



The drivers and challenges within an Online Fitness and Health community

A Netnography study on the BBG Online community

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Title: The drivers and challenges within an Online Fitness and Health community.
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Abstract:

The purpose of this dissertation is to understand the drivers for people joining fitness and health online communities and the main adversities faced by its members. In specific, it explores the “Bikini Body Guide”, a fitness and health online community, and uses Netnography as a qualitative research method to gather insights on online consumer behaviors. The results of the research reveal accountability to be the main driver for members joining the community. However, it also shows that its meaning differs from the social sciences when applied to the fitness and health context. While some members participate searching to create connections, others are looking for motivation and to sharing information. On the other hand, results show that the main challenge faced by members is in terms of frustrations, which can arise from two different sources. The first one is due to members’ ability to meeting their expectations, while the second derives from some struggles that appear along the journey such as lack of confidence, commitment or procrastination. Furthermore, this dissertation explains the implications and limitations of this study, and based on the insights collected suggests managerial recommendations, useful from a marketing viewpoint, that lies in helping marketers in the retention and increase of traffic of the community.

Resumo:

Esta dissertação tem como objetivo compreender quais os motivos que levam as pessoas a participar em comunidades online de fitness e saúde e compreender quais os principais desafios que os seus membros enfrentam. Em específico, explora a comunidade de fitness e saúde “Bikini Body Guide” e utiliza Netnografia como método de pesquisa qualitativa para reunir ideias sobre os comportamentos online do consumidor. Os resultados da pesquisa revelam o sentido de responsabilidade como o principal motivo que leva os membros a participar na comunidade. No entanto, também mostra que o seu significado, no contexto de ciências sociais, difere quando aplicado ao mundo de fitness e saúde. Enquanto alguns membros participam com o objetivo de criar relações e de se conectarem com os demais membros, outros procuram motivação ou mesmo partilha de informações e conhecimento. Por outro lado, os resultados mostram que o principal desafio enfrentado pelos membros é em termos de frustrações, as quais podem surgir de duas origens diferentes. A primeira surge através das expectativas dos membros não serem correspondidas, enquanto a segunda relaciona-se com o aparecimento de algumas adversidades ao longo do percurso, tal como a falta de confiança, compromisso ou procrastinação. Mais ainda, esta dissertação explica as implicações e limitações do presente estudo e, com base nos resultados obtidos, sugere recomendações relevantes do ponto de vista do marketing, que consistem em ajudar na retenção e no aumento do tráfego da comunidade em estudo.

Keywords: Fitness, Health, Digital Insights, Netnography, Accountability.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Problem definition and relevance

Nowadays, the wellness industry¹ is one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the world. According to the Global Wellness Economy monitor (2018), from 2015 to 2017, this industry grew 12,8% rising to a \$4.2 trillion market and represents 5.3% of global economic output.

Comparing to the old generations the modern society is characterized by being more sedentary and making poor lifestyle choices. However, as a consequence of the increase concerned of global health, the need for supply and demand of services and products that promote good health have increased. Moreover, consumers are searching for ways to improve their overall health and fitness (Lord, 2017).

Due to the digital disruption from the last years, social media plays an essential role in this health and fitness movement, as it gives platforms for people sharing knowledge and advice (Lord, 2017). According to Statista (2019), the number of social media users for 2019 is estimated to reach 2.77 billion. Thus, health and fitness information is coming from every part and consumers are more aware of the health issues, becoming more active and making healthier choices (Lord, 2017).

However, this digital disruption is not only affecting consumers' behavior but also the way fitness brands engage with them. Online communities created around particular fitness brands and activities allow members to share across all forms of social media details, goals, and achievements of their fitness journeys. These communities are becoming a valuable tool that can provide brands competitive advantages toward their competitors. Members are

¹ According to the Global Wellness Institute (2018) the wellness industry is composed of ten segments: fitness and mind-body; healthy eating, nutrition and weight loss; personal care, beauty and anti-aging; preventive and personalized medicine and public health; spa economy; thermal/mineral springs; traditional and complementary medicine; wellness real estate; wellness tourism; and workplace wellness.

encouraging, motivating and helping each other, which can act as a channel for brands to attract new customers and increase customer lifetime value (Wong, 2017).

Previous studies have been aiming to understand fitness-based brand communities and their characteristics and significant literature exist on motivation theories and frameworks to join online communities and adopt health and fitness lifestyles. However, little research has been analysing what drives people to join and stay in these specific online communities. Fitness and health are trending topics in online community discussions, but multiple members participate for different reasons and face various challenges, which provides an attractive subject to investigate further.

1.2. Objective and research questions

The aim of this dissertation is to further explore the limited research on fitness and health online community drivers. In specific, the “Bikini Body Guide” (also called BBG) community owned by Kayla Itsines will be studied. By the end of the research, this dissertation is intended to provide managerial implications that lie in helping marketers in the retention of members and increase the website traffic. Moreover, with the purpose to discover qualitative insights, Netnography will be the methodology used throughout this dissertation. Hence, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1: What drives people to join and stay in the BBG community?

RQ2: What are the main challenges faced by its members?

These research questions are meant to understand the different reasons underlying people to join the community and also the main struggles faced by its members.

1.3. Structure of the thesis

This dissertation is divided into seven sections. The first section deals with the problem definition and relevance of its study, followed by the research questions that the researcher wants to address. At section two a review of the existent literature on the main dissertation topic is made. This review starts with a contextualization of online communities and what drives people to join them, moving to existent theories and literature about online fitness and health communities, which allows identifying the research gap and where to position this

dissertation. Section three purpose is to present and contextualize the BBG community. On section four, is made an introduction to Netnography and is also explained how data was collected and analysed. The fifth section presents a thematic analysis build based on the grounded theory. On section six theoretical and practical managerial implications are made. Finally, in the last section, the limitations of the study and possible future research are presented.

2. Literature review

This section presents a review of the existent literature on the main dissertation topic: Fitness and health online communities.

2.1. Online communities

2.1.1. Definition

To be able to analyse an online community it is necessary to understand first its concept. Until the rise of mass media, the definitions of a community remained focused on geographic proximity (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001; Preece & Maloney-Krichmar, 2005). With the development of communications, researchers found factors such as the strength and nature of the relationship between individuals to be more useful for definition (Preece & Maloney-Krichmar, 2005).

Therefore, Rheingold and Hiltz as pioneers of online community development defined it as the intense feelings of membership, empathy, and support observed in people in the online spaces (as cited in Preece & Maloney-Krichmar, 2005). Other researchers have tried to operationalize the definition, but there is still no general terminology agreed. Nevertheless, for the scope of this dissertation, the interpretation of Dholakia, Bagozzi, and Pearo (2004) that online community is a group of people with different characteristics and sizes that join and interact online with the purpose of sharing and interacting with others, will be adopted.

2.1.2. Characteristics

Despite the connection to others via Internet being crucial to an online community, the concept of community cannot be applied to all online discourse sites (Ridings & Gefen, 2004). Hence, it is essential to understand the characteristics of these communities.

Online communities can be very different from each other, but there are some features shared by all. First, most of them are organized around a particular interest such as a product or topic. Second, there is a connection that members feel one to another and a sense of difference from people outside the community, which is what Gusfield called “consciousness of kind” (as cited in Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). This consciousness is more than sharing attitudes or similarities, members share a way of thinking about things and knowing of belonging. When

this connection exists members show to be more willing to share information, to support and commit to goals with others, which drives them to return to the community in the future. Third, virtual communities use and create agreements and language (e.g., emoticons or acronyms), rituals, establish boundaries and follow norms of interaction. Finally, the content is created by the community members, and communication is primarily text-based (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002).

2.1.3. Cyberspace

Kozinets (2002) in his Netnography work mentions five different types of platforms where to find online communities such as boards, web-pages, web-rings, dungeons, and chat rooms. However, over the last years, the Internet suffered a cultural shift and Netnographers need now to consider other social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, blogs and many others when doing their research (Kozinets, Dolbec, & Earley, 2014). Netnography will be the research method used in this dissertation, and further details will be presented in the methodology section.

Moreover, all these developments contributed to increasing the complexity of the online interactions, which can either be private or public, asynchronously or synchronously, over different periods, with various members, from different site sources and formats (e.g., text, visual, audio) (Kozinets et al., 2014). Furthermore, the interactive and immediate character of this social networking site creates additional complexity. Users can provide feedback not only by commenting but also through “likes” and sharing, which allows discussing a topic on multiple platforms (Jong & Drummond, 2016).

According to Kozinets (2002), consumers are basing their decisions more often within these online communities such as chat rooms, forums, and social media. These active consumers can influence the behavior and adoption of new products and services. Therefore, marketers are increasing their efforts in understanding consumer behavior in virtual communities.

Acknowledging the definition and characteristics of the online communities and where to find them, the next step is to understand the drivers and the motivations underlying people to join and stay in these communities.

2.1.4. Drivers

Online communities exist for over 25 years, and existent literature has adopted different theories to understand user participation (Zhou, 2011).

The technology acceptance model defends that the main factors that influence user's participation are the perceived usefulness and ease of use (Davis, 1989). For the commitment theory, as the name says, commitment is perceived as the main factor (Bateman, Gray, & Butler, 2011) while on the trust theory are beliefs such as ability, integrity, and benevolence (Gefen, Karahanna, & Straub, 2003). Furthermore, the social cognitive theory by Bandura (1986) defends that self-efficacy (one's belief in their innate ability to achieve a goal), individual and community outcome expectation are the main influencers on user participation. The social capital theory of Nahapiet and Ghosal (1998) argues that what predicts user behavior is the structural (social structure and network), cognitive (share understandings and values) and social (nature and quality of relationships) capital. Finally, for the social network theory, the cohesion, structure, and centrality of the network are the main factors (Toral, Martinez-Torres, Marrero, & Cortes, 2009).

However, all these studies are focusing on the motivations that affect users, lacking the effect of the decisions and opinions by other members of the community. Therefore, social influence theory by Kelman identifies three social processes that impact individual behavior: compliance (urge to comply with other members' expectations), identification (sense of belonging and attachment with the group) and internalization (match between one's values with the group's values) (as cited in Zhou, 2011).

This social influence theory was used later on by Bagozzi and Dholakia (2002) to build their motivational theory. From this theory, compliance was found to be non-significant since the participation in virtual communities is normally voluntary and anonymous, so most members do not feel the need to comply with others' expectations. Hence, on Dholakia et al. (2004) model of virtual community participation, the compliance factor was removed creating a two-factor of social influence. This model assumes that: 1) a number of individual and group variables influence the consumers' desires, intentions and their participation in the community; 2) both individual and group variables are important drivers; 3) some of the individual variables are antecedents to group variables. Therefore, the set of individual variables for participation are: 1) Purposive value (the value from accomplishing some

predetermined purpose); 2) Self-discovery (understanding important aspects of one's self through social interactions); 3) Maintaining interpersonal interconnectivity (establish and maintain contact with others); 4) Social enhancement (gaining acceptance and approval from others, social status within the community); 5) Entertainment value (fun and relax by interacting with others). For the group variables, as mentioned before, the two-factors are the internalization and identification.

Moreover, besides understanding why people join online communities is also necessary to know what makes them stay. According to Chan and Li (2010), online reciprocity is a voluntary behavior on helping others who helped us but also other members in the online community that might need help. Online reciprocity if present gives a reason for members to keep participating in online interactions and helps to circulate new information within the community (Kozinets, 1999). When community members start finding similarities with others, it creates trust among them, making them more prone to disclose personal information. This online reciprocity is particularly relevant for fitness and health online communities where members tend to share their body and health issues.

Despite all the existent theories on users' participation in online communities, for the purpose of this dissertation is important to investigate further these topics addressed to the fitness and health online communities.

2.2. Online Fitness and Health Communities

2.2.1 Seeking for fitness and health information online

Friends, family and significant others were traditionally considered the central source of social support for physical activity. However, following the cultural shift on the cyberspace, internet, social media and mobile devices introduced the possibility to search and receive this support from the computer-mediated environment (Stragier, Mechant, De Marez, & Cardon, 2018). Health information became then more pervasive, readily accessible, and available (Stevens, O'Donnell, & Williams, 2015).

Despite research showing that the internet does not replace the role of health professionals, peers, and adults, it provides a great source to circulate fitness and health information (Jong & Drummond, 2016). According to Ettel III, Ettel, Wilson, and Meola (2012), young people

modify their behavior based on information found on social media, which is considered by them highly trusted information. As mentioned previously, online spaces help people to connect with others that are not geographically close, or neither belongs to their social network. Moreover, it allows people to communicate anonymously, to reciprocate the support they receive, offering a non-judgmental space to share information (Newman, Lauterbach, Munson, Resnick & Morris, 2011).

Previous research by Rice (2006) found that the main determinants on the use of the internet to look for health information are gender (more females than males), employment (not a full-time job) and people with high engagement in other internet activities. Furthermore, Carpenter et al. (2011) and Percheski and Hargittai (2011) stated that women are more likely to search for health information online than men. This information is particularly interesting since later on this dissertation will be studied a case of an online fitness and health community composed only by women.

2.2.2 Fitness and health online culture

Online fitness culture is composed by a significant number of online communities with different goals, but all with messages focused on topics of health and fitness (e.g., diet, food, inspiration, exercising, body and weight). These messages create unique practices, attitudes, and values among members contributing to the development and maintenance of the community culture (Jong & Drummond, 2016). A key benefit of these communities is that they provide members' access to other people with similar experiences, which can create motivation among each other's (Newman et al., 2011).

2.2.3 Fitness and health drivers and barriers

Physical activity is vital for health and disease promotion. Therefore, many communities are promoting a healthy lifestyle and encouraging people to exercise more, using motivation mechanisms (Ba & Wang, 2013). Previous research has been done to understand what motivates people to engage in physical activity and how to commit to exercise regularly.

Deci and Ryan suggested a multidimensional conceptualization of motivation, dividing it in two: extrinsic (external means that influence behavior, such as money or rewards) and intrinsic (derived happiness and satisfaction from exercising). Based on Deci and Ryan theory, Vallerand and Losier proposed a motivational sequence, arguing that the motivation

behind fitness behaviors is determined mostly by social factors. This sequence starts with the social factors, goes to the types of motivation and ends with the consequences (as cited in Ba & Wang, 2013). Ridings and Gefen's (2004) support the previous, stating that information exchange and social support are the two main reasons for motivation.

Another theory that has been used in fitness motivation research is the self-determination theory. Assuming that motivation is a function of intrinsic and extrinsic factors, the theory defends that a critical factor is the degree to which people are able to satisfy their basic needs while they pursue their goals (Ba & Wang, 2013). This theory identifies three basic needs that drive human behavior: autonomy (need to be in control), relatedness (need to have meaningful relationships) and competence (need to feel effective or successful) (Stragier, Abee, Mechant, & De Marez, 2016). In 2003, Allen decided to further analyse the motivation from a social orientation perspective identifying three sources of motivation: social validation of oneself, affiliation experience, and perceptions of belonging. The first one is about receiving recognition from others while the other two, people are motivated to exercise because they want to create relationships and be part of a group that shares the same interests. Scanlan, Carpenter, Lobel, and Simons reinforced this theory, stating that the motivation in sports might be related not only with the desire to improve the physical ability but also to develop social networks (as cited in Ba & Wang, 2013).

However, not everyone has the motivation to engage in physical activity, and some barriers have been identified over the last years. According to Stutts (2002), the barriers to engage in physical activity are divided into four categories: internal, environmental, significant others, and physical limitations. The most common internal barriers are the lack of motivation, laziness, and time constraints. The environmental ones are the lack of facilities or equipment and weather conditions. Finally, the last groups of barriers are due to a lack of encouragement, social support, and physical restrictions (e.g., health problems).

To summarize, this literature review started by describing the evolution of geographically-based to online based communities, followed by the evolution of internet communities. Moreover, it examined existent literature on users' participation in online communities as well as the drivers and barriers of engaging in physical activity.

As previously seen, can be found multiple theories and frameworks about online community engagement. While some literature believes the participation is influenced mainly by individual factors, others have shown that social factors might also have a significant weight in the equation. However, this dissertation is not intended to validate them, but to rather use it as insights for addressing the research questions proposed at the beginning of this dissertation.

Although past literature covered the drivers for people joining in online communities and the drivers to engage in fitness and healthy lifestyles is still possible to identify a gap connecting these two. Hence, this dissertation will explore further this gap aiming to understand what drives people to participate in specific online fitness and health communities and the main challenges faced by its members. This will be done through a Netnography study on the BBG community case.

3. Community Case: BBG Program and SWEAT app

The purpose of this section is to introduce the BBG program along with the SWEAT app and the online community behind it. It will start with its contextualization and how was it created and developed. Finally, it will explain what the program is about and the community created around it.

3.1. Background and History

The BBG program founded in 2014 stands for Bikini Body Guide and is a 12-week fitness and nutrition program for women. It was created by the Australian personal trainer Kayla Itsines and her business partner and also personal trainer Tobi Pearce. Both trainers were using social media to drive participants to their own personal trainer sessions and boot camps, which boosted curiosity and popularity from people all over the world. Thus, it culminated in the creation of the program (Kayla, 2016).

Initially, the program was available as an e-Book, however, no later than November 2015 the mobile app SWEAT was launched. This decision was made mainly due to the growth of the business and target of the program (millennial consumers aged 25 to 35-year-old). As personal trainers, they wanted to be close to their participants, which hardly could be done via an e-Book (Perez, 2018).

3.2. SWEAT app

Besides the BBG program, the SWEAT app includes other fitness programs across different areas such as yoga and pregnancy, some of them by Kayla and some by other trainers. Moreover, it has available meal plans, recipes, shopping lists, workout planners, warm-up, and cooldowns exercises. Recently on the app is available a Trainer Audio feature which coaches participants by Kayla's voice through the workouts (Kayla, 2016). Furthermore, the app allows comparing weekly progress with side-by-side photos that can be private or shared with other members and includes over 300 pages of educational content (Sensor Tower, 2019).

The SWEAT app is free to download but follows a traditional subscription-based model. Members can opt for a monthly subscription of \$19.99 where they are eligible for a 7-day free trial period, or \$119.94 annually saving 50%. During 2017 the app suffered a re-launching to

increase its content, which contributed to 86% of growth compared with 2016. By 2018 the app reached an annual revenue rate of \$77 million and aims to approach \$100 million in 2019 (Stensholt, 2018). Moreover, out of 30 million app downloads, over a million people use it on a monthly basis (Perez, 2018).

3.3. BBG Program

The BBG program consists of 28 minutes of workout sessions with minimal fitness equipment that can either be done at home or in the gym, three times a week. As for the rest of the days, participants can either do low-intensity steady state (LISS²) cardio or high-intensity training (HIIT³), with one recommended rest day (Kayla, 2016).

Each session is focusing on a distinct body muscle (arms, abs, legs, cardio or full body) and consists of two rounds of two different circuits. Each circuit is composed of four different exercises (e.g., 15 squats, 15 push-ups, 10 burpees, and 20 sit-ups). For 7 minutes participants do the first circuit as many times as they can follow by a rest time of 30 seconds, and then move to 7 minutes of the second circuit. This process is repeated twice (Kayla, 2016). In terms of nutrition, the program doesn't eliminate foods. Instead, it focuses on helping members to adopt sustainable healthy choices with the help of recipes and shopping lists (Astorino, 2017).

3.4. BBG Community

The community is the distinguishing factor that makes the program stand out from other fitness programs. As mentioned before, BBG stands for Bikini Body Guide, however, as Kayla (2016) stated, there isn't a specific body type everyone has a bikini body, and it's just a state of mind. The name of the program focuses on members feeling positive about themselves and understanding the different things their bodies can do.

Thus, the BBG community is composed of women all over the world with different backgrounds, ages, fitness levels united by a single goal: to find support and someone to share their journey with (Kayla, 2016). The community is spread across different social networking

² LISS refers to any moderate or long duration cardiovascular exercise that maintains the same intensity (e.g. 35-45 minutes of walking).

³ HIIT consists of two periods called the "rest" and "work" (e.g. 10-15 minutes of interval sprints).

sites. However, the core is inside the official website of the app, which contains a forum section where members can start and engage in discussions. Besides, inside the site is also possible to find BBG Groups (e.g., BBG New York or BBG Italia). This feature allows members of the community to come together and find other participants in their surrounded areas.

It's seen as a "sisterhood" that goes from sharing healthy recipes, exercises modifications to words of encouragement. All these women chose to join the program for different reasons either to fight obesity, eating disorders, or just to build strength. In the end, what matters is the way they have found to motivate each other to keep on track and follow the program (Astorino, 2017).

Hence, due to this community size and diversity, it is deemed a great source to understand the reasons for people joining these fitness and health communities, and also to identify the main challenges faced by its members. For this reason, this community seems to have great insights that will be subject to study.

4. Methodology

This section is intended to present the employed research method and to explain how data was collected and analysed from the online community being study.

4.1. Netnography

As previously mentioned, the research method used in this dissertation is Netnography. Over the last years, researchers found a need to adapt the existent ethnographic research to communities emerging from online communications. Therefore, Netnography appeared as a qualitative research method to provide consumer insights adapted to study communities emerging from computer-mediated communications (Kozinets, 2002).

According to Kozinets (2002), Netnography consists of using the available information present in online forums to identify and understand the needs and decision of relevant online consumer groups. This methodology, compared to the traditional ethnography, is less time consuming, faster, simpler, less expensive, flexible, more naturalistic, and less obtrusive. However, it also has some limitations such as the need of the researcher having interpretative skills, and the difficulty to generalize results to groups outside the sample. Moreover, as like any other methodology, it's necessary to provide a general description of all the steps and procedures involved.

4.1.1. Entrée

There are two useful main steps when conducting a Netnography study. First, the research questions must be specified and the appropriate online forums to answer these questions identified. Second, researchers must learn about the forums, groups, and individual participants that they seek to understand. Moreover, before starting the data collection, researchers must be familiar with the characteristics of online communities such as interests, language, group membership (Kozinets, 2002).

Hence, following section three of this dissertation, the BBG community was the online community chosen for the research. This choice was made due to the high traffic of messages, interactivity and, as mentioned in the community case, for being constituted by women from different parts of the world. These women have different interests, characteristics, backgrounds, and join the community for various reasons.

The community is present across different social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and Official Website. However, to study the community interactions, this research focused only on the forum that is available in the Official Website. This one contains high daily traffic of postings (more than a thousand posts per day). Furthermore, the forum allows filtering postings based on the discussion topic (e.g., Introduce Yourself, Getting Started, Motivation & Encouragement, Challenges, Food & Nutrition) time and engagement of the postings (Latest, Top, Newest, Oldest) facilitating the search of data. It also provides access to the profile of members, allowing seeing when they joined the community and how many posts or discussions they participated on, which helps the researcher to make the distinction between types of members (see point 4.1.2).

The forum of the community is a public domain which means all postings and discussions are accessible despite being or not sign up in the site. However, to be able to start and engage in discussions is necessary to sign up in the forum. In this case, the researcher was already a member of the community for a couple of months.

4.1.2. Data collection and analysis

The data collected can be directly copied from the computer-mediated communications of online community members or draw from the researcher's observations of the community, its members' interactions, and meanings. Since this method often allows collecting an overload of data, researchers must guide themselves by the research questions and available resources selecting the most relevant data (Kozinets, 2002). Moreover, members of the community can be categorized based on their involvement and consumption activity. Kozinets (2002) defined four types of members: 1) "Tourists", with a lack of social ties and interest; 2) "Minglers", with strong social ties but minimal interest; 3) "Devotees", with strong consumption interests but no attachment to the community; 4) "Insiders", with strong ties to the group and consumption activity. These last two are considered the most important sources of data.

In this dissertation, the data collection had the duration of 3-months from February 2019 to April 2019. In total, 261 postings were downloaded and analysed, comprised between 2017 and 2019. Despite the majority of the postings being text-based, there were also a significant number of postings containing both written and visual content (photos). The collection of postings was made based on its relevance according to the research questions formulated previously.

On the forum, any postings referring to possible reasons for members joining the community or challenges faced by members were review and analysed. Since the forum doesn't exclude self-promotion postings⁴, to avoid the bias of a non-representative sample, postings appealing to promotion or lacking relevance were removed from the dataset.

4.1.3. Research ethics

Two main ethical concerns arise with Netnography. First, the character of the online forums (private or public) and second, the meaning of informed consent. To address these issues Kozinets (2002) recommended four ethical research procedures when using this methodology: 1) fully disclose the researcher presence and its intentions to the community members; 2) ensure anonymity and confidentiality to participants; 3) seek and collect feedback from members; 4) obtain members' consent to use specific posts quoted in the research.

To comply with these procedures, the researcher contacted Kayla Itsines (owner of the program) and the administrators of the website forum community asking formal consent for using and quoting information inside the community. After a few weeks of waiting an answer from the Manager of SWEAT Support was received, allowing conducting the analysis and collecting insights from the community. Furthermore, before any interaction with the community, the researcher introduced and presented the objectives of the study. To protect the members' identity forum names or any identification was removed from the study. Moreover, participants were treated with respect knowing that they could leave the study at any time, and that data gathered would only be used in the study with their permission.

4.1.4. Research representation and analysis

To make sense of data and generating theory, the collection and analysis were made based on the grounded theory. According to this theory of Glaser & Strauss, ideally, the collection of data should continue as long new insights are still being generated. Furthermore, when the data analysis starts, online data has to be contextualized, classified, and coded, which involves trading off rich content for clarity (as cited in Kozinets, 2002).

As mentioned by Kozinets (2010), Netnography does not imply the use of software. However, the researcher can decide to use a qualitative data analysis software program to help in coding

⁴ Self-promotion postings include promotion codes or links to other websites.

and organizing the data (e.g., NVivo). In this dissertation, due to the limited time and amount of data, the analysis and decoding of data were done using a manual and inductive approach.

Hence, after archival and elicited data was collected, it initially was sorted into codes. During the decoding stage, the researcher shared with one colleague postings and consumer quotes and asked to code it. This procedure is called by intercoding and allowed a pair of fresh eyes to identify insights different than the researcher. After this stage, the codes were sorted into categories and culminated in the creation of themes.

4.1.5. Provide trustworthy interpretation and member checks

During the data collection and analysis, the researcher must prove that the information is trustworthy. Netnography conversations differ from the traditional ethnography since they occur through computer mediation, are publicly available, mainly text-based, and the identities of members are difficult to find out. Therefore, besides observing people, there is a need to recontextualize conversational acts. Hence, to avoid misrepresenting, social pressures and to be able to generalize results, Kozinets (2002) suggests the use of triangulation data such as focus group, surveys, interviews, or ethnographic studies. To sum up, to provide trust, the conclusions must acknowledge the limitations of the online medium and technique.

Furthermore, to receive feedback, the final findings of the research should be presented to the members of the community who were studied. This method is denominated of member checks and allows obtaining additional insights, improving ethical concerns, and creating an exchange of information between the researcher and participants (Kozinets, 2002).

Thus, three members of the BBG community were selected for member checks according to their interaction within the community. The semi-structured interviews were carried out through direct Instagram messages. Moreover, with the purpose to clarify the observations made by the researcher, members were presented first with the findings of the analysis, followed by a set of questions helping to get further insights and clarifications.

5. Thematic Findings Analysis

The purpose of this section is to examine the collected data using the grounded theory introduced in the previous section. From this analysis was developed a thematic network which representation can be found in Appendix 1.

5.1. Accountability

The first theme emerging during the analysis is the accountability theme. According to the social sciences, accountability refers to a person taking responsibility for a set of duties and be able to give an account of their fulfilment (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2012). However, in fitness and health context, accountability goes beyond this definition, representing only a part of what it actually means. Therefore, in this context, besides meaning holding to stick to a training routine, making healthy choices and prove this commitment to others, it also represents the connection between members, the mutual motivation and sharing of information. BBG members acknowledge that having a community helps to push to be more responsible and give them the initial kick to start their fitness journey. This can be seen in the following postings⁵:

User (1)

“Hey ladies!

I am just getting started with the program and would love an accountability buddy! We can snap ig,⁶ message, send sweaty pics, text or whatever works best. I do so much better when someone else is keeping me accountable as well”

Or User (2)

“Is anyone interested in being accountability partners? We’ll make sure each other does our workout! And attempts to eat healthily! (Most of the time) [smiley emoticon]”

Or

User (3)

“I would love to be accountability friends and support each other. This is my first time attempting this, and I want to make sure I fully go through with it”

⁵ The data collected from the community cited in this analysis was grammatically correct to be politically correct.

⁶ Ig is an abbreviation for “Instagram”.

This theme has an important role in the fitness and health online discussions, and it reveals to be the main driver for people joining the BBG community. Moreover, it goes in line with Ridings and Gefen's (2004) theory defending that the drivers behind fitness behaviors are determined mostly by social support and information exchange. Hence, the theme of accountability can be divided into three interconnected categories.

The first category observed within the collected data is the connection between members. The data shows a lot of engagement from new members that are about to start the program. Generally, these people are looking to create bonds with other members. They do it by interacting, chatting on a daily basis and, if possible, meeting in real life to work out together and overcome the online connection. Examples of this can be seen in the following postings:

User (4)

"I am about to start the 12 week challenge, and would love to have a meetup for workout and motivation! Anyone in lawrenceville, duluth, alpharetta area?"

Or

User (5)

"Hi everyone! It's my first day and I would love to share my (next) 12 weeks experience. So, if you're ready for the challenge too, and would like to chat on a daily basis, discuss nutrition and mind changes, feel free to contact me, leave a comment, message..."

Still, members also reveal scepticism towards who they chose to bond with, and they do not just wish to connect with any person. Instead, they look for like-minded members with similar goals, characteristics, or facing the same situations. For instance, User (6) posts *"Hi! I wanted to connect with any girls who have thyroid issues disease and get some tips & trips on workouts and nutrition"* or User (7) *"Any other moms here who are looking to get back in shape?"*. While User (6) and (7) are looking to find other members sharing the same disease or life stage, additional examples can be found in the collected data where members search for other indicators such as people of the same age, health condition (e.g., eating disorder), physical struggle (e.g., muscle gain), or one-off situations (e.g., being with a cold). This reflects the online reciprocity mentioned by Chan and Li (2010) that when members find similarities among them, it increases trust, making them disclosing more personal information.

Furthermore, this search for similarities among members also reveals a sense of belonging and companionship. User (8) comments *“I am in so much pain today. Yesterday was my first day and I did legs workout”* and User (9) replies *“I’m so glad I’m not in this boat alone”*. This example shows how members feel more relieved and comforted when they find others facing the same situations. The member checks conducted support the previous stating *“It’s always a good feeling to come to a place where others are going through a similar process and may be having the same problems/struggles. Especially when you may have thought there was no solution or you were alone in struggling”*. They further elaborate explaining that, when feeling discouraged or alone, is likely they will find another member in the community with who they can relate with, which is one of the main reasons why they keep participating and posting in the community. This is what Muniz & O’Guinn (2001) meant when talking about consciousness of kind. Members share a way of thinking about things and a sense of belonging, driving them to return to the community in the future. Moreover, it goes in line with the social influence theory of Kelman which argues that attachment with the group and match between each member values with the community values are important variables that impact individual behavior.

Additionally, great amounts of the collected data are from members looking to share their social media platforms (mainly Instagram) and creating groups outside the community (Facebook and WhatsApp groups). For example, User (10) comments *“I have seen so many of your wonderful posts and this has inspired me to create my own Instagram account to hold me accountable for my fitness journey”* or User (11) *“Hey everyone! I’ve just started a new Instagram account to help myself stay motivated, I don’t have my family and friends on it but would rather have like-minded community interactions instead. Drop your Instagram bellow”*. As similar to these examples, a lot of users have created their exclusively Instagram account dedicated only to share their fitness journey. Through the member checks conducted is evident that most of the members do not feel comfortable sharing their journey and progress with their significant ones. Instead, they rather share it with like-minded people which they know they can find in the BBG community. This enhances the role of social media, as a platform that allows sharing and looking for information online. Furthermore, it goes in line with Scanlan, Carpenter, Lobel, and Simons theory that the drivers in fitness are related not only with the desire to improve the physical ability but also to develop social networks.

Along with connecting people, the second category of accountability identified through Netnographic research is a mutual motivation. Users often participate in the community reaching out for motivation and encouragement, either to start the program or to continue the journey. For instance, User (12) posts *“Hi! I would love a Daily motivation partner. We can do this (just with a bit of support and encouragement)”* and User (13) replies *“You can count me in! I’m ready to change my habits, stay with this program but girl I also need your encouragement to keep on track”*. These comments indicate that having constant support helps to commit and keep up with the program. The member checks conducted support it by explaining that when feeling down or losing track, they use the community as a source of motivation, *“(…) when I reach the community for motivation, I end up receiving so many encouragement and kind messages that I feel an obligation to not disappoint my girls and keep up with the program, this is what truly motivates me!”*. They further elaborate on the thread [Do you feel you cannot disappoint the other girls?] reinforcing that the BBG community is built around positivity and supporting others in their journey. Therefore, they feel an obligation not to disappoint the other members but, in case they do, they acknowledge that others will never see it as disappointment and will find a way to lift that person and make them see the positive things about it, *“There’s criticism but constructive (…) I feel like I literally could not disappoint them if I tried! Everyone is so uplifting and encouraging”*. This is supported by Kelman theory but goes against Bagozzi and Dholakia (2002) motivational theory. While the last one argues that community members do not feel that need to comply with other members’ expectations, in the BBG community is possible to observe a sense of obligation among members not to disappoint each other.

The last identified category of accountability is the act of sharing. Members use the community to share all kind of information, from their progress until sharing when reaching a milestone. For instance, User (14) posts *“So this is my result so far, 9 kg down! I started in January and I was thinking about waiting for my “Kaylaversary”⁷ to share the results but yesterday I took this picture and I was so happy that I couldn't wait. Couldn't be happier”*. Similarly to this post, when sharing progress, users often include images showing their body transformation. The main purpose of these posts is to encourage those who are struggling to see change and progress. Following up on the thread [“What is your goal when sharing your progress with others?”] through member checks conducted is clear that can be easy for

⁷ Kaylaversary is the date that marks when the member started to do the BBG program.

members to give up after a week or even a couple of months if they don't see similar struggles. Hence, they share their progress as a mean to support and motivate others. However, by sharing these, members are also waiting for congratulations and approval from others. Member checks support the previous referring that when reaching a milestone or improving their body results they cannot keep it just for themselves, they often feel the need to share it with the community to receive feedback from the group and stay motivated. They add *"(...) it's like a feedback loop. I know that I am progressing, but still, I want to share it with others to gain more confidence and keep myself motivated. I won't deny that makes me feel good to hear other girls saying I am an inspiration for them"*. An example of this feedback loop can be seen in the following posting:

User (15)

"Today I did my first full set of push ups without any variation and I'm just really excited, and feeling proud of myself. I had been feeling much stronger through the workouts, but push ups have always plagued me. Hope everyone else is crushing it today too"

User (16) [Reply]

"Yes!!! Congratulations and keep up the good work! How exciting to be seeing real results!"

User (17) [Reply]

"Awesome! So glad that your hard work paid off! You are an inspiration! [flexed biceps emoticon]"

In this posting User (15) shares with the community that reached a milestone and instantly many other users such as User (16) and (17) reply with congratulations messages, and even mention how User (15) is an inspiration for them. Moreover, besides sharing their accomplishments, members also use the community to express their feelings, such as User (18) shares *"Today I did my first full set of push ups without any variation, and I'm just really excited and feeling proud of myself. I had been feeling much stronger through the workouts"*. Similar to this posting, the most commonly expressed feelings among members are a sense of pride, excitement, and strength, which are often attached to the postings of progress. Alongside with feelings, community members share their goals, what they intend to reach and provide some contextualization to others. From the data collected, the majority of goals are related to weight loss, strength gain, body transformation, changes in lifestyle, and eating habits.

Finally, as previously mentioned, while some members are looking for social connections (e.g., chatting, meeting), others are looking for sharing more technical advice, recommendations, and tips on diverse topics. For example, User (19) asks for tips on exercises alternatives “*Any suggestions for alternatives to push-ups with a sprained wrist?!*”, but more data can be found going from advice on nutrition, meal ideas, clarifications about the program until general knowledge on the topics of fitness and health. The member checks conducted clarify that the program is the same for everyone, and there is a need to adapt it according to each member’s needs and conditions. Hence, people use the community as a mean to get further details about specific situations. Moreover, following on the thread [“What are your main sources of information?”] member checks replied “*(...) when it’s about method/accuracy I google. When it’s about experiencing a challenge and how to deal with it, it’s BBG girls*”. This enhances the role of online spaces as a good source of fitness and health information (Jong & Drummond, 2016), allowing members to reciprocate support, and offering a non-judgmental space to share information (Newman, Lauterbach, Munson, Resnick & Morris, 2011).

5.2. Frustrations

The second theme emerging from the analysis is the theme of frustrations. The data collected shows that when members start engaging and progressing in the program, they start facing some frustrations connected to expectations and struggles. Similar to the theme of accountability, frustrations theme is divided into two interconnected categories.

The first identified category of frustration is the match between members’ expectations and reality. For instance, User (20) mentions “*I’m on week six and looked at my progress photos, and I’m so discouraged. Why does it look like I’m getting bigger??*” or User (21) “*I’m working my booty off, but I’ve seen no physical change. It’s very discouraging because I feel like I’ve been working really hard (...) I’m at a loss for not seeing any results*”. Much the same as these users, many others demonstrate similar reactions when facing a lack of progress or achieving results different from what they expected. This frustration is pointed out as one of the reasons why members ended giving up on the program.

Align with the previous, is possible to identify another complaint among members related to the weight on the scale. Members acknowledge that one of the pros of regularly exercising is

the creation of body muscle. However, the increase in muscle comes often with an increase in weight, which is perceived negatively. Member checks comment on this topic saying “ (...) *I know the number on the scale doesn't mean anything and more weight doesn't mean I am fatter but affects me mentally seeing that the number on the scale is increasing instead of decreasing*”. In conformity with the social influence of Dholakia et al. (2004), the value of accomplishing some predetermined purpose is one of the individual factors contributing to people participating in online communities. Thus, if time passes and members of the BBG community aren't seeing their goals reached, it is often a motive for abandoning the community and program.

In addition, User (22) argues “*I'm on week 3 and can barely even make it through one lap of each circuit. My body is struggling so much with it all. I'm ready to give up!!*” and User (23) replies “*I'm also starting to realize how out of shape I am! I am unfit and haven't worked out in over a year, and I just don't know if cut out for this!*”. As this example exhibits, after engaging in the program, some members like User (22) realize how hard and painful it is, while others such as User (23) became aware of their physical conditions, which unveil to be different from what they expected. The literature review holds up the previous, according to Dholakia et al. (2004) self-discovery by members is one of the drivers for participation in communities. Moreover, members also start doubting themselves and reveal some uncertainty that leads to the development of frustration, such as User (24) “*I'm nervous I won't see results*” or User (25) “*Am I doing anything wrong to cause this weight gain? Is it normal?*”. The conducted member checks support the previous, indicating that uncertainty makes members questioning their participation in the program, and that is one of the reasons why they keep participating in the community, not to let themselves giving up. This uncertainty manifested by the BBG community is regarding members' capability of reaching their fitness goals, doing the program correctly, having the needed physical condition, and completing the journey until the end.

The second category of frustration identified within the community is the struggles experienced by its members. Users revealed having a lack of confidence especially when it comes to social environments, such as User (26) “*I really enjoy the program and can already feel myself getting physically stronger but mentally I'm still struggling*”. They often feel embarrassed when exercising in front of others (e.g., gym) either because they are not sure if they are doing the program correctly or because they feel social pressure from others. This

goes in line with Stutts (2002) who pointed out the lack of encouragement and social support, as barriers to engaging in physical activities. Additionally, another obstacle identified is the commitment and consistency in keeping up with the program. Despite the community being a great source of motivation and encouragement, some members emphasize that it is the commitment that will get them through the program, and this one needs to come from each individual. Member checks support it adding “(...) *commitment to get out of bed, put on your workout gear, and just do it. You can make excuses to yourself or just get it done. Nobody can help you and nobody can do it for you. It's all up to you. You can stick with it and just get it done and be proud of yourself when you've seen great results in the months and years to come. Or you can quit and in months and years you'll still be right where you are now. Your choice.*”.

In line with commitment come the time, procrastination and cravings. Members claim that they struggle finding the time to fit the program into their lives, mainly due to their busy schedules and responsibilities (jobs and family). Moreover, another source of struggle is finding the balance in healthy eating, which often culminates in cravings and binge eating⁸. Lastly, but very common among the collected data is the constant claims about the app, such as inefficiencies and unclear instructions. Through member checks conducted is evident that the program and app could use more clarifications in terms of use and technicalities. Nevertheless, members use the community to get further details on their doubts.

⁸ According to the Cambridge dictionary (2019), binge eating is the act of eating a lot of food, without being able to control yourself.

6. Conclusion and Implications

This section has the purpose of answering and making the bridge between the research questions defined at the beginning of this dissertation with the main findings of the Netnographic analysis.

As mentioned before, previous research focused on understanding the drivers for people joining online communities, the drivers to engage in fitness and healthy lifestyles, and the main barriers for the last one. The results of these studies culminated in multiple theories and frameworks about online community engagement and showed that social factors play an important role in this.

Therefore, the purpose of this dissertation was to comprehend what drives people to participate in specific online fitness communities and the main challenges faced by its members. This was done studying a single fitness and health online community called BBG and applying Netnography as the research method. This method allowed the researcher to conduct qualitative research focusing on understanding social interactions and its underlying meanings. Thus, the main conclusions of this study are presented below.

From the analysis conducted two themes emerged, the first one identified was the theme of accountability. Despite social sciences commonly use this term referring to a person taking responsibility for a set of duties and be able to give an account of their fulfilment, this study revealed that in the fitness and health context it goes beyond that. Hence, when BBG members participate in the community searching for accountability, they intend to look for others with whom they have to prove their engagement with the program but also to connect with them, to provide and receive motivation, and to share information.

Taking the previous into account, results showed that one of the reasons for joining BBG community is to search for social connections such as chatting on a daily basis, interacting or meeting in real life. However, members also revealed to be selective in this search and often look for like-minded people sharing the same characteristics, situations, or goals. Moreover, this connection between similar members promotes a sense of belonging and companionship among them. Another reason that drives people to participate is due to motivation, members express a need for motivation, and encouragement to stay on track and finish the journey. Results showed that having constant support help members to commit and keep up with the

program. Finally, the last identified reason for joining BBG community is driven by the sharing of information. Members participate in the community to share their progress, milestones, feelings, goals, advice, and recommendations. The sharing of progress revealed the existence of a feedback mechanism among members. While sharing their progress to encourage those who are struggling in return, they receive feedback, motivation, and congratulations messages. Furthermore, the study revealed that when experiencing challenges, members reach out to the community for advice on how to deal with it, however, when their concerns are related to the method or accuracy of the program, they rather google it.

As for the second theme identified was the theme of frustrations, which revealed to be the main challenge faced by BBG members. Throughout the analysis became evident that when members start engaging in the fitness program, they start facing some adversities that contribute to the development of frustration. Hence, the first source of frustration is the members' expectations. The study showed that if members don't start seeing results or if the results are different from what they expected, it triggers them to giving up on the program and leaving the community. Moreover, due to some members start being aware of their physical conditions and on the difficulty of completing the program till the end, it can potentially create some frustration on them. Additionally, as mentioned in the analysis section, by and large members also showed to be uncertain about the efficiency of the program and on their capability of keeping up with it, which revealed to be another source of frustration. Furthermore, members' frustrations also derive from a set of experienced struggles. While some members manifest having a lack of confidence, strength to commitment and to overcome cravings and procrastination wishes, others complain about the lack of time to engage in the program and about the app inefficiencies.

6.1. Theoretical Implications

This dissertation contributed to expanding qualitative research on the topic of fitness and health online communities. According to Kozinets (2002), consumers are basing most of their decisions in online communities. These ones can influence the behavior and adoption of new products and services, and due to that, marketers have been increasing their efforts to understand consumer behavior inside these virtual communities.

The results of the study revealed how frameworks and theories of engaging in fitness and health practices are driven by social support and information exchange (Ridings & Gefen's,

2004). Members look to connect with others, to find motivation, to share and look for information. Moreover, it also contributes to the literature of online reciprocity (Chan & Li, 2010), which defends that when members of online communities find similarities among them, it increases trust making them more prone to disclose personal information. The study showed that members do not just look to connect with someone but rather with like-minded members with the same characteristics, goals, or situations.

Additionally, this study was conducted using Netnography as the research method, which contributed to revealing the flexibility of the method along with gaining several insights on consumer behaviors and market trends.

Finally, the study revealed accountability as the main driver for people joining the BBG community and frustration as the main challenge faced by its members. However, a few factors can be addressed and improved to help retaining members and increase customer lifetime value. Hence, these insights collected by the researcher can help marketers to take actions from a managerial position and, therefore, a series of strategic recommendations will be presented and develop bellow.

6.2. Practical Implications

The managerial significance of this study lies in helping marketers in the retention and increase of traffic of the BBG community. Thus, is crucial for them to understand what drives people to join and stay in the community as well as the main challenges faced by its members.

It is worth noting that the company has already been taken important measures to improve the connection between members of the program and to incentivize the participation in the community. For instance, the website forum allows users to filter postings based on the discussion topic, and postings are created by the forum itself to encourage users to share their progress. Nevertheless, there is still a lot of room for improvement.

As this study showed, people participate in the community to connect with other members. However, instead of connecting with any person they look for like-minded members with who they share either the same characteristics, goals or face similar situations. Therefore, the company could invest in facilitating this connection between members by implementing a new section in the website forum, for instance, called “Connect with”. The same way the

company is already allowing members to filter postings based on the discussion topic (e.g., motivation; food & nutrition, gym), the idea is to allow also members filtering and engaging in postings based on indicators such as age, health condition, physical struggle or one-off situations (see appendix 2 for visual representation) . This would allow members to effortlessly and easily connect with similar ones, reducing the need for scrolling through the entire forum postings. Furthermore, it would contribute to increase the acquisition of new members and also would incentivize members to disclose more personal information. As found in previous literature and supported by the results of this study, members are more open to sharing personal information when finding similarities with others. Hence, this would be a valuable source for marketers to collect data and insights to improve the program and increase the forum traffic.

Moreover, the study also revealed that members participate in the community to share their progress for encouraging others, but also as a mechanism to receive feedback and approval. Thus, following the same type of call to action suggested before, the company could introduce a reward system for members who share their progress. For instance, members could vote on their favourite monthly posting of progress, and the most voted would receive a gift as a reward. The gifts could be one of the brands' accessories that the company already sells on its website. This would help the company promoting their merchandise, incentivizing users' participation in the community, and retaining members. As shown by the results, new members get motivated by seeing others progress, which motivates them to stay in the program and not giving up. Additionally, it would positively affect the connection and support among members.

Another important insight collected from this study was regarding the members' perception of the community utility. Members reach out to the community when facing a challenge and are looking for advice on how to deal with it, however, when their concern is about the method or accuracy they rather use google as a trusted source instead of the community. This is particularly useful from a marketing viewpoint since it can help the company mapping the customer journey. Thus, if marketers manage to fill this gap, not only will help to increase and retain the traffic of the website but will also contribute for changing the perception of members and increase top of mind awareness when members look for specialized information. Therefore, would be advisable for the company to make use of their already existent blog inside their website and invest in sharing articles connected to the program

features and exercises (e.g., improve technique, exercises alternatives, benefits). Additionally, they could post tutorial videos about the program and how to complete exercises with the right technique.

Finally, the study also identified constant complaints from members about the program app. For instance, a lot of people mentioned that the app constantly freezes which forces the user to start the circuit of exercises from the beginning, or the fact that if the user doesn't exercise during a certain week the app instantly skips for the next one and doesn't allow the member to complete the week they missed out. These app claims revealed to be one of the sources of frustration. Hence, if this frustration develops and takes control over members, it might lead them to give up on the program and leave the community. Therefore, as a final note, would be recommended to the company investing further on the improvement of these technical features.

7. Limitations and Future Research

This study presents valuable findings on the drivers and challenges of online fitness and health communities. Still, certain limitations must be acknowledged, which can contribute to future research investigations.

First of all, is worth noting that the insights collected from this study cannot validate the theories approached in the literature review, but rather helping giving direction to other qualitative and quantitative studies.

The first set of limitations concerns the methodology used throughout this study. Netnography is a research method focused on studying online communities therefore, as mentioned before, results cannot be generalized so easily and it is not advised to transfer the insights collected to other fitness and health online communities. Hence, as suggested by Kozinets (2002), other methods (e.g., surveys) could be employed to help generalize results to another group. Moreover, due to the character of this dissertation, time was not very extensive and during the data collection process, the researcher faced a significant amount of irrelevant data, which made some other important data left from the data collection. Finally, the analysis of data depends on the researcher interpretative skills which make the interpretation slightly subjective.

The second set of limitations is regarding the community studied. Since this study was limited to a single online community (BBG), findings can differ if conducted to other online communities. Furthermore, the community studied was composed only by members of the female gender and was focused on a specific fitness program. Thus, would be interesting to study other online communities such as Blogs or Instagram with members of different genders that are not attached to a single program, and address fitness and health discussions in general.

In line with the previous, and as mentioned in the methodology section, the forum community chosen for study was composed by different types of members such as tourists, minglers, insiders, devotees (Kozinets, 2002). Hence, could be interesting to divide the members into beginners and experienced ones in the program, and further explore by Netnography how they differ in terms of drivers to join the community and challenges faced.

The third and final set of limitations is connected to the nature of this research thus would be interesting to quantify some of the qualitative collected insights. For instance, future research could invest on measuring how the mutual motivation from the community help members to stay in the program and achieve results, measuring the significance of each category of the themes of accountability and frustrations, and measuring the impact of members frustration on participation in the community and program. This could be done by surveys based on the findings of this Netnography research, and by the end, quantitative results would be compared to the qualitative one.

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9. Appendices

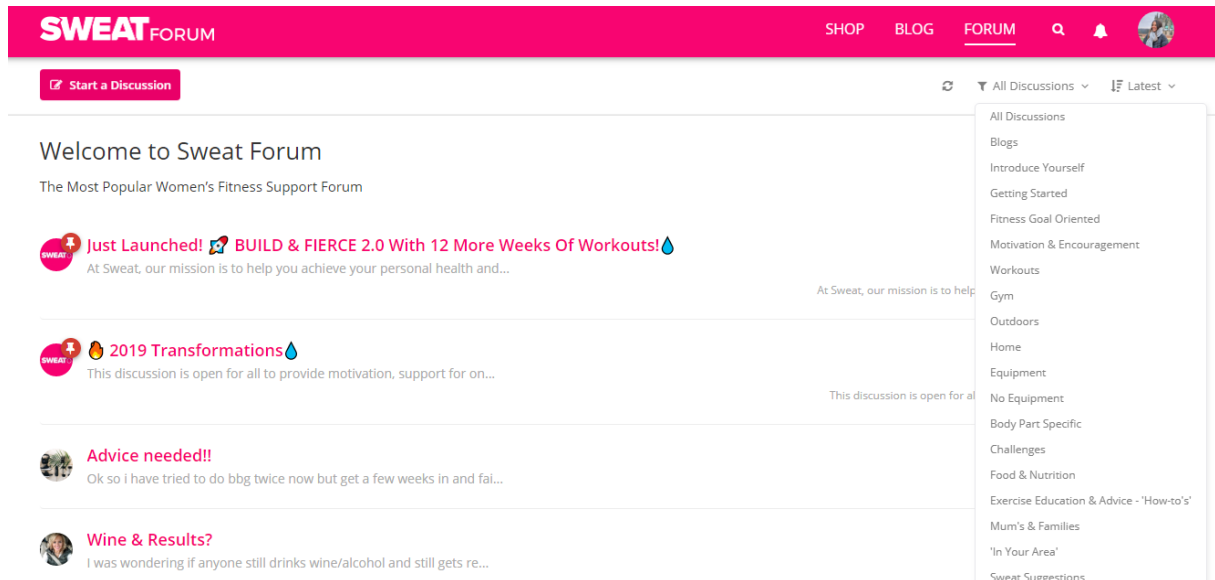
9.1. Appendix 1

Diagram of the Thematic Findings



9.2. Appendix 2

Current view of the website forum



View of the website forum with the inclusion of the new feature “Connect with”

The screenshot displays the SWEAT FORUM website interface. At the top, a pink navigation bar contains the logo 'SWEAT FORUM' on the left and links for 'SHOP', 'BLOG', and 'FORUM' on the right, along with search and notification icons. Below the navigation bar, a 'Start a Discussion' button is visible. The main content area features a welcome message: 'Welcome to Sweat Forum' and 'The Most Popular Women's Fitness Support Forum'. Below this, there are four discussion threads, each with a profile picture, a title, and a snippet of text. A 'Connect with' dropdown menu is open, showing options: 'Same age', 'Health condition', 'Physical struggles', and 'One-off cases'. To the right of this menu, a larger dropdown menu is open, listing various categories: 'All Discussions', 'Blogs', 'Introduce Yourself', 'Getting Started', 'Fitness Goal Oriented', 'Motivation & Encouragement', 'Workouts', 'Gym', 'Outdoors', 'Home', 'Equipment', 'No Equipment', 'Body Part Specific', 'Challenges', 'Food & Nutrition', 'Exercise Education & Advice - 'How-to's'', 'Mum's & Families', 'In Your Area', and 'Sweat Suggestions'.