

# The Phenomenon of The Stanley Tumbler

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## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to research the phenomenon of the Stanley tumbler. This topic was chosen because for a while it has been impossible to go online on different social media platforms without coming across some form of Stanley related content, because there are many consumers posting videos and photos on social media with their Stanley tumblers and also because there are a lot of people posting commentary and reactions to the Stanley trend. Central aspects of the phenomenon and this paper are, of course, the Stanley company, an e-commerce webshop called The Buy Guide and the social media platform TikTok more specifically the #WaterTok community on TikTok. Moreover, the Stanley tumbler phenomenon is an interesting trend to look at because it is a thing that is happening right now and also because it mainly takes place on social media, which is something people use a lot of time on everyday.

When it comes to the theories used in this paper then there are seven theory sections however some of them are more for background knowledge that relates to the other theories and will contribute to making the data used in the analysis section more understandable. The first of the theories used in this paper is eWOM and in connection to it there is also a theory section on eWOM & purchasing decisions. Hereafter, there is a short section on marketing that leads into the theory section on the 7 Ps and social media. Lastly, this paper also contains theory sections on consumer involvement and participation, affiliate marketing and co-branding. Out of these seven theories marketing, social media and affiliate marketing will be used more for background knowledge whereas the other theories will be used to analyse the data in the analysis section.

When it comes to the methodology behind this paper then the approach for the analysis is a thematic method and the theories are the themes that will be identified in the data. Moreover, constructionism is the philosophical stance behind this paper alongside interpretivism as well as the inductive approach.

The results and conclusion to this paper thanks to the analysis section are that multiple aspects have contributed to the creation of the Stanley phenomenon and that some of those aspects are The Buy Guide, different forms of eWOM from different sources and of course the Stanley company. Stanley not only contributed in the creation of the phenomenon, but the way they

contributed is also what changed Stanley a bit and thereby affected them. They changed the way the market, for example, by creating an affiliate program, co-branding with Starbucks and starting marketing more towards women than 'the working man' as they were previously known for.

## Introduction

This paper (spoiler alert) is about - as the title says - the phenomenon of the Stanley tumbler. Therefore, this introduction will first define a phenomenon and thereafter introduce the events that took place and made the Stanley tumbler a popular trend, because it is relevant to the paper and the data that will be analysed in the analysis.

According to the Oxford Dictionary, the definition of a phenomenon is "a fact or an event in nature or society, especially one that is not fully understood" and it can be natural, cultural or social ("Phenomenon"). In this case, a cultural phenomenon is the most appropriate since it "...refers to a noticeable and widespread occurrence or trend in a society that influences the beliefs, behaviors, and values of its members" ("Cultural phenomenon").

The Stanley tumbler phenomenon started in 2019 when The Buy Guide sold 5,000 tumblers in five days. The Buy Guide is an online e-commerce blog run by three American women; Ashlee LeSueur, Taylor Cannon and Linley Hutchinson (Issawi). In November 2017 they blogged about the tumbler for the first time and did so multiple times over the years with a promotional link to where others could buy it. Every time they did so, it would quickly sell out and they would receive pictures from nurses and teachers that were using the product at their work. However, in 2019 it seemed the tumbler no longer was a priority for Stanley and they stopped restocking it on the Stanley website (Issawi). This made The Buy Guide wonder if the tumbler needed a new target demographic in its marketing, because Stanley has been known to traditionally market towards 'the working man' and those who do outdoor activities like hiking and camping (Issawi) (Jansen). Whereas, The Buy Guide's followers are mainly women between the ages of 25 and 45 (Jansen). Therefore The Buy Guide contacted Stanley's national sales manager and ended up buying 5,000 tumblers to resale. In November 2019 they received the order and as mentioned they sold it all in five days. This eventually led to changes for Stanley as a brand, because in

January 2020 part of the Stanley leadership team met with The Buy Guide and they made a deal; The Buy Guide would keep selling the tumbler on their blog and so would Stanley on their website, in addition to selling the tumbler in more colours (Issawi). Not only that but The Buy Guide also encouraged Stanley to use influencers and affiliate marketing to sell the tumblers, more specifically they suggested that Stanley should get women to sell this product to other women. They pointed out that if Stanley is not marketing towards women between the ages of 25 to 50, then they are missing the mark because women are generally the ones that purchase things for themselves, their families and their husbands (Issawi) (Jansen). Stanley could see in The Buy Guide's sales how the product appealed to women and they listened to The Buy Guide's advice. This led to the tumbler being the bottle 'to have' for many Gen Z and millennial women and for Stanley to have an increase in sales in 2021 by 275 per cent compared to 2020 (Issawi). Moreover, if one goes onto Stanley's website today it is predominantly women featured in pictures and videos as opposed to the number of men and the front page is filled with different types of water bottles in many different colours and at the bottom of the page there is a link to an affiliate program (Stanley 1913). In other words, the partnership between Stanley and The Buy Guide ended up being a huge success for Stanley (Jansen).

In addition to, The Buy Guide there was also another aspect, or catalyst one could call it that contributed to the phenomenon of the Stanley tumbler and that was TikTok more specifically the #WaterTok community on TikTok. WaterTok is a trend on the social media platform TikTok and it refers to people putting different flavour packets and sugar-free syrups into water and calling it a recipe (Yoder). These recipes are known to be made in Stanley tumblers and this is what helped make the Stanley tumbler a trend. The #WaterTok hashtag has generated over 220 million views on TikTok and Tonya Spanglo (a TikTok user) has had a hand in this, since she is considered to be the origin of this trend. Spanglo started concocting her flavoured water because she needed to drink a certain amount of water each day, due to the bariatric surgery she had had and after a while, she started sharing videos of it on TikTok where others were inspired to create their own water recipes. Not only did these recipes gain traction because people were sharing videos of themselves making said recipes, but many also posted videos where they shared their displeasure

about constantly seeing videos about it on TikTok, in addition to parody videos, shock videos and videos where people just explained what the trend is about (Yoder).

Due to these events taking place online and having created the phenomenon of the Stanley tumbler, the problem formulation for this paper is: How has eWOM and the #WaterTok community on TikTok created a viral phenomenon surrounding the Stanley Tumbler and how has this affected the Stanley brand.

## Literature review

### Imagined Communities

Benedict Anderson's book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* 1983 is a classic in multiple disciplines and has influenced not just political science, but also other areas of study such as literature, sociology, history, anthropology and geography (Calhoun 14-15). In other words, even though Anderson's theory of Imagined Communities is about nationalism it goes beyond the study of nationalism, since it has had a significant impact on the overall understanding of social imaginaries, even though the term 'imaginaries' was never used by Anderson himself (Calhoun 11-12).

Anderson sought to answer questions as to how community, identity and even society were imagined and shaped through said imagination, because he did not interpret aspects such as national identity and nationalism as outcomes of lineage, but instead as aspects that are created by modularity, production and reproduction (Calhoun 12-15).

In Anderson's book, he defines a nation as "... an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson 6). He goes on to explain that "It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 6). These definitions are not to say that Anderson is implying that nations and communities are *fabrications* just because they are *imagined* - he does not view these

two words as synonyms. Instead, he points out that communities and nations should be distinguished by how they are created and imagined and not by genuineness and/or falsity (Anderson 6).

One example Anderson uses in his book to showcase an imagined community is the community a newspaper can create. When looking at a front page of a newspaper, for example, *The New York Times*, it contains different news stories that have dissimilar subject matters and have nothing directly to do with each other, and yet they have an imagined link (Anderson 33). One of the aspects that connect the news stories is the fact that they are all on the same front page, on the same date, which can be seen at the top of the newspaper. The date relates them to each other, regardless of their topics and whether or not this is the only time, one or more of, the news stories will appear on the front page or if they may be on the front page again at a later point. Nevertheless, on this specific date, these news stories are what make the plot of the front page of *The New York Times* (Anderson 33). In addition, the news stories are also linked through the fact that they are all a part of the same product that is distinct, mass-produced and distributed (Anderson 33-34).

Besides the imagined linkage that exists between the news stories themselves, there is also the imagined community the readers of the newspaper create. In Anderson's book, it is described as a kind of mass ceremony, in the sense that the newspaper is most likely consumed on the same day, by the readers of said newspaper, since it becomes obsolete after the day it was printed, which also makes it a ceremony that is/can be repeated on a daily basis throughout the year (Anderson 35). Moreover, it can be assumed that the readers perform this mass ceremony by reading the paper in the silent privacy of their minds, while - on some level - being aware that other people are doing the same thing, at some point during that day and yet they know nothing of each others identities (Anderson 35). However, the readers are able to be reassured of this imagined community, by seeing how visibly rooted it is in their daily life, if/when they, for example, see exact replicas of their own paper being consumed by someone in their neighbourhood or on the subway (Anderson 35-36).

Another example Anderson uses in his book to showcase imagined communities is print-capitalism and how it made it possible for big groups of people to relate to one another in



new ways (Anderson 36). He uses the third chapter of his book to describe how the introduction of the printing-press changed Europe by, among other things, affecting languages (Anderson 37-46). This was done by collecting many different idiolects and assembling them into fewer print-languages. These print-languages then in turn helped create national consciousness by creating a more unified way for people to communicate, since it became possible for people to understand each other via print and paper, when they otherwise would have had difficulties or found it impossible to communicate with one another in conversation. Moreover, the fact that these languages were on print also solidified them, which meant that they were no longer being individualised and 'modernised' by scribes and by the 17th century European languages had more or less taken their modern forms. Thereby, texts going back to the 17th century are accessible to people nowadays in a way that was not possible for people beforehand, due to how written texts could differentiate from century to century (Anderson 43-44).

Not only did print-capitalism help create imagined communities for people by affecting languages and making them more universal, but it also helped make the Reformation possible (Anderson 39-46). Like never before it was possible to mass-produce texts, due to the printing-press and with the help of it, Martin Luther was able to mass-produce his works and lead the religious propaganda war in Europe. His works were printed up in German and within 15 days they had been read in every corner of the country. He was the first author who was able to sell books due to his name and where he led the propaganda war many followed. In other words, thanks to print-capitalism and the printing-press Protestantism was able to go on the offensive and use the vernacular print-market to reach and connect with everyday people and even mobilise them for politico-religious agendas (Anderson 39-40).

Putting it differently, print-capitalism created imagined communities by unifying idiolects into print-languages and exploiting the print-market by mass-producing cheap editions of texts in said print-languages for the public to read - for example, Luther's works were printed and distributed in German and not in Latin, which fewer knew how to read (Anderson 37-46).

Besides the examples of imagined communities Anderson mentions in his book, his theory can as mentioned be used in many disciplines and therefore imagined communities can also be used



to describe online communities (Grădinaru 184). In an article written by Camelia Grădinaru, she mentions that the interpersonal relationships and exchanges that happen online create a social glue between individuals that affects them in different ways. She writes of how members of this social glue share values and spaces and develop social bonds as well as discursive practices such as particular rituals, jokes and expressions (Grădinaru 186). In addition, she includes a quote from Nancy Baym that further states aspects that can be examined to further understand an imagined virtual community; first of Baym mentions that it is interpersonal interactions that primarily tie people together. Moreover, specifically examining aspects that are a part of these interpersonal interactions can help to understand an imagined virtual community. These aspects are things such as their traditions, values, rituals, norms, and the way of speaking (jargon) that they develop and maintain (Grădinaru 188).

## Theory

In this section of the paper theories that are relevant to answering the problem formulation will be presented in order to achieve a holistic analysis of the phenomenon. The theories are eWOM and eWOM & purchasing decisions, marketing, the 7 Ps and social media, as well as consumer involvement and participation, affiliate marketing and co-branding. More specifically eWOM will be used to analyse the data in the analysis section and eWOM & purchasing decisions will contribute to this, as well as add some background knowledge as to why the eWOM is as effective as it is, because eWOM is not just about recommendations, but it also affects purchasing decisions. The marketing theory section is added more in relation to contributing background knowledge to the analysis section and as a segue to the 7 Ps which will be used to analyse data.

Social media has its own theory section in this paper because it is an important aspect in relation to the phenomenon since it would not have been able to take place without the social media platform TikTok. Consumer involvement and participation are important for the analysis section and the phenomenon because consumers' involvement is a significant part of the phenomenon since it is the consumers that create eWOM and the TikTok communities such as the WaterTok


community. Lastly, affiliate marketing and co-branding are mentioned to give some background knowledge to the analysis section.

These theory sections contain explanations as to what the theories are and tools to analyse the chosen data.

## Electronic Word-Of-Mouth

Electronic Word-of-mouth also known as eWOM is a concept that has been used since the mid-1990s when mobile devices and the Internet were starting to become a central part of consumer interactions and their way of conveying Word-of-mouth (Shu-Chuan) (“Word of mouth and social media” 1). Whereas, Word-of-mouth (WOM) has been given many different definitions through the years Electronic Word-of-mouth (eWOM) can be described as something that happens when consumers exchange and share information regarding a company or product(s) via communication on the internet, mobile and/or social media. More precisely eWOM can be defined as “any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet” (qtd. Shu-Chuan) (“WOM and social media: Presaging future directions for research and practice” 7). In other words, eWOM occurs when the exchange(s) between consumers take place online. These exchanges can, for example, be seen in social media posts, online product reviews, and user-generated content (Shu-Chuan).

eWOM is seen as an important topic when it comes to marketing, advertisement and communications research because it has made a phenomenal impact on consumer behaviour (Shu-Chuan). Consumers nowadays are turning to each other via social media when they are looking for insight into products, brands and services. eWOM may be able to spread wider online and link a lot of people, but these people are most likely strangers, who have never met each other in real life and are only connected by having a common need or interest. Whereas, WOM happens offline between interpersonal relations that have some form of trust between them (“WOM and social media: Presaging future directions for research and practice” 6). Many brands and companies are using social media in an effort to generate and influence eWOM, however, it can be done in different ways. According to Allan J. Kimmel and Philip J.



Kitchen who are citing a text by Karin van Zwiggelaar and Antoon van Luxemburg, some companies can be classified as *'pre-social'*, which means that they simply do the bare minimum, by having a website and emailing their customers, without having any social media strategy. Then there are companies that have accounts on various social media platforms but have no social media strategy that is thought through, they can be classified as companies that are at the *'experimental'* or *'connection'* stage. Next, there are companies that can be classified as being at the *'functional'* or *'engagement'* stage, these companies go a bit further and engage in communication with consumers via social media, for example by responding to comments made on a post. In addition, they also have a social media strategy, by integrating purposeful marketing into their social media content. Lastly, some companies are at the *'transformation'* or *'social advantage'* stage, which means that they not only communicate with consumers via comment sections online, but they also collaborate and cocreate, for example by incorporating ideas from consumers into their products and/or services. Doing this can give consumers the feeling that they are invested in the company's product or service and are therefore willing to promote and recommend it to other consumers ("WOM and social media: Presaging future directions for research and practice" 6-7).


It is not just companies/brands that create eWOM, consumers do it as well. When it comes to consumers generating eWOM there seem to be a lot of different reasons as to why they do it and who they are trying to reach and communicate eWOM to. In a paper written by Hennig-Thurau et al., they identified eight motives for giving eWOM, which were "(1) venting negative feelings, (2) concern for other consumers, (3) social benefits, (4) economic incentives, (5) helping the company, (6) advice seeking, (7) platform assistance, and (8) extraversion/positive self-enhancement" ("WOM and social media: Presaging future directions for research and practice" 9-10). In addition, they also cut these eight motives into four segments of factors that drive consumers to communicate eWOM from most to least contribution. From the ones that contribute the most eWOM, there are the *'self-interest helpers'* which are the ones who are mostly driven by economic incentives. Hereafter, we have the *'multiple-motive consumers'*, these are the ones that are driven by multiple motives. Thirdly, there is the segment classified as *'consumer advocates'*, which are the consumers that are driven by their concern for other

consumers. Lastly, the fourth segment and the one that contributes the least to eWOM is ‘true altruists’, these are the consumers that are motivated by helping other consumers and companies (“WOM and social media: Presaging future directions for research and practice” 10).

## eWOM and Purchasing Decisions

Not only is eWOM something that companies and consumers can generate online, to talk about products, but it can also influence consumers and their purchasing decisions. In an article by Brittany Beck et al. they mention that even though it is possible nowadays to shop conveniently via social media platforms, consumers are still wary of it, due to a lingering distrust of social media platforms. However, eWOM is particularly helpful in providing consumers with evaluations of products that can validate purchasing decisions. Beck et al. go on to explain that for a consumer to decide to buy a product via social media, the consumer first has to consider if they trust the social media platform from which they are gathering information about a product or perhaps even directly purchasing a product from. If they do trust the platform the consumer then has to decide whether or not they trust the eWOM that happens on the platform. If so the consumer then has to take the final step and decide if they trust the retailer as well. They can decide this by consulting the information they can get from other consumers via eWOM that discusses the product and retailer, such as referrals, reviews and recommendations or even social media community discussions. In other words, once a consumer has trust in the social media platform, the eWOM that takes place on it and the retailer, purchase is possible in the consumer's eyes (Beck et al. 1002-1003).

Moreover, Beck et al clarify that the trust a consumer has to develop relies on the expectations the consumer forms about the behaviours and motives of the retailer, the social media platform and the ones that share eWOM (Beck et al. 1004). However, in their article, Beck et al. also point out that some forms of eWOM are more influential than others. They write of strong ties and weak ties and describe strong ties as being something that “...involve close relationships within a homogenous community of shared interests that allow for a high degree of trust, emotional support and frequent information sharing” (qtd. Beck et al. 1005). Whereas, weak ties are described as “...distant, less personal relationships consisting of a wide set of acquaintances that



transmit non-redundant information on diverse topics” (qtd. Beck et al. 1006). In other words, strong ties share a higher degree of trust than weak ties and information has more influence between consumers with a strong tie. In addition, the findings of the article suggest that the stronger ties are superior to the weak ties when it comes to which ones provide enough trust for the consumer to be comfortable enough to purchase whichever product the eWOM is about (Beck et al. 1005-1006). In relation to, eWOM and social media Beck et al. classify strong ties as referrals, recommendations and social media communities and weak ties as ratings and reviews (Beck et al. 1005-1006).


## What is Marketing

In order to, understand the phenomenon of the Stanley tumbler on TikTok one must also understand the term ‘marketing’, since eWOM - whether it is intentional or unintentional, generated by a company and/or by consumers - is still a type of marketing strategy. In addition, this theory section will hopefully also help to understand Stanley’s involvement in the phenomenon.

Marketing is essential for any company because it makes it possible for them to promote their services and/or products to consumers and encourage them to buy said services and/or products (Twin, “Marketing in Business: Strategies and Types Explained”).

According to the American Marketing Association, the definition of marketing is “Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large.” (“Definition of Marketing”).

When marketing is done well it can benefit a company in different ways and yield results. It can allow a company to have a connection with their target consumers. It can provide data for companies to help them better understand their target demographic. In addition, it can be used by a company to communicate and educate others about said company and allow a company to




shape the image of their brand. Moreover, marketing can also help with the financial gain of a company by having a positive impact on sales by creating a strong relationship with consumers that makes them more likely to make purchases (Twin, “Marketing in Business: Strategies and Types Explained”).

## The 7 Ps of Marketing

There are many aspects that can be mentioned when talking about how marketing can be useful for a company and hopefully, the aspects mentioned above will be useful in the analysis section. However, to add more substance to this theory section and thereby the analysis section about Stanley’s marketing, the 7 Ps will also be explained in this part of the paper.

In the 1960s E. Jerome McCarthy established the 4 Ps, which stands for Product, Price, Place and Promotion and is a marketing mix tool used to analyse what a brand or product has to offer. In the 1980s Booms and Bitner added three more Ps to this theory, which stand for People, Processes and Physical Evidence (“Marketing Theories - The Marketing Mix - From 4 Ps til 7 Ps”). The first of the 7 Ps; Product is the item or items a company produces and offers to consumers. The product should fulfil a consumer need and either fulfil an absence in the market or a demand for more available amounts and options of a product that is already available and perhaps also sold by a competitor. When there are competing products it is important to stand out and this can be done by improving one's already existing product, for example, by creating a new version and/or adding new or more value to it, which can go beyond the product itself and be things such as online support, warranties or even social media content like a how-to-video that explains how consumers can get the most out of a product (Twin, “Marketing in Business: Strategies and Types Explained”) (Allen). The second of the 7 Ps is Price and this P is important because it is meant to generate money and cover costs. Moreover, the price of a product needs to be determined with competitors in mind, because it indicates a product's standing on the market and its brand value. The third P is Place and concerns the places consumers can purchase a company’s product. A company might have its own website and/or physical store or it might use intermediaries when it comes to locations and sales (Allen). The fourth P; Promotion is the



communications part of the 7 Ps and it is needed in order to generate interest, awareness, desire and action in consumers. There are numerous ways this can be done, for example by advertisement, direct marketing, sponsorships or by promoting a product on a social media platform (Twin, “Marketing in Business: Strategies and Types Explained”) (Allen).


The fifth P is People and this P refers to a company’s people/employees, who interact with consumers when they, for example, make enquiries about orders, have complaints or direct messages them through social media. It could be said that these people become the “face” of a company, because they are the ones that communicate with consumers. The sixth P is Process and it refers to the processes that go behind delivering a product. In other words, it is about all the processes consumers go through before, during and after buying a product, such as looking for information about a product, making the purchase itself and writing a review about a product. A company wants these processes and whichever other processes are necessary for a company to be efficient and smooth therefore communication from consumers, such as questions can be helpful for a company to know where it needs to optimise its processes. The seventh and last P is Physical Evidence, which refers to tangible and intangible element(s) of a product, for example, online reviews on a website that gives consumers reassurance about a product, an e-mail saying the product is on its way and the product itself once a consumer receives it (Allen) (“Marketing Theories - The Marketing Mix - From 4 Ps til 7 Ps”).

## Social Media

To be more specific the 7 Ps mentioned above will be used to analyse metadata from online sources and therefore they will more accurately be used for digital marketing.

There are different types of marketing and one of them is Digital Marketing, which can be done in many different ways and one of them is Social Media Marketing. Social media marketing entails using a social media platform to create and build an online presence, for example by posting content such as videos and photos and interacting with followers (Twin, “Marketing in Business: Strategies and Types Explained”). More specifically social media itself can be defined as “A computer-based technology that facilitates the sharing of ideas, thoughts, and information





through virtual networks and communities” (“Social Media: Definition, Importance, Top Websites & Apps”).

In an article by Vanja Nišić and Divna Plavšić, it is mentioned that media culture and media are important parts of modern-day society and due to the fact, that media has a constant flow of information and/or repeat information it has given people the illusion that they are members of “global society”. They further explain that this illusion has constructed an “Image of reality”, which means that people nowadays cannot imagine life without mass media. This is because media has a bigger influence on people’s lives than it had in past decades. In addition, it is not just individuals that are affected by media, but also society as a whole. Therefore, it can be said that media is actively a part of constructing reality and is a powerful tool that, for example, can be used by individuals, groups and companies (Nišić and Plavšić 73-74).

One of the things that show how powerful social media is, is how it has affected the way people communicate because nowadays conversations are happening quickly and information is easily widespread (“How has Social Media Emerged as a Powerful Communication Medium?”).

Moreover, the way people communicate in writing is also different on social media, for example, there is a tendency to use hashtags and abbreviations. Whereas, abbreviations shorten words to terms such as ‘BTW’ or ‘OMG’, hashtags have the ability to make a word or few words put together a trend and thereby give said word(s) power, since hashtags can bring people together in a community that for example agree on something particular (“The Role of Social Media and Its Effects on Communication and Relationships”). In addition, communication on social media does not even have to be in writing one can, of course, also share pictures and videos or even just share other people’s content (“How Has Social Media Affected Communication; Facts That Surprise!”).


## Consumer Involvement & Participation

In the section above social media was explained and further about eWOM was as well, and in relation to those theories and in order to answer the problem formulation it is also important for this paper to address consumer involvement and participation in the phenomenon.

In a book by Wilson Ozuem and Michelle Willis, they write about consumer participation and involvement in online brand communities, also known as OBCs. The difference between consumer involvement and participation is that involvement refers to how much input a person invests - short-term and long-term - into an OBC, whereas participation refers to activities that take place in an OBC (Ozuem and Willis 17-18).

People spend on average two hours a day on the internet and social media, which according to Ozuem and Willis is a short time period for companies to maintain consumer participation, because consumers have different characteristics and diversified behaviour which means that for them it may not be relevant for to spend a part of their two hours on the OBC a company wants them to spend time on (Ozuem and Willis 18). However, consumers can be motivated to get involved in an OBC if they, for example, feel that they share values, outlooks and principles with said OBC. Moreover, when getting involved a consumer would end up taking part in shaping said OBC's image (qtd. Ozuem and Willis 18). Involvement therefore shows a willingness from consumers, to some extent, to commit to a company's brand, while participation refers to the activities a consumer engages in in order to become involved. (Ozuem and Willis 19).

In addition, Ozuem and Willis also mention that there are four types of consumer characteristics when it comes to participation and involvement in OBCs which are *brand sentiment*, *identification with source*, *affirmative experience* and *conspicuous effect* (Ozuem and Willis 19). These four characteristics are further used by Ozuem and Willis as umbrella terms for a range of attitudes and behaviours of OBC members to determine and outline customer profiles that are more in-depth as to why consumers choose to participate and get involved. However, this will not be used in this paper, since this paper focuses on the phenomenon as a whole and does not go into the depths of what kind of profile consumers of the Stanley brand fall into.




In regards to, the four characteristics they affect what is displayed within an OBC and how that OBCs brand is perceived. The first of the characteristics; *brand sentiment* is regarding the emotions and feelings a person has towards a brand, which can be seen in the content shared by people with this characteristic, more specifically it can be seen in things such as emojis, comments and likes or dislikes shared by them. The sentiments can be positive or negative, for example, words used in a post can be negative and/or positive, as well as resharing content also carries sentiment (Ozuem and Willis 19-20). *Identification with source* is the second characteristic and it “...refers to an individual’s ability to relate to the creator of information based on perceived similarity and shared ideas ” (Ozuem and Willis 20). However, that does not mean that all the consumers that are a part of the same OBC are like-minded, because they have their own identity and attributes, as well as their own subject opinion as to why they identify with a source and engage in an OBC (Ozuem and Willis 21). The third characteristic is *affirmative experience* and it “...refers to individuals’ certainty that they have supporting evidence to justify their perspective, either from their own experience or from the experience others have stated they have had” (Ozuem and Willis 21). These perspectives can be negative or positive and are not limited to consumers but individuals, who have not purchased from the OBC’s brand yet can also feel affirmation. Moreover, the experience from consumers can influence others and their idea of the brand, especially because people, who have experience with said brand can have a bigger influence compared to individuals who have never purchased a product from the brand (Ozuem and Willis 21-22). The fourth and last characteristic is *conspicuous effect*, which “refers to the quality of features of content that is most attractive to observing customers within OBCs” (Ozuem and Willis 22). In other words, features such as the source of the content, the differences in the content, the amount of comments, responses to comments and the emojis that are used on social media are important to create an understanding, because they show the unrestricted thoughts others have about a brand and whether they like or dislike it. Individuals will interpret and respond differently to these features, as well as have different expectations about the quality, because their judgement is subject (Ozuem and Willis 22-23).

## What is Affiliate Marketing and Co-Branding

There are different forms of digital marketing and affiliate marketing is one of them, which involves a brand/company paying a third-party - also known as an affiliate - to promote and create customer interest in said brand/company's product and getting a commission from it (Twin, "Marketing in Business: Strategies and Types Explained"). The commission can be anything from a 1 per cent to a 20 per cent commission, which should help incentivise affiliates to promote the product. When it comes to affiliate marketing there are three main types. The first is *unattached affiliate marketing*, which means that the affiliate does not really have a connection to the product they are promoting. This also means that even though they can promote the product they cannot give advice or recommendations about it to consumers, because they have no expertise related to said product (James et al.). The second affiliate type is *related affiliate marketing* and this type refers to affiliate marketing where the affiliate has a kind of relationship with the product, generally because the product relates to the affiliate's niche. Therefore, the affiliate also has some knowledge and expertise to influence and generate interest, because they are perceived to have some level of authority that makes consumers see them as a trustworthy source. However, that does not mean the affiliate uses the product themselves (James et al.). The third type is *involved affiliate marketing*, which is when the affiliate has a deep connection with the product they are promoting. Moreover, the affiliate has or is using the product themselves and can thereby use their own experience as advertisement, which can help make them a trusted source for other consumers (James et al.).

Co-branding on the other hand is a marketing strategy that involves at least two brands collaborating and marketing a product they have created together that usually bears identifiers from both brands. The point of this is to combine the strength the two brands have on the market and generate more awareness for both brands, while reaching a greater number of consumers (Kenton and James). Moreover, co-branding is seen as a useful strategy for companies seeking to increase profit and market share, brand image, customer loyalty as well as perceived value.



However, co-branding needs to be done right, in other words, companies need to choose who they co-brand with carefully, because the partnership needs to benefit a company and fit their own brand in a way that does not alienate consumers, who are used to said brand's identity (Kenton and James).

In relation to, co-branding it is also important to mention limited editions, since they often go hand-in-hand with co-branding. A limited edition product is a marketing strategy where a company makes a product available that is advertised to only exist in a low quantity and/or only available during a short time period. Labeling a product as a limited edition can make it seem more prestigious in the eyes of consumers and thereby give them the urge to buy it, in order not to miss out ("The "limited edition strategy" and why it works").

## Methodology

In this section, the methods used in this paper will be explained, as well as the way in which the problem formulation will be answered.

Firstly, the research design will be presented and hereafter the reasoning for the project, the data sources used and then the philosophical reasonings behind the project. After these sections, introductions to information relevant to the project will be explained, which are the Stanley company, the Stanley tumbler, TikTok and WaterTok.

## Research Design

According to Robert K. Yin, a good case study is built on collecting, presenting and analysing data fairly. Moreover, he points out that there is no formula to tell one whether or not a case study is the right method to use when writing a paper, but one's research question can help decide that because the more the question is about explaining a current circumstance, the more relevant a case study is. In addition, Yin writes of how a case study is used to contribute knowledge about areas such as phenomena, groups, communities, organisations and so on. He

also mentions that the need for case study research comes from a desire to understand the complexities of a social phenomenon and that case studies make it possible for researchers to attain a real-world perspective and holistic understanding of a case (Yin 3-4).

When it comes to research questions there are many ways to frame them, with words such as how, where, who, what, and why, but when it comes to case studies *how* and *why* questions are the ones that are usually used. Moreover, when it comes to the type of data a case study can use there is a full variety to choose from, because it can deal with anything from interviews, documents, observations, and artefacts (Yin 9-12).

The short description above of the case study method fits this paper perfectly in what it seeks to analyse therefore the research design for this paper is a case study about the Stanley tumbler phenomenon on social media. The phenomenon is a fairly new circumstance mainly taking place on TikTok within the WaterTok community however it can also be found elsewhere online. Therefore, there will also be used a variety of different data in the analysis section.

## Data Sources

When it comes to the data and metadata used for this paper it was found online by searching for and reading about the Stanley tumbler and related topics like #WaterTok. The reason it was done this way was because the Stanley trend is something that comes for social media more specifically TikTok and because a lot of information about it can be found online on different platforms because the trend has sort of traveled around the internet, since content about it can be found on TikTok, Youtube, Instagram, Twitch and other places. Therefore, the best way to get data about the phenomenon was to look online. More specifically in relation to the paper then the data comes from Google searches that contributed multiple articles to the data. These articles are mostly written by different news organizations. Moreover, searches were done on TikTok which resulted in TikTok discover pages and a couple of specific TikTok videos being used as data. In addition, Stanley's own webshop as well as The Buy Guide's webshop are also being used as data.

That being said, it is obviously not possible to use all the data that was discovered while researching and writing this paper, because there is a lot of information online in regards to the

Stanley tumbler. Therefore, the data used in this paper was chosen by the author's subjective reasoning about what was useful and what was not.

In relation to the method used to analyse the data then the thematic method will be used. The theory that is introduced in this paper will be the themes the analysis seeks to find in the data, therefore the theory section is what drives the analysis.

## Philosophy of Science

In relation to, the philosophical stance behind this paper constructionism is the ontological assumption about reality used in this paper, whereas when it comes to assumptions about knowledge and knowing, in other words, epistemology the stance taken in this paper is interpretivism. In addition, the theory section will be used in relation to an inductive approach in the analysis to reach a conclusion (Clark, Tom., et al. 32).

When it comes to, constructionism it is an ontological position that asserts that researchers' accounts of the world are constructions, meaning that the view of the world researchers present is specific and subject however, not the definitive truth of the world. Moreover, this ontological stance asserts that social reality is something that is determined by the categories people use to understand the world, which are themselves social products. In other words, reality is not set in stone but it is a construction that is interpreted by each individual (Clark, Tom., et al. 29-30). Interpretivism does not stray far away from what constructionism stands for, because it is a term that denotes that knowledge and reality are socially constructed and that there is no objective knowledge. Moreover, it is a term that is used to interpret the meaning people give to actions, such as elements part of a case study that attempts to understand a phenomenon ("What is Interpretivism?"). The inductive approach will be used because the elements that make up the phenomenon this paper will analyse are constructions that are up for the subjective interpretation of the author of this paper. Therefore, the conclusion reached at the end of this paper is logically true thanks to the theories used to analyse the metadata in the analysis section, but not necessarily an absolute and definite truth ("Introduction to Inductive and Deductive Reasoning | Don't Memorise").




In the final part of the methodology section, short descriptions and clarifications of the company Stanley, the Stanley tumbler, the social media platform TikTok and #WaterTok will also be included, in order to, give the reader(s) necessary background information and context prevalent to the analysis section that will be answering the problem formulation.

## What is Stanley 1913

Stanley is an American brand founded in 1913 by William Stanley Jr. and for over a 100 years, the brand has continuously been producing products, such as portable and vacuum-insulated bottles (Jansen) (“About Stanley”). Stanley Jr. was the inventor of the iconic all-steel vacuum bottle that Stanley is still known for and nowadays - according to the Stanley Webshop - Stanley’s bottles are viewed as an essential part of people's outdoor adventures, workdays and road trips (“About Stanley”). Going onto Stanley’s webshop - as of the time this paper is being written - one can see that it contains a lot more products than just all-steel vacuum bottles. At the top of the webshop, there are different taps one can click on, four of them are shop, apparel, quencher and hydrate (Stanley 1913). The apparel tap leads consumers to clothing items that Stanley sells (“The Apparel Collection”). The hydrate tap leads them to a page on the webshop filled with different types of bottles and the quencher tap contains a specific type of bottle; the quencher, which can be bought in many different sizes and colours (“Hydration”) (“New In Quencher”). So even though Stanley has many different types of bottles the quencher has gotten its own tap at the top of the webshop as opposed to the other types, such as tumblers and iceflows that can be found elsewhere on the webshop, for example under the hydrate tap (Stanley 1913). In addition, to clothing and different types of bottles, Stanley also sells camp cookware, coolers and jugs, as well as food jars and lunch boxes, which can be found under the shop tap (Stanley 1913).

When it comes to this paper it is not just Stanley that needs an introduction, but the tumbler itself also needs one. First of all this paper will refer to the Stanley tumbler as a tumbler and not as the



Stanley Quencher or the Stanley Cup as some refer to it. Above in the Stanley section, it is referred to as a quencher however that is because that seems to be how the website differentiates between the different types of bottles it has, for under the tumbler tap under the hydration tap there are other kinds of tumblers besides the quenchers (“New In Quencher”) (“Hydration”). Besides the tumbler being referred to by different names, it can also be bought in five different sizes, from 64 ounces to 14 ounces and as mentioned it can also be purchased in many different colours (Stanley 1913). The number of colours available is unknown to this author however when clicking on the 40 oz tumbler it seems one can buy it in 34 different colours where 10 of them are sold out. In addition, it is also possible to customise the tumbler, which adds to the possibility of there being many different ways the tumbler can look (“The Quencher H2.0 Flowstate Tumbler | 40 oz”).

## Introduction to TikTok and #WaterTok

Moreover, in relation to this paper, TikTok is also important therefore this section is about TikTok and the TikTok trend #WaterTok.

TikTok was formerly known as Musical.ly and to begin with, the app was mainly used for short videos of lip-syncing. However, the platform has changed and nowadays the short videos on TikTok can contain anything from dance choreography, sketches, and educational and informative content that covers topics such as investing and health, just to name a few. Besides, the videos containing a diversity of topics the platform also has features that make it possible for users to add background music, voiceovers, filters, sound effects and stickers to the videos, as well as the option of stitching or dueting other users’ videos (Geyser).

TikTok has become quite popular as one of the world's most used social networking sites that has a high user count, with approximately 1,5 billion users a month as of January 2024 (Geyser) (We Are Social et al.). It has become so popular and widespread that sometimes viral videos and trends that originate from TikTok can be found on other social media platforms. The features on TikTok make it easy for users to participate in viral trends and because of that, it is easy to jump from one new trend to the next new trend and thereby trends can become more and more popular.

Additionally, TikTok can be addictive because it is easy to get lost in the short-form videos and spend hours watching one after the other. The videos start playing the second one opens the app and users end up watching random videos that are entertaining, fun and neverending (Geyser).

As mentioned, this section of the paper is also about the TikTok trend and hashtag WaterTok. Hashtags have become a universal thing that is a part of social media platforms and it is a feature users use to find content with specific topics. On TikTok, hashtags are used to categorise videos and when users add hashtags to their content it becomes easier for other users to find it when they are searching for it, for example, if a user searches for the hashtag #WaterTok they will be presented with videos containing that hashtag. In addition, hashtags are also used for trends, which means users can easily take part in trends, by using relevant, popular, and trending hashtags in their video descriptions (West).

#WaterTok is a trending hashtag on TikTok that is being used for videos in which users are sharing their water “recipes” that they are usually making in Stanley tumblers. These recipes involve adding flavour packets and sugar-free syrups to water (Yoder).

## Analysis and Discussion

In this section of the paper, the analysis of the data will take place, with the help of the theories from the theory section in relation to the thematic method. In other words, this will be a thematic analysis where the theories are the themes that will be identified in the data in order to answer the problem formulation.

Moreover, the analysis part of this paper is divided into sections corresponding with the majority of the theory sections, so the different themes get their own section. However, some of the theories that are more for background knowledge will not have their own section but will instead be a part of other theories’ analysis sections.

Lastly, it should also be mentioned that the data that will be analysed can be found in the bibliography among the other sources used for this paper.

## Electronic Word-Of-Mouth

The first theme this paper will address in relation to the creation of the Stanley phenomenon is eWOM, because it is a big part of what has created the phenomenon. Moreover, eWOM in relation to the Stanley Tumbler can be found on a lot of different social media platforms on the internet because it has become such a huge trend that it has travelled from The Buy Guide's website and TikTok to other parts of the internet where people can share content. How much there is about the Stanley Tumbler on the internet can be seen by, first of all, just by google-searching for it. When searching *Stanley tumbler* the main results that come up are endless links to different webshops that sell the product. Not just Stanley's own webshop but also webshops that sell things for outdoor activists or webshops such as Amazon and Etsy, as well as Danish stores that have webshops like Magasin, Matas and Imerco ("Stanely Tumbler"). The fact that many different retailers are trying to sell the Stanley Tumbler and/or other Stanley products shows that there is confidence in the fact that this is something that will sell. Moreover, when searching for *Stanley tumbler article* a whole other category of endless links show up. These are links are eWOM from different news organisations that share their knowledge about Stanley tumblers and related subjects, such as what is it, why they went viral, what is #WaterTok and so on ("Stanley Tumbler Article"). Not only that but as mentioned in the introduction it can be said that this trend and phenomenon began in 2019 and early 2020. However, the first couple of pages of article links that come up on Google are from 2024 and there is even one that is only four days old, as of the time this paper is being written and that article is called *Stanley Quenchers: Why are the cups so popular?* and is from the news source called TODAY ("Stanley Tumbler Article"). Therefore, the eWOM about the Stanley tumbler is still very much happening even though some would say that the trend is coming to an end (Notopoulos). Not only can the eWOM be seen by google-searching for it, but it can also be found on social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram and Youtube, when one searches for *Stanley tumbler* in their search engines.

## eWOM and The Buy Guide

However, let's start with eWOM in relation to The Buy Guide and then the eWOM #WaterTok generates and thereafter look at eWOM from other sources.

When it comes to The Buy Guide they are as mentioned in the introduction an online e-commerce blog, which means that they have their own brand, but at the same time, the three women behind The Buy Guide brand are also consumers (Issawi). At least that was how The Buy Guide got acquainted with the Stanley tumbler when Ashlee LeSueur purchased one in 2017 and fell in love with it and began giving it as a gift to friends (Vega and Shamo). This was before she, Taylor Cannon and Linley Hutchinson had started The Buy Guide and Cannon and Hutchinson were also some of the friends LeSueur gifted the tumbler. Therefore, the Stanley tumbler was one of the first products they ever recommended on their blog for others to buy ("The Story of The Cup"). For that reason, The Buy Guide definitely fits the definition of eWOM, since the three women are customers of Stanley's and they share positive words about the tumbler online. They do this on their e-commerce blog but also on their Instagram and Facebook accounts however, the content that can be found on these two social media platforms seems to be the same posts ("The Buy Guide") ("thebuyguide"). When it comes to an example of where exactly one can see positive eWOM from The Buy Guide about the Stanley Tumbler. One can see it in the words that are used on their webshop about the tumbler, for example on the page on their webshop where they have collected their favourite products from Stanley, they write "Our love for Stanley is more than just the viral quencher..." ("Stanley Favorites"). In addition, even though one would think they would have more text and articles on the blog part of their website - because it is called a blog - there are only 16 articles as of the time this paper is being written and The Story of The Cup is one of them ("Blog"). In this article, the first six sentences are about the Stanley tumbler and here again, they mention twice that they love the tumbler and the rest of the text is a description of the tumbler's good features, such as that it is dishwasher save, keeps ice cold for up to 12 hours and it fits into the cupholders in their cars ("The Story of The Cup"). The text thereby expresses positive eWOM and sounds like a product review and

recommendation to whoever reads it, because it is just listing one good and positive product feature one after the other.

A part of communication on social media and using positive or negative words is that there are most likely some receivers of whatever someone communicates. However, as mentioned in the theory section the majority of the people who contribute to eWOM or look for product recommendations from others are most likely strangers, who are only connected by common interests or needs (“WOM and social media: Presaging future directions for research and practice” 6). Therefore, it can be assumed that the people who go onto The Buy Guide’s webshop or follow them on Instagram and Facebook to some degree have common interests. However, on their webshop, there are no indicators as to how many visit or purchase from them, but on their Instagram and Facebook one can see the number of followers they have. On their Instagram account, they have around 182 thousand followers and on their Facebook they have around 1,7 thousand followers (“thebuyguide”) (“The Buy Guide”). There are therefore many people who see the content that they post and thereby there are many people who can be influenced by them. In regard to this, The Buy Guide can also be seen as gatekeepers, due to all of their followers, because The Buy Guide, of course, decide what gets posted on their webshop and social media accounts. Thereby, their content is biased towards what they want to post and what they want their followers to see and perhaps be influenced by (“Gatekeeping Theory”).

As mentioned in the theory section brands can generate eWOM in different ways and can therefore also be classified in different ways according to Karin van Zwiggelaar and Antoon van Luxemburg (“WOM and social media: Presaging future directions for research and practice” 6-7). When it comes to The Buy Guide and their brand and the eWOM they generated for Stanley - when they as mentioned, in the introduction, blogged about it on their e-commerce website - they can be classified as being at the ‘*transformation*’ or ‘*social advantage*’ stage as it can also be called (Issawi) (Jansen) (“WOM and social media: Presaging future directions for research and practice” 7). This is due to the fact that they not only communicated to the ones visiting their webshop about the tumbler, but they clearly also noticed and listened to what kind of demographic was actually buying the Stanley tumbler, which eventually led them to collaborate with Stanley in some sort of way, which is not clearly defined anywhere as a

collaboration, affiliate marketing or just retailing (Issawi). However, The Buy Guide do write that they had goals and visions with Stanley, that they got Stanley to order more tumblers to sell them in greater quantities on the Stanley website, introduced them to influencers they could start an affiliate program with and that they worked with them ("The Story of The Cup").

When looking at The Buy Guide as three consumers instead of a brand then there is also the question as to what made them share eWOM about the Stanley tumbler to begin with, when they started their e-commerce website and blog. When it comes to the eight different motives and four segments presented in the eWOM theory section then multiple of them fit the three women behind The Buy Guide. Firstly, they seem like 'multiple-motive consumers', because from how they describe it on their blog they started out as 'true altruists' who wanted to share the Stanley tumbler with others because they loved it and wanted to help Stanley market and sell it to the right people because they felt Stanley was missing the mark ("WOM and social media: Presaging future directions for research and practice" 9-10) ("The Story of The Cup"). In addition, The Buy Guide could also fit the 'self-interest helpers' and have economic incentives in mind as well as wanting to help their own brand when they create eWOM for the Stanley tumbler and helped Stanley sell more of them ("WOM and social media: Presaging future directions for research and practice" 9-10). This can be assumed because, when one clicks the shop button on The Buy Guide's webshop one is directed to another webshop, where the product is actually being sold and there one can see that it is an affiliate link by looking at the URL at the top of the page ("What does an affiliate link look like?"). Or before one is directed to the webshop that actually sells the product a text box will show up first, where one has to click *continue* in order to continue to the webshop that sells the product. In this text box - which in this case is one that popped up when clicking on a Stanley product - it actually says that "The website you just visited (<http://shopstyle.com>) has an advertising relationship with brands like Stanley.... The website owner may earn a commission or other fee when you purchase something from these brands." ("AvantLink"). This means that The Buy Guide makes money whenever someone purchases a product, like a Stanley tumbler, through their e-commerce webshop and they would therefore have monetary gain from promoting the Stanley tumbler through eWOM because it can be bought through their webshop ("Stanley Favorites").




## eWOM and #WaterTok

As mentioned it is not just The Buy Guide that has and is generating eWOM for the Stanley tumbler. The #WaterTok community on TikTok is doing so as well. When Google searching *TikTok #WaterTok* the first two links that come up are both called WaterTok but one of them leads to the latest posts containing the hashtag #WaterTok on TikTok and the other link is to a different TikTok page with content containing the hashtag #WaterTok but also #WaterTok related videos, so it is more of a discover page (“tiktok watertok”) (“Watertok”) (“#watertok”). However, what both of these pages on TikTok have in common is that they both contain videos with water recipes and when scrolling through the endless pages some of the videos also contain Stanley tumblers, which can be identified by their logo on the tumblers. Moreover, all of the videos contain the hashtag #WaterTok in the text next to the videos, where one might put a description of the video, other hashtags or emojis and so on (“#watertok”) (“Watertok”). These videos thereby have a hashtag that automatically groups them together with other videos containing the same hashtag and makes it easy for others to find related content to watch. However, as mentioned not all of these videos contain Stanley tumblers and do therefore not directly create eWOM for the Stanley tumbler.

That being said, when it comes to the eWOM these #WaterTok videos create about the Stanley tumbler it is not as direct as opposed to the way The Buy Guide writes that they love the product, but instead the eWOM on #WaterTok comes more from the fact that there are many different individuals that use a Stanley tumbler in their content, which can be interpreted as a positive thing, for why would so many people use a Stanley tumbler if they were not a good product (“Watertok”).

When it comes to which motives that drive people to make TikTok videos with a Stanley tumbler it is impossible to say why everybody who has done it does it, but both the Stanley tumbler and #WaterTok are trends on TikTok. The hashtag #WaterTok has been used in over 99 thousand videos and #stanleytumbler has been used in over 84 thousand videos (“#watertok”) (“#stanleytumbler”). Perhaps for some, they find social benefits in being another person that



posts a TikTok about a water recipe and/or Stanley tumbler. This can be due to the fact that some experience FOMO, meaning they have a “fear of missing out” on events like exciting things happening on social media (“FOMO”). And when people spend on average 147 minutes on social media during a single day, they are constantly updated on what other people are doing, like participating in trends on TikTok where one “needs” a Stanley tumbler, flavor packets and sugar-free syrups to participate in the content that is trending (Yoder). Therefore, people buy the trending products and upload their own videos in order to not feel FOMO and get a sense of belonging when other TikTok users give them positive feedback by, for example, liking their videos (Laurence and Temple).

Moreover, the TikTok videos are free product reviews, because when the tumbler is used again and again by people in the #WaterTok community and other people on TikTok start noticing and seeing the product again and again - whether it is due to TikTok’s algorithms or the Baard-Meinhof phenomenon - they become more biased towards the tumbler and is more likely to buy the product themselves (Yoder) (Pietrangelo and Legg).


### eWOM from other sources

When it comes to other sources that have and are creating eWOM for the Stanley tumbler there are as mentioned a lot of articles to be found online from different new organisations. However, another place where different forms of content and eWOM can be found about the Stanley tumbler is Youtube. On Youtube some of the different categories of videos people post are, for example, educational, entertainment, people and blogs, news and so on (McCallister). When searching for *Stanley tumbler* on Youtube a lot of different videos come up as well as shorts. Some of the Youtube channels that come up are the Stanley Brand, Forbes, CNBC Make it and Saturday Night Live (“Stanley tumbler”, Youtube). These are all very different sources that create eWOM about the Stanley tumbler. Stanley is, of course, the brand behind the tumbler and is described in the methodology section. Forbes however is a publishing and media company that covers news about finance technology, sports and business, but it is probably mostly known for its lists of the world’s billionaires (“Forbes: What it is, History, Considerations”). CNBC Make it, on the other hand, is a part of the news channel CNBC and focuses on news about how people

can save, earn and spend money on their big financial firsts (“About CNBC Make it”). In addition, Saturday Night Live is an American television series that does comedy sketches (“Saturday Night Live”).

Stanley’s motives for posting about their product on Youtube is are most likely part of their marketing and for self serving and economic reasons, since - as mentioned in the marketing theory section - marketing is used to promote products and encourage people to buy them (Twin, “Marketing in Business: Strategies and Types Explained”). Forbes and CNBC Make it, on the other hand probably have other motives than getting consumers to buy the tumbler, since they are both, in their own way, reporting news. Their motives for the eWOM is due to self-interest, since they are about reporting the news and the Stanley tumbler is a popular trend (Abad-Santos). Saturday Night Live’s eWOM about the Stanley tumbler is also self-serving however not because they are a news organisation reporting the news, but because they make sketches and parodies about current news, popular topics and political subjects (“Saturday Night Live”).

Therefore, eWOM about the Stanley tumbler comes from many different sources like The Buy Guide, TikTok users, the #WaterTok community, news organisations and there are probably plenty more. Moreover, they all have their own reasons for sharing the eWOM. This shows that the phenomenon can be found in different places on the internet and that marketing the tumbler is not just done by the Stanley brand, but also by consumers that generate user-generated content. This can be seen as both positive and negative for Stanley, since they get free advertisement through the eWOM, but at the same time they cannot control this eWOM and that can have negative consequences, because as mentioned in the theory section a motive for sharing eWOM could also be to vent negative feelings. For example, it became a thing to post videos of doing at home lead testing on one’s Stanley tumblers and some of these tests were positive for lead, which created negative eWOM for Stanley and has led to Stanley’s parent company PMI being sued, because they are being accused of misleading consumers since they did not warn them about potential exposure to lead if the tumbler was damaged (Wile) (“Stanley Tumblers Are Bad”).



Moreover, the limitations of the eWOM analysis above is that all of the eWOM that has contributed to the Stanley phenomenon cannot all be analysed, since there is so much of it to be found on the internet, therefore the analysis tried to focus on the most important eWOM in relation to the phenomenon. In addition, further studies into this area could, for example, look more closely at the discourse used on TikTok in relation to videos containing eWOM about the Stanley tumbler, in order to better understand how it became a ‘must have item’.

### eWOM and Purchasing Decisions

With all of eWOM about the Stanley tumbler going on online, one can only assume that it has affected the sale of the Stanley tumbler and thereby affected Stanley financially. Which it has, as mentioned in the introduction then Stanley increased its sales in 2021 by 275 per cent compared to 2020 with the help of The Buy Guide (Issawi). However, since then Stanley's revenue has increased even more. According to a statistic from CNBC Stanley's revenue was 98 million dollars in 2020, 194 million dollars in 2021, 402 million dollars in 2022 and in 2023 Stanley's revenue was 750 million dollars (CNBC) (Vega and Shamo). Moreover, the tumbler has become Stanley's most sold product with them having sold more than 10 million of them (CNBC). One could say that Stanley became an overnight success, however that is not really the case considering the Stanley brand is over 100 years old (Collins).

### Consumer Involvement & Participation

In relation to this paper one can also talk about the eWOM about the tumbler as what creates the Stanley brand community online and that it is not a fixed OBC that can only be found on one social media platforms, but from the previous analysis sections it suits more to say that it is an OBC that has travelled around the internet, since it can be found in relation to The Buy Guide, Google searches, Youtube videos, on TikTok and probably other places as well on the internet. The Stanley OBC has therefore already been described in the previous sections of this paper. However, this part of the paper will look more at the consumers that showcase their involvement


and participation with the Stanley brand on TikTok and use the four OBC characteristics to characterise it.

When searching for the Stanley community on TikTok it does not disappoint for even outside the #WaterTok community on TikTok there is a lot of content containing the tumbler. From the research that was done for this paper there does not really seem to be any set in stone shared principles and values for the Stanley OBC. However there are some content themes that are repeated on TikTok, such as showing one's collection of multiple Stanleys and by multiple any number between two to a shelf full of Stanleys is meant. Another content theme that repeats itself is adding accessories to the Stanley tumbler, for example, a snack bowl or small keychains. A few also have carriers for their tumblers, which is wrapped and closed around the tumbler and has pockets and a crossbody strap, so one does not have to walk with the Stanley by the handle but instead carry it like a bag. Moreover, using a specific ice mold that form three ice cubes to fit perfectly into a Stanley tumbler is also a repeated theme ("Stanley for The Community") ("Community Stanley") ("When Its Not Js My Stanley Its The Community Stanley") ("Its Not Just My Stanley Its The Community Stanley") ("THE ALL DAY 40 OZ QUENCHER CARRY-ALL"). This shows that even though there may not be principles involved in the Stanley OBC there are certain things and themes that are repeated by the consumers that post content containing the tumbler, which means that there are some sort of shared outlook on what to post for some. Moreover, they also use some of the same hashtags in order to identify there content has being Stanley content, in other words consumer use hashtags relating to Stanley, like #stanley, #stanleycup, #stanleytumbler, #stanleycollection and so on, so it is possible for other users to find them when searching for Stanley related content on TikTok, for as mentioned in the theory section then hashtags are used to bring people together, who for example agree on something and create a community (McQueeny) (Makayla) ("The Role of Social Media and Its Effects on Communication and Relationships").

When searching for the Stanley community on TikTok, as of the time this paper is being written, there was one TikTok that kept showing up and therefore it will be used in relation to the four characteristics in this section of the paper. The account that posted this video is called Darcymcqueenyyy and she has 1.8 million followers, while the video itself has 293,3 thousand

likes (McQueenyy) (“Darcymcqueenyyy”). The video contains her and seven different Stanley tumblers and a tumbler from a different brand. In the video she says that she is a Stanley girl, but that the Stanley tumbler has one flaw and she shows this by turning the tumbler upside down and water spills out. However, she also makes it clear that this does not bother her, because she is not gonna put it upside down anywhere. Then she goes on to show the other brands tumbler and how that does not spill when put upside down (McQueenyy). The text box next to the video contains the sentence “looks like we’re adding a new member to the family👀👉” as well as 12 hashtag, where nine of them contain the word Stanley (McQueenyy). Therefore, when it comes to the first of the four characteristics then she definitely has some brand sentiment, because she not only has one Stanley but seven, she calls herself a Stanley girl and she clearly still loves the Stanley products even though they spill when turned upside down. Moreover, she has included a lot of Stanley related hashtags in her text, which leads one to believe that her video and its content is meant for the Stanley community. Not only that but even though the video is a comparison between a Stanley tumbler and a different tumbler brand, and the other tumbler has a positive feature the Stanley does not, she still expresses a sort of affirmative experience (the third characteristic) that the Stanley is still a good product. Lastly, when it comes to the *conspicuous effect* it is noticeable that she displayed her Stanley tumblers on her kitchen counter for her video and that they, as well as the other tumbler, are more in focus than she is because she is standing to the side or behind the tumblers. Moreover, she also took the time to respond to some of the comments left by other TikTok users on her video (Ozuem and Willis 20-23) (McQueenyy). She therefore seems like a consumer and content creator that cares about the setup of her videos and interacting with the people watching them. In addition, she also fits multiple of the four consumer characteristics that a consumer displays in an online brand community (Ozuem and Willis 19).

Another thing to point out in relation to the OBC of the Stanley tumbler and the literature review is that Anderson uses the example of a newspaper to show how people feel and occasionally see confirmation of their community in their day to day lives (Anderson 35-36). However, that is where there is a difference to an online community in today’s world, because as mentioned




people spend two hours a day online, which means that they have two hours a day where they can experience reassurance of their community, in other words nowadays it is easier to seek out communities because they are only a few clicks away on the internet (Ozuem and Willis 18). That being said there may be a difference in seeing others being a part of the Stanley community online and using the product in videos then it is to see someone use a Stanley in the real world. However, that is a limitation of this paper since it is concerned with the phenomenon online and not so much how consumers experience it in the real world, perhaps that could be an avenue for further studies.

In summary, involvement and participation from consumers in the OBC of the Stanley tumbler can be found all over the internet, for example, in the eWOM consumers create when they make videos on TikTok with a tumbler. Moreover, some of the things that show and connect consumers to the OBC are, for example, that the videos on TikTok have repeating themes and hashtags that relate to Stanley and the tumbler. This means that whether consumers mean to do it or not, when they post content online in relation to the Stanley tumbler they are not just creating eWOM they are also creating an online community. In addition, this matters in relation to understanding the Stanley phenomenon, because it shows that the Stanley tumbler trend is due to individual consumers creating an OBC.

## Affiliate Marketing and Co-branding

As mentioned in the introduction and above in the eWOM analysis section, not only does Stanley now have an affiliate program on their website but the links that are on The Buy Guides webshop are affiliate links (Stanley 1913) (“What does an affiliate link look like?”). When it comes to affiliate marketing there are three main types, which were introduced in the theory section. The Buy Guide is the *involved affiliate marketing* type, because as mentioned they use affiliate links on their webshop when it comes to the products consumers can buy through them and they also have a connection with the Stanley tumbler through their work with the Stanley company (“Stanley Favorites”) (“The Story of The Cup”) (“AvantLink”). In addition, the three women






behind The Buy Guide, of course, also use and love the Stanley tumbler (“The Story of The Cup”).

When it comes to co-branding this is also a venture the Stanley company has taken part in. They have co-branded with Starbucks a couple of times. The first time was in November of 2023 and not only was it a co-branded tumbler but it was also a limited edition. The tumbler itself was in an exclusive red shade and had Stanley and Starbucks written on the side of it (Tingley). The limited edition tumbler was so popular that consumers were camping outside stores hours before the tumbler could be bought, in order to make sure they got one, because the tumbler sold out fast. Some consumers took advantage of the fact that it was a limited edition tumbler and are reselling their tumblers online for hundreds of dollars (Tingley). Similar event happened in January of 2024, when Stanley and Starbucks released another co-branded limited edition tumbler. This one could only be bought in Starbucks cafés inside Target stores. Moreover, the product was classified by Target as a “high-demand” merchandise, which meant that employees at Target were not allowed to, for example, buy a tumbler on their break, however some did and they were consequently fired. However, that is not the only thing that happened in relation to this release, because a man and a woman were so desperate to get a tumbler that they tried to steal a box with the limited edition tumblers in it, from behind a Starbucks counter and they were arrested for it (Dean and Reuter). These events did not seem to have fazed Stanley and Starbucks, because they released another co-branded limited edition tumbler in Target stores for mother’s day in 2024 and when it came to this tumbler, TikTok users started uploading videos of them going “cup hunting” in Target stores a day or two before the release in the hopes that they could get intel from Target employees on which Target stores would have the tumbler in stock for the release (Dean and Reuter) (Martin) (Harling).

To recap, The Buy Guide do not just sell the Stanley tumbler but they are also connected to the product and the Stanley brand. Moreover, co-branding between the Stanley brand and the Starbucks brand have been beneficial to Stanley, because they make these limited editions that people want to own and this results in them being sold out, resold online and consumers going




out of their way to get their hand on a tumbler. This means that Stanley benefits from working with others and this matters because this analysis section also shows that it is not just eWOM that has created the phenomenon but Stanley, obviously, also contributed to it with their marketing strategy of co-branding. A limitation of this analysis section and something that could be analysed in further studies is that this section only looked at co-branding between Stanley and Starbucks and did not look into or analysed co-branding between Stanley and another brand, to see if they created similar reactions in consumers.

## The 7 Ps of Marketing

When it comes to the phenomenon of the Stanley tumbler it is not just consumer's eWOM, OBC and affiliate marketing and co-branding that has made it happen, the Stanley company has also played a role and to show this the 7 Ps will be used to analyse Stanley in relation to the phenomenon.

When it comes to products then Stanley has a lot of different products, however the focus here is the tumbler (Stanley 1913). The tumbler may or may not fulfil some consumers' needs if they for example experience FOMO by not having a tumbler or not having the newest colour or an limited edition one ("FOMO"). However, there definitely seems to be some sort of demand for more tumblers considering what people are willing to go through to get one, or at least willing to go through for a limited edition tumbler (Dean and Reuter) (Martin) (Harling). So there is definitely a market for the tumbler. Moreover, besides making limited edition version of the tumbler, it can also be bought in many different colours and sizes on the Stanley webshop as well customised ("The Quencher H2.0 Flowstate Tumbler | 40 oz"). In other words, Stanley has added value to their tumbler through limited editions and their variety of tumblers on their webshop. In relation, to price the tumbler comes in five different sizes so the consumers also - to some degree - get a choice in how much money they are willing to spend on a Stanley tumbler ("The Quencher H2.0 Flowstate Tumbler | 40 oz"). The third P is place as in where one can buy the tumbler. There are, as mentioned throughout this paper, multiple places where one can buy the



tumbler. First of all there is Stanley's own webshop, then there is The Buy Guide's webshop and when it comes to a physical store then there is Target and there are probably many more places online and different stores where the tumbler is also sold (Stanley 1913) ("Stanley Favorites") (Dean and Reuter). When it comes to Stanley's promotion of the tumbler, then from the previous analysis sections it can be said that a lot of it is user generated in the form of eWOM. However, when it comes to Stanley they, for example, used affiliate marketing and co-branding (Tingley) (Issawi) (Stanley 1913). In regard to the fifth p, which is people then this paper does not have any useful data to know or comment on the employees of Stanley that interact with consumers. However, in relation to the sixth p, which is process, then it can be said that when it comes to the process of finding information and reviews of the Stanley tumbler then there is a lot for consumers to discover online, which was also mentioned in the beginning of the analysis section ("Stanley Tumbler Article"). Moreover, when it comes to the seventh p; physical evidence then there is, as mentioned, a lot to be found online among all of the eWOM that for example takes place on TikTok ("Stanley for The Community") ("Community Stanley") ("When Its Not Js My Stanley Its The Community Stanley").

To summarise then the product/tumbler that Stanley offers to consumers can be bought in many different versions when it comes to colours, sizes and limited editions. Moreover, it can be bought in different places online but also in a physical store and the eWOM that can be found online contributes to the promotion of the tumbler and what kind of information that can be found online in relation to reviews. This means that it is not just Stanley that contributes to how the tumbler is perceived in the eyes of consumers, since one cannot really disconnect all the eWOM that is online about the tumbler from the Stanley company. This matter because it shows that it is all connected in creating the trend surrounding the Stanley tumbler. A limitation from this part of the analysis section and something that can be studied further in relation to this is looking more closely at Stanley and seeing if there is some communication from them when it comes to reviews left on their webshop or other places.

## Conclusion

In conclusion to this paper the overall topic is the Stanley tumbler phenomenon and the problem formulation is: how has eWOM and the #WaterTok community on TikTok created a viral phenomenon surrounding the Stanley Tumbler and how has this affected the Stanley brand.

And in conclusion to the problem formulation then it can be said that different forms of eWOM from different sources and the #WaterTok community has helped create the phenomenon simply by consumers creating eWOM using repeated themes in the content and specific hashtag in the description boxes attached to the videos and then in turn when these things are repeated by thousands of TikTok users they created the OBC for the Stanley tumbler as well as a lot of reviews and promotion of the tumbler, whether the consumers meant to do that or not.

This has affected Stanley by first of all increasing their sales. Moreover, as the tumbler became a trend on TikTok, the Stanley brand also became more and more known, because the brand name is very much connected to the product. In addition, the way Stanley marketed their products also changed thanks to The Buy Guide and TikTok, since they started an affiliate program, began co-branding with Starbucks and as mentioned in the introduction then they also went from mainly marketing towards the 'working man' to marketing towards women.

In relation to future studies of the phenomenon then it could be interesting to look at it again in, for example, a few years and see what and if possible how the Stanley tumbler trend died down and which consequences it had.

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