that appeals to consumers who value social connections. Furthermore, McMillan's psychological

theory about the sense of community can be applied to commercial aspects since he indicates that the application of these emotional aspects are important for a business's success due to the development of customer loyalty, word-of-mouth advertising, the expression and communication of consumer's social identities and shared group experiences (McMillan, 1996).

Whereas McMillan discusses the psychological side to the sense of community, it does not cover this concept's commercial side and how it is established and leveraged strategically in terms of branding and marketing. An article by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) explores the concept of brand communities which revolve around branded products and are seen as constructed social bonds which influence consumer demand. The authors argue that brand communities help members develop emotional bonds with one another which can increase consumer demand. Furthermore, consumers use brand communities to distinguish themselves from other brands who do not align with their values. Brand communities are able to influence consumer demand in a number of ways. Firstly, members of a community are more likely to spread their positivity to others, which broadens the brand's audience. Secondly, being part of a community strengthens emotional bonds with the brand, which can increase demand and loyalty. As McMillan previously argued, customers are more likely to stay loyal to a brand when they have a deep emotional connection with it. Thirdly, brand communities may establish cultural standards that influence consumer choices by the pressure to live up to societal norms (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

2.2.1. Establishment of a sense of community through social media

Furthermore, a sense of community is enforced through social media in various ways, which has added a digital dimension to the sense of community. Social media enforces social identity, which is an important aspect of the sense of community. By allowing users to engage in online groups, social media platforms help to create and strengthen this feeling of community. Furthermore, social media can meet social needs like emotional connection and belonging, which are essential elements of social identity and the sense of community (Wilska et al., 2023). However, social media can also lead to a filter bubble through its intricate algorithms which only show you their calculation of what you are interested in and your existing beliefs. These algorithms can lead to reinforcement of your beliefs and can make it more difficult for the user to be exposed to contrasting ideas, further reinforcing your social identity (Bruns, 2019).

The influence of the social identity aspect of a sense of community on consumer demand is further portrayed by the following theory by Wang (2017). According to this theory, social identity consists of three different parts being the cognitive, the affective and evaluative dimensions. The cognitive dimension relates to an individual's self awareness and classification of their social belonging.

It entails recognizing the relation between an individual's personal and collective identity and then recognizing themselves as a member of a certain community or social group. The affective dimension is related to the emotional attachment and sense of belonging people have to their community. The evaluative dimension is related to people's view of the importance and value of belonging to a certain community, which affects their self-esteem and self-perception related to their connection to the community.

Research done by Flanagin and Metzger (2013) shows that internet users actively search for indications of authenticity of a product online. This is deeply connected to the concept of online reputation. A study conducted by Schepers (2015) found that 85,8% of consumers from the Netherlands view online reviews in their purchasing decisions. The study further states that 46% of those consumers said their purchasing decisions were influenced by those reviews.

According to Flanagin and Metzger (2013), people's judgements are influenced by social information processing, in which they seek signals from the community. Cultural enterprises may have a big influence on their audience's trust and purchase intentions by building a strong online community which generates positive comments and reviews (Flanagin and Metzger, 2013).

2.2.2. The dual role of the sense of community

A study conducted by Escalas & Bettman (2003) shows that consumers often develop a preference for certain brands when these brands are associated with certain beliefs, values or characteristics that the consumers relate to. Consumers utilize these brands and their reputation to express, communicate or improve their own desired social identities and self-perception. The study further divides these consumers into aspiration groups, which are related to establishment and improvement of their social identities, and member groups, which are related to expressing and maintaining their already established social identities (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). This shows that people can be influenced to buy something with the incentive of belonging to a certain group or the desire to fit in. On the other hand, there are many cases where people refuse to buy something because they do not want to be associated with the particular social group that is connected to that product. Not wanting to be associated with the group can overshadow the product quality and potential satisfaction received from the product. This may also include political incentives, religious incentives or peer pressure incentives. For example, not wanting to buy too many black clothes because people do not want to be perceived as gothic, ultimately to avoid negative judgments from peers (White & Dahl, 2006). Thus, I would like to argue that the sense of community has a dual role in society, it may influence consumer demand and purchase decisions in two main ways: the desire of belonging to a social group and the desire to avoid negative associations

with a certain group. All things considered, these influences result in a complicated environment in which consumer decisions are intricately connected with social views and connections rather than being just based on personal preferences.

2.2.3. Peer pressure

The manner in which the sense of community may negatively impact consumer demand is strongly related to the concept of social identity threat, researched by White and Argo (2009). In this context, consumers are not only unattracted by the relation between a product and a certain social group with which they do not want to be associated. These consumers were a part of the particular social group, but after social identity threats like negative media publicity, they do not want to be associated with it anymore (White & Argo, 2009). According to social identity theory, people try to keep a good view of themselves by associating with some groups and avoiding others, which explains this tendency (Tajfel & Turner, 1979)(Hornsey, 2008).

White and Argo (2009) highlight the role of collective self esteem which refers to the way people feel about the social group they belong to. While low collective self esteem reflects a bad impression of one's group, high collective self esteem shows strong positive sentiments toward one's group. The degree of collective self esteem is a key factor in influencing how consumers respond to social identity threats. While the research shows that people with lower collective self-esteem might disengage from community-related products, individuals who have a higher collective self esteem are more likely to maintain their social identities. This can result in a more consistent form of consumer demand (White and Argo, 2009).

This is further highlighted by a study by Bosnjak & Brand (2008) in which the influence of the sense of community can be related to the concept of the undesired self. This represents consumer incentives to avoid negative associations from their peers or society. This is strongly tied to a low self esteem which results in actions to avoid judgment and maintain a certain reputation. This supports the idea that consumers often do not buy a product because of fear of judgment and perceived negative association, although the quality of the particular product might be adequate (Bosnjak & Brand, 2008).

The desire to form groups and appreciate a sense of community is strongly rooted in biological reasons dating back to prehistoric times. We are biologically wired to have the desire to belong to a group or community because this was necessary for our survival and reproduction. Baumeister & Leary highlight this notion with the following statement:

When other people are in groups, it is vital to belong to a group oneself, particularly a group of familiar, cooperative people who care about one's welfare. Thus, an inclination to form and sustain social bonds would have important benefits of defending oneself and protecting one's resources against external threats" (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 3).

The desire to belong to a group can result in a pressure to maintain these relationships, even at the expense of other potential benefits from products. Thousands of years later, this still plays a big role in our daily life and society (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Product avoidance by consumers as a way to distance themselves from particular groups emphasizes the intricate role that community plays in consumer demand and decisions. Although a strong feeling of community might encourage brand loyalty, it can also be unattractive to potential consumers who do not belong to the same group. In order to appeal to their target audience cultural businesses and entrepreneurs should carefully manage their online reputation, target customer, branding and online identity.

2.2.4. Cancel culture

Another example of the dual role of the sense of community in society can be related to certain norms and values where people do not want to support a certain brand because they have had negative publicity due to environmental issues and such. Cancel culture is deeply connected to this, as its dynamics urge potential customers to reject brands with inappropriate behaviors or who have violated social norms and values. This is similar to when potential customers may refrain from buying items affiliated with groups they do not want to belong to. This kind of behavior is motivated by a fear of being judged or even being socially excluded. Potential consumers may feel pressured to cancel a brand themselves if they believe the brand lacks moral integrity or is connected to negative incidents, even if the brand produces high-quality goods (Saldanha et al., 2023). In contemporary society, the public voice against certain businesses, entrepreneurs or public figures is enhanced by the collective power of social media and its virality aspect, which enables people to take lasting action immediately when dissatisfied (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004).

This can be referred to as grassroots activism, which provides a sense of community and empowerment that enables marginalized groups to establish social change and improvement through their combined efforts on social media. This grassroots activism converts cancel culture from a narrow concept of punishment into a more comprehensive discussion of responsibility and social standards (Clark, 2020). Additionally, this may be seen as a form of natural public control and collective action, where consumers feel empowered by the ability to take action against large corporations through the threat of cancellation,

also seen as a form of holding them accountable. However, cancel culture is also criticized based on its unreliability and professionally uninformed judgements (Ng, 2020). In addition to its important role in society, the power of cancel culture also highlights the importance of online reputation for consumer demand.

2.3. Online reputation

2.3.1. Definition of online reputation

There are many ways to define reputation, related to its context. As the following individual definitions do not encompass the full meaning that should be attributed to this concept, I would like to combine the following two definitions to be able to form a well defined and extensive definition. In the business context, I'd like to highlight a definition by Fombrun & van Riel (1997) who state that reputation can be defined as: "a collective representation of a firm's past actions and results that describes the firm's ability to deliver valued outcomes to multiple stakeholders" (p. 6)

I would like to argue that this definition does not encompass the meaning of reputation this research would like to cover. The reputation of a company may often not only be caused by the actions and results from within a firm, but also through the reaction of the people judging a firm and their perception of the firm's actions. Consequently, this reaction is formed by a variety of external factors which are out of a firm's scope of control. For example, people may react from a state of emotion influenced by their upbringing or personal experiences. In addition to a firm's own actions, someone's reaction may further alter or enforce that reputation through word-of-mouth or social media actions.

Thus, I would like to highlight a different perspective by Deephouse & Carter (2005) who argue that an organization's reputation is a socially constructed assessment by external stakeholders, shaped by external environmental factors including industry standards, media coverage and cultural expectation (Deephouse & Carter, 2005). The combination of these two perspectives gives a complete coverage of the definition of reputation used in this research. Based on this combination, we may state that reputation can be defined as a socially constructed and collective assessment of an organization's past actions and results, reflecting its ability to deliver valued outcomes to multiple stakeholders. It is not only shaped by a firm's own actions, but by external stakeholders and influenced by broader environmental factors (Fombrun & van Riel (1997) (Deephouse & Carter, 2005).

According to Rosen (1981), reputation is an essential component in determining demand in cultural economies because perceived quality is frequently highly externally influenced and subjective. Reputation is increasingly developed and evaluated publicly through media, the rapid speed of today's

digital society has made reputation increasingly vulnerable to viral publicity. In addition to that, social media lets entrepreneurs and businesses brand themselves exactly how they want to. Younger entrepreneurs are increasingly letting go of the perfect image and building their online brand by taking their followers along on their journey, resulting in major following numbers and potential clients.

According to DiMaggio & Powell (1983) institutional isomorphism, which refers to the phenomenon in which businesses and organizations become increasingly similar due to governmental and social pressure, plays a vital role in establishing and maintaining a positive reputation through a number of ways. Businesses that conform their operations to established norms are perceived by consumers as genuine, which increases their credibility and professionalism. Thus, institutional isomorphism helps build a positive reputation by encouraging legitimacy, uniformity, and trust (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). This can be related to the importance of a positive online reputation and a sense of community, as consumers may relate to certain norms and values within a business that may improve consumer demand.

In addition to this, Spence's signaling theory (1973) argues that businesses utilize reputation as an indication of competency and dependability in several ways to reduce customer doubt. Positive reviews indicate quality and a company's reputation is influenced by its past performance and customer satisfaction. Because of their extensive history in the industry, people tend to trust well-known businesses, which helps them gain brand awareness. By confirming a company's quality standards, third-party endorsements like certifications and awards improve its image. In addition to this, new consumers can assess quality through online reviews. These are some of the ways a business can enhance their reputation and its benefits through signaling theory (Spence, 1973).

This is further shown in a more recent study by Malik et al. (2025) who argue that online reviews have a major impact on consumers and companies can leverage this to enhance their business. The study argues that the concept and presence of trust connects reviews to consumer behavior. They argue that companies should view online reviews as critical for consumer demand and should actively engage with these online reviews and thus fortify their online presence and transparency to improve consumer demand.

2.3.2. Reviews

Furthermore, Flanagin and Metzger (2013) argue that regular reviews are seen as more credible to young consumers than expert reviews when the quantity of these reviews are high. In addition to this, the quantity of information available impacts consumer trust in a company. Thus, establishing an engaged community that frequently shares their experiences or thoughts online can help a cultural business targeting young adults to build a positive reputation and favorably impact purchase decisions (Flanagin

and Metzger, 2013). Furthermore, brand communities discussed by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) are said to be aware of the said brand's reputation being built by their own involvement with the brand and additional marketing. Thus, the sense of community within a brand is deeply connected with its reputation increasing consumer demand through loyalty (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). In addition to this, Malik et al. (2025) argue that online reviews are an essential form of social proof which enforces important brand trust. They argue that consumers heavily rely on original opinions from previous customers to base their own judgements upon.

Although the degree of satisfaction with a certain product mediates the direct impact on purchase intention, a high or increased sense of connection through reviews can result in increased trust of consumers in a brand. In addition to that, the authors argue that trust plays a crucial role in the relationship between perceived social presence, information quality and the contentment resulting from the combination between them. Increased satisfaction results from more trust, having a significant effect on purchase intention (Zhu et al., 2020).

2.3.3. Social proof

According to the psychological notion of "social proof," people base their judgments, particularly when faced with uncertainty, on the behaviors and experience of others. Indicators that may signal popularity and reliability are likes, comments and follower count which thus demonstrates social proof (Rudeloff & Damms, 2023). The authors Huang et al. (2025) claim that social proof has a big impact on impulsive purchases by making decision-making easier. These social signals can lead to impulsive purchases when consumers see ads on short-form video platforms that receive a lot of likes and comments. As a result of social proof, items become more visible and appealing, which encourages customers to believe reviews and make rapid decisions. By emphasizing emotional and visual appeal, media attraction has a favorable impact on impulsive purchases. Eye-catching photos or videos are examples of engaging media material that instantly grab customers' attention and generate strong emotional reactions. Because customers are motivated by the enjoyment of the content rather than a thorough evaluation of the goods, they may make rapid decisions that result in impulsive purchases (Huang et al., 2025). In addition to this, engagement patterns give consumers the opportunity to determine how peers or community members perceive a certain brand, product or influencer. (Rudeloff & Damms, 2023)

The authors do find a slight nuance in the influence on consumer decisions. Because consumers' decision-making processes for high- and low-involvement items differ, the benefits of social proof, especially in the form of likes and comments, vary greatly depending on the type of product. Firstly,

social proof is crucial in influencing purchases for low-involvement items. These items are usually cheap and need little consideration before purchase. Customers frequently consider peripheral cues, such as the quantity of likes and comments, as reliable indicators of a product's quality in these situations (Huang et al., 2025). Peripheral cues are defined as factors that “influence attitudes or allow a person to decide what attitudinal position to adopt without the need for engaging in any extensive thought about issue- or product-relevant arguments” (Petty et al., 1983). High levels of social proof might encourage impulsive purchases, because they offer a quick indication that others people approve the products. Therefore, this can minimize the need for in-depth information about the product. Secondly, a more thorough process is necessary for high-involvement items. These items are often priced higher and complicated. Potential buyers are more inclined to read reviews when contemplating whether they should buy a more expensive product. They could place more emphasis on extensive and high-quality feedback than on the number of likes, comments and followers. Social proof can thus still have an impact on high-involvement purchases, but it has a less impact than it does on low-involvement items (Huang et al., 2025).

2.3.4. TikTok reviews

Reviews can come in many different forms through many different mediums. One of the mediums nowadays is TikTok, which is proven to be used as a social app as well as a search engine (Almoqbel et al., 2025). For example, platform users may encounter certain festival content in their ‘for you page’ and read the comments about the festival. Almoqbel et al. (2025) conducted a survey of 123 participants who were TikTok users, which found that 89,4% of them use Tiktok as a search engine. The main reasons for this were its perceived reliability, the appealing visual content, education opportunities and ease of use. In addition to this, users’ algorithms are so well customized to their interests that content is easily pushed to the right target audience, adding the risk that this target audience will likely see negative comments about the product (Jamil et al., 2024). In addition to that, the viral aspect of TikTok allows businesses to grow overnight as well as fail overnight due to the present cancel culture. This major influence of TikTok on the reach of content is further portrayed by examples like viral food hypes like the Dubai chocolate bar or music by Keinemusik, who grew rapidly after viral videos surfaced of them giving a concert in front of Egyptian pyramids.

A recent article by Zhu et al. (2020) has developed a new framework called the “stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) framework” with which they analyze how consumer trust and satisfaction are influenced by perceived information quality and social presence from online reviews. The authors found that trust and satisfaction are positively impacted by online reviews with a high perceived information quality, referring to comments or reviews that are long and detailed. Credibility is increased by positive

reviews, which lowers the perceived risk for customers while they are making decisions. Furthermore, online reviews contribute to the concept of social presence which additionally builds trust (Zhu et al., 2020). Trust is further enhanced through the reciprocal engagement that is present on social media. Social media gives followers and potential customers the opportunity to interact directly and reciprocally with influencers entrepreneurs or brands which makes consumers feel heard and appreciated (Rudeloff & Damms, 2023).

Furthermore, TikTok and other social media platforms promote a feeling of community among its members. Consumer demand can be greatly influenced by this community impact. Viral marketing frequently fosters a sense of community through collective interest among consumers who can relate to a brand or product, which may swiftly result in increased demands. People are further encouraged to make purchases that represent their involvement in the community by the collective conversations around trends, which are fueled by viral content and connect with the collective characteristics of FOMO (fear of missing out) (Kamiliya Azzahra & Adi Prakoso, 2025). Not only can influencers be used as a marketing medium, influencers are increasingly building their own brands or companies online. Entrepreneurs are increasingly becoming influencers themselves by taking followers along on their entrepreneurial journey or showcasing the lifestyle they have attained through their endeavors.

2.3.5. Person behind the brand

As we may conclude, social media is an incredibly important marketing medium as well as a tool for establishing and maintaining a sense of community. A well thought out and polished brand on social media may be crucial for establishing and maintaining a positive reputation, although this publicity can go viral on social media and negative publicity can be fatal for a business (Ahluwalia et al., 2000). Since the arrival of social media, a new career format and way of living has emerged, the online influencer. There are many examples of online influencers who had established such a major online following that they could easily become entrepreneurs. Their followers can be seen as their loyal fans, who buy anything their idol's bring on the market (Edlom & Karlsson, 2021). In addition to this, there are many entrepreneurs who have started posting on social media about their entrepreneurial journey and then gained many followers which consequently grew their brand as well as their online reputation. Examples of Dutch influencer entrepreneurs are Monica Geuze (1,4 million Instagram followers), Negin Mirsalehi (7,2 million Instagram followers) or Anna Nooshin (923 thousand Instagram followers)(source: Instagram).

According to Wang & Huang (2023) there are a few key aspects to why influencers have such social power to impact consumers online. Firstly, by offering insightful product information, they help potential customers in making well-informed judgments about purchasing certain products. Their

perceived expert standing plays an important role in building credibility and persuading consumers to follow their content and buy their products. An example of the establishment of this expert standing can be a fitness influencer who sells protein powder and shares workout videos. They built their expert standing by having a visually healthy and trained body and showcasing their body and thus the effect of their tips, products, experience and lifestyle online. Secondly, the authors argue that influencers possess a so-called referent power. This refers to a type of social power that results from someone's capacity to draw people to them through their attractiveness or popularity. This kind of power is important in the context of social influence since it allows influencers to sway other people's perspectives, opinions and consequently actions just by being attractive and visually present, which makes them a powerful marketing medium (Wang & Huang, 2023).

The influence that online reputation has on consumer demand is further highlighted by a study conducted by Rudeloff & Damms (2023). They argue that consumer demand is influenced by so-called "parasocial interactions" via social media. These parasocial interactions are defined as the one-sided relationships present on social media platforms where the audience is emotionally attached to the influencer or entrepreneur. An important aspect of these relationships that influence consumer demand is the personal feeling and connection they establish. Followers may become more devoted to a brand or product promoted by the influencer as a result of this emotional connection. This may in turn increase the possibility that followers will make a purchase through social media marketing. Furthermore, the degree of credibility is increased when followers view influencer entrepreneurs as relatable due to the personal approach. When making purchases trust is deemed a crucial factor. Thus, a personal touch in the online reputation of entrepreneurs and their online communication influences consumer demand (Rudeloff & Damms, 2023).

According to research conducted by Kamiliya Azzahra & Adi Prakoso (2025) influencer marketing has a big impact on what people decide to buy. The online reputation of influencers among their followers is often improved by their well cultivated and often polished online persona. The items that influencers promote online may see a rise in demand when consumers view these influencers as reliable and trustworthy. Meaning it is very important for influencers to promote products of high quality. When consumers feel misled by an influencer this can spark negative online discussion and even lead to the cancellation of the influencer (Kamiliya Azzahra & Adi Prakoso, 2025)(Saldanha et al., 2023).

Since people are more inclined to purchase from reliable sources, marketing campaigns can be more successful when brands or influencers have a strong internet reputation. Influencers can thus be used by entrepreneurs or cultural companies with a solid internet reputation to increase sales (Kamiliya Azzahra & Adi Prakoso, 2025). In addition to this, influencers may subconsciously promote a sense of reciprocity among their online social community. This results from certain social norms in society in

which it is normal to reciprocate a gesture with a kind of reward. Followers may feel obligated to influencers when they offer assistance, suggestions, or inside tips, which encourages more and deeper interaction and increases the possibility that they will make a purchase in return (Wang & Huang, 2023). This phenomena is deeply connected to the sense of community established by online influencers.

I would like to further delve into the relation between fandom and online followers, as the sense of community developed by influencers online and followers that are fans they have gained from it are essential for their success. Fandom can be seen as an intense form of community around a person or object, for example around a music artist. One's fandom is an essential factor in their success as its strong emotional connections, active participation and value creation has a positive influence on consumer demand and engagement. It can develop a stronger brand and can be the main reason for a product purchase. This way, the other factors that are influential for consumer demand are minimized as fandom can be the sole reason for purchase (Edlom & Karlsson, 2021). This further highlights the importance of the sense of community of influencers and influencer-entrepreneurs on consumer demand. Furthermore, businesses that are transparent may also increase their authenticity. This authenticity can make them more approachable and desirable to customers. (Mayer et al., 1995).

2.4. Expectations

Based on the insights from the literature, it is anticipated that a strong sense of community will positively influence young consumers' engagement and willingness to participate in cultural activities and pay for cultural products, particularly when combined with a positive online reputation. It is expected that reputation acts as a form of social proof in consumer decisions, enhancing trust between a business and a consumer. Social proof may in turn strengthen the feeling of belonging and sense of community. For consumers aged 18 to 30 years old, this online reputation could be established and maintained predominantly online. Consequently, the intricate connection between these factors is likely to influence consumer demand.

3. Research design

The purpose of this study is to find out to what extent consumer demand among Dutch people between the ages of 18 and 30 is influenced by the reputation of cultural businesses and entrepreneurs and by the sense of community they foster. The research question goes as follows: “To what extent do the online reputation of a cultural business or entrepreneur and the sense of community influence the purchasing decisions of 18 to 30 year olds in the Netherlands?”

3.1. Research method

In order to gather extensively detailed information and a profound understanding about consumer perception including their thoughts and emotions, a qualitative research technique will be used. A qualitative approach enables a more extensive research into meanings, nuances, incentives, and individual perceptions than quantitative techniques. Qualitative research allows for a better understanding of how people give meaning to their experiences, in contrast to quantitative techniques that use numerical indicators to measure behavior. Although quantitative methods have their benefits, qualitative methods suit the nature and goal of this research better. Considering the goal of this thesis is to investigate the degree to which reputation and community impact consumer demand, as assessed by consumers themselves, and cultural consumption is intrinsically symbolic, emotional and socially influenced, a qualitative approach enables the complexity of this experience to be captured. (Bryman, 2015).

3.2. Interview method and data collection

Conducting semi-structured meaning-making in depth interviews with consumers aged 18 to 30 years in the Netherlands will be the main method used to collect data. Information on attitudes, actions, emotions and perceptions in relation to cultural consumption is best collected through conducting interviews. This approach provides a sufficient combination between standardization and comparability of the interviews and the ability to go in-depth into each person's viewpoint. Semi-structured interviews provide an option between unstructured interviews which risk missing essential information and coming off as unprofessional and structured interviews which risk guiding the interviewee into a certain direction and missing additional valuable information (Bryman, 2015). In order to guarantee diversity in terms of gender, cultural background and involvement while choosing interviewees, purposive sampling will be

used. Moreover, interviewees must be exposed to advertisements and content from businesses and entrepreneurs in addition to regularly participating in cultural activities like festivals, museums or consumption of high-end fashion. Furthermore, each interview will take place in person or via an online video call lasting between 45 to 60 minutes. In order to gather valuable in-depth information from suitable participants, I have searched for interviewees using my network. Since the participants were gathered around the researcher's network, social desirability may have played a role in the data.

In order to ensure response comparability and facilitate thematic analysis, the interviews will contain structured questions. Three primary topics will be covered in the questions: (1) consumer demand, cultural participation and motivations (2) perspectives on the feeling of community that cultural businesses promote; and (3) perspectives on the online reputation of cultural businesses.

3.2.1. Consumer demand, cultural participation and motivations

In order to base the idea of consumer demand in a qualitative framework, this initial topic is crucial. This topic aims to explore the values, incentives and thoughts behind participants' cultural participation and consumption rather than asking them about demand in terms of economics. What kind of cultural organizations, entrepreneurs, faces of brands or products people are drawn to, why they go, what they want to gain from such experiences, and how they find new cultural 'products' or businesses are all covered in this section's questions. This will enable us to comprehend the processes of decision making that underlie cultural consumption and lay the groundwork for analyzing the potential effect of outside variables like reputation and community on those decisions.

3.2.2. Perspectives on the feeling of community that cultural businesses promote

A key component of this research, a sense of community, is covered in this second theme. Cultural businesses are increasingly using this concept in their branding, they position themselves with a feeling of social identity, connection and shared values, rather than positioning themselves solely as the producers of a product. This topic will investigate to what extent consumers feel a feeling of belonging in the cultural settings they visit or the way these businesses market their product. Moreover, this theme will explore if consumers experience a preference for a brand after building a relationship with it through the entrepreneur behind the brand and to what extent this is the case. To what extent are consumers influenced by the feeling that they are represented, the feeling of connection to a brand or the feeling that they are welcomed by a brand? To what extent does this apply for first time customers in relation to

returning customers and what is the difference here? This topic is important because, especially with younger audiences, the sense of community and engagement with community has emerged as a marketing strategy for audience development. This topic enables us to evaluate the social and emotional aspects of consumer demand by looking at participants' perceptions of inclusion, engagement, and connection with cultural products.

3.2.3. Perspectives on the reputation of cultural businesses

The third topic researches how reputation affects consumer demand, asking interviewees about their perceptions on cultural businesses or entrepreneurs, including if they perceive them positively. Consequently, they will be questioned about how these perceptions and their feelings towards the brand influence their willingness to pay for the product in question. To what extent does fandom of an entrepreneur through social media play a role in consumer demand? Are consumers more inclined to buy a product when positively evaluating the entrepreneur behind the brand and to what extent?

3.3. Operationalization

Defining the fundamental concepts of this research as qualitative variables is the process of operationalization. The first concept, which is consumer demand, is defined as the measurement of demand for cultural consumption of consumers aged 18 to 30 in the Netherlands. Consumer demand will be assessed through interviewee's perception of a brand and their connection with a brand, their incentives to follow a brand and willingness to buy a product, their perception of a brand's alignment with their values, the sense of community within a brand and the consumer's view of a brand's reputation. The second concept which is participants' sense of community as established by a business or entrepreneur is defined as the sense of belonging with a certain group or brand. The sense of community refers to how cultural companies create and foster a community and how this influences consumer demand through elements that resonate with consumers like inclusivity and shared identity. The concept of the sense of community will be operationalized by the shared values when interacting with these groups, the consumer's feeling of inclusivity and representation. Reputation is defined as the online and offline reputation a cultural company or entrepreneur has referring to for example reviews, word-of-mouth or social proof. Questions on public recognition, perceived quality, trust in cultural companies and perception of entrepreneurs behind the companies will be used to evaluate reputation, which is the last concept.

3.4. Data analysis

The target group is made up of people in the Netherlands between the ages of 18 and 30, who are influenced by social and digital media and regularly participate in cultural events. The study will aim for a sample size of 10 individuals in order to guarantee a representative result. Despite the possibility of bias within this strategy and the small data sample, this strategy is reasonable and appropriate considering the meaning-making character of the study and the limited resources (Bryman, 2015). Each interview was audio recorded (with informed consent), properly transcribed, and analyzed using thematic analysis according to the six-phase model developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). After I completed the conduction of all interviews, I started transcribing them using a transcription tool (Goodtape.ai) and editing its output to ensure verbatim transcription. After familiarizing myself with all the results, I started creating the initial set of codes using Atlas.ti, whereafter I started looking for themes within the codes. After having reviewed all these themes, I started definitively defining them and looking for connections and possible conclusions for the final results section. Both inductive coding, in which themes gradually arise from the data, and deductive coding, in which theoretical notions direct the study, are possible with this approach. Therefore, I took an iterative approach, using a combination of deductive and inductive coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.5. Ethical considerations

To ensure an ethical procedure I have firstly made all interview participants sign an informed consent form. Furthermore, I have made them feel comfortable and secure during the interview. Furthermore, I have ensured their anonymity and the privacy of their input and have only used the data for the purpose of this research.

3.6. Limitations

These interviewees were selected around the researcher's network which has resulted in all research participants coming from the south of Holland which makes the study less applicable for the entire Netherlands. In addition to this, social desirability bias may have occurred since the participants were gathered around the researcher's network, thus the participants may have felt the need to give socially desirable answers. This was limited as much as possible by making participants feel comfortable

and repeatedly ensuring them of the privacy of this research. Furthermore, only three out of ten research participants were male, which may impact the applicability of this study to men. In addition to that, although this study concerns 18 to 30 year old people, the youngest research participant was 19 and the oldest research participant is 23 which makes this primarily applicable to 19 to 23 year old people. Furthermore, a crucial limitation of this study was its scope and the available time. With more time available and a larger scope, this study could have researched more individuals and have had more material to base its findings and conclusions upon. Since this is a qualitative study in which meaning-making in depth interviews were conducted, this research is subject to possible bias from research participants, subjective data and possible subjective data interpretation from the researcher.

4. Results

In this section, the key findings will be presented which are derived from the data analysis of 10 meaning-making interviews. The data analysis includes a total of 96 codes collected over 356 quotations. These results are organized into several most important themes in accordance with the research question and findings in the theoretical framework, highlighting both expected and unexpected outcomes. The main themes that were found during the data analysis were: social aspects, the dual role of the sense of community, social proof, online reputation, online reputation: comments, influences on consumer demand, person behind the brand, influencers and brand trust. A visualization of these codes and themes can be found in the appendix (Appendix C).

4.1. Social aspects

The results on social aspects are particularly relevant to the research question as these social aspects are an important part of a community and are influenced by reputation. Thus, social aspects are at the core of the connection between a sense of community and online reputation and their influence on cultural consumer demand. In this research, all participants stated that their consumer choices were influenced by social aspects at some point. Furthermore, this research has highlighted the intricate relation between the sense of community and social identity. One's social identity is formed by many things including the combination of the effects of reputation and the effects of a sense of community. A community is often established around shared beliefs or interests, which are essential parts of one's social identity. In addition to this, the primal desire to belong to a community, as previously explained by Baumeister & Leary (1995), results in the process of establishing or maintaining a reputation that is aligned with the core values and expectations within a particular community. The reputation an individual establishes or acquires can be seen as the manner in which one's social identity is communicated to others.

Businesses or entrepreneurs can utilize the consumer's reputational preferences in order to create aligned branding to further attract the consumer. Besides offering an efficient product that does what it promises, brands can sell a certain reputation. In line with Muniz & O'Guinn (2001), the findings have shown that the communities that are established around brands can influence consumer demand by the desire to establish a reputation in line with the desired community. The clearest example to demonstrate this tendency are luxury brands. Furthermore, this research has shown that consumers feel more connected to a brand when they identify themselves with the product or brand, which confirms McMillan's similar argument regarding the positive influence on consumer demand when consumers

identify themselves with a brand (1996). However, an important nuance should be made between consumer demand being influenced by the online reputation of a brand and the reputation a consumer may acquire by buying a certain product. These two forms of reputation are intricately connected as the consumer may acquire the brand's reputation for themselves, which again shows the importance of a brand's online reputation for consumer demand. Similar to what Bourdieu (1984) argued, the findings show that consumers choose to buy or choose not to buy a certain reputation established or acquired by a brand. Consumers do this to establish or enhance a similar reputation for themselves. Bourdieu (1984) argued that social standing and reputation is reflected and reinforced by cultural consumption as the consumption of high-status products can reflect cultural capital to others. In contrast to the sole consumption of high-status items, the findings show that consumers can buy any reputation connected to a brand or product. For example, a 23-year-old male research participant highlighted this with the following statement in which he describes that he stopped buying a previously popular clothing brand when it went out of style, as this could negatively affect his reputation.

Back then, it was popular, everyone wanted to buy it, and it came with a certain image. Eventually, it just completely uh yeah went out of style or something. There is just a really negative perception around that brand now. And you immediately notice that you react differently to that brand, even when you see content from them. That actually doesn't even have anything to do with their behavior, but rather... [their reputation] Yeah, with the reputation indeed.
(Interview participant G, translated from Dutch)

Based on my findings the results suggest that consumer choices are largely influenced by friends, which ties back to the sense of community. The sense of community is established offline as well as online. The offline sense of community is further enhanced online, which enables people to be more connected but also enables the development of an increased pressure to fit in, in addition to an increased influence on consumer demand. Although research participants' consumer choices were influenced by the online sense of community, the results demonstrate that the offline sense of community played a bigger role. This research has discovered a new result, as opposed to the theoretical framework, which shows that the main way to discover new products and events is either through social media or through friends, who have also discovered them through social media. Thus, it can be concluded that the online and offline sense of community ultimately tie together. An example of how consumer choices were influenced by the online and offline sense of community in terms of friends, were the effects of the desire to fit in. When a certain product is popular within a social group, it may harm an individual if they are not able to share

thoughts on the product when they have not consumed it yet. This may result in feeling left out and thus influences the individual to consume the product. As previously shown by Escalas & Bettman (2003), one of the most important aspects of the influence of the sense of community on consumer demand are the effects of the desire to fit in. This was highlighted by the following statement, in line with the theory of Kamiliya Azzahra & Adi Prakoso (2025), from a 22-year-old female research participant who stated that she experienced a fear of missing out when she could not participate in her community, which resulted in her feeling like she had to consume a cultural product to fit in again.

If I see on Instagram or whatever that a show is really good, or that a lot of people are watching it, then I want to watch it too. But also, for example, if colleagues are talking about something like B&B Vol Liefde, then I'm like, oh I want to watch it. Because then you can talk about it together. During lunch breaks, everyone's talking about it, and then you can't really join the conversation. So you kind of feel like you have to watch it. (Research participant J, translated from Dutch)

4.2. Dual role of the sense of community

Based on my findings, the results suggest that the sense of community and online reputation are intricately connected to each other. As previously stated, the consumer choices of individuals are highly influenced by the desire to fit in, which is an important aspect of the sense of community. The dual role of the sense of community is particularly relevant to the research question as it demonstrates the extent to which consumer demand is influenced, as this dual role is a representation of how the sense of community can both positively and negatively influence consumer demand. Further confirming Bourdieu's (1984) theory, the results suggest that their consumer choices are partially based on brand reputation and the reputation they can get from buying from a certain brand. They utilize this online reputation in their judgment of what to buy to achieve or maintain a certain reputation for themselves which will result in belonging to a social group or community.

Further building upon the combination of the two studies from Escalas & Bettman (2003) and White & Dahl (2006) this research has clearly demonstrated the dual role of the sense of community in many situations. The dual role of the sense of community that is present within society refers to the presence of negative effects and positive effects of the sense of community. For example, a consumer can buy something because they are influenced by a sense of community, this refers to its positive effect. In contrast to this, a consumer can refrain from buying something because they are influenced by a sense of

community, this refers to its negative effect. This may happen because the consumers expects that the consumption of a certain product which is related to a social group may result in being associated with that group. As stated before, this is related to the desire of belonging to a certain group. The choice of consumption is influenced by the consumer's desire of association with a certain group and its reputation. As stated before by White & Dahl (2006), this is related to the desire to avoid negative associations. The dual role of a sense of community is thus mainly based around the desire to fit in the community. The results showed that there were a number of situations where this phenomenon appeared to happen. For instance, the music and festival scene has shown to be a major influence among research participants, where they stated that certain music genres and festivals have their own unwritten rules related to fashion style. The research has shown that consumers take these rules into account when visiting a festival. When a 21-year-old female research participant chose not to do this, she received comments from other visitors regarding her outfit, thus the negative associations from the community. For example, a member from the techno community stated that black clothing should be worn at a techno music event as this is part of the community's way of expression.

That's right, because I was at a techno party once and I was just wearing a white top or something. At least not a black outfit. And that's actually something that you are supposed to wear there, at least the community thinks that. Then someone came up to me and said: why are you not wearing black? (Interview participant H, translated from Dutch)

The analysis of these interviews has shown that research participants were more likely to consciously experience the negative effects of the dual role of the sense of community as opposed to the positive effects which were often experienced subconsciously. Although the negative effects appeared to be consciously experienced by the research participants more often than the positive effects, the positive effects were subconsciously experienced the most by each research participant. Although Escalas & Bettman (2003) already argued the presence of these positive effects, they did not touch upon their possible subconscious nature. A possible explanation for this could be that these positive effects are deeply rooted in biological reasons connected to the theory by Baumeister & Leary (1995). As the desire to be a part of a social group, caused by survival instincts, is such a common part of our human nature, people may be so used to it that they do not realize that this is actually the case and that this may affect other aspects of our lives.

The subconscious desire to fit in is the first way in which research participants were positively influenced by the sense of community. At first, the research participants claimed not to desire being part

of a certain community or social group. However, they started to confess that they were actually subconsciously influenced by the desire to fit in, this shows the cognitive dimension of Wang's (2017) theory as the research participants were self aware of their social belonging. For example, they confessed that their fashion style was inspired by individuals in their community, offline and online. They are subconsciously influenced to wear certain clothes because they naturally started to like the items that were common in their community and this community had become a part of their social identity. The effect of the different dimensions of social identity in relation to the sense of belonging on an individual's choices of representation highlights the dual role of the sense of community. This shows the extent to which a sense of community actually influences consumer demand.

This was perfectly demonstrated by a 21-year-old female research participant's experience in which the three dimensions were clearly present. Her self-awareness resulting in her understanding that heels would be too revealing in her position at the law firm, showed the presence of the cognitive dimension. Her desire to fit in with her colleagues by wearing a similar fashion style shows the affective dimension. Lastly, the importance of aligning with the law firm's values by wearing appropriate clothing similar to her colleagues, shows the evaluative dimension.

In the end you dress for yourself of course, but you also dress based on what other people think, and you often go along a bit with fashion. So for example, this afternoon I was scrolling through Instagram and I work at a law firm ... and we always wear heels ... And I wanted to buy those ... So I ordered them right away, also because I know all my colleagues wear them. (Interview participant E, translated from Dutch)

On a further note, the subconscious effects of the sense of community were further highlighted by the fact that most interviewees believed that their consumer choices were not influenced by the sense of community, while they did think that the consumer choices of other individuals were influenced by the sense of community. This also shows a naive tendency in which individuals think they are in control but are actually subconsciously influenced by many factors. Although positive effects were experienced subconsciously, this does not mean they were not present.

Secondly, the results show that all research participants' consumer demand was influenced by social media, which is the offline form of community, in various ways. Social media appeared to be the main medium for discovering brands, products and events. Research participants were positively influenced by social media virality and 'hype', which refers to certain products generating many pieces of content, engagement and popularity. They were positively influenced by this as social media hype

enhances visibility, brand awareness, consumer curiosity and establishes brand trust. This further builds upon the theory of Wilska et al.(2023) who only argued the enforcement of a sense of community through social media. In contrast to this, the findings show that individuals use social media as a form of communication about online content, which is in line with the theory of Wilska et al. (2023). Furthermore, a 23-year-old male research participant stated that social media was additionally used by individuals to signal a certain reputation towards other users, peers and members of their community. Although Bourdieu (1984) already stated this, this result does further add to Spence's signaling theory (1973) as Spence argues that only businesses signal their reputation towards customers. Thus, these results add a personal aspect to Spence's commercial theory. This topic will be further elaborated on in the context of online reputation as the online reputation and sense of community are intricately connected here. The found reputation signaling done by social media users is demonstrated by the following statement from a 23 year old male research participant who argued he did it unconsciously, which indicate the deep effects of the desire to establish or maintain a certain reputation, previously argued by Bourdieu (1986) and Escalas & Bettman (2003).

Well, yes, I do think that when people are at a cool place some time, they will post it on their Instagram. But what is actually for status, yes I think it indirectly is. I just like showing it to others. Not consciously. Not consciously like, oh look where I am. But otherwise you can also just put nothing on Instagram. (Interview participant D, translated from Dutch)

4.3. Social proof

The findings of this research have further shown that brand trust can be influenced by the sense of community. Six out of ten research participants said their trust in a brand and consequently their consumer choices are positively influenced by the presence of a sense of community or the feeling of belonging to a certain social group. This phenomenon can be explained by the concept of social proof which was previously argued by Rudeloff & Damms (2023) which states that people base their judgments on the experience of others. In addition to that, the findings suggest that social proof refers to the effects of the sense of community on the trust in a certain brand, business or entrepreneur. Enforcing the theory of Huang et al. (2025) when others have already bought a certain product and are showcasing it publicly, either online or offline, this radiates a form of trust to others as often individuals feel more connected to members of their community. This is similar to the influence of follower count and online reviews on brand trust previously stated by Rudeloff & Damms (2023). The results show that if someone else has

already bought the product and can verify if it is adequate, the brand trust of other consumers increases, which exactly relates to Malik et al.'s (2025) theory. This is further connected to the phenomenon in which social media virality can drastically boost business as a study conducted by Almoqbel et al. (2025) found that many TikTok users used TikTok as a search engine. Furthermore, a 23-year-old male research participant highlighted the aspect of social proof by his experience on vacation where he was using social media to look for a nice restaurant to eat that evening. He stated that even though there is a minimal difference between all restaurants in a street, people choose the known or viral option quicker as their trust in this option is higher due to social proof.

You look around, you look on social media. What are other people wearing? Yeah, just social proof. If they're wearing it, then it must be good. Then I'll buy it too. If they're going to that place, then it must be good. So I'm definitely influenced by that when I make purchases. So yeah, that's something I, yeah that's all subconscious, that's not something I'm consciously thinking about. But subconsciously, I think the purchases I make are definitely based on that. (Interview participant G, translated from Dutch)

Furthermore, brand trust is often influenced by the sense of community, in terms of the opinions of peers and friends. This builds upon the theory of Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) who also argue that communities surrounding a brand influence consumer demand through their spread of positivity, the strengthening of emotional bonds by being a part of the community and the set cultural standards within the community. Social media, the online form of community, has enabled people to be in direct contact with anyone anywhere in the world at any time, which has immensely increased the sense of community. Therefore, these results show that social media is very important for business sales and is an important influence in consumer demand as the sense of community has such an important influence.

4.4. Online reputation

Based on my findings, the results suggest that the online reputation of a brand, either the business, the entrepreneur or influencer, has an important influence on consumer demand in various ways. It is closely connected to the sense of community and a consumer's individual values. First of all, there is a slight nuance to be made in the online reputation of brands. This can entail either a business brand, an entrepreneur's brand or an influencer's brand.

This research has gathered surprising findings as it has shown that consumers mostly care about the way a brand establishes itself in the market, other consumers' perception of the brand and what kind of community they relate to a certain brand. They are not too interested in the brand and its ethical values or promises, but more the reputation the consumer will get from purchasing an item or the reputation of the product quality and if it will be worth the money. A lot of interviewees are not that influenced by the negative reputation of a brand in the form of particular norms and values or really bad publicity, either political, environmental or criminal. Because, in this sense, they see the person behind the brand or the company as a separate entity and are still interested in the value they personally get from a certain product. It seems like they only start to care about reputation when it is about the product itself or when it has a negative effect on their own reputation. This is further supported by the findings in which six out of ten research participants said they do not care about brand values. All research participants said they are (heavily) influenced by online reviews. Seven out of ten research participants are influenced by the desire to fit in. This is in contrast with the theory by White & Argo (2008) who argued that a group's collective self-esteem influenced how a consumer reacted to social identity threats like bad reputation. The authors argued that a low collective self-esteem would quicker result in disengaging with community related products, or thus negatively influencing consumer demand. Based on my findings, this influence was not experienced at all which suggests a refutation of this theory.

Furthermore, an interesting tendency that appeared throughout the interviews was the difference between the influence of online reputation between different brands/products. When a research participant was asked about the influence of online reputation, she answered that sometimes it did not have an effect on her consumer choices and sometimes it did. The two main reasons for this tendency were the moment of cancellation or bad reputation and the importance and value of the product. Firstly, the moment of cancellation mattered due to the money already spent or the past utility of the product and enjoyment of the product. This surprisingly uncovered a difference between the willingness to pay and the willingness to use a product in consumer demand, dividing the latter into two sections. When the consumer has already bought and used the product before the moment of cancellation, they are likely to continue to use the product, which is also in contrast with White and Argo's (2009) arguments in which they say that after negative media publicity, consumers do not want to be associated with a brand anymore. When this starts to affect the consumer's personal reputation, this may influence the willingness to use the product as well. Until then, cancellation or bad publicity primarily influences the willingness to pay for a product. When the consumer has not bought the product yet, the online reputation of a brand has a bigger influence on their consumer demand and their utilization of the product.

This tendency can further be explained by the fact that these consumers view the product as a separate entity from the entrepreneur or artist. For example, a consumer values the music too much to

stop listening to it, although the artist who once made the music is now cancelled. The consumer makes a distinction between the art or product and the artist or business. An important aspect of this tendency is the difference between the online reputation of the product itself and the online reputation of the business or entrepreneur who produces the product or organizes the event.

The influence of the sense of community and the online reputation established by a brand on consumer demand can be shortly explained by the phenomena in which people do not solely buy a product, they buy either an experience (sense of community) or a reputation (sense of community). This reputation is necessary to fit in the community. However, the findings indicate that the product itself remains the most important factor in consumer demand. This research has shown that the influence of the online reputation of a brand on consumer demand is increased when doubts about the product already exist, which is aligned with Rudeloff & Damm's argument that states that consumers base their judgments on other people particularly when faced with doubts. When doubts already exist, people start looking for reviews and start reading comments, also described by Petty et al. (1983) as peripheral cues. The results have shown that when they do this, they are heavily influenced by the contents of these reviews. In some cases, consumers subconsciously look for a confirmation bias in which negative comments are valued higher when they already have a negative prejudice about the product in question. In the case that a consumer has a negative prejudice about a product and reads ten comments of which eight are positive and nine are negative, the negative comments will have a higher value although there are less of them.

Based on the findings, results have shown that cancel culture is seen as a form of social control and renewed power for the consumer. It is how society is restoring itself and empowering itself against people and companies with too much power. These findings confirm the argument of Kozinets & Handelman (2004) who state that the public voice is enhanced by social media and its virality aspect, enabling people to take action more easily. The form of social control and renewed power for the consumer can be seen as grassroots activism which is explained by (Clark, 2020). Furthermore, the results of this research indicate that the online reputation has a bigger effect when it is a negative reputation than when it is a positive reputation. This can be connected to the possible drastic effects of cancel culture on businesses and influencers.

Whereas some research participants did not believe in cancel culture due to its unreliability and dramatized nature, an interesting finding in this research was the unexpected positive effect of cancel culture on consumer demand. In this tendency, cancel culture was seen as a form of social control that can increase trust in a brand and consequently improve consumer demand. If a brand does not meet expectations or keep promises, you would have already heard about its negative reputation or even cancellation online in the form of comments, videos or articles. Therefore, when this is not the case, you

can trust an established brand enough to buy their product. This adds new perspectives to existing literature on cancel culture from Saldanha et al (2023) who argues that cancel culture can result in the loss of customers after cancellation of the brand and this being influenced by fear of negative associations. A 22-year-old female research participant explained this tendency as followed:

I think to myself, cancel culture is really bad, but because I know it exists, it feels like it is more safe to buy things with those kinds of people (influencers). Because, if something does go wrong with the shipment or the products are bad, then the cancel culture will appear and fix it for me.”
(Interview participant C, translated from Dutch)

4.5. The power of repetition

As previously mentioned, consumer demand is highly influenced by the online sense of community, referred to as social media. In addition to this, social media hype or virality is an important aspect of a brand’s online reputation and how this is signaled to the consumer. Based on my findings, the results show that the main reason for this success is the power of repetition, which can be established through social media hype and virality. In addition to this, the results show that the online sense of community enhances the power of repetition as it creates an algorithm in which people see a lot of what they have already liked in the past. This adds to previous literature by Jamil et al. (2024) who argue that these algorithms push content to the right target audience. Furthermore, the power of repetition enhances consumer curiosity, which increases consumer demand. Furthermore, it establishes brand trust which is shown to be an important factor in consumer demand in this research and confirms previous research by (Zhu et al., 2020). The trust in a new brand, influencer, company or entrepreneur is built through a good reputation in the form of online consumer reviews in video form, written form and followers.

One of the research participants argued that the influence of social media hype on her consumer choices was so major that she would often visit a concert of an artist she did not even know, solely based on social media hype and virality. We may conclude that consumer demand is partially influenced by the online sense of community in the form of social media hype and virality due to it signalling a positive and trustworthy reputation, which is in line with Spence’s (1973) signaling theory in which businesses utilize reputation as a capability indication to establish trust with the consumer. This way, the sense of community establishes a certain reputation which influences consumer demand. This is highlighted by the following statement of a 21-year-old female research participant who was influenced by the online signals

of trust. These online signals of trust are social media hype and online social aspects as well as offline social aspects.

I have an example, it's called Keinemusik. It was a really big hype on Tiktok, and I know someone who actually didn't like the music. At first she said, well I don't like the music one bit. And later she heard that so many people went and she thought: well, now I actually want to go as well. (Interview participant H, translated from Dutch)

The hype or popularity, and thus positive online reputation, that is established through social media has a major influence on a brand's consumer demand. Although all research participants agreed that social media, the online sense of community, was the main medium for discovery of products and events but social aspects, the offline sense of community predominantly influenced the actual purchase.

4.6. Person behind the brand and influencers

Based on the findings of this research, the results show that influencers have a major impact on consumer demand through the intricate combination of online reputation and a sense of community. Nine out of ten research participants stated that they are influenced by online influencers. As influencers have an enormous online following or community around them and a public reputation, this highlights the major role of online reputation and sense of community in consumer demand. These influencers or major public figures behind a brand can significantly enhance the online reputation of themselves, as entrepreneurs, and of associated brands. In addition to this, influencers are an important tool for businesses to enhance their own online reputation and establish or grow an online sense of community. The results show that an important aspect of the success of influencers is because people like the person aside from the product. Consumers are attracted to or follow influencers that they are interested in based on their own incentives. They could follow influencers because they are inspiring, because followers look up to them and want to be more like those influencers, just as successful, going on exotic vacations, having nice cars, owning luxury items. They could follow them because of their fashion sense, as they share where they buy the items in their closet. Or because an influencer is very funny or entertaining. Based on my findings, the results indicate that there are three main reasons to follow an influencer are inspiration, education, entertainment or relatability.

As deemed important by Ahluwalia et al. (2000) who say branding is crucial for establishing and maintaining a positive reputation, each influencer has their own well thought out brand which attracts the

right people who can relate to their content. Relatability is an incredibly important aspect here. The moment that people enjoy content put out by influencers for at least one of the main reasons, they either want to be more like the particular influencer or can relate to this influencer.

One of the explanations given for the positive influence of an influencer on consumer demand was the consumer's personal association with the influencer. An important aspect of this positive influence and an influencer's success is when they produce content that is situated around a certain brand. An important example for this tendency is the success of a promoted or advertised product by an influencer when it is aligned with the influencer's brand. This is in line with the part of theory by Wang & Huang (2023) that argues the important role of perceived expert standing. For example, when a popular artist is known for his music related content and hits, the record label that he has established will become more successful. The fact that this influencer has already reached the goal that the consumer is trying to reach by buying the product is the key to their success. In addition to this, brands may carefully choose influencers to promote their product who already have what the product promises the consumer. Another example was given in the following statement by a 22-year-old female research participant:

For example, when it comes to beauty products, and I see a girl with a really beautiful skin who uses that product, then of course I'm more likely to buy it. So that does influence my choice, and I do that pretty quickly. I am, yeah, quite easily influenced in that area. I think, well, she has beautiful skin, so it must be good. While actually of course, that brand didn't pick her without a reason. If you actually think about it more deeply. Yeah. They just want to sell something. So, they choose her because she has beautiful skin. And I see that and think, oh, I want skin like that too. I'm going to buy that product. (Interview participant G, translated from Dutch)

Another aspect of the success of influencer content is when it is not mainly focused on selling the product, but seems more like usual content including a sponsored product or event. These advertisements are carefully curated to not look like actual advertisements, to seamlessly fit in with the usual influencer content. This can be connected to the theory by Huang et al. (2025) as they argued that the emphasis on emotional and visual appeal have a major impact on consumer demand. Consumer demand is positively influenced by the enjoyment of content. In addition to this, it is a growing trend for businesses to make social media content that is not directly related to their product, because people are not interested in pure advertisement anymore. This highlights the influence of social media on consumer demand and the success of valuable content over pure advertisements for growing an online community and establishing a positive and profound online reputation.

In addition to this, the findings of this research suggest that the success of influencers advertisements is their subconscious effect. As 3 out of 10 research participants have argued that they are not influenced by online influencers, but they do find that influencers have a major effect on brand visibility, this subconscious effect is highlighted. Although influencers may not always immediately influence a purchase, they are a key element of the marketing funnel. A period of time after the consumer has come across the influencer advertisement, they might find themselves in the market for a certain product and subconsciously choose the product that had been advertised because it feels and sounds familiar. Here, the power of repetition results in the power of familiarity and preference for the known which then influences consumer demand. The influencer advertisement can be seen as the watering of a small plant in order to eventually grow into a large plant. Watering the plant is an essential part of plant growth, but you can not see the results right away.

When people/consumers have been following the influencer for a longer period, trust is established and increased. When influencers occasionally promote products, this trust and the desire of becoming more like the influencer may result in sales. This strengthens the existing theory of Kamiliya Azzahra & Adi Prakoso (2025) who argue that people are more inclined to purchase from reliable sources, suggesting that brand should establish a strong online reputation. When the research participants were asked about the factors that made them trust these influencers, there appeared to be three main factors. Firstly, the length of the following period influenced the presence of trust. Based on the findings, the results show that consumers were more influenced by influencers or entrepreneurs with an online presence when they had been following them for a longer time. This is highlighted by the following statement by a 21-year-old female research participant:

I'd be more likely to buy something like that if it's from someone you really follow actively, then yes. I don't think random ads usually affect me that much. If you just see someone promoting a certain product like protein powder or something, I'm like yeah, here we go again. But if it's someone you've been following for years, then I think you're more easily influenced by that. (Interview participant F, translated from Dutch)

Secondly, the results have shown that trust was built based on the consumer's perception of an influencer's intention. However, influencers can easily influence this perception due to the fact that they completely control the content they release. In addition to this, the enormous amount of content has a positive effect on trust and the belief that one can form an accurate opinion about an online figure like an influencer. Thirdly, the trust in an influencer is influenced by whether the consumer likes them or is a fan

of them. This confirms a theory by Edlom & Karlsson (2021) who argue that fandom has a major influence on consumer demand and can be the main reason for a purchase. As many major influencers have fandom-like communities around them, this highlights the importance of influencers and influencer-entrepreneurs for businesses and consumer demand.

The results from this study have shown that consumers trust influencers with major followings because they are major public figures. This confirms the positive effect of cancel culture in which people have trust in popular public figures because they would have already found out about something bad if it were there. The results suggest that consumers do not believe that influencers or public figures would promote something bad or mislead you because it would seriously harm their reputation. This can be explained by Rudeloff & Damms (2023) who argue that parasocial interactions or one-sided relationships between influencers or public figures and consumers are present on social media which indicates that the audience is emotionally attached to influencer or public figure. Thus, we may conclude that fandom builds trust and thus a sense of community majorly influences consumer demand through built trust through fandom.

Furthermore, seven out of ten research participants said their consumer demand was positively influenced by an influencers' documentation of their entrepreneurial journey. This could either concern influencers who later became entrepreneurs or entrepreneurs who later became influencers. Reasons for this were firstly whether an influencer-entrepreneur possessed over the goodwill factor or favorable factor, where people want them to be successful. Secondly, the results show that either inspirational, educational or relatable content positively influenced consumer demand. Inspirational, motivational and educational content were seen as highly valuable for an individual and the improvement of an individual's life. Consumers might look up to a certain influencer-entrepreneur and find their content valuable for their own journey, to learn from an influencer-entrepreneur's successes and mistakes. The relatability of this content is what makes it applicable to a certain consumer and what makes it noticeable. In addition to this, results showed that relatable content is successful due to the fact consumers have a preference for the known. This can be related to McMillan's (1996) theory in which he argues that consumers are more inclined to make a purchase when they can identify with a brand and its goals.

In addition to this, one particular research participant stated that they are solely influenced by the person behind a brand when that person is an influencer or public figure. This highlights the impact of influencers on consumer demand and the successful approach of becoming an influencer to enhance or grow a business. The success of influencers suggest that entrepreneurs with an active public online presence can positively influence their consumer demand. This confirms that online reputation and the establishment of a sense of community around a brand plays a major role in influencing consumer demand. Therefore, social media is an incredibly important medium for a business. The success of

influencers for businesses can further be related to Spence's (1973) signaling theory in which businesses utilize reputation to influence consumer demand. Although influencers clearly influence consumer demand, other factors like the product itself, its price and its utility or value to the consumer were more important.

4.7. Online reputation: comments

Based on my findings, the results indicate that online reviews are an important aspect of the online reputation of a business or entrepreneur in influencing consumer demand. This confirms research by Zhu et al. (2020) who state that possible risk, due to information asymmetry, for consumers is minimized by online reviews which thus builds trust, which is important for consumer demand. Furthermore, Malik et al. (2025) argued that online reviews are an important form of social proof which is an essential aspect of the relation between the sense of community and online reputation. Therefore, research participants were interviewed about its influence on consumer demand. The results showed that in contrast to regular written reviews on websites, there is a rise in popularity for reviews in video form or social media comments among all research participants. All research participants were to some extent influenced by online reviews in the form of social media comments and 'product videos' which refer to the rise of reviews in video form on social media platforms. In addition to this, they actively searched for videos and actively read comments. This research has shown that reviews in the form of videos have the largest effect on consumer demand among participants.

The results further suggest that many research participants utilize social media platform TikTok as a search engine, in which they search for videos made by other consumers or influencers regarding a certain subject, event or product. This phenomenon can be explained by the combination of the rise in popularity of video form content, the trust in influencers and the trust in other consumers who do not get any compensation for their videos as opposed to influencers. Therefore, reviews in video form were often seen as more reliable as opposed to written reviews. In addition to this, half of the research participants stated that aesthetics were an important factor in their consumer choices. They said that when a brand has produced high quality videos, aesthetically based and content based, the product's attractiveness and brand trust increases.

Furthermore, this research suggests that the importance of online reviews and comments and thus the influence of online reputation increases when the price of a product increases. This adds to previous research by Huang et al. (2025) who argued that the importance of online reviews increases when there is doubt. The results on the relation between price and the importance of online reviews confirms the body

of research conducted by Huang et al. (2025) that found that there is a difference in decision-making processes for high- and low-involvement products. They found that high-involvement products, which are often more expensive, require a more thorough decision-making process.

4.8. Conclusion of results

Based on my findings, the results indicate that social media is an incredibly important aspect in the interaction between the sense of community, online reputation and consumer demand. Most people discover products and events through either social media or their friends, so either the offline community or the online community, referred to as social media. They either discuss the purchase with their community, think about whether it will fit the standards of their community, whether their community would purchase the same or if they can share the experience with their community. Within this, the online reputation of brands plays a major role as this is how consumers decide if this product or event will have a positive or negative effect on their own reputation and ultimately on their position in the community.

The influence of the sense of community and the online reputation established by a brand on consumer demand can be shortly explained by the phenomena in which people do not solely buy a product, they buy either an experience (sense of community) or a reputation (sense of community). This reputation is necessary to fit in the community. Consumer demand is influenced by a brand's reputation most consciously in the form of luxury products, where people obviously buy a status instead of a product. If they would buy a bag mainly because of its utility or beauty, they would buy any bag for a lower price. Purchasing a designer item is purchasing a certain status or reputation. Here people are trying to signal their standing and maintain a reputation within a community by buying a brand and taking over their status/reputation. Although the online reputation plays a big role in the relation between sense of community and consumer demand, most consumers are predominantly influenced by the sense of community and its effects than the online reputation. Online reputation has appeared to be more of a side factor of the sense of community and often has a subconscious effect as opposed to being a big conscious factor like the sense of community.

Furthermore, the results indicate four main connections between the sense of community and online reputation in terms of their influence on consumer demand. These connections are crucial for the understanding of their influence on consumer demand and its extent. Firstly, the sense of community and online reputation are intertwined as people sometimes buy or refrain to buy products because of the desire to fit in, which ultimately revolves around a sense of community and wanting to be a part of that community. The consumer's consumer choices related to the desire to be part of a community are based on a brand's reputation and the reputation the consumer will get from consumption. Secondly, social

proof relates to the phenomenon in which people seek information about a brand, entrepreneur or an influencer from fellow community members and peers to establish brand trust. Social proof is cue of approval for consumers in their consumer decisions. Thirdly, the influence of the sense of community and the online reputation established by a brand on consumer demand can be shortly explained by the phenomena in which people do not solely buy a product, they buy either an experience (sense of community) or a reputation (sense of community). This reputation is necessary to fit in the community. Lastly, one of the research participants argued that the influence of social media hype was so major that she would often visit a concert of an artist she did not even know, solely based on social media hype and virality. We may conclude that consumer demand is partially influenced by the online sense of community in the form of social media hype and virality due to it signaling a positive and trustworthy reputation. This way, the sense of community establishes a certain reputation which influences consumer demand.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this master thesis examines the relationship between reputation, sense of community, and consumer demand for cultural products and events by combining in-depth interviews and thematic analysis within a qualitative approach. In order to do this, the following research question was established: “To what extent do the online reputation of a cultural business or entrepreneur and the sense of community influence the purchasing decisions of 18 to 30 year olds in the Netherlands?” Although extensive research exists on traditional influences on consumer demand, the rapidly changing online sphere of social media and its major role in the lives of young adults has presented new mechanisms through which reputation and a sense of community are established and enforced. In summary, this research has found that cultural demand is incredibly influenced by the combination of the online reputation and the sense of community. This was demonstrated by the dual role of the sense of community, which shows positive and negative effects, and the impact of online reputation and community as established through social media. In this study, consumer demand was found to be highly impacted by online reviews, content from peers and like-minded people, online influencers, social media virality, trends and the desire to fit in.

This study acknowledges several limitations in terms of the subjectivity and social desirability bias, as previously discussed. In addition to this, data limitations occurred due to the small sample size of 10 interview participants which is not a sufficient sample to generalize a population. In addition to this, the qualitative nature of this study does not allow for broad claims to be made about the entire population of young consumers.

Possible suggestions for future research are statistical analysis to produce actual numbers on the influence of consumer demand. Furthermore, more profound knowledge could be found on the percentages of the different influences on consumer demand to have a clear view of the extent to which other elements are more or less important than sense of community and online reputation. In addition to this, an experiment could be done to acquire objective results in which research participants do not know the nature of the study and are asked to make consumption choices for cultural products. The online reputation of these products, as well as the alignment with the participant’s sense of community can vary between objects. This way the findings may be more objective and they can solidify the results of this research. Additionally, research could be conducted with a focus on the other factors that influence consumer demand to get a more defined idea of the influences on consumer demand and which are most important.

Despite the limitations, this study has deepened the knowledge of cultural consumer demand and the influence of online reputation and the sense of community. For instance, this thesis has confirmed and

built upon Kowalczyk & Mitchell's (2022) theory connecting reputation and the seeking of approval. Wang's (2017) was confirmed and demonstrated as well as Flanagin & Metzger's (2013) theory which was additionally enriched with the results on reviews in video form on social media platforms. Furthermore, White & Dahl's (2006) theory was confirmed and further built upon by the concept of the dual role of a sense of community. Ultimately, understanding the intricate relation between reputation, community and consumer demand is not just academically valuable, it's possibly one of the keys to thriving in tomorrow's cultural landscape.

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APPENDIX

A Interview questions:

1. Could you briefly describe the kind of cultural products or experiences you're most interested in, you follow or spend money on?
2. Could you tell me about a recent example of when you bought a cultural product or attended a cultural event? What influenced your decision the most?
3. What factors influenced your decision to buy or attend? Was it the product itself, or were other things like the person or brand behind it also important?
4. Do you ever buy cultural products or experiences from businesses or entrepreneurs you follow online? What usually motivates the decision?
5. What factors do you take into account before deciding to buy a product?
6. To what extent do social aspects influence your purchasing decisions?
7. Are you sometimes influenced to buy something by external factors like current trends, social media hype or behavior of your friends?
8. Have you ever bought something primarily to be a part of a particular cultural identity or social group?
9. To what extent is your purchasing behavior based on the product or experience itself and to what extent is it based on the person behind the brand?
10. What makes you trust a cultural business or creator enough to spend money on them?
11. Have you ever followed a cultural brand, entrepreneur, or business that gave you a sense of belonging or made you feel connected to a community, or like-minded people?
12. Have you ever felt a sense of community around a cultural business or entrepreneur? How was that sense of community established?
13. Did that sense of community influence you to support them in terms of purchasing a product or attending an event?
14. Do you think a strong sense of community can outweigh product quality as an influence on consumer demand?
15. Do you think that being part of a community can make a product or experience more emotionally valuable or memorable?

16. Have you seen communities where the community itself was the main reason for people to support the related brand or person? Have you ever experienced that yourself?
17. When discovering a new cultural business or entrepreneur online, what makes you trust them or believe in their quality?
18. To what extent does online reputation influence your consumer decisions?
19. To what extent do online reviews, follower count, aesthetics and hype influence your consumer decisions?
20. To what extent do online reviews, follower count, aesthetics and hype signal credibility or reliability to you and to what extent do you find them a form of social proof?
21. Have you ever stopped supporting a cultural business or entrepreneur because their online behavior or image did not match your values or because they were canceled?
22. To what extent does a strong online image of a brand or entrepreneur in your perception influence your consumer choices?
23. Do you think that cultural businesses and entrepreneurs strategically build a certain online image to attract certain types of people or communities? Does this work on you?
24. Would you say you usually like the entrepreneur or brand first and then the product or the other way around?
25. Between a cultural brand's online reputation, their established community and more practical factors like price and convenience, which one most influences your decision to buy or engage?
26. Is there anything else that shapes your consumer decisions that we have not touched upon?

B Research participants:

Research participant:	Gender:	Age:	Country of birth:	Running time:
A	Female	21	Netherlands	47:30
B	Female	21	Netherlands	45:32
C	Female	22	Netherlands	46:11

D	Male	23	Netherlands	46:38
E	Female	21	Netherlands	46:28
F	Male	23	Netherlands	45:01
G	Male	23	Netherlands	45:04
H	Female	21	Netherlands	45:04
I	Female	19	Netherlands	46:06
J	Female	22	Netherlands	45:31

C Code tree visualization:





