

The impact of fashion collaboration break-up on customer
perception of product equity and brand equity: the case of
Adidas-Yeezy and Kanye West

Marco Francesco Mazzù

SUPERVISOR

Francesco Paolone

CO-SUPERVISOR

Federica Savarese 746301

CANDIDATE

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	6
1. INTRODUCTION	7
1.1 CONTEXT BACKGROUND	7
1.2 EXPECTED CONTRIBUTION	9
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	10
2.1 BUILDING BRAND EQUITY LEVERAGING SECONDARY ASSOCIATIONS	10
2.2 TYPES OF COLLABORATIONS	11
2.3 MOTIVES FOR ALLIANCES IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY	13
2.4 COLLABORATIONS IN FASHION INDUSTRY AND SNEAKERS MARKET	15
2.5 COLLABORATIONS WITH CELEBRITIES	17
2.6 FASHION COLLABORATIONS BENEFITS AND RISKS	19
2.6.1 Benefits of fashion collaborations	20
2.6.2 Risks of fashion collaborations	21
2.7 SCARCITY AND LIMITED EDITION	22
2.8 RETAIL AND RESELL MARKET	24
2.9 CBBE AND FASHION COLLABORATION	25
2.10 COLLABORATIONS THAT WENT WRONG	30
2.10.1 Nike and Armstrong	30
2.10.2 H&M and The Weeknd	31
2.10.3 Johnny Depp and Dior	32
2.10.4 Prada and Zheng Shuang	33
2.11 CRISIS EFFECTS ON BRAND EQUITY	35
Conclusion	35
3. METHODOLOGY	35
3.1 CASE STUDY RESEARCH	35
3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN	38
3.3 PREPARE	41
3.4 COLLECT	42
4. RESEARCH INSIGHTS	44
4.1 PERCEPTION BEFORE THE BREAKUP	45
4.1.1 Product perception	45
4.1.2 Identification with community	46
4.1.3 Perception on Kanye West	47
4.2 PERCEPTION AND OPINION AFTER THE BREAKUP	48
4.2.1 Product perception	48
4.2.2 Identification with community	50
4.2.3 Perception on Kanye West	51
4.2.4 Opinion after the breakup	51
4.2.5 Competition, alternative product and brand name	53
4.3 OPINION ON NEW ADIDAS STRATEGY	54
4.4 IMPACT ON ADIDAS BRAND EQUITY	56
4.5 PROJECTIVE TECHNIQUE	57
5. IMPLICATION	59
6. LIMITATIONS	60
APPENDIX	62
REFERENCES	70
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	76

Tables of Figures

Table 1: Types of collaborations. Sources: thesis author.

Figure 1: Generic and fashion industry specific motives for alliance. Sources: Stephen M. Wigley 2010.

Figure 2: Fashion Lifecycles. Source: Alfonso Segura,2017.

Figure 3: Effect of scarcity message on LE product. Sources: Jang et al., 2015.

Figure 4: Livestrong Collection. Source: Fashion Magazine.

Figure 5: H&M and The Weeknd tweets about the scandal. Source: Business of Fashion, 2017.

Figure 6: Johnny Depp x Dior. Source: Marketing Magazine, 2022.

Figure 7: Zheng Shuang x Prada. Source: Fashion Magazine,202.

Figure 8: The Process of Case Study Method. Source: Yin, 2013.

Figure 9: The Process of Case Study Method “Design”. Source: Yin, 2013.

Figure 10: The Process of Case Study Method “Prepare”. Source: Yin, 2013.

Figure 11: The Process of Case Study Method “Collect”. Source: Yin, 2013.

Table 2: Case Study Research Design and Methods. Source: Yin, 2013.

Table 3: Projective technique. Source: Thesis’ author.

Abstract

Companies use brand collaborations as a way to build brand equity, and leveraging secondary association is a way to build brand image and brand awareness among customers. Sometimes these collaborations go wrong and the academy largely agrees that crises damage brand equity. Our research uses the case of Adidas Yeezy and Kanye West (their collaboration created a sneakers line branded under the name Adidas-Yeezy) in order to understand the impact of a fashion collaboration breakup on product equity and brand equity. To investigate our research question, we decided to employ a qualitative approach making in-depth and semi-structured interviews with 35 people between 18 and 35 years old. Thematic analysis, a technique that locates and explores patterns and themes in the material, was used to analyze the interviews.

Our main contribution is that product equity did not decline all that much because the perception of the consumers on this collaboration is not as bad as we might have expected from our hypothesis based on the literature. However, removing Kanye West's association with the shoes significantly diminishes their brand equity. The study demonstrates the negative impact of partnership breakups on product brand equity when the "cool factor" is absent, affecting product image and brand awareness. Our findings challenge the literature by highlighting that because consumers separate the man from the artist, what is damaging is the brand equity of the sneakers without collaboration, but that is a different matter. It's not the brand equity of the partnership. These results pertain specifically to the co-branded product and may not apply to the two brands individually.

Key words: Collaboration breakup, Brand equity, Celebrities, Adidas-Yeezy, Kanye West

1. Introduction

A successful musician and businessman, Kanye West (also named Ye) entered the fashion industry with a bold, cutting-edge idea. In 2013, he collaborated with Adidas, a leading sportswear company, to develop the Yeezy footwear and apparel collection. Thanks to this successful collaboration, Yeezy sneakers have become a must-have among fashionistas and sneakerheads worldwide. But Kanye's unexpected actions forced Adidas to end the partnership. In fact, in October (2022) Adidas officially ended its collaboration with Kanye West after the rapper shared offensive and anti-Semitic comments on social media and sparked debate by showing up at a fashion event in Paris wearing a "White Lives Matter" T-shirt in opposition to the anti-racist "Black Lives Matter" movement. (Tim Loh et al., 2022)

After the breakup, Adidas planned to start a new approach to maintain the Yeezy product line. To distance the brand from Kanye West, the company plans to rename the line simply "Adidas."

With this strategy, essential questions are raised about the impact that the end of a partnership between a fashion/sports brand and a celebrity can have on product and brand equity.

This fascinating case involving the dissolution of the partnership between Adidas and Kanye West has brought attention to the fragility of the collaboration between fashion brands and celebrities and the broader issue of the effect of a partnership between a brand and a star on product and brand equity. Brand equity is a company's market value and reputation and ability to influence consumers' purchase decisions. Therefore, this thesis aims to examine the effects of the end of a collaboration on the actual product and brand equity. It will seek to understand how it affects brand image, consumer perception, and product success in the marketplace. For the research, we conducted a case analysis and used the case of Adidas and Kanye West to address our topic.

The second chapter will be devoted to a review of the literature on collaboration between fashion brands and celebrities and branding concepts such as brand equity. The third chapter will present the methodology of this thesis, while the fourth chapter will present the research results and discuss its main implications.

1.1 Context background

In the world of sportswear and footwear, Adidas is a well-known brand. The German company, founded in 1949, has earned a solid reputation over the years by emphasizing innovation, design, and product quality. Adidas has created a remarkable loyal customer base and established itself as the standard for sports and fashion enthusiasts worldwide.

On the other hand, Kanye West, one of his generation's most well-known and divisive musicians and producers, has had a significant impact on the music world. He is also famous for his interest in fashion and his aspirations in design. His creative talent and flamboyant personality make him a brand built on his unconventional style and willingness to speak his mind (Wade, 2016). West has often used his notoriety to

express his opinions, stirring controversy with his views and actions. He has been branded as egomaniacal and self-centered because of his many gimmicks and ingenuity in music production.

West has expanded beyond the music industry into the fashion world to diversify his brand. Kanye's style often reflected his musical tastes when he became famous and drew inspiration from outside sources. Kanye has been involved in several fashion projects outside of his style, some of which have been successful, such as his first work with Louis Vuitton (Business of Fashion, 2017), and others that have not been as well received, such as his women's clothing line DW Kanye West. Kanye West's most recent venture, introducing his Yeezy brand, born out of a collaboration with Adidas, has achieved tremendous success by adhering to his brand of transparency and acting in an unorthodox manner within the conventional fashion system.

The Yeezy x Adidas sneakers are the shoes produced by Adidas in collaboration with Ye that have yielded much for both brands, becoming streetwear cults over the years. The partnership began in February 2015 with Yeezy season 1. Although Kanye had already created a sneaker for Adidas in 2006, Ye had, until 2013, collaborated with Nike. The first collaboration with Adidas was known for its essential pret-à-porter style reminiscent of military clothing and skin color. After that, Adidas decided to focus solely on the sneaker collection but, from season 6 on, once again introduced an apparel line again. As for the Yeezy sneaker model, several types were created, such as 350, 750, and 950, and, more recently, 380, 500 and 700, available in various colors. The co-brand designer debuted his Yeezy Season 4 collection at Madison Square Garden in New York and had various celebrities, such as his wife Kim Kardashian, wear the latest Yeezy outfits to showcase his avant-garde garments (Friedman, 2018).

Because of his identity, Kanye was able to influence consumers and Adidas benefited from his ability to produce value in a somewhat unusual manner. Indeed, the two sought a partnership of complementary capabilities that would maximize the value of the Yeezy brand, as both parties contributed different skills to its development (Blackett & Russell, 1999).

The partnership was a winner. All models in the Adidas Yeezy line were in consistently high demand, to the point of selling out and creating a strong resale market. The alliance strengthened Adidas' brand image, and the German brand was able to challenge giants such as Nike. As mentioned earlier, Adidas' decision to break with Kanye was forced by the rapper's latest episode of anti-Semitic comments on social media. Adidas' future action has not yet been determined, but we do know that Adidas has many Yeezy models in stock and needs to decide what to do with them. According to Kurtz, the alliance between Ye and Adidas appears to be a "typical licensing agreement" marketed as a collaboration (Isaiah Poritz and Chris Dolmetsch 2022). Kanye grants Adidas a license to use his trademarks and intellectual property, Yeezy and YZY, on shoes and accessories. Adidas manufactures and designs, which explains why it is mentioned in all design patents. Adidas claimed, therefore, ownership of "design rights to existing products" and all previous and future footwear colorations. (Isaiah Poritz and Chris Dolmetsch 2022)

Co-branding with celebrities often increases sales and customer crazes and can distribute financial risk. In addition, the more controversial the figure, the greater the impact and perhaps the more significant the gain, but it is also risky.

Adidas is considering continuing to market shoes produced with the rapper. Still, without the use of the Ye brand, we expect it will be difficult for the company to move forward in this way because of the controversy over the alliance, and the absence of the Ye cool factor will reduce their value.

Our research is driven by the desire to understand the impact on the brand equity of the product, should Adidas decide to continue selling the shoes, given that it has the right to sell them, even without the Yeezy name, because legally, it cannot use the name. We will analyze whether consumers in the future will value the sneakers for their unique design and comfort, or simply because they are Ye's shoes, and then decipher whether the brand equity of the products resulting from the Adidas Yeezy collaboration is greater or less than the same products with the Adidas brand name alone. To do this, we will study the associations and connections of customers when they think about the Adidas-Yeezy sneaker line before and after the collaboration is discontinued and, consequently, the value that the partnership brings to the products. Based on the literature review, the research aims to obtain information on the impact of this disruption on brand equity. The possible outcome we expect is that the value of Adidas Yeezy sneakers lies in the co-brand itself and not in the product made only by Adidas without Yeezy. The value of Adidas Yeezy is probably related to the brand itself, which is the union of two brands and not to the two components taken individually.

1.2 Expected contribution

As we will explain in chapter two, brand collaborations or alliances are one way to build brand equity. One topic in brand management that has received much attention is fashion collaborations and their impact on brand equity. Our study examines customer-based brand equity, or brand equity, seen through the eyes of the customer. Individuals use a product's brand name as a cue and a representation of their perceptions of the product based on their interactions with the brand or knowledge gained thereof (Swait et al., 1993). Brand cooperation offers a way to study how brand equity influences consumers' reactions to brand combinations and how they use their sense of brand equity to evaluate product features before purchasing. Co-branding is often considered a beneficial strategy for companies, regardless of whether they are regarded as high-equity brands (Washburn et al., 2000).

Several types of research support the positive impact of co-branding. For example, according to Rao et al. (1999), combining two brands "gives consumers more confidence in the quality of the product, leading to better product evaluation and a higher price." It has been shown that in a successful brand partnership, the product elicits favorable connotations in the minds of consumers (Helmig et al., 2008). Park et al. (1996) argue that a co-branded product of two complementary brands maintains a higher attribute profile in customers' minds, and favorable customer attitudes have direct beneficial effects.

Some studies focus on the impact of crisis types, response strategies, and interactions on the corporate image of the culpable ally, the nonculpable partner, and the alliance (Jaywant Singh et al., 2020); other scholars have analyzed how celebrity endorsement of a product creates equity for both the brand-product and the celebrity endorsing it (Diana Seno et al., 2005). Previous literature has developed studies on the positive associations that unknown brands achieve when paired with well-known brands. Many researchers have looked into collaborations and brand equity. However, breakups between a fashion brand and a celebrity have been much less widely studied, and this is what we want to research, using the case of Kanye West and Adidas to explore the topic. Our contribution has potential considering rapidly changing consumer behavior and the evolving business environment. Therefore, the objective of our thesis is to expand the literature related to the influence of customer brand equity and collaboration brought to an abrupt end as a result of scandal. In addition, previous research has placed a strong emphasis on apparel brands. This study focuses on collaborations in the fashion industry and specifically in the sneaker world.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Building brand equity leveraging secondary associations

Brand equity refers to the value a brand adds to a product or service beyond its physical attributes; the brand's value and strength come from consumers' perceptions and experiences. It encompasses a brand's reputation, recognition, and overall perception in the market and involves creating a positive brand image that resonates with consumers and encourages brand loyalty. One effective way to build brand equity is through secondary associations, including collaborating with another brand or an organization that shares similar values and brand image (Keller, 2020). Brand equity is critical for a fashion partnership, as it can influence the perceived value and appeal of the collaboration product. An alliance in this industry can help companies increase their brand equity by leveraging the other partner(s)'s equity. For example, a luxury fashion brand collaborating with a streetwear brand can benefit from the younger, trendier brand's equity, increasing its appeal to a broader customer base.

Building brand equity through collaboration can, therefore, be an excellent strategy for expanding one's brand influence in the market. However, to achieve positive results, it is essential to follow a number of crucial steps that we have listed below.

- Identify a suitable partner: The first step in building brand equity through a fashion collaboration is to identify a partner with similar values and brand image. The partner should also have a significant, engaged following that aligns with the target audience. This could be a fashion designer, a celebrity, or even another brand (Jaywant Singh et al., 2020).

- Define the collaboration: Once a suitable partner has been identified, it is essential to define the partnership clearly. This includes defining the scope of the cooperation, the objectives and the desired outcomes. For example, the collaboration could involve designing a limited-edition product or collection, hosting a joint event, or creating a marketing campaign together (Jemma Oeppen, 2014; Ahmad Jamal, 2014).
- Develop the collaboration: Once the partnership has been defined, it should be developed. This involves working closely with the partner to ensure the partnership aligns with both brands' values and objectives. They should also ensure that the collaboration is unique, engaging, and resonates with their target audience (Jemma Oeppen, 2014; Ahmad Jamal, 2014).
- Launch the collaboration: Once it has been developed, it is time to launch it. This involves creating a solid marketing campaign showcasing the collaboration and generating excitement among the target audience. The partnership might be promoted through social media, influencer marketing and other digital marketing channels. (Jemma Oeppen 2014; Ahmad Jamal, 2014)
- Measure the impact: Finally, measuring the collaboration's impact is essential. This involves tracking sales, brand awareness, and consumer engagement metrics. Feedback should also be gathered from the target audience to gauge perception of the collaboration and the brand (Diana Seno 2005, Bryan A. Lukas 2005).

2.2 Types of collaborations

Before embarking on a collaboration, it is essential to understand what type of partnership best suits the brand's goals. Various types of partnerships can be highlighted, each with unique characteristics and specific purposes. This section will examine the different types of partnerships companies can engage in for maximum benefit. Two of the most common forms of commercial cooperation are co-branding and brand alliances (Darby, 2006; Blackett & Board, 1999). Many attempts have been made to categorize the various forms of corporate partnerships. Recognized forms of collaboration are shown in Table 1, along with the theorists who support them.

Types	Description	Theorists
Joint promotion	A brief agreement (less than six months) between two reputable businesses from different industries. The goal is to maximize the brands' inherent synergy and increase effectiveness while spending less money.	Darby (2006), Blackett and Boad (1999) and Gammoh and Voss (2011)

Co-product development	This is the creation of a new product with a distinctive appeal through hybridization and promotion impact with the collaboration between the business and the designer. These new products are sold in limited quantities for a brief time in order to promote sales and generate exposure.	Jang, Eun-Young (2006)
Co-marketing	A new product is introduced fusing the firm's existing brand with a related corporate brand.	Jang, Eun-Young (2006)
Sponsorship and experiential marketing	A business will give money to an organization if they wish to participate in an event to develop a stronger connection with the audience. A brand may appear likable, trustworthy, or knowledgeable by being associated with an event. It can increase brand awareness, introduce new associations, or enhance power, appeal, and distinctiveness.	Blackett and Boad (1999), Breckenfeld (2009) and Pine and Gilmore (2011)
Co-branding	A collaboration between two or more well-known businesses where all member brands' names are maintained.	Blackett and Boad (1999), Gammoh and Voss (2011), Dorozala and Kohlbrenner (2008) and Aaker (1996)
Composite branding	This involves fusing two current brand names to produce a composite brand name for a new product, to which both partners contribute knowledge.	Park et al. (1996), Gammoh and Voss (2011) and Aaker (1996)
Ingredient branding	This kind of partnership is when essential characteristics of one brand are used as ingredients in another brand.	Gammoh and Voss (2011) and Aaker (1996)
Dual branding	Comparable to co-branding, the distinction is that corporate brands primarily use dual branding to support and promote items.	Saunders and Guogun and Gammoh and Voss (2011)
Licensing	A kind of cooperation wherein a third party is permitted to use intellectual property that a given business owns or controls.	Darby (2006) and Simon

Joint venture	A long-term agreement founded on operational possibilities. This kind of collaboration is advantageous for breaking into new markets or introducing new items. It lessens the partners' exposure to investment risk and competition.	Darby (2006) and Blackett and Boad (1999)
Brand alliance	Unlike joint ventures, brand alliances seek to benefit from marketing opportunities. Although the partners in this collaboration do not offer complementary services, they are geographical alternatives for one another. Developing a new "master brand" is the most significant feature of this form.	Darby (2006), Blackett and Boad (1999) and Gammoh and Voss (2011)
Celebrity endorsement	The use of famous, well-respected people to promote goods is a common practice with a lengthy marketing history. The theory behind this strategy is that a famous person can draw attention to a brand and influence consumer impressions of the brand based on assumptions drawn from what is known about the celebrity.	Keller (2019)

Table 1: types of collaborations.

Sources: thesis author

2.3 Motives for alliances in the fashion industry

Besides the various partnership categorizations, it is also essential to underline the strategic motivations for entering into a collaboration; these can vary widely, depending on a company's needs and goals. This section will explore some of the most common motivations, from business expansion to co-creating new products and creating unique and engaging brand experiences for consumers. We will then consider motivations specific to the fashion industry analyzed by scholar Stephen M. Wigley (see Figure 1).

Lorange and Roos (1993) have suggested strategic motivations for business collaboration. They are as follows:

- Strategic: to boost growth and obtain an edge over competitors.
- Financial: to distribute risk and share investments.
- Technological: gain access to resources and talents that are complementary.
- Managerial: to profit from a straightforward structure and supply chain and to reach the market more swiftly.

It is interesting to note that Stephen M. Wigley's study suggested reasons specific to the fashion industry which can be added to the strategic reasons for cooperation. They can be seen in both "down-stream" customer-facing competencies (such as brand creation and management, marketing communication and PR, retail, and sales channel presentation) as well as "up-stream," back-of-house competencies (such as fashion product design, fashion product development, responsive manufacturing)

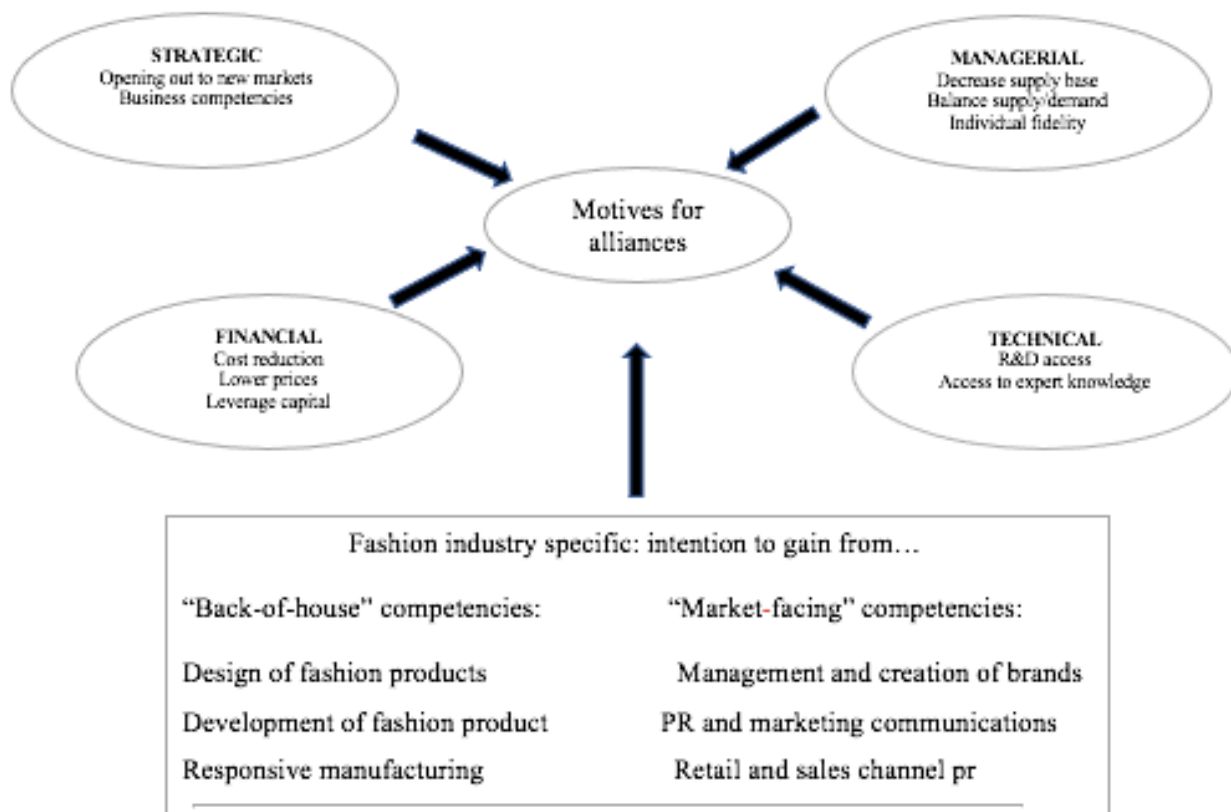


Figure 1: Generic and fashion industry specific motives for alliance

Sources: Stephen M. Wigley 2010.

As far as fashion product design is concerned, fashion is an industry in which design plays a key role. Collaborations provide opportunities to work with talented, innovative designers who bring new ideas and perspectives. Moreover, fashion is an ever-changing industry with rapidly changing trends and very short product life cycles, requiring companies to innovate continually and to try to distinguish themselves from competitors. Collaborating with another brand can provide a new point of view and a different approach to product design, leading to innovative and unique creations. In addition, collaboration can provide an opportunity to experiment with new production techniques and use other materials that would not otherwise have been possible (Stephen M. Wigley, 2010).

Fashion product development requires a lot of resources, time, and money, and companies often need help in deciding whether to invest in new products or to maintain existing ones. Collaborating with another brand can provide an opportunity to share the cost of developing a new product, spreading the risk and making the process more efficient. Collaboration can lead to outcomes that make the best use of the skills and resources of both brands, providing added value to consumers. In addition, collaborating with a partner with complementary technical or technological expertise can offer significant advantages in terms of product development. It can speed up product development and reduce production time (Stephen M. Wigley, 2010).

Responsive manufacturing refers to the ability of companies to respond quickly to customer needs by producing products to order or on demand. Responsive manufacturing has become increasingly important in fashion, where trends change rapidly, and consumer demand can be unpredictable. Collaborating with another brand can provide an opportunity to share resources and knowledge to produce more efficiently and responsively, enabling companies to respond to customer needs promptly (Stephen M. Wigley, 2010).

As regards the management and creation of the brands, there is a need to access specialized skills that would otherwise be expensive to acquire independently. For example, many fashion companies collaborate with branding agencies to develop their visual identity and build a solid and recognizable brand. This way, the company can focus on its products and business strategies, leaving brand management to branding experts (Stephen M. Wigley, 2010).

In public relations and marketing communications, collaborations can provide an opportunity to reach a larger and more diverse audience. For example, many fashion companies collaborate with celebrities and influencers to promote their products. This collaboration can increase brand visibility and reach a broader and more diverse audience. In addition, collaboration with other companies can also lead to innovative public partnerships and promote sustainability and social causes, building a positive brand reputation (Stephen M. Wigley, 2010).

Collaboration with other companies can lead to better product distribution and greater penetration in the target market. For example, many fashion brands collaborate with online or physical retailers to increase their market presence. This type of collaboration can lead to better product exposure and increased sales (Stephen M. Wigley, 2010).

2.4 Collaborations in fashion industry and sneakers market

Collaborations, often called co-brandings or brand alliances, are a type of business strategy in which two or more brands are combined to attract the attention of more customers (Keller, 1998). Visual Objective finds that 71% of consumers enjoy co-branded partnerships (Visual Objective 2021). To this extent, the fashion industry has recognized collaboration as a business keyword for the twenty-first century, which is why business collaboration can be seen in various contexts, including B2C and B2B, domestic and international markets, SOHO, and large enterprises. One of the first experiences to draw attention to fashion collaborations

was that between the well-known fashion designer Yoji Yamamoto and the sports merchandising company Adidas, which created the casual apparel line Y3 in 2000 (Appendix 1). Another example in 2000 was the multinational athletic goods business Puma, which introduced new products in collaboration with Japanese fashion designer Mihara Yasuhiro. In 2005, Puma collaborated with Gucci's head designer Alexander McQueen to develop new items. Another upscale company, Louis Vuitton, collaborated with the well-known modern Japanese artist Takashi Murakami to create the "Murakami bag," which became an instant hit.

It is interesting to note that, since the early 2000s, the nature of the partnership has changed to become a commercial strategy intended to open up consumers' wallets and social media feeds (Morgane Nyfeler,2022). In this regard, an example of how much fashion constantly changes is the recent collaboration between Gucci and streetwear giant Adidas (Appendix 2) for its autumn/winter 2022 collection, unveiled during Milan Fashion Week. That kind of collaboration shows that, in addition to creating a buzz, they give luxury brands a platform to interact with young people on the streets (Morgane Nyfeler,2022).

Zhang and Juhlin (2011) infer that fashion now reshapes people's perceptions about specific fashion players and name brands due to the consistent alliance between fashion and marketing. Especially in a world that needs to reinvent itself every six months, fashion firms today must look for ground-breaking collaborative concepts that astound consumers.

"Fashion collaborations leverage entire fashion business concepts that transform their branding strategy into not only 'sleeping with enemies,' but also to 'talking to strangers' regardless of product types." (Ahn et al. 2010). Wigley and Provelengiou (2011) understand that fashion firms, in order to be competitive in the marketplace, are increasingly implementing intra-industry collaboration; this is the case with H&M and luxury houses (Appendix 3), as well as inter-industry partnerships such as those of Prada and LG mobile (Williams, 2007) (Appendix 4).

Even if these capsule collections aim to provide more products to an already crowded market, the collaborations are still innovative experiments in which rival companies work together. In fact, according to fashion data and technology company Launchmetrics, the "Fendace" (Appendix 5) collection generated \$33 million in media impact value for Versace and \$27 million for Fendi. Indeed, in the fashion industry, "collaboration" refers to creating high added value and sharing customer awareness and image with business partners.

On the other hand, businesses have tried to set themselves apart from rivals by being distinctive through partnerships. Examples include Nike with Off-White, Nike x Jacquemus, and Supreme x Louis Vuitton (Appendix 6). For both parties to benefit, collaboration can be characterized as teamwork or equal-opportunity cooperation within a specific time frame (Kim, 2008; Park, 2008).

For their products to be chosen by consumers, brands must offer those consumers intangible values such as distinction, exclusivity, and rarity. The word "fashion partnership" is widely used in writing to describe alliances aimed at acquiring immaterial values, such as brand awareness or brand image (Yang et al., 2012). To this extent, fashion brands must support sensitivity marketing tactics to deliver these intangible values.

Usually, collaborations in the fashion industry are co-branding strategies in which two brands simultaneously identify the same item; one of these two brands could be a celebrity. Celebrities are human brands and, nowadays, more and more brands, both luxury and streetwear, are increasing their collaboration with them. This phenomenon is an interesting one to focus on because combining a designer brand with a mass-market brand like Nike or Adidas has never been more common. Such brand pairings increase the product's symbolic and status values (Desmichel et al., 2020). The symbolic values of the two brands interact and strengthen one another. For instance, Virgil Abloh, designer for Louis Vuitton and owner of the luxury label Off-White, collaborated with Nike to produce one of the century's most "hyped" pairs of sneakers. Take the Jordan 1 Retro High x Off-White Chicago as an example (Appendix 7). The sale price of these sneakers, which is €190, is comparable to that of Nike and a sense of exclusivity and high social position is conveyed. The "Ten Series," a collection of ten different classic Nike models updated by designer Virgil Abloh, debuted with the release of this sneaker. "Its design is cutting edge in every way. These ten shoes have broken performance and fashion thresholds. In my opinion, they are comparable to a David or Mona Lisa sculpture" Virgil Abloh in a Nike interview (Nike, 2017). Consumers shared this sentiment as well. To obtain one of these ten sneakers, they camped out in front of shoe stores for several days (Denny, 2021). Nowadays, reseller shops will charge more than 8,000 euros for these sneakers (StockX, z.d.).

It was uncommon for footwear brands and designers to collaborate in this way. Nevertheless, they have given rise to some of the world's most expensive and sought-after sneakers (Borges, 2020). The footwear market was estimated to be worth 275 billion dollars in 2019 and is set to increase to 375 billion dollars in 2026, according to Zion Market Research (2018).

2.5 Collaborations with celebrities

According to research (e.g., Wang and Scheinbaum 2018), celebrity endorsers increase brand liking by acting as appealing, reliable, and likable providers of brand information. However, celebrities' cultural and symbolic value is not simply a question of being cute, trustworthy, or friendly (McCracken, 1989). According to McCracken's (1989) theory, the diversity of associations a celebrity brings to the endorsement process greatly influences its effectiveness. VIPS initially gain symbolic qualities from their public personas. These qualities are subsequently translated to a specific product through marketing communications that link the star with the product. Ultimately, customers become aware of and use the product as a result. Through this technique, celebrity brand ambassadors can affect consumers' attitudes and opinions about the product. Fashion brands' collaborations with celebrities can develop in different ways with, for example, the creation of a tagline, a capsule collection, through a campaign, or the development of a cobranded product.

A campaign is created when a celebrity endorser, who is well-known by the public, uses their popularity to promote a product. Companies employ celebrities to promote their brands and products by highlighting their favorable traits. Celebrities use their fame to attract attention from the public and maintain it. They also help

consumers naturally associate a brand or product with the celebrity endorsing it. The same is true when a person thinks of the celebrity first. Celebrity endorsements affect consumers' purchasing intentions, purchase behavior, brand recognition, memory, and advertising efficacy (Spry, Pappu, and Cornwell, 2011). Celebrities can also increase a product's appeal and raise awareness (Money, Shrimp, and Sakano, 2006). According to the match-up hypothesis, a specific advertisement's usage of celebrity images or other visual imagery transmits more information than a verbal message (McCormick, 2016). When a celebrity is used, the attributes the star possesses and then transfers to the recommended product impact the endorsement's overall effectiveness. Marketers should choose celebrities who are compatible with the associations that the brand already has. If chosen wisely, the star should use its commercial to forge and strengthen new associations. Another theory, the associative learning theory, states that memory is organized as an associative network, with "a set of processing units (nodes), a state of activity, a pattern of connectivity among units, and a learning rule that allows patterns of connectivity to be modified based on experience" (Till, 1998, p. 2). The network's nodes are celebrities and brands and, anytime a viewer sees one of their commercials, an association is created between the brand and the endorser. After establishing the relationship, the brand and celebrity are included in each other's association set. In other words, the public automatically associates the brand or the star with the other whenever they see one. Till (1998) uses Nike's usage of Michael Jordan's endorsement as an example. Customers frequently associate Nike with Michael Jordan or vice versa. Brands can influence consumers' brand recognition, trust, preference, and buying intentions by using famous people in their advertising (Hung et al., 2001). Customers become increasingly used to well-known media figures as their exposure increases, developing a bond with celebrities. Celebrities are frequently brought to their attention through advertisements and social media updates.

Collaborations between brands and celebrities are not limited to advertising campaigns but can lead to the creation of a capsule collection. Susie Faux, the proprietor of a London store called "Wardrobe" in the 1970s, created the phrase "capsule wardrobe." According to Faux, a capsule wardrobe is a collection of essential garments that are always in fashion, such as skirts, pants, and coats, which may then be supplemented with seasonal items. American fashion designer Donna Karan, who released a significant capsule collection of seven interchangeable workwear pieces in 1985, popularized this concept. A capsule collection is a concise representation of a designer's vision, frequently produced in small quantities, that transcends fashion trends and seasons by being practical, that is, marketable. Without the styling and theatricals of a presentation, they frequently concentrate on construction and delivering cutting-edge looks (Business of Fashion). The brand aims to spend on brand positioning (fashionable collaborations) and top-of-mind recognition to increase clients' shopping trips or draw in new customers looking for unique, exclusive designs. Customers will stand in line for hours today to get a limited edition made by a well-known designer. Due to the increased retail price of this capsule collection, a brand can improve traffic, average tickets through cross-selling, and make greater profits.

Additionally, capsule collections are utilized to interrupt the typical fashion lifecycle. To break up seasonality, fashion retailers also deploy capsule collections (see the fashion life cycle chart). Collaboration is the quickest path to making a brand hip. For this reason, many businesses that offer products make fashion capsules to sell. Even the most opulent brands are embracing streetwear culture to appeal to Millennials.



Figure 2: Fashion Lifecycles

Source: Alfonso Segura, 2017

A cobranding partnership with celebrities entails both a transfer of image in consumers' thoughts and the addition of a new physical characteristic (the celebrity's name or image) to the cobranded items (Waters, 1997). According to Washburn, Till, and Priluck (2004), a successful co-branding alliance can improve consumer perceptions of both parties and the cobranded product. Seno and Lukas (2007) specifically conceive celebrities as brands and argue that commercial brands could benefit from their impact by creating cobranded items. Moreover, in jointly developing a new, cobranded product, the two parties are more likely to share and transfer their strengths to the new product, increasing its overall equity (Besharat & Langan, 2014). As a result, the equity of a cobranded product ought to be greater than that of an endorsed product, in which the celebrity's qualities are transiently but not permanently transmitted. According to Keel and Nataraajan (2012), cobranding partnerships with celebrities entail a celebrity's more profound and extensive involvement through a new product line that overtly carries the identities of both the product brand and the celebrity co-creator. Such partnerships include Kanye West's Yeezy x Adidas and Rhianna's FENTY x PUMA. Celebrities frequently participate in designing, producing, packaging, and marketing cobranded products. As a result, cobranding has a higher level of celebrity integration than endorsement, which results in a more robust celebrity meaning transfer. According to a study, when a celebrity is associated with a brand, customers' perceptions of the brand are more likely to match the meaning of the celebrity. When a celebrity represents a brand positively, consumer perceptions of that brand will also be more favorable. However, customers' perceptions toward brands will change if the celebrity has a bad connotation.

2.6 Fashion collaborations benefits and risks

The objective of fashion collaborations is to bring together the unique strengths of each party to create a new and exciting product that appeals to consumers. While fashion collaborations can have several advantages, they also have some disadvantages worth considering. Blackett and Boad (1999), Dorozala and Kohlbrenner (2008), Lansing and Olsen (2012), Washburn et al. (2000), Aaker (1996), Breckenfeld (2009), Darby (2006), and Gobé (2001) identify the benefit of the fashion collaboration while Darby (2006), Dorozala and Kohlbrenner (2008) and James (2006) explain the risks. In this section, we analyze them.

2.6.1 Benefits of fashion collaborations

Fashion collaborations:

- Improve the brand's image: Partnering with a successful brand can help increase the brand's reputation by increasing the brand's credibility and authority in the industry (Blackett, 1999; Boad 1999).
- Enhance the brand "cool factor": Brand collaborations in fashion can boost a brand's image more informally and creatively than traditional marketing activities. Collaborations allow brands to join new trends, creating innovative and original products that can become iconic. This increases consumer interest and attention to the brand, creating a more refined and fashionable image (Dorozala, 2008; Kohlbrenner, 2008).
- Transmit the emotional element of the brand: Brand collaborations can enable brands to present stories that satisfy consumers' emotions and passions. For example, collaborations between fashion brand Fendi and British artist Joshua Vides have created a clothing collection that combines the artist's creativity with Fendi's elegant image, creating a unique product that tells a story and conveys a specific emotion. These collaborations allow brands to connect emotionally with consumers, stimulating brand interest and loyalty (Lansing, 2012; Olsen, 2012).
- Access intellectual and identity assets: Brand collaborations can provide opportunities to access intangible resources, such as reputation, creativity, and industry knowledge, that may not be available in-house. In addition, collaborations can enable brands to create a unique brand identity by fusing different styles and cultures. For example, the collaboration between French fashion brand Louis Vuitton and Japanese fashion brand Supreme combined French fashion culture with American urban style, creating an exclusive collection (Washburn et al., 2000).
- Generate point of differentiation: By collaborating with another brand, a brand can create unique and innovative products, setting itself apart from competitors and creating an image of exclusivity and originality. For example, Louis Vuitton's collaboration with artist Jeff Koons to create a collection of bags featuring paintings by great masters made the products one-of-a-kind (Aaker, 1996).
- Increase a brand's influence: Associating with a successful brand or celebrity can increase its visibility, making it known to a broader and more diverse audience. An example is the collaboration between H&M

and fashion designer Alexander Wang, which created a limited collection and allowed the brand to expand into a high-end market (Breckenfeld, 2009).

- Enter new product categories: These collaborations allow brands to expand their range of products and services by introducing new products in collaboration with another brand. This allows brands to enter new markets and reach new customer segments, thereby expanding their offerings and reaching new customers. For example, the collaboration between Nike and Sacai led to the creation of a high-fashion sportswear collection, introducing the Nike brand to a new market of consumers interested in luxury fashion (Darby, 2006).
- Share knowledge: Collaboration in the fashion industry can lead to fresh, innovative designs that would not have been possible if brands or designers had worked separately. The partnership allows them to bring their unique perspectives, styles, and expertise to create something more than the sum of its parts. For example, the collaboration between Italian fashion house Prada and sports equipment company Adidas has led to the creation of luxury sports shoes that combine Adidas technology with the sophistication of Prada design (Gobé, 2001).
- Share resources and costs: Another benefit of fashion collaboration is that they help reduce production costs by sharing resources and distribution channels. This allows brands to benefit from economies of scale and expand their reach while keeping costs low. According to research from Accenture, productive partnerships can reduce a brand's shipping expenses by 3-4% and manufacturing costs by 5- 15%. Collaborations can also increase a store's shelf stock by 5 to 8% while improving inventory control for brick-and-mortar stores. (RETHINK Retail, 2022)
- Increase credibility: When two or more brands come together for a fashion collaboration, they bring their reputations and credibility to the project. This helps build customer trust and increases sales, brand awareness, and customer loyalty (Blackett, 1999; Boad1999).

2.6.2 Risks of fashion collaborations

- Collaboration with a partner incapable of providing promised resources: When initiating a collaboration, verifying that the selected partner has the necessary resources to carry out the project is essential. However, even if the promised resources are available, they may need to be deployed appropriately and can be ineffectively. This can lead to delays in production, additional costs, and disappointing results, negatively impacting the image of both brands (Darby, 2006).
- Collaboration with a partner with an incompatible brand personality: Brand values and the image it represents must align with those of the selected partner. Working with a partner who shares different values and goals could result in a compromised brand image, loss of credibility and reputation, and consumer

dissatisfaction. Working with other designers and brands can lead to creative differences and disagreements over design choices, vision and strategy. These differences can be challenging to navigate and can lead to a product that does not meet the expectations of either party (Dorozala, 2008; Kohlbrenner, 2008).

- Collaboration with a partner with a low status and image fit: Brand value is closely linked to the image of the selected partner. A partnership with a partner with low status and image may hurt brand perception and consumer preferences. This can affect consumers' purchase decisions and brand perception (James,2006).
- Permanent damage done to the existing brand equity of the business due to failure of the partnership: In some cases, brand collaboration may result in reduced brand equity and loss of value. If the collaboration fails, the brand's image may be damaged and its reputation impaired. In addition, the company's brand equity can be damaged in the long run, reducing its ability to compete with other brands (Darby,2006).

2.7 Scarcity and limited edition

One of the critical outcomes of fashion collaborations is limited edition products created by combining the collaborators' unique styles, skills, and perspectives. This concept aims to create a rare, exclusive, and highly desirable product for the target audience.

The principle behind the limited-edition strategy is that of scarcity aimed at creating psychological mechanisms in the minds of consumers that drive them to purchase products urgently since they are scarce; they may no longer have the opportunity to buy them.

According to psychological research (Mittone & Savadori, 2009; Shah et al., 2015), scarcity might affect people's views, opening up commercial prospects. A product provider can boost overall demand and increase client enthusiasm for a particular duration by intentionally or unintentionally establishing a temporary product shortage, improving the overall market performance. Ypulse business, in a statistic on young shoppers and limited-edition products, found that four out of ten consumers aged 13-39 have purchased a limited edition/particular edition item.

Offerings being scarce become more desirable to consumers and create a sense of exclusivity, which is the fundamental principle behind offering LE products. Previous research has shown that scarcity messages make consumers perceive LE products as special, unique, and valuable. The limited-edition strategy positively impacts product evaluation (Jang et al., 2015). Almost half of 13-39-year-olds who purchased a particular edition/limited-release item did so because it looked cool, and 31% would pay more for it (Ypulse business 2022).

In the literature regarding consumer behavior, it is noted that consumers tend to show their uniqueness by possessing scarce items. Consumers intend to stand out by wearing rare, unique items owned by only a few

(Snyder, 1977; Fromkin, 1977). According to the Snob Effect (Chae et al., 2019), if the product an individual owns begins to be used by many others, he or she will look for something more memorable.

Collaborations, as mentioned before, often result in collections released as limited editions. Under this strategy, products are released onto the market in limited quantities or for a limited time.

For limited-time scarcity (LTS) messages, we refer to a time frame during which brands push customers to buy as many limited-edition (LE) products as possible, making the offer available quickly before it expires. In contrast, only a few items with limited-quantity scarcity (LQS) are created and are the only ones that can be purchased, offering only a minimal number of buyers the chance to buy the good. Consumers perceive products as more unique and valuable when they are distributed under the LQS condition than when they are distributed under the LTS condition, according to a study by Aggarwal et al. (2011). This is also because products distributed under a time limit are more accessible to consumers. Every time someone buys a limited-quantity commodity, the number of products left in circulation gets smaller and smaller, which breeds the sense of unpredictability that defines the limited-quantity scarcity state.

In their study, Jang et al. (2015) made the following hypothesis: When products are supplied in limited editions through scarcity messages, customers will demonstrate a more robust brand attitude, higher perceived value, and higher purchase intention.

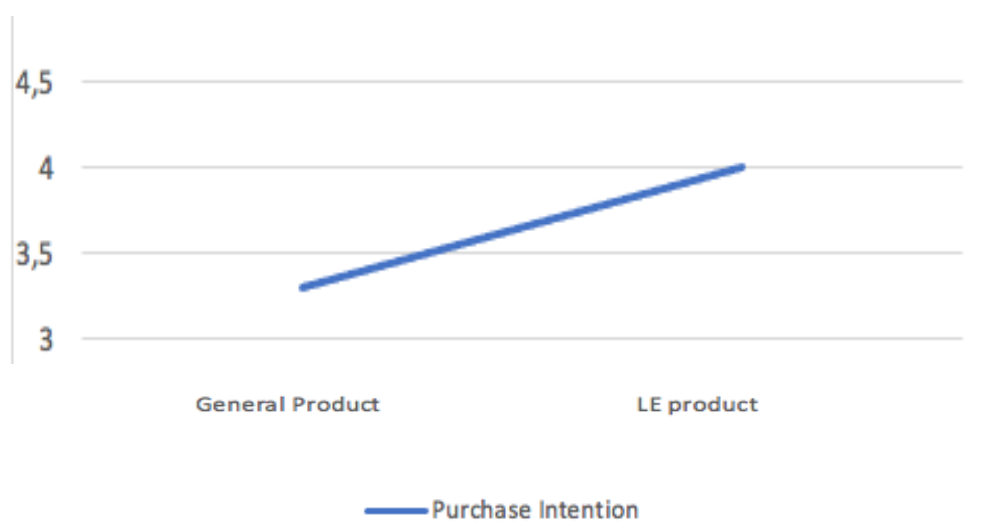


Figure 3: effect of scarcity message on LE product

Sources: Jang et al., 2015

Additionally, implementing a restriction on the product's promotional offer boosts its effectiveness, according to the study of Aggarwal et al. (2011), which examines scarcity messaging from the standpoint of consumer competitiveness. The same study also found that consumers' behavior will be more impacted by product scarcity when they perceive themselves as competing with other potential buyers.

The desirable things advertised as LE are merely the standard items with a variation, such as new packaging, a new pattern used, or simply the usage of a unique hue for that specific product.

Previously, LE was only utilized by fashion and luxury firms such as high fashion footwear Prada (Stock, 2005; Balachander, 2005), but today we can see its adoption in the streetwear industry, particularly in the sneakers market.

2.8 Retail and resell market

Limited edition products are initially sold through a limited release in certain outlets, online, or in physical stores. This process creates a certain amount of hype and anticipation among consumers, who know that product availability is limited in time and number of pieces.

The release of a limited-edition product allows consumers to purchase a unique product that may not be available later; these products have a unique design that differentiates them from the company's standard products. In addition, the limited availability of these products means that consumers may feel privileged to purchase them because they have access to something that not everyone can have.

However, not all consumers can purchase these products during the release. Due to high demand and limited availability, many products sell out quickly, often within minutes or even seconds. Consider that, for example, Supreme Tonal Box Logo Tee (Appendix 8) achieved sell-out times of 78.5 seconds on February 16, 2023 (Supreme Community).

This creates a situation in which consumers who could not purchase the product during the original release may try to purchase it later from resellers. Buying and selling gymnastics shoes or other apparel using the same criteria as buying and selling stock on the stock exchange is the essence of reselling. In its most basic form, reselling is owning a highly sought-after product that is typically limited in supply and being able to sell it to those who cannot otherwise obtain it, for a higher price. Reselling is particularly common for sneakers, mostly athletic shoes from brands like Adidas or Nike and other clothing items from brands like Supreme.

The resale market is particularly relevant regarding products sold in limited editions. The high level of transactions in this market is because the demand for these kinds of products hugely outweighs the supply, generating the necessity to access offerings in a secondary market. The resale market, where things are sold after the release date at a significant markup, is the only alternative for individuals who cannot buy at the time of release. This markup is based on how well-liked the product is, with a particular focus on products with few releases. Generally speaking, the resale market is more highly developed for the sneaker category than for other apparel, and 71% of sneaker transactions occur on StockX, which is an online shopping platform based on a bidding-to-buy model, where everyone can sell or buy products ranging from sneakers to streetwear to accessories, especially limited-edition ones that cannot be found in the primary market after release. The secondary market generated more than \$6 billion in 2020 and is projected to be 15-25 % of the primary market in 2025; the top three models of sneakers sold by market share are Jordan 1 with 23% market share, Yeezy 350 with 18% and Air Force 1 with 6% (Appendix 9). As for the streetwear category, StockX data show that Supreme is the highest for markups. At the same time, Off-White has a -10% in terms of retail prices because

it creates limited editions only when collaborating with other brands. These products represent a low percentage in the Off-White product range (StockX Snapshot: The State of Resale 2019-2020).

Reselling limited edition products can be profitable for resellers but also frustrating for consumers who could not purchase the original product on release. In some cases, the price of limited-edition products can increase exponentially in the secondary market due to their limited availability.

Reselling can have a significant impact on brand perception and consumer loyalty. Although reselling limited-edition products can increase consumer interest in the brand and create hype, reselling can also generate resentment among consumers who could have purchased limited-edition products at an average price. This may lead to a negative perception of the brand by consumers who were not able to purchase the limited-edition products, which may influence their decision to purchase future products.

2.9 CBBE and fashion collaboration

CBBE, or customer-based brand equity, is a marketing concept that measures a brand's value based on its customers' perceptions and attitudes. CBBE is the result of the cumulative effect of all the experiences that customers have had with a brand, and it reflects the overall strength and loyalty of the brand's customer base. Various factors, including brand awareness, loyalty, personality, and associations, influence CBBE.

Fashion collaborations can significantly impact CBBE by creating unique and memorable customer experiences. When two brands collaborate, they bring their respective audiences together and create a new, exciting experience for both customers. This can increase brand awareness and create positive brand associations for both brands involved in the collaboration. Okonkwo (2007), an author who writes about luxury management, posits that a brand's brand equity is high when its distinctive qualities result in continuous consumer demand and commitment.

In this study, we will consider the customer-based brand equity of Keller. According to Keller, brand equity is the value the brand adds to the product and services. Essentially the power of the brand is what customers have seen, read, heard, thought, and felt about the brand over time, namely what is in the heart and mind of the customers (that is the brand knowledge). So, what is crucial for a brand is ensuring, through marketing activities, that customers have a good experience with the product to establish in their minds the aspired feelings, images, beliefs, perceptions, opinions, and experiences they connect to the brand itself. The definition of brand equity is "the differential effect that the brand knowledge has on consumer response to the marketing of the brand" (Keller, 2003).

When a brand has a positive customer base, brand equity obtains a more favorable response from the customer. Their willingness to accept a brand extension is more significant, increasing the possibility that they will search for the brand in new channels and are ready to pay higher prices. The opposite happens for a brand that has negative customer base brand equity.

In the definition of the customer base brand equity of Keller, we can identify three factors:

1. Differential effect: This means that customers respond differently to the branded products. If this does not happen, the product is considered a commodity and can compete only on price.
2. Brand knowledge: The different responses are the result of the knowledge that the customer has about the brand, so what they have learned, seen, felt, and heard about the brand. Thus, brand equity depends on what is in the minds and hearts of the customers despite the marketing effort.
3. Customer response to marketing activities: The different responses are the reflection of the preferences, perceptions, and behaviors related to the marketing of the brand, for example, advertisement recall.

In other words, if customers react differently to branded and unbranded products that are the same, the knowledge of the brand created by prior exposure is working in the creation of brand equity. This is why brand equity could be considered a bridge from the past to the future. The company should consider that the money spent on marketing activities is invested in what customers experience with the brand. What matters is the quality, not the quantity of the investments that aim to establish the right knowledge in customers' minds. The brand's future performance depends on the customers and their knowledge of the brand.

Here we list some crucial advantages of a strong brand

- Improved perceptions of product performance
- Greater loyalty
- Less vulnerability to competitive marketing actions
- Less vulnerability to marketing crises
- Large margins
- More inelastic consumer response to a price increase
- More elastic customer response to price decrease
- Greater trade cooperation and support
- Increased marketing communication effectiveness
- Possible licensing opportunities
- Additional brand extension opportunities

A way to represent brand knowledge in the mind of the customers is the associative network memory model. This model represents the memory as a network of nodes connected by a link. The nodes collect customer information, while the link stands for the power of the relationship between nodes. Each activity of the brand can be stored as information in this network. Considering this model, brand knowledge can be considered as a combination of two-components:

- Brand awareness is the node's power, so the trial is in mind. We can measure it according to how well customers recognize a particular brand. Building brand equity is necessary, but more is needed.
- Brand image: how this is measured has not always been agreed upon by marketers. However, it is generally accepted that it is the consumer's opinion of the brand as expressed by the brand associations they have in their mind. The significance of the brand for consumers is contained in the brand associations, which are additional informational nodes connected to the brand node in memory.

Associations can take many different shapes and represent both aspects of the product and traits that are not related to it. For example, if a marketer asks a consumer what comes to mind when he thinks about Nike, the consumer may answer with core associations such as innovative technology, premium goods with a stylish design, the joy of sport and celebration, peak performance, global responsibility, and self-empowerment. These associations constitute Nike's brand image, but this may vary according to customer and segment. Customer base brand equity operates when there is strong awareness and familiarity and when there are memorable, strong, and distinctive brand connections. Sometimes brand awareness is enough to create positive responses (for example, for low-involvement products like shampoo). However, in other cases, the power of brand associations is pivotal for the different responses that create brand equity. Thus, marketers have to convince consumers that there is a difference between brands, that building a positive brand image aligns with creating brand awareness to create customer base brand equity.

In the following sections, we will examine in more detail the sources of brand equity according to Keller.

Brand awareness

The components of brand awareness are brand recognition and brand recall plus “top of mind” and brand name dominance.

- Brand recognition: The consumer's capacity to corroborate prior exposure to the brand on coming into contact with visual input. They can identify the brand since they have already been exposed to it. Studies have shown that consumers unconsciously like a brand they have already been exposed to more than an unknown one.
- Brand recall: a customer's capacity to recall a brand from memory when given a product category, a demand that the category satisfies, or a purchase or usage scenario as a trigger.
- Top of mind: The initial product recall.
- Brand name dominance: The majority of respondents can name only one brand.

Advantages of brand awareness

- Learning advantages: The development and potency of the associations that comprise the brand image are influenced by brand awareness. Marketers must first generate a brand node in the customer's memory to build a brand image; the nature of this node influences how quickly the consumer picks up and remembers new brand associations. Registering the brand in consumers' minds is the first stage in creating brand equity.
- Consideration advantage: The brand is the only one consumer considers when purchasing to satisfy their needs. When brand awareness is high, there is a higher probability that the brand is in the consideration set. According to other research, consumers do not have only one brand but a set of brands and ensuring that the brand is part of the consideration set is crucial.
- Choice advantage: Brand awareness influences the choice between the brand member of the consideration set because customers usually show that they buy the more familiar and well-established brand.

The elaboration-likelihood model explains persuasion and change in attitude. According to this model, there is high involvement when customers have:

1. Purchase motivation (they care about the product).
2. Purchase ability (they are aware of the product in the category): The consumers can make judgments because they know.
3. Purchase opportunity (they have time to make rational choices).

If they lack one of these 3, they are in a low involvement situation and they use more brand awareness to make the decisions.

Building brand awareness

To build brand awareness, marketers need to make the brand familiar through continuous exposure to the consumers; in this way, they establish the brand in their minds. Thus, the company should ensure the consumers continuously come into contact with the brand in all of its various elements. Because this increases the probability that consumers will remember the brand, recognize it, and associate the brand with the correct category or buying trigger. In competitive markets, such as fashion, it is essential to have a strong linkage between the brand and the category.

Brand Image

Brand image dominated brand management from the 2000s on and the top priority of managers was to understand how their brands were perceived. Brand image refers to how people interpret all signals coming

from the goods, services, and communications the brand covers. Image study focuses on how particular groups perceive a product, a brand, a politician, or a country.

In Keller's theory, the first step to creating brand equity is to stabilize a sufficient level of brand awareness; marketers can then focus on building a brand image through marketing activities that connect powerful and unique associations to the brand in the mind of the consumer. Brand associations refer to both brand attributes and brand benefits.

- Brand attributes: are the elements that characterize a product
- Brand benefits: are the values and the meanings that the consumers give to a product

Customers can give life to these attributes and benefit in various ways, besides from marketing activities, for example, when they directly experience the brand or from customers' reports, communities' opinions, reviews, or even on social media from WOM. Brand image is "consumers' perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory" (Keller, 2003). Associations can derive from product attributes, a celebrity, a particular symbol, or a particular region. Marketers must be aware of the significant impact that all these can have on consumers and should manage them strategically. To create the so-called different responses that characterize the consumer base, brand equity marketers have to be sure that the associations are not only positive but unique and distant from one of the competitors. These ensure that the consumers will choose the product. Brand image is influenced by the experience that the consumers have with the brand and depends on how the customers have memorized the brand in the memory.

Factors that affect the uniqueness and the power of the brand associations:

- Strength of brand associations: An association is stronger when the consumer links information about the product to knowledge of the brand. Two things make associations powerful for each piece of information; the first is the importance consumers place on it and the second is how consistently the brand is presented over time. The specific associations we remember, and their significance will depend on the association's strength, the presence of any retrieval signals, and the context in which we think about the brand. When consumers directly experience the brand, the association will be stronger and have more influence on the decision-making when consumers interpret it correctly. Information deriving from the company itself is weaker, and the possibility of change in said information on the part of consumers is thus higher. Creative communication is, therefore, fundamental.
- Favorability of brand associations: Marketers build positive associations by impressing in the mind of consumers that the brand has positive attributes and benefits that are perfect for fulfilling their needs. Moreover, people do not give all the associations the same weight and positivity. They will also think in different ways in different purchase situations.

- The uniqueness of brand associations. Brands want to be unique and different from competitors for a competitive advantage. They do so via direct or indirect comparison with competitors, highlighting performance and non-performance-related attributes. Because the brand is present in a category, certain associations may be shared and, at the same time, the category associations become linked to the brand.

2.10 Collaborations that went wrong

Even though international management literature acknowledges many positive outcomes for companies engaged in such alliances, such as higher return on equity, better return on investment, and higher success rates (Todeva & Knoke, 2005; Keller, 2003; Aaker, 1996; Darby, 2006; Gammoh & Voss, 2011), fashion brands are susceptible to potential detrimental consumer-based brand equity effects, and it is interesting to look at a number of case studies and the relative reaction of companies to adverse events within collaborations.

2.10.1 Nike and Armstrong

Nike had had a sponsorship contract with Armstrong since 1996, which led to the creation of an entire line of Nike-branded running shoes and clothing featuring the cyclist's logo. Nike's image had been strongly linked to that of the cyclist. In the case of Nike and Armstrong, the partnership had been built on the cyclist's reputation as a successful athlete and ethical role model.

2012 was difficult for cycling celebrity Lance Armstrong and his sponsor Nike. Armstrong, a seven-time Tour de France winner, was accused of using doping substances and participating in a vast sports fraud scheme. During the investigation and trial, Armstrong admitted to using doping substances and lying about his sports performance. It was an upsetting event for many sports fans, sponsors, and business partners. Armstrong's disqualification posed a significant threat to Nike's reputation. Nike decided to disassociate itself from the relationship when this reputation was compromised. Breaking off the partnership was necessary for Nike to protect its brand image.

Partnerships are vital to companies' marketing strategies and choosing the wrong business partner can negatively affect brand image (Darby,2006).

Nike dealt with the situation decisively, issuing a public statement condemning Armstrong's actions and announcing the facts. In addition, Nike decided to drop the line of products bearing Armstrong's name. These moves showed that Nike was ready to distance itself from Armstrong and protect its brand image based on credibility and integrity. (Fashion magazine, 2012)

Consumer reactions to the breakup of the partnership between Nike and Armstrong was negative. Some consumers appreciated Nike's decision to disassociate itself from Armstrong and take a strong stance against doping substances. The breakup of the partnership between Nike and Armstrong also influenced consumer behavior negatively. Many expressed disappointments and some even decided to stop buying endorsed products. A star athlete's endorsement of a brand or product can be detrimental and potentially harm it during a scandal or period of bad press. that unfavorable brand exposure has the power to damage the brand and drive people away. (Jason Brandan, 2013)



Figure 4: Livestrong Collection

Source: Fashion Magazine

2.10.2 H&M and The Weeknd

The breakup of the partnership between H&M and The Weeknd was an event that made a lot of noise in the fashion world. Abel Makkonen Tesfaye 2017 announced on his Instagram profile the renewal of the partnership with H&M for a second capsule collection. The collaboration between the Swedish clothing brand and the famous Canadian singer had been announced with great emphasis on creating a clothing line that combined the styles of both parties. Although the first collaboration went well and led directly to the development of a second one, the latter lasted only a few months. The Weeknd published a tweet in which he explained that he was "shocked and embarrassed" by what had happened and "deeply disappointed" at having seen a photo of the brand that depicted a black child wearing an H&M sweatshirt with an inscription "the coolest monkey in the jungle." The singer, for years, a testimonial of the brand decided, therefore, to break off relations with the clothing company definitively, calling the advertising campaign racist.

This breakup had a significant impact on consumers. Many of the singer's fans sided with him, criticizing H&M on social media and boycotting the clothing brand. The hashtag #boycotthm went viral on Twitter and Instagram, with many people refusing to buy H&M products.

For its part, H&M has suffered significant reputational damage, with many critics accusing the brand of being racist and irresponsible toward minorities. The brand immediately apologized on social media for hurting people's sensitivities and announced that the sweatshirt had already been withdrawn from the market.

The breakup of the partnership between H&M and The Weeknd highlighted how collaborations between brands and celebrities can significantly affect consumer behavior. When a partnership ends controversially, as in this case, it can create an emotional reaction among fans of the individual involved, who may decide to boycott the brand and express their dissent on social media. Moreover, a reputational crisis of the type that hit H&M after this breakup, can damage a company, undermining its credibility and ability to attract customers.

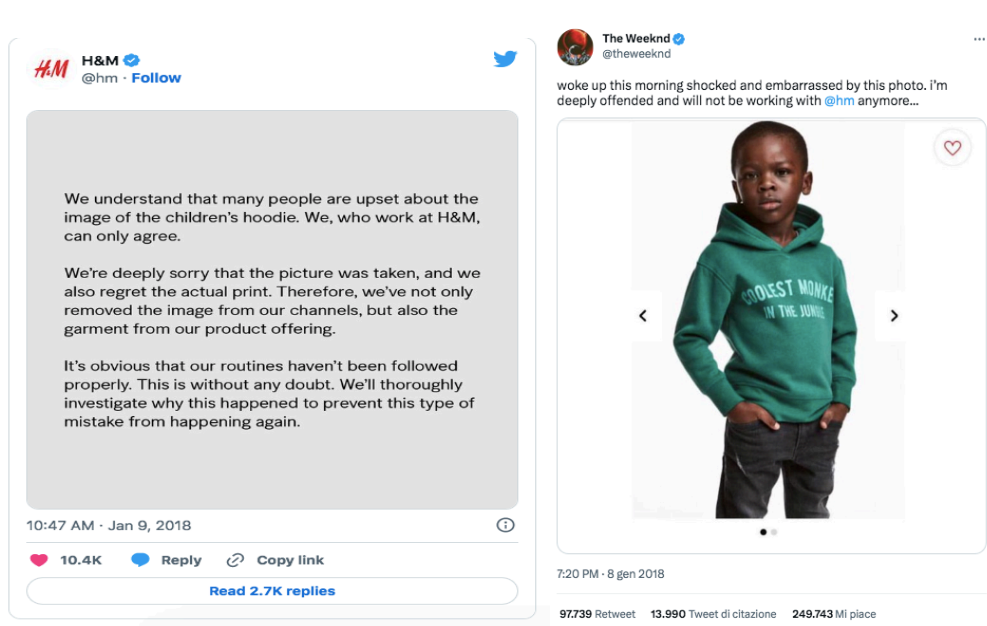


Figure 5: H&M and The Weeknd tweets about the scandal

Source: Business of Fashion, 2017

2.10.3 Johnny Depp and Dior

The French fashion house had announced Depp as the face of its new men's fragrance "Sauvage" in 2015, and the collaboration looked promising. Chosen for his authentic charm with rock rings and covered with tattoos, he represented the perfect balance of wild, refined elegance. The collaboration began with an effective communication campaign of TV commercials and posters starring Depp.

However, in 2016, his ex-wife, actress Amber Heard, accused him of domestic abuse. The announcement of Dior's collaboration with Depp could have sparked much criticism on social media from consumers who might have been against a brand collaboration with a man accused of domestic abuse. Depp's professional life

encountered difficulties when his wife's accusations began, followed by an effective negative campaign on social media. Disney decided to break his contract for the role of Jack Sparrow in *Pirates of the Caribbean*. For this reason, Dior suspended the advertising campaign with Depp pending the results of the divorce trial between the actor and Heard. However, the brand made no public statements.

The brand supported the actor during this period and later decided to keep Depp's face as a muse. The fashion house acted correctly; indeed, sales of the cologne have increased. Moreover, the brand's communication has played a crucial role in making the fragrance one of the most frequently purchased, even moreso than the bestseller of Chanel. At the same time, Dior created new fragrances, and "Sauvage Elixir" was nominated perfume of the year at the Fragrance Foundation Awards 2022. This was the result of fans who, during the trial period, set out to support the company by mass-buying the men's perfume.

This situation demonstrates how a company's reputation and brand equity can be put at stake due to a collaboration with a controversial celebrity (Diana Seno, 2005; Bryan A. Lukas, 2005). According to James (2006), the company must carefully consider the risks associated with such collaboration and make informed decisions that reflect the company's values and goals (Marketing-magazine, 2022).



Figure 6: Johnny Depp x Dior

Source: Marketing Magazine, 2022

2.10.4 Prada and Zheng Shuang

To celebrate the new year 2021, Maison Prada created the campaign "Enter 2021. New Possibilities," inviting consumers to start the new year together and share new resolutions. In order to do so, the brand collaborated with different celebrities. One of them was the Chinese actress Zheng Shuang, the award for Best New

Performance in a Hong Kong Film. Prada introduced a collection of specially designed products to honor the campaign. The actress is shown with the Prada Cleo handbag, the ideal fusion of traditionalism and futurism, inspired by the brand's iconic models and created using traditional manufacturing techniques. Zheng Shuang was announced as Prada's brand ambassador in China in June 2020 as part of the company's efforts to establish its presence in the ever-growing Chinese market.

Unfortunately, in February 2021, the actress hit the headlines for all the wrong reasons. Chinese media outlets reported that she had abandoned her surrogate mother's two children and had split up with her partner, producer Zhang Heng. The news created huge waves in China because surrogacy is illegal there. Following the allegations brought against her, Prada immediately removed Zheng Shuang from its ad campaign and said it had terminated its collaboration with the actress. There was something of a backlash against Prada on Chinese social networks.

The company stated on its official Weibo account that they had ended all collaboration with the actress. Professor Huang Shengming, from the Communication University of China, affirmed that the blow to Prada's image was immense, notwithstanding the fact that the decision to end the contract was the right one, and avoided losses in what McKinsey Estimates & Company identify as an essential and rising market in fashion and luxury goods. The expression by consumers of their opinions in public on the dynamics and behaviors of companies and celebrities is growing constantly. It pushes companies to act immediately to curb this negative word of mouth effect.

The partnership breakup between Prada and Zheng Shuang is an example of how fashion companies can respond to disputes involving the celebrities or influencers they partner with. According to Professor Huang Shengming, Prada acted swiftly and decisively to remove the actress from its ad campaign and terminate the partnership, demonstrating its commitment to corporate social responsibility and protecting its reputation (Fashion Magazine, 2021).



Figure 7: Zheng Shuang x Prada

Source: Fashion Magazine,202.

2.11 Crisis effects on brand equity

The viewpoint and behavioral intentions of consumers are delicate; certain unforeseen and serious external events could have an impact on them together with other considerations. The academy largely agrees that crises damage brand equity. According to Dawar and Lei, both the correlation between the crisis itself and brand associations as well as the intensity of the crisis have an effect on how customers perceive the brand, which in turn affects brand equity. In other words, brand equity will suffer more damage from a crisis the more closely related it is to a brand association. The more expansive the vision, the more harm to brand equity it will cause. Academics typically concur that the original cause of the influence is the breach of consumers' expectations since crises reduces brand equity. Therefore, the impact of the crisis on brand equity is minimal as long as consumers' expectations are not disappointed. According to Dawar and Pillutla, businesses will lose less brand equity no matter what actions they take as long as consumers continue to have a high level of trust in their products. (Liuying He and Yaxuan Ran, 2015)

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have examined collaborations in the fashion industry to build brand equity by combining two or more brands' resources, expertise, and reputations. We explored the various types of collaborations that can be undertaken, the reasons for creating these partnerships, and the associated benefits and risks. We also discussed the products of collaborations that are usually limited-edition products which, after their initial release, are usually bought on the resell market. It is essential, however, to consider that collaborations can affect the customer base brand equity in positive or negative ways. We have seen some collaborations that have gone wrong, damaging the company's brand equity. Fashion collaborations are an effective strategy for building brand equity but require careful management to ensure long-term success.

3. Methodology

The adopted methodological approach will be displayed in this section, along with a thorough explanation of the research methodology. The case study research, qualitative research, and the sample comprise the themes that make up this section.

3.1 Case study research

To address our thesis topic, we decided to employ a case study research approach; this methodology perfectly applies a qualitative research approach because, in this work, we wanted to understand a complex phenomenon while keeping the holistic and significant characteristics of real-life experiences. We attempt to answer the

how- and why questions, which are more explicative for which case studies are more suitable as the preferred research strategy. To develop our research, we use the method proposed by Yin for the case study. This consists of six steps: plan, design, prepare, collect, analyze, and share.

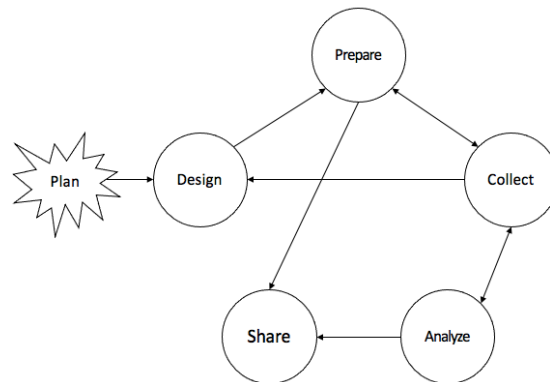


Figure 8: The Process of Case Study Method
Source: Yin, 2013

The first step explains the research questions related to the case. Our issue is to understand what the impact on Adidas-Yeezy brand equity after the breakup of the collaboration between Adidas and Kanye West would be. In other words, the aim is to explore how the absence of the cool factor "Ye" impacts customer perception and behavior.

The choice of the case study as the method for our research was dictated by the fact that it satisfied three conditions identified by Yin as a prerequisite for the use of the case study:

- the impact of the collaboration breakup on brand equity is considered; the quantitative data of the collaboration is not critical for our research;
- control over, or definition of, any information to be collected is no longer possible, given that the collaboration has come to an end;
- attention is focused on a real case.

The method will be used, adapting it to the case in question. Internal data and future choices of the company (Adidas) that might be relevant for the study are not disclosed or published. Nevertheless, gathering empirical evidence from product consumers in order to understand the phenomena is possible.

The most popular techniques can be categorized into five groups in the social sciences: experiments, questionnaires, archive analysis, historical analysis, and case studies. These methods can then be interpreted in light of three factors: the type of question the researcher is attempting to answer, the extent to which the researcher has control over the events being studied, and the temporal dimension, which refers to whether the subject of our research is a current issue or a historical fact.

Controlling behavioral occurrences is not required in our case, and we concentrate more on current events than historical ones; Our qualitative research uses many of the same methods as history, but also incorporates interviews carried out with those who were directly involved in the events. The usual How? and Why? case study questions enable us to follow the common thread of change before and after the collaboration breakup and focus less on identifying a phenomenon's frequency or the impact of one variable on another.

Given the complexity of the Adidas Yeezy case, numerous areas of study, such as financial or legal, might be established. The choice fell on one aspect that seems particularly interesting, given the breakup's impact on internal organizational issues, especially on consumers. Hence, the question can be briefly stated as follows:

How does a fashion collaboration breakup impact customer perception and behavior?

Our research addresses a problem with far more variables of interest than data-collecting sites. As a result, since it relies on numerous sources of evidence, the data need to be converged using the triangulation approach and benefits from earlier creation of theoretical hypotheses to guide data collection and analysis.

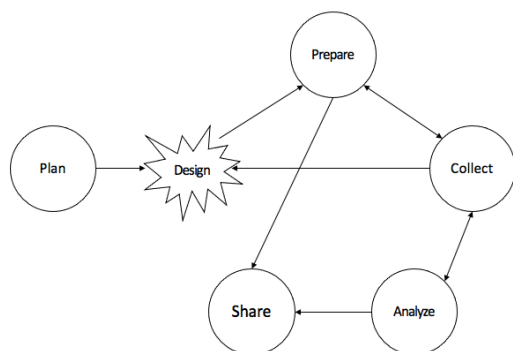
Below we explain why we chose a single case study for the development of our research

The following factors influence our preference for a single case design:

- Depth of understanding: The dissolution of the Adidas and Yeezy relationship marks a singular and complicated event that calls for in-depth examination to comprehend its dynamics and effects. We can analyze each of these features thoroughly in a single case study, in order to build up a complete picture of the phenomena.
- Particular context: By concentrating on a single instance, we may examine the dissolution of the Adidas and Yeezy relationship in its unique setting. We can take into account pertinent factors, environmental impacts, and particular interactions that might have had an effect on customers. Our knowledge of what consumers think is increased through this contextual approach.
- Understanding of effects: Using a single case as a basis, we can examine and assess how such an occurrence affects the two parties. We can examine the trends and their effects on customer brand equity.
- Relevance and applicability: A single case study on the dissolution of the Adidas and Yeezy relationship can give stakeholders in business alliances knowledge that is both pertinent and useful.

Future choices and partnering tactics can be influenced by the lessons acquired from this particular example.

3.2 Research Design



- | |
|---|
| <p>Design</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Provide the analysis unit and the likely case to be looked into.- Create the theory, arguments, and problems that will guide the envisioned research.- Define the design of the case study.- Specify the steps to retain the case study's integrity. |
|---|

Figure 9: The Process of Case Study Method “Design”
Source: Yin, 2013

The research design activity is the second phase of our case study construction. The design phase of a case study is crucial as we establish the relationship between the purpose and methodology of the research and decide how it will be conducted scientifically. The research design links the information we have collected, the research questions, and the results we have obtained.

It is essential to define the object of the research. Our unit of analysis is the brand created by the collaboration/association between Adidas and Yeezy resulting from consumer associations and perceptions. The initial question and the hypothesis to be investigated are the only factors influencing the selected analysis unit.

There are different theories or perspectives from which an object can be investigated. In our case, i.e. the end of cooperation in the fashion industry, the same reality can be examined from an organizational perspective and in terms of individual behaviors and brand equity theories from a customer perspective. The idea that will be discussed involves deciding which aspects of the case study should be analyzed. We analyze collaboration and customer brand equity, particularly in the fashion industry. We assume that the end of cooperation can damage the essential brand equity of cobranded products. This means that the value of the combination of Adidas and Yeezy may be higher than the brand equity of the two brands considered separately.

In order to investigate our research question, we decided to employ qualitative research because we wished to discover insights, develop hypotheses and define critical variables that impact brand perception and attitudes. We used qualitative research because we needed to learn more about the problem, not having information

from the Adidas company, and we needed a deep understanding of the problem facing the co-branded product. This problem cannot be measured quantitatively. In fact, in-depth face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted to learn more about how consumers reacted to Adidas and Kanye West's co-branding deals.

First, we prepared a pre-recruitment questionnaire (for more information, see the Appendix) conducted through Google Forms. We explained to the respondents that it was for research purposes in the sneaker industry and that they could later do an interview. The questionnaire was meant to select our respondents in a way consistent with our research purpose. In fact, within this questionnaire, we asked questions to find out whether they owned the product being considered, whether they were aware of the breakup between Adidas and Yeezy, whether they knew Kanye West as the creator of the product design, and whether they were familiar with the brands Adidas and Yeezy. The first questions were general in order to understand whether they had ever bought sneakers that were the result of a collaboration and whether, in general, they recognized brand collaborations in the shoe industry, by showing them photos of different collaborations and asking them to select which ones they recognized and which they had ever bought themselves. Ultimately, we asked for consent and contact information if they met the interview criteria. In the second phase, we prepared an interview guide (for more information, see the Appendix) in which we explained at the beginning the typology of the interviews, which were in-depth and semi-structured, taking approximately 45min to 1h 30. Interviewees were to be asked one initial question and, from then on, they were free to tell us anything that came to mind. Ultimately, we would ask them a few explorative and socio-demographic questions, explaining there were no right or wrong answers and opinions in this interview; interviewees' thoughts were what truly mattered, so they were free to speak entirely at ease. We also requested permission to record the interview to access the information at a later stage when the data would be analyzed. However, we guaranteed that everything they said would remain anonymous and confidential.

At the beginning of the interview, we showed photos of shoes resulting from a collaboration and asked the interviewee which ones they recognized or had bought themselves. Next, we asked their opinion about the Adidas Yeezy and their opinion before and after the breakup of the collaboration. We also asked for opinions on competing collaborations that they had recognized or purchased. The topics we tried to address were the tangible and intangible features of the product, perceptions of the product and price and distribution channels, their feelings about owning the product, the context to which they associated the Yeezy shoes, their relationship with the collaboration, their loyalty to the brand and their image of the product. Next, we performed the projective technique by asking them to associate the brand with a particular person for both the Adidas-Yeezy collaboration and competing collaborations they had mentioned before. As a last question, we asked their opinion about owning the Adidas Yeezy with the Adidas brand alone.

All of the interviews took place in March and April of 2023. An open-ended interview served as the primary data collection method for the primary data. The phenomenon of interest was examined to identify trends among the various responders. The core question was then effectively answered in part by these patterns. If necessary, the questions in qualitative research might be adjusted after in-depth discussions with the

respondents (Arsel, 2017). Through qualitative research, the researcher can better understand customer attitudes, opinions, and subsequent behavior (Bradley, 2013). Respondents who bought Yeezy sneakers at least once were questioned in-depth to gather the necessary primary data. Semi-structured interviews with Yeezy owners were performed in person or online. The benefit of conducting the interviews in person is that it gives the interviewer a better understanding of the respondent. If the responder prefers, an online setting is created to conduct the interview. Because of the relative anonymity of online communication and its potential for better self-presentation and increased sincerity compared to face-to-face interviews, online interviewing can be preferable to offline interviewing in some circumstances (Janghorban et al., 2014). Because of this, we provided the respondent with the option of an online or offline interview. The respondents' identities would not be disclosed after the interviews for privacy reasons. Because of this, the respondent could answer honestly without worrying about repercussions (Arsel, 2017). A participant consent form was issued for the in-depth interviews. Here, the purpose of the thesis research will be outlined, along with the effects of the breakup on those participating in the interviews. Each interview ended with a question on the respondent's knowledge of other people that wear Yeezy sneakers. We could connect with other trustworthy respondents in this way. In order to obtain enough data, 35 interviews were done. After examining twelve interviews, Guest et al. (2006) found that new topics had yet to emerge. This implies that all key subjects can be covered in 35 interviews. The following lists the hypotheses, subjects, and sub-questions that we plan to look at in our study on the effects of the dissolution of Adidas and Kanye West's collaboration on customers. To elaborate these assumptions, we shall consult the literature on business alliances and brand equity.

The following is the main hypothesis:

H1: The dissolution of the Adidas and Kanye West partnership negatively affects the co-brand's product equity and consumer base.

Additional Hypotheses:

H2: The dissolution of the Adidas and Kanye West partnership alters the perception of the co-brand's products.

H3: Consumer impression of the Adidas brand suffered as a result of the dissolution of the Adidas and Kanye West cooperation.

3.3 Prepare

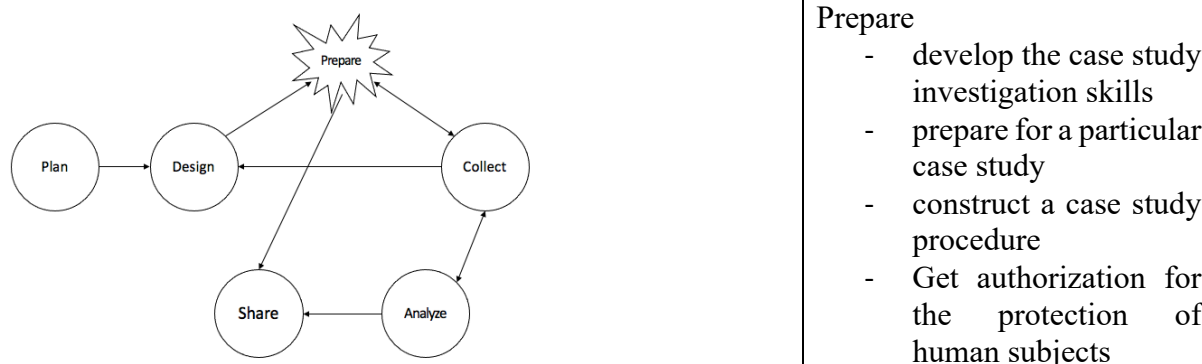


Figure 10: The Process of Case Study Method “Prepare”
Source: Yin, 2013

1. The qualifications required of researchers employing the case study approach

Our expertise rested in seizing unanticipated chances that arose from analysis at both preliminary and subsequent stages. Our research guaranteed the researcher's ability to listen without being misled by ideologies or preconceptions. Our researcher kept the original purpose in mind but was also willing to adapt plans and procedures if something unexpected happened, naturally balancing flexibility and scientific rigor. Data collection was not done through mechanical recording. Information was interpreted through deep knowledge of the subject matter.

2. Training and preparation for a particular case study:

For the conduct of the research, we obtained informed consent from all persons who joined the case study, advising them of the nature of the activity and emphasizing the voluntary nature of participation; we were careful to protect the study participants from any danger, especially avoiding any deception; we protected the privacy of the participants and the confidentiality of the data collected.

3. Protocol development:

We developed a protocol with the necessary instruments, procedures, and rules for our case study research. Our field research procedures were interviews. We integrated real-life events with the predefined data collection plan (the pre-recruitment questionnaire and questions asked can be found in the Appendix).

3.4 Collect

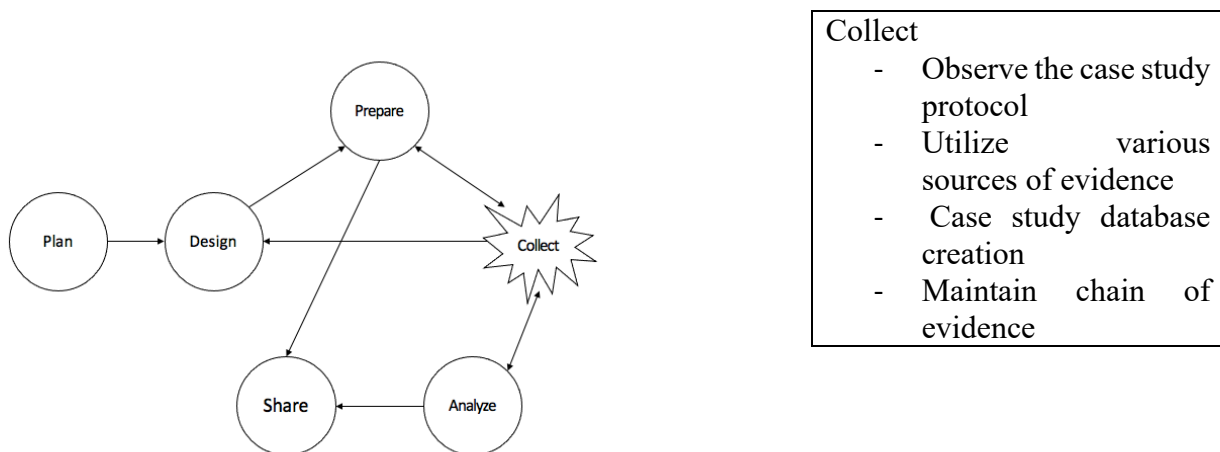


Figure 11: The Process of Case Study Method “Collect”
Source: Yin, 2013

Yin identifies six data sources that can be used for a case study: documents, archives, interviews, direct observation, participation, and physical objects. We used a combination of primary data (the interviews) and a literature review. The difference between the interview and the questionnaire should be emphasized. The interview is a guided conversation and not a structured series of questions. In other words, although the researcher pursues his or her line of research in entering into a relationship with the interviewee, the series of questions is likely to be fluid and non-rigid, following the thread of discourse modulated by the interviewee. Interviews require two levels of attention: the first is focused on getting the information needed to answer one's question, but the second must simultaneously pay attention to being friendly, open, and willing to be contradicted. Interviews can then take different forms, being open and unstructured or focused on a narrow topic. We used non-structured interviews.

	Strengths	Weaknesses
Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Targeted-focus directly on case study topics - Insightful- provide perceived causal inferences and explanation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bias due to poorly articulated questions - Response bias - Inaccuracies due to poor recall - Reflexivity- interviewee gives what interviewer wants to hear
Documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stable-can be reviewed repeatedly - Unobtrusive-not created as a result of the case study - Exact- contains exact names, references, and details of an event - Broad coverage-long span of time, many events and settings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Retrievability- can be difficult to find. Biased selectivity, if collection is incomplete. - Reporting bias- reflects (unknown) bias of author(s) - Access- may be deliberately withheld

Table 2: Case Study Research Design and Methods
Source: Yin, 2013

For our research, we were interested in people who belong to Generation Y. Generation Y, also known as the Millennial Generation, includes people born between 1977 and 2002 (Parker et al., 2014). This generational group was chosen as the sample based on their high involvement in purchasing clothing and fashion products to express themselves, and because of their higher purchasing power (Parker et al., 2014; Parment, 2013). We also referred to literature on celebrities considered to be opinion leaders, who served as a benchmark for purposes of comparison with consumers; this generation is ideal because Kanye West is Generation Y himself (Rogers, 1995; Shoham & Ruvio, 2008).

The sample size for this research included a range of at least 30-35 respondents to perform a qualitative analysis of the data collected effectively. The respondents who participated in this survey were approximately 18-35 years old.

An intentional sampling technique was adopted to select the sample according to the study's specific objectives (Suri, 2011) through the pre-recruitment questionnaire sent to Nova and Luiss students and consequently to their acquaintances or family members.

Accordingly, we requested contact information from likely respondents interested in participating in the study. Based on Creswell's two recommendations, criterion-based sampling was used to find people who were suitable and willing to openly and honestly share the most relevant information on the topic under study (2007). Accordingly, to be eligible to participate as informants in the study, individuals had to meet specific requirements: (a) They had to have previously purchased a pair of Adidas Yeezy; (b) they had to be aware of the partnership dissolution between Adidas and Kanye West. An ordered list of questions was used to create a semi-structured interview guide to better understand the topic (Galletta, 2013). The guide's layout allowed users to openly express their opinions, exploring how customers reacted to the partnership.

All interviews were audio-recorded. The interviews were instantly transcribed after being recorded. The benefit of immediately transcribing is that we could change the interview questions if we believed a topic needed to be more sufficiently covered. As the interviews were being recorded, it was unnecessary to take notes as the questions were being asked, allowing the questions to take center stage (Vennix, 2019). After the transcription, the interviews were compiled in an Excel table in which we tried to divide the answers according to the topic that we wanted to address, namely: brand awareness, brand recall, brand recognition, brand image, attributes, benefits, associations and perception, brand loyalty recommendation and repurchase and projective technique. Two equal tables were constructed, one for Adidas Yeezy and another for competing collaborations. Inductive analysis was used to extract themes based on the data collected. Reading and analyzing the data with this technique led to new emerging themes.

4. Research Insights

As part of our investigation on the effects of the Adidas and Kanye West collaboration breakup on customer perceptions and behaviors, we conducted interviews with 35 Yeezy shoe consumers. The analysis and results of the interviews are presented in this chapter. The in-person and online interviews took about 45/60 minutes each to complete. Through a Google Forms sent to Luiss and Nova students and their friends and relatives, individuals were sought out based on their interest in and ownership of Yeezy sneakers.

Thematic analysis, a qualitative research technique that locates and explores patterns and themes in the material, was used to record and analyze the interviews. The analysis took place over a number of stages, including familiarization with the data, data coding, the creation of early themes, review and theme-refinement, and theme-finalization.

The breakup of the Adidas and Kanye West cooperation and its effects on customer perceptions and behaviors were significant issues that emerged from the investigation. The following section further details these themes and includes pertinent statements from the participants to support the conclusions.

4.1 Perception before the breakup

The co-branded products of Adidas Yeezy have been so effectively internalized in people's minds that people refer to them as the products started the whole culture of limited-edition sneakers and streetwear. What made all this possible is Kanye, thanks to his ability to bring new and crazy ideas to the table. This is the perception held in the mind of the customer.

The following quote exemplifies the argument:

"The first product, or at least one of the first products which let them, the whole, uh, the culture of the limited-edition sneaker and streetwear started." (Male, 26, owning Yeezy Boots 350)¹

4.1.1 Product perception

The collaboration between Adidas and Kanye West was one of the most exciting and innovative on the market, leading to the creation of a unique and distinctive design that captured the attention of many people and was also produced with high-quality materials, offering a very high level of comfort.

In this way, an indelible mark was left on the world of limited-edition sneakers thanks to the unique aesthetic and construction quality combining the experience of Adidas and the creative vision of Kanye. Yeezy also has a strong bond with Kanye West, one of the most influential artists and designers of our time. This bond gives Yeezy a cultural appeal that other shoes can't reproduce. Just think of the hype created by Kanye thanks to the presentation of the shoes at concerts and how they were released, selling out in seconds.

The following quote exemplifies the argument:

"Brought creativity into the sneaker market, which has created a new way of selling sneakers, which is the raffle. Uh, and creating a lot of vibe around those sneakers and creating raffle market that is developed after the first release in the retail market." (Female, 20, owning Boots 380)

¹ All the quotations in this chapter are transcribed exactly as they were told by interviewed people.

For most consumers, these are among the first shoes recognized as the result of a collaboration and among the first ones they recall when they consider buying a pair.

The following quotes exemplify the argument:

"I think about Nike-Supreme air force, Adidas Yeezy, Nike White Off-White, Nike x Sacai, Adidas per Balenciaga." (Female, 28, owning Yeezy Boots 750)

"Yeezy, for sure. I also think about Nike x off-white, Nike x supreme, the collaboration between Gucci and Adidas, and Gucci and Balenciaga." (Male, 21, owning Yeezy Boots 950)

"Doing shopping searching for a sneaker, I will say Yeezy and Supreme." (Male, 19, owning Yeezy Boots 350 V2)

As for the tangible product attributes, Yeezy shoes are very much characterized by the innovative design and the comforts of the various models released, as stated by the people interviewed. As regards intangible attributes, it is clear that most people appreciate the fact that the Yeezy design means that they have shoes for every occasion, from gym sessions to chilling with friends, to going to university and for more formal occasions too.

The following quote exemplifies the argument:

"There's a shoe for every occasion, you know? So like, if you want to go to the gym, there's a shoe for that. If you want to go to clean your grass, there's a shoe for that. If you want to go in the snow, there's a shoe for that. If you want to go in the summer, there's a shoe for that." (Male, 24, owning all the models)

Also, from the perception of the price before the end of the collaboration we can understand how much credibility and value that Kanye West brought to the product because, before the breakup, people tended to say that the retail price of 230€ was pretty fair, even if the resell price could sometimes exceed 1 000€.

The following quote exemplifies the argument:

"The collaboration, uh, think, uh, collaboration concept is the one that adds value to the product." (Male, 23, Yeezy Runner)

4.1.2 Identification with community

Before the breakup people wearing the shoes felt unique; people had the feeling of being part of a community, participating in a movement that had the figure of Kanye West as pack leader and in which everyone wearing a pair of Yeezy was identified as someone with an awareness of the latest streetwear shoes.

The following quotes exemplify the argument:

"I feel part of a movement." (Female, 31, owning Yeezy 500)

"links between people that they have it because when you see someone that has a pair, you recognize that that person is aware of streetwear." (Male, 22, owning Yeezy 700)

4.1.3 Perception on Kanye West

People have shown the importance of the brand itself as a product differentiator, mainly because of its association with the person of Kanye, and they have underlined that, regarding the models produced by the artist, a lot of people bought them merely for their association to the person rather than for their quality or design.

The following quotes exemplify the argument:

"I feel fresh like Kanye when I wear them." (Male, 25, Yeezy 950 Boots)

"I feel more attached to the artist using that type of shoes." (Female, 27, Yeezy Boots 350 V2)

The shoes were also invented thanks to him and that is why they became famous. The fact that he had all his closest friends wear the shoes too has also had a great influence on the rap industry. The Chicago rapper excels at building anticipation; launching one of his new sneakers becomes a spectacular global event, like the one that took place in New York City and was streamed in 42 movie theaters worldwide. It was as if it had become a symbol of lifestyle symbol.

The following quote exemplifies the argument:

"But with an artist such that. You never know; we can create value and destroy value as much faster as we have created it." (Female, 29, Yeezy Runner)

4.2 Perception and opinion after the breakup

4.2.1 Product perception

As for the product's brand awareness resulting from the collaboration between Adidas and Kanye West, i.e., the Adidas Yeezy sneakers, both brand recall and brand recognition remain high as can be understood from the interviewees' words. This is because, as one consumer says, "he's living off the income".

As for the product recall, appeal is decreasing compared to recognition, which still remains high because Nike has the upper hand with its collaborations.

The following quotes exemplify the argument:

"To buy right now, I will say Nike Jordan." (Female, 30, owning Yeezy Boots 350)

"Adidas Yeezy is a collaboration with a strong identity and big up follow from all over the world. And, but not, not at the level of Nike." (Male, 35, owning Yeezy Boots 350)

"I recognize all, but if a new Yeezy is created, surely I will buy it. I used to buy one every year." (Female, 18, owning Yeezy Boots 380)

Only a few super fans of the Yeezy would still buy them now for their design and their comfort, but the rest of the people would probably now buy a Nike-Jordan, Nike Off- white, or a Nike for Sacai rather than a Yeezy shoe.

After the breakup of the collaboration, Adidas Yeezy has maintained popularity but no longer has the same aura of exclusivity that it previously had. There are principally two reasons given by consumers. Many people have lost interest in the sneakers due to the end of the collaboration with Kanye West. The popularity and value of these sneakers have undergone a certain change. Many have started to view Yeezy as less exclusive and of lower value than the versions produced during the Adidas-Kanye West collaboration. Focus on the Yeezy launches has come to an end, as they are no longer associated with the successful partnership with the famous rap singer. Another reason for this lower interest in the shoes is the fact that some believe them to have become rather outdated, not having changed much in the design, and they have also become more accessible to everyone.

As regards the product's brand image after the breakup, it is essential to highlight that the majority of people feel that design and comfort have remained stable whereas most perceive that there has been a decrease in the coolness of the product. It's still nice, but it has lost some of the cool factor.

The following quotes exemplify the argument:

"The comfort when having the shoes at your feet. Um, the easiness, putting them on your shoe and your feet." (Male, 32, owning Yeezy Boots 500)

"Cause there's like; there's a shoe for every occasion, you know? So, if you want to go to the gym, there's a shoe for that; if you want to chill, there is a shoe for that." (Female, 33, owning Yeezy 700)

The co-brand product's associations have been upset by the end of the collaboration and credibility has been lost.

The following quotes exemplify the argument:

"Has lost a lot of credibility" (Female, 34, owning Yeezy Runner)

"It feels like a copy, like they just got the product and rebranded it." (Male, 21, owning Yeezy Boots 380)

The products having been thus internalized, people now feel that taking those same products and rebranding them with just the Adidas name has reduced them to a mere copy, an appropriation of the artist's property. The shoes are no longer considered exclusive because what made them exclusive was Kanye's presence. Consumers remember that Adidas was already making shoes very similar to Yeezy that did not have the same appeal. Ye's fan base, is after all, particularly loyal and whenever a new Yeezy product is launched, it's sold out in seconds, even if it happens to be a pair of the worst sneakers ever to hit the market.

The following quotes exemplify the argument:

"There are lots of sneakers that Adidas did in its time that looked exactly identical to Yeezys. I think the collaboration made it a lot more appealing." (Male, 23, owning Yeezy Boots 350 V2)

"I will say there's going to be a flop cause it's no more, something limited. What makes the Yeezy limited was Kanye West coming up with new ideas, with strange ideas." (Female, 24, owning Yeezy Boots 700)

"No. Not going to happen Yeezy without Kanye; there's no future in the collaboration." (Female, 25, owning Yeezy Boots 500)

"Originally, the design is by Kanye, so it's a bit silly, and it's a bit of an invasion of an Artist." (Male, 27, owning Yeezy Boots 380)

Moreover, there is a mixed feeling in people's words. The majority think the collaboration has no future because, even if they got back together, everything would have changed. At the same time, they recognize that the best outcome would be to sell the co-branded products together again although the jury is still out on whether they would buy them.

The following quotes exemplify the argument:

"If they will back together, Uh, it's, um, it's not the same." (Female, 20, owning Yeezy 950 Boots)

"the best outcome for them would be to sell them together because the fan base for Kanye West is crazy, and like, basically with every launch of Yeezy, everything gets sold out immediately, even if it's literally like the worst piece of clothing you've ever sold." (Male, 22, owning Yeezy Runner)

4.2.2 Identification with community

People interviewed said that, given the product has become highly popular, and given the impact of the breakup, the brand has lost hype and, consequently, has become less unique than before.

The following quotes exemplify the argument:

"I don't feel exclusive as before." (Male,34, owning Yeezy Boots 750)

"The comfortless and still the design, but not the uniqueness anymore." (Male,23, owning Yeezy Runner)

"I don't feel any more like being unique." (Female,24, owning Yeezy Boots 350 V2)

"That is not any more attractive." (Female,22, owning Yeezy Boots 350)

"These kinds of shoes have also passed their fashion period." (Male,25, owning Yeezy 950 Boots)

Nowadays it is commonly recognized that the price no longer reflects the product, which is less unique and of lower value after the breakup of the collaboration.

The following codes exemplify the argument:

"Of course, they value them differently after the collaboration." (Female, 27, owning Boots 350 V2)

"Price for sure is a buying driver, and now it is too high." (Male, 31, owning Yeezy Boots 750)

To this extent, it is interesting to note that a minority of people stated that this product is now part of footwear history and this, of course, might have an impact on prices, even if on the resell market the Yeezy shoes being sold are the ones released before the breakup, because these are perceived as the product with value, not those released by Adidas only after the split.

The following quote exemplifies the argument:

"It's like, uh, having a piece of the history of the streetwear." (Female, 22, owning Yeezy Runner)

4.2.3 Perception on Kanye West

In this section of the product brand image related to persona and symbol, interviews have highlighted the importance of the presence of a figure like Kanye West in product development and their association of the brand with the person of Kanye. To this extent, after the collaboration breakup, people have stated that they are not willing to see the brand without the Yeezy symbol and the person of Kanye.

The following quotes exemplify the argument:

"It's difficult to delete the idea of West from this picture." (Male, 24, owning all Yeezy models)

"Yeezy is Kanye. Therefore, I don't like seeing them without Kanye." (Female, 26, owning Yeezy 950 Boots)

Even if most people have underlined that, in the case of the artist figure, they tend to distinguish their behavior from the art he is producing; consumers are highly aware that with a person like Kanye, the possibility of having determinant effects on the brand itself is high. His absence from the co-brand destroys the value of Adidas Yeezy products. The destroyed value lies in what Kanye has created.

The following quotes exemplify the argument:

"Not because of what happened. Sometimes you would also like to separate between the artists and the art."

(Male, 25, owning Boots V2)

"The name Yeezy can make the difference because you buy it for the Ye name under it."

*"Yeezy brand people, 100% buy it just for the clout of it being associated for. Nobody f**king likes those clothes just for the way they are." (Female, 28, owning Yeezy Runner)*

4.2.4 Opinion after the breakup

It cannot escape our notice that the experience with the brand has changed negatively. People affirm that the co-branded product is an old concept now and buying the product in this period would not be a rational choice. They are being dramatic but realistic when they say that the attraction of the shoes has declined perhaps not

100% but 80% at least. If the product was in decline over the last few years, the breakup of the collaboration means it is now dead and has no future.

The following quotes exemplify the argument:

"It only with the loss 100%, then, the excess of, of the collaboration of the beauty of the shoe. I'm a bit too realistic and probably too dramatic, but it would lose, not the 100%, but the 80% for sure." (Male, 29, owning Yeezy Boots 380)

"The product is destined to die because it's already declining." (Female, 32, owning Yeezy Boots 500)

It is collaboration that gives value to the co-branded products and the road that Adidas is now taking, trying to rebrand the product as Adidas only and taking away the cool factor is, for most people, risky if not impossible.

The following quotes exemplify the argument:

"The collaboration, uh, think, uh, collaboration concept was the one that added value to the product." (Male, 30, owning Yeezy Boots 700 and 350)

"Guess it's a risk to rebrand it and just sell it as nothing happened only by Adidas" (Female, 33, owning Yeezy Boots 700)

What is interesting to note is that, on the one hand, the absence of Kanye is seen negatively by consumers but, on the other hand, for a lot of them Kanye's behavior has not hurt the co-brand; they claim that their reaction is neither negative nor positive regarding Kanye's statements in public and on social media. This is because many tend to separate his life as an artist from his private life and mental stability. People know that what he has said is very bad, and they consider what Adidas has done to be right, putting a stop to sales immediately. However, they tend to disregard the negative aspect and the majority say it is not their concern.

The following quotes exemplify the argument:

"Now the relationship is neutral, neither positive nor negative." (Male, 35, owning Yeezy Boots V2)

"More people will like, disregard it and be like, it doesn't matter to me what he did." (Female, 23, owning Yeezy Runner)

"I understand why this site is terrible, but I am a fan, so that it wouldn't change." (Male, 21, owning Yeezy Boots 750)

*"I know a lot of people separate the music from the artist. The Kanye West fans were like, okay, never mind."
(Female, 22, owning Yeezy 950 Boots)*

The loyalty towards the brand has suffered a negative impact. Not only because the willingness to repurchase the co-branded products has decreased without Kanye but also because the willingness to recommend the product has decreased. Most of the interviewees say that they would not recommend the Yeezy sneakers or, if they did, they would not do as much as before and only do so because of their comfort.

The following quotes exemplify the argument:

"I would recommend it again in the future, but for sure less than before." (Male, 22, owning Yeezy Boots 700)

"I would not recommend and would not buy again in the future." (Female, 25, owning Yeezy Boots 380)

"I recommend the shoes, but at the moment, just for the comfort." (Male, 27, owning Yeezy Boots 500)

"I don't recommend it as much as before." (Female, 29, owning Yeezy Boots 750)

A minority say that they will purchase in the future, but only if Adidas-Yeezy does something different and new in terms of look, shape, color, and price, but that they will certainly buy less than before because of the absence of Kanye. Another minority say that they will only accept or recommend the sneakers if they are remarkable.

The following quotes exemplify the argument:

"I will buy in the future only if they do something new regarding look, shape, color, and price. However, I would be slightly less than before cause of the broken collaboration with Kanye." (Male, 23, owning Yeezy Boots 350)

"I don't think I will buy it cause, like, trend changes, and now is no cooler." (Female, 28, owning Yeezy Boots 350 V2)

"I don't think I would recommend cause it's no cooler, like trend changes, and now add is no cooler." (Male, 26, owning Yeezy Boots 500)

4.2.5 Competition, alternative product and brand name

Eliminating Kanye West from the scene has shifted consumers' attention to alternative products and competitive brands; the main one is Nike, with its collaboration with Jordan, Off-White, and Sacai. Adidas-Yeezy's co-branded products have lost their appeal, and most interviewees prefer now to buy other shoes that emerge from other collaborations; the leading one is Nike-Jordan. People also point out that Yeezy is no trendier than in the past and that they would invest in a trendier collaboration right now, considering that they already own a few pairs of Yeezy. What can be understood from the statements of the interviewees is that Adidas-Yeezy was already on the way down in recent years. The breakup of the collaboration has accelerated this process of decreasing brand equity in favor of competitors.

The following quotes exemplify the argument:

"Right now, I prefer to buy a Jordan instead of Yeezy." (Male, 31, owning Yeezy Runner)

"But nowadays. It's a bit, uh, old as a concept, and I would not buy another eye that's crazy right now."

(Female, 22, owning Yeezy Boots 380)

"Jordan has understood the importance of collaboration with other brands and designers could have been a successful way of innovating the product and refreshing the attractiveness of the product. I found this example in the Jordan for Off- White, which is a, high priced product nowadays and a beautiful product. And, I think that, in those recent months, Jordan has taken the lead into the sneakers market." (Male, 19 owning Yeezy 950 Boots)

4.3 Opinion on new Adidas strategy

Willingness to buy Adidas Yeezy sneakers decreased after the end of the collaboration. The majority say they wouldn't purchase the shoes under the name Adidas. It is a matter of character. More than half of the respondents say they bought the shoes because they were Kanye's sneakers, and they are not going to buy them now because the person that they were inspired to buy them by in the first place dropped out of the deal.

The following quotes exemplify the argument:

"60% of the time people bought because it is a Kanye West shoe. It's like the name for me. I like the shoe, how it looks like, but I feel like it loses a little bit of the wow factor." (Male, 26, owning Yeezy Boots 350 V2 and 750)

"I'm not going to buy this since the person I wanted to buy this for in the first place dropped out of the deal." (Female, 24 owning Yeezy Boots 380)

On the other hand, a minority will not buy the sneakers because the product has remained the same over the last few years, is no longer innovative and because there is a brand like Nike involved in cooler collaborations in the fashion industry. Another minority will still buy the product even under the Adidas name because the shoes are excellent, comfortable, and because they are not fans of Kanye anyway. However, they only value the sneaker's quality and not the brand as a whole.

The following quotes exemplify the argument:

"If the product remains the same, the price remains the same, and the time of distribution remains the same, but without Ye brand, I will not buy." (Male, 27, owning Yeezy Boots 700)

"You have to be a fan of him not to buy the shoes." (Female, 30, owning Yeezy Boots 350)

The most common feeling is that it is impossible to feel the same hype around the Yeezy brand and product as before the breakup.

The majority says, however, that if they return together, they will probably repurchase the sneakers because Ye's behavior hasn't changed customer minds. They know it is hard, but it would be cool to see the partnership up and running again. The respondents say the collaboration was successful for a long time and should not stop.

The following quotes exemplify the argument:

"I feel like it's dying." (Female, 25, owning Yeezy Boots 350)

"if they were to return, so Kanye and Yeezy together again, I will probably repurchase them. His behavior hasn't changed my mind." (Male, 27, owning Yeezy Boots 500)

"the hype behind the Yeezy, it's almost impossible to have again. So, they're good. They're doing good but not as they used to do." (Female, 29, owning Yeezy Boots 380)

"it would be cool if they made a partnership again, but it's hard." (Male, 26, owning Yeezy Boots 750)

When asked about the possibility of purchasing Yeezy sneakers by Adidas only, a few of the interviewees say that they will buy them, but the majority who support the co-brand are opposed and have started a boycott. In their opinion it would be like wearing just a normal, everyday pair of shoes; they may well be lovely, but they are different. They recognize that the shoes are the same, but the fact is that they are no longer associated to Kanye and are thus less popular. People claim that it makes no sense to stop the collaboration with Kanye and sell the shoes created, although it is clear that breaking up the partnership was the only way forward if Adidas were to salvage their reputation, given that what they stand for means that they are no longer in line with

Kanye's values. According to the majority, the best thing would be for Kanye to publicly change his opinion and for Adidas and Yeezy to join forces once more.

The following quotes exemplify the argument:

"The majority of people probably will buy that, but the good people who supported these from the beginning are against these." (Male, 20, owning Yeezy Boots 350 V2)

"Same sneakers, but only with Adidas name. I think it's a complete mess." (Female, 30, owning Yeezy Boots 500)

"Kenny West has to change his opinions, at least publicly. And I think the collaboration, since it has worked so well for those years, will not stop." (Male, 25 owning Yeezy Boots 700)

"It's like you were wearing Kanye West shoes, now you're just wearing like dealer shoes, which is still nice, but like, you know, it's different now." (Female, 27, owning Yeezy Boots 380)

"I don't think they should be sold cause if they broke up the collaboration, they no longer stand with that person. So, if they start selling those shoes, It's very contradictory." (Female, 28, owning Yeezy Boots 750)

"But right now, after the breakout between Adidas and Canyon West, I would never buy again a shoe, which is just Adidas, and with the Yeezy style, but without Ye." (Male, 32, owning Yeezy Boots 350)

4.4 Impact on Adidas brand equity

From what we can extrapolate from the interviewees' words, what happened between Adidas and Kanye West did not affect Adidas brand equity. People believe that Adidas did the right thing in ending the collaboration partly because they say they had no choice if they wanted to salvage their reputation in the market. Adidas is considered a giant in the sports and fashion industry. The collaboration lost credibility, but the Adidas brand did not; it remains a firm favorite along with Nike. The loss of profit for Adidas negligible, considering that only a small percentage came from Yeezy, but that has no bearing on reputation and image. No one imagined that Adidas would take such a drastic step, i.e., breaking off the collaboration, given that it generated a lot of money for the company, but this is all the more reason for consumers to take it as a gesture of responsibility, knowing that they would take a financial hit but would remain true to their core values.

The following quotes exemplify the argument:

“It's one of, together with Nike, the main sportswear brands and they are affirming themselves even in, uh, a more street scenario.” (Male, 22, owning Yeezy Boots 700 and 350)

“Adidas Yeezy is different from Adidas is like saying Smart and Mercedes, Smart is from Mercedes, but they are different. So for me, what happened has no impact on Adidas itself.” (Female, 23, owning Yeezy Boots 750)

4.5 Projective technique

Using the projective technique, the strong association between Adidas Yeezy and Kanye West becomes clear. When we asked the interviewees what kind of person Adidas Yeezy would be, the majority said Ye or described a person like him, i.e., a robust black man, a rapper singer connected to the hip hop world, a fresh person, someone that likes to show off somewhat and a highly stylish person that follows the trends and stands out from the crowd. Moreover, he is described as a person who represents the excellence of the fashion and sneakers culture and has a strong sense of style, albeit casual. People say the person associated with the brand is evident in the empire that Kanye has created, which is eclipsed by the Adidas-Yeezy sneakers.

Due to the strong association with Kanye, his absence from the co-branded product has led to a decrease in brand equity, which is clear from people's words. They now describe the brand as a person that was, in the beginning, not for everybody, was once cool but no longer is. Now they view Adidas Yeezy as a person who is not as trendy as he was before, who no longer follows fashion trends, and is no longer unique. Moreover, he is described as a person in the corner who feels superior to everybody else.

The projective technique used on competitors underlines the negative impact on the brand equity of Adidas-Yeezy. The majority describes Nike Jordan as an athlete or as a basketball player, a more stylish person at the moment than Adidas Yeezy, more reliable and trustworthy, a person with whom you can have a good conversation.

	<i>ADIDAS-YEEZY</i>	<i>ADIDAS</i>	<i>NIKE-JORDAN</i>	<i>NIKE</i>
<i>Male, 23, owning Yeezy Boots 350</i>	<i>"A person, not for everybody at the beginning, but then as it grows up, the person almost open to the public and like, it was cool, but during the times but now no more. I mean, no, as it was once."</i>	<i>"I saw him like, um, I don't know, a young boy, but not too young, like a teenager with a sporty person who goes out like with, uh, with the skate and, um, leaves at the best is. His age is like, uh,</i>	<i>"It's more connected to basketball."</i>	<i>"A young person, uh, which likes to wear trend clothes, trend outfits, and always search for challenges."</i>

		<i>have fun with, uh, with friends."</i>		
<i>Female, 22, owning Yeezy Boots 700</i>	<i>"You know how in every class there's always this one asshole in the corner that thinks he's better than everybody."</i>	<i>"I think adidas would be a sporty person, um, well organized and uh, uh, with a high level of technology."</i>	<i>"Would be a better person than Adidas."</i>	<i>"A person that likes enjoyable moments."</i>
<i>Female, 28, owning Yeezy Boots 350 V2</i>	<i>"Big, big black guy." "A fresh person."</i>	<i>"For me Adidas represent the freedom of sports. I don't know, I associate maybe with children that run but not in a competitive setting."</i>	<i>"It would be a teenager, around 20 years old, who has a classic sporty style. And wants to stay update."</i>	<i>"Nike would be a runner in more competitive setting."</i>
<i>Male, 30, owning Yeezy 950 Boots</i>	<i>"It is just kind of Kanye. Yeah. There's no doubt. Someone that just do whatever they think they want to do. Someone risk taker."</i>	<i>"Safe person. Like, it's like not, they took a risk with Yeezus in the beginning."</i>	<i>"Jordan is more commercialized in a certain sense."</i>	<i>"Cool kids in school."</i>
<i>Male, 26, owning Yeezy Boots 380</i>	<i>"Kanye West also aesthetically but I don't know, probably a rap singer. Someone who wouldn't do sport."</i>	<i>"I think it would be somebody who's like always dressed like, not necessarily sporty, but very chic."</i>	<i>"It would be a very tall guy. The bad boy sort of charisma But still everybody wants to talk to them."</i>	<i>"Cheerleader. Yeah. Very popular. somebody who's like so nice that nobody can hate them."</i>
<i>Female, 22, owning Yeezy Boots 750</i>	<i>"I would associate it with West. Someone that's like a bit to show off, that feel connected to the hip-hop world."</i>	<i>"Maybe it'll be someone who play sports. Listen, for example, to hip-hop music."</i>	<i>"I don't know, maybe Michael Jordan."</i>	<i>"Nike was a person, mm, I don't know, maybe Serna Williams."</i>
<i>Male, 25, owning Yeezy runner</i>	<i>"An extraordinary fashion person, constantly updated with the fashion standards."</i>	<i>"A fresh person."</i>	<i>"More connect to basketball."</i>	<i>"Nike would be like, older."</i>
<i>Female, 31, owning Yeezy Boots 500</i>	<i>"A much younger person, around 20 years old. Exclusive and casual kind of dressing. Listen, for example, to hip-hop music."</i>	<i>"A person with a really strong and determined identity."</i>	<i>"A person that represent the history and the culture of basket."</i>	<i>"Really similar to adidas and Yeezy. "</i>

<p><i>Male, 21, owning all Yeezy models</i></p>	<p><i>“I think that there could be so many different types of people that could represent the collaboration, from sporty people who care about the comfort, to other people who just saw the product online and would like to style it their own way.”</i></p>	<p><i>“I would probably associate the brand to a sporty / casual person that mostly cares about feeling comfortable with what he/she is wearing.”</i></p>	<p><i>“A person that wear the sneakers also when he/she is elegant.”</i></p>	<p><i>“An athlete.”</i></p>
---	--	---	--	-----------------------------

Table 3: Projective technique

Source: Thesis’ author

5. Implication

The main implication of our research is that the impact on the collaboration's product equity is much lower than what Adidas probably estimated; the crisis did not do a great deal of damage to the brand equity of the partnership. Our main contribution is that product equity did not decline all that much because the perception of the consumers on this collaboration is not as bad as we might have expected from our hypothesis based on the literature. We would expect a significant impact on brand equity and product equity, which would be low, but consumers say that the shoes of the collaboration are still something that they perceive as exciting and cool. The problem comes when the brand Adidas removes Kanye West from the shoes; people manage to split, differentiate, and separate the image of the designer from the idea of the man. Companies need to understand that a person can behave in a way that is super-destructive and yet people will still buy because the artist was great. The literature states that, in cases like these, equity should go down, and it does happen but what is more damaging is the brand equity of the shoes without the Yeezy brand. Now the product has no interest; it has lost its cool to the extent that people won't buy.

Moreover, the breakup did not impact Adidas’ brand equity either; it is still considered positively and is seen to behave correctly. But it modified the product, and nobody will buy the product if it's not branded.

From the insights of the research, we suggest contradicting the literature because the impact of the breakup is not always negative, or at least is not as harmful as the literature suggests. Because consumers separate the man from the artist, what is damaging is the brand equity of the sneakers without collaboration, but that is a different matter. It's not the brand equity of the partnership.

These results of our research show important implications for fashion brands when considering strategic alliances with designers to create hype for the product. This study provides empirical evidence of the negative

impact of partnership breakup on product brand equity when the cool factor is missing, considering the effects it has on product image and product brand awareness.

First, product recall and product recognition are both high during the partnership, when the partnership is successfully developed, and the selected partner can bring high intangible value; after the breakup, brand recognition remains relatively high, but brand recall decreases, and this is the worst situation for a brand because consumers know about it. It would, however, never enter their heads to buy. The brands experience a decrease in market share and sales. These results refer to the co-branded product but are not valid for the two brands considered separately.

Second, for partnerships that end due to a celebrity scandal, consumers tend to turn a blind eye to adverse events and to separate the partner's personality from their profession. Consumers tend to see the result as an excellent, fashionable product with an exclusive, limited-edition design that not all consumers can afford. They tend to feel part of a community by wearing the products worn by celebrities.

Third, the end of the collaboration also ends the uniqueness of the product to the point that consumers begin to regard the price as high. The absence of the celebrity in the partnership reduces the propensity to buy. Most consumers purchase products that result from a collaboration solely and exclusively because they are associated with that celebrity, even if the product is not the most beautiful. In addition, the co-brand product will, despite the breakup, always be associated with the star who made it a unique product.

Fourth, if after the breakup with the celebrity, the brand intends to continue selling the co-branded product, it must be aware that, for consumers, it is not the same, especially when the product was developed thanks to the creativity of the partner; it is now considered a copy and they will not buy it. Companies must be aware that the product will never get the hype it managed to get with the celebrity on board. In addition, the company must consider that the celebrity's supporters might boycott the brand if it sells a copy of the co-branded product.

Finally, this research has shown that one impact that the company cannot overlook when breakups of collaborations happen due to celebrity scandals, is that consumer attention may shift to other associations and alternative co-brand products.

6. Limitations

In order to widen the perspective of our research, it is also important to highlight its limitations.

The first limitation that we have faced is the fact that there is currently no extensive literature available on this specific topic. The breakup of brand collaborations and the impact on brand equity is a complex and relatively recent phenomenon that has only attracted attention in recent years. As a result, academic resources and empirical research focused on the effect of such ruptures on brand equity are still limited.

A second limitation of the study concerns the methodological approach used, which is based on qualitative techniques. Qualitative research offers insights and rich understanding of phenomena, but it has certain

inherent limitations. For example, the use of interviews may result in a limited selection of participants or material for analysis, which could affect the extent to which the results obtained are representative. Companies need a relatively large number of respondents to ensure the accuracy of the results of how consumers perceive a product. In addition, the results of qualitative research may be affected by the subjectivity of interviewees or interpreters.

The adoption of a single case study is also a limitation for the research; while a case study approach offers a unique opportunity to examine a particular event or phenomenon in detail, it might be interesting and useful to explore additional cases of collaboration breakups between fashion/sports brands and celebrities, in order to broaden understanding and generalize findings.

Moreover, the research sample is heterogenous in terms of nationalities, including Italians, Brazilians, Portuguese, Africans, French, and Germans. It might well prove more accurate to conduct the same research, subdividing the various nationalities, given that culture may substantially impact consumer perceptions and behaviors.

The same is true of the age range of the sample in this research; we only consider people from 18 to 35 because we believe it is this age group that most consumes the products in question, but people under 18 and over 35 could also use them and thus have an impact on the choices of companies developing co-brand products.

Finally, there is also the issue on the generalization of results; we do not believe that these can be extended to any collaboration in any industry.

Our research can, therefore, be a starting point for future research to fill in the gaps.

Appendix

Appendix 1



The first ever partnership between a high-end fashion label and a sportswear company: Y-3. A ground-breaking partnership blending two very different aesthetic systems. This delicate juggling effort yields giant cut pieces, necessary hoodies with a nod to Asian aesthetics, mix-and-match dresses between sportswear and haute couture, and jackets with liberal amounts of the Y-3 insignia and the three stripes.

Appendix 2



This partnership launches Gucci firmly into the world of urban wear, positioning it to compete with other fashion houses that have abandoned their own heritage designs in favor of a more urban aesthetic. The collaboration consists of 1970s-era stamps, dopey-vision caps, and a fusion of landmarks.

Appendix 3



Versace x H&M: Classic Versace symbols and elements, like as the Greek key and the daring cuts, are reimagined by Donatella Versace. Prince, one of the greatest musicians of all time and a style icon in his own right, gave it his blessing. Also, it was the first time H&M had collaborated with a high-end fashion house on home furnishings.

Balmain x H&M: In order to give his collection for H&M some star power, Olivier Rousteing, the creative director of Balmain, enlisted the aid of his supermodel friends Gigi Hadid, Kendall Jenner, and Joan Smalls. The popular commercial video featured the chic supermodels competing in a dramatic dance war in a futuristic subway run by Rousteing. They were clothed in metallic fabric, studded studs, and rigid designs.

Appendix 4



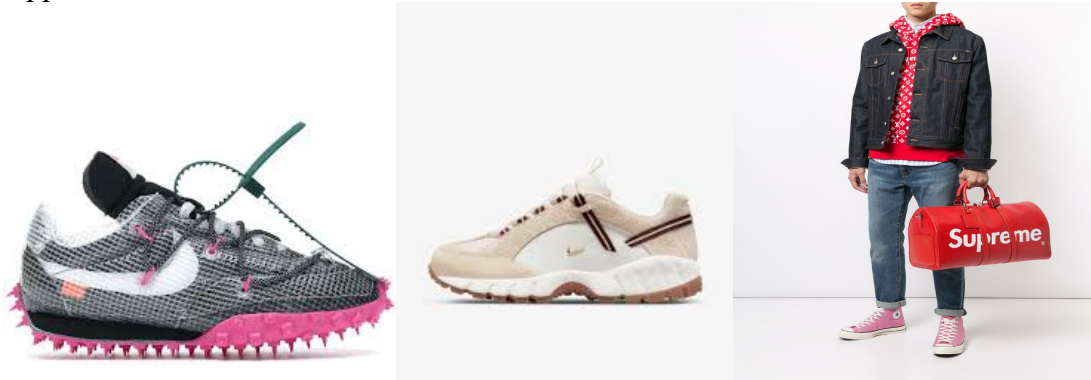
The 2006 relationship between the luxury brand and LG resulted in the development of two high-end smartphones that were released on the market in 2007 and 2008, respectively. Nowadays, the focus is on the key components of the smartphone industry, from software to user interface to design and packaging.

Appendix 5



Versace and Fendi, two Italian fashion and luxury brands, have revealed the outcome of their first-ever collaboration: a nod to femininity and friendship. For this unique range, the doppia F and Medusa combine their expertise and do not hesitate to mix their distinctive stylistic codes: the baroque Versace stamp and Medusa medallion are found combined with the Fendi monogramme. The outfits are enhanced by jewelry, shoes, bags, and sneakers since gold is the ideal hue.

Appendix 6



Nike and Off-White: In 2017 Virgil Abloh, the founder and CEO of Off-White, was responsible for designing ten famous Nike silhouettes, which were first disassembled. Abloh disassembled each of the ten pairs of shoes separately, rebuilt them with new designs, and reorganized their parts.

Nike x Jacquemus: The collection consists of 15 neutral-colored pieces, including the legendary Nike Air Humara vintage model from the end of the nineties with a little Swoosh. Notable also is the going to-a-pieghé that recalls Jacquemus' preferred tennis players.

L'heritage Louis Vuitton's exclusive heritage meets Supreme's Made in USA street modernism. Supreme's Made in USA street modernism meets Louis Vuitton's exclusivity. The accessories match Louis Vuitton's signature natural cuoio and are made of jacquard-woven camouflage fabric. And the others are made of Epi leather in shades of red and black with the Supreme emblem imprinted in relief, much like an adhesive sticker.

Appendix 7



Jordan 1 Retro High x Off-White Chicago

Appendix 8



Supreme Tonal Box Logo Tee

Appendix 9



Jordan 1, Yeezy 350, Air force 1.

Appendix 10

LUISS

Nova



YEEZY

BOOST

**The impact of fashion collaboration
break-down on consumer perception
and behavior: the case of Adidas and
Kanye West**

Pre-recruitment questionnaire

Target:

People that

- buy sneakers: people that buy sneakers that are product of a collaboration between two brands and are available for purchase either at retail price or resell price. The objective is to have a sample of people that have bought the Yeezy sneakers at least once for themselves
- are familiar with the brand Adidas and the brand Yeezy and the celebrity Kanye West
- are aware of the breakup between Adidas and Yeezy and are informed of the facts
- are international, follow trends and like exclusive sneakers; they are in the 18-35 age range

The pre recruitment questionnaire was conducted via Google Forms with the questions in English. It started with an explanation of how this questionnaire was to be used for research purposes in the sneakers market and that the questionnaire was to recruit consumers who met the necessary criteria to proceed to the interview stage of the study.

1. Have you ever bought a collaboration sneaker for yourself?

- Yes: continue the questionnaire
- No: end the questionnaire

2. Do you recognize any of the following sneaker brand collaborations? Select all that apply.

(Examples include Nike-Jordan, Adidas-Yeezy, Nike-Off-White, Nike-Supreme, Adidas-Balenciaga, Adidas-Prada, Adidas-Gucci)

- Recognize Adidas Yeezy and one of every other collaboration: continue the questionnaire
- Don't recognize the collaboration: end the questionnaire

3. Have you purchased any of the following sneakers for yourself? Select all that apply.

- Select Adidas Yeezy and something else: continue the questionnaire
- Select something else and not Yeezy: end the questionnaire

4. Do you know that Yeezy is Kanye West's brand?

Yes: continue the questionnaire

No: end the questionnaire

5. Do you know that on October 25th, 2022 the collaboration between Adidas and Yeezy came to an end?

- Yes: continue the questionnaire
- No: end the questionnaire

Overall objective with the questionnaire was for the person to be at least somewhat familiar with the Adidas-Yeezy collaboration.

6. Which nationality are you?

The interviewer could select from among various nationalities.

7. As mentioned previously, the next step would be to hold a possible interview. Would you like to give us your contact information for this purpose?

- Yes: present option to give email and or phone number
- No: end the questionnaire

Thank you for your participation in this questionnaire!

Appendix 11

LUISS

NVA



YEEZY

BOOST

**The impact of fashion collaboration
break-down on consumer perception
and behavior: the case of Adidas and
Kanye West**

*Interview guide
(English)*

Warm-up

Hello! Thank you for meeting with me, my name is Federica Savarese, and I am a Nova SBE and Luiss student that is conducting research on fashion collaboration. This interview will take approximately 45min to 1h30 and will be conducted as an in-depth interview. This means that I will ask you only an initial question and, from then on, you are free to tell me anything that comes to your mind on the topic. In the end, I will simply ask you a few explorative and socio-demographic questions.

I would like to underline that there are no right or wrong answers and opinions in this interview, your thoughts are what truly matter so please feel free to speak completely at ease.

If it is all right with you, I would like to record this interview in order to have access to the information at a later stage, when the data will be analyzed, but everything you say will be kept anonymous and confidential.

Are there any questions you would like to ask before we start the interview? [If/when there are no questions to clarify, we will proceed to the interview]

We would like to inform you that we will focus on the market of sneakers born of collaboration between a brand and a celebrity.

Show picture of sneakers from collaboration





1. Can you kindly tell us which ones you recognize and which ones you bought for yourself?
2. What is your opinion about Adidas Yeezy sneakers?
3. What was your opinion about Adidas Yeezy sneakers before the breakup and what is your opinion now after the breakup?
4. What is your opinion on (other collaboration they mention before that they know or have purchased)?

Possible topics to address

- Tangible and intangible characteristics of Yeezy
- Product perceptions
- Price perception
- Distribution channel perception
- Feeling of owning the item
- Context connection
- Relationship with the brand
- Brand loyalty
- Brand image

Projective technique

1. If Adidas were a person what kind of person do you think it would be and why?
2. If Adidas Yeezy were a person what kind of person do you think it would be and why?
3. If (collaborations that they mentioned themselves) were a person what kind of person do you think it would be and why?

How would you feel about the opportunity to own Adidas-Yeezy as they are but with only the Adidas name?

Show picture

Socio-demographic information

Thank you for your answers. To conclude, I would now like to ask you a few socio- demographic questions for statistical purposes:

- Age
- Gender
- Level of Education
- Occupation
- Number of people in the household

Wrap-up

Thank you so much once again for your helpfulness and participation; the information we collected will be very useful for our research. Have a great day/night!

References

- Aaker, D. (1996), *Building Strong Brands*, Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, London.
- Aggarwal, P., Jun, S. Y., & Huh, J. H. (2011), "Scarcity messages: A consumer competition perspective", *Journal of Advertising*.
- Ahn, S., Kim, H. and Forney, J.A. (2010), "Fashion collaboration or collision? Examining the match-up effect in co-marketing alliances", *Journal of Fashion Marketing & Management*.
- Alfonso Segura, 2017, capsule collection in fashion, the fashion retail, <https://fashionretail.blog/2017/09/12/collaborations-in-fashion-capsule-collection/>
- Arsel, Z., 2017, Asking Questions with Reflexive Focus: A Tutorial on Designing and Conducting Interviews, *Journal of Consumer Research*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucx096>
- Athens, Greece (2010), "Market-facing strategic alliances in the fashion sector".
- Baccelloni, A., Giambarresi, A., & Mazzù, M. F., 2021, Effects on consumers' subjective understanding and liking of front-of-pack nutrition labels: a study on Slovenian and Dutch consumers. *Foods*, 10(12), 2958.
- Balachander, S., & Stock, A. (2009), "Limited edition products: When and when not to offer them", *Marketing Science*.
- Besharat, A., and R. Langan, 2014, Towards the formation of consensus in the domain of co-branding: Current findings and future priorities, *Journal of Brand Management*.
- Bethan Alexander Graduate School, London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London, London, UK, and Luis Ortega Contreras London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London, London, UK (2016), "Inter-industry creative collaborations incorporating luxury fashion brands".
- Bin Shena, Tsan-Ming Choib, Pui-Sze Chowc (2017), Brand loyalties in designer luxury and fast fashion co-branding alliances, *Journal of Business Research*.
- Blackett, T. and Boad, B. (1999), "Co-Branding: The Science of Alliance", Macmillan Press Ltd, London.
- Blackett, T., & Russell, N., 1999, What is Co-Branding? In *Co-Branding: The Science of Alliance*, New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.
- Brand Collaborations Will Be Bigger Than Ever in 2022, RETHINK Retail. <https://rethink.industries/article/brand-collaborations-will-be-bigger-than-ever-in-2022/>
- Breckenfeld, D. (2009), "The Cool Factor: Building Your Brand's Image Through Partnership Marketing", John Wiley & Sons, Inc, Hoboken, NJ.
- Burgess, W, *Hip-Hop Sneaker Collaborations*, 2020.
- Chae H., Kim S., Lee J., Park K., (2019) Impact of product characteristics of limited-edition shoes on perceived value, brand trust, and purchase intention; focused on the scarcity message frequency, *Journal of Business Research*.
- Choi, J. W. J., & Kim, M., 2019, Sneakerhead brand community netnography: An exploratory research, *Fashion, Style & Popular Culture*.
- Cobb-Walgren, C. J., Ruble, C. A., & Donthu, N., 1995, Brand equity, brand preference, and purchase intent, Journal of Advertising*,
- Creswell, J.W., 2007, *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Darby, M. (2006), "Alliance Brand: Fulfilling the Promise of Partnering", John Wiley & Sons Inc, Hoboken, NJ.
- Denny, The sneaker – marketplace icon. *Consumption Markets & Culture* (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2020.1741357>
- Diana Seno, Bryan A. Lukas, 2005, The equity effect of product endorsement by celebrities.

- Dior fires Galliano after racist comments incident and scandalous video released, fashion network 2011. <https://it.fashionnetwork.com/news/dior-licenzia-galliano-dopo-l-episodio-dei-commenti-razzisti-e-la-diffusione-di-un-video-scandalo.156191.html>
- Dior stands by Johnny Depp inking new multi-year seven-figure deal, marketing interactive 2022. <https://www.marketing-interactive.com/dior-stands-by-johnny-depp-inking-new-multi-year-seven-figure-deal>
- Dorozala, N. and Kohlbrenner, A. (2008), "Co-Branding as a Tool for Strategic Brand Activation – How to Find the Ideal Partner", An Explanatory Case Study in the Fashion and Design Sector, School of Economics and Management Lund University, Lund.
- Eom, K. H., & Choi, Y. M. (2012). A case study on type of collaboration in fashion brand. Journal of Korea Digital Design Council.
- Feldwick, P. (2002), "What is Brand Equity Anyway?", World Advertising Research Center, Henley.
- Friedman, V., 2018, Kanye West Finally Gets His Fashion Right, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/01/fashion/kanye-west-yeezy-season-6-photos.html>
- Galletta, A., 2013, Mastering the semi-structured interview and beyond: From research design to analysis and publication. New York: NYU Press.
- Gammoh, B. and Voss, K. (2011), "Brand alliance research: in search of a new perspective and directions for future research", Journal of Marketing Development and Competitiveness.
- Giorgino, F., & Mazzù, M. F., 2018, BrandTelling. Egea.
- Gobé, M. (2001), Emotional Branding, Allworth Press, New York, NY.
- Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L., 2006, How Many Interviews Are Enough? Field Methods, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822x05279903>
- Helmig, B., Huber, J. A., & Leeftang, P. S. H., 2008, Co-branding: The State of the Art. Schmalenbach Business Review. <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf03396775>
- Isaiah Poritz and Chris Dolmetsch, 2022, Ye-Adidas Divorce Muddles Ownership of Yeezy Brand, Designs, business of fashion.
- Isaiah Poritz and Chris Dolmetsch, Ye-Adidas Divorce Muddles Ownership of Yeezy Brand, Designs, 2022, <https://www.bnnbloomberg.ca/ye-adidas-divorce-muddles-ownership-of-yeezy-brand-designs-1.1837624>
- James, D.O. (2006), "Extension to alliance: Aaker and Keller's model revisited", Journal of Product & Brand Management.
- Jang (2015), Scarcity message effects on consumption behavior, Psychology and Marketing.
- Jang, Eun-Young (2006), "An Analysis on Cases of Fashion Collaboration Strategy" Journal of Fashion Business.
- Janghorban, R., Roudsari, R. L., & Taghipour, A., 2014, Skype interviewing: The new generation of online synchronous interview in qualitative research. International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being, <https://doi.org/10.3402/qhw.v9.24152>
- Jason Brandan, 2013, "Consumer Behavior & Loyalty Toward Endorsement Livestrong and the Lance Armstrong Scandal: An Analysis of Consumer Behavior & Loyalty".
- Jaywant Singh et al., 2020, 'Corporate image at stake': The impact of crises and response strategies on consumer perceptions of corporate brand alliances, Journal of Business Research.
- Jaywant Singha, Benedetta Crisafullib, La Toya Quaminac (2020) 'Corporate image at stake': The impact of crises and response strategies on consumer perceptions of corporate brand alliances, journal of Business Research.
- Jemma Oeppen & Ahmad Jamal (2014), Collaborating for success: managerial perspectives on co-branding strategies in the fashion industry, Journal of Marketing Management.

- John-Steiner, V., Moran, S. and Seddon, F. (2004), in Miell, D. and Littleton, K. (Eds), "Collaborative Creativity: Contemporary Perspectives", Free Association Books, London.
- Judit H. Washburn et al., 2004, Brand alliances and customer base brand equity effects.
- Kaitlin M. Davis, 2017, Social Media, Celebrity Endorsers and Effect on Purchasing Intentions of Young Adults.
- Keel, A., and R. Natarajan, 2012, Celebrity endorsements and beyond: New avenues for celebrity branding, *Psychology & Marketing*.
- Keller, K. L., 1993, Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity, *Journal of Marketing*.
- Keller, K.L. (2003), *Strategic Brand Management: International Edition, Building, Measuring, and Branding Brand Equity*, Pearson Education Ltd, Harlow.
- Kim, M. J., & Park, E. K. (2008). A case study of collaboration with designer and brand as trading up, *Journal of the Korean Society of Fashion Design*.
- Kitson, R. (2018), A Psychologist's Perspective on Kanye West, <http://www.shrinktank.com/psychologists-perspective-kanye-west/>
- Kyulim Kim, Eunju Ko, Mi-ah Lee, Pekka Mattila & Kyung Hoon Kim (2014), Fashion collaboration effects on consumer response and customer equity in global luxury and SPA brand marketing, *Journal of Global Scholars of Marketing Science*.
- Lanseng, E.J. and Olsen, L.E. (2012), "Brand alliances: the role of brand concept consistency", *European Journal of Marketing*.
- Liuying He and Yaxuan Ran, 2015, The Correlation of Brand Equity and Crisis: A Review and Directions for Future Research.
- Lorange, P. and Roos, J. (1993), *Strategic Alliances: Formation, Implementation and Evolution*, Blackwell, Cambridge, MA. *Luxury Tribune* by Morgane Nyfeler, 2022.
- Mazzù, M. F., & Perrey, J., 2011, Power Brands: creare, portare al successo e gestire i propri brand.
- Mazzù, M. F., Baccelloni, A., & Finistauri, P., 2022, Uncovering the Effect of European Policy-Making Initiatives in Addressing Nutrition-Related Issues: A Systematic Literature Review and Bibliometric Analysis on Front-of-Pack Labels. *Nutrients*, 14(16), 3423.
- Mazzù, M. F., Baccelloni, A., Romani, S., & Andria, A., 2022, The role of trust and algorithms in consumers' front-of-pack labels acceptance: a cross-country investigation. *European Journal of Marketing*, (ahead-of-print).
- Mazzù, M. F., Marozzo, V., Baccelloni, A., & de'Pompeis, F., 2021, Measuring the Effect of Blockchain Extrinsic Cues on Consumers' Perceived Flavor and Healthiness: A Cross-Country Analysis. *Foods*, 10(6), 1413.
- Mazzù, M. F., Romani, S., Baccelloni, A., & Gambicorti, A., 2021, A cross-country experimental study on consumers' subjective understanding and liking on front-of-pack nutrition labels. *International Journal of Food Sciences and Nutrition*, 72(6), 833-847.
- Mazzù, M. F., Romani, S., Baccelloni, A., & Lavini, L., 2022, Introducing the Front-of-Pack Acceptance Model: The role of usefulness and ease of use in European consumers' acceptance of Front-of-Pack Labels. *International Journal of Food Sciences and Nutrition*, 73(3), 378-395.
- McCormick, K., 2016, Celebrity Endorsements: Influence of a product-endorser match on Millennials attitudes and purchase intentions, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*.
- McCracken, G., 1998, Who is the celebrity endorser? Cultural foundations of the endorsement process. *Journal of Consumer Research*.
- Mittone, L. and Savadori, L. (2009), "The scarcity bias", *Applied Psychology*.
- Motion, J., Leitch, S., & Brodie, R. J., 2003, Equity in corporate co-branding: The case of Adidas and the All Blacks, *European Journal of Marketing*.

- Nike break the contract with Armstrong, fashion magazine 2012, access on march 2023. <https://www.fashionmagazine.it/business/Divorzi-Nike-rompe-il-contratto-con-Lance-Armstrong--34489>
- Nike, Virgil Abloh and Nike Announce New Design Project “The Ten”. Nike News, (2017). Retrieved 5 March 2022, from <https://news.nike.com/news/virgil-abloh-nike-the-10>
- Okonkwo, U. (2007), *Luxury Fashion Branding: Trends, Tactics, Techniques*, St Martin’s Press LLC, New York, NY.
- Park, C. Whan, Sung Youl Jun, and Allan D. Shocker, 1996, Composite Branding Alliances: An Investigation of Extension and Feedback Effects, *Journal of Marketing Research*.
- Park, C.W., Jun, S.Y. and Shocker, A.D. (1996), “Composite branding alliances: an investigation of extension and feedback effects”, *Journal of Marketing Research*.
- Parker, R. S., Simmers, C. S., & Schaefer, A. D., 2014, An exploratory study: Gen Y males and their attitudes toward fashion. *Academy of Marketing Studies Journal*.
- Parment, A., 2013, Generation Y vs. Baby Boomers: Shopping behavior, buyer involvement and implications for retailing, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*.
- Pepsi pulls Kendall Jenner ad ridiculed for co-opting protest movements, the guardian 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2017/apr/05/pepsi-kendall-jenner-pepsi-apology-ad-protest>
- Pine, J. and Gilmore, J. (2011), *The Experience Economy*. Revised Edition, Harvard Business School Publishing, Boston, MA.
- Prada closes with Zheng Shuang, involved in the “surrogacy scandal, 2021. <https://www.fashionmagazine.it/community/latrice-nel-mirino-dei-social-prada-chiude-con-zheng-shuang-coinvolta-nello-scandalo-della-maternit-surrogata-106691>
- Rao, A. R., & Ruekert, R. W., 1994, Brand alliances as signals of product quality, *Sloan Management Review*.
- Rao, A. R., Qu, L., & Ruekert, R. W., 1999, Signaling unobservable product quality through a brand ally, *Journal of Marketing Research*.
- Robert K. Yin, 2009, *Case study research : design and methods*.
- Rogers, E., 1995, *Diffusions of Innovations* (4th ed.). New York, NY: The Free Press.
- Seno, D., and B.A. Lukas., 2007, The equity effect of product endorsement by celebrities: A conceptual framework from a co-branding perspective, *European Journal of Marketing*.
- Shah, A.K., Shafir, E. and Mullainathan, S. (2015), “Scarcity frames value”, *Psychological Science*.
- Shan, J., Lu, H., & Cui, A. P., 2022, 1 + 1 > 2? Is co-branding an effective way to improve brand masstige? *Journal of Business Research*, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.01.058>
- Shiyun Tian, Weiting Tao, Cheng Hong & Wan-Hsiu Sunny Tsai, 2022, Meaning transfer in celebrity endorsement and co-branding: meaning valence, association type, and brand awareness, *International Journal of Advertising*.
- Shoham, A., & Ruvio, A., 2008, Opinion leaders and followers: A replication and extension. *Psychology & Marketing*.
- Simonin, B. L., & Ruth, J. A., 1998, Is a company known by the company it keeps? Assessing the spillover effects of brand alliances on consumer brand attitudes, *Journal of marketing research*.
- Skowronski John J., and Carlston Donald E., 1987, “Social Judgment and Social Memory: The Role of Cue Diagnosticity in Negativity, Positivity, and Extremity Biases,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.
- Snyder, C. R., & Fromkin, H. L. (1980). *Uniqueness: The human pursuit of difference*. New York: Plenum Press.

- Spry, A., Pappu, R. & Cornwell, T.B., 2011, "Celebrity endorsement, brand credibility and brand equity", *European Journal of Marketing*.
- Stats on young shoppers & limited-edition products 2022 Ypulse Business. <https://www.ypulse.com/article/2022/03/10/3-stats-on-young-shoppers-limited-edition-products/>
- Stephen M. Wigley School of Art, Design and Architecture, Huddersfield University, Huddersfield, UK, and Aikaterini-Konstantina Provelengiou.
- Stock, A., & Balachander, S. (2005), The making of a "Hot Product": A signaling explanation of marketers' scarcity strategy, *Management Science*.
- StockX Snapshot: The State of Resale 2019-2020. <https://stockx.com/about/sx-market-insights/stockx-snapshot-the-state-of-resale-2021/>
- StockX. (z.d.), Jordan 1 Retro High Off-White Chicago, 2022, van <https://stockx.com/air-jordan-1-retro-high-off-white-chicago>
- Supreme community, Sellout times 16th February 2023 EU, <https://www.supremecommunity.com/>
- Suri, H., 2011, Purposeful sampling in qualitative research synthesis, *Qualitative Research Journal*.
- Swait, J., Erdem, T., Louviere, J., & Dubelaar, C., 1993, The equalization price: A measure of consumer-perceived brand equity, *International Journal of Research in Marketing*.
- The Weeknd ends collaboration with H&M after "racist" online image, fashion network, 2018. <https://in.fashionnetwork.com/news/The-weeknd-ends-collaboration-with-h-m-after-racist-online-image.933952.html>
- Tijn Pulles, 2022, Creating the bandwagon effect using a co-branding masstige strategy.
- Till, B. D., & Busler, M. (2000). The Match-Up Hypothesis: Physical Attractiveness, Expertise, and the Role of Fit on Brand Attitude, Purchase Intent and Brand Beliefs, *Journal of Advertising*.
- Tim Loh, Aaron Kirchfeld and Eyk Henning, 2022, Adidas to End Kanye West Partnership After Controversies, <https://www.businessoffashion.com/news/retail/adidas-to-end-kanye-west-partnership-after-controversies/>
- Todeva, E. and Knoke, D. (2005), "Strategic alliances and models of collaboration", *Management Decision*.
- Van Osselaer, S., & Alba, J. W., 2000, Consumer learning and brand equity, *Journal of Consumer Research*.
- Visual Objective, 2021. <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/71-of-consumers-enjoy-co-branding-partnerships-encouraging-more-companies-to-market-products-together-301361260.html#:~:text=Visual%20Objects%20finds%20that%2071,for%20supporting%20co%2Dbranding%20initiatives.>
- Vuk, J. (2016), The Kanye West konundrum. *Eureka Street*, <https://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=920864202501572;res=IELAPA;subject=Asian resources>.
- Wade, A. (2016), Kanye West: The Brand, http://trace.tennessee.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2940&context=utk_chanhonoproj
- Wang, S.W., and A.C. Scheinbaum, 2018, Enhancing Brand credibility via celebrity endorsement: Trustworthiness trumps attractiveness and expertise, *Journal of Advertising Research*.
- Washburn, J. H., Till, B. D., & Priluck, R., 2000, Co-branding: brand equity and trial effects, *Journal of Consumer Marketing*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/07363760010357796>
- Washburn, J., Till, B. and Priluck, R. (2000), "Co-branding: brand equity and trial effects", *Journal of Consumer Marketing*.
- Washburn, J.H., B.D. Till, and R. Priluck., 2004, Brand alliance and customer-based Brand-equity effects, *Psychology and Marketing*.
- Waters, K., 1997, Dual and extension branding: Using research to guide design decisions and branding strategy, *Design Management Journal*.

Wigley, S.M. and Provelengiou, A.-K. (2011), "Market-facing strategic alliances in the fashion sector", *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal*.

Williams, M. (2007), LG unwraps iPhone-like Prada cellphone, *Inforworld*.

Wood, L. (2000), "Brands and brand equity: definition and management", *Journal of Management Decision*.

Xiaohui Shi, Feng Li, Pattarin Chumnumpan, 2020, "The use of product scarcity in marketing".

Yang, H. J., Kim, S. S., Kim, Y. Y., Kim, T. E., Bae, Y. J., Chan, C., & Yang, H. S. (2012). The influences of shopping orientation on selection criteria, attitudes, and preference of collaborated fashion products. *Journal of the Korean Society for Clothing Industry*.

Zhang, Y. and Juhlin, O. (2011), "Fashion as system or action net in 'Fashion in All Things' a case in color design of mobile phones", Vinn Excellence Center, Stockholm.

Zion Market Research, Footwear Market - by Product (Athletic and Non-Athletic), by Material (Rubber, Leather and Plastic), by End User (Men, Women and Kids), and by Distribution Channel (Online Channel, Supermarkets and Hypermarkets, Independent Retail Stores, and Others): Global Industry Perspective, Comprehensive Analysis and Forecast, 2020 – 2026, 2018. Retrieved 5 March 2022, from <https://www.zionmarketresearch.com/report/footwear-market>

Executive summary

1. Introduction

A successful musician and businessman, Kanye West (also named Ye) entered the fashion industry with a bold, cutting-edge idea. In 2013, he collaborated with Adidas, a leading sportswear company, to develop the Yeezy footwear and apparel collection. Thanks to this successful collaboration, Yeezy sneakers have become a must-have among fashionistas and sneakerheads worldwide. Adidas benefited from Kanye's ability to produce value in a somewhat unorthodox manner within the conventional fashion system. But Kanye's unexpected actions forced Adidas to end the partnership. In fact, in October (2022) Adidas officially ended its collaboration with Kanye West after the rapper shared offensive and anti-Semitic comments on social media and sparked debate by showing up at a fashion event in Paris wearing a "White Lives Matter" T-shirt in opposition to the anti-racist "Black Lives Matter" movement. (Tim Loh et al., 2022)

Kanye grants Adidas a license to use his trademarks and intellectual property, Yeezy and YZY, on shoes and accessories. Adidas manufactures and designs, which explains why it is mentioned in all design patents. Adidas claimed, therefore, ownership of "design rights to existing products" and all previous and future footwear colorations. (Isaiah Poritz and Chris Dolmetsch 2022)

After the breakup, Adidas planned to start a new approach to maintain the Yeezy product line. To distance the brand from Kanye West, the company plans to rename the line simply "Adidas." With this strategy, essential questions are raised about the impact that the end of a partnership between a fashion/sports brand and a celebrity can have on product and brand equity. Adidas' future action has not yet been determined, but we do know that Adidas has many Yeezy models in stock and needs to decide what to do with them.

This fascinating case involving the dissolution of the partnership between Adidas and Kanye West has brought attention to the fragility of the collaboration between fashion brands and celebrities. Brand equity is a company's market value and reputation and ability to influence consumers' purchase decisions. Therefore, this thesis aims to examine the effects of the end of a collaboration on the actual product and brand equity and how the absence of the cool factor affects the value itself. The value of Adidas Yeezy is probably related to the brand itself, which is the union of two brands and not to the two components taken individually. It will seek to understand how it affects brand image, consumer perception, and product success in the marketplace. For the research, we conducted qualitative analysis and used the case of Adidas and Kanye West to address our topic. First, we will see a review of the literature on collaboration between fashion brands and celebrities and branding concepts such as brand equity. Second will present the methodology of this thesis, while after we will present the research results and discuss its main implications.

Breakups between a fashion brand and a celebrity have been much less widely studied, and this is what we want to research, using the case of Kanye West and Adidas to explore the topic. Our contribution has potential considering rapidly changing consumer behavior and the evolving business environment. Therefore, the

objective of our thesis is to expand the literature related to the influence of customer brand equity and collaboration brought to an abrupt end as a result of scandal.

2. Literature review

Building brand equity leveraging secondary association

Brand equity refers to the value a brand adds to a product or service beyond its physical attributes; the brand's value and strength come from consumers' perceptions and experiences. It encompasses a brand's reputation, recognition, and overall perception in the market and involves creating a positive brand image that resonates with consumers and encourages brand loyalty. One effective way to build brand equity is through secondary associations, including collaborating with another brand or an organization that shares similar values and brand image (Keller, 2020). Building brand equity through collaboration can, therefore, be an excellent strategy for expanding one's brand influence in the market. However, to achieve positive results, it is essential to follow a number of crucial steps: identify a suitable partner, define the collaboration, develop the collaboration, launch the collaboration and measure the impact (Jemma Oeppen, 2014; Ahmad Jamal, 2014).

Types of collaboration

Before embarking on a collaboration, it is crucial to comprehend what type of partnership best suits the brand's goals, each with unique characteristics and specific purposes.

- Co-product development: This is the creation of a new product with a distinctive appeal through hybridization and promotion impact with the collaboration between the business and the designer. These new products are sold in limited quantities for a brief time in order to promote sales and generate exposure (Jang, Eun-Young 2006).
- Co-branding: A collaboration between two or more well-known businesses where all member brands' names are maintained (Blackett and Boad, 1999, Gammoh and Voss, 2011).
- Licensing: A kind of cooperation wherein a third party is permitted to use intellectual property that a given business owns or controls (Darby, 2006 and Simon).
- Celebrity endorsement: The use of famous, well-respected people to promote goods is a common practice with a lengthy marketing history. The theory behind this strategy is that a famous person can draw attention to a brand and influence consumer impressions of the brand based on assumptions drawn from what is known about the celebrity (Keller, 2019).

Motives for alliances in the fashion industry

The motivations for entering into a collaboration are mainly four:

- Strategic: to boost growth and obtain an edge over competitors.
- Financial: to distribute risk and share investments.
- Technological: gain access to resources and talents that are complementary.
- Managerial: to profit from a straightforward structure and supply chain and to reach the market more swiftly.

It is interesting to note that Stephen M. Wigley's study suggested reasons specific to the fashion industry which can be added to the strategic reasons for cooperation. They can be seen in both "down-stream" customer-facing competencies (such as brand creation and management, marketing communication and PR, retail, and sales channel presentation) as well as "up-stream," back-of-house competencies (such as fashion product design, fashion product development, responsive manufacturing).

Collaborations in fashion industry and sneakers market

Visual Objective finds that 71% of consumers enjoy co-branded partnerships (Visual Objective 2021). To this extent, the fashion industry has recognized collaboration as a business keyword for the twenty-first century. Zhang and Juhlin (2011) infer that fashion now reshapes people's perceptions about specific fashion players and name brands due to the consistent alliance between fashion and marketing. Especially in a world that needs to reinvent itself every six months, fashion firms today must look for ground-breaking collaborative concepts that astound consumers. Indeed, in the fashion industry, "collaboration" refers to creating high added value and sharing customer awareness and image with business partners. Businesses have tried to set themselves apart from rivals by being distinctive through partnerships. For their products to be chosen by consumers, brands must offer those consumers intangible values such as distinction, exclusivity, and rarity. The word "fashion partnership" is widely used in writing to describe alliances aimed at acquiring immaterial values, such as brand awareness or brand image (Yang et al., 2012). To this extent, fashion brands must support sensitivity marketing tactics to deliver these intangible values. Usually, collaborations in the fashion industry are co-branding strategies in which two brands simultaneously identify the same item; one of these two brands could be a celebrity. Celebrities are human brands and, nowadays, more and more brands, both luxury and streetwear, are increasing their collaboration with them. This phenomenon is an interesting one to focus on because combining a designer brand with a mass-market brand like Nike or Adidas has never been more common. Such brand pairings increase the product's symbolic and status values (Desmichel et al., 2020). The symbolic values of the two brands interact and strengthen one another. Moreover, the footwear market was estimated to be worth 275 billion dollars in 2019 and is set to increase to 375 billion dollars in 2026, according to Zion Market Research (2018).

Collaborations with celebrities

Celebrity endorsers enhance brand liking by being appealing, reliable, and likable sources of brand information (Wang & Scheinbaum, 2018). They possess symbolic qualities from their public personas, which are transferred to the product through marketing communications. The associative learning theory explains that viewers automatically associate the brand and the endorser, creating a link between them in memory. Fashion brands collaborate with celebrities through various approaches, such as taglines, capsule collections, campaigns, or co-branded products. Capsule collections are limited-edition representations of a designer's vision, offering unique and exclusive designs that attract customers. Collaboration helps brands establish a trendy image and attract consumers, including Millennials. Jointly developing a co-branded product allows both parties to share and transfer their strengths, increasing the product's overall equity. Co-branding partnerships involve deeper involvement from celebrities, explicitly combining the brand and celebrity identities. Positive representation by a celebrity enhances consumer perceptions of the brand, but negative associations can lead to changed perceptions.

Fashion collaborations benefits and risks

The objective of fashion collaborations is to bring together the unique strengths of each party to create a new and exciting product that appeals to consumers. While fashion collaborations can have several advantages, they also have some disadvantages worth considering. Brand values and the image it represents must align with those of the selected partner. Working with a partner who shares different values and goals could result in a compromised brand image, loss of credibility and reputation, and consumer dissatisfaction. Working with other designers and brands can lead to creative differences and disagreements over design choices, vision and strategy. These differences can be challenging to navigate and can lead to a product that does not meet the expectations of either party (Dorozala, 2008; Kohlbrenner, 2008). Collaboration with a partner with a low status and image fit, brand value is closely linked to the image of the selected partner. A partnership with a partner with low status and image may hurt brand perception and consumer preferences. This can affect consumers' purchase decisions and brand perception (James, 2006). There could also be a risk of a permanent damage done to the existing brand equity of the business due to failure of the partnership. In some cases, brand collaboration may result in reduced brand equity and loss of value. If the collaboration fails, the brand's image may be damaged and its reputation impaired. In addition, the company's brand equity can be damaged in the long run, reducing its ability to compete with other brands (Darby, 2006).

Scarcity and limited edition

One of the critical outcomes of fashion collaborations is limited edition products created by combining the collaborators' unique styles, skills, and perspectives. This concept aims to create a rare, exclusive, and highly desirable product for the target audience. The principle behind the limited-edition strategy is that of scarcity aimed at creating psychological mechanisms in the minds of consumers that drive them to purchase products urgently since they are scarce. Offerings being scarce become more desirable to consumers and create a sense

of exclusivity, which is the fundamental principle behind offering LE products. Previous research has shown that scarcity messages make consumers perceive LE products as special, unique, and valuable. The limited-edition strategy positively impacts product evaluation (Jang et al., 2015). Almost half of 13- 39-year-olds who purchased a particular edition/limited-release item did so because it looked cool, and 31% would pay more for it (Ypulse business 2022). Consumers intend to stand out by wearing rare, unique items owned by only a few (Snyder, 1977; Fromkin, 1977). For limited-time scarcity (LTS) messages, we refer to a time frame during which brands push customers to buy. In contrast, only a few items with limited-quantity scarcity (LQS) are created and are the only ones that can be purchased, offering only a minimal number of buyers the chance to buy the good. Consumers perceive products as more unique and valuable when they are distributed under the LQS condition than when they are distributed under the LTS condition, according to a study by Aggarwal et al. (2011). Previously, LE was only utilized by fashion and luxury firms such as high fashion footwear Prada (Stock, 2005; Balachander, 2005), but today we can see its adoption in the streetwear industry, particularly in the sneakers market.

Retail and resell market

Limited edition products are initially sold through a limited release in certain outlets, online, or in physical stores. These products have a unique design that differentiates them from the company's standard products. In addition, the limited availability of these products means that consumers may feel privileged to purchase them because they have access to something that not everyone can have. However, not all consumers can purchase these products during the release. Due to high demand and limited availability, many products sell out quickly, often within minutes or even seconds. The resale market, where things are sold after the release date at a significant markup, is the only alternative for individuals who cannot buy at the time of release. Reselling is particularly common for sneakers, mostly athletic shoes from brands like Adidas or Nike and other clothing items from brands like Supreme. The resale market is more highly developed for the sneaker category than for other apparel, and 71% of sneaker transactions occur on StockX, which is an online shopping platform based on a bidding-to- buy model. The secondary market generated more than \$6 billion in 2020 and is projected to be 15-25 % of the primary market in 2025; the top three models of sneakers sold by market share are Jordan 1 with 23% market share, Yeezy 350 with 18% and Air Force 1 with 6% (Appendix 9) (StockX Snapshot: The State of Resale 2019-2020).

CBBE and fashion collaboration

As said before collaboration are way to build brand equity and so fashion collaboration can significantly impact customer base brand equity by creating unique and memorable customer experiences. CBBE, or customer-based brand equity, is a marketing concept that measures a brand's value based on its customers' perceptions and attitudes. The definition of brand equity is "the differential effect that the brand knowledge has on consumer response to the marketing of the brand" (Keller, 2003). According to Keller, brand equity is

the value the brand adds to the product and services. Essentially the power of the brand is what customers have seen, read, heard, thought, and felt about the brand over time, namely what is in the heart and mind of the customers. Considering this model, brand knowledge can be considered as a combination of two-components: brand awareness and brand image. Brand awareness is the node's power in customer's mind and is composed by brand recognition, that is consumer's capacity to corroborate prior exposure given an input, and brand recall that is customer's capacity to recall brand from memory when given a product category. Brand image refers to how people interpret all signals coming from the goods, services, and communications the brand covers. In Keller's theory, the first step to creating brand equity is to stabilize a sufficient level of brand awareness; marketers can then focus on building a brand image through marketing activities that connect powerful and unique associations to the brand in the mind of the consumer. Brand associations refer to both brand attributes, that are the elements that characterize a product, and brand benefits, that are the values and the meaning that the consumers give to the products.

Even though international management literature acknowledges many positive outcomes for companies engaged in such alliances, such as higher return on equity, better return on investment, and higher success rates (Todeva & Knoke, 2005; Keller, 2003; Aaker, 1996; Darby, 2006; Gammoh & Voss, 2011), fashion brands are susceptible to potential detrimental consumer-based brand equity effects, and it is interesting to look at a number of case studies and the relative reaction of companies to adverse events within collaborations. For example, the collaboration between Nike and Armstrong, H&M and the Weeknd, Dior and Jonny Depp, and Prada and Zheng Shuang. With regard to the former Nike had had a sponsorship contract with Armstrong since 1996, which led to the creation of an entire line of Nike-branded running shoes and clothing featuring the cyclist's logo. Armstrong, a seven-time Tour de France winner, was accused of using doping substances and participating in a vast sports fraud scheme. Nike decided to disassociate itself from the relationship when the reputation was compromised. Nike dealt with the situation decisively, issuing a public statement condemning Armstrong's actions and announcing the facts. In addition, Nike decided to drop the line of products bearing Armstrong's name. The breakup of the partnership between Nike and Armstrong also influenced consumer behavior negatively. Many expressed disappointments and some even decided to stop buying endorsed products. A star athlete's endorsement of a brand or product can be detrimental and potentially harm it during a scandal or period of bad press. That unfavorable brand exposure has the power to damage the brand and drive people away. (Jason Brandan, 2013)

Crisis effects on brand equity

The viewpoint and behavioral intentions of consumers are delicate; certain unforeseen and serious external events could have an impact on them together with other considerations. The academy largely agrees that crises damage brand equity. According to Dawar and Lei, both the correlation between the crisis itself and brand associations as well as the intensity of the crisis have an effect on how customers perceive the brand,

which in turn affects brand equity. In other words, brand equity will suffer more damage from a crisis the more closely related it is to a brand association. The more expansive the vision, the more harm to brand equity it will cause. Academics typically concur that the original cause of the influence is the breach of consumers' expectations since crises reduces brand equity. Therefore, the impact of the crisis on brand equity is minimal as long as consumers' expectations are not disappointed. According to Dawar and Pillutla, businesses will lose less brand equity no matter what actions they take as long as consumers continue to have a high level of trust in their products. (Liuying He and Yaxuan Ran, 2015)

3. *Methodology*

To address our thesis topic, we decided to employ a case study research approach; this methodology perfectly applies a qualitative research approach because, in this work, we wanted to understand a complex phenomenon while keeping the holistic and significant characteristics of real-life experiences. We attempt to answer the how- and why questions, which are more explicative for which case studies are more suitable as the preferred research strategy. To develop our research, we use the method proposed by Yin for the case study. This consists of six steps: plan, design, prepare, collect, analyze, and share.

The first step explains the research questions related to the case. Our issue is to understand what the impact on Adidas-Yeezy brand equity after the breakup of the collaboration between Adidas and Kanye West would be. In other words, the aim is to explore how the absence of the cool factor "Ye" impacts customer perception and behavior. Hence, the question can be briefly stated as follows: "How does fashion collaboration breakup impact customer perception and behavior?".

The following is the main hypothesis:

H1: The dissolution of the Adidas and Kanye West partnership negatively affects the co-brand's product equity and consumer base.

Additional Hypotheses:

H2: The dissolution of the Adidas and Kanye West partnership alters the perception of the co-brand's products.

H3: Consumer impression of the Adidas brand suffered as a result of the dissolution of the Adidas and Kanye West cooperation.

Our preference for a single case design is explained by the following factors:

- Depth of understanding: The dissolution of the Adidas and Yeezy relationship marks a singular and complicated event that calls for in-depth examination to comprehend its dynamics and effects.
- Particular context: By concentrating on a single instance, we may examine the dissolution of the Adidas and Yeezy relationship in its unique setting.

- Understanding of effects: Using a single case as a basis, we can examine and assess how such an occurrence affects the two parties.
- Relevance and applicability: A single case study on the dissolution of the Adidas and Yeezy relationship can give stakeholders in business alliances knowledge that is both pertinent and useful.

In order to investigate our research question, we decided to employ qualitative research because we wished to discover insights, develop hypotheses and define critical variables that impact brand perception and attitudes. First, we prepared a pre-recruitment questionnaire (for more information, see the Appendix 10) conducted through Google Forms. We explained to the respondents that it was for research purposes in the sneaker industry and that they could later do an interview. The questionnaire was meant to select our respondents in a way consistent with our research purpose. In fact, within this questionnaire, we asked questions to find out whether they owned the product being considered, whether they were aware of the breakup between Adidas and Yeezy, whether they knew Kanye West as the creator of the product design, and whether they were familiar with the brands Adidas and Yeezy. Ultimately, we asked for consent and contact information if they met the interview criteria. In the second phase, we prepared an interview guide (for more information, see the Appendix 11) in which we explained at the beginning the typology of the interviews, which were in-depth and semi-structured, taking approximately 45min to 1h 30. Interviewees were to be asked one initial question and, from then on, they were free to tell us anything that came to mind. Ultimately, we would ask them a few explorative and socio-demographic questions, explaining there were no right or wrong answers and opinions in this interview; interviewees' thoughts were what truly mattered, so they were free to speak entirely at ease. We also requested permission to record the interview to access the information at a later stage when the data would be analyzed. At the beginning of the interview, we showed photos of shoes resulting from a collaboration and asked the interviewee which ones they recognized or had bought themselves. Next, we asked their opinion about the Adidas Yeezy and their opinion before and after the breakup of the collaboration. We also asked for opinions on competing collaborations that they had recognized or purchased. The topics we tried to address were the tangible and intangible features of the product, perceptions of the product and price and distribution channels, their feelings about owning the product, the context to which they associated the Yeezy shoes, their relationship with the collaboration, their loyalty to the brand and their image of the product. Next, we performed the projective technique by asking them to associate the brand with a particular person for both the Adidas-Yeezy collaboration and competing collaborations they had mentioned before. As a last question, we asked their opinion about owning the Adidas Yeezy with the Adidas brand alone. All of the interviews took place in March and April of 2023. The relative anonymity of online communication and its potential for better self-presentation and increased sincerity compared to face-to-face interview because of this we provided the respondent with the option of an online or offline interview.

For our research, we were interested in people who belong to Generation Y. Generation Y, also known as the Millennial Generation, includes people born between 1977 and 2002 (Parker et al., 2014). This generational

group was chosen as the sample based on their high involvement in purchasing clothing and fashion products to express themselves, and because of their higher purchasing power (Parker et al., 2014; Parment, 2013). Accordingly, to be eligible to participate as informants in the study, individuals had to meet specific requirements: (a) They had to have previously purchased a pair of Adidas Yeezy for themselves; (b) they had to be aware of the partnership dissolution between Adidas and Kanye West. An ordered list of questions was used to create a semi-structured interview guide to better understand the topic (Galletta, 2013). All interviews were audio-recorded. The interviews were instantly transcribed after being recorded. The benefit of immediately transcribing is that we could change the interview questions if we believed a topic needed to be more sufficiently covered. As the interviews were being recorded, it was unnecessary to take notes as the questions were being asked, allowing the questions to take center stage (Vennix, 2019). After the transcription, the interviews were compiled in an Excel table in which we tried to divide the answers according to the topic that we wanted to address, namely: brand awareness, brand recall, brand recognition, brand image, attributes, benefits, associations and perception, brand loyalty recommendation and repurchase and projective technique. Two equal tables were constructed, one for Adidas Yeezy and another for competing collaborations. Inductive analysis was used to extract themes based on the data collected. Reading and analyzing the data with this technique led to new emerging themes.

4. Research insights

Thematic analysis, a qualitative research technique that locates and explores patterns and themes in the material, was used to record and analyze the interviews. The analysis took place over a number of stages, including familiarization with the data, data coding, the creation of early themes, review and theme-refinement, and theme-finalization.

Perception and opinion before the break-up

The co-branded products of Adidas Yeezy have been so effectively internalized in people's minds that people refer to them as the products started the whole culture of limited-edition sneakers and streetwear. What made all this possible is Kanye, thanks to his ability to bring new and crazy ideas to the table. This is the perception held in the mind of the customer. In this way, an indelible mark was left on the world of limited-edition sneakers thanks to the unique aesthetic and construction quality combining the experience of Adidas and the creative vision of Kanye. Yeezy also has a strong bond with Kanye West, one of the most influential artists and designers of our time. This bond gives Yeezy a cultural appeal that other shoes can't reproduce. Just think of the hype created by Kanye thanks to the presentation of the shoes at concerts and how they were released, selling out in seconds. For most consumers, these are among the first shoes recognized as the result of a collaboration and among the first ones they recall when they consider buying a pair. As for the tangible product

attributes, Yeezy shoes are very much characterized by the innovative design and the comforts of the various models released, as stated by the people interviewed. As regards intangible attributes, it is clear that most people appreciate the fact that the Yeezy design means that they have shoes for every occasion, from gym sessions to chilling with friends, to going to university and for more formal occasions too. Also, from the perception of the price before the end of the collaboration we can understand how much credibility and value that Kanye West brought to the product because, before the breakup, people tended to say that the retail price of 230€ was pretty fair, even if the resell price could sometimes exceed 1 000€. Before the breakup people wearing the shoes felt unique; people had the feeling of being part of a community, participating in a movement that had the figure of Kanye West as pack leader and in which everyone wearing a pair of Yeezy was identified as someone with an awareness of the latest streetwear shoes. People have shown the importance of the brand itself as a product differentiator, mainly because of its association with the person of Kanye, and they have underlined that, regarding the model produced by the artist, a lot of people bought them merely for their association to the person rather than for their quality or design.

Perception and opinion after the breakup

Brand recall and brand recognition remain high as can be understood from the interviewees' words. This is because, as one consumer says, "he's living off the income". As for the product recall, appeal is decreasing compared to recognition, which still remains high because Nike has the upper hand with its collaborations. Only a limited number of devoted Yeezy enthusiasts continue to purchase these shoes for their design and comfort. However, the general population now tends to prefer Nike collaborations such as Nike-Jordan, Nike Off-White, or Nike for Sacai over Yeezy. Since the end of the collaboration between Adidas and Kanye West, Yeezy has maintained its popularity but has lost its previous sense of exclusivity. Consumers attribute this shift to two primary factors. Firstly, many people have become disinterested in Yeezy sneakers due to the termination of the partnership with Kanye West. The sneakers' popularity and value have consequently undergone a notable change. The focus on Yeezy launches has diminished as they are no longer associated with the successful collaboration with the renowned rapper. Secondly, some individuals perceive Yeezy shoes as outdated, with minimal changes in design, and they have also become more accessible to a wider audience. Regarding the product image of Yeezy after the breakup, it is crucial to highlight that most people believe the design and comfort have remained consistent, but there has been a decline in the product's perceived coolness. While Yeezy shoes are still regarded as appealing, they have lost some of their previous cool factor. The rebranding of Yeezy products under the sole Adidas name has resulted in a perception among consumers that these products have lost their originality and are now seen as mere replicas, appropriating the artist's intellectual property. The exclusivity of the shoes has diminished because it was primarily derived from Kanye West's involvement. Consumers recall that Adidas had already produced shoes that were similar to Yeezy but lacked the same appeal. Kanye West's fan base, known for its strong loyalty, eagerly purchases new Yeezy products, causing them to sell out within seconds, regardless of the quality of the sneakers. There is a

contradictory sentiment among individuals regarding the future of the collaboration. While many believe that even if the partnership were to be revived, the dynamics would be significantly altered, they also acknowledge that the ideal scenario would involve the joint sale of co-branded products. However, it remains uncertain whether consumers would actually make purchases in such a scenario. Interviews have revealed the significance of Kanye West's involvement in product development and the strong association between the brand and his persona. Consequently, people have expressed their unwillingness to perceive the brand without the Yeezy symbol and Kanye's presence. Although many individuals distinguish between Kanye's behavior and his artistic output, they are acutely aware of his potential to exert a profound impact on the brand. The absence of Kanye from the co-branded products diminishes their value, as it is intrinsically tied to his creative contributions. It is evident that the consumer experience with the brand has undergone a negative transformation. People assert that the concept of co-branded products has become outdated and purchasing them during this period would not be a rational choice. While they may sound dramatic, their perspective reflects a realistic assessment that the appeal of the shoes has declined significantly, perhaps by at least 80%. If the product was already in decline in recent years, the dissolution of the collaboration renders it obsolete with no future prospects. The collaboration itself bestows value upon the co-branded products, and the current path Adidas is pursuing—rebranding the products solely as Adidas and stripping away the cool factor—is perceived by most as risky, if not impossible. Interestingly, while the absence of Kanye is viewed negatively by consumers, many of them do not let his public statements and behavior affect their perception of the co-brand. They tend to separate his artistic life from his personal life and mental state. While acknowledging the inappropriateness of his remarks, consumers generally consider Adidas' decision to swiftly halt sales as appropriate. However, they tend to overlook the negative aspects, and the majority state that it is not their concern. The loyalty towards the brand has suffered a negative impact, not only in terms of decreased willingness to repurchase the co-branded products without Kanye but also diminished enthusiasm for recommending them. Most interviewees state that they would not recommend Yeezy sneakers or, if they do, they would do so to a lesser extent, primarily emphasizing their comfort. A minority expresses intentions to purchase in the future but only if Adidas-Yeezy introduces distinctive and innovative elements in terms of aesthetics, shape, color, and pricing. However, they anticipate buying fewer products than before due to Kanye's absence. Another minority indicates that they would only accept or recommend the sneakers if they possess remarkable features. The absence of Kanye West from the Adidas-Yeezy brand has resulted in a shift in consumer preferences towards alternative products and competing brands, notably Nike, which offers collaborations with Jordan, Off-White, and Sacai. Co-branded products from Adidas-Yeezy have lost their appeal, and most interviewees now prefer to purchase shoes from other collaborations, with Nike-Jordan being the most prominent choice. People emphasize that Yeezy is no longer as trendy as it once was, and they would rather invest in a collaboration that is currently more fashionable, especially considering that they already own several pairs of Yeezy shoes. The statements of the interviewees suggest that Adidas-Yeezy had already been experiencing a decline in recent years, and the breakup of the collaboration has further accelerated this decline,

resulting in a decrease in brand equity in favor of competing brands. The termination of the collaboration between Adidas and Kanye West has led to a decline in consumers' willingness to purchase Adidas Yeezy sneakers. The majority of respondents express their reluctance to buy the shoes under the Adidas brand, primarily due to the absence of Kanye's involvement. Many customers initially bought the sneakers because they were associated with Kanye, and without his presence, they are no longer interested. A minority refrain from buying the sneakers because they perceive them as lacking innovation and prefer other brands' collaborations, such as Nike. However, another minority still values the product's quality and comfort and would consider purchasing them under the Adidas name, albeit without strong brand loyalty. The prevailing sentiment is that the Yeezy brand and product no longer generate the same level of hype after the collaboration ended. Despite this, the majority of respondents express a willingness to repurchase Yeezy sneakers if Adidas and Kanye were to reunite. They believe that Kanye's behavior has not affected their decision and express a desire to see the partnership continue, highlighting its previous success. When asked about the possibility of purchasing Yeezy sneakers solely under the Adidas brand, a few respondents would consider it, but the majority of co-brand supporters oppose this and have initiated a boycott. They argue that without Kanye's association, the shoes lose their uniqueness and become ordinary. While acknowledging that the shoes themselves remain the same, they emphasize the diminished popularity without the Kanye connection. Many argue against the decision to end the collaboration and sell the shoes without considering the impact on their reputation. Nevertheless, breaking up the partnership was seen as a necessary step for Adidas to preserve their reputation, as they are no longer aligned with Kanye's values. According to the majority, the ideal scenario would involve Kanye publicly changing his opinion and Adidas and Yeezy reuniting once more. The termination of the collaboration between Adidas and Kanye West did not significantly impact Adidas brand equity. Consumers perceive Adidas as a reputable and influential brand in the sports and fashion industry, and the end of the collaboration was seen as a necessary move to protect the company's reputation. Although the collaboration lost credibility, Adidas itself remains a popular choice alongside Nike. The decision to end the collaboration was unexpected but was seen as a responsible action, demonstrating Adidas' commitment to its core values. Despite the financial implications, consumers appreciate Adidas' willingness to prioritize reputation over profit. The main implication of our research is that the impact on the collaboration's product equity is much lower than what Adidas probably estimated; the crisis did not do a great deal of damage to the brand equity of the partnership.

5. Implication and conclusion

Our main contribution is that product equity did not decline all that much because the perception of the consumers on this collaboration is not as bad as we might have expected from the literature review. We would expect a significant impact on brand equity and product equity, which would be low, but consumers say that the shoes of the collaboration are still something that they perceive as exciting and cool. The problem comes when the brand Adidas removes Kanye West from the shoes; people manage to split, differentiate, and separate

the image of the designer from the idea of the man. Companies need to understand that a person can behave in a way that is super-destructive and yet people will still buy because the artist was great. The literature states that, in cases like these, equity should go down, and it does happen but what is more damaging is the brand equity of the shoes without the Yeezy brand. Now the product has no interest; it has lost its cool to the extent that people won't buy. Moreover, the breakup did not impact the Adidas brand either; it is still considered positively and is seen to behave correctly. But it modified the product, and nobody will buy the product if it's not branded. From the insights of the research, we suggest contradicting the literature because the impact of the breakup is not always negative, or at least is not as harmful as the literature suggests. Because consumers separate the man from the artist, what is damaging is the brand equity of the sneakers without collaboration, but that is a different matter. It's not the brand equity of the partnership. These results of our research show important implications for fashion brands when considering strategic alliances with designers to create hype for the product. This study provides empirical evidence of the negative impact of partnership breakup on product brand equity when the cool factor is missing, considering the effects it has on product image and product brand awareness.

First, product recall and product recognition are both high during the partnership after the breakup, brand recognition remains relatively high, but brand recall decreases, and this is the worst situation for a brand because consumers know about it. It would, however, never enter their heads to buy. The brands experience a decrease in market share and sales. These results refer to the co-branded product but are not valid for the two brands considered separately.

Second, for partnerships that end due to a celebrity scandal, consumers tend to turn a blind eye to adverse events and to separate the partner's personality from their profession.

Third, the end of the collaboration also ends the uniqueness of the product to the point that consumers begin to regard the price as high. The absence of the celebrity in the partnership reduces the propensity to buy. Most consumers purchase products that result from a collaboration solely and exclusively because they are associated with that celebrity, even if the product is not the most beautiful.

Fourth, if after the breakup with the celebrity, the brand intends to continue selling the co-branded product, it must be aware that, for consumers, it is not the same, especially when the product was developed thanks to the creativity of the partner; it is now considered a copy and they will not buy it. Companies must be aware that the product will never get the hype it managed to get with the celebrity on board. In addition, the company must consider that the celebrity's supporters might boycott the brand if it sells a copy of the co-branded product.

Finally, this research has shown that one impact that the company cannot overlook when breakups of collaborations happen due to celebrity scandals, is that consumer attention may shift to other associations and alternative co-brand products.

6. *Limitation*

The limitations of our research should be acknowledged to provide a comprehensive perspective. Firstly, the lack of extensive literature on the topic of brand collaboration breakups and their impact on brand equity restricts the available academic resources and empirical research in this area. Secondly, the qualitative approach used in our study has inherent limitations. While it provides rich insights, the use of interviews may result in a limited selection of participants and potential subjectivity in interpretation. Another limitation is the reliance on a single case study, which limits the generalizability of findings. Exploring additional cases of collaboration breakups would enhance understanding and allow for broader generalizations. The heterogeneity of the research sample in terms of nationalities suggests that conducting separate studies for different nationalities may provide more accurate insights, considering the potential influence of culture on consumer perceptions and behaviors. Similarly, expanding the age range of the sample beyond 18 to 35 would provide a more comprehensive understanding of consumer preferences. Finally, the generalization of our results should be cautious as they may not apply to all collaborations in different industries. Future research should build upon these limitations to fill the gaps in the current understanding of brand collaboration breakups and their effects.