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**The Visit of an Unexpected Friend
How to Do an Unexpected Collaboration
and What It Can Do for Your Brand**

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The Visit of an Unexpected Friend

How to Do an Unexpected Collaboration and What It Can Do for Your Brand

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to explore the phenomenon of unexpected collaborations between brands.

Methodology: This paper follows a qualitative research approach. The research is centered around a multi-case study based on secondary data. In the analysis and discussion, the literature review is applied to the case studies to reveal patterns that lead to managerial- and theoretical implications.

Findings: Based on the observations made, a framework was developed showing that a successful unexpected collaboration requires a clear link, working as a bridge between the brands. The findings also reveal how unexpected collaborations can be used as a tool to develop and strengthen brands.

Research limitations: This study focuses solely on unexpected collaborations. Future research could study differences between traditional and unexpected collaborations, allowing for comparisons. The paper explores three case studies and studying additional cases would strengthen the reliability and generalizability of the conclusions. Lastly, the paper is limited to product collaborations, allowing future research to investigate services.

Practical implications: When creating an unexpected collaboration, the partnership works as the element of surprise while the products showcase the unexpected fit. This should be done by deciding what the brand wants to achieve with the collaboration, find an unexpected partner with whom you have a link that connects to what you want to achieve, and lastly, create a collaboration where the link is clearly shown in the products.

Originality/value: The paper contributes to a broader perspective on collaborations. The previous literature mentions that collaborations should seek a perfect fit and include an element of surprise. Brands are often recommended to search for a similar partner to collaborate with, but this paper shows that they can also seek an unforeseen partner where there is an unexpected fit. Additionally, this study shows how unexpected collaborations can be put into practice, discusses what the potential benefits in doing so are, and aims to give a broader view of what a perfect fit and element of surprise can be.

Keywords: Unexpected Collaborations, Unexpected Fit, Storytelling, Brand Personality, Brand Heritage

Paper type: Research paper

Introduction

The strategy to collaborate with another brand is nothing new, and we have become used to seeing two different brand logos with an 'x' in between. As early as in the '20s, the French winemaker Château Mouton Rothschild made collaborations with artists such as Picasso, Dali, and Chagall, who enriched the bottles of the highly coveted wines (Park, 2015). There are many potential benefits of doing a collaboration with another brand, such as financial, functional and self-expressive (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010). More specifically, it can increase the number of brand touchpoints, serve as an entryway to new categories and markets, increase brand credibility and help to endorse brand values (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010).

Even though collaborations are nothing new, most collaborations have been between brands in the same industry, or with the same target group. However, unexpected collaborations between brands who, at first glance, don't have anything in common seem to occur more and more frequently (Tang, 2020). For example, during the process of writing this paper, the news of the certainly unexpected collaboration between the high-end luxury fashion brand Balenciaga and The Simpsons came out (Cartner-Morley, 2021). It is said that cross-industry collaborations can create unique products and experiences for consumers, which is needed in a world with more competition than ever and where consumers long for 'out-of-the-box' thinking (Tang, 2020). Many of these cross-industry collaborations receive a lot of media attention, and there are several examples where they have been successful for both the brand's equity and the company's sales. However, most studies point to high failure rates of brand collaborations (Dodourova, 2009), indicating that a brand cannot collaborate with just anyone and expect to gain success. The purpose of this paper is therefore to explore the increasing phenomenon of

unexpected collaborations between brands. This led to the formulation of the following research questions: why should brands do unexpected collaborations, what is needed to create a successful unexpected collaboration and how is this done?

Literature review

Brand Collaborations

Brand collaborations can be done in multiple different ways depending on which partner you choose to do the collaboration with what outcome you are looking for, and in what way you do the collaboration (Géraldine, & Reine, 2020). As Géraldine and Reine (2020) describe in the book: The art of successful brand collaborations, the purpose of brand collaborations is to find a perfect match. What that perfect match is might vary from different collaborations depending on each brands' identity and core values. However, for the collaboration to be a success, it is important to create a surprising effect (Géraldine, & Reine, 2020). The goal with a collaboration should not only be the co-branded product, but to create a collaboration that has a meaning and an impact on the companies and their stakeholders (Géraldine, & Reine, 2020).

Storytelling & Signature Stories

While building a brand, a useful tool to use in creating a story (Chiu, Hsieh & Kuo, 2012). Baker and Boyle (2009) highlight that by using storytelling, the probability to bypass all the advertising that consumers are reached by is higher. The authors further describe that a good story is a story where people feel touched when they hear it. This emotional aspect will increase people's comprehension (Chiu, Hsieh & Kuo, 2012) and result in effects that are longer lasting than the effects advertising creates (Baker & Boyle, 2009). Additionally, storytelling has an impact on brand attitude and behavioral intentions (Chiu, Hsieh & Kuo, 2012).

To create a good brand story Chiu, Hsieh and Kuo (2012) believe that there are four key aspects that need to be included: authenticity, conciseness, reversal, and humor. Besides these elements, creating a good brand story is a process. Baker and Boyle (2009) divide this process into three stages where the first stage is envisioning by defining the story. The second stage is engaging, including sharing the story and encouraging people to engage with it, and the third stage is to enact. The purpose of stage three is to get people to make the story their own and to start sharing it with others (Baker & Boyle, 2009).

A type of storytelling is signature stories, which Aaker and Aaker (2016) defines as a story that contains a strategic message that works to strengthen the brand, its strategy as well as its relationship with consumers. The author adds that a signature story embodies three elements: it is authentic, intriguing, and narrative. Brands creating a signature story are able to further develop their core, for example, their personality, visibility, and relevance (Aaker & Aaker, 2016). Signature stories differ from tactical stories as they are not used to execute short-term sales uplifts or objectives. Instead, Aaker and Aaker (2016) highlights that they are used for long-term brand building and as they get retold, signature stories are able to achieve authenticity, influence and gain traction. The author also contrasts stories with facts, adding that signature stories are more impactful as they are able to inspire, persuade, initiate conversation, and alter behavior, thus, leaving them remembered. In regard to brand heritage, signature stories are a powerful way to connect the brand's products and values to its heritage. As a result, the audience is reminded of the brand's heritage story (Aaker & Aaker, 2016). Two criteria for evaluating signature stories are outlined by the author: the quality of the story and the message. A high score on both aspects is needed for a story to be considered a signature one.

The Three Rhetorical Perspectives

Urde (2016) details the way in which rhetorical perspectives can be integrated into brand management, specifically in the study of the brand core. The author mentions that rhetoric can guide how a brand communicates in interaction through determining the idea, choosing the relevant arguments, and conveying these to reach the brand's desired outcome. Rhetoric is made up of three perspectives: logos, ethos, and pathos. Logos reflect arguments that are based on facts, enhancing one's understanding. Ethos' arguments aim at creating trust between the brand and its audience, while pathos' arguments appeal to one's emotions. For effective communication, rhetoric theory states that all three perspectives must be present (Urde, 2016). Brands can use these rhetorical perspectives to help receivers trust the brand, understand their message, and aspire to a specific result (Urde, 2016).

Brand Identity

A brand's identity, as defined by Kapferer (2012), can be seen as the core values, key beliefs and visions that emphasize the elements of a brand's uniqueness. The brand's core values are a central part of the brand's identity (Urde, Balmer & Greyser, 2007). Melin (2002) outlines the four criteria for defining core values as difficult to imitate, valuable and communicable to the consumer, as well as unique. Additionally, Kapferer (2012) highlights that brand identity is the common element found throughout the brand's actions, products, and communications, that specify the brand's meaning, aim and self-image. The author adds that consumers can perceive the underlying objectives of a brand through their typical products, brand name, symbols, logo, country of origin and packaging. These elements can be seen as the marks left by the brand from which its identity can be deduced from.

Brand Personality

The framework Dimensions of Brand Personality clarifies and explains how we as people see brands. This is important for brands to understand since the consumer tends to purchase from brands whose personality reflects who they are or who they want to be (Aaker, 1997). Within psychology, the big five theory of personality is the most accepted theory for understanding the personality of people, and it utilizes five traits to describe people (Lim, 2020). Aaker's Dimensions of Brand Personality aims to do the same thing but for brands since we tend to see brands similar to how we see people's personalities. However, there are some changes to how we see brands, and therefore, the five traits are different for brands. The first trait is sincerity, which can be described as down-to-earth, honest, wholesome, and cheerful. The second trait is excitement, which can be described as daring, spirited, imaginative and up-to-date. The third trait, competence, can be described as reliable, intelligent, and successful. Fourthly, sophistication can be described as upper-class and charming, and lastly, ruggedness can be described as outdoorsy and tough (Aaker, 1997).

Brand Heritage

A heritage brand makes use of its past to be relevant in the present and in the future. It focuses on how to discover, use, and protect a brand's heritage in corporate branding. There is a vital difference between a brand's history and its heritage - the history focuses on the past, while heritage focuses on three-time frames. By owning and managing a brand's heritage correctly, a brand can gain a competitive advantage by achieving a more distinct position, improving the relationship with non-customer stakeholders, and creating an improved value proposition by increasing credibility and authenticity. The management of brand heritage includes three steps: uncovering the heritage, activating the heritage, and nurturing the heritage (Urde, Greyser & Balmer, 2007).

The Heritage Quotient is a framework presenting the five dimensions of brand heritage; track record, longevity, core values, use of symbols and history. The framework shows how a brand should work to use its history to be relevant in the present and in the future. The more salient these elements are, the more heritage a brand possesses. Track record is the first element in the framework and is the degree of demonstrated performance, that the brand has lived up to its values and promises. Longevity is how consistently the other elements have been used in the past. Core values are promises in external communication and internally guided standards that can become part of a brand's heritage if consistent and well-articulated. Symbols can be a variety of things but should be meaningful and used to reflect the past in order to create brand heritage. Lastly, history important to identity can be a vital element for brands where the history reflects who- and what they are (Urde, Greyser & Balmer, 2007).

Methodology

Research Design

The research is based on a qualitative research approach. This approach is inductive rather than deductive (Bryman & Bell, 2011), where the main purpose of the paper is to create new theory rather than test already existing frameworks and theory. Since the purpose of the paper is to explore unexpected collaborations between brands, an in-depth understanding was deemed necessary. The constructionist view that a qualitative approach holds (Bryman & Bell, 2011) was therefore seen as the most appropriate approach given this purpose.

Data Collection

The research takes the form of a multi-case study paper based on secondary data. This was seen as the most appropriate way to obtain an in-depth understanding of the phenomena that this paper wishes to explore, as well as answer the research

questions. The research was limited to business to consumer products in the private sector since this is where unexpected collaborations seem to be the most common. The study of several collaborations was deemed more fitting than the study of a single collaboration because it would strengthen the reliability and validity of the paper. Additionally, it would deepen the understanding, enabling a more complex view of the phenomena. This is important as the paper seeks to find patterns with its inductive approach. Several collaborations were considered, however, three main collaborations, with two brands in each collaboration, were chosen and studied. The chosen collaborations were Omega x Snoopy, Smeg x Dolce & Gabbana and IKEA x Virgil Abloh. These specific brands and their collaborations were selected for several reasons. Firstly, the collaborations studied were considered good examples of successful collaborations between brands, that at first sight had many dissimilarities, and therefore illustrated the phenomena that the paper wishes to explore. Secondly, the previous familiarity of the observed brands in the collaborations studied led to an increased in-depth understanding of the brands. Lastly, each collaboration observed and studied below works as examples of what was discovered while having a different role in understanding the phenomena and answering the research questions.

Case Studies and Observations

Omega x Snoopy - "Eyes on the stars"

Omega is an old Swiss watchmaker established in 1848 (Precision Watches & Jewelry, 2011). It is a highly prestigious and luxurious brand that has won a number of reputable awards for their high quality (Broer, 2014). Omega Speedmaster, maybe Omega's most known model, was the only watch to survive NASA's testing of extreme pressure and speed. It was therefore

selected by NASA to be their provider of watches for their astronauts, and in 1969, became the first watch to be worn on the moon on the wrist of Buzz Aldrin (Precision Watches & Jewelry, 2011). It was also the official watch during the Apollo 13 mission that went terribly wrong where the spaceship had to return to earth under dramatic circumstances instead of going to the moon. The astronauts' Omega watches played a vital part in the ad-hoc solutions that saved the crew and took them back to earth safely, which led to Omega winning NASA's "Silver Snoopy Award" (Goulard, 2020). The dog in the peanuts comic strip is the mascot of NASA, and the prestigious award is given for achievements related to mission success and human flight safety (Granath, 2018).

Many years later, the award worked as an initiator to a collaboration between Omega and Snoopy. Omega has created three watches in collaboration with Snoopy with the first being introduced in 2003. On the dial, Snoopy is portrayed near the 9-hour, as seen in figure 1, as well as on the case back. The watches are described as legendary (Goulard, 2020) and cost a lot more on the secondary market than their official list price. The most expensive watch out of the three costs around 40,700 - 52,000 USD, in comparison to its official list price of approximately 7,000 USD (Weppelink, 2020).



Figure 1. The Omega Speedmaster Silver Snoopy Award 50th anniversary dial (Pitch, 2020)

The collaboration works as a great tool for storytelling. Chiu, Hsieh and Kuo (2012) emphasize the importance of the audience being touched by the story, creating longer-lasting effects than advertising, which this collaboration seemingly does. The collaboration enables Omega and Snoopy to tell their story through the three stages in the process of storytelling described by Chiu, Hsieh and Kuo (2012) earlier. It especially helps in the second step, to engage with the story and the third step, to enact it. When people purchase or converse about the watches in the collaboration, they become part of the story and share it with others. This can also be connected to Aaker and Aaker's (2016) findings, whereas the story gets re-told, it is able to achieve authenticity and influence. The collaboration can therefore be seen as a tool to tell the story through the customer, not only through promoting it to the audience. Furthermore, the story contains the elements that define a signature story, enabling Omega and Snoopy to gain the benefits described by Aaker and Aaker (2016) earlier. It can for example develop the two brands' personalities and brand heritage.

The brand personality (Aaker 1997) of Omega could be perceived as somewhat more sincere and down-to-earth as a result of this collaboration since it features Snoopy. Yet, it also is perceived as more competent and maintains its sophisticated personality. The increased degree of sincerity results in a more complex and human brand personality, which enables Omega to stand out from its competitors within the luxury watch segment, a segment where brands mainly have a sophisticated personality. For Snoopy, who has a highly sincere personality because it's a cartoon for kids, the collaboration affects different elements of their brand personality. The collaboration strengthens Snoopy in the two elements exciting and competence since they show both their history with NASA as well as being showcased on a prestigious watch. As Aaker (1997) describes, people purchase from brands that represent their

own personality, which in this case may help Snoopy to retain customers for a longer period of time while also being relevant for an older audience.

As mentioned earlier, since the collaboration is a signature story it also works as a great tool to strengthen Omegas and Snoopy's brand heritage. Instead of the space explorations solely being part of the brands' history, the collaboration makes the history relevant in the present and future. Through the collaboration, the audience is reminded of the brands' heritage. This is especially true for Omega by showing the elements' track record and symbols that are presented in the framework made by Urde, Greyser & Balmer (2007). The collaboration reminds the consumer that it was elected as the official watch for NASA, highlighting the quality Omegas watches have held for a long time. It shows that they thereby have lived up to, what could be seen as, its values and promise during a long period of time. Additionally, it displays the symbol of the Silver Snoopy Award on the dial, which reflects the past and is a symbol with meaning.

The three rhetorical perspectives of Omega are strengthened through the collaboration. Their logos is reinforced by being the official moon watch and their ethos is strengthened by the simple fact that the watch was selected by NASA, a governmental agency, which seemingly builds trust in its quality. Their pathos is heightened through appealing to our emotions in the story, especially regarding its part in saving the crew in the Apollo 13 mission. The collaboration, therefore, works as an interesting branding tool to strengthen what could be seen as Omega's brand identity: trustworthy, professional, and historic, while still being playful by including the aspect of Snoopy.

Smeg x Dolce & Gabbana - "Sicily is my love"

Dolce & Gabbana and Smeg have done three collaborations together since 2016 (Liao, 2018). Smeg produces home

appliances with the aim that their products should have originality, quality, and inventive elegance (Smeg, n.d.a). Dolce & Gabbana is a company within the luxury fashion industry, “blending traditional elegance with modern and contemporary style” (Dolce & Gabbana, n.d.). Smeg and Dolce & Gabbana both have their origin in Italy, which works as the basis for the collaborations with a focus on Sicily (Smeg, 2018). Italy, and more specifically Sicily, represent both the Italian food culture which is of significance for Smeg (Smeg, 2017) and where Domenico Dolce comes from (Forbes, n.d.). Besides the fact that the companies are united by their country of origin, they both have an interest in the artistic field which is clearly shown in their collaborations (Smeg, 2018).

Their first collaboration consisted of 100 limited edition refrigerators where each one of them were hand-painted by Sicilian artists (Smeg London, n.d.). One year later they launched “Sicily is my love”, a collaboration with some of Smeg’s smaller kitchen appliances such as their toaster, kettle, and citrus juicer, see figure 2. The products were decorated with motifs that in different ways have a connection to Sicily (Smeg London, n.d.). Their latest collaboration, called Divina Cucina, is a collaboration with matching Smeg stoves,



Figure 2. Items from the Smeg x Dolce & Gabbana collaboration “Sicily is my love” (Smeg, n.d.b)

fans and refrigerators. The collaboration came in two different designs, alluding to the colors, history and culture of Sicily, as the previous collaborations did (Smeg, 2018).

The partnership between Dolce & Gabbana and Smeg is a great example of how companies can strengthen each other’s brand identity. Even if these companies operate in two different industries it seems like they, when analyzing them both, have similar core values. Through their collaborations, some of these are especially highlighted, such as their connection to Italy, their elegance and blending tradition with modern design. Thus, their products reveal a new way to show Sicilian culture. How these values are expressed might also affect the brand's personality. In this case, both Dolce & Gabbana and Smeg can be seen, based on Aaker's Dimensions of Brand Personality (Aaker, 1997), as sophisticated brands since they can be perceived as upper-class and charming.

In the same way, as their collaborations reinforce their brand identities, one can say that their collaborations also strengthen both brands' personalities. Their first collaboration may be the one that shows that aspect most clearly since that was a limited-edition collaboration. As there was a limited number of products, it was not only difficult to find one, but the prices increased as well, which may have led to an added feeling of the brands being upper-class. At the same time, the clear connection to Sicily and Italy with all its history may give a sense of charm. Beyond that the brand's personality is sophisticated, the collaborations may also add a sense of excitement to both brands' personalities, especially Smegs. The creative and colorful design on what is usually seen as quite ordinary everyday products adds a modern, up-to-date, and daring element to Smeg’s brand personality.

The collaboration builds both brands ethos, logos, and pathos. The artistic design, specifically the colors and motifs suggest

the creation of a dream of Southern Italy, its culture, and its food, which in return, evoke certain emotions that appeal to consumers and builds pathos. Furthermore, both Dolce & Gabbana and Smeg are established brands known for their quality. Given that they did the collaborations together strengthen their ethos as they are able to instill trust in each other. The strong link to Italy that they emphasize in their collaborations can also foster trust as well as contribute to the logos argument that Urde (2016) discusses.

The clear connection to Italy in their collaborations is also a way for the brands to use their history to further strengthen their brand heritage. This especially concerns Smeg since Dolce & Gabbana have used their Italian and Sicilian heritage prominently in the past (Bobb, 2017). However, by making their past relevant through the products in the collaboration, they also enhance their history and remind the customer of it. Especially the elements, history important to identity and symbols in the Heritage Quotient (Urde, Greyser & Balmer, 2007) can be seen as strengthened. The collaboration emphasizes their Italian origin, which can be seen as both an important part of their history and as a symbol that reflects who they are.

IKEA x Virgil Abloh - "Markerad"

Virgil Abloh expresses his identity as a designer through his brand Off-White, a brand that has its products rooted in the values and culture of streetwear (Stein, 2020). Virgil's brand was founded in 2013, and in the latter half of 2018, became the world's most popular brand according to the Lyst Index (2018). Virgil's designs for Off-White are well known for being a balance between streetwear and luxury fashion.

IKEA was established in 1943 with a clear vision to "create a better everyday life for the many people" (IKEA, n.d.c.). The retailer aims to sell a broad variety of affordable, practically designed furnishing products. They are known for their simple Scandinavian design and ready-to-assemble

homeware items, where their democratic design stands at the core of their products allowing for accessibility. According to Forbes (2021), IKEA has now become the 40th most valuable brand in the world.

The IKEA x Virgil Abloh "Markerad" collection was launched in 2019 with the objective of elevating everyday anonymous items (IKEA, n.d.b.). Figure 3 shows some items from the collection, which targeted a new generation, namely millennials moving into their first home wanting to make a statement and personalize their home interior. In the video *IKEA x Virgil Abloh: The Designers Explain the Concept of the Collection* (2018), Henrik Most, creative leader at IKEA, stated that the objects are not only functional but can strongly reflect millennials' identity, speaking to one's soul. Henrik mentions that IKEA observes movements and what happens in culture, so through this collaboration, IKEA is one of you. Additionally, Virgil Abloh expresses the unique opportunity this collaboration presents, pairing what Virgil stands for in pop-culture with IKEA's accessible democratic items (Chen, 2019). Specifically, Virgil wanted millennials to appreciate the raw design of the objects on a level that could only be made possible by IKEA (Chen, 2019). A lot of the products were sold out within a day, indicating a successful collaboration (Chai, 2019).



Figure 3. Items from IKEA's collaboration with Virgil Abloh (canary---yellow, n.d.).

IKEA and Virgil Abloh pay tribute to the beauty in everyday mundane items, telling a story through their collaboration. Baker and Boyle (2009) highlight the emotional aspect as part of a good story. In this case, both brands are able to emotionally connect to millennials that are willing to express their identity through home interiors who are now able to do so in a unique way. IKEA wanted to provide items that would speak to one's soul and through this, form an emotional connection. The collaboration can also be seen as a signature story, which Aaker and Aaker (2016) mentions contains three elements: authentic, intriguing, and narrative. Due to the contrasting brand identities and different target groups, the collaboration becomes intriguing and unexpected. It is authentic because Virgil Abloh has not teamed up with a homeware retailer to create products before. Lastly, it is narrative as it tells the story of enhancing everyday items that we normally would not notice. For example, the collaboration includes a chair with an attached doorstep to its leg, adding a unique element.

Aaker's (1997) five dimensions of brand personality can be applied to this collaboration. In the case of IKEA, the brand associates itself with the excitement trait as they have appealed to a younger generation by teaming up with Virgil Abloh, whose brand can be seen as an important part of pop-culture. IKEA's primary trait could be interpreted as sincere due to their down-to-earth and accessible approach to furniture. This collaboration is therefore a way for IKEA to combine their primary trait with excitement as a secondary trait. In contrast, excitement could be interpreted as Virgil Abloh's primary trait due to his disruptive designs and his take on streetwear as a luxury fashion. As a result of the collaboration, Virgil achieves the strengthened secondary trait sincerity by being associated with IKEA.

IKEA and Virgil Abloh have very contrasting brand identities, operating in different industries and targeting different

groups. Some of IKEA's core values are simplicity and cost-consciousness (IKEA, n.d.a.). On the other hand, Virgil Abloh's designs are seen as daring and inaccessible due to both the high price point and the limited number of items released. Despite their contrasting brand identities, both IKEA and Virgil have gained from this collaboration as they draw from the strong sides of each other's identities, while maintaining how they are perceived in the other elements. IKEA is able to target millennials with the help of a pop-culture reference, forming an emotional connection while also gaining a more innovative and up-to-date view in the eyes of consumers. Virgil becomes more accessible and down-to-earth, for example, that the prices reflect that of IKEA's prices.

From a rhetorical perspective, this collaboration uses ethos, logos, and pathos arguments in its communication. Virgil Abloh is able to build trust with the audience as IKEA is seen as a strong, reliable brand, strengthening its ethos. The fact that Virgil can collaborate with IKEA reinforces his impactful creative ability and further enhances his brand. Off-White was the world's most famous brand in the second half of 2018 according to the Lyst Index (2018), so Virgil's design success contributed to the success of this collaboration. While IKEA contributed with its great brand value and mass scale, providing the audience with logos arguments. Pathos' arguments are used as well as the audience now feel that Virgil Abloh's IKEA designs are somewhat more accessible and affordable than his brand Off-White. While IKEA is able to emotionally connect with millennials through the use of pop-culture, providing them with homeware they can express their identity with.

Discussion and Conclusions

Why Should Brands Do Unexpected Collaborations?

The observations from the three collaborations illustrate the many benefits unexpected collaborations can provide. Firstly, it can turn the products into stories. Good storytelling has several requirements, which is especially true in regard to signature stories. As described by Aaker and Aaker (2016), it must be authentic, intriguing, and narrative to reach the consumer. As illustrated in the cases above, unexpected collaborations can help achieve these criteria, as well as aid in the three-step process of delivering a story (Baker & Boyle, 2009). Unexpected collaborations can therefore be seen as a tool to build a story and provide brands with the positive and long-lasting effects of storytelling. For example, it can help to develop the core of the brand, its brand personality, and the brand heritage, all of which will be discussed individually below. By delivering a signature story, it will also strengthen the pathos used in communication as it will speak to people's emotions. Furthermore, the story an unexpected collaboration can hold also has the ability to strengthen the ethos and logos of a brand in a frictionless way, which the Omega x Snoopy case illustrates clearly.

Evident in these three cases, unexpected collaborations can be used to either 'refresh' its image, pay homage to the country of origin or highlight a shared history in an interesting way. An unexpected collaboration is often temporary in nature, and therefore, will most likely not affect the participating brand's core values or identity in a drastic way. In the same way, the brand's core product offerings mainly do not change after the collaboration is over. This allows a brand to reflect their identity onto the other and gain the benefits as a result. For example, IKEA was able to target millennials and become more modern in the eyes of consumers, while Virgil became more accessible to a wider audience. The observations from the collaboration were positive, however, reflecting identities is something to consider when creating an unexpected

collaboration as positive effects are not a given.

The three cases all illustrated that unexpected collaborations can affect a brand's personality. As described by Aaker (1997), consumers tend to buy from brands with whom they associate themselves with. In today's digital and globalized world, it could therefore be argued that it is more important than ever to have a clear and distinct brand personality in order to stand out from competing brands. The Smeg x Dolce & Gabbana case suggested that brands can strengthen their current brand personality, in this case, the sophisticated dimension, through unexpected collaborations. The other two cases illustrated that unexpected collaborations also have the ability to add new elements or enhance secondary elements of a brand's personality such as excitement for IKEA and sincerity for Virgil Abloh.

Furthermore, the research indicates that unexpected collaborations can be used as a tool to develop and strengthen brand heritage. This is not given but requires that the collaboration is built on a story where a part of the brand's history is included and presented in the product to make it relevant in the present and in the future. Contrary to the other two collaborations studied, the collaboration between IKEA and Virgil Abloh does not build brand heritage, since the collaboration is not built on their history. This shows that brand heritage is not a requirement for unexpected collaborations. However, how a collaboration strengthens the brand heritage, in the cases where it does, also varies depending on which of the elements presented by Urde, Greyser & Balmer (2007) the collaboration uses.

What Is Needed and How Is This Done?

According to Géraldine and Reine (2020), an element of surprise is needed to create a successful collaboration. Rather than developing a surprising collaboration with an expected partner, the partner itself can be the element of surprise. This can be seen

from the observations of the three cases, where the element of surprise is created through the unexpected partner. The findings suggest that when brands want to do a collaboration, they can search beyond the given brands to collaborate with and attempt to find a more unexpected partner. It seems like unexpected collaborations often include brands from different industries and target groups. For example, Omega and Snoopy have different demographic target groups, IKEA and Virgil Abloh could be seen as having different psychographic target groups, and lastly, Smeg and Dolce & Gabbana have different behavioral target groups. In Smeg and Dolce & Gabbana's case, Smegs kitchen appliances are used daily, while Dolce & Gabbana could be seen as clothes for special occasions. This suggests that the element of surprise in collaborations can actually be a form of 'two colliding worlds' when they have an unexpected fit - something in common that works as a bridge between the brands that one cannot see at first glance. In Omega and Snoopy's case, Omega's prestigious and sophisticated world 'collides' with Snoopy's sincere and harmless world, where NASA works as the unexpected fit.

From the observations made, the findings suggest that a successful unexpected collaboration does not only require an unexpected partner yet also a link between the brands. The search for a link to build a collaboration also relates to what Géraldine and Reine (2020) describe as the purpose of a brand collaboration: to find the perfect match. However, the three cases illustrate that the unexpected fit can be several different things, and what may seem unfitting at first glance, is rather well thought out. Just as with the element of surprise, the cases show that this fit can be different. As illustrated by Omega x Snoopy and Smeg x Dolce & Gabbana, common history or historic moments can be a way to reveal an unexpected fit. Brands should therefore look into their archives to try and find events or 'forgotten friends' that could

be the unexpected fit. However, a common history does not necessarily have to be the unexpected fit, as illustrated by IKEA x Virgil Abloh, where it is rather a common fundamental idea. This indicates that not only brands with a long and rich history can participate in unexpected collaborations, but also young and new brands, such as Virgil Abloh. However, the findings point to the fact that no matter what the fit is, the fit has to be shown in the collaboration and be clear to the customer. For example, if the Smeg x Dolce & Gabbana collaboration did not highlight their fit, that they both have their origin in Italy, it would seemingly be a confusing collaboration for the consumer. The collaboration also demonstrates that the fit does not have to be extensive. While the Omega and Snoopy story can be interpreted as deeply rooted, the findings suggest that an unexpected collaboration can also be something as simple as both brands having the same origin and honoring that.

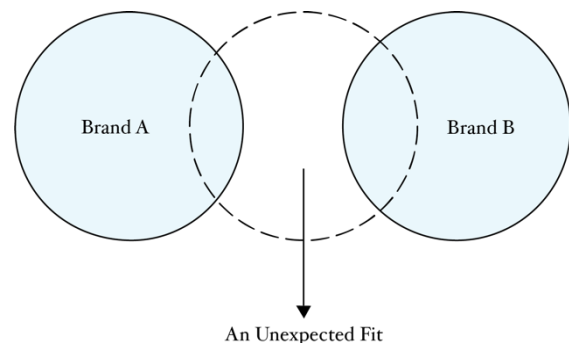


Figure 4. The Unexpected Collaboration Framework.

To conclude, in an unexpected collaboration the element of surprise lies in the partnership while the collaboration itself shows the unexpected fit that the brands have. This led to the development of the unexpected collaboration framework, as illustrated in figure 4. In an unexpected collaboration, the two partners should, at first glance, not have anything in common as this creates the element of surprise. However, the middle circle shows the collaboration itself that has to include something both brands have in common. This works as the unexpected fit between the brands, which is important to ensure that

the customers understand the collaboration and it is therefore of significance that the products of the collaboration reflect this.

Managerial Implications

In order to create an unexpected collaboration, managers should first find out what they want to achieve with the collaboration. Unexpected collaborations can have several different benefits for a brand; however, they are not given and will only be achieved if illustrated clearly in the collaboration. Secondly, managers should search for an unexpected partner with whom they have an unexpected fit with which is based on what they want to achieve with the collaboration. If a brand wants to strengthen its heritage, it should dig deep into its own archives. On the other hand, if a brand wants to enhance a brand personality trait, the brand should search for a partner who, in a collaboration, would reflect its identity onto the brand. The unexpected fit can be several things: a story, its history, or a common idea. Lastly, when a brand knows what it wants to achieve with the collaboration and has found a suitable and unexpected partner to collaborate with, it is important that the unexpected fit is shown and communicated clearly through the products. In this way, the collaboration will hold an element of surprise in the partnership itself, and the unexpected fit will work as the bridge between the brands. This will enable the brand to achieve the wanted benefits decided in the first step.

Theoretical Implications

Brands are often recommended to search for a similar partner to collaborate with, but this research shows that they can also seek an unforeseen partner where there is an unexpected fit. Collaborations need an element of surprise and a clear fit. This paper shows that the partner one collaborates with can be the element of surprise. However, when doing so, it is vital that there is an unexpected fit that works as a bridge between the two brands, and that this fit is clearly reflected in the collaboration. The study contributes with a

framework illustrating this: that an unexpected fit can work as the link between two brands who at first glance do not have anything in common.

The paper contributes to how unexpected collaborations can be used as a tool to develop and strengthen brands. In the cases studied, it was shown that unexpected collaborations could work as a tool for story building, enhancing the brands three rhetorical perspectives, building brand heritage, strengthening the brand identity, and developing the brand's personality. However, none of these benefits stated are given, since the nature of the collaboration and what it entails is the deciding factor of what the potential benefits may be.

Limitations and Further Research

This research solely focuses on cases of unexpected collaborations. If a more comprehensive study were to be done, it would be interesting to study examples of expected collaborations in a comparative study with unexpected collaborations, particularly examining when brands should use which type and which type is the most advantageous. By comparing the cases, the implications of using unexpected collaborations would build on the ones mentioned in this study, improving the reliability of the conclusions. Additionally, this paper explores merely three cases that are not representative of the number of collaborations currently done, therefore, studying additional collaborations would strengthen the reliability and generalizability of the conclusions. Lastly, this study is limited to product collaborations within the private sector and further research could investigate if the same conclusions of unexpected collaborations apply for the service and public sector.

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