



Intensity of collective consumption practices in brand communities: the case of crossfit

Laurence Dessart¹ · Grégory Bressolles²

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Abstract

Building on practice theory and brand community literature, the aim of this article is to (1) identify the nature of intensity of collective consumption practices and (2) understand how intensity of consumption practices interplays with consumer's relations to the self, the community, and the brand in a collective branded setting. The Crossfit brand is used as a context in this article because of its inherently intense nature and communal consumption settings. Twenty-one Crossfitters from North America and Europe were interviewed to understand their collective consumption practices of the brand. The results show that intensity of collective consumption practices consists of four dimensions: complexity, frequency, length and focus. Intensity is essential to the nature and maintenance of the relationships consumers keep with themselves, the community and the brand, and shapes them in many ways. While intensity is key to the way consumption practices exist, intensity is also highly personal, context-dependent and subject to interpretations and changes, which can even put the brand at risk. In a society where intensity is increasingly sought after by individuals and used as a differentiator by brands, we propose a first conceptualisation of the concept. This article also offers keys to managers to tap into the mechanisms of intense collective consumption practices for their brand.

Keywords Intensity · Collective consumption practices · Brand community · Practices · Crossfit

I didn't know WODs¹ would be so intense. Every workout leaves me exhausted and wanting more. (Testimonial from a Crossfit member)

Introduction

Collective consumption practices are an important axis of research in consumer studies, and practice theory has gained traction in marketing literature since 2005 (Warde 2005, 2014; Scholz 2021). Collective consumption practices are defined as “linked and implicit ways of understanding, saying and doing things. They comprise a temporally

unfolding and spatially dispersed nexus of behaviours that include practical activities, performances, and representations or talk. Practices link behaviours, performances, and representations” (Schau et al. 2009, p. 31). Significant headway has been made on collective consumption practices in marketing, in listing and classifying them (e.g. Holt 1995; Schau et al. 2009), as well as understanding how, through embodied activities, they foster brand engagement (Schau et al. 2009), value creation (Hartmann et al. 2015; Akaka and Schau 2019), brand image (Rindell et al. 2011), or even cultural capital (Warde 2014). There remain some blind spots, though, in the understanding of practices (Skålén et al. 2015).

Specifically, this article focuses on practice intensity, an overlooked, yet pervasive, phenomenon in the understanding of collective consumption practices. Practice studies and brand community research offer little understanding of the notion of intensity or its effect on those who perform them (Schau et al. 2009; Warde 2014; Southerton 2013). This article means to address this conceptual weakness, contending that intensity may affect the way consumers experience

✉ Laurence Dessart
laurence.dessart@uliege.be

Grégory Bressolles
gregory.bressolles@kedgebs.com

¹ HEC Liège, Management School of the University of Liège, 14, Rue Louvrex, 4000 Liège, Belgium

² KEDGE Business School, Talence, France

¹ Crossfit jargon for «Workout Of the Day», a sequence of movements and rules representing the daily practice.



consumption, their relation to the self (Southerton 2013), the community, and the brand, i.e. the regular triad of relationships in brand community research (McAlexander and Schouten 1998). Understanding the role of intensity of practices is relevant to brand (community) management because of the advantages it can bring to brands: beyond brand loyalty (Dessart et al. 2019) and strong links to the brand, emotional and behavioural intensity in brand communities can go as far as generating transcendent experiences (Schouten et al. 2007). Intensity of emotions in a collective context also plays a role in fostering brand purchase intentions and word-of-mouth (Daniels et al. 2020).

Practice theory shows that intensity is relevant in collective consumption practices because practices are known to be repetitive, frequent, and potentially very complex (Schatzki 1996). First, practices are, by nature, performed repeatedly and regularly (Warde 2014; Southerton 2013). Schau et al. (2009, p 40) state that “practices must be known to be repeated and must be repeated to become part of the value creation repertoire”. Practice repetition generally sought after by marketers as it induces loyalty (Neal et al. 2006) and value for the consumers and the brands (Schau et al. 2009). Second, practice theory also highlights that some practices can be complex (cooking, farming or sustainable consumption, for instance), leading to an intense consumption experience (Schatzki 1996) or representing a challenging, time-consuming endeavour (Phipps et al. 2013). For instance, high-level craft beer connoisseurs can develop a very complex taste engineering system to master their art, based on intensive involvement with the practice (Maciel and Wallendorf 2017). Some studies even state that practices represent complex arrangements by nature (Skålén et al. 2022). Practice theory thus indicates that practices can be intense, suggesting that intensity has various dimensions apparently linked to their frequency, repetition and complexity. However, beyond indications that intensity may be inherent to practices and multi-dimensional, as yet, no research has looked into the fact that collective consumption practices are of a certain intensity, and what this may entail. Little attention has been given to brands that purposely foster intense practices or to consumers attracted by intense practices. The nature and dimensions of intensity thus remain unclear.

The brand community literature, also concerned with collective consumption practices of brands (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001), offers little additional insight on the phenomenon of intensity, but makes repeated mentions of its existence, in reference to different concepts. For instance, brand community members can engage in the community with different levels of intensity (Pongsakornrungsilp 2010), be heterogeneous in this sense (Dessart et al. 2019), and also evolve through time in their intensity of engagement or emotions (Brodie et al. 2013). Hollebeek et al. (2017) also

propose, based on Schau et al. (2009), a practice-based segmentation of consumer engagement with each other in the community, where the intensity of practices are understood to vary according to the consumer’s own predispositions or the nature of the community. Yet, to date, the brand community literature fails to specifically address the notion of intensity of practices.

To address these gaps, this article asks the question of the nature and the role of intensity in collective consumption practices. More precisely, the aim of this article is to (1) identify the nature of intensity of collective consumption practices and (2) understand how intensity of consumption practices interplays with consumers’ relations to the self, the community and the brand in a collective branded setting. Taking a practice theory lens, we review the literature on consumption practices and brand community to examine practice intensity.

To approach intensity as a phenomenon, we focus on the context of extreme sports brand communities, where intensity is at the core of brand values and their functioning (Powers and Greenwell 2017) and collective practices are instrumental to brand consumption, (Schau et al. 2009). Specifically, the Crossfit brand represents the context of our study (Powers and Greenwell 2017; Thompson and Isisag 2022). We use an interpretive case study approach based on observations and participant observations, combined with 21 semi-structured consumer interviews spanning a period of 5 years. The article contributes to the brand community and practice literature by unpacking the specific meaning of intensity of collective consumption practices by proposing a definition thereof, as well as explaining how intensity impacts the self, the community and brand relationships.

Intensity of collective consumption practices

Practice theory is concerned with practices conceptualised as routinised behaviours (Reckwitz 2002) composed of (1) understanding, (2) procedures, and (3) engagement (Warde 2005). Understandings refer to knowledge of what to say and do, or know-how and competencies. Procedures concern the explicit rules, precepts and instructions that allow performativity, mental and bodily activities. They are linguistic formulations concerning how things should count or should proceed. Engagement is the state of emotions, motivations, moods and purposes that create commitment to a task (Reckwitz 2002; Schatzki 1996; Warde 2005). Practices are inherently linked to consumption (Schau et al. 2009), embodied (Bourdieu 1990) and social (Warde 2005), making brand communities a fertile ground for collective practices (Schau et al. 2009; Arsel and Bean 2013; Chandler and Chen 2016). Considering this general background of practice theories, several elements suggest



that intensity of practices is a relevant—if overlooked—phenomenon, rooted in the very nature of practice theory.

First, Holt (1995) makes several references to the intensity of practices from an emotional, relational and effort-based perspective. Specifically, he states that consumers can engage in “labour-intensive” practices, i.e. practices that require a lot of effort to achieve the desired aim (e.g. creating long-term connections with a sport club, or acquiring the necessary resources to buy a secondary residence). He also states that intensity can be found in the emotional aspect of practices, whereby consumers’ expressions of feelings escalate in the presence of others, and where sadness (of seeing one’s team lose, for instance) can result in tears. Lastly, Holt (1995) contends that the complexity of the product itself can create intensive practices, e.g. when a baseball fan makes sense of their experience through a complex interpretive framework specific to the game.

Moreover, the notion of intensity of practices seems rooted in the fundamental premise that practices derive from routine and frequency, which create habit. Practices, by nature, are repetitive performances, hence the performances of many individuals in similar circumstances are an enactment of a communal practice (Warde 2014). Practices thus differ from mere actions by their repeatable and repeated nature (Schau et al. 2009), making habit and repetition fundamental to the vitality and existence of practices (Schau et al. 2009). Little is known, though, about when the frequency of repetition or the time spent on a practice creates intensity rather than mere habit. In contrast to the formation of habits, which emerge out of mindlessness (Warde 2014), or without reflexive knowledge (Wilhite 2012), recent work suggests that intense experiences can emerge out of conscious and repetitive practices of high frequency (Scott et al. 2017).

To summarise, there is a notion that the intensity of practices might be characterised by various dimensions, contingent on certain aspects of consumption and also impacting consumer experiences (Holt 1995). The complexity of the product, service, or task at hand seems to be linked to intensity (Benedettini and Neely 2012)—or how practices are enacted (Chandler and Chen 2016), along with the frequency of practice (Warde 2005).

It is also important to distinguish here the focus of the study, intensity of practices, from other similar concepts. While intensity is a relevant concept for various marketing phenomena, such as involvement (Warrington and Shim 2000), we focus here on intensity of practices. Consumer involvement, which is considered as the expression of a feeling of interest, enthusiasm and excitement (Bloch 1981), or general level of interest in an object, stimulus or situation (Rothschild 1984), is inherently distinct from practices—although practices can stem from involvement.

The following section shows how brand communities can serve as a fertile ground for the investigation of intense collective consumption practices.

Brand communities: a breeding ground for intense collective consumption practices

To examine intensity of collective consumption practices, this article focuses on forms of communal consumption practices related to specific brands, taking roots in the long stream of brand community literature (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001; McAlexander and Schouten 1998; Black and Veloutsou 2017; Kornum et al. 2017; Willis and Wang 2016). Brand communities are defined as “specialized, non-geographically bound communities, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand” (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001, p. 412). Contrary to transient communal events, which are sporadic or unrelated to a specific brand (e.g. Belk and Costa 1998; Kozinets 2002; Celsi et al. 1993), brand communities support enduring brand relationships, an important condition for intensity of collective consumption practices to develop.

A collective setting, such as a brand community, is necessary for collective consumption practices to emerge (Schau et al. 2009; Hartmann et al. 2015). Practically, the members of a community enact their brand relationship by meeting in real life or virtually (Black and Veloutsou 2017; Confente and Kucharska 2021; Hollebeek et al. 2017; Kornum et al. 2017). Recent scholarship has placed much focus on digital media and platforms and how they sustain social consumption around a brand as well as practices (e.g. Akdevelioglu et al. 2022; Hakala et al. 2017; Hartmann et al. 2015).

Brand communities also support embodied, real-life practices. For instance, Harley Davidson chapter meetings are frequent events organised by the consumer communities (Bagozzi and Dholakia 2006). Brand enthusiast meetings, also called “brandfests” (McAlexander and Schouten 1998), as “corporate-sponsored events provided primarily for the benefit of current customers”, such as Jeep fans, are also well-known (McAlexander and Schouten 1998, p. 378). More recently, a study investigated Nike running communities in Denmark, reveals regular urban running meetings (Kornum et al. 2017). These get-togethers are unique moments for consumers to experience the brand together, share practices, expertise, and show mutual support (Schau et al. 2009; Kjeldgaard and Bode 2017; Ind et al. 2020). Such events embody the lived experiences of community members getting together around their shared passion for the brand, often consuming the brand on these occasions as well. These moments of real-life sharing practices are particularly important for the sustenance of the community. Thanks to their vividness and flow, they reinforce the bonds between



members (McAlexander et al. 2002; Black and Veloutsou 2017) and allow value co-creation amongst members and firms (Chandler and Chen 2016). While it is commonplace for community members to share about their brand experiences and develop brand-related community practices (Schau et al. 2009; Pedeliento et al. 2020), frequent communal brand consumption, remain episodic (Samuel et al. 2018) and limited to specific “events” such as brandfests.

Brand community literature also offers some initial insight on the phenomenon of intensity, whether associating it with a certain level of engagement (Dessart et al. 2019), participation (Pongsakornrunsilp 2010) or even emotions (Dessart et al. 2020) and actions (Brodie et al. 2013). Various levels of intensity in brand community involvement can bring about different outcomes for the brand or for consumers, such as increased loyalty (Dessart et al. 2019). Intensity is also understood as varying across members. Community members within a same community can vary largely in the intensity with which they experience feelings of brand community integration, participation and commitment (Pedeliento et al. 2020). While insightful in explaining that intensity can vary in brand communities, these studies consider intensity to be a measure of the level of a certain phenomenon pertaining to members’ engagement in a community, but never explain what makes up intensity.

To investigate intensity of collective consumption practices, this study focuses on brand community settings, where brand consumption is tightly knit with real-life community interactions, thus giving a unique perspective to community research. In this type of community, lived communal experience of the brand is inevitable—rather than limited to brandfests, and lasts for as long as the brand is consumed. Brand consumption is meshed with community interactions; they are intertwined (such as football matches—see Sierra and Taute 2019). This particular type of brand community, rooted in frequent and embodied real-life interactions (also see Samuel et al. 2018), is expected to reveal intense communal consumption practices owing to their frequent and repetitive nature.

Methodology

In this research, we adopt an interpretive case study design to investigate the concept of intensity of collective consumption practices in brand communities. In particular, we use participant observations conducted by the two authors, and we augment these participant observations with semi-structured interviews to elucidate critical aspects of the participants’ collective practices in the brand community

(i.e. their Crossfit box²). These methods are widely used in the interpretation and analysis of sociocultural phenomena (Corbin and Strauss 2008). We seek to achieve an analytical generalisation from empirical observations of the case to a theoretical description of dynamics at play (Yin 2017).

Context of the study: the case of the Crossfit brand

Consumption practices are acted out in local and contextually specific performances (Reckwick 2002; Schatzki 2002; Warde 2005). To further highlight the intense nature of practices, we have chosen Crossfit, a sports brand, as the context of study for our empirical investigations. The embodied and extreme nature of its consumption aptly qualifies this brand for studying intensity of collective consumption practices.

Crossfit is an example of branded fitness. According to Powers and Greenwell (2017, p. 524), branded fitness resembles “sports (...) that happen inside dedicated places (often with hefty membership fees) and that are inscribed within and accented through the telos of the brand (foodstuffs, gear, props, services and social media). People who adopt branded fitness as their routine often transcend regular gym members and even “gym rats” in their devotion, becoming proselytes engaged in a “way of life” that warrants substantial time, social, and financial investment”. Crossfit is categorised as “extreme” branded fitness. Extreme branded fitness consists of branded exercise programs where participants push themselves beyond recommended exercise requirements, testing the limits of human strength, endurance, and tolerance (Powers and Greenwell 2017). Extreme branded fitness also includes Yoga Bikram, Spartan Races or Tough Mudder, known for their level of intensity and resulting pain (Lamb and Hillman 2015; Scott et al. 2017; James and Gill 2018).

The concept of intensity is at the heart of the Crossfit brand’s values and mission and enacted in the way the sport is practiced. The Crossfit brand proposes its own definition of intensity: Intensity is measured by Power (P), which is composed by the force (F), distance (d) and duration (t) of the workout ($P = (F \times d) / t$). Force is the weight lifted (which can be the body weight). Distance is how far the load is displaced vertically during the movement, times the number of repetitions, and duration is the time of the effort. Time is the denominator because the faster the effort is completed, the higher the intensity (Crossfit 2019).

To enact intensity, Crossfit offers a “high-intensity power-training” (HIPT) program used to improve general physical skills, such as stamina, strength, flexibility, power, speed and agility. The program incorporates exercises related to weightlifting (e.g. jerks, squats, deadlifts), gymnastic (use of rings, handstands and parallel bars), as well as aerobic

² The name for Crossfit gyms.



exercises (e.g. running and rowing). These exercises are performed at a high intensity with little recovery time, during a “workout of the day” (WOD), lasting between 5 and 20 min. In a typical Crossfit session, athletes conduct a warm-up, a skill or strength development segment, the WOD, and a cool down (Gianzina and Kassotaki 2019).

Intensity is also a central element weaved into the history of the brand. Crossfit is an international brand, created in California in 2000 by Greg Glassman, a former gymnast and personal trainer. In 1995, Glassman started experimenting with combining exercise practices usually considered distinct (gymnastic, Olympic lifting and conditioning) into a hybrid “functional fitness” that would result in a level of fitness surpassing what any of those activities could produce on their own (Heywood 2015, pp. 24–25). Initially, Glassman tested his “functional fitness” method on his personal training clients before being hired by the Santa Cruz Police Department to train their officers. In 2005, there were 13 affiliate gyms. Fifteen years later, the Crossfit brand is now recognised by its members and non-members as a staple for fitness, functionality and performance. More than a brand, the strength of Crossfit lies in the creation of tightly knit communities of aficionados that reinforce their own practices and cult for the brand, while sometime being at odds with its management (The Independent 2020). The mixture of maximum effort at high-intensity, competition, and tribalism has given rise to more than 14,000 Crossfit affiliates worldwide (Crossfit.com 2021). Over time, Crossfit has developed a distinct culture, which extends beyond the workouts. It is an “immersive” (Heywood 2015), highly social, and “reinventive” (Dawson 2017) form of exercise that encourages practitioners to share their experiences with one another.

Like many sports (Pradhan et al. 2020), Crossfit relies heavily on its community, which can be found at the global level, with a clear strategic impetus from the brand, but also percolates at the local box level. The founders of Crossfit state that: “The community that spontaneously arises when people do the workouts together (WOD) is a key component of why Crossfit is so effective, and it gave birth to a global network of Crossfit affiliates. Harnessing the natural camaraderie, competition and fun of sport or game yields an intensity that cannot be matched by other means.” (Crossfit.com 2021). This statement highlights how meshed the concepts of community and intensity are, and how instrumental they are to the effectiveness of Crossfit.

To summarise, Crossfit epitomises intensity in a collective setting. While the definition of intensity by Crossfit is highly valuable to our understanding of intensity of collective practice it also suffers certain shortcomings. The definition is bound by the specific nature of the Crossfit activities (e.g. lifting weights vertically) and as such hardly relevant to other contexts. Moreover, it does not take into account

the consumer perspective and individual experience, which may also include psychological and social elements beyond the bodily enactment of the practice. Last, the enduring and long-term aspect of the practice is also overlooked. The Crossfit definition of intensity is but a starting point on understanding the role of intensity in brand community settings, which our project aims to explore.

Data collection

The authors have both been practicing Crossfit since 2014. Personal experience and interest led us to question our practice, a method common in consumer studies (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001; Tumbat and Belk 2011). Having collectively practiced Crossfit in licensed or non-licensed environments in 10 countries around the world, we have had a chance to observe, participate and discuss Crossfit in various cultural and temporal settings, similarly to Thompson and Isisag (2022). Personal experience has induced a penetrating understanding of the intensity of the Crossfit consumption practice while providing access to other practitioners. By engaging in ongoing participant observation (Wacquant 2004), the authors acquired an embodied and immersive understanding of the practice, as well as the skills and knowledge necessary to build rapport with the participants (Murphy et al. 2019). This layer of auto-ethnographic data built the foundation of a series of interviews with Crossfitters, and of a social interpretive approach to analysis (Atkinson and Coffey 2003).

In order to go deeper than our personal experiences, we conducted 21 interviews in Europe and North America between 2017 and 2020. To best highlight collective practices, the interviews were conducted with members (12), coaches (4) and box owners (4). Interviews took place before or after a WOD at the box. The owner and coaches of the box were first approached to obtain their agreement to interview them and their members. They also helped us identify members we could interview. The interviews relied on an interview guide (in “Appendix 1”) including questions relative to respondent experiences with Crossfit (e.g. motivations to start, context, definition), personal and communal practice; impact (e.g. food, work, body, relationships), sacrifices (e.g. time, money); personal role in the Crossfit community; cultural aspects related to Crossfit and its possible negative sides. Along with the recurrent notion of intensity, we have found evidence of practices, relationship with the community, the brand and the self. Throughout the interviews, we teased out what makes Crossfit intense and what constitutes intensity, building on the personal narratives of the participant’s experiences (Thompson 1997; Murphy et al. 2019). Table 1 summarises the profiles of the interviewees and interview details.



Table 1 Interviewees' characteristics

Name	City (country)	Status	Age	Date started Crossfit	Interview duration
Alex	Bordeaux (FR)	Member ⁽¹⁾	25	April 2016	50'
Ana			26	Feb. 2016	62'
Audrey			28	May 2015	41'
Anne-Laure			28	March 2016	59'
Carolina			26	June 2013	31'
Cécile			25	Jan. 2016	36'
Clémence			27	April 2016	40'
David			33	March 2014	62'
Yohan			34	May 2014	32'
Remy		Owner ⁽²⁾	45	Feb. 2013	35'
Charlotte	Amsterdam (NL)	Coach ⁽³⁾	35	Feb. 2013	15'
Molly	Boston (USA)	Owner	38	Jan. 2010	40'
Marc-André	Montréal (CA)	Member	46	2008	55'
Johannie			33	2012	51'
Steven		Coach	30	Nov. 2011	48'
Alexandra			28	2008	25'
Simon		Owner	35	2008	23'
Mike	San Francisco (USA)	Member	36	2013	35'
Benjamin		Member	26	2013	20'
Pat		Coach	30	2008	37'
Jenn		Owner	37	2011	28'

Member: member of a Crossfit box, thus member of the brand community

Owner: owner of a Crossfit box, as per the affiliation system put in place by the Crossfit brand- the owner is also often coach

Coach: the coach trains the members during the workout of the day (WOD), helps, advises and supports their practice

Data analysis

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. In total, fourteen hours of interviews were recorded and 94 single-spaced pages of transcribed data, along with interview notes, were analysed, using a social interpretive approach, similar to other studies using a brand community case study design (e.g. Akdevelioglu et al. 2022). The analysis builds on a thematic approach consisting of an iterative process of reading, assessing, and identifying emerging themes and categories that organise and describe data in detail (Braun and Clarke 2006), constantly going back and forth from theory to data. A series of codes was first created deductively based on the available practice and brand community literature (for instance, we expected from the literature that intensity would show dimensions of complexity and frequency), and other codes emerged inductively from the analysis (typically, the dimension of focus hereafter, which was not conceptualised).

In order to increase the validity and trustworthiness of the analysis, we used triangulation between researchers during the coding process. Using the Nvivo 12 software, three researchers (the two co-authors and an independent

marketing researcher, not involved in the data collection) independently classified and coded the data collected, which ensured the avoidance on researcher bias through producing diverse perspectives in the data analysis (Maylor and Blackmon 2005). Following a hermeneutic approach, they independently coded the entire dataset and subsequently compared their interpretations of participants' verbatim items and coding decisions. In several instances, disagreement about coding decisions led the researchers to review the data together and openly discuss their respective views and interpretations with the objective of seeking a consensual solution (Thompson 1997). At the end and after 4 inter-coder meetings to agree on the analysis, 29 theoretically informed, data-based agreed upon nodes and sub-nodes emerged from the analysis.

We analysed the data at the individual level whilst considering the community in these individual experiences. With a view to our objectives, the analysis focuses on (1) identifying the nature of intensity of collective consumption practices and (2) understanding how intensity of consumption practices interplays with consumer's relations to the self, the community and the brand in a collective branded



setting. To do so, we followed the approach of Strauss and Corbin (1990), using open, axial and then selective coding around the core concept of intensity. The authors first coded units of data in the transcripts upon reading them, based on their relevance to the study, and extracted open codes directly linked with excerpts from the data. Next, open codes were aggregated into higher order categories. In defining these higher order categories, the authors went back to the literature for guidance. An example of the coding approach can be found in “Appendix 2”.

Results

The nature of “Intensity of collective consumption practices”

As they provide insight into the nature of intensity of collective consumption practices, the data suggest an answer to our first research question. There is evidence that the brand, brand consumption and communal settings interplay to generate intense practices, which are enabled through the embodied performativity of the members (Scott et al. 2017). Four dimensions of intensity come to light, offering an understanding of the concept.

Complexity

Firstly, complexity appears to be a dimension of intensity. Complexity arises from the difficulty of the practice, its variety and intricacy. Participants express how hard it is to process mentally and perform physically, especially with all the rules and meanings that need to be processed. Integrating all the types of movements and their combinations also contributes to this complexity. Participants explain finding the practice complex because they need to think about many things concurrently and develop strategies to make it through. At first, they may even feel that they will never succeed.

When you’re done, you are exhausted, as much physically as mentally, you are totally drained. Alex – M – 25

Complexity is also increased by the element of surprise: WODs change every day and more than often, are not announced in advance. Making the practice ever-changing and surprising motivates people a lot. This variety is linked with intensity because, as interviewees explain, no habit is created, and you need to be ready for the unexpected, which can be very challenging. This notion adds a nuance to the

“habitual” aspect of practices as initially understood by researchers (Warde 2014).

I get kind of bored easily and that’s why Crossfit is fun because every day you go to class and it’s something different and you look at a workout and you go, oh that’s a fun workout it’s a creative workout it’s a workout that will challenge me. Jenn – F – 37

Frequency

Frequency also appears to be a dimension of intensity. Frequency—the number of occurrences of the practice over a given timeline—is a very malleable and subjective facet of intensity for the respondents, as besides the actual frequency of the practice it can also be considered against that prescribed officially.

5 days/week. It is the optimum amount. It’s the Crossfit « prescription ». You do 2-3 in a row and then rest. When you exercise at this level of intensity, it is important to take rest days. Molly – F – 38

Frequency of practice evolves over time and is individual-specific. Interviewees state that it is a matter of time-management, lifestyle, age, and work-life balance, but there is a clear shared understanding that frequency of practice impacts many aspects of the consumption, such as performance, self-perceptions and relation to the community (see further in analysis).

Crossfit really changed my perception of training. It allowed me surpassing myself and performing. I train 4 to 5 times a week, sometimes alone, or I tried to join a WOD. Clients like when you train with them. Steven – M – 30

Length

Moreover, length appears to be a dimension of intensity. Length refers to the time dedicated to the practice in a given consumption occurrence, but can also refer to the time elapsed since the first consumption. Both aspects tend to affect consumer experience but also—and mainly—their performance. Members who have been practicing Crossfit for a long time have a long-term vision, although most agree that results are visible from the first practice.

I think the value is progress and that’s one of the main things that they’re trying to provide for their participants. Progress for the sake of progress is that you’re showing up one level and then you’re growing to a completely different. Benjamin – M – 26



Participants point out also that the uniqueness of Crossfit is that short WODs are extremely effective, so there is no need to spend hours in a given session. The interviews suggest that frequency and consistency are more important than lengthy workouts: length is inseparable from frequency to understand the intensity of the Crossfit practice.

The amount of work you get done in that hour is a lot and if I wasn't going to Crossfit, I probably would be going to that 24-hour gym and I would be probably there for two and a half to three hours so, as far as timewise, it's more efficient. Mike – M – 36

Focus

Finally, focus appears to be the remaining dimension of intensity. The data gives evidence that intensity should also be understood through an element of concentration—or focus—which directly taps into the cognitive dimension of practices, while complexity, length and frequency denote the embodied aspect of the practice (Bourdieu 1990). This notion of focus emerged sharply from the data, while not being this explicit in the reviewed literature. Focus refers to the cognitive mobilisation, attention, engrossment, or concentration required by the practice.

It requires concentration, whatever the movement, whether it is gym or weightlifting, to avoid pushing too much or placing yourself wrong ... you need to think carefully about what you are doing: the pelvis, a straight back ... you need to think about all the performance points. Alex – M – 25

Participants express that there is extreme focus, engrossment and absorption in the task, hence cognitive intensity. Often, they talk about "thinking only about the task", and "resetting" their brains, which denotes immersion into the experience (Carù and Cova 2007).

For an hour, I only think about how I'm going to manage my WOD, do better than last time. I don't think about anything, I crush every thought, I do a full reset. When I get out, I've forgotten everything, I have no more problems. It's totally better than an hour with a shrink! Audrey – F – 28

According to some participants, focus is necessary because of the strength required, the complexity of the combined movements including the risk of injuries. For instance, coaches explain that high intensity considerably reduces the error margin so that they need to be extra careful to prevent injuries.

Toward a definition of the intensity of collective consumption practices

The above observations lead to a tentative definition of intensity of collective consumption practices. We propose that the *intensity of collective consumption practices is a multi-dimensional concept referring to the way a consumption practice is enacted behaviourally, cognitively and emotionally. Intensity of collective consumption practices is an individual-specific, subjective and time-specific phenomenon, and is composed of 4 dimensions: complexity, frequency, length and focus. Complexity* can be understood as the difficulty of the practice, based on its variety, intricacy, and rules. *Frequency* refers to the number of occurrences of the practice over a given time horizon (mostly a week in the case). *Length* is the amount of time units dedicated to a given practice occurrence or since the starting date of individual practice. Lastly, *focus*—which denotes both an aspect of flow (being lost in the moment) and extreme concentration—is the cognitive immersion into the task.

The various aspects of intensity are inseparable. Focus is induced by complexity as the intricate nature of the activity requires mental engagement. Frequency is related to length. Complexity, moreover, varies with length and frequency, as the difficulty to perform a movement may decrease with the number of practices and with time, or increase if high frequency is not respected.

And at the time, I was like 19 years old, I could do a lot of Crossfit workouts and never be sore. I would never be tired and I wish there was a video of it because it probably looked really ugly. My mobility was terrible. I don't want to imagine what my overhead squat looked like, for example. I bet you it was really nasty. Then from there, it's just been the last 12 years of learning, trying to get better with technical movements. Pat – M – 30

Additionally, intensity of practices is a subjective concept, which varies with time, but also depending on myriad other personal and contextual elements. Intensity of practices cannot be measured as an objective representation of what should or should not be intense for any given individual in any given situation. Practices by definition are bound by the understanding, knowledge and emotions experienced through activities (Reckwitz 2002) and, as a result, a characteristic of practice can only be individual-specific.

You could be good at some stuff but bad at some other stuff, no matter what you can always improve and you don't feel bad or like superior to everybody else because everyone's main goal is to get better personally, not against everybody else. Mike -M- 36



On the basis of this more precise understanding of the intensity of practices, we explore how intensity interplays and shapes consumers' relations to the self, the community and the brand. If often harmonious, these relationships can also be tainted with challenges, obstacles and stigma. The following section offers a nuanced view of the role of intensity in collective consumption practices.

The intensity of collective consumption practices and the self

The relation of the self with the intense practice of Crossfit starts with what motivates the person to join a Crossfit box. For Crossfit members, the initial personal motivation is often related to improved wellbeing (Chandler and Chen 2016) and body transformation. These objectives are nurtured by the perception of intensity and efficacy embodied by the brand and communicated by Crossfitters. While this tale of intensity can bring an element of fear it also acts as a motivational force.

At first, it was more about feeling better about my body and losing weight. Now, it's more about having a toned body and one that allows me performing, going further. Audrey – F – 28

Subsequently, the intensity of consumption practices has a direct impact on the individual benefits members claim to gain. First, the frequency of the practice, as it is prescribed to do Crossfit up to 5/6 times a week, creates an intense rhythm building strong habits (Wilhite 2012). Since the aim in Crossfit is for everyone to experience intensity, no matter their initial skills or level, everyone pushes themselves.

Today you won't hear me say « it's too hard, I'm quitting » (...) I know there are solutions for every problem, they teach it in Crossfit. It's also a school of life! Audrey – F – 28

The results of this constant self-surpassing attitude show quickly and help Crossfitters shed kilos and increase muscle mass.

The element of variety can also be a strong motivator. In a society where people are easily bored, Crossfit brings an element of fun and unpredictability, which contributes to their continuous and sustained engagement. Crossfit is an immersive (Heywood 2015), highly social, and reinvented (Dawson 2017) form of exercise. Beyond clear physical improvements, Crossfitters explain that Crossfit can become a lifestyle, impacting other aspects: work, food, time management and self-esteem.

It's an activity that targets your brain and makes you behave and live your life differently. I've become more determined, I stand up for myself. Before, I was really shy, introvert, a bit naïve. Crossfit also helps me go through with what I start doing; I used to start doing something and not finish it. If I had to use one word to describe this, beyond focus, it's self-control. Ana – F – 26

Crossfitters' testimonies express a form of transformative experience, akin to what Tumbat and Belk (2011) explain with the Everest climbing experience, but with a recurrent, almost daily and ritualised form of practice (Pekkanen et al. 2017). Crossfitters often evolve from simply wanting to get back in shape, attracted by a strong promise of improved well-being, to adopting an addictive lifestyle, almost like a cult.

The more you do Crossfit, the more you see your improvement and it's really cool, and so an addiction really forms and makes you want to keep going. David – M – 33

With the benefits associated with intense consumption practice also come negative effects, with injuries being the prominent one on the self. Many respondents recall injuries at some point of their Crossfit experience, sometimes inducing a very long period of rest and frustration. General body pains and soreness are also experienced but rarely complained about.

I have been injured for a full year due to an accident and I couldn't train, and I tried, but it did not work out so I became very unhappy but after a while, you have that period of acceptance, and then I found a way to work with it. Charlotte – F – 35

Interestingly, however, Crossfitters seldom blame the brand, company, or others for their injuries. These are their own doing, for being careless, too impatient, unaware of their needs and abilities on the day: they would not have "dosed" well the intensity of their practices, letting themselves being carried away by the practice, or being oblivious of their personal limitations. An interesting paradox emerges: intensity is prescribed by the brand, encouraged by the community and sought after by Crossfitters, but is also the cause of negative experiences, such as injuries. These are put on personal responsibility. No participant declared wanting to discontinue their practice after recovery or blaming anyone for an injury.

I did that to myself on a boxjump. I felt a pain, but I continued pushing and pushing...It serves me right



though because the week I hurt myself, I did too many WODs; I was coming in the morning and in the evening (...) I did nine WODs in four days, and on the fifth day, I got injured. Alex – M – 25

Participants often feel the same self-blame when not reaping all the expected benefits from Crossfit.

Overall, interviews offer room for interpretation of a general understanding amongst Crossfitters that, despite the pain, setbacks or difficulties, the intensity is ultimately good for them, their body, mind and general well-being. They take pride in their achievement.

The intensity of collective consumption practices and the brand community

As a third aspect of our enquiry, we investigated the link between intensity of practice and relations among community members. We found that the brand community plays a role in the panoptical or social aspects of intensity (e.g. being seen by other people engaging in intense practice and feeding off that). It appears that, however hard the workout, the group will always push its members to surpass themselves. In this process, the group is instrumental, thanks to strong support rituals and practices in consumption, which are a key element in community literature (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). In fact, as the intensity of the practices increases, so does mutual support.

The special part are people around you. I can do all the things by myself: my abs, my squats, etc., things I used to do in a normal gym ... if you tell me go to the gym and do your squats I will but I will not push myself. When I am with the others, they tell me I can do more, and I don't believe them but then I find myself doing a PR of 70kgs at squats...ok, (laughs) probably you were right! The others push you to do more and be better. Carolina – F – 26

As a common Crossfit ritual, for instance, everybody stays to cheer the last person doing their exercises, and no one leaves until all have done so and been congratulated. Crossfitters recognise that intensity is experienced differently by everyone, and that the same WOD make take longer to complete for others. They stick by each other's side until the end. For the person being last to complete the WOD, this support from peers is extremely valued, and even helps them finish. The sheer intensity of the support community members give each other is said to be unseen in other types of gyms.

The community part of it is the thing that drives it the most and I don't know what other community is better athletically than this. Mike – M – 36

Because of the intensity of the practices, each person has a role to play, including the coaches, who maintain the rituals, ethos and values of the brand. No matter their background, each member, with their strengths and weaknesses, can benefit and support the community. Participants recognise that every member experiences intensity differently and at different levels, and that this variety also creates support and group cohesion.

The study of Crossfit members also reveals that individuals, whatever their background, perceptions of and relation to sports, can be part of a Crossfit community. The diverse nature and intensity of exercises appear to sweep away prejudice within the community: benevolence and mutual help prevail over competition. A common understanding among Crossfitters is that anyone can do Crossfit and is welcome to it, no matter the age, gender or physical condition.

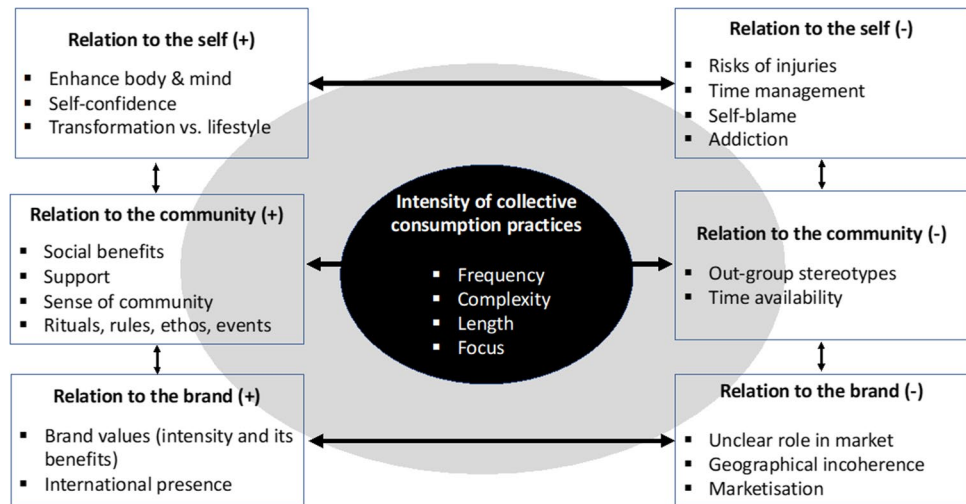
Yet, more than the physical ability or body type, the intensity of the practice seems to act as a cut-off criterion for being attracted or repulsed by the brand (Dessart and Cova 2021): we can even say there are those who are not afraid of the intensity, and join, and those who are reluctant to join or even demonise Crossfitters on account of their high-intensity practices. Intensity thus somehow acts not only as a unique selling point and inclusion criterion for the in-group, but also as a repulsive criteria for the out-groups. The prevalent positive facets of brand community member relationships thus do not disclaim accounts of problematic inter-personal relationships. As in any community, there is positioning and disidentification from out-groups (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). Intensity of practices plays an important role here as it is the source of negative stereotypes and opinions surrounding the Crossfit community. Community members are well aware of this negativity and sometimes try to fight it.

I would love to break the stereotype that Crossfit is all about strength and that it is only for gym freaks. I often get comments from people who come to initiation that Crossfit looks very « intense » or that it « scares » them. I would like to bring Crossfit to the masses. Molly – F – 38

In addition to creating tensions with outsiders, Crossfit intensity also brings heterogeneity within the community. Subgroups and roles are created within a certain community (Veloutsou and Black 2020), but also across countries and time. For instance, members from North America deplore the level of competitiveness that an intense practice can generate with time. This internal tension is particularly present in regions where Crossfit has been established for years, creating competitiveness amongst members.



Fig. 1 Intensity of collective consumption practices in the Crossfit brand community



I think that Crossfit evolves more and more toward a « competitive » model and less toward wellbeing.
Simon – M – 35

These nuances indicate that, while the intensity of practices fosters positive in-group relationships, caveats also exist. If group relationships are geared toward supporting individual achievements, there is potential slippage toward excessive competitiveness or addictive behaviours (Cui et al. 2018).

In most cases, however, members are not in a competitive mindset and only seek self-betterment, with friendly rivalry at the most (Akdevelioglu et al. 2022). The data show that the intensity of practices is instrumental to the strong bonds between people, and this is evidenced by mutual support and care. In this process, the brand fills an instrumental and essential role.

The intensity of collective consumption practices and the brand

The role of the Crossfit brand appears to be essential for the intensity of practices to exist for several reasons. Firstly, it is clear that the brand is what brings people together. It is the shared values, ethos, rituals and “rules” of the brand that bring structure to the activity and to the intense communal consumption. These elements are the constituting elements of the community. The brand advocates a “holistic” form of intensity, and this is mostly understood in terms of lifelong well-being, wellness and fitness. For being core to the values of Crossfit, intensity percolates in every member’s individual and collective practices.

The intensity of Crossfit is also one of the unique selling points that differentiates it from other sports. Many interviewees expressed having chosen Crossfit in contrast to

other forms of sports because of intensity and its underlying aspects of frequency, length and complexity.

It is generally more efficient (than traditional weight-lifting), speedier and also harder: less comfort, more intensity. It is this very holistic aspect, this link between physical and mental activity ... I’ve seen it in other sports but it is more obvious in Crossfit because there is the mental aspect and the collective dimension.
Yohan – M – 34

Additionally, while intensity may be a differentiating factor for the Crossfit brand, it appears to be a double-edged sword as well. The brand, indeed, does not have the monopoly of intensity in sport; its methodology is open to all and highly replicable. Some gyms use Crossfit’s guidelines and artefacts without being officially affiliated to it, and overtly propose a similar intense methodology, a community spirit and even rituals. The competing gyms often refer to “cross-training” for their way of exercising but also more informally to Crossfit itself. Thus there can be strong confusion in the market, putting Crossfit’s “unique” intensive sports practice under treat.

Further, interviewees indicate that, as the brand and its meaning in the market have changed drastically, their relationship to the brand and perception thereof has evolved with time. In its early days, the brand was seen as a herald of marginality and originality, powered by a very strong culture of pleasure and self-betterment. In contrast, the brand is now associated with competition, branding alliances (Reebok previously and Nobull presently) and more generally, profit and money-making business.

Originally, Crossfit was for outsiders (...). I am not mainstream and when something is popular, it is not for me. (...) Now, (Crossfit) is becoming a place for

performance rather than self-improvement. Marc-André – M – 46

In addition to this market value slippage from the early days of Crossfit (Cova and Paraque 2016), our interview sample highlights a sharp gap between North-American and European perceptions. In North America, where the brand was established earlier, there is a form of brand maturity along with a well-developed monetisation of the concept. Europe, on the other hand, still somewhat benefits from the culture quality of the early years, even though the competitive aspect is starting to percolate through the practices as well.

Figure 1 summarises the rich interplay between the intensity of collective consumption practices and individuals' relationship to the self, the community, and the brand.

Discussion

To our knowledge, no marketing study on practices has attempted to define practices intensity exhaustively. This article advances our understanding of collective consumption practices and contributes to practice theory by focusing on an overlooked aspect of the anatomy of practices: intensity. We propose that intensity is a quality of practices that permeates knowledge, activities and engagement (Warde 2005), and that it is constantly negotiated, and co-created between the individual consumer and his/her environment. Intensity emerges out of individual action and understandings, but it is perpetuated and reinforced by the social context and firm-controlled elements, in line with the co-created view of practices (Chandler and Chen 2016). This paper defines, dimensionalises and contextualises intensity in practices. More specifically, it brings insight into collective consumption practices in several ways.

First, it opens the discussion on the intensity of practices by proposing a definition of the concept. Intensity of practices is viewed as composed of frequency, complexity, length and focus. While several studies on social consumption and practices highlight some of these elements separately (complexity for Holt (1995) and frequency for Warde (2014)), this article is a first attempt at exhaustively studying intensity of practices, its nature and dimensions. While earlier contributions focused on habitual and frequent nature of practices, (Warde 2014), the present study brings to light the multi-dimensional nature of intensity, which is akin to the nature of service complexity (Benedettini and Neely 2012). We propose that the interaction of length of practice and mental focus is a critical driver of intensity.

A few medical studies address the notion of intensity of (physical) practice, which they define in terms of frequency and duration of performance (Kwakkel 2006). While highlighting that the complexity of the task fosters intensity and effort (Richter et al. 2016), they note that intensity, according to the conservation principle, is avoided by our bodies. Our study, on the contrary, suggests that intensity may be a desired state, a view that accords with Scott et al. (2017), proposing that consumers increasingly seek physical pain, namely, as a remedy for a dull lifestyle. Intensity of consumption practices in collective settings thus not only sheds light on the nature of practices and brand relationships, but yields a psycho-social perspective on consumer behaviour.

Second, our findings reveal how intensity impacts individuals in their practice. As such, our data also differs from studies on brand communities where members are often considered homogenous in kind (Ouwensloot and Öderkerken-Schröder 2008), and to be seeking similar benefits or working toward similar goals (Veloutsou and Black 2020). The few community studies that approach members as heterogeneous often do so in terms of their role in the community (Veloutsou and Black 2020) or engagement with the brand (Dessart et al. 2019) rather than in terms of their bodies, capabilities and experiences. Our findings attest that people with very different backgrounds, physical abilities, expectations and experiences with the brand can get together in an intense practice. We also find that intensity, however idiosyncratic to practitioners, is a strong transformative experience (Tumbat and Belk 2011; Pekkanen et al. 2017). Our article concurs with studies suggesting that intensity can increase the sensation of pride in achieving a task (Holt 1995), thus affecting one's self-perception and contributing to identity projects (Dessart and Cova 2021).

Third, beyond benefiting the self, intensity of practices is socially negotiated and created, and hence impacts community relationships. As stated by Pekkanen et al. (2017), the intensity of the experience is the seed of the *linking value* or shared feeling (Cova 1997). Intense practice also alleviates individual differences through generating intense forms of community support (Scott et al. 2017). Given the intensity and variety of practices, no individual can be good at everything. In intense practices, consumers of whatever background have both strengths and weaknesses, which contributes to defining their role within the community, and fosters a strong support system in brand consumption practices (Schau et al. 2009; Veloutsou and Black 2020) while sweeping away externally perceived stereotypes. Hence, the community becomes a real driver for the individual and a critical component of brand consumption. Selflessness and mutualisation of effort are manifestations of intense communal brand practice. Thus, by highlighting the unique nature



of practices where intensity is sustained by frequency, unpredictability and ethos, our article brings depth to the understanding of community practices (e.g. Schau et al. 2009; Brodie et al. 2013), which are usually considered peripheral to actual brand consumption.

Fourth, our findings also shed light on the relationship of community members with the brand. It evidences that the brand is an essential element in the communication, promotion and sustenance of intensity. The brand ethos and values constantly refer to intensity and advocate collective consumption practices of an intense nature. By providing a canvas and sets of rules and competencies to perform practices, the brand is also instrumental to the development of the community (McAlexander et al. 2002; Miliopoulou 2021). Yet, the common understanding of intensity as core to the brand is not enough to maintain the brand values and its members' full adherence to its ethos. The brand can be at risk as its business model and core culture evolve; it can face a slippage of value (Cova and Paraque 2016). This value slippage is non-concomitant in its international dimension, evidencing international heterogeneity in the brand community (Cova et al. 2007). Thus, we conclude that the understanding and, most importantly, enactment of practice intensity are bound by an ecosystem of other brand artefacts, meanings, and brand management decisions that can harm, or at least shift, consumers' relationship to the brand and to their practice.

Managerial implications

Not all brands automatically foster intense practices and sell intensity as part of their DNA. Yet, consumers can engage in intense practices against or beyond normal usage prescriptions, leading to either positive or detrimental effects. We believe that, beyond the limiting nature of the Crossfit case, practice intensity can be experienced with any brand that represent lifestyle choices, such as leisure pursuits, hobbies and other activities like travel and tourism. Beyond extreme fitness—e.g. Crossfit, Bikram yoga, Tough Mudder—or beyond any brand repeatedly consumed in groups—e.g. sports, education or co-working, managerial implications can concern many brands where intense—e.g. addictive—consumption can emerge.

From a managerial point of view, practice intensity can be used by marketing managers as a segmentation variable in the Crossfit/extreme fitness market (and some other markets too). Practice intensity is highly personal and context-dependent. So, managers have to recognise that consumers differ in how they engage with the intensity of their practice and enactment thereof. Thus, they can customise service experiences to meet differential styles of consumers' practice intensity. Although the basic service is the same for

everyone (the same WOD), Crossfit coaches and/or members can adapt/customise the level of practice intensity by scaling the efforts (increasing/decreasing the number of repetitions and/or the loads lifted). The Crossfit WODs last 1 h and the most intense part often has a limited "time cap" of 15–20 min).

Even though Crossfit may seem to be designed for ambitious people who are motivated by personal challenges, people with very different backgrounds, physical abilities, expectations, and experiences with the brand can get together in an intense practice, which can be tailored to meet consumer expectations.

Our article shows that managers can capitalise on intensity of practices to support the development of a community around their brand; as intensity makes practice challenging, the help and support of others is all the more essential. Brands can foster the creation of support networks, encourage consumers to consume collectively and negotiate brand meaning collectively, even for products or industries where it is not normally the case. Crossfit gives evidence of a shift in the fitness industry from the promotion of individualistic values to more communal ones: gyms and fitness brands traditionally do not offer communal values or benefits. There is a change of paradigm in the understanding of brands and practices, and the way people train in the fitness industry. What started as an individualistic endeavour has become an activity elevated by the community, much like communal sports (Sierra and Taute 2019). This may be applicable to other industries experiencing changes toward more communality.

Our findings give managers recipes to manage the relationships of their consumers with the brand. To create intensity, managers should seek variety and frequent changes in the consumption of the brand, creating surprise and avoiding boredom. Feeling challenged and dealing with the unexpected are strong motivators and generators of intensity, because consumers have to constantly adapt and reinvent their practice. Frequency should also be promoted as necessary to reap the benefits of the brand.

Last, this article provides guidance to help consumers manage their own identity project around brands. We know that consumers often use brands as means toward the building of self-identity (Thompson 2014; Dessart and Cova 2021). With intense practices, a brand can take an essential role in the life of consumers and become central to the development of an ethos or way of life (Fournier and Lee 2009). Brands should also understand that intensity is individual-specific and that every consumer will experience it differently: respecting the spectrum of intensity levels is key to allowing each consumer to develop their own identity and evolve with the brand. Rather than supporting the consumption of the brand (Schau et al. 2009), managers should seek to support individuals in their practice, beyond



company-advocated practices (Skålén et al. 2022). Intensity can be marketed as a core value or unique selling proposition of the brand, which can thus become a motivator to join the practice, reject it (Dessart and Cova 2021) or build stereotypes around the brand, creating a very strong demarcation between in- and out-groups (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001).

Limitations and future research

Having paved the ground to an understanding of intensity of practices and unpacked its constituting dimensions, we hope to inspire future research to better understand and conceptualise intensity. Despite the wide temporal and geographical span of our study, we have addressed but one brand, and thus encourage future research to explore practice intensity in a variety of branded contexts, most prominently experiential products and services where consumers’ role in co-creating value is high. Such research could bring forward a better understanding of the conditions for intensity to emerge and be sustained, as well as of the types of intensity that may exist. Further, we noted that the customer perception of intensity is different from that of the brand itself: investigating various stakeholder’s understanding of the term could be of interest.

A deeper understanding of the good and bad sides of intensity in practices should be explored, as well as why consumers and brands alike may associate with it. What makes consumers seek intensity in our societies (Scott et al. 2017)? In a global context apparently geared toward more introspection, mindfulness, slowness and minimalism, why do people seek intensity, challenge and complexity? Can intensity be a form of self-care and a positive trend in consumption? On the other hand, our study suggested that dark sides can also be associated with the pursuit of intensity such as sacrifices, injuries and alienation from a reference group. These positive and negative aspects of intensity should be further elucidated.

Appendix 1: Interview guide

Name:

Gender:

Age:

Nationality:

Crossfit Box (city):

Date started Crossfit:

For Box owners and coaches only

- When did you start doing Crossfit (before coaching/be a box owner)? Why?
- What made you want to become a coach/box owner?
- Which benefits do you get from this activity?
- Would you stop coaching Crossfit?
- What do you think about your customers/members?

1. Story of your personal experience with Crossfit

- The beginnings (when, motivation, context, ...).
- When did you start Crossfit?
- What motivated you to start?

2. Personal definition of Crossfit: For you, what is Crossfit?

- What do you know about the history of Crossfit?
- Crossfit: between sport and brand: what does the Crossfit brand represent for you?

Prompt about intensity if missed out

- How would you define Crossfit to someone who does not know it?

Prompt about intensity if missed out

- What are the values (positive / negative) that you associate with Crossfit?
- According to you, in what Crossfit is different from other sports or similar activities? Why?
- How do you think Crossfit has evolved over time? In a positive way? Negative way?

3. Your personal practice of Crossfit

- What makes Crossfit special for you?
- What does Crossfit mean to you?
- Is it important for you? Why?
- Do you have a particular goal when doing Crossfit? How does Crossfit help you achieving that?
- Does the intensity of WODs matter to you?

4. The Impact of Crossfit

Do you think Crossfit impacts aspects of your life in particular? Which ones? how?



- The food you eat / your nutrition program
- The relation to oneself (body, mind, clothes, ...)
- How do you feel in your body with Crossfit?
- How do you feel in your head with the Crossfit?
- The relationship to others
- Your work
- How do you feel when you're not doing Crossfit?
- Is there anything you like less about Crossfit? Something you would change if you could?
- Has your opinion of Crossfit changed from the beginning? How? Why?

5. Your place in the "Crossfit" community?

- What do you think of other members of your box?
- Have you made friends with other members of your box?
- What is your role in your box? among the other people who do Crossfit with you (help, ...)?
- Is there a particular "profile" for doing Crossfit in your box?

- How do you feel about the other members of your box when you practice Crossfit?
- What do you think of other "Crossfitters" in the world?

6. Sacrifices to practice Crossfit

- For you, does practicing Crossfit represent a financial sacrifice (subscription to the Box, clothes, food, proteins and other substitutes, ...)?
- Do you experience sacrifices in terms of time (time to go to the Box, compared to family life, compared to other activities / sports)?
- Any other sacrifices

7. Negative aspects related to Crossfit

- Do you perceive negative aspects in relation to Crossfit?

Prompt: Bad image, risk of injury ...

8. Cultural / international aspect

- Have you ever trained in another box than yours? If so, in the same city? the same country?
- What are the main differences that you have been able to identify across boxes/countries/cities?

Appendix 2: Coding Sample

Higher-order code	Open code	Quote
Complexity	Physical complexity	<i>"It is very complex (...) as a bodily expression and requires a real symbiosis between your body and the activity"</i>
	Mental complexity	<i>"We want people absorbing as much information as possible, as quickly as possible"</i>
	Element of surprise	<i>"It is constantly varied and intense. The fact that it is always varied creates less habits and more gains."</i>



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Declarations

Conflict of interest On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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Laurence Dessart is Associate Professor of Marketing at HEC Liege, Management School of the University of Liège. She holds a Ph.D. from the Adam Smith Business School of the University of Glasgow, in the United Kingdom. Her research interests include brand management, consumer engagement and digital marketing. She is a member of the editorial board of the *Journal of Product Management* and *Journal of Business Research* and has published in journals such as the *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, *Journal of Business Research* or *European Journal of Marketing*, among others.

Grégory Bressolles is a Senior Marketing Professor and Head of the Specialised Master in “Digital Marketing & Data” at KEDGE Business School. He holds a Ph.D. and an HDR from the University of Toulouse – Capitole (France). His research interests include consumer behaviour, digital and services marketing, multi-channel retailing. His research has been published in the *Journal of Business Research*, *Management International*, *International Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management*, *Journal of Enterprise Information Management*.

