



LUT School of Business and Management

Bachelor's Thesis

International Business

**THE IMPACT OF CROSSFIT BRAND ON CONSUMER DECISION-
MAKING PROCESS**

CROSSFIT-BRÄNDIN VAIKUTUS ASIAKKAAN
OSTOPÄÄTÖSPROSESSISSA

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this research was to study the impact of CrossFit brand on the consumer decision-making process. The main objective was to find out how the brand influences the consumers when they are about to start CrossFit. People can perform various sports so the purpose of the study was to find out what makes CrossFit special in their objective. The sport has grown enormously for the past ten years and it has had the help of social media in that process. The study consists of two different parts: theory part and empirical part. The theory part was made by studying the themes that are around this topic, since there are no previous studies made from CrossFit brand's impact. The theory part consists of three different sections which are social media and its effects on consumers, brand attractiveness and consumer buying behavior. The empirical part was made with qualitative method by interviewing CrossFit athletes and the results were used to answer the research questions of this study.

The empirical study showed that the brand has an influence in the decision-making process but also the people that already perform the sport have a role in it. The study showed that the brand doesn't affect only directly through social media, but also through the athletes who already perform CrossFit through post purchase behavior and by them taking actively part in the brand community. The regular athletes can be considered as brand ambassadors. The brand community is so big and active in social media, but it is not relevant for the consumers when they are about to start the sport. The brand was also considered as a guarantee of a certain value.

TIIVISTELMÄ

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Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli tutkia CrossFit-brändin vaikutusta asiakkaan ostopäätösprosessissa. Päättökysymyksen avulla oli tarkoitus selvittää miten brändi vaikuttaa asiakkaisiin, kun he ovat aloittamassa CrossFitin harrastamista. Ihmiset voivat harrastaa lukuisia eri urheilulajeja, joten tarkoituksena oli selvittää mikä tekee CrossFitistä erityisen heidän silmissään. Kyseinen laji on kasvattanut suosiotaan viimeisen kymmenen vuoden aikana valtavasti ja se on saanut sosiaalisesta mediasta apua kasvussaan. Tämä tutkielma koostuu kahdesta osasta: teoriaosuudesta sekä empiirisestä osuudesta. Teoriaosuus tehtiin tutkimalla aiheen ympärillä olevia teemoja, sillä juuri CrossFit-brändin vaikutuksesta ei ole tehty aiempaa tutkimusta. Teoriaosuus koostuu kolmesta osuudesta, joista ensimmäisessä käsitellään sosiaalisen median vaikutusta asiakkaisiin, toisessa brändin houkuttelevuutta ja kolmannessa asiakkaan ostokäyttäytymistä. Empiirinen osuus tehtiin laadullisen tutkimuksen menetelmällä haastatteleamalla CrossFit-urheilijoita ja niistä saatuja tuloksia käytettiin vastaamaan tämän tutkimuksen tutkimuskysymyksiin.

Empiirinen tutkimus osoitti, että brändillä on vaikutusta ostopäätösprosessissa, mutta myös ihmiset jotka jo harrastavat lajia ovat suuressa roolissa. Tutkimus osoitti, että brändi ei vaikuta ainoastaan suoraan sosiaalisen median kautta, vaan myös lajia jo harrastavien urheilijoiden kautta. Heidän ostopäätöksen jälkeinen käytöksensä ja aktiivinen osallistuminen brändiyhteisöön on suuressa roolissa. Tavallisia CrossFit-urheilijoita voidaankin pitää brändilähettiläinä. Brändiyhteisö on niin suuri ja aktiivinen sosiaalisessa mediassa, mutta se ei ole relevantti asiakkaille jotka ovat aloittamassa harrastusta. Brändillä koettiin myös olevan tietynlainen laadun takuu.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In current world consumers are surrounded by plenty of brands and different products (Chovanova, Korshunov & Babcanova 2015, 615). Brands have impact on people's everyday lives and they are in a big role nowadays since the channels for them to do their impact have grown in the internet platforms. Brands have influence in the consumer's decision-making process when they are about to purchase a product or service. This study combines the effect of the brand in the customers decision-making process and how the social media impacts the process. The consumer decision-making process Has five steps and the last one of the is post purchase behavior. It is also studied how this behavior impacts other consumers who are in the middle of the process and how it affects social media through viral marketing and electronic word of mouth.

In this research, this phenomenon of brand impacting consumers is studied from the point of view of a sports brand. CrossFit is a sport which was created not so long ago, so it is interesting to study how has it grown so much and what is the influence of social media to this growth. It is studied how CrossFit brand affects the consumer decision-making process. How much does a brand have power when people are choosing their hobby?

1.1 Background of the study

CrossFit is a sport program which is designed to enhance fitness and health. It took a couple of decades for Greg Glassman to develop the sport. In CrossFit athletes perform constantly varied functional movements at high intensity. The sport has movements that are inspired by gymnastics, weightlifting, running, rowing etc. Due to Glassman, those movements are the core of life. The program is designed so that it can be scaled to any individual regardless of experience or person's mobility. In CrossFit people go to the "box", which means a CrossFit gym, and do workouts together, so people rarely workout by themselves. The key component why CrossFit is so effective and popular is said to be the community that arises from people doing workouts together and cheering each other. (CrossFit 2017b)

In 2017 CrossFit is an enormous brand. People talk about it online, on social media, people can see the brand on gym walls when walking on the street, it's written on gym equipment and Reebok even has clothes that are branded "Reebok CrossFit"-gear. CrossFit has become popular in the era of social media and it has grown enormously with the help of it. Everyone has heard something from CrossFit and it can be good or bad, since it divides opinions. Since the sport is quite new there are not many published scientific articles from it, especially from the brand point of view. There are multiple options from which people can choose their hobby when they start to exercise and lose weight for example. What makes them choose especially CrossFit?

CrossFit Inc. was founded in 2000 and by 2005 it had 13 affiliates in the United States (Bloomberg 2017; The Box Mag 2012). In 2017 there are 13 000 affiliates worldwide. CrossFit is a registered trademark and it is not a franchisee, their affiliates are legitimate fitness practitioners who have applied and accepted as official CrossFit affiliates so they can practice business as a CrossFit gym. That means, that anyone can't start up a gym that is called CrossFit gym. (CrossFit 2017a)

One part of this sports growth is the CrossFit Games. CrossFit Inc. organizes the CrossFit Games-competition every summer with Reebok to find The Fittest Male and Female on Earth. The event has grown from a farm competition to a big event that is held in a couple of stadiums in California, USA and it's streamed live to the CrossFit Games-website so millions of people all around the world can follow the games online. (Reebok CrossFit Games 2017)

CrossFit and the top athletes who compete in regional competitions and in the CrossFit Games are very active daily in social media such as Facebook and Instagram. For example, CrossFit Inc. has 1,7 millions of followers in Instagram and 2,8 millions of likes in Facebook (Instagram 2017; Facebook 2017). Regular people in their boxes can do the same workouts as the athletes from the Games since they actively share their workouts in Instagram. CrossFit and Reebok are in partnership meaning that Reebok has for example sports equipment and clothes branded as "Reebok CrossFit" gear that are designed for the needs of a CrossFit athlete (Rishe 2011). It's interesting to study what effect this has on the decision-making process. Does the brand and its athletes have an impact or do people just want to work out on high intensity?

Joining CrossFit gym is not the same thing as joining a regular gym: to join, a person must take part to a course called “On Ramp” that guides the athletes to the sport and its special features. In Finland, the course is typically one month long and it costs about 100-250 euros and when the athletes have passed the course they can join the regular schedule in the gym (CrossFit Lappeenranta 2017; CrossFit Basement 2017). The monthly cost of CrossFit is also very different from a regular gym since the monthly fee is approximately 90-120 euros in Finland when a regular gym can cost for example in Lappeenranta, Finland from 20 to 70 euros a month (Syke Gym 2017; Forever kuntoklubi 2017). That said, the decision to join a CrossFit gym requires a willingness to pay hundreds of euros at once and higher monthly fees.

1.2 Research questions, purpose of this study and limitations

The aim of this thesis is to understand the effect of the brand when a consumer decides to join a CrossFit gym. The research questions are divided to one main question and to three sub-questions. The main research question is as follows:

“How does the brand effect on people’s decision to join a CrossFit gym?”

To answer this main research question it’s needed to have sub-questions which support the main research question. The sub research questions are:

“Which factors have influence in the decision-making process?”

“What kind of role social media has in the decision-making process?”

“What makes a customer choose CrossFit over a normal gym?”

The purpose of this study is to find the factors that affect the decision-making process. Consumers have a lot of options from which to choose from, so it is interesting to explore the decision-making process from this brand effect point of view. The purpose is also to explore if the customers understand themselves that the brand has affected them somehow.

This research is limited so, that the interviews are performed only for Finnish athletes.

The results will then explain the phenomenon from a Finnish point of view. The research is limited also so that in the interviews are only the point of view from those who have chosen CrossFit. So, the people that choose between CrossFit and a regular gym the regular gym are not included in this research.

1.3 Literature review

The impact of brand in consumer buying has been studied widely. Usually, in these researches the studies are made from the point of view of a specific product. Wells (2008) studied the impact of brand on consumer buying and the products were air conditioning products. The conclusion of the study was that the impact varied depending on the end goals of consumers, brand image, features, price and experience for example.

Chovanova et al. (2015) studied the impact of brand on consumer behavior when purchasing a product in retail context. The research was performed quantitatively and the conclusion was that the purchasing of products or services by brand differs by the age of consumers. They also discovered that half of the consumers did their purchase by a brand.

Kurtkoti (2016) studied the factors influencing consumer buying process for different products and brands. The conclusion of that study was that the factors influencing the consumer buying process are different depending on the products or the brand. For example, in the services sector, emotional and functional values drive the consumer behavior.

CrossFit's has not been previously studied widely. Studies from sport brands generally are mainly handling sports equipment, not a precise sport, since it's a new phenomenon that a sport can be also a brand by itself. There are previous studies about CrossFit specifically but they handle the sport mostly from a medical point of view. There are few other studies made. Partridge, Knapp & Massengale (2014) studied the motivational variables in CrossFit facilities and their focus was how the individuals set their goals when working out.

The only studies found that handle the brand are from Hannon and Anthony. Hannon (2013) studied the CrossFit brand and its growth, dilution and lessons for the industry. The conclusions of that study were that CrossFit has succeeded in brand management and the base of its popularity is on the program but also in the community that it has around the world. Anthony (2016) interviewed Russell Berger on the myths and mantras surrounding the brand. Russell Berger is a brand spokesman and the interview showed that people have different opinions about the brand and the audience can have easily misunderstandings about the sport.

The effects of social media marketing on consumer decision-making process has been studied previously. Shaheen & Lodhi (2016) studied how social media effects the decision-making process with the conclusions that when customers read positive feedback on company's website they are likely to buy the product. They also discovered that social media made the decision-making process more complex and the social media websites had a positive influence on consumer decision-making process.

Singla & Arora (2015) studied how the social media impacts on consumer buying and the focus was on university students. The conclusions in that study were that the students purchased clothing and entertainment products when they relied on social media. Most of the students agreed that social media has an impact in their decision to purchase. The students thought that social media is a reliable source when searching information and they found it an easy way of searching.

Forbes (2013) studied if social media has an influence in consumer buying behavior and he investigated recommendations and purchases. The study was based on consumers who decided to purchase an item based on a recommendation of a friend or contact in social media, for example Facebook and Twitter. The results of that study were that consumers buy products based on recommendations from people that are not considered as "opinion influencers". This means that consumers value the opinion of their friends and persons they can relate to.

Schivinski & Dabrowski (2014) have studied the effect of social media communication on consumer perceptions of brands based on users in Facebook. They studied both

firm-created social media communication and user-generated communication. They found differences between those two communication types and the study showed that user-generated communication has a more positive effect on brand equity and brand attitude among social media users.

1.4 Theoretical framework

The main theme in this thesis is how the brand effects the consumer decision-making process and especially the purchase decision. The consumer decision-making process consists of needs awareness, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and finally post purchase behavior.

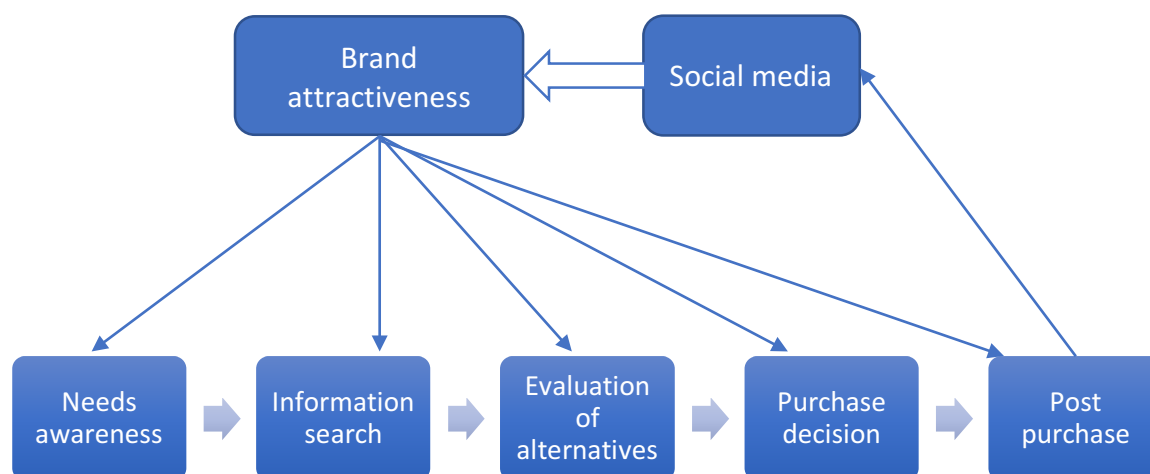


Figure 1. Theoretical framework

The Figure 1 above shows the theoretical framework of this research and it is used to study the theoretical part and the empirical part also. The framework helps to understand how the brand influences and how the process goes around. Social media affects the brand attractiveness and brand attractiveness influences the five steps of consumer decision-making process. The last step of the process, the post purchase behavior can influence the social media through customer reviews and other consumers' comments.

1.5 Research methodology

Methodologies in researches divide into two categories: quantitative and qualitative researches. Quantitative research measures the amount of a population who think or behave in a specific way which is done by counting the number of people who purchase specific brands or think alike with specific statements. Statistics are produced to show the amounts of the population that can be divided to specific categories, so the research method focuses on the numerical measurements of consumers. Qualitative research on the other hand isn't as easy to define. Qualitative research studies questions what, why and how, meaning that the questions how many or how much are not in the focus. The research method tries to understand why individuals and groups think or behave like they do. (Keegan, 2009, 11)

This research explores a phenomenon, so it is studied with the qualitative method. The questions that arise from this research are why and how, so the method appears to be the proper one. The studied phenomenon is quite new therefore the qualitative method helps to understand the phenomenon in a deeper way.

In qualitative research, it is common to have small samples of people who represent the studied phenomenon. The interaction between the researcher and the person interviewed is informal, more like a normal conversation. The goal is to understand what the person interviewed thinks and feels. The role of the interviewer is to lead and follow, asking simply a string of direct questions is not the proper way. Leading means that the person interviewed is fully familiar with the client's objectives and following on means that the person interviewed is encouraged to interesting conversational paths that are also relevant to the researcher. The style of interview performed like explained helps the interview to be like an everyday conversation and that way natural. (Keegan, 2009, 12-13, 104).

The empirical data will be collected with interviews from athletes who perform CrossFit. Interview is a proper way to gather the empirical data for this research since the phenomenon that is studied is something that happens in consumers' minds when they decide to purchase. The interviews will be performed personally with each athlete. The

interviews will be partly done via email and with some athletes the interview will be performed in person.

The questions asked can be open or closed questions. Open questions are questions starting with for example “how” or “when” so that they cannot be answered with “yes” or “no” which are the usual answers to closed questions. The open questions will then provide more valuable information in this research. The athletes have started CrossFit in different years and they have different kinds of backgrounds in sports. The athletes live all in Finland and are members in official CrossFit affiliate gyms. The athletes were chosen from the researcher’s connections.

1.6 Outline of the study

This research is divided into theoretical and empirical sections. The first chapter presents the introduction and background for this research and the research questions, objectives, limitations and the research method that are used in this study. The theoretical part starts in the second chapter, where it is presented how the social media influences consumers. The third chapter is about brand attractiveness and how it affects consumers. The fourth chapter is about the consumer buying process and which steps does it have and what happens in each step. The empirical section starts in the fifth chapter, where the empirical data of this research is presented and the analysis of the interviews. Finally, in the sixth chapter, summary and conclusions are presented.

2. SOCIAL MEDIA AND ITS EFFECTS

Nowadays consumers utilize the Internet not only to read, watch or buy but also to utilize different platforms to share content, create, modify and discuss. That represents the phenomenon of social media. (Babajide, 2013) Social media can nowadays easily affect a company's reputation and sales since the user base is wide and the information spreads rapidly among users. However, many companies are not quite sure how to utilize the social media, since they don't truly understand it and its opportunities. (Zhang & Mao, 2016) Many marketers are also uncertain if people will see their advertising and click on their content. (Hanna, Rohm & Crittenden, 2011)

2.1 Creating relationships with consumers in social media

Companies can create an excellent forum to form relationships with customers and one example of this is creating a brand fan page on social networking site, for example in Facebook. Companies can put brand posts in their fan page, for example videos and texts and customers can become fans of these pages. They can also take part by commenting or liking a post. The integration of social media changes the process how the brands communicate to customers and vice versa (Gallaughner & Ransbotham, 2010). By creating a brand community based on the fan pages, consumers can interact with the company. The members of brand communities share an interest and that can create a bond (De Valk, Van Bruggen & Wierenga, 2009). Brand communities do important tasks for the brand (Laroche, Habibi, Richard & Sankaranarayanan, 2012).

There are multiple drivers that influence how many likes or comments consumers put in different fan pages. (Laroche et al., 2012) Brand communities give also a social structure to the relationship between the customer and the marketer and the community has an impact to the customer loyalty. (De Vries, Gensler & Leeflang, 2012) According to Muntinga, Moorman & Smit (2011), when consumers use social media they use the brand-related content to enjoy, relax and as a pastime. According to Naaman, Becker & Gravano (2011), social media provides the most recent news and the hottest topics for discussion and consumers use it also nowadays widely to search information from different products.

Companies can do two types of posts in social media: a customized message and a broadcast. The type depends on the level of customization of the message. A customized message is a message that targets a specific person or a group of people, for example in Facebook. On the other hand, broadcast is a tool with which a company can target anyone that is interested, for example tweets in Twitter. (Zhu & Chen, 2015) In social media, marketing procedures strengthens the customer-based brand equity (Kim & Ko, 2012). It is said, that the marketing actions made in social media, are part of the promotional mix in the new brand communication model (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Social media communication has an enormous influence on brand equity. Traditional media has a bigger influence on brand awareness, however social media communication has a great impact on brand image. (Naylor, Lamberton & West, 2012). Social media is a good platform where customers can develop preferences about different products or brands. (Bruhn, Schoenmueller and Schafer, 2012)

Social media provides a remarkable opportunity to have contact with consumers in their social environments and build more personal relationships with the consumers (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011). When delivering a message through traditional media, it is usually considered as being delivered directly from a marketer in their own original voice. That can obtain in social media also, but a brand-related message when being delivered by a source other than the marketer is not necessarily considered as a direct message from the brand's marketer to consumers, it is more like an authentic manner. (Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011)

2.2 Viral marketing

When a customer likes something on a brand fan page, the information of that like is visible in public, for example in Facebook. By this like, the customer's followers or friends become aware of that post. That said, fan pages can reach also the follower's or liker's friends in social media. Liking a post or commenting on one is a very similar phenomenon as WoM communication (word of mouth). (Shawney, Verona & Prandell, 2005) This phenomenon makes a virtual brand community a powerful, interactive platform where consumers can do recommendations from consumer-to-consumer. (De Vries et al., 2012)

According to Muntiga et al. (2011), social media associates electronic word of mouth when consumers interact with each other about brands. (Gruen, Osmonbekov & Czaplewski, 2006) Due to researches, eWOM is highly relied to and customers consider it a relevant source of information on the Internet. According to Kim & Ko (2012), social media is an ideal platform for eWOM since consumers generate and share brand-related information to their friends and followers. Researchers study the use of eWOM on social media with three point of views: seeking opinions, giving opinions and passing opinions. When consumers have a high level on behavior of opinion seeking they are more likely to search information and tips from other consumers when they are making a purchase decision (Camarero & San José, 2011). When consumers have a high level on behavior of opinion giving, they are also called opinion leaders, they have a high impact on other consumers' attitudes and behaviors. The last one, opinion passing, means that the eWOM helps the flow of information. (Yang, Liu & Zhou, 2011) This phenomenon can also be called viral marketing and since it has a high-and-rapid rate of response, companies try to create a "hype" to promote their products or services. (Chu & Kim, 2011)

Social media can be divided into two parts. The first part is profile-based social media which focuses on individual members. That means, that the topics are related to the members and the focus is to get the members to connect with the specific topics. The profile-based social media encourages connection since the user behind the profile is interesting. Examples of profile-based social medias are Facebook and Twitter. The other part is content-based and that focuses on the contents. Contents can be discussions, articles and comments on the content posted. The main goal of content-based social media for the consumers is to connect with contents that certain profiles make since they find them interesting. Examples of content based social medias are Instagram, Pinterest and YouTube. If brands want to promote interaction, they must make unique content, have reflection with their followers' profile, be active and start discussions and be helpful in certain matters. (Manthiou, Chiang & Tang, 2013) If the brand succeeds to provide this kind of content, it can boost their credibility and affinity. (Zhu & Chen, 2015)

The information that is trendy is covering four sub-motivations in social media: surveillance, knowledge, pre-purchase information and inspiration. Surveillance

means that consumers observe and want to stay updated on their own social environment. Knowledge means that consumers have brand-related information that they can share with other consumers and vice versa so they can learn more from a product or a brand. Pre-purchase information means reading reviews of products or topics on brand communities so that the consumers can make carefully considered buying decisions. The fourth and last sub-motivation is inspiration which means that the brand-related information can help the consumer have own ideas, so it works also as a source of inspiration. For example, consumers look pictures from other people's daily clothing looks so that they can decide what to wear. (Muntinga et al., 2011)

3. BRAND ATTRACTIVENESS

Brand knowledge is in a very important role in consumer behavior since the more the consumer is aware of the brands price and quality, the more the consumer is attracted towards purchasing that brand. People think differently of the brands since they have different kinds of preferences and occasionally the purchasing choices can depend on their past experiences. (Sarwar, Aftab & Iqbal, 2014) Brand works as a sign that allows consumers to recognize a product from ones they are not familiar or from ones they don't like. It is studied, that brand has an impact on consumer's preference to purchase and brands help people to categorize their choices (Chovanova et al., 2015, 615; Transparency, 2005).

Branding is nowadays one of the most important factors of business strategy. Brands are important to their owners for two reasons. First reason is that they are in focus of consumer loyalty and they ensure demand in the future and sales. The other reason is that a brand can stabilize the business and help against competition. (Chovanova et al. 2015, 615) Branding is in the focus to create value to customer and it works also as an important tool for creating and keeping competitive advantage (Holt, 2015). Due to globalization, the competition between companies and brands is growing all the time and innovative solutions are needed to make the brands globally known so that they maintain their status. Brand identity and recognition are highly important so that brands can be successful. (Godey, Pederzoli, Aiello, Donvito, Chan, Tsuchiya & Sing, 2013) A brand is the main vehicle to connect with the consumers and it can influence customers' attitudes to it in many ways, for example brand awareness, perceptions about image and preferences for this brand. (Sarwar et al., 2014)

Nowadays people consider brands as their recognition, emotional achievements and status symbols. It's cited that consumers are emotionally attached to brands they choose and value. It's explored that if a consumer is a fan of a celebrity and sees the celebrity using a specific brand, the consumer is likely to buy the same brand. Brands make a status consciousness in consumers' minds and that leads to the sense of recognition and to the feeling that it is trendy to use different brand products or services. (Sarwar et al., 2014)

3.1 Brand equity

Brand equity means the progressive utility of value that adds to a product or service from its brand name and it is usually believed that it affects the long-term profitability of a company (Jalilvand, Samiei & Mahdavinia, 2011; Lassar, Mittal & Sharma, 1995). Brand equity is also a model that Keller (1993) claims to be dominant and that it provides the link between its two dimensions which are brand awareness and image. Building a brand that has a positive brand equity has a positive impact on companies' performance through its impact on consumers' responses to brands (Buil, Martinez & de Chernatony, 2013, 64).

Brand equity has an impact to the company and it's under a debate how it can be built with clear marketing actions (Christodoulides & De Chernatony, 2010). A strong brand equity has an impact on increased brand preference, willingness to purchase a premium product and customer loyalty (Keller & Lehmann, 2006; Lassar et al., 1995). When consumers think, they get some unique value from a specific brand, they are more willing to pay the higher price (Keller & Lehmann, 2003). Brand preference means that consumers have the habit to prefer the brands they know something and feel something about and that can be measured by asking customers which are their favorite brands from different categories (Keller, 2003). According to Kim and Ko (2012), social media marketing activities and brand equity together have a positive impact on customer future buying behavior.

Brand awareness means the strength of the brand or the trace that the brand leaves in memory so that consumers can identify the brand under different conditions (Rossiter & Percy, 1987). Brand awareness makes the recalling easier when consumers think of different brands and their opinions about them (Sarwar et al., 2014). Keller (2003) claims, that brand awareness has a key role in consumer decision-making process by providing the consumer three advantages. The first advantages are learning advantages, second consideration advantages and the third advantages are choice advantages. (Keller, 2003) Brand awareness affects brand equity in four ways. First, it creates a brand node in consumer's mind, then it provides a feeling of familiarity of the brand in the consumer's thoughts, then it acts like a signal that enhances trust

in the brand and at last it is a reason for the consumer to include the brand in his set of consideration. (Gil, André & Salinas, 2007)

The association and attachment that consumer has with a brand is called brand image (Sarwar et al., 2014). Brand image is in a key role when referring to consumer's feeling about a brand and that has an impact on consumer behavior. Farquhar (1990) claims that there are three important elements when a company builds a strong brand with the consumer: positive brand evaluation, positive brand attitude and a stable brand image. Because of branding, customers become committed to certain company and its brand. (Chovanova et al., 2015, 615) Keller (1993) describes that the brand image means also the associations the consumer has when remembering a brand.

4. CONSUMER BUYING PROCESS

Companies must think of different influences on consumers so that they can understand how the consumers make their buying decisions. Companies should also identify who is the decision maker, what different types of buying decisions there are and the different steps in the buying process. There are five unique roles that people can have in the buying process. The first role is initiator, who suggests that the product or service should be bought. The second role is influencer, who has an opinion which affects the decision. The third one is decider who decides if the product should be bought or how and where it should be bought. The fourth one is buyer who buys the product and the fifth and last role is user who consumes the product or service. (Kotler, 2000, 96)

4.1 The different buying behaviors

Consumer decision-making is different depending on which products or services are under the buying decision. The process is very different if the consumer buys toothpaste or a new car. There are four types of consumer buying behavior and the behavior depends on the buyer involvement and how different the brands are from each other. The different buying behaviors are complex buying behavior, dissonance-reducing buyer behavior, habitual buying behavior and variety-seeking buying behavior. (Kotler, 2000, 97)

4.1.1 High level of involvement

Involvement means the stage of the consumer's interest in information about a product and how motivated he is to gain more information about it (Zaichkowsky, 1985). When consumers pay a premium price for something, are responsible to others for the decision they make or they make an important decision for themselves, they have a high level of involvement in the decision (Puccinelli, Goodstein, Grewal, Price, Raghubir & Stewart, 2009). The complex buying behavior has a high level of involvement. It applies when the decision is made about a product that is expensive, not often bought, risky and self-expressive. Consumers do research when thinking of

purchase, since they are concerned to make a right decision because of the level of involvement (Puccinelli et al., 2009). An example of this category is purchase of a computer. The buyer develops opinions about the product and then develops attitudes about it. Finally, the buyer makes a choice that is well thought through. (Kotler, 2000, 97)

The dissonance-reducing behavior applies when the product to be bought is expensive, bought not so often and it has a risk. The products have a high level of involvement for example carpeting which costs a lot of money and is self-expressive. Buyer wanders around and buys quite quickly the product and then after the purchase experiences dissonance but is responsive to information that supports the purchase decision. (Kotler, 2000, 97)

4.1.2 Low level of involvement

When consumers have a low level of involvement, it differs very highly from the high-involvement. For example, they engage in superficial processing and they are influenced by simple positive or negative cues (Puccinelli et al., 2009). The habitual buying behavior applies when the product to be bought is not expensive and often bought, for example salt. The buyer makes the decision based on the familiarity of the brand instead of passing through the normal steps of belief attitude and behavior. Advertising is not the best way to get the consumers to buy the product since they buy out of habit, but sales promotions for example can make the customers try a new product. (Kotler, 2000, 97)

The last buying behavior is the variety-seeking buying behavior which applies when the buyer chooses between brands so that he can have new experiences, not because of dissatisfaction. An example of this category's product is cookies. The behavior has also a low level of involvement. The buyer has some opinions about the product and he chooses the brand without massive evaluation and the buyer makes an evaluation of the product while consuming it. The buyer switches brand often so that he can get new experiences. (Kotler, 2000, 97)

4.2 The steps of the buying decision process

Consumer buying decision is a process that has different steps in it. The steps are needs awareness, search of information, evaluation of alternatives, selection and finally the post purchase behavior. There are multiple factors that impact the consumer buying process and which factors lead the consumer to purchase. (Sarwar, Aftab & Iqbal, 2014) According to Kotler (2000, 98), the purchase decision begins long before the actual purchase is made and it has effects after the purchase also. The model shows that the customers go through each five steps but in reality, they skip or reverse steps sometimes. The model captures the full variety of considerations that the consumers have when they face a new purchase that has a high level of involvement. (Lakshmi, 2016) The purchase decision process is affected by characteristics of a consumer, for example age, gender, occupation and lifestyle. (Kotler, 2000, 98)

4.2.1 Needs awareness

The first step of the buying process is the problem or need recognized by the buyer. The needs awareness step can be influenced by involvement interacting with demographic variables (Puccinelli et al., 2009). The needs awareness is an interaction of two main components: the desired state and the real state. The desired state is the way the consumer would like the need to be met and the real state means how the need is actually met. (Bruner & Pomazal, 1988) The need can be triggered by an internal factor, for example consumer is hungry, or it can be triggered from outside, for example seeing an advertisement and the trigger becomes a drive. Marketers can do research of which factors make a consumer identify a need, so that they can try to do more of those kinds of advertisements. That leads to the second step of the process. (Kotler, 2000, 98)

4.2.2 Information search

The consumer that has recognized a need and is triggered will go search for more information. There are two levels of arousal. The first level is the heightened attention. On that stage the consumer comes more alert to information about a product. The

other level is active information search in which the consumer goes online and searches information, talks with his friends and goes to visit stores to have more information on that specific product. Nowadays consumers rely increasingly on the internet when searching for information since it provides plenty of platforms where to get and share information (Kulandairaj, 2013; Peterson & Merino, 2003). That said, the sources of information can vary from family opinions, commercial sources such as advertising and web sites to experiential sources in which the consumer for example handles and tries the product. However, the amount of information nowadays is huge, so consumers can have difficulties to process the different feedbacks they can read online (Kulandairaj, 2013). Internet is an easy tool for information search since it takes minimal amount of time, effort and money (Peterson & Merino, 2003). Consumers receive most of the information from commercials but the information that has the most effect is the one that comes from personal sources. (Kotler, 2000, 98)

When a consumer searches for information, he becomes more aware of competing products and brands. There are different set of brands considered when the consumer makes the comparison. The first set is the total set of brands available for him. The consumer will learn from only a subset of these brands and that subset is called awareness set. Some of these brands will be what the consumer finally wants, and that subset is called consideration set. After these subcategories and all the research, there are only a small number of brands that are considered as strong contenders and that subcategory is called the choice set. From this choice set, the consumer makes his final choice. (Kotler, 2000, 98-99)

4.2.3 Evaluation of alternatives

When the consumer has gone through the information search, there are multiple evaluation processes that help the consumer make the decision. According to newest models, the process is seen as cognitively oriented which means that the consumers make their opinions usually on a conscious and rational basis. There are some basic concepts when thinking the process. When the consumer is trying to satisfy a need, he seeks benefits from a product and there are multiple options to satisfy that need. It depends on the product, which attributes are relevant and important to the consumer. For example, if a consumer is about to buy a camera, the important attributes can be

picture sharpness and camera size. When the consumer is evaluating alternatives, he develops thoughts of brand beliefs about different brands and how they satisfy the need with the attributes. (Kotler, 2000, 99-100)

4.2.4 Purchase decision

The consumer has preferences between the brands in the choice set in the evaluation stage. There are two factors which can affect the process between the intention to purchase and the purchase decision. The first factor is the attitudes of other people. The amount of how much a person cares about other people's opinions depends on two things. The first one is how intense the other persons' negative attitude is towards the consumers buying decision. The second factor is how motivated the consumer is to respect other people's wishes. If a consumer has a lot of people around him that have different kind of opinions and the consumer would like to please them all, that makes the process very complex. (Kotler, 2000, 100)

The second factor that can affect the process between the intention to purchase and the purchase decision is unanticipated situational factors. That means that there are some factors that can affect the consumer, for example he might lose his job. There can also be a salesperson that turns him off or some other purchase can become more urgent. The purchase decision can also be affected by a perceived risk. It depends on the amount of money that the consumer is about to use, the amount of the uncertainty of attributes and the amount of consumers' self-confidence how much risk there are. Consumers don't want to take risks and they have routines that reduce the risk, for example avoiding decisions, gathering information from friends and preferring brands that are national. (Kotler, 2000, 100)

4.2.5 Post purchase behavior

When the consumer has purchased the product, the consumer goes to the final step of the buying process which is the post purchase behavior. In this stage the consumer experiences a level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The companies work doesn't end when the consumer buys the product, since the consumers have different kind of

feelings and needs after the purchase. The companies should monitor post purchase satisfaction, actions and the product uses after the purchase. (Kurtkoti, 2016) When the buyer's expectation meets the product's perceived performance, the consumer is satisfied and is likely to buy the product again and tells about that purchase to others (Kotler, 2000, 100-101)

The consumer's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the purchase has a major impact on what the consumer does after the purchase. Many marketers say that their best advertisement is a happy customer. Customers that are not satisfied are likely to return the product or abandon it. They can also take public action by complaining to the company or social media. In cases like these, the company hasn't succeeded at all at satisfying the customer. (Kurtkoti, 2016) Negative word of mouth that arises from the negative feelings about the purchased product, spreads much faster than the positive word of mouth. That is because the consumers also tend to tell less about positive experiences and they tend to warn others so that they don't purchase the "bad products". (Kotler, 2000, 100-101)

5. THE RESULTS OF THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

There were four athletes interviewed in this research. The athletes all workout in CrossFit Lappeenranta and have been performing CrossFit there from a few weeks period to a couple of years. All the athletes have started the sport in Lappeenranta, Finland. All athletes were doing basic strength conditioning in a regular gym before they started CrossFit.

Table 1. Background of the interviewees

Interviewee	About	How long has been doing CrossFit	Background in sports
Athlete 1	24-year old women who is studying business in Lappeenranta University of Technology	1 week	Kettlebell competitions and basic gym training
Athlete 2	24-year old women who is studying business in Lappeenranta University of Technology	2 years	National level basketball competitions
Athlete 3	23-year old man who is studying industrial engineering in Lappeenranta University of Technology	1 year	Ice hockey, skiing and basic gym training
Athlete 4	22-year old man who is studying industrial engineering in Lappeenranta University of Technology	3 months	Basic gym training

All athletes have profiles in Instagram and Facebook. That means that they can see the presence of CrossFit in social media if they search information from it by themselves or if their friend likes or suggests a post for example. The criteria for these interviewees was that they should at least have a Facebook profile, otherwise it would be difficult to understand the brands effect in social media if the person is not part of social media.

5.1 Starting CrossFit

The interviewees were first asked if they had heard about CrossFit before starting the sport and if yes, what specifically had they heard. Athlete 1 said that she had heard a lot from CrossFit from various sources, for example in Instagram she had seen a lot of

pictures since they were recommended for her based on her friends' behavior on Instagram. She didn't have a proper understanding what CrossFit as a sport consists of. She had also heard something from her friends that had tried the sport. Athlete 2 found out about the sport from magazines and online and after that she was interested about starting the sport but still waited for three years to start.

Athlete 3 had also heard something about CrossFit from his friends. He had understood that the sport was hard core, basically the toughest sport a man can perform. He also had heard that the sport was not only about strength but also about endurance, speed, accuracy etc. Athlete 4 had a quite different story, since he had only heard negative things about CrossFit. The first thing he had seen was in YouTube a video where a popular channel mocked CrossFit and told it was only for "dummies". Due to that the athlete thought that the sport is just goofing around but after watching a couple of documents on Netflix he had a clearer view what the sport actually was about.

When the interviewees were asked where did they get the idea to start CrossFit, they had quite similar answers. All four of them thought that they were bored of going to regular gym and doing basic strength and conditioning. Since Athlete 2 is a former basketball competitor, she thought CrossFit could probably be suitable for her since it combined things she already knew how to do and movements she didn't had learned already. She was also interested in the CrossFit methodology that there are ten different skills a human should be good at. Athlete 1 had thought that it would be nice to start performing some sport after a break and she had heard from a friend that CrossFit Lappeenranta organizes OnRamp-courses at that time. She had also heard from her friend good things about CrossFit and that caught her interest.

Athlete 3 got the idea from social media and wanted to stop the basic gym membership. He was in need for motivation. He searched for information online and for a couple of years tried to find a friend with whom to start with but ended up starting alone. Athlete 4 said *"The biggest reason was that my friend pressured me and I had heard how much my friend liked it and I had seen his progress so that gave me the final push to join the CrossFit gym"*. That said, Athletes 1 and 4 had friends that performed CrossFit and they had heard good things about the sport from them. Athletes 2 and 3 were only

searching the information online and didn't have any friends that were performing CrossFit and that said weren't affected by their friends' opinion.

When the interviewees were asked from which different sources they looked for information when they got interested from CrossFit, their responses were quite similar. All four read CrossFit gyms' websites and Athletes 1 and 4 asked from their friends who were members at CrossFit gym. Athlete 2 said *"I searched for information mainly online, from CrossFit gyms' websites and from CrossFit Inc.'s webpage, I didn't use social media at that point. The social media has become a relevant source and environment after starting CrossFit and when I started to understand it more, I have started to follow in different social media channels the CrossFit athletes that are in the center of the sport"*. That said, none of the athletes used social media to search information when starting CrossFit.

5.2 Influences of brand and social media

The interviewees were asked what kind of image did they have in their minds about CrossFit. The responses varied in this question also, since Athlete 1 answered that she didn't know much about it so she didn't have a positive or neither negative image of CrossFit. She thought she didn't have enough information to form an image. Athlete 2 said that she had an image that is like the reality, saying that CrossFit is diverse and not boring, rough and very communal. Athlete 3 had similar thoughts than Athlete 2, but he also said *"I was a bit unsure if I would be up to it, since it seemed to rough but when I went to the Onramp I realized that there are people that vary very highly on their levels of condition and strength"*. Athlete 4 had a negative image due to the negative videos he had seen on YouTube and social media.

The fifth question was "Do you think the brand had an influence when you decided to join a CrossFit gym?". Athlete 1 said that there were a lot of different training philosophies from which to choose, so CrossFit was the sport from which she had heard most of. However, she didn't think the brand had a significant influence in the decision-making. Athlete 2 said *"Yes and no. Sort of yes, since the brand guarantees a certain value and the sport is really well branded. Many other gyms have "CrossFit"-*

classes or something very similar in their schedules but I can't take them as seriously as the original CrossFit-gym's ones. I don't trust that they can provide as good workouts as the original CrossFit but on the other hand the workouts can be as good, the brand just is very important to me". Athlete 3 said that the brand didn't have an influence, since he was just interested about the sport itself. Athlete 4 said that the brand had a negative influence, but he decided to join the CrossFit gym anyway.

The sixth question was "Do you think social media had an influence when you decided to join a CrossFit gym?". Athlete 1 thought it had an influence since she had seen so much of it in social media compared to other sports, she had thought about CrossFit for a long time, mainly because she had seen so much of it in her social media channels. Athlete 2 said that *"social media didn't have an influence when I was making the decision"*. Athlete 3 said that the social media appearance he had seen about CrossFit was so negative, that he thinks he didn't follow the correct channels so it didn't have an influence when he started. Athlete 4 had similar thoughts as the third athlete.

The seventh question was "Did you know by name any professional CrossFit athletes and if yes did it have an influence in the decision-making process?". The responses were like each other in this one. None of the athletes knew any professional CrossFit athletes by name when they were making the decision to start.

The eighth question was "Why didn't you choose a regular gym when you decided to join a CrossFit gym?". All the athletes said that they had been working out for ages in a regular gym and that was boring, so they wanted to try and learn something new. Athlete 1 said also that she wanted to try something new and the gyms at Lappeenranta weren't good. She also had the feeling that CrossFit would be easy to start since she wouldn't have to decide herself what to do when working out since the sport is programmed for athletes by the coaches.

5.3 Post starting behavior and sum up

When the athletes were asked, what is their opinion about CrossFit now that they perform it, the responses were quite similar. Athlete 1 who has just started, thinks there is a very positive vibe at the gym and she thinks it is fun to learn new things. She hasn't

got any negative feelings. Athlete 2 thinks that *“CrossFit is a very versatile sport in which people meet easily new people and it gets a person out of his/her own bubble. I’m really addicted to the sport and I think many people would find a good hobby for them from CrossFit if they would try it”*. Athletes 3 and 4 both said that it is fun and though at times but they don’t know what else they would do. Athlete 4 also said that the hobby is quite expensive, but he still performs it.

The tenth question was “What makes CrossFit popular?”. Athlete 1 said that she thinks it’s the factor that people can do so many different things is one of the reasons and that the sport is so controlled by the coaches so people don’t have to decide by themselves what to do or try to learn new things by themselves. Athlete 2 said *“At some point it was trendy to perform CrossFit, but I think the reasons people stay by the sport are that it is not boring, you get new challenges all the time, you have familiar persons with who to do it and for me it is very important that I get directions what to do. I think it is also popular since so many CrossFit athletes share their CrossFit stories online in different social medias and that has a positive influence in the brands popularity”*. Athlete 3 had quite similar thoughts, that CrossFit has a big hype around it. He also said *“for example if someone searches CrossFit from Google, there are various kind of videos that can be found, and people can think it’s cool and then they go and try the sport. When you start it, you can’t stop it since you are constantly seeing your progress and that is very addicting”*. Athlete 4 had similar thoughts as Athletes 2 and 3.

The last question asked was “Have you or would you recommend CrossFit to your friends?”. The athletes’ answers were like each other in this question. All of them said that they have already recommended CrossFit to their friends, even though Athlete 1 has performed the sport for only one week. The interviewees also said that they will keep recommending the sport to others. Athlete 2 said *“My sister has started CrossFit because of me and I have dragged my friends to “Bring your friend”-workouts to the gym. I have recommended this sport but I don’t think it suits for everyone, but it suits for most people in my opinion”*.

Table 2. Sum up of the interviews

Interviewee	From which source, did athlete found out about CrossFit?	How did the brand influence?	Would athlete recommend the sport?
Athlete 1	She had heard a lot from CrossFit from various sources, for example in Instagram she had seen a lot of pictures since they were recommended for her based on her friends' behavior on Instagram.	She had thought about CrossFit for a long time, mainly because she had seen so much of it in her social media channels	Yes
Athlete 2	She found out about the sport from magazines and online.	<i>"The brand guarantees a certain value and the sport is really well branded. Many other gyms have "CrossFit"-classes or something very similar in their schedules but I can't take them as seriously as the original CrossFit-gym's ones. I don't trust that they can provide as good workouts as the original CrossFit but on the other hand the workouts can be as good, the brand just is very important to me".</i>	Yes
Athlete 3	He had heard something about CrossFit from his friends	<i>"For example if someone searches CrossFit from Google, there are various kind of videos that can be found, and people can think it's cool and then they go and try the sport. When you start it, you can't stop it since you are constantly seeing your progress and that is very addicting"</i>	Yes
Athlete 4	He had only heard negative things about CrossFit from social media	The brand had a negative influence, but he decided to join the CrossFit gym anyway.	Yes

6. CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter the research questions are answered and in the end of this chapter the thoughts for future research are presented. There were one main question and three sub-questions in this research, which are answered first by combining the theory and empirical study. The answers to the questions are partly similar, since the factors affect each other highly.

The first two sub-questions were:

“Which factors have influence in the decision-making process?”

“What makes a customer choose CrossFit over a normal gym?”

There appears to be multiple factors that have influence in the decision-making process. It appears that the factors in this research were friend's opinion and the brand. Friends' opinions have influence, since two of the athletes had heard experiences about CrossFit from their friends and they had asked for more information from them. This is in line with Kotler's (2000) findings that if the consumer is satisfied he tells about that purchase to others. Two Athletes did some online research from CrossFit gym's web pages.

Like Zaichowsky (1985) claims, involvement means the stage of the consumer's interest in information about a product and how motivated he is to gain more information about it and Puccinelli et al. (2009) claim that if consumer pays a premium price for something, he has a high level of involvement in the decision. It can be said that starting CrossFit requires a high level of involvement, since Athlete 2 said she thought of starting CrossFit for three years before actually starting and she was searching information that time. Athlete 4 said that CrossFit is quite expensive, so that also tells about the high level of involvement. Also, as Kotler & Lehmann (2003) cited, when consumers think they get some unique value from a specific brand they are more willing to pay a higher price, it can be seen to match with this finding, that the athletes were all willing to pay the higher price.

However, the price was not a factor that had an influence in starting CrossFit, since none of the athletes said that they hesitated starting because of the price. This is quite

interesting, since CrossFit can be considered as a premium gym because of the price. The monthly fee is much higher than in regular gyms, so if it would be thought with common sense, the price would be a factor that influences the starting decision. In this case, the brand probably has succeeded in creating a hype in consumers' heads so that they want to start CrossFit whichever the price is. However, if the price would be higher than it already is, it would probably become a more relevant factor since the interviewees are all students, and their income is quite standard and low compared to people that are working full time. The Athletes could also have had in mind that a customer can end their CrossFit-gym membership very quickly since the resign time is only one month, so they don't have to involve themselves financially for a long period. That information can also be a factor that emphasizes the willingness to start CrossFit.

That leads to the brand which clearly has an influence, since Athlete 1 said that she chose CrossFit and not some other training philosophy since she knew more from it because of social media. Athlete 2 said that the brand guaranteed a certain value for the sport, so that also proves that the brand was a factor that influenced the decision-making process. However, the brand had also negative influence since Athlete 4 had heard only negative talk about CrossFit, but he still started it because he had heard positive experiences from his friend. In this case the friend's opinion was more important for the Athlete than the negative image he had seen in social media. The friends that recommended the sport can be considered as influencers like Kotler (2000) them called, since they had an opinion that affected the buying decision. It can be said, that the brand has a bigger effect that the interviewees can first see themselves.

One big factor that all the Athletes listed was that they wanted to try something new and they were bored of doing basic gym training. Apparently, CrossFit has succeeded at creating a brand that people consider something new and different from basic gym training and something people can't do by themselves at a regular gym. It seems that the athletes didn't think of it even as an option to do CrossFit movements at the regular gym. It appears that the consumers get value of the brand, since they consider that joining a CrossFit gym is a forced way to perform the sport.

The third sub-question was:

“What kind of role social media has in the decision-making process?”

It seemed that the Athletes didn't search for information in social media, which is interesting since Naaman et al. (2011) found out in their research that consumers use social media widely to search information from different products. The interviewees also said that social media didn't have an influence when they started. This is also quite interesting, since the social media around CrossFit has grown enormously for the past few years. However, the Athletes didn't think the social media had an effect. Apparently, social media didn't have an active role in the decision-making process. The Athletes knew that it existed around the brand, but they didn't consider that it affected them.

However, after starting CrossFit the Athletes have become active social media users around CrossFit. They are all following CrossFit athletes in Facebook and in Instagram, and Athletes 2 and 3 have shared CrossFit related posts in their own accounts. This is connected to De Valk et al. (2009) findings that the members of brand communities share an interest and that can create a bond. Also the Athletes answers support the findings of Laroche et al. (2012) that brand communities give a social structure to the relationship between the customer and the marketer. The empirical research shows that the social media around the sport becomes relevant when you perform it yourself, but when you are starting the sport, it is not in any relevant role. It can be said that social media in CrossFit's case has a supportive role, since the athletes know that it is there, but they are not relying in the social media when searching information.

And finally, the main research question was:

“How does the brand effect on people's decision to join a CrossFit gym?”

The CrossFit brand is big and it's very highly present in social media. If people want to read or see something about CrossFit, it's all out there to be read and seen. However, the brand community around CrossFit is big, but is it the factor that gets people around the sport? Not directly.

It seems, that the brand has an influence on the decision to join a CrossFit gym. When doing this research, it has appeared that the brand has some or minimal effect through social media when the interviewees were starting CrossFit. Two of the athletes relied on their friend's experiences about CrossFit. All four athletes said that they would recommend the sport and they already have recommended. This sums up, that the brand community CrossFit has achieved in social media is a very important part of the sport for those who already do it. From the rate, how much generally regular CrossFit athletes share their experiences in social media, it can be seen that the brand community is on a big level.

It seems that the brand community affects the new consumers through the athletes who already perform it. The viral marketing the athletes do online and the word of mouth they talk in their everyday lives are the channels through which the brand effects. It can be seen from the theoretical framework that the post purchase behavior affects the social media, since nowadays that is the place where people go and tell their experiences about different things and that is in line with Kotler's (2000) findings that if consumers like the product they bought, they are likely to recommend it. CrossFit athletes can be said to be the brand ambassadors themselves and regardless of the level of the athlete, since the two interviewees had heard from the sport from regular CrossFit athletes. That leads to the conclusion that the brand doesn't affect only directly through media, it affects through the athletes themselves, the brand ambassadors. That said, the CrossFit gyms should keep their customers happy and satisfied since they are the persons who tend to get more new customers to the gyms which is in line with Kotler's (2000) statement that a company's best advertisement is a happy customer.

6.1 Further research

This phenomenon of brand effecting consumer buying process could be studied with various new points of view. This study from CrossFit brand's effect could be widened to consider different countries and to study if there are differences between cultures. It could also be studied what's the role of opinion leaders when people trust their friends when purchasing a product or starting a new hobby.

Another research that could be made from this researches' understanding is the role of tight brand communities. It's an interesting phenomenon that the CrossFit athletes recommend so actively the sport to others. This phenomenon recommendations of brand ambassadors would be an interesting and effective tool for companies to grow and spread the knowledge around the world. Since the new consumers are tend to be brought to the gym by an old customer, could companies in general use this thought and try more to keep their existing customers satisfied instead of actively searching for new customers.

7. SUMMARY

The purpose of this thesis was to study how the CrossFit brand impacts the consumer decision-making process. The purpose was to study the phenomenon around CrossFit in social media and to find the factors that affect the consumer's decision-making process when starting CrossFit. The research was made by combining the theory with empirical research which in this study was done qualitatively and with interviews. The research was limited so that the interviewees were Finnish athletes and the study did not consider for example cultural differences. The athletes also had all started their hobby in maximum of two years ago, so the field of social media and CrossFit brand have been quite like each other when they all have started.

The study started with introduction in which the background of the study, research questions, purpose of the study and limitations were presented. Those were followed by presenting the theoretical framework and research methodology. After the introduction chapter started the theory part. In the theory section at first social media and its' effects were studied and that followed by the brand attractiveness chapter. The theory part ended with a deep research of consumer buying process and its steps. The empirical research started in chapter five and it was an analysis of the interviews of the four athletes who perform CrossFit. The sixth chapter presented the conclusions and answers to the research questions. In the end of that chapter the suggestions for further studies were presented.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. Interview questions

Background:

Do you have a profile on Instagram or Facebook?

What is your background in sports?

Questions:

1. Had you heard about CrossFit before starting the sport and if yes, what specifically had you heard?
2. Where did you get the idea to start CrossFit?
3. From which sources did you look for information when you got interested in CrossFit?
4. What kind of image did you have in your mind about CrossFit?
5. Do you think the brand had an influence when you decided to join a CrossFit gym?
6. Do you think social media had an influence when you decided to join a CrossFit gym?
7. Did you know by name any professional CrossFit athletes and if yes did it have an influence in the decision-making process?
8. Why didn't you choose a regular gym when you decided to join a CrossFit gym?
9. What is your opinion about CrossFit now that you perform it?
10. What makes CrossFit popular?
11. Have you or would you recommend CrossFit for your friends?