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Crafting communities: A haven for escapism and well-being

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Abstract

This chapter focuses on a knitting group community that has been established within an independent local shop in the southside of Glasgow. Emerging from the rising popularity of crafting in the UK, this research explores what underpins the convergence of this knitting community. To do this, the chapter draws upon crafting literature, where craft has offered therapeutic space for wellbeing, as well as being an outlet for creativity. Adopting social constructivist methodology, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with twelve participants who attended the wool shops 'Knit and Natter' group. Data were thematically analysed, which led to the development of a conceptual framework that recognised community engagement formation that offered escapism from the stresses of everyday life. The participants reported the importance of a sense of belonging and shared interest through knitting, as well as improvements on their wellbeing. While the shop offered a central hub for connectivity, it was the group members that provided support for skill development and for life experiences. The chapter ends with recommendations on how this knowledge can contribute to advancing the sustainable fashion agenda, through carving out value and meaning from production and investment in community commodity creation.

Key Words: Crafting; knitting; creativity; community; wellbeing; sustainability; independent retailers

Introduction

Crafting, and in particular knitting, is increasing becoming a more popular leisure activity, often as a form of escapism from busy lifeworlds (Mintel, 2018). Crafting communities can provide solace along with a sense of belonging and purpose (Fournier and Lee, 2009), underpinned by a system of values that include techniques and traditions (Hofstede, 1980). This was evident in the Arts and Crafts movement of around 1880-1920, where art, poetry and literature contributed to expressions of nature, creativity and society, offering a sense of place within a distinctive period; indeed, this was a fertile time for the development of art, design and literature, with many noteworthy works (Gibson, 2019). However, with the growth of MNOs, inexpensive commodities and mass production, there has been a shift away from craft movements and the literature has reported upon the loss of crafting skills over the last few decades (Ritch, 2020; Gibson, 2019). Therefore, the resurgence of new crafting movements requires further exploration, including the social and emotional impact of belonging to a crafting community, and the positive purposeful effects it can provide (Gibson, 2019). Consequently, the aim of this chapter is to explore how is crafting is experienced within a community setting and how this is made meaningful for those involved, as well as how creativity can provide pleasure and enable shared emotional connections. To support this aim, five research questions have been formulated:

1. What underpins the sense of community experienced within a crafting group?
2. What social values are enhanced through community engagement?
3. What are the benefits of creative social engagement?
4. How does crafting inform notions of 'something' and how does this translate into value?
5. What are the benefits of creative social engagement?

The chapter is structured as follows: firstly, the literature around the growth of crafting will be reviewed after which Ritzer's theory of globalisation/glocalisation will be presented. To better understand the importance of community, Kozinet's (2014) Social Brand Engagement theory will be utilised. Kozinet's (2014) postulated that there are four cornerstones to involving consumers: Create; Care; Communicate; and Commune. Although this derived from the purpose of creating online communities to encourage brand engagement and forming relationships, our data exhibited similar aspects of emotion, empathy along with the sharing of stories and experiences that led to a similar sense of belonging that was captured within Kozinet's (2014) framework. The chapter will conclude with implications for community engagement and the development of businesses and social enterprises, as well as how this model can contribute to a more sustainable future.

Background context

It is important to note that during the global pandemic caused by Covid-19, when the UK governments imposed a lockdown on societal activities, including work, sales in crafting materials grew (Wood, 2020; Brayshaw, 2020). However, our research was gathered in

February 2020, just before the first case of coronavirus was identified in the UK, amid reports that crafting was becoming an increasingly popular leisure activity (Luckman, 2018; Mintel, 2018). While reports indicate a loss of crafting skills over the last few decades (Ritch, 2020; Gibson, 2019), most likely due to the decreasing price points of supermarket and low-cost fashion retailers (Ritch and Brownlie, 2016), the recent popularity of crafting has been made more accessible with access to materials and practical advice through online retailers and tutorials (Lewis, 2011). The resurgence is also represented in the growth of both offline and online knitting communities (Lewis, 2011). Crafting covers a number of techniques and practices of manipulating materials by hand (Riley, Corkhill and Morris, 2013), as a form of expression, creativity and culture. While typically crafting covers spinning, weaving, tapestry, quilting, crocheting and sewing, the focus of this chapter is knitting as a leisure activity. The history of knitting practice dates back to Egyptian times, but evidence of knitting has been found around the globe from 3000-5000AD (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2021a). In the UK, unique regional knitting skills are recognised (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2021b), and in particular Scotland has a rich heritage of textiles, both weaving and knitting. Harris tweed, governed by an Act of Parliament, is still woven in the Outer Hebrides by crofters in their homes, using traditional methods, and is still used to produce luxury fashion (Harris Tweed Authority, ND). The Scottish islands of Orkney and Shetland, where the Fair Isle is located, also have a rich heritage of knitting, specifically the Fair Isle style which has strong influence from Scandinavia (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2021b). While knitting was historically used as a form of income, it is now conceptualised as a leisure activity. Whilst it is well documented that creative crafting contributes to wellbeing (Pöllänen, 2015), little attention has been paid to knitting communities (Riley et al., 2013), particularly from a marketing perspective. However, the resurgence of the popularity of knitting after decades of decline provides opportunity for commerce and teaching knitting skills and techniques. Consequently, this research explores how consumers engage with knitting as a means to experiment with creativity and find a sense of community.

Crafting

Many occupations inhibit monotonous processes, and the activity of knitting can provide an outlet for creativity as well as honing skills (Luckman, 2018; Lewis, 2011). Bramall (2014) suggests that the rise of crafting was in response to austerity measures that were a key feature of the UK Conservative government's response to the economic crisis of 2008. However, the notion of austerity nostalgia that romanticises war time resilience is, states Bramall (2014), a luxury afforded by the middle class, as opposed to those experiencing hardship and living in poverty. Bramall (2014) links crafting as maintaining links to skills from the past, and this is also acknowledged within the sustainability movement, again popularised by middle class consumers who can afford the higher price points of sustainably produced goods (Ritch and Brownlie, 2016). Bramall (2014) aligns the popularity of crafting with the rise of reality TV programmes that feature craft activities, such as: *Bake Off*; *The Great British Sewing Bee*; and the *Pottery Throwdown*, which have filtered into mainstream society and resulted in more people '*having a go*' (Lewis, 2011). Crafting falls within the conceptualisation of 'slow fashion' (Fletcher, 2008), where value is constructed through production and aesthetic, and is

an antithesis to the fast-paced consumption-disposal model of fast-fashion; crafted commodities, especially when there is a link to the ‘maker’, tend to be retained for longer and not subjected to evolving trends.

Crafting as a means for therapy was reported during both World Wars, when returning soldiers experiencing trauma benefited from crafting activities as a diversion to pain as well as for the development of new skills (Luckman, 2018). Healing properties were also identified by Riley et al. (2013), who carried out an online survey in English speaking countries and found that their participants knitted for relaxation, stress relief and creativity, fostering a sense of calmness and increased levels of happiness. Additionally, Riley et al. (2013) found that more frequent knitting increased cognitive functioning and similar emotions were also reported by Turney (2009). Riley et al. (2013) and Katz-Frieberg (2010) concluded that knitting provided therapeutic qualities that contributed to wellbeing and quality of life. Similarly, Pöllänen (2015) investigated the experience of Finnish knitters, who expressed that along with enhanced wellbeing, they also felt empowerment and achievement, emerging from the therapeutic process of rhythmic repetitive crafting. The flow of the activity slowed rambling thoughts to enable reflection and a clearer process of thinking (Pöllänen, 2015). This was experienced within the ‘*physical tactile engagement*’ with materials to produce a tangible object which could be admired by others (Riley et al., 2013: 52; Lewis, 2011).

Riley et al. (2013) and Potter (2017) also found that knitting communities were appreciated as a means to connect with others in social spaces: spanning demographic differences, knitters enjoyed the socialisation offered by collective pleasure in the craft; sharing information on skills evolved to sharing life stories, enabling mutual acceptance without a specific focus. This sense of belonging and social inclusion also enhanced wellbeing, whether the community was physical or online (Riley et al., 2013; Lewis, 2011). Other research has also reported that knitting helps manage mental health, and that the activities meditation qualities aids relaxation (Hickie and Randels, 2015), reduces depression (Culph, Wilson, Cordier, and Stancliffe, 2015), anxiety (Riley et al., 2013) and can relieve workplace stress (Anderson and Gustavson, 2016). Luckman (2018) and Pöllänen (2015) suggest that the benefits of knitting can be experienced within both solitary and collective activities, as found in research that investigated the role in crafting for post-recovery after the devastating earthquake in Christchurch (Tudor, Maidment, Campbell and Whittaker, 2015).

While craft activities are often considered an antithesis to mass production and homogenisation (Ritch, 2015), this can also be considered as expressing social and political value. For example, in response to social issues, there may be a call for knitters to craft for a sense of purpose. One social example would be the call for knitters by the Penguin Foundation, to create small jumpers that would keep penguins who were caught in oil spills warm (Brown, 2014). In a political sense, ‘yarn bombing’ the act of covering social spaces and public objects (trees, lamp posts, pillars, post boxes, etc.) with knitted or crochet creations to raise attention for specific issues (see Image 1). McGovern (2014a) found that those who participated in this phenomenon did so as an act of rebellion and protest, often in support of climate change issues (Hawkins, 2015). This again harks back to war efforts, and particularly World War 1, when civilians were

encouraged to knit socks, balaclavas and mittens for soldiers, an act illustrating care, support and patriotism through ‘knitting for a cause’ (Tynan, 2014). McGovern (2014b) suggests that this act of ‘craftivism’ provides a means to shine a light on social and political issues, such as violence against women – which is of particular relevance given that knitting is an activity historically carried out mainly by women (Tynan, 2014), and more recent research suggests that still holds true (Riley et al., 2013). In 2017, a series of ‘Women’s Marches’ across the USA expressed concern that the Trump administration were reversing women’s right to access reproductive care and many (both male and female) protesters wore pink knitted ‘pussy’ hats as a statement that referred to having ownership of their bodies, and to reflect the terminology that Trump had used to describe female bodies (Bain, 2017). Knitting patterns for the pussy hats were shared widely on the internet, and an example of one can be found in Image 2. However, craftivism also played a role in maintaining morale during the pandemic, as illustrated in Image 1 below when a Leither (a resident of Leith, Edinburgh) knitted a hat for a post box, and posted a message thanking the local post service for providing good customer service throughout the lockdown (STV News, 2021). In this sense, knitting is used as a means to support others by showing care for improving environmental conditions and by harnessing traditional skills to make statements relevant to current society. What was considered as ‘women’s work’ has been given political leverage, making a statement about what is relevant in current society. This is also reflected in crafting providing escapism from the problems experienced by society.

Image 1: Yarn bombing a message to the local post service on a post box in Leith



Photograph by Millie Ashworth-Ritch

Image 2: Knitted 'pussy' hat, a protest against the Trump administration and the removal of reproductive health care



Photograph by: Ecoworldreactor.blogspot.com

Theory of Globalised Production

The democratisation of fashion has led to the homogenisation of high street styles as fashion retailers compete on speed to market and low pricing (Ritch, 2015). While the limitations of machines replacing cottage industries have been debated since the Industrial Revolution (mid-1800s), when William Morris initiated the Arts and Crafts Movement in response to manufactured aesthetics (Gibson, 2019), globalised industrialisation is now embedded into the world's economy. Consequently, the standardisation of global trends infiltrates cultural nuances, with multi-national organisations (MNOs) dominating the global marketplace. The value of mass production equates to reducing manufacturing costs to maximise profit, as heralded by Levitt the 'prophet of globalisation'. He argued that the standardisation of global manufacturing and retailing was cost effective and would enhance global competition (Levitt, 1983): as markets became saturated, new markets would open up new opportunities (Rajogopal, 2009).

However, along with dictating style, underpinned by cost cutting measures that compromise sustainability, there is a loss of the sense of place (Ritzer, 2003) as well as craftsmanship and humanity (Gibson, 2019) within mainstream markets. Critics argue that standardisation is a form of imperialism that leads to global homogeneity, dilute of cultural diversity (Ritzer, 2003:194; Hirsh, 2017). On one side of the argument, globalisation provides the free movement of people, money, ideas and products (Levitt, 1983); globalised markets offer consumers the ability to purchase cultural products out with the country of origin. However, within standardisation is the loss of a sense of place, techniques and tradition (Hofstede, 1980), with

the offering being the same from western to eastern countries and this has corroded aspects of culture. Ritzer (2003) refers to this imposition of Westernisation on other countries and cultures, as globalisation - a means to exert power, influence and to grow profits. He argues that globalisation profiteers from selling '*nothing*', commodities devoid of any sense of place or humanity and that can be easily replicated and reproduced. In contrast globalisation has a sense of origin, it is '*something*' fashioned in a certain place using specific techniques and materials that provide value and meaning. This could be related to an aspect of production which may, for example, be reflective of culture and heritage. In this sense, the commodity is representative of unique emotive attributes that stimulate memory and cannot be replicated or reproduced.

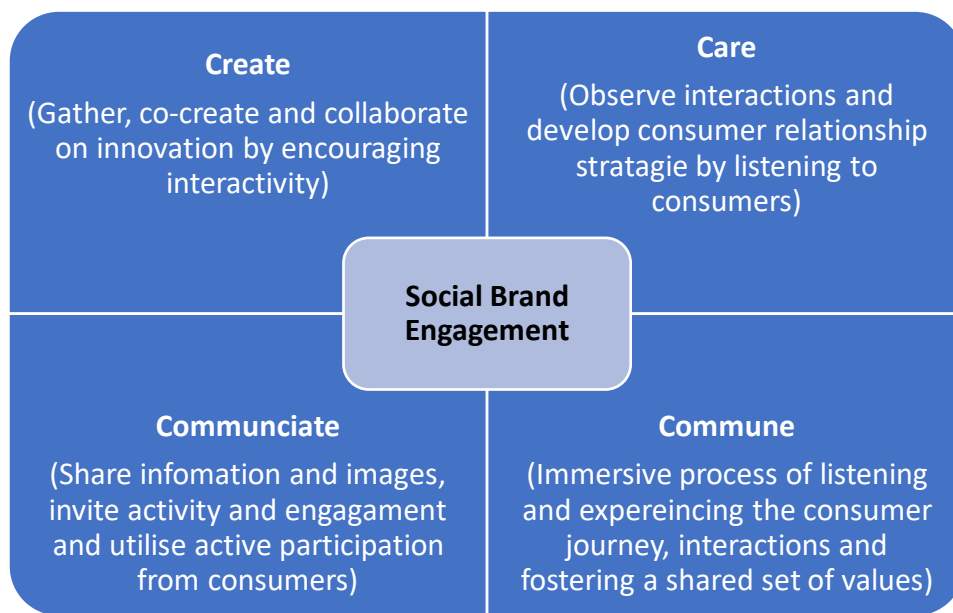
These contrasting positions can be characterised as the production of fast-fashion commodities for the sake of consumption (and profit) versus the organic creation of commodities through the manipulation of materials using skill and experimentation (Gibson, 2019). Ritzer's (2003) theory was considered relevant to this chapter, as crafting organically creates and constructs commodities (Gibson, 2019), as opposed to the manufactured aesthetics that dominate UK high street retailers. For example, this research was carried out in an independent knitting shop located in Glasgow's South Side and explores the social and emotional experience of belonging to a crafting community and the positive purposeful effects it can provide (Gibson, 2019). Whilst aspects of community may be replicated, within and out with the UK, the experiences reported in this chapter are idiographic and dependent on the interactions of the social actors (the sales staff in the shop and the customers), representing something experienced within social engagement, as discussed next.

Social brand engagement theory

Whilst Kozinet's (2014) developed this theoretical framework to understand how brands can create a sense of community online, the premise is underpinned by facilitating a social space for group of individuals sharing mutual interest in a brand (Dessart et al., 2015), or an ideology or activity, to provide a place to share interest and knowledge and community. This concept was also illustrated within the data collected from the customers of the independent knitting shop in Glasgow, illuminating upon the sense of community that was created in the shop space, as well as attending the knitting group ('Knit and Natter') and lessons. Community is formed through a self-selected group of actors who share a system of values, standards and representations (a culture) as well as recognising bonds of membership with each other and with the whole (Dessart et al., 2015). Through engaging with the community, the actors will embody and endorse values important to the cultural brand ethos (Fournier and Lee, 2009). Whilst the notion of brand is often applied to the global standardisation underpinning a MNO system of value, such as Apple representing creative innovative technology or Nike endorsement of diversity and empowerment, this is not necessarily the only conceptualisation of brand. Indeed, as will become relevant in the findings section, the construction of shared value and the sense of community was evident within independent knitting shop in Glasgow, in such a way that it epitomised the interactive expectations experienced within the independent wool shop brand. In this sense, the wool shop had created a unique brand offering that was

communicated to, and understood by, customers. Within the seminal work of brand experience by Pine and Gilmore (2011), expectations of commodity consumption are an extension of experiential brand construction. Molyneux et al. (2018) contributes with the suggestion that positive experiences can be crafted to encourage emotional and economic attachment. From this space, the construction of community encourages brand engagement to form a relationship and offers a fertile ground for meaningful connections between consumers regarding the brand (Kozinets, 2014). Kozinets (2014) described the components of the Social brand engagement theoretical framework within the quadrant below:

Figure 1: Kozinets's (2014) Social brand engagement theoretical framework



Whilst the theory offers marketers a framework to design activities that can develop a sense of community online between a brand and consumers, this chapter illuminates upon a lens where consumers physically experience community. This offers insights into how community can be constructed and fostered to encourage a sense of belonging. The findings will enhance marketing management, but more importantly, will offer insight into how to develop the concept of community, evoke shared values and replicate similar experiences that can advance the sustainable fashion agenda.

Methodology - a social constructivist exploration of community formation

As stated above, the social setting from which data was collected was an independent wool shop in Glasgow southside. Gibson (2019) argues that crafting exists within a social constructivist epistemology, as it is informed by environmental stimuli and tactic learning as a means to underpin experimentation and seeking inspiration. Social constructivism was considered relevant as group formation is idiographic and dependent of co-construction from the actors who participate (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). The sociality of this philosophy implicates that those involved within the community will form a group through seeking others with similar worldviews for interactivity and connectivity. Therefore, this research adopted

convenience sampling to engage with a knitting group organised by an independent wool shop. Whilst one of the research team was a member of the group (Marian), and invested in the community, this research is not immersive or ethnographic to examine group interactions (Moraes, Carrigan and Szmigin, 2012), rather it explores the accounts of individual members and their perceptions of belonging to the community. To set the scene, Marian describes where the knitting group meets and the knitting shop:

The knitting group itself is held in a local church hall as the shop itself is too small for everyone to fit inside. It would meet on the third Tuesday of every month at 7.30PM until roughly 9PM. It's open to anyone who wants to join, the details are posted to the shop's public Facebook page in advance of each meeting.

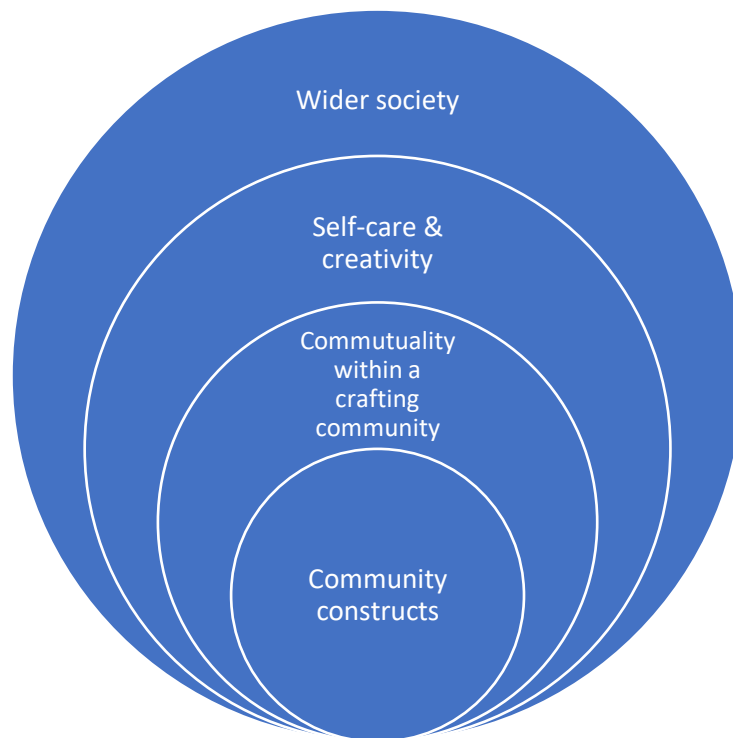
The shop is tiny. It has a large table in the window with half a dozen chairs around it where it's really common to find the owner helping someone with a pattern or wool or something. Beside that there's a large dresser with patterns/buttons/needles/measuring tapes etc. Then the rest of the small space is filled with cube shelving units filled to the brim with wool.

The classes that the shop holds are held in the shop itself. They keep the groups small so that the tutor can have the ability to interact with everyone and make sure they're all understanding what they are learning. The classes are held after closing time but if someone comes by during the class to shop, the owner allows them in.

During regular opening hours, it's really common to find the owner or one of her staff sitting at the table helping a customer to decipher a pattern or pick out the best wool for a project. I've also seen customers helping each other when they go in. I know that people go in just to catch up with the owner and they don't necessarily make a purchase. She makes everyone feel welcome to the point where a visit to the shop is definitely something to look forward to.

Semi-structured interviews were developed from reviewing the extant literature and conducted with twelve community members. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed before applying thematic analysis. Analysis involved identifying concurrent themes, examining each interview individually and then all interviews as a whole. Once this process was completed, a closer examination was carried out with the main themes and the conceptual framework below was developed.

Figure 2: Conceptual framework of the participants existential community experience



The figure illustrates that belonging to the community was central to the participants experience, through which a constructed set of values led to sense of ownership and a sense of belonging. Community constructs, underpinned by shared value and belonging was considered, by the participants, as directed by the shop owner and other staff; the established sentiment was appreciated by the group and set the tone for all interactions. This is similar to Kozinet's conceptualisation of '*commune*' as immersive and interactive, but with an established set of values that act as glue to direct social norms and behaviours. Following, communitality within the crafting community was important to the participants, they enjoyed being part of the group, sharing ideas and skills about knitting, evolving onto sharing life stories. It is important to note that the group were all female and of Caucasian ethnicity, aged between 20 and 70 years and were at different life stages: four were widowed; two had partners; six lived within a family setting; one was a student; and six were retired (see Table 1). Although they were all local to the area, this was a group that would have little interaction out with the knitting group setting. Yet, there was a sense of pride and a willingness to support one another, evident in how they provided praise for one another's' crafted works and supported new knitters. This is akin to Kozinet's '*communication*', sharing information, advice and ideas which was an active process of giving and receiving. Self and creativity was also important, and the wellbeing and mental health literature was evident in the participants discourse of self-care to manage stress and find space and time for oneself. This was especially true for those who were retired and widowed, where their own communities and social occasions were reducing. This theme is similar to Kozinet's '*create*' whereby the purpose of the group was to be actively involved in knitting. However, it was also evident that the participants were also carving out a space for self, where there were reduced demands asked of them and they were able to relax and enjoy their craft.

This leads into wider society of using their time productively to support others, within their locality as well as globally. The group contributed to charitable knitting requests, such as knitting blankets for Malawi refugees and knitting for premature babies in hospital. However, they also knitted gifts for friends and family, from which they gained much pleasure. Wider society was also reflected in an introspection of their role of supporting local independent retailers and the value of independent retailers in their locality and wider society. This is similar to Kozinet’s aspect of ‘care’, developing from the self-care provided by participating in the group, there was a recognition that collectively they could use their skills and practice to extend care and support others, which in turn increased the positive feelings of belonging to the group.

Table 1: Participant characteristics

Participant	Age	Life stage	Knitting experience	Dominant theme
1	70	Retired (Library Assistant)	Advanced	Atmosphere
2	40	Working (Lawyer)	Beginner	Socialising
3	50	Retired (Police Officer)	Advanced	Socialising
4	70	Retired (Teacher)	Advanced	Creativity
5	60	Retired (Teacher)	Intermediate	Creativity
6	70	Widowed	Advanced	Socialising
7	30	Working (Occupational Therapist)	Beginner	Socialising
8	50	Retired (Library Assistant)	Intermediate	Supporting independent businesses
9	50	Working (College tutor)	Beginner	Creativity
10	50	Volunteer (Charity fundraiser)	Advanced	Supporting independent businesses
11	70	Widowed	Advanced	Atmosphere
12	20	Student	Intermediate	Socialising

Findings

As stated, the four themes were developed from the analysis and recognised as aligning with Kozinet’s (2014) Social Brand Engagement theoretical framework of: Create; Care; Communicate; Commune. Each of the themes will now be discussed.

- Community constructs (atmosphere; shared values; belonging)
- Commutuality within a crafting community
- Self-care and creativity
- Wider society

Community constructs

The idea of community was linked socialising, however underpinning the collective meeting were subthemes of atmosphere, belonging and shared values (Figure 3). There was much recognition that community constructs were established by the shop owner and were atmospherically evident when entering the shop, along with participating in the knitting groups and classes. Some of the quotes that led to the development of the sub-themes supporting the

overarching main theme of community, belonging and shared value are presented in Table 2 below, along with a descriptive analysis.

Figure 3: Community constructs

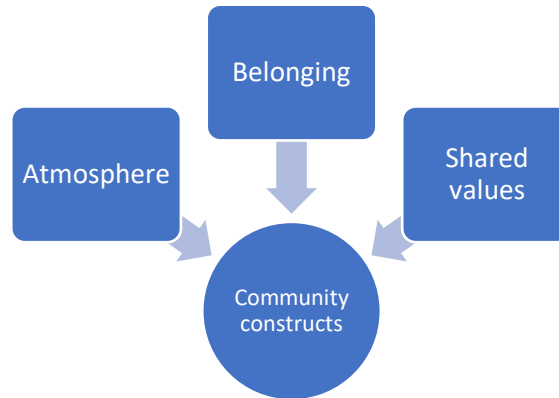


Table 2: Community: belonging and shared value

Sub theme	Quote
<i>Atmosphere</i>	<p><i>I often go into [the shop] just for a chat and she knows I'm not in to buy wool! I think that's because of the community [created]. (Participant-4)</i></p> <p><i>You can go in there and sit for as long as you'd like. I like that I can go in and touch the wool and flick through the pattern books without the pressure to buy something. And then she'll say: 'You've been in that long you could have had a cup of tea!'. (Participant-11)</i></p> <p><i>The 'Knit and Natter' [group] is quite nice, it makes it more than a shop, it's a place that you can go and meet people and socialise and share tips and ideas and things. [The shop owner] is very friendly and welcoming, you can walk in and ask questions, she's always willing to help you out. (Participant-7)</i></p> <p><i>Every time I go in, she'll [shop owner] greet me by name, ask how I am, ask after my family, ask how my projects are getting on. She's so welcoming. I feel like she's quite happy to let you have a wander without necessarily buying something. She's also really knowledgeable. I know that if I'm having problems with a pattern I can go in and ask her for help. She's also really good at helping you pick out wool and buttons. (Participant-12)</i></p>
<i>Shared values</i>	<p><i>It is a nice community that she has made. You can see that it's not put on and it's just a nice way for her business, to get other people to know each other. It's nice, it's friendships and connections to other people, and its learning about other people's lives as well as just their craft. It's not something that she had to do, so that's what it makes it really nice that she's done that. (Participant-3)</i></p> <p><i>It's a good natter! You're not going to see one person, it's nice to see the same faces, it's nice to see new faces too and invite them in. For me it's more a community thing than the knitting! It's nice to catch up then and you can have a chat about things other than knitting! It's nice to do something with my mum as well! (Participant-3)</i></p>
<i>Belonging</i>	<p><i>[I like] meeting people, being a part of something. There was another group I went to for patchwork and I stuck it for four months, but I just felt as if I just didn't fit in. (Participant-1)</i></p>

I like to go there because I feel [shop owner] knows me. You feel that you're known, I really like [the shop staff] and the people that I've met. It does give you a sense of belonging. (Participant-5)

I always feel part of the knitting group. I always feel part of the shop. (Participant-11)

You [feel] part of a family (Participant-12)

As illustrated in Table 2 above, the atmosphere when entering the independent wool shop was 'friendly and welcoming' (Participant-7) and this was noted by all the participants interviewed. The quotes also present a number of emotive concepts that contribute to the 'brand' (shop) experience. Again, drawing upon the quotes above, customers were greeted by name, families were asked after and the focus was not necessarily on sales, but being present in the space. This sculpts the notion that the shop is a hub for craft and community, aligning with Ritzer's (2003) sense of place, something made meaningful through shared values; in this case craftsmanship and humanity (Gibson, 2019) and an invitation to belong (Dessart et al., 2015). This was evident in going to the shop 'just for a chat' (Participant-4), sitting 'as long as you'd like' (Participant 11) and getting support and advice with materials and skills (Participants-7 and 11). Whilst sales are necessary to maintain profitability, it is evident that the welcoming atmosphere provided a social space for a community of individuals to commune and immerse themselves in their shared activity (Dessart et al., 2015).

The participants noted their comfort at feeling able to drop into the shop without feeling obliged to make a purchase, and while there becoming involved with helping other customers in the shop! This infers a strong feeling of belonging and investment in the shop, and the knitting community (Molyneux et al., 2018). Belonging is evident in the quotes, where the participants felt 'known' (Participant-5) and 'part of something' (Participant-1), that something being the shop and the 'Knit and Natter' knitting group (Participant-11), where the group felt at home within 'a family' (Participant-12). The purpose of the 'Knit and Natter' group was to encourage shared interest in knitting, and often included lessons in specific techniques. Each participant took along the knitting project that they were currently working on, and the knitting produced in those sessions was owned by the knitter, and was neither displayed in the store or for sale. Expressions of belonging were evident of experiencing positive emotions (Molyneux et al., 2018) and the participants noted that the shop owner had 'made' (Participant-3) and established an atmosphere, that was not only stimulated by mutual interest, but transcended warmth to welcome 'new faces' (Participant-3). This community construct was co-created (along with the shop staff) to become an environment of meaningful connectivity that was imbued with care, communing and communicating knowledge and advice around the craft, the cornerstones of Kozinet's (2014) conceptualisation of community. As Participant 2 expressed: 'people want to mix together and [the shop] facilitates that', and Participant-10 stated: 'The knit and Natter [group], that's when you get to see everybody, and if the wool shop wasn't there, that wouldn't be there'. This sentiment of creating a reciprocal community was recognised in the quotes above, as well as the literature (Fournier and Lee, 2009). The goodwill established by the owner filtered throughout the atmosphere and interactivities, setting shared values and commutuality into the core of the community.

Communitality within a crafting community

As discussed in the last section, the community was constructed within an atmosphere of shared value and a sense of belonging at the core; surrounding this were aspects of socialising and collectively enjoying their craft, leading to commutuality, as presented in Figure 4 below. Whilst it was recognised that the participants were involved within other social spheres and that they often knitted on their own or in other groups – the community established around the local wool shop was unique due to the warm atmosphere established by the owner that encouraged belonging (Figure 4). Example quotes that led to this theme can be found in Table 3.

Figure 4: The space for commutuality

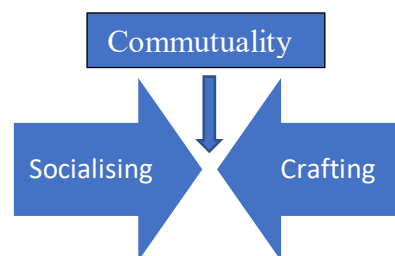


Table 3: Commutuality within a shared interested community

Sub theme	Quote
<i>Socialising</i>	<i>You meet other people, that desire in humans to interact. [which] we're kind of being robbed of with the rise of social media. [There are a] variety of demographics and psychographics: it's a self-selecting group. (Participant-2)</i>
	<i>I like the variety of people, younger people and people that have totally different opinions. Occasionally we talk about the issues of the day, but most of the time it's a laugh. I feel like other people want you to enjoy yourself, you can feel that in the group. (Participant-4)</i>
	<i>It's nice seeing the older women [who are now] friends! You'd be surprised how long some of them have been knitting, some [are] new as well. (Participant-11)</i>
<i>Shared interest</i>	<i>I think it's nice to know that there are people out there who have that common interest, I think it bonds you. (Participant-5)</i>
	<i>It's good to interact [especially] with people who are into the same kind of crafts. (Participant-3)</i>
	<i>It's just nice to be with other people who've got the same interests and hobbies. (Participant-10)</i>
<i>Communitality</i>	<i>The Knit2gether is the social aspect and I quite like the fact that other people can admire what I do. Because I live alone, I've got nobody to show my work to. And although I'm an experienced knitter, there's some things I've learned [to do] differently (Participant-3)</i>

I like the socialising part of it, but I also love to see what people are doing. That [is] very encouraging. You think, “Oh yeah, I could do that”. You become inspired by them. (Participant-6)

I like showing off my work because I don't have anyone to show it to. If I say to someone in the family “look at that” they go “oh yes, that's nice mother”, but they don't knit or sew, they don't know what's gone into that (Participant-4)

As evidenced in Table 3 above, the community were drawn to this social space to share their interest in the activity. This is expressed in quotes of finding kindred others who are ‘*into the same kind of crafts*’ (Participant-3) and share a ‘*common interest*’ (Participant-5) of the ‘*same interests and hobbies*’ (Participant-10). Also evident is the desire to socialise within this shared interest sphere (Potter, 2017; Fournier and Lee, 2009), with others who appreciate the craft and skills required (Potter, 2017; Riley et al., 2013; Hofstede, 1980). As expressed in the quotes, and the literature, the group were self-selected, choosing to attend because of their mutual interest, not only in knitting, but also because of the atmosphere created by the shop owner – a brand (as an independent trader) in which they wanted to engage. The values instigated through the shop, as a selling space and an involving ideology, were embodied one by all the actors. Interesting also is that this self-selected group spanned demographic characteristics, as noted by Participants 2 and 11; they were not bound by age or life-stage; rather the group was diverse in their backgrounds and reasons for attending, and this was appreciated by all. This desire to commune and connect – to be ‘*interactive*’ (Participant-2) and to want the event to be ‘*enjoyable*’ (Participant-4) - was evident in the quotes. As Participant-4 elaborates:

People who go to these groups, they are all the same. They want to be friendly and that's what you go for. We go to be happy, with each other, and to help other people to be happy. (Participant-4)

The friendliness and pleasure gained was heightened by their shared interest in knitting; the ability to ‘*show off*’ (Participant-4) their creations, to receive ‘*admiration*’ (Participant-3), advice and to provide ‘*encouragement*’ and ‘*inspiration*’ (Participant-6) for developing their craft was also expressed in the quotes. Riley et al. (2013) noted that pleasure in knitting was also obtained from others appreciating the skill of organic creations constructed through crafting. The ability to manipulate material using creative skills is also an antithesis to a monotonised workplaces (Luckman, 2018; Lewis, 2011) as well as a homogenised marketplace (Ritzer, 2003). Each creation was unique, evolving in partnership with the shop owner and the group through the sharing of skills and knowledge (Luckman, 2018; Bramall, 2014; Lewis, 2011). Discussions around their projects helped shape the future of new creations and encouraged those who were less skilled to be ambitious with developing their skillset, as expressed by Participant-7:

You can pick up tips, [some] people [have] a lot of experience. There was one lady who had knitted baby cardigans for the show and tell, she'd knitted them in red with cables. She [said] that she knits the ribbons down the front to put the buttons on and she doesn't exactly follow the pattern. And I thought that's the sort of thing that you only gain with

experience. She's sharing it with everyone. It's nice to do the show and tell to see what other people are doing. (Participant-7)

Intrinsic to the emotive connectivity and shared experience within the group, is the focus on the knitting that the participants created. The inclusion of a 'show and tell' section encourages the 'sharing' of practice, skills and experiences, one that Participant-7 clearly found useful. As knitting is a skill that is no longer commonplace in households, or a skill passed through generations (Ritch, 2020; Gibson, 2019), it means that new generations have to seek experience from elsewhere. This is an aspect that the group can cater for, bringing together those new to knitting and those more experienced, with benefits for both. Lewis (2011) noted the increased popularity of online and offline knitting tutorials, and the 'Knit and Natter' group was a commercial activity established by the shop owner to encourage the creation of a knitting community— epitomising Ritzer's (2003) something of value. The sharing of skills and experiences bonded the group, offering an emotional attachment to participation that emerged from meaningful connections. However, the ethos of this community emerged from the collegial setting, not necessarily as a desire or platform for selling – brand value was experience through belonging, acceptance and shared interest, which Pine and Gilmore (2011) assert is an extension of experiential brand construction. Of course, it must be acknowledged that the knitting group is a commercial exercise, one which drew attention to the shop and the products sold and yet this was not the sole purpose of the group: it was the emotive experience that bound the group together and ensured that, collectively, they wanted to support the local wool shop – they had a shared interest in the success and future of the shop as a place to commune and consume. One reason for this was the wellbeing experienced from participating in the knitting group.

Creativity and self-care

Research by both Riley et al. (2013) and Pöllänen (2015) introduced the notion that knitting improved wellbeing, and the literature indicates that crafting has been used for healing and therapy since World War 1 (Luckman, 2018), and more recently to help support communities in Christchurch after the devastating impact of the Earthquake in 2011 (Tudor et al., 2015). The therapeutic attributes of individual and collective creativity were experienced by our participants also, as expressed in Table 4 below, along with how being part of the knitting community that was forged out of commutuality enabled creativity and 'self-care', as presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Community and commutuality



Table 4: Creativity and self-care

Sub theme	Quote
Creativity	<i>It's very therapeutic, it helps me to relax. (Participant-5)</i>
	<i>It's very therapeutic at night. (Participant-6)</i>
	<i>I find it very relaxing. It's a nice activity to do that you can just focus solely on and it also means that you can make some nice things that you can either wear yourself or give as gifts to other people. (Participant-7)</i>
	<i>It's nice to relax for a couple of hours with my knitting. (Participant-9)</i>
Self-care	<i>It's very therapeutic. It's my quiet place, my getaway. (Participant-10)</i>
	<i>I had four very good friends and unfortunately three of them have passed away. I thought I've got to this age and I'm having to find new things to do and new people to meet. I thought [I would try] knitting groups and they're good fun! Especially if you're retired, [being part of] the community gives you something to do. (Participant-1)</i>
	<i>I like meeting different people, I live alone now because I was widowed 14 years ago. It's not that I don't see people, I've got the family and I've got whole lot of other groups and friends, but because I am interested in [knitting], my daughter and I go together. Before it was her friends and my friends, but now we have mutual friends. (Participant-4)</i>
	<i>I'm on my own now, it's nice [to] go out and meet people. Him and I did everything. So, when he died, I had to make a new life for myself and make new friends. One way is joining these groups and that helped me tremendously. I just enjoy going. It gives you an incentive to go out and it always cheers you up because you always get a laugh. (Participant-7)</i>

In belonging to the group, it could be argued that the main purpose of the group emerged from their desire to be creative and progress their knitting skills; this became a shared activity as projects were discussed and new ideas were generated from group interactions, benefiting from different levels of experience and knowledge. As knitting is a niche skill, the group offered a bespoke synergy with interested others. This could be considered as creativity providing self-care, given that so many of the participants (5, 6, and 10) found knitting 'therapeutic', as well as 'relaxing' (Participants-5, 7 and 9), as was indicated in the literature

(Hickie and Randels, 2015; Culph et al., 2015; Pöllänen, 2015; Riley et al., 2013). Participant-10 expands by stating knitting is her ‘*getaway*’, providing a ‘*quiet place*’. Caring was also experienced, moving beyond knitting projects to the welfare of the group, creating a sense of purpose and belonging. As group conversations moved beyond the craft itself to personal reflections of family, friends and work colleagues, feelings of obligation were reduced, along with a sense of escapism. Communication enabled sociability, responding to different needs within the group. For example, some members were retired or widowed and belonging to the group offered contact with others, for others it was an opportunity to have indulgent self-focused time away from demanding families. In particular four of the participants, (presented in three quotes in Table 4, Row 2) indicated that they were widowed or has lost close friends, and this had left a space in their lifeworlds. In seeking a social experience that was not overly demanding in terms of time and commitment, the knitting group offered a place to make new friends and have fun. Some of them noted in the interview that they had participated in other groups as well but had not experienced the welcoming and relaxing atmosphere that was evident in the local wool shop group, and they therefore had been hesitant to return. The sense of belonging fostered within the ‘Knit and Natter’ group, as well as the shop itself, provided them with an incentive to attend, to ‘*meet new people*’, have ‘*something to do*’ (Participant-1) and to be ‘*cheered up*’ (Participant-7). Collectively, communing bolstered the members sense of self – the focus on being creative, and the rhythm of the activity, helped manage anxieties in the outside world (Culph et al., 2015; Hickie and Randels, 2015), and this was of particular importance to Participant-12 who struggled with her mental health

It gives me a sense of purpose. I struggle with depression and knitting helps get rid of that feeling of helplessness that comes with depression. I find it calming and therapeutic. (Participant-12)

As well as experiencing calm and relaxation through crafting, Participant-12 finds that creating provides a sense of purpose. This is akin to the research by Pöllänen (2015) who found that knitting offered mindfulness and clarity. Culph et al. (2015) investigated whether Australian men who attended ‘Men’s Sheds’ (community spaces where woodwork and related crafting are intertwined with socialising). They found that the sense of purpose in sharing skills and forging new relationships not only reduced depression but increased feelings of pride and achievement. While the men interviewed has previously experienced loss, through aging and other life related instances, belonging to the Men’s Shed community enhanced their sense of identity and purpose, and this was particularly relevant to those who were no longer working. Identity and purpose were also identified in our knitting group community: for those who were retired were seeking belonging and usefulness and the younger members who were seeking knowledge and experience of skills. It is here that the value of intertwining community and commerciality becomes evident within local areas, under the ethos of a brand that reaches out to residents. The loss of independent traders on local high streets has often been criticised as limiting the formation of local communities, and this was expressed by the participants and will be discussed next.

Wider society

As presented above, the sense of community within the knitting group, experienced within the atmosphere of being in the space, as well as the sense of belonging and shared interest, was felt to be unique to supporting a local trader. The commutuality that resulted in finding solace and self-care within the community contributed to goodwill for wider society. While the group often focused their attentions to collectively knitting for a sense of purpose, working together on charity projects, such as blanket's for Malawi refugees and knitting for premature babies in hospital (Brown, 2014), this goodwill was not positioned as being politically driven, as noted by McGovern (2014a, b) and Hawkins (2015). However, the participants allegiance for the local wool shop as a local trader influenced their rebellion against mass-market homogenisation and multi-national retailers. Goodwill extended to caring about the facilities that enriched local communities and there was a strong opinion that local traders were a key aspect of this. For example, Participant-5 states that:

The locality is richer for it, more attractive. The shops have all become the same. I like to go to places where there are wee shops and places of interest that are different, rather than the [usual] line of shops. (Participant-5)

Participant-5 notes that local traders add variety to the high street, through being visually more attractive and selling products that are unique, offering novelty and value attributes that are missing from homogenised multi-national retailers (Ritch 2020; Gibson, 2019). This notion of 'wee shops' being places of interest links with Ritzers (2003) globalisation/grocalisation theory that 'something', contrasting with 'nothing' standardised products that are devoid of cultural nuances and have no sense of place (Ritzer, 2003; Hofstede, 1980). Independent retailers selling bespoke products were relished by Participant-7, as giving 'something different' to the manufactured aesthetics available in most retailers (Gibson, 2019). She also expresses that independent shop owners 'know their stock, it's welcoming, they'll spend a bit of time with you' (Participant-7). This was evident in the first theme of community constructs, where the atmosphere created by the wool shop owner was 'welcoming', inviting interested others into the community. Another aspect was heightened by the wool shop owner's knowledge, around the stock that she had selected to sell within the shop, as well as her knitting experience of materials and skills. This adds value to a local trader, an assurance that the materials and related accessories, such as knitting needles, will be suitable for the crafting activity. Value extends to the shop being a place to revisit when experiencing difficulty with the wool and pattern and knowing that skills can be further developed through participation in the knitting group. Given the cost of knitting materials, this assurance that the project will be successful and developing a relationship with the wool shop encourages loyalty, as is evident in the quote below:

I've got a relationship with the shop and [I] feel welcome there. Also, it's local and I like to support local shops. (Participant-4)

This quote relates to community constructs, particularly belonging, as was discussed above. However, it also illuminates upon the participants having a vested interest in the future success

of shop and maintaining its place on their local high street. Participant-4 recognises that she, as a consumer, plays a role in the future of local shops, and therefore she intends to ‘support’ local traders with her patronage. Thriving local shops are important for wider social communities adding, as noted by Participant-5, diversity and interest, but also as being a place where the community in the locality can meet and support one another, increasing wellbeing. This was important to Participant- 11, who stated that she often met neighbours in the wool shop that she had previously not had any contact with – and now upon meeting them had ‘*a wee five-minute blether*’. Therefore, local shops serving the local community are important for developing neighbourly collegiately that broadens the wool shop community into wider society, as captured by Participant-2:

It’s good for people’s mental health. It’s good for local community spirit. It’s anti-commercialisation, capitalist. It allows people to not follow the brands, to do their own style and sell their own type of goods and encourages individuality. (Participant-2)

Relevance for theory and practice

This research advances theory on the building of consumer communities, through the lens of crafting, to examine how consumers engage, share and contribute to communities and what social values are gained from participation. Our data exhibited aspects of emotion and empathy, captured within the sharing of stories and experiences that led to the sense of belonging, which were akin to Kozinet’s (2014) Social Brand Engagement theory. Community was viewed through an immersive experience that filtered from the brand (independent trader) and encompassed all interactions from consumption to simply communing (Pine and Gilmore, 2011). The commutuality within the ‘Knit and Natter’ community was as much about wellbeing as it was related to crafting, as they sought to share knitting, skills and life experiences. The solace experienced in crafting, through the suspension of busy lifeworlds and work-related monotonous processes, enabled an outlet for creativity, which was particularly relevant during the pandemic and subsequent lockdown in 2020. Indeed, the number of craft orientated television programmes continued to rise during the pandemic, as enforced social distancing limited the production of other entertainment programming genres. Given that interest in crafting was growing prior to the global pandemic (Intel, 2018), and intensified whilst many were on furlough during the lockdown (Wood, 2020; Brayshaw, 2020), our research offers a timely insight into how independent retailers can co-create brand community through shared values and interactive crafting experiences.

The research will be of interest to marketing managers, as an illustration of how brand community can be fostered. It is here where opportunities for advancing the sustainable fashion agenda can be addressed. While this chapter examines how community was experienced by each actor individually, and collectively; the experience itself was made more meaningful because it was unique. The novelty of this uniqueness was due to the space and the interactivity of the actors, all of which were distinct to a particular space and time, but also directed ideographically – determined by the actors in the scene at each particular time. The shop was not only a selling space, but it encouraged engagement. This infers that the local wool shop

offered ‘something’ in contrast to the nothing of standardisation, that is neither personal nor unique. This is where Ritzer’s (2003) globalisation/glocalisation theory illuminates upon ‘something’ containing value and meaning, ‘something’ being what consumers appreciate, particularly when it instigates emotive feelings. Not only is the wool shop unique, but each experience in the wool shop is unique, depending on who is encountered during the visit. The interactions captured in the quotes demonstrate much humanity, and are not easily replicated – however, that is not the point! Rajogopal (2009) suggested that when markets become saturated, new markets become attractive. The evidence from the quotes above certainly indicate preferences new markets, that of ‘wee shops’ and ‘places of interest’ that are ‘selling something different’, hosted by traders who ‘know their stock, [are] welcoming, [and will] spend a bit of time with you’. Just as the participants in our research expressed a sense of purpose and achievement through their craft, underpinned by belonging to the brand community, other crafting interest groups could carve out sustainability responses through linking crafting, community and consumption through production and aesthetic value. Creativity as a means to connect and commune would stimulate bespoke commodities, which could expand to developing social enterprise and commercial outlets. This could also include workshops to repair, modify and repurpose garments and textiles through the manipulation of materials and tools. Further, when crafters recognise that they have invested time and skills into their creation, their emotional attachment increases, and they are less likely to dispose textiles to landfill (Fletcher, 2008).

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