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**Exploring loyalty within car subscriptions, in
the case of Care by Volvo**

*How can brand communities and social bonds be used to increase
Millennials' customer loyalty in the car subscription business model?*

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Abstract

Introduction: Subscription is a fairly new phenomenon, with several arising innovations. One of these innovations is Care by Volvo. This business model counters ownership of cars to accessibility to cars, which several generations also seem to do. One of these generations are millennials which are the focus of this study. The business model of subscriptions makes loyalty difficult to sustain since subscribers are not held down by a long-term commitment to it.

Research question and aim: The aim of this study is to explore the role of social media-based brand communities and social bonds in increasing loyalty to a car subscription service. The research question is: *How can brand communities and social bonds be used to increase Millennials' customer loyalty in the car subscription business model?* Theories about loyalty, social bonds, social media, and brand communities are used to answer this.

Methodology: This study follows an exploratory approach to shed light on this little-discovered phenomenon. To answer our research question, netnography and interviews have been conducted.

Results: The results of this study help us gain insight into Millennials' usage of car subscriptions, and how loyalty manifests within car subscriptions. The results also point toward how Millennials use social media, and form social bonds in brand communities.

Conclusion: It has been discovered that brand communities increase the cognitive loyalty of Millennial car subscribers. Brand communities do so by granting new consumers access to information shared by community members; about a brand, product, or service. In this exchange of information, social bonds are formed, and consequently, new consumers build a preference for the brand.

Keywords: Car subscriptions, Care by Volvo, Millennial consumers, loyalty, brand communities, social bonds on social media.

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1. Introduction

The subscription economy is still a fairly new, and exciting, phenomenon that has in recent years received more attention from scholars and companies (Bishof, Boettger & Rudolph, 2020). New innovations connected to this new type of business model are arising, one being Care by Volvo. Care by Volvo is a new subscription-based business model that Volvo Cars are currently developing. This is connected to the new trend that has emerged in several parts of the world where the focus is shifting away from ownership, especially regarding the newer generations such as Generation Z (people born between 2012 and 1997) and Generation Y (people born between 1981 and 1996, also known as Millennials) (Kim & Jin, 2020; Fortunato, 2019). These generations are no longer obsessed and interested in owning things in the classical way (Fortunato, 2019). The reason behind this is still unclear as to if it relates to them being bored of things quickly, or if it relates to sustainability reasons. However, regarding the economical terms, there is evidence that younger generations, such as Generation Y and Z, cannot afford to own things as much as the previous generations have (Horch, 2020). Another assumption regarding those generations is that they are believed to be very un-loyal compared to older generations. One example of this lack of loyalty of younger generations can be seen in what is known as “job-hopping”. That is changing jobs and companies more often than the older generations have done (Paulise, 2021). This leads us to question younger generations' loyalty in terms of consumption, especially in regards to ownership versus access. Loyalty is usually regarded as a valuable competitive asset (Aaker, 1991). Benefits that loyalty can bring to companies or brands encompass lower consumer acquisition costs, enhanced switching barriers, more referrals, increased per-customer sales, and growth of profit (Reichheld & Teal, 1996). Regarding the business model for the subscription economy, there are both advantages and disadvantages. One advantage is that it can create closer bonds between the users and the brand (Bischof et al., 2020). The disadvantage, however, is that the binding time is very different from other business models. Nothing is stopping consumers from changing their subscriptions or unsubscribing (Obaidalaha, Salerno & Colbert, 2017). This part of subscriptions is fragile (Freed et al., 2022). The service providers need to ensure that customers repurchase and renew their subscriptions to achieve profitability while at the same time offering them a lower price than a one-time purchase (Freed et al., 2022). Therefore, we can state that customer loyalty plays a vital role in the subscription economy. Nowadays, creating customer

loyalty has become one of the most important business strategies (Griffin, 2010; Henneberg, 1997; Kumar & Shah, 2004). So how can we create customer loyalty and retain subscribers?

In research, the concept of loyalty has been viewed by many scholars as a behaviour of repeated purchase. However, this traditional conceptualization of loyalty has been questioned over time, as repeated purchases might be caused by other factors such as accessibility and behavioural inertia (Dick & Basu, 1994; Moisescu, 2014; Odin et al., 2001). Later, a more recent stream emerged, that supports that loyalty consists of two components, behaviour and attitude (Dick & Basu, 1994; Kumar & Shah, 2004). The latter conceptualisation of loyalty avoids the repeat purchase bias and is regarded as more accurate (Dick & Basu, 1994).

Furthermore, loyalty is built on several elements such as different kinds of values and commitment. In turn, consumer relationships and relational bonds are affecting both values and commitment, there is therefore a link between relational bonds and loyalty (Chiu et al., 2005; Chai, Malhotra & Dash, 2015). There are three different relational bonds that affect loyalty (Chai et al., 2015; Chiu et al., 2005) and in this study, we will focus on one of those three. Social bonds are more personal compared to the other bonds and focus more on emotions and interpersonal relationships (Rodriguez & Wilson, 2002). In these relationships, both personal and social relationships are included (Wilson, 1995), which shows that this has a link to social contexts such as social media and brand communities. Compared to structural bonds and financial bonds, social bonds are said to be the most impactful out of all the relational bonds (Balci, Caliskan & Yuen, 2019), and as it is emotion-based it directly affects attitudes which are linked to behaviour and loyalty (Chiu, 2002; Edwards, 1990; Bellenger, Steinberg & Stanton, 1976; Chandon, Wansink, Laurent, 2000).

Studies show that social media are able to nurture relationships among users, and between consumers and organisations through interactions (Hollebeek et al., 2014; He et al., 2019). As a result, organisations are starting to recognize social media's capability to get their customers to engage with their brands, and consequently increase customers' loyalty to these brands (He et al., 2019). Furthermore, customers usually engage with brands on social media either for transactional purposes (e.g., spending money), or communal purposes (e.g., interacting with other customers' content within a brand community) (Gummerus et al., 2012). For this reason, many organisations, including businesses, use social media profiles and groups to build an online community around a brand, a product, or a service (Dholakia et al., 2004). Previous literature describes online communities (i.e. brand communities) as a structure of social

relations among the fans of a certain brand (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). So, a benefit of brand communities is creating interaction among brand admirers and with the brand itself (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010, Alloway & Alloway, 2012; Calder et al., 2009; Gummerus et al., 2012). These interactions that occur within a virtual community can transform functional processes on social media, such as the use of hashtags in posts, into a wave of support and advocacy that serves the brand around which the community is built (Hull & Lewis, 2014, Lim et al., 2015). In fact, brand communities benefit companies that want to strengthen the culture of their brand and enhance brand loyalty (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Laroche et al., 2013).

We, therefore, argue that brand communities serve the communal purposes of social media engagement, and are thus capable of converting an occasional connection with a brand into a more permanent relationship (Lim et al., 2015). Hence, the theoretical account for focusing on brand communities within social media goes back to the role of brand communities, and the social bonds within these online communities, in driving behavioural and attitudinal loyalty in the context of subscriptions.

For this study, we wish to combine the problems we have mentioned before, of Millennials and their loyalty as well as the problem of customer loyalty in subscription economies with the case of Care by Volvo to explore how the company can increase customer loyalty in their new project. More specifically we wish to see how social media-based brand communities and social bonds can be used to increase this. Hence, the aim of this study is to explore the role of social media-based brand communities and social bonds in increasing loyalty within a car subscription service. We will use theories about loyalty, social bonds, social media, and brand communities to answer this. Moreover, Volvo Cars have been expanding its customer base toward Millennials (Volvo Cars, 2018). Considering this, and the facts about Millennials favouring accessibility to cars over ownership, as well as this generation's tech-savviness, we believe it would be an interesting group to investigate, and a natural choice as it is Volvo's target group. Using this, our research question will be:

How can brand communities and social bonds be used to increase Millennials' customer loyalty in the car subscription business model?

2. Literature review

2.1. Loyalty

2.1.1. The conception of loyalty

Loyalty is a widely researched topic in the field of marketing (Kumar & Shah, 2004), which is defined by Oliver (1999) as “a deeply held commitment” (p.34) from consumers to their preferred product or service, consequently resulting in future repeated purchases from the same brand (Oliver, 1999). Nowadays, loyalty has been phrased in multiform terms such as service loyalty, and program loyalty in different market-specific scenarios (Akbar, 2013; Dick & Basu, 1994; Kiseleva et al., 2016). A myriad of marketing literature has revealed that satisfaction, trust, and commitment are essential in driving loyalty (Gustafsson, Johnson & Roos, 2005; Lee, Huang & Hsu, 2007; Wallenburg et al., 2011). First, satisfaction refers to consumers' affective state that stems from an overall evaluation of their previous consumer experience (Dagger & O'brien, 2010). Satisfied consumers are more likely to convert into loyal consumers since they are more likely to repurchase and make recommendations (Picón, Castro & Roldán, 2014). As for trust, it is explained as the consumers' confidence in the brand or company and the willingness to rely on it (Moorman et al., 1992; Stathopoulou & Balabani, 2016). Trust is built up over time within a relationship between the brand or company and its consumers (Dagger & O'brien, 2010). Last, commitment represents the degree to which consumers wish to maintain a relationship with the brand or company (Dagger & O'brien, 2010, Verhoef, 2003). All these three elements are proven to have a positive impact on consumer loyalty (Lee, Huang & Hsu, 2007; Picón et al., 2014; Sahin, Zehir & Kitapçı, 2011).

2.1.2. The construct of loyalty

Day (1969) firstly proposes that loyalty encompasses two dimensions, behaviour and attitude (Dick & Basu, 1994). Similarly, Jacoby and Kyner (1973) argue the prerequisites of loyalty should include not only a behavioural reaction but also "a function of psychological (decision-making, evaluative) processes." (p.2). Using the composite framework of behavioural and attitudinal measures to define loyalty had been gradually and widely recognized over time (Kumar & Shah, 2004). Behavioural measurement is commonly used in loyalty studies (e.g. Cunningham, 1956; Frank, 1962; Tucker, 1964), which refers to assessing loyalty by using metrics such as purchase frequency, buying sequences, probability of product repurchase (Dick & Basu, 1994; Kabiraj & Shanmugan, 2011). These metrics reflect the actual customer

purchase and are related to company performance like revenue (Mellens, Dekimpe & Steenkamp, 1996). The behavioural measurement focuses on "what consumers do" as it is based on purchase outcomes (Kha, 2008). It also provides an easy observational and relatively objective approach to identifying loyalty (Kabiraj & Shanmugan, 2011; Kumar & Shah, 2004). For example, if a certain brand is chosen eight times out of twelve purchases, there is a loyalty relationship between the brand and the buyer since the purchase frequency exceeds two-thirds in total (Jacoby & Kyner, 1973). On the other hand, attitudinal loyalty can be understood as the psychological commitment that is reflected in a customer's intention to repurchase in the future, the willingness to recommend to others, the preference for the brand or company, and the prioritisation of a supplier (Kabiraj & Shanmugan, 2011; Kumar & Shah, 2004). The attitudinal measurement is described by Kha (2008) as the analysis of how consumers feel, which is linked with the psychological aspect of loyalty and differentiates loyalty from merely repeated purchases (Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978; Jacoby & Kyner, 1973). Furthermore, attitude involves aspects of cognition, affect, and conation (Dick & Basu, 1994; Oliver, 1997).

2.1.3. Development phases of loyalty

The development of loyalty is one of the most important directions of loyalty research as it describes how loyalty is produced. According to Harris and Goode (2004), one of the most influential models is the "loyalty chain" proposed by Oliver (1997). The model divides the development of consumer loyalty into four consecutive phases (i.e., cognition, affect, conation, action) and loyalty can be generated in each stage within the process. The first phase refers to cognitive loyalty. This phase of loyalty is achieved when the consumer uses the information available about a brand's attributes to form a belief that it is better than its market alternatives. Loyalty at this stage is shallow since it is for the most part developed from knowledge about the brand. However, at the end of this phase, the consumer gets to experience the brand through a product or service and is hence able to form more than a knowledge-based opinion of the brand. Consumers move to the next phase when their first experience in the previous stage is satisfactory, and their loyalty keeps on increasing as they accumulate satisfactory experiences. Their attitudes have more affective overtones, therefore this phase is called affective loyalty. Oliver (1997) explains that feelings and affections toward a brand are less easily dislodged than information about a brand. Hence, affective loyalty is characterised by a deeper commitment to the brand in comparison to cognitive loyalty, which is based on rational information processing. Nonetheless, consumers at this phase are still subject to switching, because their

positive affections and attitude are not supported by an intention to repurchase. In the next phase, however, conative loyalty, consumers link their positive attitude toward the brand with an intention to repurchase it. Conative loyalty delineates a slightly deeper level of loyalty, but it still represents an anticipated action that might be unrealized. Once consumers substantiate the intention with the action of repurchase, they enter the last phase of action loyalty. Unlike in other phases, action loyal consumers achieve both attitudinal and behavioural loyalty, thus they are less likely to look at other alternatives of the brand, whenever they need to make a purchase. The consumption of the brand becomes automatic, which Oliver (1997) describes as “action inertia”.

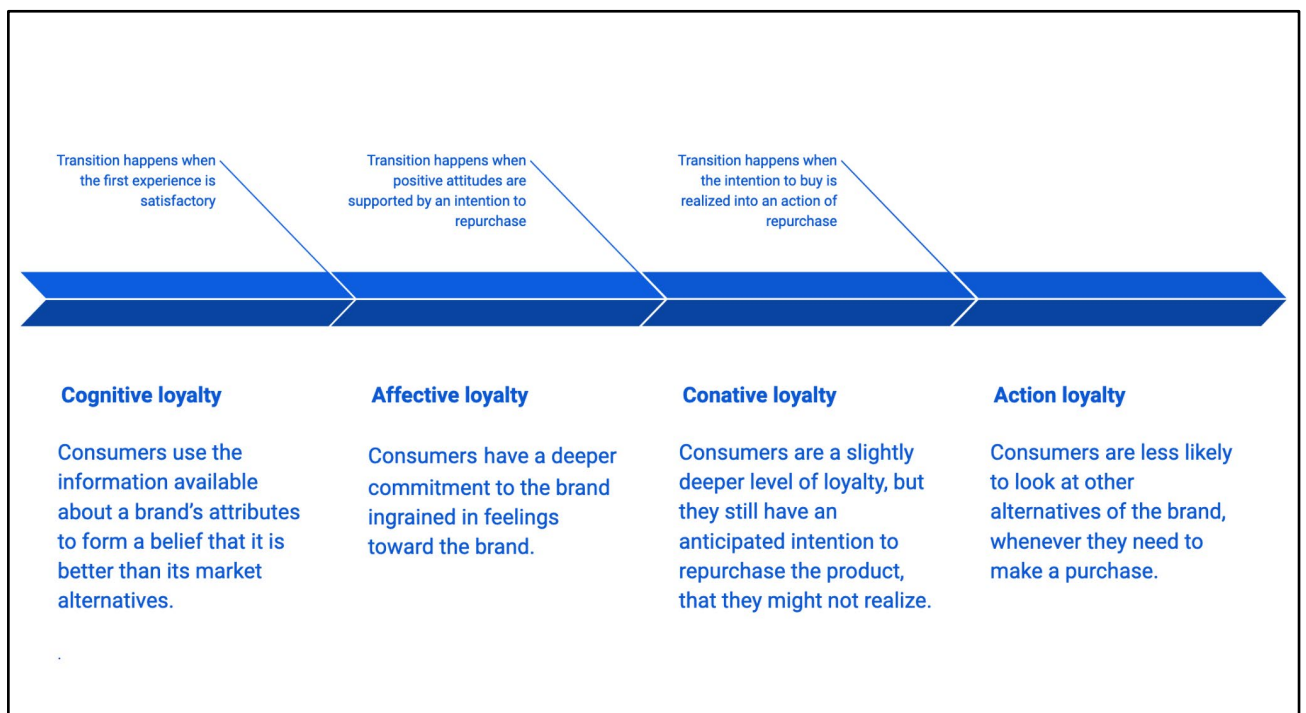


Figure 1: Visual demonstration of the loyalty chain model described by Oliver (1997)

2.2. Social bonding

Bonding is said to be a core objective when it comes to consumer relationships and it is a cornerstone of loyalty (Chiu et al., 2005; Chai et al., 2015). It affects loyalty by affecting the elements by which it is built up, elements such as commitment and values, both hedonic and utilitarian (ibid), and trust (Čater, 2008). Commitment binds consumers to a specific target (Chai et al., 2015) while values are believed to be important in managing long-term customer relationships (Pride & Ferrell, 2003). Both of these elements are key components in establishing and maintaining long-term relationships which are important in loyalty (Cater & Zabkar, 2009). Chiu et al. (2005) state that consumers who perceive high value from relational

bonds will in turn be more motivated to be loyal and that their experiences with those relational bonds will influence the value perception.

There are three different types of relational bonds that affect loyalty: structural bonds, financial bonds, and social bonds. Structural bonds are defined as “the degree to which certain ties link and hold a buyer and seller in an economic, strategic and organisational sense, regardless of emotional matters” (Rodriguez & Wilson, 2002, p. 61). Due to its characteristics, it is perceived to be more suitable for B2B relationships as it is more of a “task bonding” due to the organisational and strategic sense (Chai et al., 2015). Next is a financial bond which is defined as a practice used to increase loyalty through price incentives (Berry, 1995). It is based on the commonly known assumption that all consumers wish to save money and so their motivation for engaging in exchanges is then to save money (Berry, 1995; Peltier & Westfall, 2000; Peterson, 1995; Gwinner, Gremler & Bitner, 1998). Social bonds are more interpersonal and are more about emotional bonding. They are about ties that link the buyer and seller in a personal sense (Rodriguez & Wilson, 2002). The parties involved are held together by personal and social relationships (Wilson, 1995; Petrescu, et al., 2018) and are therefore more relevant for social benefits as well as psychosocial benefits, not mainly strategical and financial (Chai et al., 2015; Chiu et al., 2005). Social bonds focus mainly on the perceived value the consumer receives from others (Petrescu et al., 2018). It is shown through research that strong, personal relationships result in a stronger commitment to maintaining the relationship (Wilson, 1995). Moreover, in the context of marketing studies, previous research indicates that social bonds have an impact on consumers and consumption behaviour. Specifically, some studies on social bonds imply that people tend to use products or services as a result of interpersonal exchanges (Teng & Huang, 2016), while other studies show that social bonds make consumers more open to communicating, caring, and listening (Hsieh et al., 2005, Petrescu et al., 2018). These interpersonal exchanges and personal ties are not restricted to consumers only but can also include relationships between a company and its consumers (Petrescu et al., 2018). In this case, social bonds are enhanced by understanding customer needs and providing personalised services (ibid). It is important when developing social bonds to stay in touch with clients, show an interest in their needs, worry about satisfying them, and maintain a positive relationship with them (Berry, 1995; Williams, Han & Qualls, 1998), especially since individuals evaluate social bonds based on the extent of interest and support they receive from the other end of the bond (Berry, 1995; Lin et al., 2003, Hsieh et al., 2005). As the social bonds affect the emotional aspect of consumers, they also affect their feelings toward the service experience and therefore

affect their attitudes and hedonic values (Chiu 2002; Edwards, 1990; Bellenger, Steinberg & Stanton, 1976; Chandon, Wansink, Laurent, 2000). Social bonds refer more to the human side of business exchanges and include liking, trust, familiarity, friendship, and personal confidence (Thunman, 1992; Rodríguez & Wilson, 2002). Social bonds are elemental in building trust and commitment (Wu & Lin, 2014), and according to Chiu et al. (2005), a firm can increase loyalty through hedonic values by using social bonds. If compared to the other bonds, social bonds are said to be the most impactful, having the highest influence on consumers (Balci, Caliskan & Yuen, 2019).

Furthermore, advertising and digital marketing are tools that can be useful for enhancing social bonds. Firstly, consumer information can be collected online through digital marketing which in turn can be used to customise ads to create a better bond with the consumers. This can also make the advertisement more authentic and help to generate a valuable exchange and relationship between consumers and companies (Malefyt, 2015) which has been described earlier as important when it comes to building relationships between companies and consumers. Moreover, through this established relationship, consumers can use a company's social networks to create bonds among themselves, resulting in positive value creation (Malefyt, 2015). Many consumers who are internet users confirm that social interactions that happen during online activities help them avoid loneliness (Korgaonkar & Wolin, 1999) and build trust for future economic transactions (Granovetter, 1983). This is particularly true for Millennials, given their big presence on social networks, and the overlap between their online and offline social groups (Spero & Stone, 2004; Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Furthermore, the way social bonds unfold offline is very similar to the way it happens on a virtual platform. Both virtual and traditional social settings grant social support to the people who participate in them (e.g., a feeling of belonging to a larger group), they both have particular purposes (e.g., keeping up with friends), and specific social and emotional outcomes on the people who partake in them (e.g., a willingness to open up and connect with others) (Petrescu et al., 2018; Giota & Kleftaras, 2014). So, connecting back to what we have already stated, social bonds influence both trust and commitment positively which in turn affects loyalty (Čater, 2008). From this, we assume that social bonds are an efficient tool for creating loyalty.

2.3. Social media and brand communities

2.3.1. Reasons to use social media

The most popular social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, Youtube) all have different audiences, features, and purposes, but share the same core notion (Pavlovskaya, 2021). All these platforms are “internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and it allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content.” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). This definition suggests that social media permits its users to generate content and share their creations with others. Muntinga et al. (2011) further explain that consumers within social media are either consuming content (e.g., viewing posts, reading content), contributing to content (e.g., commenting, rating, sharing) or creating it (e.g., uploading, publishing). However, social media is also perceived to encourage open communication within networks of users (Helal, Ozuem & Lancaster, 2018), and to specifically facilitate social interactions and the progression of relationships (Safko, 2012). Similarly, different researchers delineate the role of social media (Mayfield, 2008; Kietzmann et al., 2011) to (1) stimulate conversations between users about a stream of public content, (2) allow the circulation of information through content sharing, (3) foster relational connectedness between users relating to each other, and (4) enable the formation of communities and belonging to them. These attributes and functionalities indicate that people use social media for one of the following reasons: to participate in conversations, to seek desired information (Yoshida et al., 2018), to create relationships with relatable people (Petrescu et al., 2018), and to be part of a community (Gummerus et al., 2012).

Furthermore, a big majority of the people consuming social media on a daily basis are Millennials. PewResearch (2021) reveals that the highest rate of social media usage lies within the demographic cohort of Millennials. Specifically, users aged between 18 and 29 years old recorded high usages of the platforms Youtube, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, and Tiktok. Followed directly by users aged between 30 and 49 years old for the same platforms, except for Facebook. These two sub-groups fall directly into the demographic group born between the early 1980s and the early 2000s. Furthermore, young adults below the age of 30 years old stand out for their use of Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat (PewResearch, 2021). This indicates that Millennial users recognize social media as the most natural medium of interaction and communication. Namely, the way Millennials perceive and engage in

communication differs from that of their preceding generations. For them, communication is seen as readily available, instant, and convenient (Helal, Ozuem & Lancaster, 2018), which is in big part due to the advent of technology that eliminated geographic and time obstacles (Strauss & Howe, 1991; Lingelbach et al., 2012; Rainer & Rainer, 2011). On a different note, nowadays, even businesses and companies are using social media for different purposes. The number of businesses using social media for marketing is increasing, and companies are pouring more resources into their social media management (Nguyen & Mutum, 2012; Yoshida, et al., 2018). On a corporate level, social media is used as a marketing and communication tool (Kim & Ko, 2012), that builds interactive and stronger buyer-seller relationships (Nguyen & Mutum, 2012), to ultimately generate loyalty (Yoshida et al., 2018). Drawing from relational bonds articles, research in the field of social media management and social identity articles (Berry & Parasuraman, 1991; Berry, 1995; Lin et al., 2003; Hsieh et al., 2005; Wu & Lin, 2014; Teng & Huang, 2016), we attempt to delineate a relationship between online social networks and social bonds. First, social bonds can be viewed as the more personal connections that a company builds with its customers (Rodriguez & Wilson, 2002), as well as the interpersonal interactions between individuals (Petrescu et al., 2018), notably, between consumers of the same brand. Through these social bonds, people feel supported and cared for, whether it is by a company or a fellow customer (Petrescu et al., 2018; Giota & Kleftras, 2014). Secondly, people also join social networks to build long-lasting connections with people they relate to, and a sense of social support and belonging (Gummerus et al., 2012, Petrescu et al., 2018). Undoubtedly, the advent of social media has eliminated the barriers to reaching out to other people and interacting with them, and it has also simplified the process of finding like-minded people to connect with. Finally, various studies (Lin et al., 2003; Hsieh et al., 2005; Wu & Lin, 2014) recognize the effect of stronger social bonding on people's behavioural patterns (e.g., engaging in conversations, cultivating new relationships), and attitudes (e.g., openness to communicate, caring). Hence, in light of these theoretical perspectives, we assume that both companies and individuals use social media to form social bonds. Also, the more consumers engage on social media, with either companies or individuals, the stronger the social bonds they form, and therefore more likely to be influenced by the relationships they have formed.

2.3.2. Brand communities and social bonds

Within social networks exist a more specific form of social interactions that revolve around particular brands known as brand communities (Dholakia et al., 2004; Laroche et al., 2013; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Brand communities are a structure of social relations among the fans of a certain brand (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). These communities are composed of entities that interact with one another, namely, the members of the community, the brand, the platform hosting the community, the relationships amongst the entities, and the exchanged content (Laroche et al., 2013). In the literature about brand community and social media, we find a keen resemblance between the motivations leading consumers to join social media and those leading consumers to join brand communities. Similar to social media, the main motives to join online brand communities is the need to socialise (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004), the need to belong to a group of like-minded people (Gangadharbhatla, 2008; Tardini & Cantoni, 2005), or the desire to be associated with symbols that one admires (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Schembri et al., 2010). Furthermore, consumers use social media to collect information on a specific topic or seek the opinion of others on brands (Yoshida et al., 2018). Similarly, brand communities provide a wide source of information that includes company-generated content, as well as consumer-generated content, that usually reflects the consumers' thoughts, concerns, and feelings toward the brand (Szmigin & Reppel, 2001; Von Hippel, 2005). Considering the premise that the incentives to enter social media and brand communities are similar, Laroche et al. (2013) formulate a new concept called social media-based brand communities, to refer to online brand communities that take place on social media platforms. Some empirical findings show that these brand communities play a big role in strengthening engagement with brands on social media (Yoshida et al., 2018). This in turn strengthens the social bonds users are forming on these platforms and eventually influences several community-related behaviours that they could be doing. For instance, heavily engaging in brand-related conversations, helping fellow brand users in the community, pulling in and retaining other users, and providing feedback to the brand for improving consumer experiences (Dholakia et al., 2004; Schau et al., 2009). Furthermore, the literature proposes that this ultimately has effects on a user's brand loyalty (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006).

To understand the importance of brand communities in building customer loyalty, we recur to McAlexander et al.'s (2002) argument as a starting point. The researchers suggest that events and brand fests create deeper and more meaningful experiences, on the levels of consumer-to-

consumer exchanges and company-to-consumers exchanges. This context with high-level interpersonal and social interactions reinforces the community around a brand and allows its continuity. As a matter of fact, things play out similarly in the online scene. Consequently, the members of an online community build a sense of attachment and belonging to it and other members of the group (Sánchez-Casado et al., 2018), which arguably causes the attached members to exaggerate the attractiveness of the community, share positive reviews on the brand, and purchase repeatedly (Bendapudi & Berry 1997; Dalla Pozza, 2014; Kang et al., 2014). Hence, in a social media setting, online brand communities play a mediating role in the creation and maintenance of brand loyalty, through an interplay of social bonding (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Dholakia et al., 2004; Yoshida, et al., 2018). When investigating the benefits of social media-based brand communities on brand loyalty, Laroche et al. (2013) conclude that brand communities have a positive effect on brand loyalty, mediated by brand trust. The research confirms that refining customer relationship with the brand, the company, the products, and specifically other customers enhances brand loyalty (ibid). We, therefore, assume that these communities, as a very concrete example of social bonds in the virtual realm, are strengthened when the exchanges between the community's members are rich, which has direct effects on brand loyalty.



Figure 2: A visual representation of the theoretical framework of this study

3. Methodology

For this study, we adopt an exploratory approach. This approach is used to shed light on the nature of little-discovered phenomena that have not been previously studied in-depth, and how they occur in real life. It also contributes to expanding the knowledge in that field (Hunter, McCallum & Howes, 2019), and hence reveals new sociological or psychological insights relating to that field (Stebbins, 2001). We believe this approach to be a good fit for our study, considering that our aim is to explore the role of social media-based brand communities and social bonds in increasing loyalty to a car subscription service. Moreover, since Volvo's subscription service is still in the early stages of development, the research and knowledge regarding its customers are still limited. Therefore, we see it as self-evident to continue with an exploratory approach.

Furthermore, qualitative research is very suitable for unstructured problematics where the knowledge about the studied phenomenon is restricted (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Also, qualitative methods focus on the understanding of social constructs and people's richly textured life experiences and reflections in an interpretive way (Jackson, Drummond & Camara, 2007) which is in line with the aim of this study. Therefore, based on this, we choose qualitative research methods to gather data. Moreover, our research does not intend to collect metric data as the quantitative method, instead, we are looking into the consumers' own thoughts and responses, which corresponds to a qualitative study. Furthermore, a multi-method research design has been used in this paper as we have decided to include several methods. The reasons for this are to receive richer data for our analysis and to make it more accurate (Davis, Golicic & Boerstler, 2011). We have chosen to first conduct netnography and then interviews. We believe that these two methods complement one another as the focus of each one is different. Netnography gives us an initial insight into what is being discussed on social media concerning car subscriptions, and the recurrent topics that prevail in those discussions. It also allows us to gain knowledge about how these conversations unfold, and what are the common behaviours and attitudes toward car subscriptions and car brands on social media. Considering the results of the netnography, we designed in-depth interview questions that helped us receive more knowledge about loyalty, which is directly linked to our research question.

3.1. Netnography

In order to receive more information and deepen our knowledge of car subscriptions, we decided to conduct a netnography. Netnography is a qualitative research method that aims to comprehend “the cultural experiences that encompass and are reflected within the traces, practices, networks, and systems of social media” (Kozinets, 2020, p.14). This was a tool for us to see what topics regarding car subscriptions were being discussed online and how. We believed this would be of assistance when later preparing for interviews and conducting them as it would give us great insight into the topics consumers discuss in relation to car subscriptions, as well as consumers’ behaviour online. Also, as we are largely exploring social media's effect on loyalty, we saw that using netnography as a method that focuses on social media is a rational choice to gather this information. Investigating the social exchanges in the context of car subscriptions will allow us to gain insight into the cultural realities generated by brand community members and will help us explore and unearth the different topics and trends involved in increasing loyalty through social media-based brand communities (Kozinets, 2020). Furthermore, since Care by Volvo is a very young project, there is not enough data to generate a search that only targets Care by Volvo’s brand communities. This is why we decided to broaden our search to include communities of other brands as this would help us receive the information needed which would later be applied to the Care by Volvo case. Netnography uses a combination of research exercises classified into three movements: data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation (Kozinets, 2020). These movements entail various practices which we performed to conduct a successful netnography (ibid). We initiate netnography by simplifying our research question and aim to search queries, and define what are the desired effects of conducting these queries. When gathering data, we decided to look for both Swedish and English comments for richer data. We investigated the following social media channels: LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Reddit to extract proof of social media bonds in the context of car subscriptions. This involves any type of customer-to-customer, company-to-customer, or customer-to-company interactions in the form of comments, publications, replies, or reviews. We conducted this search on other online forums as well, such as Flashback and similar forums such as online brand clubs.

3.1.1. Coding

As data found through netnography is very unstructured (Kozinets, 2020), we decided to identify recurring topics and keywords among the data in order to structure it better and to be able to draw conclusions from it. When coding data and preparing it for analysis, we followed guidelines from Kozinets (2020). Collating was the first step in this guideline and to do that we checked for keywords and recurring words among all the posts online. Examples of this are all posts involving anything regarding numbers which led us to price and cost as well as questions that led us to the topic of advice and help. Collating is the preparation for the next step which is coding. When coding, we checked the different posts again but with relevance to our research topic in mind. Again, by finding posts including numbers we could see that most of them involved costs and the price of the service which led us to check other posts that included these words. The same goes for those posts that included questions as we could see most of them were in connection to asking for help or advice. We connected this back to our research question to see the relevance and since these topics influenced the outcome of whether the person tried/continued with the subscription or not, we decided it had some relevance and therefore continued with them. Then, once we found relevant posts, the Swedish posts and comments were translated by the Swedish-speaking team member. To check the accuracy of that translation, google translate was used to roughly see if the meaning of the quote was correctly communicated. Afterward, we divided the posts according to the keywords found in the posts and comments as well as the themes of discussion. This led us to the third step of combining the different posts to find patterns among them which led us to our findings on the topics. The total findings were: price, advice and help, sharing excitement, attributes of design and service, flexibility, the interaction between consumer and brand, and the language on different social media platforms. To analyse these findings, we have then connected it back to our literature and theoretical framework.

3.2. Interviews

As netnography has provided general insight into the car subscription service in the context of social media, we chose interviews as a complementary qualitative method interview for the further empirical data collection on our research question and for more in-depth information. Interviews are commonly used in marketing studies by researchers to learn about consumers, to answer questions like “how” and “what” they consume, and to explore consumers’ interpretations of these consumption experiences (Doody & Noonan, 2013; Fontana & Frey,

2000; Genzok, 1999). Considering that the aim of this study is to explore how social media-based brand communities can increase the loyalty of Millennial car subscribers, this required the discovery of any latent relationships between loyalty, social media usage, brand communities, and millennial car subscribers. Hence, interviews are a good method to particularly investigate these latent relationships, which can be done by inquiring Millennial car subscribers about their experience with car subscriptions.

3.2.1. Data collection

The profile of the selected respondents was created based on the interview's purpose. Our interviewees were Millennial social media users, from across the world, who were using a car subscription at the time of the interview, or who had used it in the past. As mentioned earlier, the Millennial generation is the age cohort that this study will focus on, therefore, the target group should meet this age requirement. Second, given that social media is the medium hosting brand communities and social bonds, we expected the interviewees to be social media users. Third, this study is set in the context of car subscriptions thus, consumers with an experience using a car subscription are the most qualified people to interview. Last, to enlarge the participation scope, we interviewed people from different geographical locations. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured way, which means a series of core questions were preset but other questions were generated according to the response of participants during the interview (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The interview guide encompasses four sequences. These sequences consecutively addressed the background of interviewees, their experience with car subscriptions, their behaviour on social media, and finally their loyalty to car subscribers in conjunction with social media usage. The design of this interview structure aims to investigate if a link exists between brand communities, social bonds, and loyalty in the behaviour and attitude of a Millennial car subscriber. The respondents were contacted through different social media channels where we have seen some activity from the particular respondent in regards to car subscriptions. They were asked to participate in an interview for a master thesis and received some information about us as students and the study itself. However, we decided not to share too much information about what we are researching to not affect their answers in any way and in that way avoid bias. As we have promised anonymity to our interviewees, their names will not be shared in this study, but some more information about them can be found in the table below.

Name	Car subscription service they have used	Gender	Country	Occupation
P1	Care by Volvo	Male	Sweden	Financial analyst
P2	Steer (third-part company)	Male	USA	Entrepreneur
P3	ONTO (third-part company)	Male	UK	HR manager
P4	ONTO (third-part company)	Male	UK	Musician
P5	ONTO (third-part company)	Male	UK	Youtuber and graphic designer
P6	Volvo M, Green Mobility	Male	Sweden	Engineer
P7	Volvo M, Green Mobility	Female	Sweden	Engineer

Table 1. Overview of interviewees

All interviews were conducted online through Zoom in the form of one-on-one interviews and lasted approximately 1-1.5 hours. The reason for the duration was to receive the in-depth information needed to answer our research question. The interviews were recorded with the interviewees' consent to be used as first-hand data for transcribing. After we had conducted the interviews, we proceeded to transcribe them, using speech-to-text tools. We then went through the text manually to rectify any errors, and then carried on to analysing and coding the data.

3.2.2. Data coding and analysis

In consumer research, the analysis and interpretation of data aim to reveal perspectives, topics, and patterns in the data. We set to use an inductive data analysis, which is more suitable with the choice of an explorative study. This choice rests on the fact that inductive approaches are primarily concerned with core meanings that naturally appear in the raw data (Thomas, 2006), in this case, the transcribed script from the interviews. Eventually, the outcome of the analysis should represent the categories and conceptual constructs, identified in the data, which are most relevant to achieving the research objectives of the study and answering the research question (ibid). To proceed through the interview answers, we drew from the procedure described by Spiggle (1994) and applied the following operations: categorization, abstraction (alternatively known as coding), comparison, dimensionalization, and integration. The first step was to

categorise the data. This required observing patterns in the data to identify chunks of text that represent instances of the same phenomenon. We then grouped these pieces of raw data that represented a similar phenomenon under distinct categories. These categories were given a preliminary label, which we also referred to as a code. The next step, **abstraction**, was to group different categories under larger conceptual classes, which we referred to as constructs. At this stage, we had a set of constructs from which several categories and codes branched out. As per the inductive approach we set to follow for this analysis, these conceptual constructs were not pre-defined by apriori topics but rather emerged naturally from the coding and categorization of data (Belk et al., 1988). The third step was to **compare** the different constructs, to check their theoretical relevance and significance vis-a-vis each other, and vis-a-vis the theoretical framework of the study. This comparison was also helpful to pick out which constructs had a theoretical relevance to the study. We refer to these constructs as main constructs. We also recognised, as secondary constructs, the ones that would not contribute directly to answering the research question, however, contained intriguing pieces of data, which can be interesting to discuss. At this point of analysis, we obtained a general overview of all the identified constructs and categories, which is presented in Table 2.

Constructs	Main constructs					Secondary constructs		
	Using car subscription	Usage of social media	Forming social bonds on social media	Social bonds in brand communities	Loyalty within Car Subscriptions	Recommendations by interviewees	The future of car subscriptions	Attitudes toward car brands
Categories	Reasons to choose a car subscription provider	Reasons to use social media	Depth of social bonds	Characteristics of brand community and their members	Customer satisfaction	Ways to build a brand community	Reasons why subscriptions will be more popular in the future	Reason for choosing a car
		Benefits of social media platforms	Inclination to connect vs inclination to form bonds	Benefits of brand communities	Reasons behind the loyalty of car subscribers	Ways to build trust	Millennials' openness to car subscriptions	Impression on a car brand
			The activity on social media and attitude towards social media	Influence of brand communities on members	Signs of car subscribers' loyalty	Ways to build loyalty		Interest in trying car subscriptions or car brand
				Trust in brand communities				

Table 2. Overview of the categories and constructs in interview results

We then proceeded to **dimensionalisation**, by identifying the properties of the main construct and its categories. Next, in the **integration** stage, we drew relationships between the main constructs discovered in the data. Finally, it is important to point out that, although the analysis guide by Spiggle (1994) was clearly mapped out, the performance of the actual process of data analysis was not fully linear. It entailed many reiterations to ensure that the data had been thoroughly examined. These five steps allowed us to compile and formulate the final findings.

The main constructs that were extracted from the data are presented and described under the heading Interview Results, while secondary constructs are made available in the appendix 2.

3.3. Reliability, validity, ethical implications, and trustworthiness

This study has considered the validity, reliability, ethical considerations of empirical data, and trustworthiness. To reach reliability we tried to gather data until saturation was reached. This was possible to do in netnography as we no longer found any new information. However, regarding the interviews, saturation was not reached. This is due to time limitations and the trouble of finding participants who have tried car subscriptions. Moreover, to preserve the reliability of the study and its repeatability using similar methods (Yin, 2013), we disclose the question guide in Appendix 1. To preserve the internal validity of the study, we maintained a degree of objectivity when presenting the findings. Therefore, we differentiate between the inferences based on empirical instances that appear in the data and the ones based on our interpretations. We have also tried to interpret the results as they have been written, for example, quotes, without changing them. Furthermore, we have respected ethical implications throughout the study by keeping the identity of all participants, for both netnography and interviews, anonymous. Before interviews, we have asked the interviewees for consent before recording and also consent for using their answers in our study. We have been transparent with the respondents about the study, our educational background, and what we will use their interviews for. Overall, transparency has been maintained throughout the processes and steps of the study.

Regarding trustworthiness, there are four aspects used to assess it: dependability, transferability, credibility, and conformability (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). To achieve dependability, one should offer the reader information about processes, showcase that the process has followed a logical order as well as present all documents and make sure the information is traceable (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Throughout this study, we have presented the processes from this study as well as presented arguments for the order and logic of things. As we have followed the natural order of theories as well as methods and where the results have taken us, we believe that we have achieved this. Also, as we have always presented how we have received our results and where we have found our information, through referencing, we believe our data is traceable. In the analysis, we have transferred the works of others that we derived from our literature review and combined it

with our own work (results) in order to reach the answer to our research question. This shows that we have made a connection with previous work and therefore achieved transferability. Credibility is similar to reliability and validity as this is evaluating whether our study has sufficient data to meet our claims (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). As several methods have been conducted it has strengthened the data and the credibility of this study. However, as we have mentioned we are exploring a rather new phenomenon so data has been difficult to find. We have managed to reach saturation in one of the methods and have been close to reaching it in the other. Nonetheless, throughout this study, we have always aimed to make strong logical links between the parts and in our findings, and have made sure that a strong link exists between our research and the research of others. Conformability is reached by linking findings and interpretation to the data in ways that can be easily understood by others (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). We believe we have reached this through our coding of the data which we have presented in a way for readers to easily understand and follow in a logical sense.

4. Results

4.1. Netnography results

When conducting netnography we found evidence of interactions through all the channels. Consumers, as well as brands, were commenting on other users' posts stimulating conversations and discussions. They were liking posts to show approval or that they agree with or like what they see and/or read. They also use the channels to share posts to circulate information as well as tag other users to draw attention to a post and/or the conversation in the comments. This shows us that social interaction among people online exists. Furthermore, we also found some topics of discussion when it came to car subscriptions. The topics found are the following: price, advice and help, sharing excitement, attributes of design and service, flexibility, the interaction between consumer and brand, and the language on different social media platforms.

The first topic that recurred among different discussions and posts was related to **price** and the different costs related to the service. The consumers mostly discussed how expensive this service was and how it was not worth the money, or how consumers were not taken into consideration when deciding this price. Some of the consumers stated that a car subscription (due to its price) is not fitted for 'ordinary' consumers.

“Expensive...nothing for ordinary people...unfortunately.”

“Expensive and terrible service when something happens. Terminated and never again.”

“14.000 was way too expensive.”

“Makes zero financial sense, but folks who value flexibility at all costs and are prepared to pay a premium, then I guess. There are people who don't mind that.”

“The cheapest Tesla LR costs approximately 10k a month, depending on the loss of value. If I put 5k on that, I can travel with a Taxi all month in that case. ‘Ordinary’ people cannot put 5k a month on it.”

“Too pricey for me.”

However, even though many consumers seemed to think this service was expensive, we found that people who compared this service to other services and deals actually thought the opposite.

“1250 miles a month, insurance coverage and the ability to cancel anytime after 4 months. And only \$825 due at signing. I hope this is sustainable for them because it's a great deal compared to traditional leasing.”

“It is more expensive, but the huge advantage is that it is on a short-term basis, with no long commitment like a 3 or 4 year leasing. This makes it ideal for short term requirements, or those wanting to have the flexibility of ending a lease without massive penalties. All maintenance included too.”

“The best thing about this offer is not the car itself, but the financing. A perfectly okay, safe Volvo, no matter what you think about electricity or design, for 4700kr/month for 36 months. The financing however is amazing if you read about it. With ‘normal’ leasing the leasing cost increases at the same rate as the interest increase (approx. 300-600kr per 1% increase). With current situation in the world a 3% increase in interest is not impossible. For example: a Kia EV6 would increase from 5200kr/month to 7000kr/month from one day to another anytime during the leasing period. But with this service you have a FIXED monthly cost which is not changed by interest rates. THIS, Volvo should receive credit for.”

We have also found that many consumers conduct calculations about the costs and share this online, which we found was another topic. In one case a future consumer asked for advice

regarding which model to choose and one replied to this consumer by doing calculations of the costs of the different models which would influence which model would be chosen. Calculations could be seen both within the Tesla brand community as well as Volvo brand community.

“You can count roughly backwards. The hybrid is 600kr more expensive per month according to what you state above. T3 pulls 0.75l/mile in mixed driving according to Volvo’s own numbers. Gas is approximately 15,50 kr/litre. $600/15,5 = 38$ litre of gas every month. $38/0,74 = \text{approx. } 51$ miles a month. So, you have to drive approximately 51 miles on pure electricity every month for it to break even. How you drive only you know. Maybe you will have to calculate the cost of installing a charging box at home.”

“ $77000\text{kr}/6 \text{ years}/ 12 \text{ months} = 1070/\text{month}$. So anywhere around this price would be reasonable with binding time, interest etc. Then one can also consider other options such as kr/km driven. $77000\text{kr}/(15000\text{km} \times 6 \text{ years}) = 0,85\text{kr}/\text{km}$.”

When it came to calculations, we saw that they were often connected to the second topic, which is that people usually turn to social media to ask for **advice and help**. As mentioned, there was this case of asking for advice about which model to choose. Where the future consumer wrote:

“Hello, I am very drawn to ordering and subscribing a XC40 through Care by Volvo. 3 months binding time...My question is, do I choose a hybrid t5 that charges or an ordinary T3 inscription? Both are extremely well equipped, almost fully, what differs between them is that you get a 360 camera and nicer rims with the hybrid, otherwise it is basically the same car. The hybrid is 6700 and the other 5300. Although taxes are added for approx. 10.000kr every year so add 850 to it per month, which is approx. 6100. How much gas do you save on a hybrid? I have tried googling it but I don’t think I know that much about it, its hard to understand the numbers. What do you say?”

It is to this the other consumer replied and helped her answer her questions. He also then gave her his own advice:

“I would have chosen the hybrid, it is a nicer feeling to drive an electric car (it is quieter), it is nice to not have to think about filling it with gas as much and you don’t need to have a bad conscience regarding the environment as when you drive a diesel/gas car...”

The consumer then declared that she chose a hybrid. There have been more cases similar to these where people ask for recommendations, ask for other consumers' previous experiences, as well as for help, and advice. Most share posts like:

“Hey, has anyone tried the Volvo car subscription. I’m intrigued by this concept.”

“Has anyone in real life done the Volvo subscription service?”

“Anybody have experience with Volvo’s subscription service Care by Volvo?”

As well as sharing their own **excitement** or letting others know that they are trying the service, which is the third topic.

“I’m doing the Volvo Subscription plan and got the XC90. I’m very excited.”

“We are driving up to Scotland tomorrow and picking up a Volvo XC40 EV along the way. EV instead of ICE. Subscription instead of ownership. Exciting times.”

“The XC90 is pretty sweet. My wife is switching to Volvo One subscription plan.”

The fourth topic is that we have also found that many social media users write and comment on the **attributes** of Volvo cars, their origin, and the cars' quality as well as the **service** itself. Many of the comments have been made by unsatisfied consumers or people who do not like the Volvo brand and its cars.

“The ugliest car ever made by China/Sweden.”

“Never something from China again for me, I check if it is from China and I don’t buy it.”

“Don’t buy cars from China please, also electric cars are not the solution sorry.”

“Plastic like most of the electric cars unfortunately.”

“Too badly equipped, I have an early XC40 extra everything including air suspension. You have included the stripped XC40 even the ones with gas engine succeeded to ruin a car with practically no additional options.”

“Do all electric cars have to be ugly?”

“The car is nice to drive but I am so unsatisfied because of recurring problems with the software. The GPS is not working, the screen blacks out, the radio has its own life. Wait for a couple of years and do not repeat my mistake. Yes Volvo. I have submitted the car several times to Bilia.”

“Why does it consume so much electricity? It has a large battery but it doesn’t go very far with it?”

“Care By Volvo experience is not recommended. End charges are a complete con. Battery on the PHEV completely useless and never gave the ‘book’ mileage. Delivered late, then ‘wear & tear’ and supposed excesses amounted to nearly a further month fee. Avoid.”

However there have also been some positive comments about the attributes but they have not been as descriptive and detailed as the negative comments, but rather quite general.

“So nice and the colour is so pretty.”

“This is gorgeous.”

“It’s beautiful.”

Sometimes they compare Volvo to their competitors, such as Tesla.

“40 min charging...Tesla is 10 years before Volvo.”

“Only Tesla understands that just because a car is electric it doesn’t mean it has to be ugly.”

“When will Volvo present electric cars that can measure with the competitors? Volvo has slipped behind brutally, which is very sad!”

There are several consumers who give positive feedback about the service itself, and when they do, the topic is mostly related to **flexibility**, which in these cases is a good thing. This is the fifth topic.

“My Volvo subscription is the best thing I did. No salespeople, dealers, depreciation or long-term commitments. I see it as a white goods/commodity product on my driveway.”

“In my view the biggest advantage of subscription over leasing is that you can hand the car back any time (subject to the 3 months’ notice of course), something that will cost you a lot

more to do if you are leasing. I tried Care by Volvo for the 30 days trial period just to see if having a car was for me, and I think that flexibility of being able to hand back the keys is something that may be worth paying a premium for.”

“...My family is one car right now and are thinking about going to 2. We like flexibility. Currently do Care by Volvo for car 1.”

“I’ve been with Care by Volvo with an XC40 for around a month, and it’s one of the best decisions I ever made. Completely predictable and I can cancel any time. Plus an amazing car.”

“...That’s what I love about this subscription model I can change cars every month 😊.”

The flexibility of the service and the perspective of it being short-term has also shown to influence people’s behaviour around car models. It seems that many use this service in order to try a car before either buying it or switching to another model they wish to try instead. We could find this topic among statements such as:

“I did the subscription because we didn’t know if we’d like having an EV generally. Now we know we do and are looking to buy.”

“As the Model Y is not yet available to order in the UK. I was looking into other EVs and noticed that Volvo offer a 3-month rolling subscription for their XC40 recharge EV. I had not seen this before and was wondering if you think Tesla might consider this approach?”

Moreover, as a sixth topic, we found evidence of **interactions between the brand and its consumers** which could be related to several of the topics above. Mostly the interaction happened when the consumer either had questions about the subscription service or general questions about the different car models. It also happened when consumers generally asked for help or advice regarding the subscription service to which the brand's social media profile answered. These are some of the cases:

Consumer 1: “I want to learn more about this subscription service. I love this car so much!”

Volvo: “Great to hear that you like the XC40! If you let us know in which country you’re based, we’ll be able to provide more info on Care by Volvo that applies to your market.”

Consumer 2: “Please finalise details on taxes/fees/cancellation etc, myself and a couple of other people I know here in NYC are waiting to subscribe but won’t until final details are released. Been waiting since the fall. Saw the car at the NYIAS and I’m 99% ready, just need that info and I’ll subscribe.”

Volvo: “Hi X, we’re happy to hear you’re excited about Care by Volvo. We have been in contact with Volvo Car USA and they expect this to be sorted by the end of this month, however you can already now sign up to reserve your subscription. For more details, please contact Volvo Car USA directly on...”

In both of these cases, we can see that the brand is trying to help a possible customer with their problems and reflections. But there were also cases when the brand replied to their consumers when sharing their experiences.

Consumer 3: “The subscription (lease) on my @volvocars is nearly up. I LOVE my Volvo (this is my third) but I can’t justify a new subscription/purchase with how few miles I drive these days. Maybe one last road trip!”

Volvo: “We are happy to hear that you enjoy your Volvo.”

Another interesting finding is related to one particular social media, which is LinkedIn. This platform is otherwise known as a professional social medium, and we could see aspects corresponding to this. On all the other platforms the discussions were mostly between consumers from a consumer perspective. Namely, on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit, most conversations were amongst people who have used car subscriptions before or are planning to subscribe to one soon. These users were sharing their own experiences and feelings about the car subscription service from the viewpoint of a person who has used it. However, on LinkedIn, we could see a shift in this, since the perspective of the discussions and the persons involved in these discussions, were not particularly consumers who have tried this service or who are currently using it. Rather, they discussed the overall subscription service as a strategic move for the automobile companies, and as the next big thing in the future of mobility, for all the different brands offering it. So, the finding here is the **language** used and how it differs from one social media platform to another social media platform. This finding is the seventh and last topic.

Consumer X has shared another post about subscriptions and is writing:

“Where EXTREME focus and PROCESS are the differentiators in @autonomy’s positioning: selling not just only Tesla’s but just Model 3’s ... through a unique “pay as you go” transaction process. #productinnovation #nichepositioning.”

“Yesterday, at a business lunch with as-a-service enthusiast, I talked about the benefits of Tesla’s subscription strategy from a company perspective. In my opinion, it was the perfect strategy shift to move from high-priced one-time sales to lower-priced introductory purchases with additional subscriptions. I was asked to provide an estimate of the date by which industrial companies will rely on subscriptions for the majority of their business. Today, I read what the stock market thinks about it. In my forecast, based on the adaptability of the internal organisation to the business model anticipation, I had completely neglected the influence of the stock market. Bad mistake. Many organisations will probably have to go over their internal pain points and go for subscriptions faster and earlier. Because the owners/shareholders demand this show of strength.”

“If you are the type who wants to drive a new car every few weeks or months, a car subscription is the best arrangement for you. You may choose a new brand or model as often as the subscription allows you to. The T4L subscription model provides a method that delivers value and best-in-class services to develop member relationships and garner significant customer loyalty that drives growth by providing “Enjoyable, Easy & Flexible Transportation Access.”

“The future of car ownership is subscription.”

The attitudes seem to be positive toward the service and business model from this perspective as most of the people online were enthusiastic when discussing it. Many discuss the benefits of this type of business model and how this is the next step in the process of car ownership and seem enthusiastic about it.

4.2. Interview results

4.2.1. Using car subscription

Reasons to choose a car subscription provider

There are two types of car subscription providers the interviewees were dealing with. The first kind of provider is a car manufacturing company that provides a car subscription service that operates with cars of its brand only. One example is Volvo Cars and its car subscription program Care by Volvo. The other type of provider refers to third-party companies like Onto

in the UK and Steer in the USA. These companies have a fleet of cars with several brands. Both types of providers offer the flexibility to have a car without committing to it in the long term, and the opportunity to try different cars. These reasons are the main motivations for interviewees to choose car subscriptions in general. That is, car subscribers can cancel the service anytime after the minimum commitment period (i.e. three months for Care by Volvo, and one month for Onto and Steer) and switch to different cars during the subscription period. While Care by Volvo consumers can change between different models of Volvo Cars, Onto and Steer consumers had a wider variety of brands and models to choose from (e.g., Porsche, Kia, Tesla, Volkswagen, Peugeot). As for the choice of a specific car subscription provider, many interviewees expressed that price was the most significant reason when making that choice.

“The price is going to be my first factor.” -P2

“Onto is the cheapest... I decided to do it because it was well priced... even with the price increases, it's still cheaper than Elmo which is their main competitor here, and far cheaper than any car rental company, in terms of a subscription service.” - P4

“I think, they (Onto) are almost the cheapest around. ... So with this amount of flexibility they offer, I couldn't really find anything comparable that I could get this cheap. So I think even if they offer the price up (increase the price), it's still the cheapest option...obviously, the price is an outstanding factor.” - P3

The second reason mentioned by interviewees was choice range, that is, they selected the car subscription company with wider car options than others. For example, P1 switched his car subscription from Lynk & Co to Volvo Cars because Care by Volvo provided the electric car option while Lynk & Co did not.

4.2.2. Usage of social media

Reasons to use social media

The interviewees expressed various motivations behind using social media. The two most common reasons are to stay connected with family and friends and reach out to companies.

The interviewees explained how nowadays using social media is the most straightforward way to catch up with friends and stay in touch with family.

“(I use) Instagram because I have a huge community on Instagram of friends, you know that's one of the oldest platforms on which I have been, so it's the easiest place where I stay connected with my friends.” - P2

Moreover, P3 and P6 also explained that the platforms they use depend on the type of connections they aim to build or maintain, which is usually determined by the type of content which that one platform is known for. For instance, LinkedIn is used for professional networking, while Instagram can be used to contact friends who do not use Facebook anymore. Moreover, social media is also used by individuals to complain about a bad experience they have had, or easily contact the company. The latter is especially for people who dislike using the phone, because of the long waiting time. For them, customer service is usually easier and faster to access on social media platforms.

“I think it's good that people have the opportunity to vent and then they get a response quickly. I think that's a good thing. It's probably one of the best things about social media and I've got friends that only use Twitter just to complain.” – P5

“I used Twitter only for one reason, it is when I have to complain about some services, some brands, and I think Twitter is where you get the fastest response.” – P6

“I use Twitter mainly. I just wanted to get in touch with companies because they are more likely to respond on Twitter than any other channel.” – P3

The interviewees agreed that social media, especially Twitter, has granted consumers an outlet to call out companies or just vent out, catch the attention of companies and get them to respond quickly.

An interesting finding that the data reveals is that individual users who conducted marketing endeavours in a specific field (e.g., electric cars), also known as influencers, are more adept at the usage of social media. This type of user has more knowledge of the dynamics of social media due to frequent and deliberate use. Namely, P5 expressed how he attracted and formed

business relationships, promoted his content, generated side revenue, and hosted a private community about electric cars, all on different social media platforms.

“The meeting I had in fact before ours was with an insurance company that wants to do some videos with me so they want me to produce these videos and so that would be a co-branded video that I produce about electric cars with them so that's the kind of thing that's nice and that never would have happened were it not for Twitter.” – P5

“I think maybe that's what social media is, a marketing tool for yourself really ... I get a little bit of advertising revenue.” – P5

“I'm the admin of a couple of Facebook groups for electric cars Facebook groups, so I tend to just go into Facebook just to approve some posts from those groups.” – P5

All these activities denoted, in one way or another, that he was using social media to build connections that will grow his business, and enlarge his circle of connections on social media. This might indicate that users who have used these online networking channels more professionally, as opposed to normal users, are more eager to form relationships and connections with brands and brand fans because they are more aware of the benefits of social media platforms, and are more motivated to seek them.

Benefits of social media platforms

Ultimately, the usage of social media generates various benefits for all types of users. While examining the data, the reasons and benefits of using social media seemed similar, however, as the data analysis progressed, the difference and relationship between the two categories became clearer. Both companies and individuals go into social media to seek a set of benefits, which we have identified as their reasons to use social media. These reasons are benefits and advantages that are known to them, and which they were aware that they will gain before joining social media. However, this topic also includes the unexpected advantages that users have gained by joining social media. One of the benefits that were identifiable in the data is that users are more likely to get better deals and easily find products or services they need thanks to social media ads. When asking the interviewees whether they have ever tried products or services that social media has introduced them to, one interviewee in specific explained that she uses Instagram for that purpose particularly, which she viewed as an advantage of having

social media. Moreover, social media introduces users to services and products they did not know about before and educates users about them.

“I just discovered new car brands because of social media. There are these new car brands that are coming up you know all the electric ones and I came to know about them only because of social media.” – P7

Evidently, many interviewees heard about car subscriptions via social media channels. They also mentioned that they used social media to further research car subscription providers and plans after they heard about it for the first time.

“It was a YouTube video or something like that which came up talking about car subscription, so I kind of just noted it down.”- P4

“I heard on Twitter about Onto...someone said that they were really good.”-P5

“I heard about them (Steer) through, a cars review show (on YouTube) called CNET on cars posted by Brian Cooley.”- P2

Being introduced and educated about the newest trends in the market was the case for several interviews, especially in terms of the newest mobility options, like car subscription services. Most interviewees were introduced to the car subscription they used through either Instagram, YouTube, or Twitter. This indicates that social media is a place where customers go to initiate their journey in the car subscription world. Furthermore, YouTube is very beneficial, notably for promotional content, that gives a detailed review of a specific good, or service.

“Before Onto, I did watch a lot of YouTube videos about cars and I did watch a couple of people's reviews of Onto and I think that YouTube videos and YouTube content is a very good way of promoting...I thought we would have done it anyway but definitely watching those videos made me feel secure about going with the company.” - P4

As described earlier, individual users of social media use it to freely express what they think of a brand, while companies use social media to gather these opinions and create a clearer picture of their customers' attitudes. The data also shows that the interviewees as consumers were aware of the benefits of social media for companies, and of companies' efforts to be more proactive to answer consumer requests, and offer help when customers share their bad

experiences. Companies do that by adopting the same tools that consumers are using, like comment replies and direct messages. Some companies, like Volvo Cars and Polestar, are even open to contributing to Facebook groups, in which they respond to users.

“I think Volvo and Polestar had been more open (than Lynk & Co) and actually sort of contributing to Facebook groups, I mean being there and actually responding and giving the users some inputs, and I think that's been, um, much better received.” – P1

Eventually, the benefit here for a company is not only avoiding negative publicity on social media but ultimately connecting with its customer base. These interactions where brands assist consumers on social media make consumers feel cared for and strengthen buyer-seller relationships.

As for consumer-to-consumer connections, the data reveals that the benefits of social media pertain largely to communication and connecting with like-minded people through shared interests.

“I can tell you something it's a very powerful tool to connect with people... It always feels good to know that you have people who you can rely on, people that care about you so it's a good feeling to know that you're not alone.” – P2

As portrayed above, connecting to people with similar opinions on social media leaves the person with positive feelings of support, and as explained by other interviewees, after this match, one is willing to connect more.

4.2.3. Forming social bonds on social media

This construct includes instances of data where interviewees reveal the extent to which they connected with other users of social media, with companies, or with influencers. It also portrays the difference between creating connections and creating bonds on social media.

Depth of social bonds

In this topic, two contrasting opinions about creating social bonds on social media have appeared. The first opinion supports the idea that interactions on social media can lead to

building deep connections. Specifically, some instances of data describe how an individual user might go through several steps to reach a level of deep and meaningful bonding on social media.

“It doesn't take much to connect with people, you know like asking questions, hey what is this about hey how do you do this. I find so many people posting interesting things ... that I naturally have an interest for and I'm always asking them questions.” – P2

“When you're just comfortable you know talking to this person or texting this person and you have texted this person that you met on social media more than let's say four-five times a day then yeah I think then it should be quite evident that you're comfortable or reach the level where you know you can meet the person or have a strong connection with that person.” – P7

The interviewees above explained how connections between people start with bonding over common interests. Eventually, the connection becomes more solid and evolves into a bond, through a reciprocal and continuous exchange on social media. Moreover, some interviewees explained that if they felt comfortable with the person they have met online, then they would consider meeting them in real life.

“I feel I've made a lot of friends through Twitter, a couple in particular that I would actually say quite good friends now and I've gone on trips with them and things like that so that's great.” – P5

“That (bonding with other social media users) is something you never really think about, it comes naturally. I think it's something that's reciprocal right so if I find a person who I'm interested in and I feel like that person is always engaging when I'm posting content as well and I'm engaging with that person is posting content. Then at some point, the conversation is gonna shift from being online friends to hey let's actually meet in real life ... so I think it's a step-by-step thing where both parties gradually move towards that stage.” – P2

As conveyed in these quotes, individual users of social media might initiate a connection by discussing a common topic of interest, deepen their connection by increasing the frequency of their interactions, and finally solidify their connection by meeting in real life. As stated by P2, this is a natural process that occurs over a long period of time. However, it does not necessarily

lead to the particular outcome of moving the relationship to real life. This leads us to the second opinion contained in this topic, which supports the idea that interactions on social media are insignificant, and therefore, creating bonds on these virtual platforms is not possible.

“I might comment on something and might have a back and forth with someone for a short amount of time but then I don't know them. So I've never met them, you don't have that chance to really forge your relationship. I feel like people still need human connections, properly do that.” – P4

The interviewees that appear to be sceptical of forming connections and friendships virtually challenged the precedent opinion by stating that conversations are fleeting and superficial on social media, which makes the creation and maintenance of connections quite difficult. Interestingly, one common point that both opinions raise is that real-life interactions have more potential than social media in deepening human bonds, and they are still a crucial part of social bonding.

Inclination to connect vs inclination to form bonds

This construct represents the interviewees' predisposition to connect with other individual users or companies on social media. The data reveals that the interviewees had different standings when it came to their inclination to socially connect or bond on social media. First, there was a category of interviewees who were less inclined to form social bonds with companies and other consumers on social media. In this case, the person is either not a brand-oriented person or is inherently disinterested in connecting with brands and companies. Alternatively, the person believes that the natural reaction to viewing an interesting post on social media is not necessarily interacting with the creator of the post, and therefore, they did not see the point in connecting with other people.

“You know, even though I do think that this whole globalisation of social media is nice I don't wanna force a conversation with someone I don't know...And just because they've posted a video doesn't mean that we're two people that should be having a conversation.” – P4

According to the interviewees, lacking the inclination to connect with companies on social media seems to be a general disinterest in the brand of a product or service, with a higher focus on usability and usefulness. Whilst lacking the inclination to connect with people seems to be a result of online personality type or a lesser desire to socialise in a virtual setting. As mentioned

previously, bonds result from deepening social connections on social media. Since this category of interviewees was not open to initiating a simple interaction or connection on social media, this indicates that they are the least likely to form social bonds on these virtual platforms.

Second, some interviewees expressed an inclination to form social connections on social media and talked about trusting a company. The data shows that interviewees were more cautious toward companies because they are mainly seeking to advertise their products and services. Interviewees talked about their openness to follow brands that are established and which they have heard of before, implying that these brands are trustworthy companies in their respective industries. Furthermore, as pointed out by P5, brands that do not show the humans behind the business are difficult to trust, and therefore connect with.

“If it's just a company reaching out to me and I don't know the CEO for instance or even some of the people that work there and it's just this kind of faceless brand that's contacting me then I'm not as inclined to bond with them at all because it feels it's like a marketing exercise ... on social media is very difficult to connect with anyone when you are just a brand.” – P5

The interviewee also mentioned that as an influencer who holds a responsibility toward his followers, he can only connect with companies that he trusts. This trust is based on a corporate culture he agrees with, or the humans operating the business at the company. Thus, this indicates that trust plays an important role in making people more inclined to form social bonds on social media, especially in the case of consumer-to-company bonds. It is however important to point out that although these interviewees were inclined to connect with others on social media, they were not very open to deepening their connections and developing them into bonds, as indicated in the quotes below.

“Bonding is a strong word but I suppose it's kind of bonding a little bit yeah. The relationships I've got with some of these companies I would say are quite good, yes but it's arguably quite superficial. They're not my friends particularly but I'm friendly with them.” – P5

“I wouldn't say like an emotional bond and such but there are some people that I follow where they give good advice ... but that doesn't mean that I am attached in any sense.” – P6

The third category of interviewees was open to both connection and bonding with companies on social media, especially with personal brands, which are usually companies that have a prominent human figure representing them, like Gary Vee of VaynerMedia.

“You know the best feeling you can have when you're on social media and you're trying to connect with these big-name brands ... is when you can DM them and get a personalised answer... That means a lot to me you know so that's when I have the impression that there is a connection between me and that person because I know I can reach out and get a tip or an advice or something when I need it.” – P2

These findings provide an interesting insight into the links between the inclination to form connections and bonds on social media and the depth of social bonds and indicate that not all social media users are capable of opening up to other individuals and trust companies.

The activity on social media and attitude towards social media

While examining the links that can be drawn between the different categories identified in the data, we found out that the inclination to form connections is connected to the users' **activity on social media** and **attitude towards social media**. The first stands for the intensity and frequency by which social media users engage in the platforms. The second includes users' feelings and thoughts towards social media in general.

The interviewees who showed a reluctance toward bonding on social media were mostly passive on the platforms they used. Meaning that their activity on social media mainly consisted of idle scrolling, and occasionally contributing to posts with a like or a quick comment. Furthermore, their attitude towards social media is on the negative side.

“I just think that it makes people want to show themselves in a certain way. And I think the real world is very different from that. I think that the line between the real world and the social media world is getting more and more distorted ... Again, I don't know the whole like online discussion thing, I feel kind of that it just gets so toxic so fast, I am just not really interested in it.” – P4

From this, it shows that the social media users who are not inclined to connect and interact with other users have a negative attitude toward social media and rarely use the platforms. As for

the interviewees who showed a higher inclination to interact with other users on social media, they used social media more frequently, either for idle consumption, interacting with posts, or creating content. Unfortunately, there has not been a lot of feedback on the attitudes toward social media from this type of user.

4.2.4. Social bonds in brand communities

This construct includes instances when the interviewees were describing the attributes of people who belong to brand communities in terms of their attitude toward a brand and their perception of it. Also, the features that shape the nature of a brand community on social media, the influence that it has on its members, and the trust between social media users.

Characteristics of brand community and their members

Most interviewees shared their thoughts about what a brand community consists of, and what are the attributes of people who belong to brand communities.

“When I think about brand communities, I'm thinking about the ability of a brand to stay in touch with you, what are your needs (as customers).” – P2

“Well, I think I am part of Onto's community. So they have a separate website or like a sort of maybe part of the main website...So it's like a forum space.” – P3

“Here is the thing, Twitter is a very loose kind of thing. I mean if we talk about a brand community on Twitter it's not necessarily like a group the same way that Facebook is.” - P5

Here, the interviewees described brand communities differently. Some of them perceived it as an entity with defined boundaries, like a group or a forum, which is usually closed to the public, and a joining request is required upon entry. At the same time, a brand community can have no boundaries, and being a member of it only requires an interest in the brand, or in the subject of the community. In both cases, brand communities stand on interactions and communication amongst its members, and between the brand and members. Furthermore, the data shows that members of a brand community have different attitudes toward the brand they support in comparison to normal consumers. According to the interviewees, brand community members tend to be more enthusiastic about a brand than other brand users and are open to helping other community members by sharing their experiences or answering questions.

“I do read the comments like every few days. Sometimes I respond to people especially if they have a question about the car I have or the cars I had or like generally stuff about the company. And like, I'm always like, trying to keep up with other people's comments and stuff. So the Ontario community I'm definitely part of.” – P3

In some cases, these brand member communities don't necessarily have to be able to consume the brand but are big supporters of the brand and the work of its company.

“I don't follow them or anything. I have just watched interviews with him (Elon Musk), and I've watched lots of reviews of the cars. And because I have been in the car, I really like it. I wouldn't say I feel part of it mainly because of the price of the car ... I know they are trying to come out with a slightly cheaper car and if that was to happen then definitely, I would consider it over and above any other company. I would say there's like, a worldwide pro-Tesla community...And so yeah I do feel part of the pro tesla community.” - P4

Benefits of brand communities

Interestingly, some interviewees pointed out that the role of a community leader is very important in increasing engagement in a community, and also influencing brand members' loyalty to the community and brand. Interestingly, the car brand Tesla and the electronics brand Apple came up frequently in the speech of various interviewees, when referring to brands that have overly enthusiastic communities of loyal customers. In the quote below, P5 tried to work out the resemblance between the two brands and justified it by the existence of a very charismatic leader that people tend to look up to. While Apple had Steve Jobs, Tesla has Elon Musk, and the strong personality characteristics of each leader played a big role in creating and maintaining a community around the brand.

“I mean Tesla don't pay anything for advertising, all they rely on is word of mouth ... Tesla has done what Apple did a few years ago and got this kind of almost weird cult around the brand but Tesla has taken it to the next stage and they've gotten into social media.” – P5

According to the testimony of other interviewees, it can be said that the reason behind the success of Tesla's brand community is that it represents a space for consumers to advocate the values that the brand and products stand for, which these consumers approve and support.

Evidently, some interviewees explained how brand communities are a good outlet for consumers to attach themselves to a certain identity.

“I guess it's some statement as well. I mean those communities I think is connected to sort of how you see yourself and how you want to be perceived.” – P1

“I just feel part of the community (Electric cars community) which is responsible for environmental change and also lifestyle change and...the change of power in terms of those companies who are basically responsible for global warming and massive worldwide corruption.” - P4

With the example of Tesla, it appears that brand communities can succeed in increasing loyalty when they become a place where their members are free to express themselves, and a place where they have received encouragement from like-minded people who happen to be in the same brand community. Therefore, brand communities benefit their members with emotional and social support. This in turn benefits companies since the interactions between members function as a sort of free marketing for the company, and also an extension to their customer support service since members help each other out by answering commonly asked questions, and overall showing assistance with particular matters that are raised within the community regarding a car or a subscription service.

Influence of brand communities on members

Concerning how brand communities affect their members, three different findings emerge in the data. The first result indicates that while the emotional and social support of community members has an effect on community members, it is, however, not enough to increase loyalty.

“Well, the community gets me into the brand but what keeps me in the brand is my experience once I'm in there... If I use the product and I don't have a great experience with the product I might move, even if the rest of the community says it's a great product.” – P2

It appears that a brand community does not have as much impact on the decision to renew a car subscription, in comparison with the user's personal experience with the car or service provider. Contrarily, as it is portrayed in the quote below, consumers care the most about the financial benefit of using a car subscription, and what are the cheapest deals that they can obtain.

“So for me, the most important thing is that I spend the least amount of money or like I get good value for my money. So it's nice to have a good community but it's not a deciding factor to me it's really the overall cost and the value I get for my money.” - P3

The second result indicates that brand community members can be more forgiving of the downsides of a certain brand and would buy from the same company without considering other options.

“I think it's some sort of type of loyalty to the brands...so people might sort of oversee issues because they like the overall brand, (they are) sort of the fan of the brand...If there's a new product, you might decide I will get this without sort of reading reviews or how it's being perceived.” – P1

Being a fan of a brand, or being part of its brand community might cause the consumers to overlook the shortcomings of a product or service, and therefore, perform repeated purchases without seriously considering other options, or asking for second opinions.

The third result refers to tribalism as an outcome of being part of a brand community. This tribalism occurs when members blindly follow the leader of their respective communities or fall into a confirmation bias. This bias is fueled by similar opinions from community members, or by social media algorithms that push toward users the content that will most likely confirm their biases, and with which they are most likely to agree.

Trust in brand communities

This tribalism or excessive support for a brand can distort the brand perception of members, which sometimes makes their judgement of it questionable, and less trustworthy for people who are outside the brand community. When the interviewees were asked whether they trust the opinion of a brand community members they did not belong to, they answered that they would trust someone from a brand community only about their knowledge of the product or service, since they have firsthand experience. However, they were disinclined to trust their opinion of the brand, because they think it is probably exaggerated. Contrarily, they would trust a community member who would provide them with both negative and positive feedback about

a service or product. Or alternatively, trust a community member's opinion on the downsides of a product, while trusting a person outside that community with the positive aspects of a product.

As to trust amongst brand community members, the data shows that inside brand communities, interactions increase trust. As the frequency of interaction and participation in a brand community increases, the depth of connections increases as well.

“On Twitter, I have a little bit more of a deeper relationship with people and more interaction, so you do have more of a chance if you interact with people, to build a proper relationship and therefore any recommendation they make you're going to believe it I think a bit more. And as I said on Facebook, I don't have that (interaction) to the same degree (as on Twitter).” – P5

“I trust the opinion of those inside the brand community like me because it's kind of like a brotherhood once you part of a community you belong together in that community so it's just like we're Bros.” – P2

4.2.5. Loyalty within car subscriptions

Customer satisfaction

Most interviewees were satisfied with their experience of car subscriptions. The data shows that this satisfaction is based on three factors. The first factor relates to the cars themselves. Although the cars that the interviewees were driving at the time of the interview, or had driven in the past were not their favourite car model/brand, they still shared good comments about the cars, since the cars were cost-effective. The second factor is the complementary services to the cars. Such services include car maintenance service, inclusive insurance, and public charging, which made the car subscribers feel content with their experience and believe that the subscription was worth the price. The third factor refers to a supportive customer service. For instance, many interviewees praised that their subscription providers always responded fast, especially on social media or the company's private app, when they faced an issue with the subscription, or with the car. All these service features worked together to create a positive experience for interviewees.

“Overall the experience was fantastic, I really think it was brilliant, the company ONTO were very good.” – P5

“Their customer service has been good.” – P4

Reasons behind the loyalty of car subscribers

The most prominent reason why all interviewees were willing to continue with their subscriptions after the first renewal was their satisfactory customer experience.

“It fits my needs perfectly. And generally, they (Onto) keep delivering on what they're selling. So I have the car, I didn't have any major problems, and that's why I've been with them for a year and a half. Because I like what I'm getting.” – P3

The second reason that was brought up by some of the interviewees was related to the financial benefits of staying with the current subscription service. For example, Onto allows its customers to collect points when referring the service to new people. These referral points are then transferred into credit into the customers' account, which they can use to get discounts in their next subscription.

“I've got quite a lot of money in my account that I can use so I'll get a free car ready if I do it again. I know there are other car subscription services but I wouldn't look at them just because I've got this money sitting in my account.” – P5

Other reasons behind loyalty mentioned by interviewees include the lack of better alternatives and switching cost.

Signs of car subscribers' loyalty

First, the data indicates that most interviewees renewed their subscription with their respective providers without switching to another provider. Moreover, the longest subscription amongst the interviewees lasted for one year and a half. This points to behavioural loyalty. Second, we also found instances in the data that point to attitudinal loyalty. Precisely, the interviewees recommended the service to other people who had the same needs or interest in car subscriptions, since their experiences were satisfactory.

“I think I’ve seen similar situations in our friends but they’re considering buying a car, but don’t really know how much they would use it, so for those people I recommended taking on a subscription and using it for a few months and see how they like it.” – P1

“Yeah, I recommended it (Onto) to so many people, like people are always asking me about it. So yeah actually like I’m an ambassador for them.” – P3

Moreover, all interviewees expressed their intention to renew their subscriptions with their current providers. However, although interviewees had the intention to stay with the same company, they did not plan to continue with the same car model /brand, especially for the interviewees who were using third-party companies, since they had the option to switch cars during the same subscription plan. They were more willing to switch to other car models or car brands in the future.

“I want to continue with Steer because there is the option of a Porsche and a lot of other cars that I could switch to eventually.” – P2

On a different note, from the findings it appears that the interviewees who were using a third-party subscription like Onto, felt particularly loyal to the service provider as opposed to the cars they had driven while being subscribed to the service. One of the interviewees however pointed out that he felt loyal to the car subscription business model overall. This indicates that there are three distinct subjects of loyalty in the context of car subscriptions provided by third party providers.

5. Analysis and discussion

In this research, we have gained insight from both netnography and interviews that consumers, and people overall, do connect with others online and create some type of social bonds. Interviewees have themselves stated that their interactions on social media have led to connections and we can see in the netnography how different consumers and users are connecting through the different platforms. This also includes interactions between a company and its consumers, which is also stated by Kim and Ko (2012). It is stated in literature that in

order to create social bonds with their customers, firms must show an interest in their needs and problems (Berry, 1995; Williams, Han & Qualls, 1998) and then meet these needs while staying in touch with them as well as offering some type of personalised service (Petrescu, et al., 2018). Through our findings, we can see that companies have succeeded in creating social bonds by interacting with their consumers and creating connections which in turn has led to an increase in trust. It seems that the interviewees are very cautious when it comes to communication generated by the company as they believe that the goals for most communication are advertising and sales. They believe that the company only wishes to advertise their product or service, and hence they are not being sincere. This is when the interviewees mentioned the importance of trust. Another reason for having a hard time trusting a company, according to our interviews, is because they are not personal enough. Some interviewees mention “faceless brands” which decrease the trust as they are less personal, and they have nothing to connect to. Instead, they mention that they wish to have a brand with a face they can connect to, making it more relatable, which shows that more personal interactions and personalised communication indeed are connected to trust, but also the attitude toward the company. According to this finding, if a company wants to create a bond and a relationship with its customers, they need to show a face, that is they need to be more personal, showing more of a human side of the business (Thunman, 1992; Rodriguez & Wilson, 2002). The companies which do not do this are hard to trust. This has also shown that in order to even take the step to create bonds with a company they have to trust them and, in this case, most of their trust is based on what they have heard about the brand before and if they are well-known or not. Nevertheless, when it comes to communication between a brand and a consumer, the interviewees mention that personalised answers are important for them to feel connected with the company. This connects back to the literature mentioning the importance of personalised services when wanting to generate a valuable exchange between the company and its customer (Malefyt, 2015).

Statistics (PewResearch, 2021) have stated that Millennials prefer communication through social media as has been seen in our findings. All interviewees have expressed that social media is a preferred tool when wanting to communicate with companies as it reduces active waiting time. This also shows that Millennials think of communication as instant, readily available, and convenient (Helal, Ozuem & Lancaster, 2018). It has also been seen, in both interviews and netnography, that social media platforms have been used when communicating with companies, and other consumers, over some questions or concerns. What could be seen in both

findings is that various platforms are used for different things. Some platforms, such as Twitter, are better when someone wishes to complain or gain the company's attention, while Facebook is better for creating groups and discussions within these groups. Instagram was often mentioned as a tool that introduced consumers to new products through ads and made them try these. This leads us to the point that digital marketing and digital ads are said to be a great tool when consumers want to create connections with consumers as this gives them an insight into data about them that can be used to create benefits designed to their needs which would, in turn, create those social bonds (Malefyt, 2015). As we can see, social media is used as a marketing, communication, and information tool (Kim & Ko, 2021; Yoshida et al., 2018) since it has pushed several consumers into trying new products, or at least learning about them. Several of the interviewees have found car subscriptions, as well as other new products and services, through social media platforms. They say they would not have tried it if it were not for social media, so indeed it is a great tool for advertisement. The users found in netnography tried different car models that other users had referred them to. Moreover, it is also said to be a good tool for creating relationships and interactions between the buyer and the seller (Nguyen & Mutum, 2012) but also among the consumers themselves (Malefyt, 2015). The interactions on social media have evidently made the consumers feel cared for, which in turn has strengthened the relationship between the buyer and seller, indicating a creation of social bonds. It has also created bonds between the consumers as they feel support from other consumers and that they "have someone to rely on" (Petrescu et al., 2018; Giota & Kleftaras, 2014). This is an indication that it actually helps avoid loneliness, which has been stated by Korgaonkar and Wolin (1999). It also shows that social media is a useful tool for this.

Furthermore, as people have stated that they indeed connect with other people on social media by creating bonds with them, the depth of these bonds has varied among the interviewees. Those who develop deep connections with others mention their common interests as the starting point of their bonding. Some of these interviewees went on to later meet these people offline as well, so one can say that they use social media to create relationships with relatable people as proposed by Petrescu et al. (2018), and to build long-lasting connections with the people they relate to as Gummerus et al. (2012) and Petrescu et al. (2018) state. However, there were also some interviewees who did not apply to this as they perceive themselves to be very passive on social media platforms. These interviewees believe that communication online is superficial and that it cannot take the place of offline communication. This questions the fact that social interactions online and the way social bonds unfold virtually is the same, or at least

very similar, to the way they unfold offline (Petrescu et al., 2018; Giota & Kleftaras, 2014). But, when researched more in-depth, even those that are quite passive online (when it comes to generating and sharing content) and who believe the online world is superficial, still use social media as a way to communicate and create bonds and relationships with their current friends. They still conduct similar offline behaviour of keeping up with friends and conducting some form of social interaction through likes, comments, and shares, which is in line with what the literature states (Petrescu et al., 2018; Giota & Kleftaras, 2014). Furthermore, according to our findings, the frequency of social media usage also seems to affect social bonds. That is whether social bonds are developed at all and in that case how much. From our literature review, we concluded that people who are more engaged and who interact more on social media are more open and likely to create bonds on social media, compared to the ones who are passive, infrequent users. This finding shows us that our conclusion regarding social bonds and social media is true and that passive social media users cannot create the same social bonds on social media as the frequent users do, since they do not involve themselves enough to be able to develop those bonds. Hence, they cannot then be affected by them (the bonds) as the others can.

As mentioned, we have seen that people connect to those that they share the same interests with, but they are also connecting to groups of people, so-called communities. Usually, people who are involved with communities, more specifically brand communities, prefer the products/services or brand within that particular community (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001) and wish to be associated with symbols connected to that brand (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Schembri et al., 2010), which goes in line with the findings of this study. Findings show that those who are a part of a brand community are more enthusiastic about that particular brand, compared to others. They are also more involved online within those communities compared to other passive social media users which also connects back to our previous statement: the more active consumers are on social media the more bonds they create. Moreover, giving and receiving encouragement within these communities also benefits the companies since it works as a sort of free marketing. Many of these brand communities have helped to attract new consumers and have made them try the product or service offered by the brand. This shows that these communities play a big role in creating and strengthening engagement (Yoshida et al., 2018). However, it has been confirmed by our interviewees that brand communities are not enough to make them loyal to a brand or product/service, which questions the theory that suggests that the sense of attachment and belonging causes loyalty

(Sánchez-Casado et al., 2018; Bendapudi & Berry, 1997; Dalla Pozza 2014; Kang et al., 2014). But members of brand communities are more forgiving and intend to give brands another chance before changing to other brands, which shows that members do at least build a sense of attachment and belonging to the brand and the other members (Sánchez-Casado et al., 2018) which makes them at least re-purchase for a while (Bendapudi & Berry, 1997; Dalla Pozza 2014; Kang et al., 2014). Furthermore, from the findings, we have been able to conclude that the reason for joining brand communities is quite similar to the reason for using social media: the need to socialise (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004) and the need to belong to a group of like-minded people (Gangadharbhatla, 2008; Tardini & Cantoni, 2005). We have also observed that consumers within these communities also use them to help each other out while asking for help and advice themselves. This shows that communities provide a wide source of information that includes content not only from the company itself but also from consumers which are evidently thoughts, concerns, feelings, and experiences connected to the brand, product, or service (Szmigin & Reppel, 2001; Von Hippel, 2005). Regarding trust, we have found that brand communities increase trust toward other members. That is, consumers would trust the review and recommendations more from a person within that brand community than from someone that is not part of it. People outside of a brand community are perceived to be less trustworthy and their judgement is questionable since they are not believed to have the same experience of the brand as the community members do. This could indicate brand loyalty, as Laroche et al. (2013) state, but it has not been found in this research. However, it has been seen that the interactions within these brand communities increase trust which makes our assumption true that these communities are strengthened when the exchanges between the members are rich.

Regarding the different dimensions of loyalty, we see cases of re-purchasing intentions (in this case subscription renewals) and willingness to give recommendations, which shows attitudinal loyalty. Moreover, some interviewees have already renewed their subscriptions, which shows behavioural loyalty. This goes in line with the theories on loyalty being two-dimensional (Day, 1969; Dick & Basu, 1994). Moreover, to assess the degree of loyalty among the interviewees we have used the loyalty chain by Oliver (1997). We have findings that point toward the first phase: cognitive loyalty. For instance, several interviewees use social media and brand community content to learn about car subscription providers and make comparisons between competitors in terms of price and offers. When a provider's offerings are superior to their competitors, it results in a preference for that provider and a slight increase in loyalty for it. The findings also shed the light on the second phase, affective loyalty, where subscribers rely

on their level of satisfaction, and personal experiences when deciding whether they wish to renew their subscription or not. This finding goes in line with Oliver's (1997) loyalty chain, which states that consumers' satisfaction tends to increase their loyalty to a product, brand, or service. However, this finding also questions Laroche et al.'s (2013) claim that brand communities increase brand loyalty. Precisely, this finding gives us an understanding that to move from cognitive to affective loyalty, consumers rely more on their own experiences, instead of what they have heard about it on social media or brand communities. If they have a satisfactory experience and agree with the community members they will commit to the service, both because they get social and emotional support from community members and because they get the benefits they are expecting from the car or service. However, if they receive a dissatisfactory experience with the car or service, they will either switch to another car if their subscription plan allows them to, or switch to another subscription service, even if the community is supportive. In other words, when a customer joins a car subscription for the first time, the involvement of a brand community in increasing loyalty is limited within the very first stage of loyalty: the cognition phase. Therefore, if the consumers fail to get satisfaction at the cognition phase, then the brand community is very unlikely to retain the customer. In the alternate scenario, where consumers are satisfied at the cognition phase, and start developing positive affections, then the consumer will advance to a deeper state of loyalty, the affective phase, and stay loyal to the car or subscription service. In this case, satisfaction increases loyalty, while brand communities do not necessarily increase loyalty.

Moreover, the findings show that satisfaction does play a role in making consumers more loyal as suggested by Picón et al. (2014) and that consumers derive satisfaction by evaluating several elements in their experience with subscription providers as proposed by Dagger and O'Brien (2010). According to interview results, these elements were found to be good prices and very helpful customer support. While the first element of good prices delineates a financial bond (Chiu et al., 2005; Chai et al., 2015) the third element of customer support delineates a social bond between the company and its customer (Rodriguez & Wilson, 2002; Wilson, 1995; Petrescu et al., 2018). All of this leads us to say that since social bonds contribute to satisfaction, which has been proven to increase loyalty, then social bonds in this particular scenario do increase loyalty. However, the study does not provide enough findings for this conclusion, and therefore we decide to consider it as an interesting supposition to explore in further studies. The supposition here is that social bonds in the context of car subscriptions could make subscribers move further into the loyalty chain proposed by Oliver (1997) into

deeper stages of loyalty. Moreover, we also find cases of the third phase: conative loyalty, as most interviewees had intentions to renew their subscriptions after a satisfactory first experience. As for the fourth phase, some interviewees have already renewed their subscriptions a couple of times with the same retailer showing partially the final phase of loyalty: purchase action. However, this repurchase behaviour represents only partially what Oliver (1997) describes as action loyalty, where consumers automatically repurchase from a brand without considering alternatives. The findings do not show accounts of similar intentions among interviewees, and therefore it is hard to say whether they have made it to the end of the fourth phase. Interestingly, one finding shows that bonuses subscribers had acquired from referrals bound them to use the same service, which could indicate that financial bonds at this phase are more efficient to retain subscribers.

When interpreting the findings of the study, we set out to look at the implicit linkages between social bonds, brand communities, and Millennials' loyalty, all in the context of the car subscription model.

First, we came to understand that brand communities help new consumers build a cognitive loyalty, (i.e., a preference for one subscription service based on information about it), which is considered a very shallow level of loyalty. Brand communities contain many information shared by knowledgeable and loyal consumers of a subscription service. They are, therefore, the place where new consumers get support from more experienced consumers of a subscription service. Moreover, brand communities are the place where new and older consumers can form social bonds, express themselves freely, and feel understood by like-minded individuals in the same brand community. In all these different ways, brand communities help consumers build cognitive loyalty, which is primarily based on learning more about the service. When consumers reach the transition point at the end of the cognitive phase, they refer to their own experiences and level of satisfaction to make the jump to the next phase. In the context of car subscriptions, this occurs when a new subscriber decides to renew their subscription with the service provider. As the consumer accumulates a good number of satisfactory experiences, their loyalty evolves to further phases. However, brand communities (e.g., the brand community of the service being used, brand communities on car subscriptions, brand communities on car brands), are not involved in the process of increasing subscribers' loyalty beyond the phase of cognitive loyalty.

Second, one of the most prominent elements that arise from the analysis is trust. Trust is a decisive enabler of brand communities. It is a feeling that a new consumer (i.e., consumers who are still learning about a brand, and at the beginning of the cognition phase) needs to feel when they get in contact with a brand community for the first time. As shown earlier, this study helps us understand that trust is a consequence of social bonding. Recurrent and repetitive exchanges on social media, which are considered a form of social bonding, create trust between the parties of those exchanges. Once trust is established, the new consumer is more likely to believe what the opposite party in the exchange is advocating for. In other words, after new consumers socially bond with the members of a car subscription community and establish trust with the members, they consequently trust the community and the car subscription provider overall. This means that new consumers need to first trust community members and what is being exchanged within the community about the car brands and services. Therefore, we infer that brand communities can only be impactful and increase cognitive loyalty if they are trusted by new consumers. This discussion about trust and social bonds adds to the depth and richness of the knowledge that we gained on the way brand communities increase loyalty since it indicates that brand communities need to secure certain conditions, to accomplish cognitive loyalty.

6. Conclusion and contribution

This study aims to explore how brand communities and social bonds work to increase consumer loyalty in the context of social media. The research is developed in the background of the novel and promising industry of car subscriptions with the case of Care by Volvo. The study addresses the challenge that car subscription companies face in retaining Millennial customers and explores the possibilities of increasing Millennials' loyalty by utilising tools like brand communities and social bonds. The theoretical framework of this study is built on the linkage between loyalty, social bonds, and social media-based brand communities, which leads to the assumption that social media-based brand communities and social bonds have an impact on consumer loyalty. To proceed with this research, the explorative approach and qualitative methods (netnography and interview) have been used to collect data from several mainstream social media platforms. This research brings insight into social media strategies on how to handle customer loyalty which can be useful for companies within this industry.

After connecting and interpreting the results in light of the theoretical framework of this study, we come to explain how the findings and discussion answer the research question that states:

How can brand communities and social bonds be used to increase Millennials' customer loyalty in the car subscription business model? Evidently, we discovered that the true potential of brand communities does not reside in increasing customer loyalty within car subscriptions, but rather in retaining new customers long enough in the service, to form their own opinions and thoughts about a service. The moment consumers build their own experiences and gain enough knowledge about the service or car they are using, their loyalty becomes dependent on those experiences and opinions they have built instead of what the community around them says about the car or subscription service. However, while this helps us understand “if” brand communities increase loyalty within the boundaries of the cognition phase, this study enquires to explore “how” brand communities increase loyalty, even within the limits of the first phase. The way brand communities do that is by providing new consumers with enough information about a brand or product/service, to allow them to build a preference for it. Brand communities are a very good source of information for consumers who wish to know more about car subscriptions, different providers offering the service, and the range of cars available under a subscription. Moreover, this study helps us acknowledge the role of trust in enabling brand communities to increase cognitive loyalty. To conclude, the way social bonds can increase loyalty is by generating trust. Also, the way car subscription communities can increase loyalty is by supporting consumers and educating them about car subscription services, in a trustworthy way.

In addition to the conclusions that we draw from this explorative research, and which answer the research question, this study has several contributions to the body of research on loyalty, social bonds, social media marketing, and brand community management. First, an interesting thing we came to understand about loyalty in the context of car subscriptions is that there are different types of loyalty in interplay. The first one is loyalty to the car brand, the second is loyalty to the subscription service provider, and the third is loyalty to the car subscription model as a concept, or as a business model. Our findings have confirmed that people who subscribe to cars are less interested and less loyal to car brands and car models. Yet, they show greater interest and loyalty to car subscription services and the car subscription business model. Given that the study has limitations, the findings could not lead us to fully grasp whether Millennials are loyal to the specific service provider they are using or rather to the business model of car subscriptions as a whole. We speculate that it is rather the latter. Millennials are first and foremost loyal to the business model of car subscriptions, rather than the car subscription service itself. This can be for several reasons. Millennials dislike the commitment that

ownership naturally implicates. This is especially for the first half of the Millennial age group (i.e., between 26 and 34 years of age) who are still not capable of financing a car or are simply not ready to definitively settle down in one place. Moreover, by using car subscriptions, Millennials are challenging the idea of the unnecessary ownership of cars, which leads to cars being idly parked for 95% of their lifetime (Morris, 2016). Millennials are also challenging non-sustainable consumption by using car subscriptions since most car subscription providers have a fleet of electric cars, which are environment friendly, but more expensive. Luckily, the car subscription model allows Millennials to drive expensive cars for a fraction of the price. Furthermore, consumers might be inclined to subscribe to one provider on one day, but easily switch to another service that offers a better deal. Therefore, we speculate that Millennials are more loyal to the car subscription model as a whole, rather than a specific car subscription service. This calls for a sense of urgency among car subscription providers, including Volvo Cars, who still need to find creative and innovative ways to retain their consumers and increase their loyalty to their service. This study shows that social media-based brand communities and social bonds are one way to do so. This brings us to the second contribution of this study. The theoretical scope of this study integrates theoretical perspectives, which have not been seen in combination in previous literature, or previous qualitative studies. The results of this study propose that brand communities and social bonds formed on social media have the potential to create loyalty, and can be an innovative solution to tackle millennial consumers' churn within car subscriptions.

6.1. Limitations

The main limitation in this study has been time and this has mainly impacted the methodology of this study. Due to the short amount of time, we could not conduct enough interviews to reach saturation. Hence, we cannot use the answer to our research question and generate it for the whole target group. It was very time-consuming to find consumers who have tried car subscriptions, especially Care by Volvo since it is a fairly new phenomenon with not so many consumers at this moment. With the time frame at hand, we had to include a larger number of car retailers including third-party retailers, which was not initially the thought. We could also see that consumers who use third-party retailers differ in their answers from those who tried the subscription directly from the car manufacturer. When consumers use a subscription service from a third-party retailer it is hard to pinpoint what they are exactly loyal to. They are using the product of a car manufacturer but use the service from a subscription provider which could

be either the manufacturer directly (like Volvo) or a third-party (like Onto). It is thus difficult to determine what subscribers are precisely loyal to.

Another limitation regarding interviews has been GDPR. Volvo has, in their database, information about consumers who use Care by Volvo and if we were to receive this information in order to contact them it would have affected our research positively as it would only include Volvo's customers and not third-party retailers. But as mentioned we did not have time which was of the essence to receive this information.

During this research, we have realised that there are some cultural differences that lead to a difference in behaviour. For example, we have realised that British people are quite reserved and from the answers we have received in our interviews, social bonds on social media work differently for them than for the Americans who are perceived to be quite social and 'open'. This could impact our research as social bonds could perhaps be used differently for different cultures. Some respond more to this while some do not. We have included interviewees from all over the world which could affect the answers and if there are cultural differences between Sweden and those countries it would be hard to generate accurate answers from this study that fit the Swedish consumer.

6.2. Future research

As a future topic of research, we suggest that one could research a similar topic but instead of using social bonds they could investigate financial bonds and their effect on loyalty within car subscriptions. The reason for which we suggest this is because, we have noticed that price has been discussed and mentioned a lot, both in netnography and in interviews. In netnography, people have discussed the costs and price of car subscriptions quite frequently and in depth. Many have calculated and helped others calculate the cost of subscribing versus owning, hence, we see that it is a recurring topic. Interviewees have also mentioned that price is very important when deciding for which car subscription to try, but also to stick with. We have seen that one of the retailers (the third-party retailer Onto) uses price incentives as a strategy to attract and keep customers. This indicates to us that in this case, it is not only social bonds that are interesting and seemingly important but also financial bonds.

As we have mentioned previously in limitations, this study included people from all over the world. Another research could be conducted with only Swedish consumers, with an only focus

on Care by Volvo consumers. It could be interesting to see if there are differences in the case of social bond's affection and culture and how brand loyalty is perceived by a direct retailer. This could also be of bigger interest to Volvo per se, as they can generate, if saturation is reached, the results to their whole target group and plan their strategy accordingly. Furthermore, Millennials' might be Volvo's main target group, but they are not their only consumers. Hence, it would be interesting to investigate other generations and see how they are affected by social bonds or what helps increase their loyalty.

Future research can also be in the form of case studies that investigate specific brands that appear to have a very strong brand community and consumers who are generally known to be loyal (e.g., Tesla Motors, Apple). These case studies can try to check if there are any linkages between the brand communities of these brands, their social media presence, and their customer loyalty. Eventually, the results of such study cases can be useful to generate a strategy for companies that aim to increase their customers' loyalty. Finally, since this study concludes that brand communities must be trustworthy to increase loyalty, we suggest further research to explore what elements can make a brand community trustworthy, and consequently increase loyalty.

6.3. Managerial implications

The first practical implication suggested to Care by Volvo is to use brand communities on social media to attract and retain new customers who are still in the first phases of loyalty. The advantage of brand communities is that they are for the most part free, as they are on free platforms, and almost self-sufficient because people help each other. More experienced customers help new customers to answer their questions and support them emotionally and socially. New customers benefit from all the information they find in brand communities, and from the social bonds they create on social media while building their own opinion and attitude towards the service. Since brand communities are good for retaining new customers within the first phases of loyalty, Care by Volvo can use them instead of their current strategy, which consists of committing first-time subscribers to a preliminary three-month period. A pre-set commitment could confuse some subscribers as to whether they are "short-term leasing" the car or "subscribing" to the car. Also, it could scare away a big portion of prospect consumers, especially Millennials, who are not ready or open to pre-set commitments.

We also recommended that Care by Volvo prompt its community members to interact and create social bonds between them on social media, to increase trust between members. Trust between the company and its brand community has been shown to be important to increasing loyalty. One way to increase this is by showing the humans behind the business operations of the service, (e.g., CEO, marketing team, sales agents), in marketing material on social media making it more personal. This will help Care by Volvo form social bonds with its current subscribers, particularly millennial subscribers who use social media since they tend to trust brands that represent their personnel on social media.

Moreover, as we have seen that authenticity is very important for the consumers, we suggest that Care by Volvo keep authenticity in mind when designing marketing strategies and campaigns and encourage their community members to also be authentic with their posts, comments, and reviews. For a company, authenticity means being transparent with customers, even if the company does something wrong. As for community members, authenticity entails being transparent about the strengths and shortcomings of the car subscription. As a matter of fact, some community members have a reputation on social media to be very attached to the brand and dislike all other brands within the same industry. This animosity sometimes creates a sort of tribalism between brand communities, which negatively affects the trustworthiness and authenticity of the community, the members, and the brands. Therefore, we suggest that Care by Volvo should find ways to uphold the trustworthiness of its community and thus that of its brand.

On a different note, we noticed that the social media landscape differs between the platforms regarding the interaction preferences of users. Car subscribers or potential consumers prefer to use Twitter to receive news and directly contact companies (e.g. complain or ask for help), Facebook to find brand groups, Instagram to try new things due to ads, and LinkedIn to talk about the general business model. Care by Volvo could make marketing strategies for social media to strategically utilise the advantages of each different platform. We suggest that Care by Volvo actively engage in interaction with its consumers on Twitter, empower and manage the brand groups on Facebook, invest in Instagram ads to attract consumers, and shape its image as a pioneer in the car subscription market on LinkedIn. However, although there are distinctions between different social media platforms, Care by Volvo should make them interconnected to build a holistic brand community and deliver the same brand proposition.

Furthermore, as our study reveals that brand community and social bonds mainly have an impact on the cognitive phase of loyalty, in which car subscribers form cognitive preference of brand by comparing with other alternatives with given information, therefore, we advise Care by Volvo to highlight their unique selling point of the company in terms of the frequently discussed topics such as price and flexibility to strengthen the consumer positive cognition for Care by Volvo. Besides, it has also been seen in our study that financial elements are important to encourage consumers to stay with the company. The competitor Onto launched a referral discount campaign on Twitter and received great results. Likewise, we recommend Care by Volvo to try to combine social bonds with financial bonds in the context of social media to increase loyalty.

Last, from a more macro perspective, flexibility is the main reason for consumers to choose car subscriptions, which is a benefit for car subscribers but a problem for companies since it leads to losing control of users' loyalty. The solution to this could be to make the entry easy but to make it difficult to exit. Some interviewees recurrently mentioned that these are Tesla's and Apple's strategies. They are creating a strong exit barrier by including products and services that are interconnected. This creates a brand ecosystem that retains customers. When users get used to a particular ecosystem, it is hard for them to leave it due to the switching costs of all the interconnected services and products. Therefore, we recommend Care by Volvo try to create its own ecosystem by embedding external elements like user communities, car consultants, mobile applications, charging stations (for the electric cars), and car washing into the Care by Volvo system to lock the consumers into the car subscription.

7. References

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8. APPENDIX

8.1. Appendix 1-Interview guide

1. Background
Give a short description of yourself: name, occupation and location.
2. Car subscription related questions

- Are you currently subscribed to a car? If yes, with which company?
- Why do you use car subscriptions? **** What is your main reason?
- How long have you subscribed to a car? Why?
- Do you need to actively think about continuing the car subscription each month? How much (more or less) compared to other types of subscription?
- Where did you learn about car subscriptions? What have you heard about it?
- What do you think of your experience so far? Tell us things you like, dislike, surprises, things that you want to see more?
- What do you think about the price? Do you feel that you are getting what you pay for?
- What car brand do you have?
- What do you think about this brand? What have you heard about it?
- What do you think about the car model, its attributes? Tell us what you like and dislike about it.
- Do you have any intention to continue your subscription with this car brand? Why / Why not?
- Have you tried other car brands during your car subscription? Why? Why not?
- Is there any car brand that you prefer compared to the one you have now? Why? Why not?

If yes:

- Where did you hear about this brand?
- Did you have any interaction with this brand before, have you used their cars or other products before?
- What was your experience during these interactions?
- Do you plan on trying their car subscription (*or a subscription with this car*) ? Why? Why not?

Back to the car brand you have now:

- Was the brand the main reason why you chose this subscription plan or was it the other way around?
- Have you recommended this service to others? Why/why not? Would you?

3. Social media, social bond, brand community related questions

- What social media do you use? What platforms? - Why do you use these platforms?
- What do you use social media for in general? Describe in more detail your activity on social media: consuming content, contributing to content, or creating it.
- What are the benefits that you derive from social media?
- How do you connect with people on social media?
- Do you feel like you can bond with people on social media? If yes, at what point/stage in your communication with other people that you feel like you have bonded with them. Why this stage?
- How do you feel after creating these bonds with others?
- How do you connect with brands/companies on social media?
- Do you feel like you can bond with companies/brands on social media? At what point/stage in your communication with a brand/company that you feel like you have bonded with them. Why?
- How do you feel after creating these bonds with the company/brand?
- Have you ever spoken/or communicated in favour of a brand in any way, on social media? Like recommendations? Positive comments? Shares? *** What reactions did you receive? Comments etc?

- Have you ever tried a product or service that social media has introduced you to? (Ex: social media ads, influencers etc.) How often has this happened that social media introduces you to new products or services?
- Do you usually check recommendations or reviews online before trying a new product or service? Why/ Why not?
- Has this ever influenced your purchasing? Why/ Why not?
- Do you trust reviews from other people on social media? Why/ Why not?
- Do you trust posts from companies/brands on social media? Why/ Why not?
- What would it take for you to trust a brand/company, what do they have to do to gain your trust?
- How would you define a brand community, in general? Do you identify yourself as being a part of a brand community? Why/ Why not?

If yes

- Which brand communities are you part of?

- What are the benefits that you derive from brand communities?
- Do you think that being part of a brand community affects your perception of a brand? If yes, in what ways? If no, why not?
- Would you trust the opinion more from people within the same brand community as you compared to the ones who are not? Why/ Why not?

4. Loyalty related questions

- Have you used social media to read about car subscriptions? If yes, what have you read? If no, why not?
- Have you participated in discussions about car subscriptions online? What were the discussions about? If not, why?
- Would you be able to trust a car subscription company based on what they post on social media? Why/Why not?
- Would you be able to trust a car brand if many people on social media share positive things about it? Why/Why not?
- If many people on social media share positive things about a car brand, Would you be willing to try a car brand in the form of a subscription? Why/Why not?
- Do you think you are more likely to stick with the same car brand because the community you belong to likes and uses the same car brand? Why/Why not?
- Do you think you are more likely to stick with a car subscription because the community you belong to likes and uses car subscriptions? Why/Why not?
- Do you feel that if your car subscription provider answers your requests and questions on social media:
 - Does it make you like the service more (loyalty)?
 - Would this lead you to continue your subscription with them?
 - Would it lead you to recommend this service to others? Why?
 - Does it make you like the car brand you are using more (loyalty)? How so?
 - Would this lead you to continue using this car brand longer?
 - Would it lead you to recommend this car brand to others? Why?

Only if you are part of a car brand community:

- Do you feel that if the community you belong to answers your questions and requests on car subscription issues, your liking and preference of (loyalty to) the brand will

increase? Why/ Why not? What about your liking and preference to the car subscription service itself?

Only if you are subscribing with a manufacturers' subscription program (e.g., Care by Volvo):

- What would be needed for you to continue with this service of a particular brand? What would it take for you to recommend the car subscription service of a brand to other people?
- If you had a deep trust in a car brand, and were satisfied with your subscription using it, would you still subscribe to other car brands? Why/ Why not?
- If you had a deep trust in a car brand, but are unsatisfied with the subscription service, what would you do?
- How do you understand loyalty? When you are loyal to a brand, what do you do?
- Would you say that you are loyal to a car brand now or a car subscription now? Which one and why?

5. Conclusion questions

- Do you have any suggestions or recommendations for how brands/companies should communicate with their consumers on social media if they wish to increase trust and loyalty?
- Do you think that car subscriptions will become more popular in the future? Why/ Why not?

8.2. Appendix 2- Secondary constructs

The future of car subscriptions

The data shows how interviewees thought of the advantages of the car subscription model and the future development of the car subscription industry from a millennial consumer perspective. The interviewees compared car subscription with car ownership and stated that older generations are more likely to be attached and committed to one car brand or model and are more willing to keep a car for the long term. Differently, Millennials are more oriented toward flexibility and the ability to try more expensive cars for relatively cheap. These represent the same reasons why car subscriptions perfectly meet the interviewees' needs and expectations. Further, they also believed that car subscriptions will be a trend in the future.

Attitude toward car brands

Some interviewees expressed their opinions about specific car brands they have used before or are currently using. These attitudes were built on their experience driving the car, or what they have heard about the brand from friends, family, or online. For instance, Volvo cars are known to be very secure and safe, however, they are also thought of as more suitable for people who are about to retire, as explained by one of the interviewees.

Recommendations by interviewees

The interviewees shared their thoughts on how they think companies should build their brand communities and increase customer trust and loyalty toward the company. To build brand communities, the interviewees suggest that companies can use social media platforms that are tailored to host closed groups. As for building trust, interviewees stressed that companies need to ensure consistency between what they promote on social media and what they actually do and ensure authenticity and transparency in their social media marketing. The interviewees also recommended that customer support on social media helps them trust the company. This in turn leads to an increase in customer loyalty, since consumers feel cared for when their favourite subscription companies assist them.