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The Rolex Online Brand Community:
A Netnographic Study of Rolex Members Motivations
for Online Engagement

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Abstract:

The purpose of this dissertation is to obtain a deeper understanding of the Rolex online brand community. In particular, the paper aims to investigate the different motivations members inhabit to participate in the online brand community devoted to Rolex and the outcomes of these engaged activities. The literature on motivations in online brand communities has predominately been focused on brands with mass produced goods, and luxury goods has not received similar attention. Thus, this paper broadens the online brand community literature by including luxury consumption behaviours in an online environment with the current literature on online- and brand community. A netnographic research approach is implemented to acquire knowledge on online interactions in brand communities and grounded theory is used to generate thematic network from the gathered netnographic data. The findings uncovered that Rolex OBC members have a same shared devotion and love towards Rolex, but their motivation to engage in the community varies. The analysis found that there were three themes that identifies their motivational behaviour to engage. These motivations are attached to the theme of social validation, information seeking and frustration. Hence, the dissertation discusses theoretical- and managerial implications that provides the brand recommendations to implement the members motivation to partake in the Rolex online brand community, for the creation of a Rolex-managed OBC.

Resumo:

O objetivo desta dissertação é obter um entendimento mais profundo da comunidade de marcas on-line da Rolex. Em particular, o artigo tem como objetivo investigar as diferentes motivações que os membros possuem para participar na comunidade de marcas on-line dedicada à Rolex e os resultados dessas atividades envolvidas. A literatura sobre motivações em comunidades de marcas on-line tem sido predominantemente focada em marcas com produtos produzidos em massa, e produtos de luxo não receberam a mesma atenção. Assim, este artigo amplia a literatura da comunidade de marcas on-line, incluindo comportamentos de consumo de luxo em um ambiente on-line com a literatura atual sobre a comunidade de marcas e on-line. Uma abordagem de pesquisa netnográfica é implementada para adquirir conhecimento sobre interações on-line em comunidades de marcas e a teoria fundamentada é usada para gerar rede temática a partir dos dados netnográficos coletados. As descobertas revelaram que os membros da Rolex OBC têm a mesma devoção e amor compartilhados pela Rolex, mas a motivação para se envolver na comunidade varia. A análise constatou que havia três temas que identificam seu comportamento motivacional para se envolver. Essas motivações estão ligadas ao tema da validação social, busca de informações e frustração. Portanto, a dissertação discute implicações teóricas e gerenciais que fornecem recomendações de marca para implementar a motivação dos membros para participar da comunidade de marcas on-line da Rolex, para a criação de uma OBC gerenciada pela Rolex.

Key Words: Netnography, Online Brand Community, Rolex, Motivation, Social Validation, Information Seeking, Frustration

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1. INTRODUCTION

The first part of the dissertation deals with the problem definition and relevance, followed up with the objective and research questions for the study. In addition, this section will provide the reader with a company description and an outline of the dissertation.

1.1 Problem Definition and Relevance

The availability of the internet has changed how consumers interact with the brand and other users, and people can communicate with one another anywhere at any time. Consequently, the development of online brand communities is a result of the availability of the internet, where those with shared interests go together to engage with one another. In addition, the market for luxury products has seen an increased growth the past decades, as it is more accessible to the public and not just for the prestigious elite (Hennigs et al., 2012; Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). The combination of increased consumption of luxury goods in the masses and availability of online brand communities, have given brand supporters the ability to share their thoughts and experience (Amine & Sitz, 2004). In the mits of this revelation, a high presence of member-based brand communities is appearing online, and studies have elevated to understand what makes these brand supporters interact with each other and creating these societies on social media. Additionally, the growth in these communities has changed and transformed the marketing and business strategy for brands, as more brands are using social networks as a way to obtain consumer insight and knowledge (Brodie et al., 2013). Today however, not all brands have own communities for their supporters, such as the luxury brand Rolex, where the supporters themselves are managing these communities.

As a result, the study undertakes published writings based on online brand communities and member motivations regarding engagement in an online setting, as well as literature concerning consumption of luxury good. The relevance of studying luxury products in virtual communities stems from the availability of research about luxury goods in online brand communities. Since, majority of the literature accessible are not focused on luxury brands, the reason of the study is to understand the motivations to participate in the Rolex online communities started up by devoted Rolex supporters.

1.2 Objective and Research Questions

The dissertation has the objective to investigate and seek insight on the motivation's members inhabits to participate in the Rolex online brand community. Additionally, understanding the outcomes of such engagement and the effect it has on the dedicated members of the brand. As a qualitative research study, it strives to reveal insights from a netnographic perspective on motivation to participate in such communities on social media.

To earn the insight and aim of the study, a netnographic research approach is used. This provides means to gain understanding of member behaviour in an online community, without any geographical restrictions. Therefore, to obtain this knowledge, the following research questions are presented to obtain this knowledge:

RQ1: “What can we learn about members motivation to engage in the Rolex online community?”

To understand the first and main question on Rolex community members and their motivations, the following sub-questions are formed and examined:

RQ2: “What motivates member to partake in an online brand community?”

RQ3: “What are the outcomes from the motivated engagement?”

1.3 Rolex

Rolex is a luxury watch manufacturer based in Geneva, Switzerland, but it was originally founded in 1905 as Wilsdorf & Davis in London by Hans Wilsdorf and Alfred Davis (FHH, 2019). It was not until 1908 that Hans Wilsdorf established the brand Rolex, a name Mr. Wilsdorf wanted to be short, easy to say in any language and looked good on a watch (Rolex, 2019). With that, Rolex has become the most recognisable watch brand in the world and seen as a symbol of prestige and quality among people today (Green, 2016).

Rolex has been praised for its innovations in the watchmaking world, with offering the first waterproof, self-winding watch, in addition to be the first watch with to show a date (Green, 2016). The company targets a niche segment of high-end consumers that wants to wear a watch as a prestige and is sold in limited numbers throughout stores only approved by Rolex (Bhasin, 2018). Therefore, the brand Rolex is interesting, when put together with online members motivation to engage in the Rolex OBC as luxury goods are more common among the masses.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

The dissertation is divided in six chapters. The first, introduction, covers the problem and relevance of the study, and the research objectives, with a brief description of the brand Rolex. The following chapter, literature review, provides academic literature covering topics involving online brand communities. Additionally, this chapter includes the motivated behaviour in online communities and outcomes of the engagement in communities. Chapter three introduces netnography as the selected research method, and how it has been implemented in this study. Additionally, it includes the process of which communities were selected, data collection and analysis of the gathered data. Subsequently, the result analysis from the netnographic research is presented, and the development of thematic findings are introduced and analysed in the fourth chapter. Chapter five includes the conclusion and theoretical- and managerial implications, succeeded by limitations of the dissertation and further research suggestions are appointed in the final chapter.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter follows up with literature and research studies regarding brand communities (hereby BCs) and online brand communities (hereby OBCs) that supports the dissertations' topic. Furthermore, the researcher digs into relevant papers with reference to motivated behaviour in an OBC and BC setting, and outcomes from these engagements. Finally, the last part will include literature regarding luxury consumption, as the brand Rolex is considered a luxurious object to possess.

2.1 Brand Community and Online Brand Community

Introduced by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), BCs are a place where people with shared interests come together, and as technology grew, they shifted to the internet, thus creating OBCs (Sicilia & Palazon, 2008). Consequently, it became less difficult to connect people across the world, leading to more activities happening online. However, as activities mainly happen online, Wirtz et al. (2013) express that they are not deprived of using face-to-face events and meetings, which previously was used as the communication method, making members create closer relationships with each other. The following section focuses on giving an overview of OBCs and BCs, on learning about them, as Ozboluk & Dursun (2017) express there are differences, even though their core purpose of connecting shared minded people is the same.

2.1.1 Brand Community (BC)

A BC according to research, and introduced, by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) is described as a particular or otherwise different type of consumer community, more precisely "A specialised, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand" (p. 412). Furthermore, according to McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig (2002), a BC is a manufactured relationship where the customer is being situated. Moreover, Amine and Sitz (2004) describe a BC as a gathering of individuals with shared interests about a particular brand; and creates their own society with its own social scale, value, code of conduct, customs and language (Cova & Pace 2006). Communities can be seen as different through their relation to a brand or a product group. For instance, Fournier and Lee (2009) state that communities focusing excessively on a product category would be seen as too generic for the people that are genuinely committed to a brand; this is due to their desire of engaging with other individuals that identify themselves with a particular brand. To understand BCs, Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) applied an ethnographic research approach that resulted in a finding of

three significant mechanisms: “consciousness of kind”, “ritual and tradition”, and “moral responsibility”.

The first mechanism known as “consciousness of kind”, draws the shared sense of belonging in a community, where the people in the community feel an intrinsic connection to each other. Additionally, Bagozzi and Dholakia (2006) add that members in the community would distinctly see the differences from non-members, thus members will be able to see the collectiveness that directs them to create relationships between the genuine members. Additionally, Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) state that members at one point feel like they know one another even though they have never encountered in person. Members would also go through a legitimisation stage, in which they distinguish between members that to a great extent know the brand and those that are not committed, to value the culture, ritual and traditions (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). Nonetheless, Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) emphasises that an issue with BCs is the hierarchical system, and that anyone can become a member. This means that a separation between genuine members and non-genuine has an impact, and strong opinions are expressed within the community in regard to the quality and authenticity (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001).

The second mechanism entitled “rituals and traditions”, relates to the shared values, behaviours and group norms found among members in the community. Algesheimer, Dholakia and Herrmann, (2005) explain that in traditional communities these types of groups have a mutual understanding of the fundamentals of the community, languages that are practised and on cultural faith and beliefs. In addition, Casaló, Flavián and Guinaliu (2008) mention that members would create their own signature of the community experience, which they express within and outside the community. However, when it comes to non-conventional communities, people are connected to others through shared interests, consequently diverting from traditions, and starts creating their own rituals (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). The rituals are related to their own shared group interest, examples of these include sharing brand stories, and to celebrate the history of the brand (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). The study conducted by Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) used an example where the Saab (car) BC have greeting rituals where members greet each other on the road by honking, nodding and waving. This ritual shows the maintaining and existence on their consciousness of kind, as it involves having a sense of belonging and connection to genuine members.

The final mechanism from Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) is the "moral responsibility", which describes the feeling members have from obligations and commitments concerning other members and the entirety of their community. Consequently, these feelings give rise to a collective action and provides a sense of unity to the community (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Furthermore, an ethnographic research by McAlexander et al. (2002) studying the Jeep (car) BC, where they took part in an annual Jeep event, known as Jamboree, illustrated a moral responsibility. It involved an experienced Jeep owner helping inexperienced Jeep drivers and showing them what their car was able to do. McAlexander et al. (2002) express this gesture to be a display of a knowledgeable Jeep member partaking in a moral responsible collective action. Similarly, this action performed by a Jeep owner exhibits what Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) call "assisting brand community members", which is described as a mission to accomplish in a community.

In addition to introducing the theory of BC, Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) formed the "Brand Community Triad" (Appendix 1). The model illustrates two types of relationships: on the one hand there is the relationship between the brand and the customer, and on the other hand the relationship between the customers themselves. On top of that, Muniz and O'Guinn state that it would be unachievable to have a prosperous BC if there were no relationships among the community members. Additionally, Sicilia and Palazon (2008) argues that a customer-to-customer relationship is more meaningful, as it creates stronger human bonds between members, compared to a brand-to-customer link, that can create a successful BC. A further study by McAlexander et al. (2002) carried on and broadened the model from Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) creating a "Customer-Centric Model of Brand Community" (Appendix 2). The model is composed with a relationship between customer and brand, customer and product, customer and marketers, and between customers themselves. According to the model presented by McAlexander et al. (2002), the relationship between the focal customer-to-brand is stronger. Hoppe, Matzel and Terlutter (2007) argue that customers would identify themselves and have more of an emotional attachment to the company and brand since the community centres around the customers.

2.1.2 Online Brand Community (OBC)

An OBC is a BC located on the internet, and restrictions because of a geographical element is no longer there, as it can easily connect people from around the world (Ozboluk & Dursun, 2017). There is a difference between OBCs and BCs even if their core purpose is to bring brand admirers together according to Ozboluk and Dursun (2017), as they refer to the internet and technological innovations as the cause. Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas (2015) explains that there is a growing factor in virtual communities as electronical mediation is utilised more often, it makes it easier to connect people. Similarly, Dholakia, Bagozzi and Pearo (2004) argue that the availability of technology has eliminated the time and space constrains, because it allows admirers to virtually get together at any time and place. The use of computers and mobile devices have seen to be a significant instrument to enable the interactions among brand admirers' as BCs shift to online mediums (Algesheimer et al., 2005). It has also helped participants to ding like-minded people where they share their opinions and interest according to Sicilia and Palazon (2008). There are also rules one needs to follow in these communities, as Maloney-Krichmar and Preece (2005) point out that interactions between members have a sense of orderliness by having sets of rules, laws and protocols. It is with this in mind that Sicilia and Palazon (2008) refer to the internet being a consequent for change in community rules; they change since people have different ways of behaving, making it easier to spread arguments and hateful comments.

Similar to the mechanisms submitted by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) when it comes to OBCs, Wirtz et al. (2013) presents three markers when one considers forming an OBC. The first marker known as "Brand Orientation", talks about how a brand itself needs to be the core focus of a community, hereby including the experience of consumption, and the general shared interest among members, for example driving cars (Wirtz et al., 2013). However, Fournier and Lee (2009) argue that a general interest would not be enough for the most devoted members, as they are more interested in others with the same high brand love. Still, an OBC with low brand strength can still make it, if it focuses on having members with a strong shared interest, according to Wirtz et al. (2013). Wirtz et al. (2013) also add that availability and low-cost maintenance of OBCs can develop members within to a high brand identity, if members interact with each other in a more frequent matter. Fournier and Lee (2009) argue that "Often people are more interested in the social link that comes from brand affiliation then they have in the brand themselves". This is contrary to "brand orientation" by Wirtz et al. (2013) where the core focus should be the brand, and not the social links as the main focus.

The second factor Wirtz et al. (2013) identify is “Internet-use”, which describes the presence of BCs that can be found both online and offline. As an OBC, Wirtz et al. (2013) included what they call “hybrids” in their study. Hybrids are a mix of an online and offline BC. In their study, Wirtz et al. (2013) explain that “hybrids” are BCs that did not have an online presence before, but would evolve to have a major online presence. This transformation was seen in a study by Hatch and Schultz (2010) on the Lego and Harley Davidson community, which showed that a strong devotion to the brand offline was key to make its online presence strong. Today however, the BCs mostly start online before expanding to offline, and this only applies if they recognise any value that would be added or activities that may be difficult to do online (Wirtz et al., 2013). Even though the main activities occur online, it does not mean OBCs are prevented from using offline activities, such as physical meetings (Wirtz et al., 2013).

Finally, the “Funding and Governance” dimension addresses how historically OBCs can be funded and governed by the brand itself, but also governed by its member or entirely by devoted supporters (Wirtz et al., 2013). The existence of “hybrids”, as mentioned in “internet-use”, is relevant when it comes to the control of OBCs as Fournier and Lee (2009) recommend the governance and funding by devoted members. This method implies that the brand would not be in total control or accountable for its actions and activities, as it would focus on self-interest which would interfere with the spirit in the community (Fournier and Lee, 2009; Wirtz et al., 2013). The method of choice however, would be to have a divided governance model in which they will co-exist and create value together which would benefit both sides, according to Hatch and Schultz (2010).

2.2 Motivations to Participate in Online Brand Communities

People in online communities have various motivation purpose in their interactions (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006). The following section provides a stance on what motivates members of an OBC to participate and interact within community. An empirical study from Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh and Gremler (2004) presents a theoretical framework that contains eleven motivational drivers. These drivers are divided into five utilities, which motivates a members' engagement in OBCs. In addition, the framework is based on Balasubramanian and Mahajan's (2001) study on economic leverage in virtual communities presented findings of three utilities: "Focus-Related", "Consumption" and "Approval". Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) extended the study and added two more utilities: "Moderator-Related" and "Homeostase". Hence, the framework is used as a structural way to discover and compare it with other written literature, to see the coherence and understand the motivations for participation in an OBC.

The Focus-Related utility talks about the benefits a member receives by adding significant value from their contribution in the group. Within focus-related utility Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) explains four motives for participation. (1) Concern for other consumers refers to members that want to help other consumers in their choice, and includes both positive and negative experiences (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Wirtz et al. (2013) point out that to avoid members' uncertainties is a factor, where members will reach out and share their thoughts to decrease a members' confusion in a buying process. Findings from, a study by Dholakia, Blazevic, Wiertz and Algesheimer (2009) discovered that eBay members went to shared knowledge and gave advice on a specific tasks and skills, in order to help out other members in the forum. (2) Helping the company, indicates members' motive to express their satisfying experience with the brand, with the intent of helping out the brand. Thus, they would recommend it to others in the online community (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). A customer would for example communicate their own positive experience with a brand, and in return for the gratitude, they would earn their support. This motivation can be supported by Equity Theory (Adams, 1963; Ross and Kapitan, 2018). Equity theory means that a customer aspires to give fair exchanges, meaning when a customer has been highly satisfied would use the internet to give a strong recommendation to the brand. (3) Social benefits describe the enjoyment a member retains when expressing themselves in an online community and identifies itself with the community (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). A member would be able to discover and form oneself through interaction with other members, and derive social advantages to achieve future desire (Dholakia et al., 2004). People also become members of a community due to loneliness, and the desire to

come in contact with people with the same interests. This is supported by Dholakia et al. (2004), referring to social benefits as members motives to obtain a form of contact with others which then evolves to companionship, emotional relationships and support systems. (4) Exerting power describes the power of commentary influence that members of the community hold in such a way brands have no control over, and can influence the brand's perception (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). In many cases, the motivation advance when a consumer has had a negative experience with the brand or product, and strongly influences the community (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

Consumption utility describes the value that members acquire from the contribution that another member has consumed. These contributions can include reading product reviews and written comments, and lead to another members motivation to write (Balasubramanian and Mahajan, 2001; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). The critical driver (5) post-purchase advice-seeking explains how members of an OBC would seek other peoples' experience with a product and seek advice from others (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Dholakia et al. (2004) emphasise the informational value, which describes a member seeking to obtain and share knowledge in online communities. Similarly, Sicilia and Palazon (2008) refer to this as a functional value as a motive for members when receiving or providing information and advice (Sicilia and Palazon 2008; Wirtz et al., 2013).

Approval utility refers to members that receive satisfaction from their own contribution that has been approved and consumed by other supporters, including formal or informal feedback, in both private or in public, and from other members and platform operators (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). The first driver, (6) self-enhancement, describes the desire for positive acknowledgement that individuals seek from members; this can mark them as an expert or intelligent user (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Members also want to obtain approval and increase their status in the community, as some people join a community merely to respond to questions and present knowledge (Dholakia et al., 2004). The second driver, (7) economic reward, has shown to be very useful as a member would be appreciated for their behaviour and rewarded by the community operators (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). This could however, affect the long-term participation of active OBC members, and on the other hand increase the passive members only on a short-term basis (Wirtz et al., 2013).

Moderator-Related utility is the moment a platform operator takes the initiative to interact with a company, representing the community members and be seen as the supporter for their cause; the two factors are known as (8) convenience and (9) problem-solving support (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). This means that dissatisfied members, instead of using lawyers and other costly measures, have members motivated to take these tasks of representing the rest of the community (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

Homeostase utility refers to the need for stability and steadiness in a person's entity; members would express themselves through commenting their experiences to get some life balance, from possessing either negative or positive consumer experiences (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). A member would for example purposely express their satisfaction and pleasure from a specific experience to others, in such a way that their tension of excitement can be released; this motivation is described as (10) expressing positive emotions (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). On the opposite side, the motivation of (11) venting negative feelings, is directed to any dissatisfying experience a member wants to express to minimise frustration (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

Among these characteristics for members' motivation to partake in an OBC, Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) emphasises on social benefits as one of the major drivers. For the purpose of future research however, all variables are important to be able to distinguish between the most prominent motivations that occur in the OBC, like the Rolex OBC in this case. Lastly, another motivation beyond the framework above is what Dholakia et al. (2004) describe as entertainment value, that is the pleasure and tranquillity members get by having interaction with others in the online community. Members are more likely to enjoy interactions when meeting others with the same shared interests (Sicilia & Palazon, 2008).

2.3 Outcomes of Motivated Engagement in an Online Brand Community

Members' engagement in an OBC would be expected to have certain outcomes. For this section, we will investigate what the outcomes are from members that participate in an OBC.

According to Wirtz et al. (2013) customers' engagement in an online community tend to reinforce their brand loyalty. Dessart et al. (2015) acknowledges this when a customer steps up to defend the brand against competitive brands, which strengthens loyalty. Kumar et al. (2010) backs this idea and states that loyalty can remain sustainable as positive supportive members occur in situations where they defend the brand. The outcome from engaging with other customers to seek advice and input plays a significant part in the purchasing process (Wiertz & de Ruyter, 2007). This is because the effect of members' experiences can translate into purchase and loyalty, even if the person is not entirely familiar with the brand (Dessart et al., 2015). In some cases however, Rood and Bruckman (2009) found that when a member searches for a particular answer, they would quickly leave after acquiring the information they wanted, and only come back when in similar situations.

In an exploratory study by Brodie et al. (2013), outcomes of members' engagement in an OBC included: Consumer loyalty and Satisfaction, consumer empowerment, connection, emotional bonding, trust and commitment. A similar idea from Wirtz et al. (2013) divides the outcomes of customer engagements in the OBC into two, that is OBC outcomes and Brand outcomes. The OBC outcomes is the intent of a member continuing participation, increase in their satisfaction, and strength of commitment and trust to the OBC. On top of that, Schouten, McAlexander and Koenig (2007) suggest that members motivated knowledgeable, active and social interaction between themselves can give strength to the level of satisfaction and group dynamic. In addition, McAlexander et al. (2002) research of the Jeep community, showed members engagement increased the positive feelings to the brand and strengthen community integration. Algesheimer et al. (2005) state that the stronger the participation is, the stronger it will increase the effect on member longevity and continuance in a BC.

Brand outcomes indicate that active community members would be prompted to strengthen the BC through brand commitment, satisfaction and loyalty (Wirtz et al., 2013). These are members with a great commitment to the OBC, and are more inclined to possess a stronger commitment and dedication to the brand, both positive and negative (Kim, Bae and Kang, 2008). The study

by Brodie et al. (2013) shows that members would manifest their loyalty to the brand and community by conveying their satisfaction.

Engagement in OBCs can create friendships and more emotional relationships, which leads to more openness among members from the shared interest of the brand. As the research by Rood and Bruckman (2009) shows, members that were interviewed had shared very personal information about their lives with fellow community friends, in regard to family, marriage and health issues. Members also became closer as they interacted daily with one another, and participants stated that they were friends and no longer brand related friends. In addition, members would start their own virtual rituals e.g. breakfast meetings (Rood and Buckman, 2009).

2.4 Consumption of Luxury

Luxury goods has for a long time been exclusive for the high-rank individuals in the society as a symbol of their superiority and remains in a certain degree to this day (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). However, Hennigs et al. (2012) describes that people today are more centred on consuming luxury goods to receive admiration from others as a purpose.

Kapferer and Bastien (2012) talks about that consumption of luxury has changed with time, from being reserved for the upper class to be more accessible to less privileged citizens. However, the concept of luxury has not changed, as the yearn of making an impression of one's success and status still continues to exist (Okonkwo, 2009). Additionally, in the seek for status O'Cass and McEwen (2004) describes "status consumption" in which individuals are prone to consume products that enhances their status and image to people. Furthermore, in cases where the consumers are considered to be less fortunate based on wealth and self-confident, have the tendency to use luxury products to increase their status image (McFerran, Aquino & Tracy, 2014). This behaviour signals that luxury goods can be used to fabricate a person's image and status in the society, however, individuals that possesses confidence are less likely to show this behaviour (McFerran et al., 2014). Nevertheless, even if consumers are seeking status and prestige, particular brands represent specific images, which steers members behaviour to seek the approval of that groups image (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). In this case, the members in the Rolex community are prompt to show their dedications and knowledge towards Rolex, in addition to show their watch and the experience of using the watch to the rest of the group.

Similarly, Vigneron and Johnson (1999) talks about prestige-seeking consumer behaviours in a luxury context, where the level of perception in price (low/high) and self-consciousness (private/public) determines their behaviour towards seeking prestige among others. In example, a consumer with concern for public image and see high price as an indicator for prestige, would be more prompt to show off their riches and power to the group. However, if a member is more concerned about public image, they would be considered a follower, and be more eager to be associated with the desired group (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). Lastly, through the consumption of luxury goods and tangible products, users evolve a relationship with the product, in which it creates a new part in oneself (Belk, 1988). Creating this relationship, consumers build an identity based on material objects, as such making them think of their success and happiness by being visible for others to see.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The following chapter presents the applied research methodology approach to support the research questions discussed in this study. The qualitative approach of netnography will first be introduced as the chosen research methodology to explore the Rolex OBC. The steps within netnography will work as a guide in the research, and follow the process of how it has been implemented in the study of the Rolex OBC.

3.1 Netnography

Introduced by Kozinets (1998), netnography was at the time considered to be a new way of conducting qualitative research, as it was developed to “Investigate the consumer behaviour of cultures and communities present on the internet” (p. 366). Netnography derives from ethnography, that stems from “the social science disciplines of anthropology and sociology” (Singer, 2009, p. 191), and procured recognition in the sociology, cultural studies, consumer research and other social scientific fields (Kozinets, 2002). Kozinets (2002) states that “ethnography refers both to fieldwork, or the study of the distinctive meanings, practices and artifacts of particular social groups, and to the representation based on such study” (p. 3). Thus, netnography which is fundamentally ethnography on the internet, is formed by using the techniques of ethnography to examine cultures and communities with the assistance of the internet and computer-mediated communication (Kozinets, 2002).

Compared to traditional methods, like focus groups, in-depth interviews and surveys, netnography consumes less time and is not as complicated, as it also allows to be conducted in an inconspicuous fashion (Kozinets, 2002). It also provides researchers the ability to observe natural occurring behaviours between consumers in an online community, with the focus on viewing social interaction between consumers and access to informers in the community (Kozinets, 2002). This makes it different and more unique than other research methods, as it has far less interference and fabrication by the researcher to influence members (Kozinets, 2002). Netnography has been evolving over the years as the internet has progressed, thanks to the strong presence of social media and social networks. On top of that, Kozinets (2010) expresses that the social world is shifting towards being digital, as millions and even billions of people regularly interact in online communities on a daily basis.

Implementing netnography has the advantage that individuals would be more prompt to express their opinions, because of their more anonymous setting, which provides researchers with an

easy opportunity to access information on natural and unbiased behaviour (Kozinets, 2010). It is therefore important that the researcher inhabits interpretive skills, as online interactions have not the same richness of information as face-to-face interaction (Kozinets, 2002). Netnography is an efficient technique however, for acquiring the understanding of online communities and member interaction within the community without them necessarily being involved (Kozinets, 2006).

Netnography presents a suitable method to approach this study and the Rolex OBC, and also what we can learn from this community. This is supported by the fact that netnography as a method enables researchers to observe and study communities online, and presents essential social interactions online (Kozinets 2010). Additionally, netnography is considered to be flexible as it is adaptable, based on the intent and purpose of the research (Kozinets, 2002). Furthermore, to perform a netnographic research Kozinets (2010) illustrates six stages: research planning, entrée, data collection, interpretation, ensuring ethical standards, and research representation. These stages would work as instructions that give direction and support on how to conduct a netnographic research, which contributes to this study. In addition, Kozinets (2010) propose a guide when searching for a community, that they are: (1) relevant to your research focus and questions, (2) active, with recent and regular communication, (3) interactive, flow in the communication among members, (4) substantial and vibrant number of communicators, (5) Large diversity among members, and (6) data-rich, providing detailed data.

In the following sections, we will go through the stages of performing a netnographic research by Kozinets (2010) and how it was implemented and conducted in studying the Rolex OBC.

3.2 Research Planning

The first stage of construction for the research is to define the research focus, topic and question relevant to the online community (Kozinets, 2010), which has already been determined in the introduction., It is vital that the online community is chosen based on high traffic of interaction, and number of members inside the community (Fuller et al., 2006). The use of search engines enables the identification of communities that fit the research purpose and objective, while also getting familiar with the community (Kozinets, 2010). On this basis, we select the communities that fit the research objectives and qualify based on netnographic elements in this study.

As the research aims to study the online Rolex communities, searches on keywords such as “Rolex”, “Rolex community” and “Rolex watch community” was conducted. From this point on, we came across several communities on Rolex that appeared when searching on social media outlets and Google. After gaining familiarity with the relevant communities found from the search, there were many interesting groups, especially on Facebook, that suited the research. It is important to highlight that these groups are not managed by Rolex itself, but rather managed by dedicated individuals. This notion is of great significance for this study. Rolex is a niche brand, even though it has a high name recognition worldwide, and the number of communities that are compliant with the requirements are not many. Therefore, this research will focus on the two specific Facebook groups which fills the requirements, as it is abundant on data, has high activity, diversity, many members and interactions.

3.3 Entrée

In this stage we want to immerse into the community to get to know the members better, learn more about the community and getting a better grasp of their behaviours. The online communities chosen for the study was two Facebook groups by the name of Rolex Forum and Rolex Forum Norge (Norway). Since I have already been a member of these communities for quite a while, the access of information was readily available, and the language barrier was non-existent for the one group based in Norway, as Norwegian is the researcher’s native language.

Rolex Forum (hereby RF) is the largest international group present on Facebook today, and had the highest activity compared to the other groups. RF was created in December 2014 and had at the time around 44.000 members that were from all over the world with large diversity, which mostly were directed toward males. In addition, it is operated by three persons, whereas one has the role of “admin” and two are “moderators”, who also participate in the conversations besides managing the group.

Rolex Forum Norge (hereby RFN) is a Norwegian Rolex group, is similarly dominated with males, and also has high activity despite being specified to only one country of Rolex enthusiasts. The group was created in October 2016, and has approximately 4.600 members, including two “admins” and three “moderators”.

Going through the Facebook groups, there were other similarities as well, in addition to the members being mostly male, as both communities have a set of entry requirements. Both RF and RFN have a set of rules (Appendix 3 and 4) which are displayed in the group information. It was easy to enter the communities, as RF was more of an open group where the admin approved you, and the RFN group entry depended on members' approval. A common factor for these groups were the fact that members could do business through the group, as there is a marketplace within the community where members can sell, buy and swap watches between themselves. In addition, the OBCs illustrates rituals, these include unboxing of a watch and start of the weekend photos. This gives proof to Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) mechanism of rituals and traditions, in which members have created their own rituals to share a new watch with community members and to welcome the weekend with a watch.

3.4 Data Collection

The data collection process involved observation of members in the respective communities and further proceed to interact with the members, which was done throughout the research period that lasted from February 2019 to June 2019. As stated by Kozinets (2010) "data collection in netnography means the communication with members of a culture or community" (p. 95). Netnographic data collection aims to capture three types of data, archival: data collected without involvement from the researcher, elicited: co-created data by researcher and member, and fieldnotes: observational and reflective notes (Kozinets, 2010).

Through observing the two Rolex communities, the archival data was done by going over and observing members posting on Facebook groups without any involvement from the researcher. There were a total number of 60 relevant posts collected from the communities, these included mostly text, with a large amount of combination of text, picture and video. Since the study focuses on what we can learn from community members motivation and outcome for participation, the posts collected was relevant for these topics. In addition, the observation of the overall appearance of the group was conducted, this included the ones controlling the group, rules to follow in the groups, how to enter the group, and the structure of the community.

For the collection of elicited data, interviews were conducted through the Facebook platform, with two members of each of the communities in the study. As it is created by researcher to have interactions with the community members. Therefore, a conversational interview was

conducted through Facebook messenger to ask members question in regard to the research topics and questions.

Finally, fieldnote data was generated from the researchers own observations of the community, their members and interactions, which also includes the researchers own participation in the community and interaction with members. This includes reflections and recordings of what the researcher felt and sensed during his/hers experience in the online community (Kozinets, Dolbec and Earley, 2014).

3.5 Data analysis and interpretation

After collecting netnographic data, the next step is to examine, interpret and analyse the gathered information. To be able to make sense and interpret the data, a manual data collection method (Kozinets, 2010) was applied, by adding the data collected in an excel spreadsheet. This method is considered to be most suitable for research that have a smaller and less complicated data, as well as it is less time consuming and cost less than other options (Kozinets, 2010). The method was therefore applied to the study as the amount of collected data would be easily manageable and interpreted, especially as the time constraint for the study was limited.

The process included the conceptualisation of Glaser and Strauss (1967) grounded theory method, as the data collected were broken down to generate codes in which created categories, and then resulted in establishing theories. Grounded theory was chosen since it shapes to advance the enabling of generating theories through analysing data, this is done by identifying categories as a technique, from coding, to produce a theory (Willing, 2008).

When conducting the analysis, the archival data was entered into the excel spreadsheet which advanced in coding and interpret the member posts, which resulted in discovering a number of keywords such as “opinion”, “frustration”, “help” and many more. Afterwards, the codes proceeded the development and establishment of categories, which then followed the rise of three main themes: Social Validation, Information Seeking and Frustration. For a visual of the coding, categories and themes, and their connections can be found in Appendix 5.

3.6 Ensuring Ethical Standards

Kozinets (2010) emphasises that research ethics is of great importance, as it can be the area that is most uncertain, public, and the most questioned section. When conducting a netnographic research Kozinets (2002) recommends four ethical procedures: “(1) The researcher should fully disclose his/her presence, affiliations and intentions to online community members during any research. (2) The researcher should ensure confidentiality and anonymity to informants, and (3) The researcher should seek and incorporate feedback from members of the online community being researched” (p. 9). The last procedure (4) is specific for online mediums as the researcher needs to contact the members and obtain permission to use any specific posting or direct citation in the research (Kozinets, 2002).

When presenting himself to the community and their members, the researcher made sure to comply with the above procedures, through introducing the research topic, objectives and purpose. Authorisation on observation and direct quotation was obtained from direct contact with the group admins, whilst also assuring that all material and names would be kept anonymous. Lastly, all the participants were treated in the most respected manner and could at any point renounce their participation and material generated to the research.

3.7 Member check

To generate more insight and feedback from the research, a conduction of member checks was used as the researcher shares their results and findings with members in the online community (Kozinets, 2002). This enables a continuous discussion with members to clarify more information that occurs and give rise to new unobserved discoveries, as well as it ensures appropriate interpretation from the collected data and ensuring ethical standards (Kozinets, 2002). The member check was conducted through a selected number of two members from each community to share and present the findings of the study, continuing with questions to obtain clarification of the discovered findings from the data collection and analysis.

4.0 RESULTS ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

After the completion of the netnographic research, the exploration of the Rolex OBCs developed into three themes, which will further be explained in the upcoming sections, that represent the results analysis and findings from the research. Moreover, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Appendix 5 displays the themes, categories and codes to supplement and get a visual of the construction for the following sections. The use of a manual data collection method was useful when interpreting the data, as it drove the researcher to focus more on reading and analysing data clearly, providing the researcher with the ability to read between the lines and understand meanings of a text or posting, rather than just focusing on specific words (Kozinets, 2010).

4.1 Social Validation

The first theme established from the netnographic research was the theme of social validation. When we talk about this theme in the Rolex OBC, the meaning is directed to how people seek status and recognition from others in the community. In this study social validation involves a hedonistic feeling, meaning a member that behave in a way where their self-interest and desire of pleasuring oneself is the most important aspect through the experience with a product (Hirshman & Holbrook, 1982). Furthermore, when referring to social validation, members in the community are living through their consumption and purchase of their Rolex watch (Mittal, 2006), in which they express it using the community. This means that members are showing off their Rolex watch using images and text to document their consumption and experience with their watch to others in the community. Additionally, validation refers to the compliments and the prestige members get while posting about their watch and increasing their status within the community.

From the analysis of the Rolex OBC groups, there was demonstration of members seeking status and prestige, by showing off their watch and express their watch is special through postings in the group. The findings involved a cultural and societal unwritten law imbedded in Norwegian and Scandinavian way of life formulated by Axel Sandemose called: The Jante Law (Sandemose, 1936). The Jante law contains of 10 rules (Appendix 6), Cappelen and Dahlberg (2018) describes it as “one should never try to be more, try to be different, or consider oneself more valuable than other people” (p. 419). The law, in general, means that people in the society should not act or behave in way as if they were more important and better than others, and

individualism should not trump collectivism (Palamara, 2016). The image underneath shows two posts that reflect upon this, taken from the RFN.

Member 1:

"I am not selling it. Yet. Just wanted to show you the crispiest 16710 Pepsi [specific model] in Norway. Or does it exist crispier? Show me! Here with Superjubl [type of bracelet] for the occasion."

OR

Member 2:

"Isn't it a wonderful day!?! Look at my shiny Submariner Hulk! [specific model] What do you think?"



It is evident that the post does not correspond with the laws of Jante when one interprets the post, as the member first expresses that they show off a watch in perfect condition, and also challenges other members to show off their watches. These challenges usually appear, as members post images of their watch of the day and ask community members to show theirs. Furthermore, both members give the impression that their watch is special, which is the opposite of the Jante laws' first rule to think you are not more special than others. The posts from member 1 and 2 also exhibit the urge to seek recognition and approval; that the watch looks like it just came out from the store, it has no sign of wear and it is in excellent shape. The picture attached to the post, shows that member 1 spent time to make sure that the watch was seen in a great condition, and that it looks exquisite for the attention-seeking recognition. A notable observation that could explain the impulse of member 2, is the start of the post where the member expresses the day as "wonderful". This indicates the sense of happiness, and at the end seeks validation by asking others about their opinion of the watch.

The following image exhibits two member checks, by share their thoughts on the two postings, as member checks are to assure, confirm and give more details around the discussed topic.

Participant 1:

“I see that there are lots of dedicated members in the community, that likes to show off their watches. In many cases I see the same people doing it most of the time, and it seems like they want to have the attention. There are many people that want to feel more superior than others in the Facebook group, something the law of Jante in a way prohibits. However, I don’t see why people should follow this old unwritten rule, especially when wearing a Rolex watch.”

OR

Participant 2:

“Rolex is an expensive watch, and I can see that people love to show off their watch and receive recognition for their beautiful watch. It’s Rolex, what do you expect, it is not a way to say I am modest. So, I can understand that people want to flash [show off] their watch and feel proud. I would also love to add that there are differences between Rolex owners, and some wants to feel like they are in a way better than many others, and that’s not any issue.”

From the statements participant 1 and 2 give, it is evident that members in the community seek social validation, and the law of Jante have little or no part in the Rolex online community. Participant 1 also mentions that the majority of the posts comes from specific members and indicates activity among members are different as some are more prompt to the need for recognition. Community members portray joy for the watch posts rather than to spread conflict. This illustrates a community where the dedication and passion to Rolex is strong, where like-minded people can share their love for Rolex. However, participant 2 draws an appealing thought, that Rolex watches are not leading the position as a low-key accessory, rather it is used to seek attention. Furthermore, it also leads to online community members seeking status, meaning that a member wants the feeling of having created high achievements within the Rolex community from others. This is illustrated from the following image from Member 3:

Member 3:

“Picked up these beauties yesterday from our local AD [Authorised Dealer of Rolex]. It was between this and the Air King [specific model]. Not regretting my decision. Also picked up one for my wife, she seems to really like it.”

[Comment] Member 4:

“Congratulation on the new watches, they are indeed beauties, no regrets there! I guess I should say welcome and congrats to you wife as a new Rolex owner and member.”

The first impression from Member 3, shows that he has a relationship with the AD of Rolex, and brags about it when the member says, “our local AD”. This illustrates a member that wants to manifest their customer relationship with their nearby Rolex store, and that it is a special

bond between them. Furthermore, member 3 talks about not regretting the choice, which is a sign of the need to get other members to confirm the choice. This is illustrated by the comment from member 4, exhibiting the endorsement and approval of the watch choice. In addition, the member shows off the capability to choose between watches that are considered to have a high price, which shows that members in the community seek status for their accomplishment of having this ability to choose watches in these price ranges. Since Rolex is considered to be a status symbol for success, owners want to be noticed to increase their social enhancement. Lastly, the member receives recognition for adding an extra member and a Rolex supporter to the community, by purchasing a watch for his wife, presenting himself as an advocate for Rolex. The evidence on social validation from the post is supported through the member check from participant 4, sharing insight on the subject in the following image:

Participant 4:

“If you are a Rolex owner, you don’t care showing off the watch you have, receiving the love from other people and getting new Rolex owner to come along. This is normal. It is like when you’re a kid, when had a new toy you loved to show it to the other kids and get praised. In this case you can reach beyond borders and get praised for you toy (watch), but it’s a bit more expensive.”

The statement from participant 4 makes it clear that members in the community take great pleasure in posting about their watch and receive compliments from others. Within the community, to show off an expensive watch to others that share the same passion, is by what is gathered a normal behaviour. However, when comparing it to toys, the view of members seeking social validation from Rolex owners is a major part in the online community. Since it reveals that, similar to a child, the feeling of earning admiration from others uplifts one’s self-confidence and status. As a result, the same members often post about their watch or purchases, like mentioned by participant 1, because of the received attention. Likewise, participant 4 talks about this behaviour being normal, confirming that this is a common practice among members. When observing members and participants there is ultimately no strong evidence indicating members that seek social enhancement receive any harsh negative comments from others. It is apparent that the theme of social validation is connected to members that want to show off or parade their watch and increase their status within the community. This, in a place where Rolex devotees are gathered to share the same admiration for the brand as the people that post to boost self-confidence.

4.2 Information Seeking

The second theme identified from the analysis is information seeking behaviours, based on members seeking and giving help, advice, opinions, and also having monetary incentives. The findings from the analysis show that the participants in the Rolex communities use the group to satisfy a particular functional need or to give a helping hand. Furthermore, the theme presents to be the most occurring throughout the two communities, as it involves and invites members to more participation in the community. The theme represents the fact that members are seeking the ability to satisfy a particular need, in which the OBC is where they can fulfil these needs.

The topics discussed in the theme include sharing images when there are any questions regarding the authenticity of a Rolex watch, as Rolex is one of the most replicated brands in the world. When posts concerning copied watches are made, the members in the community are quick to express their feelings and show their knowledge to help a fellow member. In addition, the members present their moral support through showing a sympathy to members experiencing the dilemma of replicated Rolex's. The following image from members illustrates a member seeking support from the community and the aid received.

Member 5:

"Hello to my fellow members. I found a seller that wants to sell his watch, but I am unsure and scared if it is a fake[replicated] watch. Everything seems to be in order, but I would love to hear from you guys before making a decision. I have been able to take a couple of pictures which I am sharing with you. Thank you!"

[Comment] Member 6:

"I am a sorry dude, but this one is not a real watch. What I can see from the pictures, there are many things that question my eyes, and my experience say it too. I am sad to see these horrible replicas. Good luck on finding your Rolex!"

OR

[Comment] Member 7:

"That is a fake watch my friend. Don't buy! I am sorry for your excitement, but there are many other opportunities to get a hold of a real watch. Just keep searching for your dream watch, and at least you dodged a bullet."

The post from member 5 is initially about purchasing a watch and having uncertainties in regard to the authenticity of the watch, therefore seeking help from the community to get answers. Wanting advice from the community before purchasing a watch indicates that one has a major trust in the community, as well as faith in members to help one another. On top of that, the comments from member 6 and 7 illustrate the need to assist a fellow member, while expressing

some thoughts. The comments show compassion and encouragement towards member 5, and member 6 is portrayed to be an experienced and knowledgeable person to making sure member 5 does not purchase the watch. Member 7 also talks about Rolex as a “dream watch” and demonstrates an eagerness to support a member in need as they share similar desire for Rolex. Also, the two assisting members show encouragement to member 5 for the future hunt for a genuine Rolex watch, to uplift the searcher further, and assure the member that there are people that wants to help fellow community members.

The example from member 5 is a demonstration of seeking help and advice in the Rolex OBC. However, it is not singled out to one specific matter like seen with member 4’s situation, rather it includes a vast variety of situations where a member would like to get more information about. This is a typical example of a member seeking information about Rolex, and in the following image the diversity of the information, help, advice and opinions members seek in the community are shown:

Member 8:

“I have a Rolex watch, and I am wondering if I should polish it. I have owned it for about 5 years now and there are scratches and scuffs that I would like to vanish. I have googled it and there are mixed feelings about it. Hope you I can get some pointers from experienced people.”

OR

Member 9:

“Which one do you think is nice, Submariner or SkyDweller/[specific model]? I am conflicted between the two.”

OR:

Member 10:

“Hey! I am going on vacation to Madrid, and I was wondering if someone has any idea which stores to visit, to get the best deals on a Rolex watch. Thanks in advance!”

The image above describes a mixture of the different question’s members have in both the RFN and RF group. Most of the posts includes images that relates to the question, while in some cases it can be random pictures the member attaches to attract attention. It is interesting that member 8 initialt searched online and then asks the group for advice from members that may be experts on this. The impression is that members would rely on others in the community when there are uncertainties involved, similar to how member 9 asked for opinions from the group. It also makes the community feel more secure, as people feel safe and trust the other members thoughts in regards to questions they need an answer too. When looking at member 10, the

interesting part is that the member is asking for help internationally, suggesting a community that helps one another no matter where you might be. For more insight, Participant 3 revealed some details around the subject in the following image:

Participant 3:

“Rolex is an expensive watch, and there are people that save up so much money to even afford one on their wrist, so you can see so many posts about anything regarding any sort of issue or questions about Rolex. Unfortunately, the issue with replicate watches is hard to avoid, and I see members frequently trying to get help, as well as help out other members by warning them about certain places and people selling watches. I feel like the majority of members are here because they have a great deal of devotion to Rolex, which strengthens the trust in the group and is a place where people can come to get help wherever they might be.”

From the view of participant 3, it is apparent that the Rolex OBCs studied have trust and kindness among its members, as they are surrounded with people that have love for Rolex. It is interesting to discover that members in the community also warn the group when it comes to anyone that is selling any copied Rolex watches. This is a testimonial to the dedication and support to the community as sharing knowledge and helping out members is strong among members. In addition, members can ask whatever they might need help for all around the world, giving the rise for a community where Rolex admirers can come for support.

Besides helping out members, questions regarding value of watches frequently occur, as members have the intent of selling or buying items. For example, members seek to find out the value of a watch if they have inherited it. The Facebook groups become a market space for Rolex consumers, and is a place where people find out more about purchases and value of watches. This demonstrates the bond of trust to others and in knowledge, as valuable items are sold through the Facebook community. Through the following postings from members in the community illustrates the seek for support from the online community.

Member 11:

“WTB [want to buy]. Anybody have something fun to sell me? My budget is up to around €9.000. I am adding a picture for attention.”

OR

Member 12:

“Someone who has a link to a Rolex Submariner 1993 mod, Ref: 16613 gold/steel? [specific model] Please send me a PM if you have one to sell.”

Or

Member 13:

“Hello, I got this watch from my grandfather, anyone have an idea how much its worth?”

The image above represents the type of questions members ask, as well as showing how diverse the posts are. Even though they initially look different, the essence is similar as it is related to sale, value and purchase. Members that sell their watches have a common incentive in why they are selling, which is that the member is looking for a new watch to buy from the sale. The image statement from participant 1 adds insight to this topic.

Participant 1:

“I think it’s nice to have a place where we can get answers about anything Rolex related and that it comes from anywhere in the world, which gives us worldwide knowledge. Also, I think that sales/purchase/value is a big part of the community, since it’s a place where we can exchange Rolex items among members in a fair matter to help each other out, genuinely. I even bought a watch from a member looking to sell to buy another watch.”

Participant 1’s validates that topics regarding value, sales and purchase is a major part in the OBC, and illustrates how the community is used as a helpful and useful tool for members. In addition, it is seen as a place where members can trade between one another, and there is a trust in the community, as participant 1 bought a watch from another member. Participant 1 presents evidence of faith in the community and states that the community have genuine interest in supporting members, referring to his own purchase. This also shows that members are determined to be honest to other supporters and creates harmony among the Rolex supporters. Therefore, when looking at the theme: Information Seeking, the Rolex members use the community as a utility to fulfil their need to gather information, as well as having buying and selling behaviours. When doing so, members are met with warmth and eagerness to help. With this in mind, it can be claimed that members take care of their common interest and devotion to Rolex.

4.3 Frustration

The third theme discovered is frustration, which occur on a constant basis in the OBCs, and relates to particular topics regarding Rolex. One of the topics mentioned focuses on the availability of purchasing a Rolex watch, as noticed by members it is difficult to buy certain watches. The consequents are that the waiting list for buying a watch is long, and further increases prices on the second-hand market, and results in members uttering their frustrations. Frustrations due to replicated watches also occur in this theme, although it differs as people show their anger towards the market of copied watches on posts regarding replicas, rather than seeking help. Throughout the observed communities the two reoccurring topics regarding the theme of frustration was availability and replication of watches. The following image illustrate the frustration concerning the availability of watches attached with two pictures from the respective members:

Member 14:

“Excitement that turns into disappointment. Not a single SS model [specific model]. Arggh [upsetting reaction]”

[Comment] Member 15:

“What’s the point of the shopfronts... they can take names for waiting lists online, but you know the chances of that is freaking low”

OR

Member 16:

“Honestly, what is it with the lack of watches. I went in to a shop and I was met with a store with nothing in it basically. I know that there are issues getting watches, but I didn’t know that it’s this bad.”

[Comment] Member 17:

*“I AGREE. Rolex needs to consider putting a few more watches out there, its f***ing [profanity] depressing to go into a shop now a days. Also, the prices on used models get freaking expensive.”*



With these examples, it is apparent that the topic of shortage of Rolex watches build up annoyance among members. Notably, member 14 expresses that the eagerness to buy a new watch was quickly shut down by the lack of watches in the store, creating an upsetting reaction noticed at the end. The comment from member 15 proves that this is a common issue with buying a Rolex watch, adding that the chances of getting hold of certain models can be difficult. Similarly, member 16 encounters a relatable problem, knowing that it would be hard to get hold of a watch, however, not quite as difficult as experienced. Member 17 reacts more with anger, as well as being irritated over the high second-hand market prices for Rolex watches. This hints to the people capitalising on the shortage of watches, by selling a watch higher than the retail price, which then aggravates members that are invested and passionate about Rolex and want to buy one to keep it. The situation where members are faced with the lack of watches is a vulnerable topic and is frequently talked about in the community. According to the member check with participant 4 and 2, it is evident that what is said about the lack of availability is a cause for discontent.

Participant 4:

“People want to buy Rolex and there are specific models that are very popular among us, which are super difficult to get, and if you get one, it’s like winning the lottery. Rolex is a luxury brand, and I could guess that it is supposed to be exclusive, but what about us that really are supporters? And going to the store with empty shelves is sad and irritating.

OR

Participant 2:

“It’s hard to see watches that cost 20-30% over retail prices in the used market, which is extremely ridiculous. It really destroys it for the rest of us, that loves Rolex. I feel like people are taking advantage of the brand, and it’s going over the real customers.”

The member check talks about both the major topics that create frustration among members in the community, especially people wanting to buy a Rolex. Participant 2 emphasises the second-hand market, which is of concern to the members, whilst participant 4 talks about the lack of watches. Participant 4 compares acquiring a watch with the lottery, this indicates that the struggle to buy particular watches can be complicated, and even impossible. When watches become more expensive because of the second-hand market, members that consider themselves great supporters become frustrated, and see it as disruptive for genuine Rolex admirers.

The topic of replicated watches is sensitive, as learned from the previous theme of support. However, when talking about the theme frustration, members reactions towards posts that seek help can escalate their feelings on the subject. Members are quick to show their dissatisfaction with comments on posts regarding copied Rolex watches. This is illustrated with the following image of members reacting to a post initially made to seek advice:

[Comment] Member 18:

*“FAKE FAKE FAKE. I am sick and tired of seeing these persons ripping off people that want to buy a real watch and uses a huge amount of money to buy their dream watch and ruins it for them. This is f***ing[profanity] ridicules, please Rolex, can you for god sake stop it.”*

OR

[Comment] Member 19:

*“This is obviously a horrible counterfeit. It’s hard to see so many of them in circulation now, and I am damn scared to be victim of this s**t[profanity]. This is destroying our pleasure of owning a Rolex, when so many think I wear a fake, and I don’t want to explain myself.”*

The comments from the members show strong thoughts in regards to false Rolex watches, and many uses profanity to express their frustration. Reacting this harshly to the subject shows that dedicated members and supporters are strongly attached to Rolex. Member 19 also have issues when wearing a Rolex watch, and blames the replica market. Since Rolex is an expensive item to wear, members want to make sure that people know they are wearing a genuine Rolex. In a similar way, member 18 talks about Rolex being a dream, and that replicated watches damage the joy and pleasure of owning one. The aggressive reaction from community members towards this subject is connected to the amount of money spent on their ideal watch, and the high risk of receiving a counterfeit watch on the second-hand market. Rolex owners are tired of defending themselves from accusations of wearing a copied watch as it becomes a build up for frustration.

Observed from the analysis, the topics of the availability and the risk of purchasing counterfeit Rolex watches is common in the OBC and a driver for frustration among community members.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This section draws to conclude the conducted netnographic analysis on the Rolex OBC by answering the first research questions from the first chapter of the thesis. Finally, presenting the theoretical- and managerial implications for the conducted research.

5.1 Members Motivations to Engage in the Rolex Online Brand Community

It was apparent from the analysis that members in the community were, and still are participating in the Rolex OBC with different motivations. The motivation of self-enhancement (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Dholakia et al., 2004) was frequently met from the analysis of the two Rolex OBCs. Members are motivated through earning approval and seeking acknowledgement on their Rolex watch from others and increase their status position in the community. In addition, they share pictures of the watch with others and benefit from the compliments from supporters, resulting in more frequent activity from these particular members. Members that seek social validation see it as a pleasure when receiving flattering remarks, which gives rise to the motivations of interacting with fellow admirers. Since members have the same-shared interest to Rolex, the posts and comments within the theme of social validation show that entertainment and amusement is a key driver. This means the satisfaction and pleasure acquired through conversations with like-minded Rolex enthusiast and talking about the affection they have with Rolex. Therefore, in the discovery from the theme of social validation, the motivations to participate in the Rolex OBC are seek status, self-enhancement, and entertained interactions with members.

The search for advice and help is a highly reoccurring topic in the theme of information seeking, and views as a main motivation for members to participate in the OBCs, especially in a buying and selling context. This illustrates that members look for other peoples' experience, knowledge and counsel in the search of fulfilling their own needs. Similarly, the members responding to those postings, show the motivated behaviour of providing and helping out members in the community. Those members want to assist others in their choice and make them avoid any uncertainties when buying a Rolex watch. The questions and answers from members vary greatly, even though they are always related to Rolex. Nevertheless, there are particular questions that stand out more, such as authenticity of a watch, purchasing intentions of a watch or accessory, and choice of watch. When talking about purchase, member motivations towards selling their watch, use the online community for their purpose. In addition to the motive to sell, an underlying motivation to participate is that a member seeks to purchase a new Rolex

from the sale of the current one. With this in mind, the main motivations for member participations from the analysis of the theme of information seeking is the need for assistance, helping fellow admirers, and buying or selling items.

The theme of frustration revealed that members have an urge to participate when certain topics are discussed. These motivations are expressed in a negative way, in which a member can express their feelings towards an experience with Rolex. Members are triggered to express negative feelings towards the lack of availability to buy watches in the store, consequently setting off the emotions about highly expensive second-hand market price on Rolex watches. On top of that, members are quick to act and share their irritations on replicated watches, even if a member only asks for help to verify the watch authenticity. The negative expressed feelings expressed by members show a concern for Rolex, as they are posting and commenting on these topics to be visible. As one member pleaded to Rolex to make an end to the “fake” Rolex watch distribution. Hence, the motivations members have when uttering such feelings is a motivation to partake in articulating negative attitudes and the concern for the brand.

The outcomes from motivated participation in the Rolex OBC have been visible when members interact when it comes to seeking assistance. As a result, the members seeking assistance receive knowledgeable information from others that are seeking to help out a fellow member. This effects the trust among Rolex enthusiasts as they are confident in the knowledge and experience of other members when it comes to pricey watches starting from €4.000. This occurs even when members have searched outside the community and ends up asking for their advice to confirm their questions, as an effect increasing the loyalty and commitment to the OBC. When a member posts about and shows off their Rolex, it illustrates that their frequent activity is generating social interactions that improves the group dynamic and involvement in the future. Despite that, in a community where members have a significant affection and devotion for Rolex, the concern for the brand is high. This relates to the outcome seen from the theme of frustration, as it shows that members share their similar thought about specific topics regarding Rolex availability, replicas and price. Even if members are committed and loyal to Rolex, their outburst show concern and want to help the brand, making sure the awareness of the difficulty’s members face with these topics. Nevertheless, the members that are not as dedicated to Rolex are more prompt to have a short-lived experience with Rolex and causing them to leave for another brand. Lastly from the analysis, particular members frequently commented on the same post and conversated and would be an indication of an engagement leading to a friendship.

However, there were no evidence from the analysis that members in the Rolex OBC had created any relationships besides the interactions online.

Finally, when examining the rules of the two OBCs (Appendix 4 and 5), it is apparent that these rules are to prevent harmful discussions from shifting away from the group purpose, which is to share their admiration to Rolex. Consequents of not following rules is imitate expulsion. The group rules also encourage members to interact with each other and share their watches with the community members and be friendly to one another.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

From an academical perspective, the study on the Rolex OBC has provided knowledgeable insight on the motivation members have to participate in an OBC. The studies on OBCs and BCs (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al., 2002; Wirtz et al., 2013), illustrates that the Rolex OBCs inhabit the fundamentals of an OBC and BC. Additionally, with the use of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the findings of the theme's social validation, information seeking and frustration, shows the main motivations of member engagement. These findings revealed that motivations regarding buying and selling behaviours would be a contribution to the existing research on economic reward and purchasing advice (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Dholakia et al., 2004; Wirtz et al., 2013). Since the evidence of the research showed that members in the Rolex OBC use the groups as a place of business among each other. Furthermore, as introduced in the first section of the thesis, studies on luxury goods are not widely researched in the context of motivated behaviour to participate in OBCs. Therefore, the presented study has taken a dip in the exploration of luxury products in OBCs, as it is still in a stage of discovery.

Lastly, the presented study shows the use of netnography as a research method for studying OBCs (Kozinets, 2002). Providing the study with the ability to gather information on members and the communities with flexibility and adapt oneself in an online setting. Enabling the researcher to acquire knowledge through interpreting the diversity of online users' postings and comments, learning and understanding the meanings of several texts and images. This study showed how text and images of member posting could be used to gain the knowledge of motivated behaviour and interaction in an OBC.

5.3 Managerial Implications

An OBC seen from a marketing viewpoint is an intermediate, connecting the customers or members and the brand. By having an OBC, the brand can potentially affect the consumer brand relationship, and increase the brand loyalty, repurchase rate and create new relationships with customers. Since luxury customers have the tendency to choose the brand first, before choosing the brand product (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). While searching for Rolex OBCs, there was not a community found that was managed by the brand itself that fulfilled the criteria based on OBC literature (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al., 2002; Wirtz et al, 2013). It is therefore recommended that Rolex would have an own online community-based platform to connect with Rolex supporters and future admirers. Since a dialog between the brand and supporters could for example help to minimise the members frustration level and show understanding to their irritation to the availability of Rolex watches.

Even if this study aimed not to have a Rolex managed OBC. However, it would be an advantage for Rolex to interact with their customers and supporters, as consumers of the brand can inhabit more information from Rolex. Furthermore, marketers can use the opportunities from the communication within the community as a source to obtain data to analyse for marketing research. With the findings from this study, the social validation, information seeking and frustration, can further be developed and benefit the brand, as they can obtaining a deeper knowledge of their consumers that could strengthen their relationship. Since the communities are used as a utility, a brand-managed online community can be used to give useful information to Rolex members and work as a platform where members can get answers to any questions directly from Rolex.

A reoccurring topic in the studied communities was the lack of watches distributed and the struggle to get a hold of a new Rolex watch from a store, without being on a waiting list that could stretch over years. However, as a luxury brand, if Rolex would flood the market with more watches, could be damageable for the brands preposition of being desirable and luxurious. On the other side, when members are reporting empty stores and a high second-hand market price, they become frustrated, which can damage their relationships with members. Consequently, make them shift towards another brand. A step for Rolex to minimise this, could be to train the authorised dealer to sell their watches to customers with conditions regarding the intent of keeping the watch. As this would not require Rolex to produce more watches, rather it would supply watches to the Rolex devotees and members that would keep down the

frustration. Example is how Louis Vuitton restricted the purchase to two bags per year for each customer, and customer had to explain why if they wanted to buy more, concerned the bags would be resold up to 40% higher of the retail price afterwards (Wilson, 2008). Nonetheless, the less circulation of watches could also mean higher price in the used market, but seen it is still a luxury brand, it would be a trade-off between supplying genuine members versus those that want to make a profit.

When talking about the difficulties of replicated Rolex watches, there are already few actions that has been done to minimise that consumers would receive copied watches. These measurements are engravings and markings on their watches that only Rolex have the tools to make to distinguish themselves from a nearly identical replica. However, the replicated market is hurting the consumers and forces the brand to battle against a “epidemic” which is near impossible, as replica makers operates in countries where there is no prosecution for this matter. Ultimately, the recommendation to this problem would be to work with the online retailers e.g. eBay & amazon, as well as shipping companies that ship goods from countries where they are made. This could prevent less unguine Rolex watches to flood the market in the areas where there is the highest possibility to encounter copied Rolex watches.

Finally, when mentioning a Rolex-managed community in the first paragraph, it could be a major concept for Rolex to have offline activities, similar to McAlexander et al. (2002) research on the Jeep community. This can create more meaningful community where members are interacting physically and talk about their affection for Rolex, in addition to exchange knowledge and products face-to-face. Eventually this could be a great place where Rolex can minimise the frustration among community members with their thoughts on the matter.

6.0 LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This final part of the thesis on the Rolex OBC, end with the limitations from the conducted research, and the further research that can be carried out to further understand the community.

6.1 Limitations

There are limitations to the study as it, first of all, focuses on two Rolex OBC on Facebook. Therefore, the presented findings and results cannot represent the entire existence of all Rolex communities, and as well hide the fact that there may be additional discoveries from these OBCs. Moreover, as a netnographic research, it has a narrow focus on online communities, which means the current study on the two Rolex OBCs cannot be generalised to other similar communities. In addition, the data collection period was limited from February to June 2019, as the period of the thesis, we cannot bare the fact that postings before and after that period could reveal more about other motivations in the Rolex OBCs. Considering the fact that the two communities have a large number of postings and high activity. This makes the time limit of approximately 4 months somewhat a restriction in order to cover more insight from the communities that could contribute to the research.

There is also the acknowledging fact that this study focuses on Rolex watch communities, a luxury watchmaker, as its area of research. Therefore, we cannot apply the findings and results to other watchmaker brands in the luxury market, as their members or supporters may have differences in behaviours and outcomes than Rolex consumers when participating in an OBC.

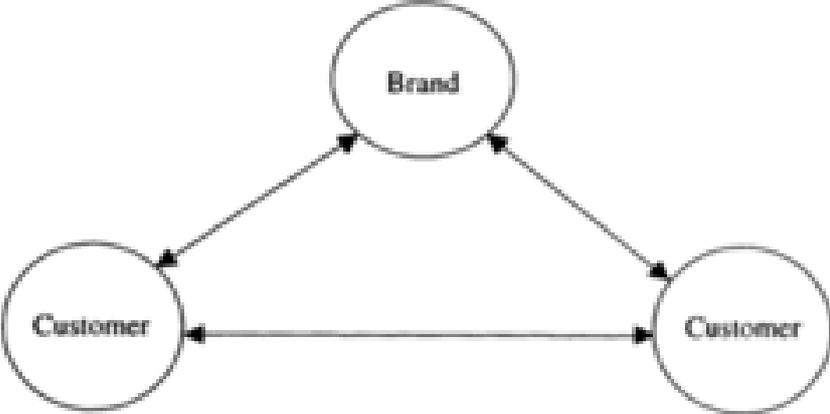
To end, the fact of finding research articles that are related to the similar subject of Rolex or luxury OBCs was difficult to get a hold off, as there were few studies that would be relevant through a netnographic research perspective. Therefore, research on consuming luxury products was the closest one could get to find relevance in the luxury marked.

6.2 Further Research

Since netnography is a qualitative research method, the conducted study provides a solid footing for further research and is supposed to be a contribution in the current knowledge of the Rolex OBC. However, the findings from the study should be supplemented with a quantitative research to assure a greater result. This can be accomplished using surveys, which enables a higher number of participants that would provide a larger sample to ensure more details about the members in the Rolex community. In addition, questions would be formed with the support of this research with a quantitative approach, as it then would grant the insight from this analysis to be compared with the results of the quantitative study. Examples of questions could be in regard to their intent of participating, longevity of their membership, nationality and their relationship to Rolex and the OBCs. Furthermore, it would be promising to include in further research the differences between nationalities in the Rolex OBCs, as this study touched on one international and one Norwegian community. This would be interesting to see if there are cultural differences in their motivational behaviour to partake in the Rolex OBC. In addition, the survey would ask questions formed to gain knowledge about the different types of member roles encountered in the Rolex community. As the insight from the present analysis of motivation can be linked to different roles in the community and gain the brand knowledge on how to target certain consumers more efficiently. Additionally, as one of the most identifiable luxury brand in the world, it would be appealing to see if how other luxury watchmaker's online community members compares with Rolex supporters, e.g. Audemars Piguet, Patek Philippe, IWC, Breitling. In which we can look how members in their respective community talks about their preferred brand and their motivation to interact. Lastly, it would be compelling to get insight from people outside the Rolex OBCs to obtain an external perspective on Rolex members motivations to participate in the OBC.

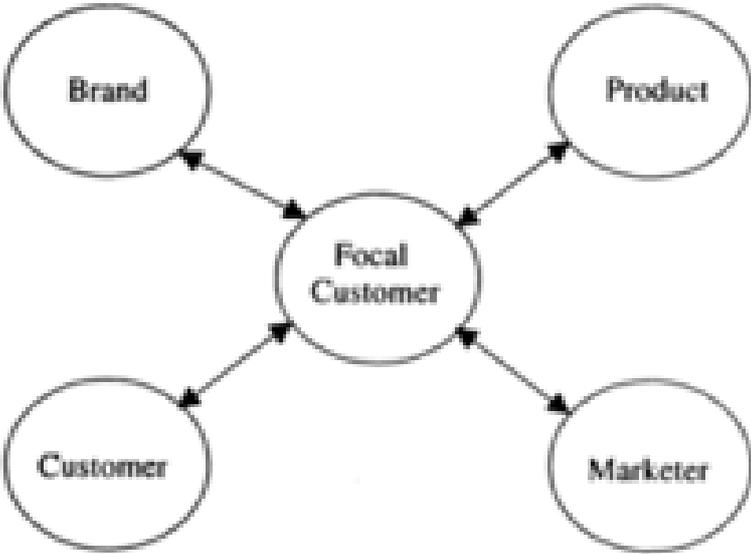
7.0 APPENDIX

7.1 Appendix 1: Brand Community Triad



Source: Muniz and O’Guinn (2001)

7.2 Appendix 2: Customer-Centric Model of Brand Community



Source: McAlexander et al. (2002)

7.3 Appendix 3: Rules and Guides from Rolex Forum Norway Facebook group:

*Only existing members can invite / add new members *

Welcome to Rolex Forum Norway.

The group's goal is quality rather than quantity!

The following guidelines have been created to safeguard the purpose of the group, and that is to gather enthusiasts and collectors for the Rolex / Tudor brand in Norway;

1. Sales of Rolex and Rolex accessories are allowed. Tudor is also allowed.

However, this is not a major sales channel for those who do clock sales as a business activity. Sales ads from only private sellers are allowed. The ad MUST contain good pictures of the watch / accessory, fixed price (no "auction" in the ad) and a good description of the watch / accessory's condition. Comments are allowed as long as you adhere to the rules of having a good tone with each other. Only posting a link to find ad is not allowed. A simple image of a watch teaser for a sale / exchange is allowed.

2. It is not allowed to "bump" a sales ad unless it is a new price. If you "bump" illegally, the comment is deleted, and the thread is locked for comment. In addition, thread starts may be removed from Rolex Forum Norway if the rules are breached repeatedly.

3. It is allowed to criticise/praise Norwegian official dealers and shops. As dealers are also members of the group. Resellers can also post watch news and update the forum about what they have available for sale in the store, via posts and not sales ads.

4. Absolutely no discussion of Norwegian customs and VAT rules when importing watches. There are already several groups that have raised this topic several times, and you find answers yourself by searching the web.

5. Feel free to inquire here on an advertisement for a Rolex or Tudor watch that you are considering buying so you can hear other people's opinions on condition, price, etc ...

6. ONLY Rolex and Tudor watches in Rolex Forum Norway, and this also applies under "What kind of watch do you wear today?" posts.

7. NO pictures of their watch at the wheel while you are speeding and driving! Such images will be deleted immediately.

8. There should be a friendly and pleasant tone between the members in here.

9. Remember that there is a "Report to Administrator" feature. So, if anyone gets anything backed by the ad, then review the post. An Admin will take care of the matter.

10. Admins may at any time - and without notice - remove posts where the above rules are not followed.

11. There should be absolutely no open discussion or criticism of an Admin in post threads regarding an Admin's decision. This should be taken in a private message to the current admin. Comments are deleted and the member risks blocking from the group.

Regards. Admin team

Source: Rolex Forum Norway Facebook Group (2019)

7.4 Appendix 4: Rules and Guides from Rolex Forum Facebook group:

Rolex forum in an Open venue to share pictures ask questions about your Rolex watches.

-If you post a blurry picture it will be deleted.

1)For Sale posts must be posted in the sales corner.

2) DO NOT link to other pages. Too many fishing attempts by scammers.

3) Be nice to each other.

4) We do not allow pictures of guns. I personally have no issues with them, but it upsets many members and creates extra work for the mod team.

5) Being rude will get you banned.

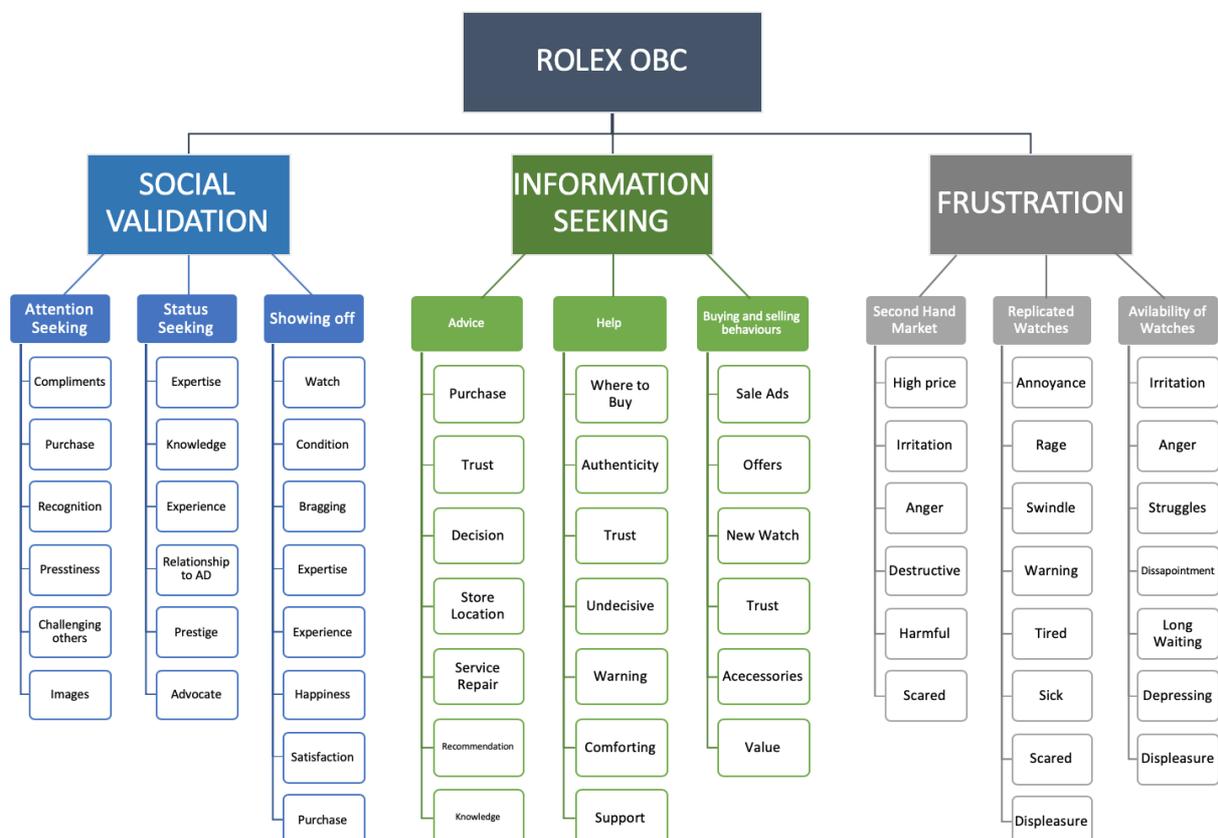
6) Please no political talk, it always results in hurt feelings and people being banned.

7) Do not ask if a certain model is an investment. We don't have a crystal ball.

8) Dealers who attempt to circumvent the rules and sell on people's posts will be banned.

Source: Rolex Forum Facebook Group (2019)

7.5 Appendix 5: Thematic Network



7.6 Appendix 6: The 10 Rules of The Law of Jante:

The Jante Law

1. Don't think you're anything special.
2. Don't think you're as good as others.
3. Don't think you're smarter than others.
4. Don't convince yourself that you're better than others.
5. Don't think you know more than others.
6. Don't think you are more important than others.
7. Don't think you are good at anything.
8. Don't laugh at others.
9. Don't think anyone cares about you.
10. Don't think you can teach others anything.

Source: Cappelen and Dahlberg (2018)

8.0 GLOSSARY

OBC	Online brand community
BC	Brand community
OBCs	Online brand communities
BCs	Brand communities
RF	Rolex Forum
RFN	Rolex Forum Norge (Norway)
AD	Authorised Dealer (Stores that are allowed to sell Rolex watches)

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