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# **The Odd Couple**

The Value of Unconventional Brand Collaborations

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# Abstract

The purpose of this research is to explore the phenomenon of Unconventional Brand Collaborations from a consumer culture perspective and discover the factors that make them appealing to Gen Z. Hence, this study aims to give another perspective than the one given by previous literature on brand collaborations, which emphasizes the need for a high perceived fit between the parent brands. To fulfill the research purpose, a qualitative study was conducted. The research holds the philosophical assumptions of a relativistic ontology and social constructionism epistemology. Nine semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather the empirical material for this study. The sample consisted of participants with knowledge of brand collaborations who were between the age of 18 and 25. The study views the phenomenon of Unconventional Brand Collaborations from a consumer culture perspective. However, as existing literature on brand collaborations mostly holds a brand perspective, the consumer culture perspective in this thesis consists of three parts: the postmodern consumer, brand relationships, and unconventional marketing. These constitute the theoretical lens of the thesis together with the previous literature on brand collaborations. This thesis contributes three main conclusions. First, a suggested definition for Unconventional Brand Collaborations is presented, which is currently missing from the existing literature. Second, four values were identified that make Unconventional Brand Collaborations appealing to the consumer: uniqueness, identity, relationship, and utilitarian. These all had two or three factors connected to them, which altogether constitute nine factors making Unconventional Brand Collaborations appealing. Third, four factors that decrease the consumer's appeal for Unconventional Brand Collaborations were identified: disliking or not having a connection to the parent brands, lack of leverage, and lack of authenticity. The findings contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon from both a theoretical and practical perspective. Furthermore, it adds a consumer culture perspective on the phenomenon. It also illustrates that brand collaborations can be successful when the parent brands have a low perceived fit and illustrate the factors that make it more and less appealing.

Keywords: Unconventional Brand Collaborations, perceived fit, brand partnerships, consumer culture perspective, Gen Z

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# 1 Introduction

*This chapter aims to give a background to the phenomenon of Unconventional Brand Collaborations and provide a clear description of the research purpose. The chapter starts with a small background on brand collaborations and then moves on to explain the research gap within the current literature, which includes an introduction to the phenomenon of Unconventional Brand Collaborations. The definition of the phenomenon that is used in the study will also be presented. These parts will be developed further in section 2.1. This will be followed by a brief explanation of Gen Z, which aims to justify why they are especially relevant to this topic. Moreover, the section will describe the research purpose. The aims and objectives of the research are then discussed and lastly a brief outline of the remaining chapters of the thesis is presented.*

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John scrolls through the social media notifications on his phone. There is a text from his friend Adam, who has sent him a link to an ad for the new brand collaboration between The Simpsons and Balenciaga. He is used to seeing two different brand logos with an X between them, but this brand collaboration is different from the ones that he is used to. It is unexpected, and for some reason he gets interested. He tries to google the reason why the cartoon series is collaborating with the high-end fashion brand and wonders how the products will look, so he calls Adam. They both laugh and talk about how ridiculous it is that their favorite cartoon show from when they were kids now collaborates with a high-end fashion brand, usually worn by movie actors and rock stars - not on Homer Simpson. They both like high-end fashion brands but always felt as if it was too big and braggy to wear. However, this is not the case now and they end the conversation with a promise that they have to try to get the clothing pieces when they are released. At least they will get a t-shirt each, no matter what it costs. After all, a product that combines their childhood with their current life in such an appealing way might never appear again.

This fictional scenario is based on the findings of the thesis. The thesis aims at exploring the growing phenomenon of Unconventional Brand Collaborations. This phenomenon can be explained as two brands, who at first sight do not have much in common, collaborating on a product. A more distinct definition will be explained further in section 2.1.5. Previous research has mainly focused on the strategic branding viewpoint of brand collaborations, and not on the



consumer's perspective. Furthermore, previous literature heavily emphasizes the need for brands to search for a similar partner when conducting brand collaborations. However, within Unconventional Brand Collaborations, it is the opposite: the partners have a low perceived fit. The thesis, therefore, explores this phenomenon from the consumer culture perspective, aiming to understand what makes Unconventional Brand Collaborations appealing to the consumer.

## 1.1 Brand Collaborations as a Powerful Marketing Tool

Brand collaborations are a powerful method for brands to reach new, complementary markets and expose the brand to new customers. The trend of brands collaborating is nothing new, however, it has increased drastically (Schieber, 2021). The global rate of brand collaborations was expected to exceed 35-40% a year in 2010 (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010). This could be seen in today's business world, especially within retail, where new brand collaborations seem to occur more frequently than ever. Previous literature states many potential benefits brand collaborations may bring. For example, Aaker (2004) claims it can instantly gain access to new markets and develop its positions within current markets through customer reach and differentiation. Moreover, Uggla (2010) categorizes the potential benefits brands can gain through collaborations into three categories: financial, functional, and self-expressive. Brand collaboration can greatly increase both brands' reach. It enables brands to increase the number of touchpoints to current, and new, consumers (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010), as they will reach a broader audience and two sets of customers, instead of just one. Furthermore, brand collaborations have the potential to increase brands' credibility with the consumer and help to strengthen the image of the brand as functional (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010). This could be done, for example, by collaborating with a highly functional brand such as GORE-TEX (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010). Furthermore, brand collaborations can endorse a brand's core values (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010). The potential benefits of brand collaborations as stated by previous literature will be discussed in detail in section 2.1.2.

Brand collaborations also hold risks for both parties involved (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010). Uggla and Åsberg (2010) define six main risks brands hold when collaborating with another: loss of control over brand associations, loss of control and lost focus in the target groups, image dilution through overexposure, losing depth and variety in the core offering, becoming generic, and lastly, less

leverage points for the involved brands in the future. The potential risks brand collaborations hold will be presented and discussed more in detail in chapter 2.1.3.

While brand collaborations can create many benefits for the collaborating brands, most studies indicate high failure rates of brand collaborations, according to Dodourova (2009), indicating that brand collaborations only give positive impacts on the brands when executed correctly. Since brands make a significant financial investment in brand collaborations (Wilson, 2011 cited in Childs & Jin, 2020a), and they hold several risks for the brand's image (Uggla, 2010), it is important to ensure the brand collaboration will instead create potential benefits all brands should strive for. Hence it is important to explore and understand what the consumers find attractive with brand collaborations.

## 1.2 Research Gap

Previous literature on brand collaborations has mostly focused on with whom a brand should partner. This has mainly been researched from a branding perspective, whereas this thesis holds a consumer culture perspective, focusing on what factors the consumer finds appealing. Further, previous literature highly emphasizes that brands should look for a similar partner to collaborate with to create a successful brand collaboration. Géraldine and Reine (2020) state that brands should find the perfect match to create a successful brand collaboration. In addition, Charry and Demoulin (2014 cited in Childs & Jin, 2020a) claim that the greater the perceived similarity, or fit, between the brands, the more successful the brand collaboration will be perceived by consumers. Childs and Jin (2020a) continue that it is critical to ensure that the partner brand chosen aligns with the own brand's image and strategy, which they describe include their target customers, products, and pricing strategy. They, therefore, recommend that “brands with a similar level of quality, price, and image consider partnership” (Childs & Jin, 2020a, p. 391). However, in the business environment at the time of writing, an entirely different phenomenon can be viewed, where many collaborating brands seem to have nothing in common at first. These brand collaborations are further referred to as Unconventional Brand Collaborations. It can be seen that many of these Unconventional Brand Collaborations are highly attractive to consumers, even though the brand collaborations are not constructed within the criteria of what previous literature states is needed to be successful. Many of the Unconventional Brand Collaborations that can be viewed within today's

business world have created products that went viral and were very popular with consumers, which will be shown later in this chapter. Consequently, this thesis aims at understanding why the phenomenon of Unconventional Brand Collaborations works from a consumer culture perspective.

The majority of brand collaborations have taken place between brands within the same industry and targeting the same demographic. Yet more and more brand collaborations are occurring where the collaborating brands seem to have nothing in common at first glance (Tang, 2020). For this thesis, Unconventional Brand Collaborations are defined as brand collaborations aimed at consumers where the partner brands meet at least two of the following criteria: (1) low brand-image fit, (2) low product-category fit, and (3) unequal in terms of brand strength. This definition is motivated and explained more in detail in section 2.1.5.

The previously mentioned Unconventional Brand Collaboration between The Simpsons and Balenciaga is real (Cartner-Morley, 2021), and was announced not long before the writing of this research began. The high-end fashion brand Balenciaga was just, at the time of writing, ranked as the world's hottest luxury fashion brand by the Lyst Index (n.d.). This is based on shoppers' purchase habits, such as conversion rates and sales, as well as Google search statistics, social media mentions, and engagement numbers from around the world (Lyst Index, n.d.). According to Dagens PS (2021), the Unconventional Brand Collaboration with The Simpsons count as one of the reasons why they are considered to be the world's hottest luxury fashion brands, together with other unconventional partnerships such as their alliance with Kanye West and their collaboration with the video game Fortnite, in which they made digital clothing pieces. Fortnite is one of the most famous video games in the world and is especially played by the younger generation. Almost 63 percent of the players are between 18 and 24 years old and can thus be assigned to Gen Z (Clement, 2022). As such, it could be assumed that Balenciaga is seeking to arouse the interest of the younger generation by collaborating with Fortnite.

Another example of a successful Unconventional Brand Collaboration is between the highly prestigious and luxury Swiss watchmaker Omega and the cartoon series Peanuts (Goulard, 2020). Omega was selected by NASA to provide watches for their astronauts when they went to the moon for the first time during Apollo 11, (Precision Watches & Jewelry, 2011). The watches were later used again during Apollo 13 where the astronauts under dramatic circumstances had to rely on

their watches' ability to track time to come back to earth safely since they had problems with their measurements (Goulard, 2020). This granted Omega the Silver Snoopy Award from NASA, which is given for achievements related to mission success and human flight safety (Goulard, 2020). The dog Snoopy from the comic strip Peanuts is the mascot of NASA and is therefore being used as a symbol for the reward (Goulard, 2020). Later, the award worked as an initiator to the brand collaboration between Omega and Peanuts. The brand collaboration consisted of several different watches from Omega, where Snoopy is portrayed on the dial, as well as sometimes on the back with the words "Eyes on the Stars" written (Goulard, 2020). Goulard (2020) describes the brand collaboration as legendary, and it has been a hot topic within the watch community. The retailer price for the watches was around \$7,000 but sell for many times more than on the secondary market, where they go for between \$40,700 - \$52,000 (Weppelink, 2020).

However, not all Unconventional Brand Collaborations occur within fashion or retail, or with at least one brand that is perceived as luxurious, even if it may be the most common with at least one of these factors. The partnership between KitKat and Etude House exemplifies that Unconventional Brand Collaborations can also be within other industries and with brands that are not perceived as luxurious. The Korean makeup brand Etude House has released an eyeshadow palette in brand collaboration with KitKat (Hyun, 2019). Etude House is a Korean beauty brand that aims to appeal mainly to young women in their early twenties (Dong-Chan, 2016). Each eyeshadow of the palette looks like a different flavor of a KitKat bar, and the palette as a whole is designed with a KitKat logo on it (Hyun, 2019). Furthermore, this isn't the first occasion Etude House has combined candy or food with its products and therefore indicates that such Unconventional Brand Collaborations can give brands positive impacts (Hyun, 2019).

There are many more examples of brand collaborations in recent times of writing, which strike as unexpected to the consumer, but where it undoubtedly has positive outcomes on the brands and their sales. Clearly shown from these examples that Unconventional Brand Collaborations can be successful

at various levels and within different industries. This is counter to prior literature, which states that brands should seek a similar partner when conducting brand collaborations. This thesis, therefore, aims to investigate what constitutes Unconventional Brand Collaborations and what makes them

valuable from a consumer behavior point of view. Since most Unconventional Brand Collaborations seem to aim toward a younger generation, the thesis will explore and investigate the targeted audience's opinions on them.

### 1.3 Gen Z

67 percent of Gen Z customers have purchased products that are part of a collaboration between brands, and therefore represent the generation with the highest purchase percentage of a collaboration product (Sabanoglu, 2021). Consequently, it can be assumed that Unconventional Brand Collaborations may be of special interest to them. Gen Z refers to those born between 1995 and 2010 (Bassiouni & Hackley, 2014). These individuals are highly educated and innovative. Prensky (2001) describes Gen Z as a generation characterized by the ability to “think and process information fundamentally differently from their predecessors” (p. 1). Gen Z was the first generation to grow up in an era of social media, and much of what they encounter online is branded (Kastenholz, 2021). Furthermore, they spend a lot of time interacting with their favorite brands virtually, as the first generation of digital natives (Bernstein, 2015). According to Sprott, Czellar, and Spangenberg (2009), brand knowledge and preferences are particularly strong among Gen Z, just as their brand engagement with their self-concept. In comparison to previous generations, Gen Z exhibits a different expression of itself (Goldring & Azab, 2020). There is less brand loyalty among Gen Z than in previous generations (Schlossberg, 2016). To enhance their personal brand, Gen Z wants to wear items that are high quality, functional and stylish to give the impression of exclusivity (Vision Critical, 2016). According to Goldring and Azab (2020), Gen Z expresses themselves through their shopping and consumption habits. According to research from Bank of America, cited in Hoffower and Kiersz (2021), Gen Z will be the major driving force in the economy within ten years, and is expected to go past the previous generation, the millennials, in purchasing power by 2030. Moreover, Gen Z has highly influencing powers and could be seen as leading consumer behavior according to Hoffower and Kiersz (2021). They engage with brands that reflect their current or desired self-concept. Gen Z consumers have no defined identity (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). For them, it is important not to define themselves in just one way or in a stereotypical manner. In time, they seek to develop their individual identity by trying out different ways of being themselves. Therefore, they can be considered identity nomads (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Generation Z emphasizes uniqueness, including a unique style, odd hobbies, and interests

(OC&C, 2019). Therefore, brands that stand out and offer invention, authenticity, and humor are more appealing to them (Reyes, 2019). They are looking for companies that offer products or experiences that are different or unique (Reyes, 2019).

In the past, status was shown through products or brands that showed belonging to a certain group, but this concept is fading away (Maguire, 2022). The Gen Z generation is more open to self-expression than previous generations. In other words, the products they wear may not necessarily reflect their status, but what they believe in (Maguire, 2022). Consequently, it can be assumed that Gen Z strives for uniqueness and buys products from brand collaborations more than previous generations. Gen Z is therefore of special interest for this thesis and will be the selected target group, which is justified further in section 3.4.1.

## 1.4 Research Purpose

Since brand collaborations have a high failure rate (Dodourova, 2009) and brands make significant investments in them (Wilson, 2011 cited in Childs & Jin, 2020a) it is important to understand why successful brand collaborations work. Previous literature states that brand collaborations should seek a high fit (Childs & Jin, 2020a) and include an element of surprise (Aaker & Biel, 1993). Brands are consequently recommended to search for a similar partner to collaborate with (Charry & Demoulin, 2014). In today's business world it can however be seen that many brand collaborations consist of two partners who only have little in common at first glance. This research, therefore, aims to contribute to a broader perspective on brand collaborations than what the current literature holds and show that they also can be successful with an unforeseen partner. Furthermore, this thesis will be conducted from a consumer culture perspective, where brand collaborations and their success factors will be viewed from the consumers' point of view. This was chosen as there is little previous research on Unconventional Brand Collaborations and understanding what the consumer finds appealing with these collaborations was therefore seen as the starting point of exploring the phenomenon. Since this is an increasingly occurring phenomenon in today's business world, it is important to understand why Unconventional Brand Collaboration works to broaden the academic literature on brand collaborations. Additionally, it will help brand managers to both understand the phenomenon and help them perform better collaborations for their brands.

The purpose of this research is to explore the phenomenon of Unconventional Brand Collaborations from a consumer culture perspective: What are the factors making Unconventional Brand Collaborations appealing to Gen Z?

## 1.5 Aims and Objectives of the Research

The research focuses on Unconventional Brand Collaborations and what makes them appealing to consumers. The following paragraphs will be addressed with various intended practical and theoretical contributions.

Regarding the theoretical contributions, the study aims to bring the consumer perspective to the forefront in relation to brand collaborations, as there is little to no literature on this perspective to date. Existing research on collaborations between brands is mostly focused on the brand perspective with a strategic viewpoint. As such, this study should focus on the consumer's perspective and experiences. In addition, since little or no literature exists on the topic, another theoretical contribution will be to explore and define the phenomenon of Unconventional Brand Collaborations. According to previous research, the collaborating brands must have a high level of fit, or similarities, for the collaboration to succeed. Another objective of this study is therefore to complement and extend the existing literature from the consumer's perspective. In this way, it should be demonstrated how and why Unconventional Brand Collaborations can appeal to certain target groups, contrary to what has been expressed in previous literature. By analyzing the findings, factors that make Unconventional Brand Collaborations attractive to consumers will be identified.

The study also aims to make a practical contribution to brand managers by exploring what parts of collaborations consumers find attractive. Accordingly, this paper will contribute to what Unconventional Brand Collaborations should include to be perceived as attractive by consumers, which is important for practitioners when setting up partnerships and seeking a partner. Furthermore, this work should demonstrate that the composition of the collaborating partners is more diverse than previously assumed. For brands to find the best collaborating partner, the identified factors that make Unconventional Brand Collaborations appealing to consumers are aimed to function as a guideline.

## 1.6 Outline of the Thesis

This thesis consists of six chapters. The above-outlined introduction will be followed by a chapter aiming to provide a background to the previous literature on brand collaborations. The chapter will also include three theoretical frameworks that make up the consumer culture perspective that the thesis holds, which is a perspective that is currently missing from the existing literature on brand collaborations. Chapter 3 will then present and discuss the methodology of the study. This includes the research philosophy, the research design, the data collection method, the sampling, data analysis methods, as well as a discussion regarding the quality of the study and its ethical considerations. Chapter 4 will then present the findings and analyze them through the lens of the previous literature on brand collaborations and the chosen theoretical framework. The following chapter concludes the findings of the research and aims to answer the purpose of the research. Chapter 6 will present both the study's theoretical and managerial contributions and implications. Lastly, the limitations of the study are discussed and suggested directions for future research are given.



## 2 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

*This section aims to provide the reader with a background to the previous literature on brand collaborations. In addition, three theoretical perspectives are presented, including their connection to the purpose of the research. The three theoretical perspectives are: postmodern consumer, brand relationships, and unconventional marketing. These will make up the consumer culture perspective of the thesis, which is currently missing from the literature on brand collaborations.*

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### 2.1 Literature Review on Brand Collaborations

#### 2.1.1 What is a Brand Collaboration?

Brand collaborations have been around for a long time. As early as 1924 the French winemaker Château Mouton Rothschild collaborated with highly known artists of that time to enrich the labels of their highly sought-after wine bottles (Park, 2015). However, different forms of alliances and collaborations between brands have been an increasing trend within marketing recently (Uggla, 2004), and are arguably more relevant than ever. The phenomenon of brand collaboration holds several different names but describes the same thing: two brands collaborating on a project. Some of the names often mentioned in previous literature are brand collaborations, brand alliances, brand partnerships, and co-branding. When two brands come together in a collaboration they are often referred to as parent brands within the existing literature (Balabains & Mitchell, 2021). According to Wang, Soesilo, and Zhang (2015) retailers are increasingly collaborating with brands and creating products that are unique and differentiate them from their competitors. Uggla and Åsberg (2010) build on this and state that the global rate of brand alliances and collaborations could exceed 35-40% a year. Uggla (2004) suggests several forces that help in building this trend including increased pressure of effective marketing spending, increased stress on the brand to accelerate cash flows, and thereby creating shareholder value. Collaborations are often used to expand a brand's territory and leverage the existing brand equity (Uggla, 2004). Wang, Soesilo, and Zhang (2015) build on this and state that mass-market retailers are increasingly collaborating with other brands to create unique products. According to Uggla (2004), a brand can broaden its mission and meaning by collaborations as it enables the brand to extend into unexplored categories. In addition,

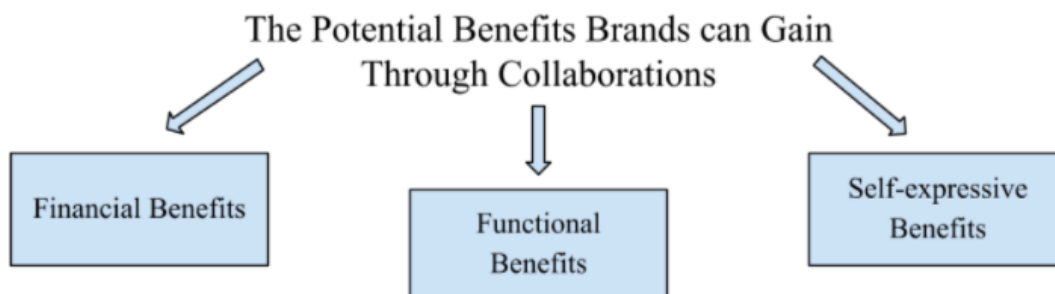
Uggla (2004) states that a consumer's knowledge of a brand changes when it is connected to another brand. It is therefore clear that whatever the reason for a brand collaboration is, it can affect the consumers' view on both the collaborating brands.

Within retail, where many brand collaborations take place, brands can broadly be categorized as more or less functional or symbolic (Balabains & Mitchell, 2006). Functional brands are described as more focused on addressing practical needs and immediate consumption, whereas symbolic brands are more focused on emotion, self-expression, and prestige (Balabains & Mitchell, 2006). For example, a highly functional brand within watches could be Casio, whereas Rolex could be seen as a highly symbolic-driven brand.

There are many different brand collaborations, consequently leading to many different categories. One way of categorizing them is described by Uggla (2004), where they are divided into three different categories: ingredient branding, ingredient co-branding and symmetrical co-branding. Ingredient branding refers to the addition of a single key attribute from one brand to another (Uggla, 2004). An example of this could be the partnership between GORE-TEX and The North Face, where the GORE-TEX material is being used in The North Face jackets (The North Face, n.d.). Ingredient co-branding on the other hand described as having a larger impact on the brand and is a collaboration where a reciprocal commitment is made of both brands in regards of changes in core values, the identification of discrepancies across attribute profiles, and the identification of a potential new position (Uggla, 2004). An example of this could be the partnership between Netflix and Ben and Jerry's, where Ben and Jerry's named a flavor Netflix & Chill'd (Ben & Jerry's, n.d.). Lastly, symmetrical co-branding is described by Uggla (2004) as more of a balanced relationship between the brands where the product is created through the combination of both brands. Furthermore, Uggla (2004) claims that it can have such a big impact on each other that it affects the associations consumers have towards the brands. An example of this could be the partnership between the kitchen appliance producer SMEG and the high-end fashion brand Dolce & Gabbana, who have made three collaborations together. The collaborations include kitchen appliances painted in vivid colors and patterns (Smeg London, n.d.), making them blend into the aesthetic Dolce & Gabbana look.

## 2.1.2 The Potential Benefits Brands can Gain through Brand Collaborations

Brand collaborations can elevate brands in many ways from a strategic point of view. While the thesis is focusing on a consumer culture perspective, most previous literature is focused on the strategic implications and benefits brand collaborations may bring. Brand collaborations are viewed as a powerful method for reaching new, complementary markets and exposing the brand to new customers. Kotler and Keller (2009) describe several ways of building brand equity, where one of them is by borrowing it. This is accomplished, for example, through brand collaborations, by linking the brand to other information in the memory that transmits the significance to the consumer (Kotler & Keller, 2009). Necessity, asymmetry, reciprocity, efficiency, stability, and legitimacy are some of the factors that motivate brands to search for a partner to collaborate with (Balabains & Mitchell, 2006). According to Aaker (2004), collaborations between brands can help them instantly gain access to new markets and develop their positions within current markets through customer reach and differentiation. Kunde (2012) argues that retailers use brand collaborations to increase the traffic to their selling channels and that collaborations with well-known brands create a unique offering in the view of the consumer, consequently creating competitive advantages for the retailer against others. It is therefore clear that brand collaborations can create many different advantages for the collaborating brands. Uggla and Åsberg (2010) divide the potential benefits brands can gain through collaborations into three categories: financial, functional, and self-expressive, as illustrated in figure 1.



*Figure 1 Potential Brand Benefits from Brand Collaborations*

The financial benefits are described by Uggla and Åsberg (2010) as the essence of brand collaborations, as the brands get access to each other's customer base. Partnerships can greatly increase a brand's reach since, for example, it enables a brand to increase the number of touchpoints to its current consumers and can help the brand connect with new customers (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010). This can be seen as the brand reaches two sets of customers, instead of just one and

consequently a broader audience. It includes strategic implications such as increased brand touchpoints and cash flow, reduced validity, and facilitating higher prices (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010). Bucklin and Sengupta (1993) describe that brands that collaborate, and therefore share brand associations, increase their brand equity as they can reach new markets at a lower cost and avoid spending fixed investments on creating a new brand.

Functional benefits are described as the brands being able to extend their territory toward the end-users through their collaborations (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010). The strategic implications of this are: instant differentiation and brand relevance at low cost, serving as an entry ticket into new categories and markets, strengthening the functional proposition, and, as increased reach and brand awareness (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010). Park, Jun, and Shocker (1996) describe that these brand collaborations can sometimes help a brand create a stronger attribute profile than if the brand would extend into new territory on its own. Furthermore, Uggla and Åsberg (2010) describe that a brand collaboration enables a brand to create a competitive advantage when collaborating with a partner that offers an important ingredient to the partnership. The association with that ingredient can spill over to the brand itself outside the collaboration (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010). For example, when a brand collaborates with GORE-TEX, it can create a spillover effect. In such a brand collaboration, the consumers' associations with GORE-TEX can also be associated with the other parent brands' products that are not included in the collaboration. Therefore, a brand can gain a significant strategic advantage in capitalizing on a core competency from the partner in a brand collaboration, consequently borrowing expertise and associations the brand does not possess on its own (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010).

Lastly, symbolic and emotional benefits refer to the possibility of reinforcing or borrowing “symbolic benefits through a transfer of design and self-expressive associations from the partner brand” (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010, p. 39). This holds several strategic implications for brands such as reduced cognitive dissonance, endorsed brand values from the partner brand, increased brand credibility and trust, an endorsement effect that leads to an increased feeling of safety, a more expressive brand personality, and lastly a more vibrant brand identity (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010). A brand collaboration often involves significant symbolic elements that spill over into the other brand (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010). Therefore, these brand collaborations have the capacity of changing and tweaking the consumer's perception of the brands (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010). Again, the brand

collaboration between SMEG and Dolce & Gabbana (Smeg London, n.d.) is an example that can be used, where SMEG represents the functional values of the collaboration while Dolce & Gabbana represents the more symbolic values.

While previous literature discusses the benefits of brand collaborations from a strategic viewpoint, they can be used to identify and analyze the factors that make Unconventional Brand Collaborations appealing from a consumer culture perspective. Consequently, the strategic benefits will allow for a more diverse and complex analysis of the findings.

### 2.1.3 The Potential Risks Brand Collaborations Hold for Brands

Even though there are many potential benefits with brand collaborations, far from all become a success story, as they hold major risks for both parties involved (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010). Brands make a significant financial investment in collaborating (Wilson, 2011 cited in Childs & Jin, 2020a). It is therefore important that they ensure that their investments are worthwhile and will have a positive impact on sales and brand reach. In addition, most studies indicate high failure rates of brand collaborations, according to Dodourova (2009), indicating that collaborations can only give these positive impacts on the brands when executed correctly. Brands must therefore consider all the possible risks associated with brand collaborations during the process of searching for a collaborating partner (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010). Uggla & Åsberg (2010) define six main risks of brand collaborations, as illustrated in figure 2.



*Figure 2 The Six Risks of Brand Collaborations*

First there is a risk of loss of control over the brand's associations (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010). Uggla and Åsberg (2010) describe that the most obvious risk with collaborating with a partner is the possibility that a brand loses control over the brand's identity, core values, and associations since they become associated with the partner brand and to some degrees are dependent and effect by

what the other brand does. It is especially risky since brand positioning and identity tend to change over time, in particular partnerships with celebrities (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010). An example of this is the long-term brand collaboration between the car rental company Hertz and O.J. Simpson, which first proved to be a huge success for Hertz before O.J. Simpson was being tried for the murders of his former wife and her friend (Jurberg, 2020). According to Jurberg (2020), Hertz was even dragged into the murder case as he was riding a Hertz car in a highway chase from the police, which probably created a lot of negative associations around the Hertz brand from consumers due to their former collaboration with O.J. Simpsons.

A second risk is that brand collaborations can lead to losing control and focus in the target audience for both parties (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010). Keller and Swaminathan (2019) describe that brand personalities have points of parity and points of difference that should both be clearly reflected in a brand collaboration to make it meaningful. Points of parity can be described as parts of the brand identity that are equal to other brands within the same category, and points of difference can be described as parts of a brand's identity that stick out from the other brands in its category (Keller & Swaminathan, 2019). When partnering with another brand through a collaboration there is a risk that these points of difference and points of parity get confused for the consumers as the distinctive features of the brand may be forgotten or illustrated in a disconcerting way (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010). This can then lead to an image loss for the brand and is especially at risk when two brands with conflicting brand personalities collaborate (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010), which is often the case with Unconventional Brand Collaborations. Boad (1999) builds on this and states that the risk of friction between the brands should not be underestimated if the brands' values differ significantly from each other.

Third, Uggla and Åsberg (2010) describe a risk of image dilution through overexposure as too many brand partnerships can decrease the positive impacts they can give, as described earlier. This increases the need for brands to be careful in the selection process of the right partner to collaborate with.

Fourth, brand collaborations hold a risk of losing depth and variety in the core offering (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010). This is mostly the case for retail co-branding where retailers only get the ability to showcase a limited amount of their offering since it is then only part of the assessment and not the

only offering in the retail store (Young, Hoggatt Casandra & Paswan, 2001). An example of this, given by Young, Hoggatt Casandra & Paswan (2001), is the brand collaboration between Pizza Hut, KFC, and Taco Bell. The three fast-food brands created a tri-restaurant that offered food from all the brands. However, it limited the individual brands' assortment in the tri-restaurant, consequently creating limited depth and variety in their offering (Young, Hoggatt Casandra & Paswan, 2001).

Fifth, Uggla & Åsberg (2010) there is a risk that one of the brands in a collaboration becomes generic and turns points of difference into points of parity. The generic state indicates that the consumer does not associate the product with the brand anymore, but simply with the collaborating partner and that it becomes part of that category (Blackett & Boad, 1999). A hypothetical example of this could be if a brand partner up with GORE-TEX in an ingredient branding collaboration, where they put the GORE-TEX material into their product, and the consumer then stops associating the product with the brand, but rather as a GORE-TEX product. Then the brand risks simply becoming part of that product category, and not being viewed as a brand by itself by the consumer.

Sixth, and lastly, brand collaborations hold a risk of less leverage points for the involved brands in the future (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010). Uggla and Åsberg (2010, p. 43) describe this as “when a brand is leveraged in combination with another brand, some of its leveraging potential for the future might be preempted... The reason for this is simple: if sources of brand equity are borrowed rather than built, the same sources cannot be leveraged in the future”. Kotler & Keller (2009) points out that what is built in brand equity can be controlled and leveraged in the future, but Uggla & Åsberg (2010) argue that if these resources and associations are only borrowed in a brand collaboration, there is a risk that the consumer will no longer associate the brand with them in the future after the partnership has ended.

While brand collaborations can create many benefits and create many positive outcomes for the parent brands, it can also be seen that it is far from certain that brand collaborations will become successful and create the wanted outcomes. Hence, it is important for brand managers to fully understand the phenomenon of brand collaborations and why they are attractive to consumers. Since there is limited, or no, research on Unconventional Brand Collaboration attractive and why

the consumer finds them attractive, it is important to explore and understand this phenomenon more from the consumer's viewpoint. An increased understanding of the consumer's viewpoint of the phenomenon will help brand managers to conduct future brand collaborations to gain as many of the potential benefits of brand collaborations as possible, as well as avoid the risks they entail. Furthermore, even though the previous literature review is focusing on the risks from a managerial perspective, they will be used to identify and discuss factors that lower the appeal of Unconventional Brand Collaborations for Gen Z.

#### 2.1.4 High Perceived Fit Between the Parent Brands

Previous research stresses that it is highly important for brands to partner up with the right partner when collaborating (Ahn, Kim & Forney cited in Childs & Jin, 2020a), to maximize the benefits and minimize the risks collaborations entail. In this search for the right brand to collaborate with, previous research strongly emphasizes that brands should look for a similar partner in order to create a successful brand collaboration. Previous literature has often described this as a high perceived fit and strongly states that it is the major factor in creating successful collaborations, as the two parent brands are often combined for complementary image reasons (Balabains & Mitchell, 2021). Childs and Jin (2020a) add on to this and describe that most previous literature on brand collaborations has heavily emphasized that a high perceived fit is important to gain a high evaluation from the consumers. Additionally, Charry and Demoulin (2014) state that the higher the perceived similarity is between the partner brands, the more successful the brand collaboration will be in terms of consumers' attitudes towards the brands and increased urge to buy the products.

Balabains and Mitchell (2021, p. 3) define fit as “the degree of psychological congruency between two product categories, or product brands, or retailers and it is “perceived” fit that is important”. Uggla (2004) adds on to this and mentions that both the brand fit, and the category fit are important to consider in brand collaborations. Brand fit is concerning the psychosocial fit between the brands' identities, whereas the category fit is how well the parent brands' product categories fit together (Uggla, 2004). For example, a collaboration can be built around a fit between the brands' identities complement each other, or because their product categories complement each other. An example of a category fit is pizza and soft drinks since their categories compliment well together.



Géraldine and Reine (2020) state that brands should find the perfect match to create a successful brand collaboration. Additionally, Childs and Jin (2020b) claim that the greater the perceived similarity, or fit, between the partner brands in a collaboration within retail, the more successful the collaboration will be perceived by consumers. According to Childs and Jin (2020a), previous literature has mostly focused on this in terms of brand-image fit, product-category fit, and product attribute fit. Further, the authors, therefore, emphasize the importance to ensure that the collaborating brand has a similar, or complementary image and strategy, which includes the two parent brands' target groups, products, and pricing strategies in order to achieve this high perceived fit (Childs & Jin, 2020a). Similar to Balabains and Mitchell (2021), they explain that a high perceived fit is when two parent brands are coherent and complement each other (Childs & Jin, 2020a). Childs & Jin (2020a, p. 391) therefore states that “high-end retailers collaborate with high-end brands, and low-end retailers collaborate with low-end brands. In other words, we recommend that retailers and brands with a similar level of quality, price, and image consider partnership”. Balabains and Mitchell (2021) agree on this note as they state that a high perceived fit between parent brands creates more positive reinforcing effects when the brands are more similar. Brands need to consider issues such as the image fit of the parent brands, the fit of the parent brands' respective product categories, but also the different brands' different strengths compared to each other (Balabains & Mitchell, 2021). To conclude, previous literature on brand collaboration states that the partner brands should have a high perceived fit in three ways: (1) brand-image fit, (2) product-category fit, and (3) brand strength fit.

In addition to the parent brands having a high perceived fit, ‘leverage’ is also considered an important factor in creating successful collaborations (Aaker & Biel, 1993). This is described as the differentiating attribute in the partnership that creates something unexpected for the consumer (Aaker & Biel, 1993). Furthermore, Dodourova (2009) describes some additional factors that affect the outcome of a brand collaboration. These factors that influence the outcome of brand collaborations, and have been cited in previous literature, are the objective and subjective satisfaction, competence building, the degree of trust between the brands, and clash of corporate cultures (Dodourova, 2009). However, these are focused on internal brand culture and competence problems they are not affected by, or affect, the consumer. Therefore, this research will not take these factors into account or investigate them further. As the thesis views brand collaborations

from a consumer culture perspective and focuses on what makes, and in what way, unconventional brand collaborations are appealing, these factors are therefore not viewed as relevant.

### 2.1.5 Research Gap and Definition of Unconventional Brand Collaborations

While previous literature stresses the need for a high perceived fit between the partner brands, many of the brand collaborations occurring at the time of writing do not meet the stated criteria, but still have been highly successful and appealing from a consumer's perspective. For example, the collaboration between Balenciaga and The Simpsons, described in section 1.2, does not meet any of the criteria for a high perceived fit mentioned in the previous literature. However, it is still considered, together with Balenciaga's other Unconventional Brand Collaborations, to be one of the most important reasons why Balenciaga has increased its status within luxury fashion and was ranked as the hottest luxury brand in the world in 2021 (Lyst Index, n.d.) As there are many similar examples, it could be argued that it is a gap in the current literature that does not consider the consumer's viewpoint of these brand collaborations. Previous literature has mainly focused on the managerial implications of brand collaborations, whereas many of the Unconventional Brand Collaborations occurring within the business world, in recent time of writing, are highly successful and appealing from a consumer culture perspective. There is therefore a need to explore this phenomenon further and understand the reason why consumers find these Unconventional Brand Collaborations attractive.

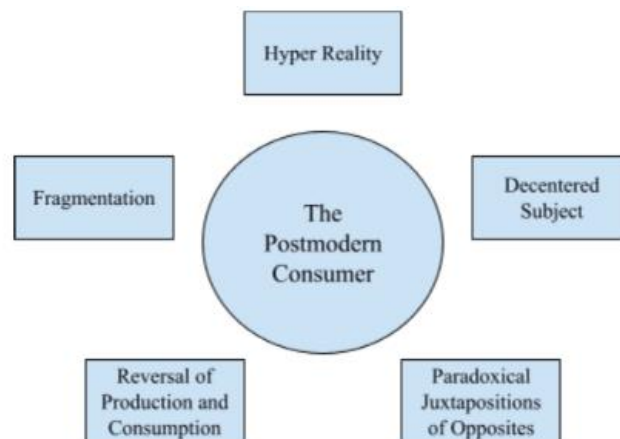
In this research, these brand collaborations are defined as Unconventional Brand Collaborations. While most Unconventional Brand Collaborations have a high leverage, as described by Aaker and Biel (1993) as being an important success factor, they do not have a high perceived fit, which is stressed by previous literature as the most important thing in creating a successful brand collaboration. In this thesis, Unconventional Brand Collaborations are therefore defined as brand collaborations targeting consumers where the partner brands that do not meet at least two of the criteria previous literature states for a high perceived fit: a high brand-image fit, a high product-category fit, and equal in terms of brand strength. Therefore, Unconventional Brand Collaborations are, in this thesis, defined as brand collaborations targeting consumers, where the partnership between the brands fulfills at least two of the following three criteria: (1) low brand-image fit, (2) low product-category fit, and (3) unequal in terms of brand strength.

With the first criterion, low brand-image fit, this thesis refers to brands with different target groups, and therefore often operate within different price segments. They are consequently brands with considerably different perceived images from the consumer's point of view. It is important to highlight that it is what the brand is perceived as, and not what it aims to be perceived as that is considered for this criterion. It is also not regarding what category they are operating in, but simply the image the consumer tends to associate them with. The second criterion, low product-category fit, in this thesis refers to brands that are not within the same industry, or category. To fulfill this criterion, they should also not be within complementary categories, such as the example with pizza and soft drinks previously mentioned. With the third criterion, unequal in terms of brand strength, this thesis refers to brands where there is a significant difference in how well known they are within their category. To clarify, this has nothing to do with the price category the different brands operate within, but rather their brand strength in the eyes of consumers. For example, H&M operates in the lower price segment within fast-fashion but should still be viewed as having a lot of brand strength, since they are well known within the fast-fashion industry.

These criteria can be viewed as highly subjective. Therefore, the research aimed to use very clear examples of Unconventional Brand Collaborations where there is not much of a debate about whether it fulfills these criteria. Hence, when providing the participants with examples, collaborations were chosen where the parent brands could be seen as extreme opposites in these criteria. However, the aim of the thesis is not to define whether different specific brand collaborations work within this definition or not, but rather to explore Unconventional Brand Collaborations. This consequently requires some type of definition, which was previously not available to the extent we were aware. Moreover, it is important to remember the philosophical assumptions that construct the foundation of this research, where reality is seen as subjective, and the research aims to illuminate different truths and how they become constructed, as can be read more in detail in section 3.1. Therefore, the main importance does not lie in whether we or the readers agree that the different examples given by the participants are truly Unconventional Brand Collaborations or not. Consequently, if the participants believe a brand collaboration is unconventional within their reality, this research will view the given example accordingly.

## 2.2 Postmodern Consumer

A central component of our study is to understand the consumers' consumption regarding brand collaborations, and hence the literature on consumer culture theory. As described by Arnould and Thompson (2005, p. 868), consumer culture theory "... refers to a family of theoretical perspectives that address the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meanings". The postmodern consumer is one branch of consumer culture theory and emphasizes that identity is no longer given, but rather presented as an open question where the postmodern consumer portrays and identifies itself through consumption and products (Hamouda, 2012). According to Hamouda (2012), postmodernism started to be used and researched in the 80's and can be seen as the end of the previous era called modernity. According to Hamouda (2012, p. 98), Gerrit and van Raaij defined postmodernism in 1998 as "a cultural episode, characterized by a pluralism of styles (of consumption) and ideologies, a need of hyperreality and self expression through consumption". Based on tribal marketing, postmodern consumers are not only searching for products and services that allow them to more free, but also for products and services that connect them to others, to tribes (Cova, 1997). For example, a consumer who buys a Harley-Davidson often does so to become part of the "biker-tribe", and even if not, is often seen as part of it by others (Cova, 1997). Based on Cova (1997), consumers value goods and services that enable social interaction of a tribal nature through their linking value. Furthermore, previous literature on the postmodern society has emphasized five main subjects that define the postmodern consumer: hyperreality, decentered subject, fragmentation, and multiple identities, reversal of production and consumption, and lastly paradoxical juxtapositions of opposites (Hamouda, 2012). These are illustrated in figure 3.



*Figure 3 The Five Subjects that Define the Postmodern Consumer*

Hyper reality can be seen as the construction of social reality with use of powerful meanings and representations of simulations (Firat & Venkatesh, 1993). This is somewhat of a fuzzy concept but can be seen as the postmodern consumer's conscious inability to differentiate reality from simulations of reality. A postmodern consumer's experience at Disneyland could be seen as an example of this (Firat & Venkatesh, 1993). The hyper reality affects both the postmodern consumer's identity construction as well as consumption. Identity construction can be seen as how an individual, or consumer, perceives itself and its purpose in life (van Raaij, 1993). According to Hamouda (2012), the hyper reality of the postmodern consumer illustrates these facts, and can mainly be found in communication forms, where the meaning of messages becomes floating. These communication forms can therefore be given new meanings leading to a new reality (Firat & Venkatesh, 1993). Again, Disneyland could be seen as an example of this where the consumer gives the fake houses and constructions new meanings to create a different, new, reality to step into. The hyper reality creates the opportunity for a big number of consumers, or a community, to give brands new meanings (van Raaij, 1993), consequently affecting the identity construction for the postmodern consumer. According to Lee (2009), the image of brands and products belongs to the consumers, as the meaning is interpreted and decided by them. In addition, the hyper reality also affects the postmodern consumer's consumption experiences. According to Hamouda (2012, p. 99), "The hyperreal culture seems to show other aspects and one of these trends is the will of consumers to prefer simulation to "reality". Postmodern consumers feel more playful pleasure of the simulation rather than the standing quest for moments of "reality". According to Ritzer (1999), simulated environments appear more spectacular than the real world for the postmodern consumer. Consequently, the postmodern consumer seeks after this spectacular hyper reality and consumes it thereafter.

Hamouda (2012) describes that the subject, that was in focus for the modernist, is instead decentered for the postmodern consumer. The subject is confused with the object, where the influence of objects guides the desire of the individual, or the subject, instead of the other way around (Hamouda, 2012). As Hamouda (2012, p.101) further describes: "with the decentered subject condition, postmodernism highlights the confusion between subject and object in consumption and raises the question of control in their relationship". Additionally, Hamouda (2012) describes that objects often have power over us as subjects. According to Hamouda (2012), this can be seen in for example commercials where the objects are the heroes rather than the human

subjects, who simply enjoy the show of the great object. The Pepsi commercial in 2017 where a Pepsi-can ended the tension between a group of protesters and the police force could be seen as an example of this. It led to big backlashes as it was said to trivialize the Black Lives Matter movement since it focused on the object instead of the subject: the group of protesters and their message (Victor, 2017). Gergen (1991) explains that the subject, in other words, we as individuals, have decentered to the degree that the subject is in fact several subjects in the sense that we change our identity depending on the situation, which will be explained further in the next section.

In the postmodern era, individuals reject the dominant values of society and everything they perceive as normal (Firat & Venkatesh, 1993; Cova, 1997). This is reflected in the desire of consumers to do their own thing and, therefore, consume diversely. According to Hamouda and Gharbi (2013, p. 613), the postmodern consumer is "... a fragmented individual who lives fragmented and paradoxical consumption moments". Therefore, companies must produce highly personalized products and services. Modernism emphasizes the central unification of the consumer, while postmodernism fosters fragmentation of the consumer (Firat & Venkatesh, 1993). For example, a stereotypical modern consumer seeks a clear identity, while the postmodern customer is more fluid in its identification through consumption. As part of postmodernism, fragmentation involves the combination of different elements to produce something new. Due to postmodern individualism, society becomes fragmented, in particular in the consumption sector (Cova, 1997). According to Firat and Vektesh (1993), the life of the postmodern consumer involves a series of independent acts of consumption. All of these require a different product with a different function, which consequently affects the consumer itself into being fragmented (Hamoud, 2012). For example, the postmodern consumer portrays different identities when in the workplace, when at home with the family and when out with their friends. The postmodern consumer, therefore, tends to have several identities rather than just one, and due to the confusion of genres, marketing needs to reevaluate its representation of the ideal consumer at the level of strategic planning as well as at the level of communication and image (Firat & Venkatesh, 1993; Cova, 1997). The postmodern consumer is flexible and used to changing these different images it has in its portfolio. Postmodern society is characterized by individuals who are free of social constraints and try to convey their individuality by making as many choices as possible from a broad set of options (Cova, 1997). Hamouda and Gharbi (2013) conducted a study that indicated that postmodern consumers are always striving to be socially desirable by constantly changing

their identities. The findings state that the postmodern consumer is not attempting to manage his image in the presence of others by changing identities (Hamouda & Gharbi, 2013). Instead, he is seeking to express himself deeply in all the identities he created (Hamouda & Gharbi, 2013). Consequently, individuals in the postmodern era are encouraged and used to changing their image frequently (Hamouda, 2012). Therefore, they are trying to adapt to new roles and identities (Hamouda, 2012) in comparison with the modern consumer, who rather try to create and maintain one clear identity.

The idea that value is created in the production, and then destroyed in the consumer's consumption is challenged by the postmodernist, where many acts of consumption are seen as what mainly creates value and meaning to products for the consumers (Hamoud, 2012). Cooper, McLoughlin, and Keating (2005) further describe that consumption of products can signal group memberships and lifestyles, consequently working as a link to different social groups the postmodern consumer wants to be a part of. Hamouda (2012) describes that the individual consumer is constantly reproducing their identity during the act of consumption, as the consumption of products serves as “a social act of symbolic meanings, social codes, and relationships” (p. 102). Therefore, all individuals are different from each other in their consumption choices (Hamouda, 2012). Further, Hamouda (2012) describes the implication of reversed production and consumption on groups as products gaining symbolic meanings through their consumption rather than as an act of image production. It is therefore important for brands to create products that signal something to consumers, who then through their consumption create symbolic meaning and hence create the value of the product. Hamouda (2012) describes that consumption acts as the following three functions for the postmodern consumer in a group setting: a value system revealer that reflects the group cultural norms and values, a membership revealer that distinguishes members from non-members, and lastly a mean of social action where postmodern groups can use consumption to mark group membership or even boycott other brands and objects.

Hamouda (2012) describes the paradoxical juxtapositions of opposites as a major element of the postmodern consumer. Firat and Venkatesh (1995) state that the confusion of subject and object, as previously discussed, has resulted in that they can be represented mutually, consequently being a paradoxical juxtaposition of opposites. Hamouda (2012) describes that the paradoxical juxtapositions of opposites refer to “the existence of incompatible or contradictory personalities in

the same individual” (p. 100). This further explains the fragmented self, also previously discussed. The paradoxical juxtapositions of opposites affect the consumption of the postmodern consumer as they tend to consume experiences contradictory and opposite (Hamouda, 2012). This can explain the appeal of Unconventional Brand Collaborations to some degree, as the postmodern consumer believes everything can be combined and juxtaposed (Hamouda, 2012).

To conclude, previous literature on the postmodern society is focused on five themes that define the postmodern consumer: hyperreality, decentered subject, fragmentation, and multiple identities, reversal of production and consumption, and lastly paradoxical juxtapositions of opposites (Hamouda, 2012). In short, the postmodern consumer's identity is not given but is constantly reconstructed (Hamouda, 2012). The postmodern consumer constructs and expresses this identity through acts of consumption (Hamouda, 2012). Furthermore, the postmodern consumer searches for uniqueness and authenticity, and it has a pluralistic style of consumption (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard & Hogg, 2019). The postmodern consumer, therefore, tends to have several identities and changes between these frequently and in a fluid way, being able to express themselves deeply in many ways (Hamouda & Garb, 2013). Since this thesis, contrary to most previous literature on brand collaborations, focuses on the consumer culture perspective to understand how the phenomenon is constructed, it is important to understand how the consumer itself is constructed and how they view reality. The postmodern consumer theory helps with enlightening this and understanding Gen Z more in-depth, which is the generation in focus of this study.

## 2.3 Brand Relationships

Maintaining healthy relationships is not limited to purely human relationships but also between consumers and brands. Relationships between brands and consumers are unique to both parties. However, these relationships must also contain traditional elements. Brands become human when consumers build relationships with them and see them as partners, and the relationships gain importance and value to the consumer as a result (Fournier, 1998). Accordingly, the brand is not a passive element that only offers a product, but an active component of the relationship in constant interaction with the consumer (Fournier, 1998). Earlier studies on consumer-brand relationships tended to see the brand as a facilitator (Grönroos, 1997). In the first half of the 90's Blackston (1992) and Fajer and Schouten (1995) for the first time showed that brands are actively involved



in the relationship. Following this, Fournier (1998) provided a theoretical basis and explanation of the relationship between consumers and brands.

A consumer's possessions are a significant part of their sense of self and of who they are (Belk, 1988). People have actual relationships with products and possessions, not only because they are useful, but also because they represent much more to them than the actual utility (Belk, 1988). Keller (2001) describes the relationship between consumer and brand as brand resonance. As defined by the author, brand resonance refers to: "...the nature of the relationship that customers have with the brand and the extent to which they feel that they are "in synch" with the brand" (Keller, 2001, p. 15).

There are some basic partnership requirements that brands must meet to be perceived as partners. This includes that both partners must be actively involved in defining their relationship, as well as depend on each other (Fournier, 1998). Brands are humanized and personalized by consumers in various ways to legitimize their position as relationship partners (Fournier, 1998). Consequently, brands are perceived by consumers as human characters (Levy, 1959). Aaker (1997) adds that consumers assign personal attributes to brand objects, such as products. Due to this, the brand becomes a key component of the relationship, and consumers develop an emotional attachment to it because of their interaction with it (Fournier, 1998). Consumers develop several relationships with brands throughout their lives, but only a few of them are emotional relationships (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). As a brand becomes more integrated into the extended self-concept, its emotional attachment increases (Belk, 1988). Meaningful relationships can change self-concept and sense of self-worth (Belk, 1988; Fournier, 1998). In general, the more emotionally connected a consumer is to a brand, the more likely it is to continue the relationship (Bowlby, 1977). Customers can also form brand communities as a result of their relationship with brands (McAlexander, Schouten & Koenig, 2002).

The components of brand relationships include intensity, duration, and loyalty, as well as the perception of the brand persona and its fit with a person's persona, as well as personal history and experience of the brand (Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2009). Fournier (1998) designed a six-dimensional brand relationship quality construct, which is a measure of the overall quality, depth, and strength of the relationship. As illustrated in figure 4, it includes affective and socioemotional

attachments (love/passion and self-concept connection), behavioral bindings (behavioral interdependence and personal commitment), and supportive cognitive beliefs (intimacy and brand partner quality).



*Figure 4 The Six Dimensions of the Brand Relationship Quality Construct*

The first theme of the brand relationship quality construct is regarding affective and socioemotional attachments. It includes love and passion, as well as self connection. The former refers to the emotional bond between a brand and consumers (Fournier, 1998). All strong brand relationships revolve around passion and love, a concept that is reminiscent of human concepts such as love between people (Fournier, 1998). Brands that are regarded as strong are irreplaceable and unique (Fournier, 1998). The self connection component of the brand relationship quality construct reveals how much the brand reflects the consumer's self-identity concerns (Fournier, 1998). In essence, it is the degree to which consumers incorporate a brand into their self-concepts and thereby express themselves through it (Fournier, 1998; Escalas & Bettman, 2003). The connection between brands and the self-concept can relate to the past and therefore be nostalgic, or it can be related to the future and therefore be desired (Kleine, Kleine & Allen, 1995). To maintain the relationship, it is significant that the consumer has a self connection to the brand. The moment a person becomes emotionally attached to a brand, it becomes part of their sense of self (Fournier, 1998). According to studies, this component correlates more strongly with brand relationship quality than any other (Kim, Lee & Lee, 2005).

The second theme relates to behavioral bindings and includes the facets of interdependence and commitment. Interdependence refers to the frequency and intensity of interactions between brand and consumer (Fournier, 1998). In addition, other brand-related activities, independent of the purchase, are considered (Fournier, 1998). The second facet, Commitment, is determined by the consumer's attitude toward the brand. The view of self is also included in the outcomes of the

relationship, thereby strengthening the stability of the relationship (Fournier, 1998). An active and stable commitment contributes to the longevity of a relationship (Fournier, 1998).

The last theme, supportive cognitive beliefs, includes the elements of intimacy and brand partner quality. The level of intimacy between a brand and its consumers is measured by the degree to which they are attracted to it and how much they accept it in return (Fournier, 1998). The final component, brand partner quality, refers to the quality of the relationship overall and the degree to which consumers are satisfied with the relationship and its performance based on elements such as trust and reliability (Fournier, 1998).

The thesis emphasizes the importance of self connection because relevant relationships can contribute to the expansion of the self-concept into new domains (Aron & Aron, 1996). Additionally, relationships can strengthen the self-concept through the enhancement of self-esteem and self-worth (Aron, Paris, & Aron, 1995). Brand preferences develop based on self-concept (Ross, 1971). The self-concept is a person's perception of himself or herself, which is established through self-perception and judgment by others (Rogers, 1959). Fournier (1998) also suggests that brands help consumers to define and confirm their self-concept. Further, Ross (1971) adds that consumers prefer brands that match their ideal self-concept when it comes to conspicuous consumption and prefer brands that reflect their actual self when it comes to inconspicuous consumption. Ross (1971) defines the self-concept in terms of the actual self, the ideal self, the actual social self, and the ideal social self. The actual self refers to how people view themselves whereas the ideal self describes how people would prefer to see themselves (Ross, 1971). The actual social self is about how people believe other people see them, whereas the ideal social self, refers to how they wish to be seen by other people (Ross, 1971).

Consumers are searching for additional associations that add value to products' basic features (Chernev, Hamilton & Gal, 2011). Individuals have a desire to express themselves, which results in the development of their interactions with other members of society (Fournier, 1998). Therefore, consumers may see the ability to express themselves as an additional benefit. Consumers favor companies that fit their ideal self-concepts, according to Fournier (1998). Consumers are constantly searching for new ways to express themselves through their choices. As a result, brands have an impact on how people express themselves (Munteanu & Pagalea, 2014). The self-

expressive function of a brand is one of the most important aspects of a brand in the context of the consumer-brand relationship (Keller & Swaminathan, 2019). Each individual tries to construct a distinct identity based on their prior experiences and decisions (Munteanu & Pagalea, 2014). Consumers, likewise, utilize brands to demonstrate their knowledge and style (Amaldoss & Jain, 2005; Twitchell, 2002). Consumers can create and confirm their own identity, as well as the perception of their identity by choosing a specific brand. As a result, brands can be used to express oneself as well as show others what kind of person one is (Munteanu & Pagalea, 2014). Consumers favor companies that are intended to fit into their lifestyle and complement their image (Munteanu & Pagalea, 2014). According to Vyncke (2002), an individual's lifestyle is made up of a variety of everyday behaviors and patterns. Consumers can transmit hidden components of their self-image to the outside world when they choose a certain brand (Dolich, 1969).

The emotional connection to the brand is stronger, the stronger the self-connection of the consumer is to the brand. Brand collaborations consist of at least two different brands. Thus, it is of utmost relevance to determine how the relationship behaves through the partnership of two unconventional brands. The consumer may have a relationship with both, which can then be stronger than the relationship with just one brand. Concerning consumer brand preferences, the reflection of the self-concept in the brand plays a major role and when consumers see themselves confirmed in a brand, they are attracted, which leads to a stronger relationship. This is especially true for Gen Z consumers who prefer brands that reflect their self-concept (Hoffower & Kiersz, 2021; Ross, 1971). Unconventional Brand Collaborations will bring together two different brands and therefore, it is crucial to find out how consumers perceive them, and to what extent they feel reflected and can express themselves.

## 2.4 Unconventional Marketing

Nowadays, consumers are swamped with marketing messages and products. In many categories, there is an extreme difficulty for the consumer in distinguishing between products and brands, as well as understanding how they differ and complement a consumer's lifestyle. Products and activities that are used every day are difficult to remember (Tynan & McKechnie, 2009). To stand out from the crowd, it is, therefore, necessary for a brand to create a lasting impression (Tynan & McKechnie, 2009). To stand out from the crowd, it must be unusual, perplexing, and surprising

(Lindgreen & Vanhamme, 2003). Marketing that is unconventional stands out and makes an impression on consumers by doing something unexpected. Since anything unusual becomes normal when it is repeated, brand collaborations are limited (Lindgreen & Vanhamme, 2003). Consequently, this experience is unique and only available for a limited period and for a specific product. Therefore, consumers acquire a fear of missing out (Hodkinson, 2016).

Despite the wide range of products accessible, many types of items cannot be distinguished by their functional attributes. The consumer is already familiar with it, and several similar products can replace each other since they serve the same purposes (Lindgreen & Vanhamme, 2003). Consequently, companies should aim to excite their clients rather than simply satisfy them (Lindgreen & Vanhamme, 2003). A self-expression feature can be utilized to make the product surprisingly pleasant for the consumer (Lindgreen & Vanhamme, 2003).

An example of consumers admire for things that stand out can be seen in Bellezza, Gino, and Keinan's (2014) study on the red sneaker effect, where participants perceived a person as more competent if he or she was aware of the established norm, but purposefully chose to break with it by wearing something unusual. This individual was viewed as autonomous and confident enough to act independently in creating and following his own path (Bellezza, Gino & Keinan, 2014). Those who follow their own rules are favored, contrary to the popular perception that compliance with norms aids acceptability (Bellezza, Gino & Keinan, 2014).

It can also be viewed as a surprising act. Lindgreen & Vanhamme (2003) claim that products and services which are unexpected cause surprise. When an individual wears whatever they think fits them best rather than adapt to the mainstream environment, they are more likely to be perceived positively (Bellezza, Gino & Keinan, 2014). It demonstrates that the person forges their own path by not following the rules and trying something out of the ordinary (Bellezza, Gino & Keinan, 2014). As a result, consumers seek unique and original products to escape the mainstream (Bellezza, Gino & Keinan, 2014). When members of a group feel extremely similar to one another, they seek ways to distinguish themselves from the group (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). When individuals feel broadly similar to other individuals, they experience negative feelings (Fromkin, 1970; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). For example, the ability to offer luxury products alone is no longer enough for companies to stand out. Consumers are getting more knowledgeable and

demanding products that are unconventional, and represent themselves (Bellezza, Gino & Keinan, 2014). This is a quest for uniqueness and originality. Consumers with an increased demand for uniqueness favor unique products (Tian, Bearden & Hunter, 2001; Tian & McKenzie, 2001).

Most products today are similar in terms of functionality and cannot be distinguished in that factor. For many product categories, the main way to differentiate products is through elements that surprise and are unique to the consumer. For consumers, especially Gen Z consumers, it is particularly important to own original and unique products that stand out and give them the ability to express themselves (Reyes, 2019). The combination of two completely different brands may make the collaboration stand out from others. Consequently, it is of the utmost importance for this research to determine whether Unconventional Brand Collaborations fulfill these criteria and to what extent these products can be used to demonstrate uniqueness.

## 3. Methodology

*The following chapter outlines the methodological choices of the research. First, the research philosophy will be discussed, which serves as a base for the rest of the chapter. This is followed by an argumentation for the chosen research design and data collection method. Furthermore, the sampling and data analysis method is presented and discussed. Lastly, a critical discussion is held regarding the study's quality and ethical considerations.*

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### 3.1 Research Philosophy

#### 3.1.1 Ontology

This research holds a relativistic ontology. Consequently, the research does not view reality as objective but rather socially constructed and given meaning by social interactions (Easterby-Smith, Jaspersen, Thorpe & Valizade, 2021). Considering the research purpose of understanding the consumer's point of view of Unconventional Brand Collaborations and the aim of exploring a different perspective than the one given by previous literature, the relativistic ontology is seen as appropriate. This thesis is aimed at exploring the phenomenon from a consumer culture perspective, and the relativistic ontology is distinct from the strategic perspective taken by prior literature. It is therefore viewed as important to understand the consumers reality and how it is constructed. The research, therefore, follows the philosophical assumption of the relativistic ontology, where there are multiple truths and where facts depend on the observer and the given context (Easterby-Smith, Jaspersen, Thorpe & Valizade, 2021).

#### 3.1.2 Epistemology

Following a relativistic view, this thesis holds a social constructionism epistemology. Consequently, it aims to illuminate different truths and how they become constructed (Easterby-Smith, Jaspersen, Thorpe & Valizade, 2021). According to Bell, Bryman & Harley (2019) research that follows the social constructionist view does not view reality as objective but rather socially constructed, and consequently aims to portray a particular version of reality rather than one that can be viewed as obvious. Social constructionism is therefore seen as an appropriate epistemological view for this study's purpose, as previous literature states that parent brands should have a high perceived fit, which they do not in the phenomenon of Unconventional Brand

Collaborations. Consequently, the research aims to illuminate different truths and realities from consumers than the ones given in the previous literature on brand collaborations. Furthermore, the purpose of understanding what consumers find appealing with Unconventional Brand Collaborations goes well with the social constructionist position, as preferences, opinions, and perceptions are highly subjective. As explained by Easterby-Smith, Jaspersen, Thorpe, and Valizade (2021), the relativistic view emphasizes that different individuals hold different views, as their reality is affected by their past experiences and position within society.

### 3.1.3 Qualitative Approach

The research question will be answered through a qualitative research approach. To answer the research question and understand the phenomenon from a consumer culture perspective, there is a need to get an in-depth understanding of the consumers' views on brand collaborations and what makes Unconventional Brand Collaboration attractive to them. A qualitative approach is typically used when the research aims to go deep rather than broadly (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019), which therefore is seen as appropriate for this research. Consequently, this research will aim to collect rich and extensive data from a few individuals and understand their view of Unconventional Brand Collaborations in-depth rather than collecting data from a wider sample. The qualitative research approach allows the researcher to examine the underlying meanings of individual justification methods (Easterby-Smith, Jaspersen, Thorpe & Valizade, 2021). Additionally, it is an effective method for stepping into the minds of others and exploring the world and the reality as they do (McCracken, 1988). The choice of using a qualitative research design for this research purpose is also supported by a quote from Draper (2004, p. 642), who states that the interest of qualitative research lies in "... the quality or nature of human experiences and what these phenomena mean to individuals". Furthermore, Draper (2004, p. 642) explains that qualitative research aims to "... understand and explain beliefs and behaviors within the context they occur". Since this research aims to understand the consumer's perception of Unconventional Brand Collaborations, what partnerships they like, why, and in what context, the qualitative research method is seen as applicable and well suited to the purpose.

This research aims to increase the general understanding of the phenomenon of Unconventional Brand Collaborations through the use of theoretical abstraction. Following the purpose of understanding and exploring the phenomenon of Unconventional Brand Collaborations, and what



makes them appealing in the perception of the consumer, this research aims at broadening the view of previous literature that states that brands should seek a high perceived fit (Childs & Jin, 2020a). This is further explained in section 2.1.5. The research, therefore, aims to increase the understanding of the concept by adding another view from the one given in previous literature and how the phenomenon of Unconventional Brand Collaborations is constructed.

This study aims to build on previous research on brand collaborations and broaden both the theoretical and managerial perspectives and approaches to collaborations between brands, which is explained further in section 1.5. Consequently, this research has an inductive approach rather than deductive since its main purpose is to increase the knowledge and explore the phenomenon of Unconventional Brand Collaborations, which follows the definition of an inductive approach given by Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2019). It is therefore seen as an applicable approach to this research, as an inductive approach enables a generalization to be made from observations in the data set, and through those create general principles (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019).

### 3.2 Research Design

As a result of the nature of the research and the existing theory that is presented, a phenomenological approach is used (Creswell, 2017). Phenomenology aims to capture the essence of a phenomenon from the viewpoint of those who experience them (Creswell, 2017). Essentially, phenomenology seeks to understand what and how a phenomenon was experienced rather than understanding what the individual thought about it (Teherani, Martimianakis, Stenfors-Hayes, Wadhwa & Varpio, 2015). The phenomenon must be interpreted from the perspective of the individual experiencing the phenomenon (Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019). Considering the chosen consumer perspective, the phenomenological approach is appropriate, as it allows for an understanding of how consumers experience Unconventional Brand Collaborations and thus understanding what is appealing about this phenomenon. The purpose of this approach is to describe commonly expressed opinions and thoughts of the participants on how they experience Unconventional Brand Collaboration. This is done to reduce individual experiences and provide a more generic description (Creswell, 2017).

### 3.3 Data Collection Method

#### 3.3.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Following the thesis phenomenological research design, interviews will be conducted (Creswell, 2017). This allows the participants, who have knowledge of Unconventional Brand Collaborations, to share their experiences (Creswell, 2017). An in-depth understanding of consumers' attitudes toward Unconventional Brand Collaborations will be gained by conducting several semi-structured interviews, allowing respondents to express themselves freely (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989). Interviews allow the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of how the participants experience a certain phenomenon (Easterby-Smith, Jaspersen, Thorpe & Valizade, 2021). In this case, it is how the participants experience Unconventional Brand Collaboration and what makes them appealing. Moreover, interviews are seen as a good method to gain a rich understanding of consumers' opinions, values, and beliefs (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989), which is of great importance to understand to fulfill the purpose of this study. Semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to be flexible in the interviews by, for example, asking follow-up questions and having open discussions (Easterby-Smith, Jaspersen, Thorpe & Valizade, 2021). At the same time, the semi-structure prevents the interview from straying away too far from the subject, as an unstructured interview may (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Furthermore, the use of semi-structured interviews allows the respondent to talk freely and discuss aspects they view as important to the subject (Easterby-Smith, Jaspersen, Thorpe & Valizade, 2021). This helps the researcher to better understand the participants' thoughts, meanings, and the consumers' logic of the world (Easterby-Smith, Jaspersen, Thorpe & Valizade, 2021). In this case, this refers to what makes brand collaborations attractive to them, and why. Consequently, semi-structured interviews are seen as the most suitable data collection method for the purpose of this study.

#### 3.3.2 Interview Guide

Prior to conducting the interviews, an interview guide was developed to create a loose structure for the interviews, which can be seen in detail in appendix A. However, it is important to remember that the chosen data collection method is semi-structured interviews and consequently the interviews contained questions and discussions outside of the interview guide. This is backed by McKracken (1988) who claims that it is important that the interview guide does not create

restrictions on the freedom and variability of the interview. As Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2019) suggest, the questions were therefore constructed in an open-ended nature, aiming at creating leeway for possible extensions and further exploration. Furthermore, the interviewer had the freedom to remove questions that were formally answered and to rearrange the order of the questions to match the conversation. Prior to conducting the interviews, a test interview was conducted to try out the interview guide. This was done to make sure that it held understandable and appropriate language as well as to test that the questions were asked in a logical order to ensure that there was a good flow in the interview, as suggested by Bryman (2004). Additionally, the laddering method was used during the interviews to ensure further explanations from the participants and gain more developed answers. This includes both laddering up and laddering down. The laddering up approach is used to motivate for more descriptive answers to their opinions and values (Bourne & Jenkins, 2005), and was practically done through questions such as “why do you like this partnership?” and “why is this important to you?”. Furthermore, laddering down is the process of collecting more detailed answers from the respondents, and aiming at creating a more in-depth data collection (Easterby-Smith, Jaspersen, Thorpe & Valizade, 2021). This was accomplished using questions such as “could you give an example of this?” and “can you elaborate?”. However, there was a strive to not ask leading questions when laddering up and down, but rather ask open-ended follow-up questions to limit the interviewer's effect on the participant (Bryman, 2004).

All the interviews were conducted using video calls. This was mainly due to the convenience of the participants since this allowed the interview to be less time-consuming, where there was no need to travel to each other. Furthermore, it increased the flexibility for the participants, where they could choose a spot themselves where they felt comfortable participating in the interview, as some participants might have felt uncomfortable doing so in person. Moreover, it also enabled the possibility of interviewing participants located far away from Lund, where we were based at the time of writing, without having to travel to them. Therefore, several participants could be interviewed, who were based far from Lund, and consequently, it would have been practically hard to meet these participants in person. According to a study conducted by Barnes & Noble College (n.d.), 90% of the members of Gen Z use apps with interactive live video, such as Zoom and Skype. Due to most Gen Z's being familiar and comfortable with video calls such as Zoom, especially because of the Covid-19 pandemic, it was seen as both appropriate and applicable to this study.

When the interviews started, the two of us took separate roles. The decision to split roles was taken since the allowed one to solely focus on interviewing, listening, and asking follow-up questions, in accordance with the semi-structured approach, while the other took care of the technicalities of recording the session and taking notes. Furthermore, Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2019) argue that another advantage of having more than one researcher present when interviewing is that the presence of several interviewers can help the participant view the setting as more casual, consequently enabling them to be more sincere, open and honest.

All interviews began with a relaxed conversation get the participants more relaxed and to build rapport, which is a crucial part when conducting interviews since it builds trust, making the participants more honest (Alvesson, 2003). The participants were then presented with a brief explanation of our roles and intentions with the interview and a brief background of the study. The participants were therefore aware that the study's purpose was to explore Unconventional Brand Collaborations. Before the interview, the participants all signed a consent form. The template can be seen in appendix A. Before going into the questions, the participants were reminded of the content in the form. It was therefore ensured that the participants were aware that the interview would be recorded, that they could stop the interview at any point, and that they were always fully confidential. When given their full consent to participate, the interview then began.

The interviews can be described as containing two different sections, see appendix A. These sections both included several predetermined themes to control the flow of questions and make sure all the participants discussed these themes at some point during their interviews. The first section contained a set of questions regarding the participants' views on Unconventional Brand Collaborations. It aimed at understanding the reason why the participants found these attractive, how it helped them to construct their identity, and in what way they added value to the products. Additionally, it aimed at understanding the factors that made Unconventional Brand Collaborations less appealing to the participant. The second section contained three examples, or scenarios, of Unconventional Brand Collaborations. This section aimed to get the participants' reactions and opinions on these. Every scenario began with a small introduction to the brand collaboration, where the participants were also shown a picture of it that was sent in the meeting chat. The pictures were picked out in advance, and all the participants were shown the same pictures. These are included in the interview guide, appendix A. The respondents were then asked

several questions regarding their opinions of the brand collaboration, how it affected their view of the brands, and if they found it appealing. This process was then repeated for the following two scenarios. The first scenario used was the Unconventional Brand Collaboration between Balenciaga and The Simpsons, which has shown to be an extremely successful brand collaboration, see more in section 1.2. Additionally, it exemplifies the phenomenon in a good way as it meets the criteria for Unconventional Brand Collaborations which can be seen in section 2.1.5. This was also the case for the following two scenarios that were presented to the participants. The second scenario discussed was the Unconventional Brand Collaboration between IKEA and Virgil Abloh. This partnership was seen as a bit different from the other two as it did not contain clothing products, consequently broadening the discussion from simply fashion products. The third, and last, scenario shown was the brand collaboration between LEGO and Adidas. This was seen as an easier and less complex Unconventional Brand Collaboration to understand than the other two, while still being seen as a good example of the phenomenon. Furthermore, all the brands used were considered to be well known, and often of interest for Gen Z, which increased the probability that they had strong opinions and thoughts about them.

Lastly, the participants were asked if they had anything they wanted to add, or if they felt that anything was missed in the discussion. When the interview was over, questions regarding demographic backgrounds were asked from the participants in the form of their nationality, occupation, and gender. Their age was already known, as this was one of the sampling criteria, as explained in the following section.

## 3.4 Sampling

### 3.4.1 Sampling Criteria and Technique

In this research, a subset of the population of interest are selected using a non-probability sampling technique following a qualitative research design. Through non-probability sampling, we can emphasize our subjective judgments, which suggest that brand collaborations do not require a certain level of fit between the brands to function. According to the previous literature on branding, the parent brands should collaborate based on their fit (Childs & Jin, 2020a), but there is only limited or no research supporting that brand collaborations with a low perceived fit can become successful. Thus, the participants in the study were selected to be part of the sample only if they

were thought to exhibit characteristics relevant to the research findings. If the phenomenon of Unconventional Brand Collaborations is not present in this biased sample, then it is unlikely that consumers are interested in Unconventional Brand Collaborations using an unbiased sample (Easterby-Smith, Jaspersen, Thorpe & Valizade, 2021). Therefore, it was seen as appropriate to use a non-probability sampling technique for this study, more precisely through a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling.

To answer the research question in the most reliable way, the study needs to focus on particular units that are of interest. Consequently, a purposive sampling technique was viewed as appropriate for this study. The sampling technique chosen is not representative of the entire population due to the small number of units being used (Easterby-Smith, Jaspersen, Thorpe & Valizade, 2021). However, it is a conscious choice, since only people with specific characteristics and interests in Unconventional Brand Collaborations are of particular significance for the research. This refers to subsets of consumers as those who are engaged with the topic. However, due to the problem of finding a sufficient number of participants with too narrow criteria, the choice of only using two sample criteria based on their knowledge of brand collaborations was selected. To take part, the two requirements that needed to be fulfilled were: (1) have purchased at least one item from a brand collaboration; (2) have a basic understanding of brand collaborations. Thus, purposive sampling is applicable. In addition, it was deliberately chosen to only search for participants who were members of Gen Z. It can be assumed that members of Gen Z are especially interested in Unconventional Brand Collaborations since they strive for both uniqueness (Reyes, 2019) and are the most frequent buyers of brand collaborations (Sabanoglu, 2021). From this, it can be concluded that they also have a basic understanding of brand collaborations. Brand knowledge in Gen Z is especially strong, as are brand preferences and a greater brand engagement in self-concept, according to Sprott, Czellar, and Spangenberg (2009). Consequently, it can be assumed that Gen Z members tend to fulfill the required criteria to a higher degree than other generations, but it was still ensured that they did fulfill the criteria on an individual basis. In addition, according to research from Bank of America, cited in Hoffower and Kiersz (2021), Gen Z will surpass Millennials in income and purchasing power by 2030, and become the major driving force in the economy. Consequently, it is particularly important for brands to understand their view of Unconventional Brand Collaborations. However, even though the youngest members of Gen Z are, at the time of writing, as young as ten years old, the participants had to be over eighteen to be

interviewed. The decision to not interview younger participants was taken as they might not be aware of their behavior, or able to explain their opinions as vividly, which would consequently generate less impactful data. Additionally, this was also considered from an ethical perspective, as the participant's full consent was needed. Hence, there was a third criterion that was also considered when selecting participants. To conclude, the three criteria that need to be fulfilled to participate in the study were: (1) have purchased an item from a brand collaboration; (2) have a basic understanding of brand collaborations; (3) born between the years 1997 and 2003, and hence being between 18 to 25 years old during the period where the interviews were conducted.

When the first participants were found based on these criteria above, a snowball sampling technique was applied to find additional participants. It is important to note that the participants found through the snowball sampling technique were also required to fulfill the three criteria above. In accordance with the snowball sampling technique (Easterby-Smith, Jaspersen, Thorpe & Valizade, 2021), the ones who met the criteria were then asked if they knew others who also met the criteria. Snowball sampling is a good sampling technique when it is difficult to approach relevant people (Easterby-Smith, Jaspersen, Thorpe & Valizade, 2021). Since the phenomenon of Unconventional Brand Collaborations can be viewed as quite niche and specific, it was seen as an appropriate sampling technique to use in combination with purposive sampling. Together they enabled us to find additional participants of interest for the study and thereby increase the sampling size.

Unconventional Brand Collaborations are a well-established global phenomenon, and no indications of it being centered to a specific market could be found. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were held with participants in several different countries. When the participants were from Sweden or Germany, the interviews were held in the participant's native language as these are languages spoken by at least one of us. This was done to make sure they did not hesitate from elaborating on their answers because of insecurity in speaking English and that they felt comfortable with the language. Recording the interviews and then translating them to English carries a risk of translation bias, which refers to the risk of misunderstanding the language, misinterpretation of meaning, and a lack of conceptual equivalence (Kirkpatrick & van Teijlingen, 2009). However, the risk of this was seen as lower than the reward of doing so and was therefore

still viewed as the best solution. Furthermore, efforts were made to limit the risk of translation bias through careful translation when transcribing.

### 3.4.2 Sample Size and Characteristics

This process of recruiting participants was repeated until reaching a satisfactory number of participants where additional interviews were not viewed to give additional insights or illuminate new patterns. According to Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2019), saturation is met when no new data is uncovered when conducting new interviews. However, when reaching this point, one additional interview was conducted to make sure no new insights were found. This resulted in a total number of ten participants being interviewed, containing six females and four males from six different countries, see table 1. The average age among the participants was 22,8 years and the interviews lasted 29 minutes each on average. All the participants have been given fictional names to replace their real names. This was done to keep the participants fully anonymous.

*Table 1 Participants and Their Key Demographics*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Length of Interview</b>
1: Tobias	23	Male	Student	Sweden	31 min
2: Sara	24	Female	Content Creator	USA	42 min
3: Julia	22	Female	Student & part-time working	Bosnia	24 min
4: Emilia	19	Female	Student	Sweden	30 min
5: Mia	20	Female	Fashion Blogger & Student	USA / Sweden	37 min
6: Martin	25	Male	Student	Germany	30 min
7: Björn	24	Male	Marketing Manager	Germany	26 min
8: Adam	25	Male	Student	Germany	22 min
9: Selina	22	Female	Student	Indonesia	24min
10: Lena	23	Female	Student	Austria	24min

### 3.5 Data Analysis

The analyzing process is always a constant back and forth, and therefore hard to describe, maybe especially in qualitative research due to its artistic, intuitive, and creative characteristics (Patton,



1980). However, the data was analyzed according to Spiggle (1994) seven analytical operations to some degree, even though it was somewhat more of a flexible manner where the different steps were not always done in chronological order with a start and a stop. The seven analytical operations described by Spiggle (1994) are categorization, abstraction, comparison, dimensionalization, integration, iteration, and refutation.

Firstly, the recorded interviews were transcribed. The first step of the analytical process thereafter began, which is the coding process, or categorization as Spiggle (1994) describes it. This is the process of classifying and labeling units of data (Spiggle, 1994). The data was therefore organized according to the most common themes identified, with the research purpose in mind. These different findings were all categorized and given a number. In some cases, statements were applicable to multiple categories and were then assigned to all the relevant categories in order not to be forgotten in the specific category's context and to allow an analysis of the relationship between different categories. When the categorization was completed, the different answers were rated between 0-4 after importance and relevance for this study. This served as a sorting mechanism to select the most interesting and common answers, which made the analysis easier. This was done separately by both of us, to avoid as much bias as possible, and the average rating was used as the navigation tool when going further into the analysis. Next, the abstraction process began. In accordance with Spiggle (1994), the categories were reorganized as they were merged into more general and bigger categories, each containing quotes from the respondents. This is done to find more general and broader themes and patterns (Spiggle, 1994). We both participated in this step and discussed the different potential categories based on their separate initial categorizations. In the next step, comparison, the focus was on finding patterns and similarities between the respondents' opinions and views, as well as differences and recurring topics. These comparisons were done within the different categories and quotes within the same category were discussed and compared to each other. Spiggle (1994) explains that comparison is done throughout the analysis process in different ways during the data exploration, often implicit and unsystematically. While this might also be needed to see patterns and allow creativity in the analysis process, the comparison done at this stage was quite systematic. The next step, dimensionalization, focuses on identifying interrelations between different categories (Spiggle, 1994). Again, the use of multiple categories was useful for this purpose. This was followed by the integration process, which aims to move the analysis beyond the identification of themes (Spiggle, 1994). Consequently, the data

set was viewed in the context of the previous literature review of brand collaborations and the theoretical framework for this research. The focus laid on understanding the findings in this context, and how they could be applied to the theoretical framework, hence adding a consumer culture perspective to the literature on brand collaborations. The iteration step is about repetition in the analysis (Spiggle, 1994). As previously mentioned, the path through these steps was not straight, but fluid. The findings and the most common themes were presented using quotes and discussed through the theoretical lens of this research, which can be seen in the following chapter. These quotes are aiming at highlighting the most common opinions, beliefs, and expressions to summarize the themes accurately.

### 3.6 Quality of the Study

The authors strived to have a reflexive approach towards each other and prevent predispositions and personal opinions that could affect the outcome of the research. There was therefore a great emphasis on defining the underlying philosophical assumptions, as the researcher's awareness of this strengthens the quality of the study (Easterby-Smith, Jaspersen, Thorpe & Valizade, 2021). The beginning of this chapter therefore aimed at explaining and discussing the research philosophical position to both be as transparent to the reader as possible, as well as increase our awareness of our underlying philosophical assumptions, which consequently strengthens the quality. Furthermore, Easterby-Smith, Jaspersen, Thorpe, and Valizade (2021) argue this awareness also can increase the researchers' creativity in the research, which therefore can be seen as indirectly strengthening the conclusions made. There was also a strive to be as transparent as possible regarding the process of analyzing the data as well as how the participants were selected, while still maintaining their anonymity.

To guarantee external validity would require replacing the insights in similar cases to ensure the findings are generalizable. Furthermore, Shenton (2004) argues that transferability in qualitative research is low, as it is hard to prove that the findings apply to other populations because of a relatively small sample size and since it cannot be statistically tested. However, the validity of this research is strengthened by the reflexivity in the interviews. Consequently, we focused more on analysis and interpretation of the data rather than creating consistent interviews. The choice of following a reflexivity approach in the data collection was taken with the ambition to understand

the viewpoint of the participants and their opinion of Unconventional Brand Collaborations. Furthermore, new interviews were conducted until achieving data saturation, which strengthened the study's validity, as no new insights could be obtained. Therefore, the study is viewed as having a relatively high validity, with the purpose of this study in mind, since it was highly exploratory, and consequently focused on illuminating and understanding a new phenomenon from a certain perspective. Hence statistical generalization is not the main focus of this study.

Test interviews were conducted to try out the interview guide before the real interviews to refine the questions and achieve a higher level of reliability. Furthermore, the non-probability sampling method was used to get in contact with insightful people with experiences and opinions regarding brand collaborations. Consequently, they were able to provide valuable insights to answer the research's purpose. Moreover, to strengthen the reliability, the research aims to provide a transparent illustration of the material used for the analysis to make the process as clear and understandable for the reader as possible. The fact that all the data was viewed and coded individually by both of us before analyzing further also validates the data analysis process and strengthens the reliability of the research according to Yin (2014).

### 3.7 Ethical Considerations

Both the protection of the research participants and the integrity of the research community were considered in this research, as it is important to reflect on the ethical factors that may influence the research according to Easterby-Smith, Jaspersen, Thorpe, and Valizade (2021).

All the participants are anonymous, as their names have been switched out to a number when their quotes are being used in the following chapter. It was also ensured that they agreed to participate and therefore the research has their full consent to include quotes from the interviews and to analyze them. This was done through a consent form, see appendix B, before the interviews. The contract of agreement was sent through mail or handed over in person as well as confirmed right before starting the interviews. Moreover, the participants were ensured full data confidentiality. All the interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants. This enabled the interviews to be transcribed and coded afterward, which allowed for a better analysis. Furthermore, the participants had the right to withdraw from the interview at any time or skip questions that they were not comfortable answering. The choice of conducting the interviews digitally allowed them

the opportunity to cancel the interview easily if wanted for them, as well as making sure that the participants could pick a spot for the interview where they felt comfortable and could express themselves freely. Moreover, only participants over 18 years of age were interviewed. From an ethical perspective, this was done as the participants' full consent was needed.

The purpose of this research was explained to the participants. Consequently, they knew that Unconventional Brand Collaborations was the phenomenon studied, which might have affected their answers. However, this was done to make sure that the conversation, and consequently the data, focused on the phenomenon of interest, leading to a higher quality of data for this research purpose. It is important to remember that this research wants to illuminate a different reality than the one given by previous research, and it was therefore seen as important to make sure the conversation focused on Unconventional Brand Collaborations, even though brand collaborations with a high perceived fit also were mentioned several times. Moreover, we were aware of avoiding deception about the nature and aim of the research, as well as striving to present the findings in an as transparent and honest way as possible to avoid false or misleading reporting of the data.

Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Jackson (2012) identified four political dimensions that might impact the research: the experience of the researcher, the subject of study, corporate stakeholders, and lastly academic stakeholders. Regarding the experience of the researchers, we strived to have a high degree of awareness regarding our inexperience in conducting research, as well as that background and personal experiences might affect the research. However, our different academic backgrounds hopefully led to a more diverse and complex interpretation of the data, as well as reducing personal biases when conducting the research. Furthermore, the high degree of awareness of inexperience and of the risk of involving personal beliefs hopefully minimized the effects of this on the study's results. Regarding the subject of the study, a high degree of awareness was established regarding the purpose of the study: to explore and illuminate a phenomenon in a new light rather than contradict previous research. Since there were no corporate stakeholders involved and a very limited effect from academic stakeholders, these were not viewed as big concerns for this specific research. The academic stakeholders were mainly Lund University and the supervisor, who delivered feedback but did not influence the direction of the research or the findings significantly but rather worked as a helpful sounding board.

## 4 Empirical Material and Analysis

*This section aims to illustrate the most common themes brought up by the participants in the interviews. They will be illustrated via illustrative quotes. The findings will be analyzed through the viewpoint of the previous literature on brand collaborations and the three theoretical perspectives which together constitute this thesis's consumer culture perspective. Four values were found to why Gen Z found Unconventional Brand Collaborations appealing: uniqueness, identity, relationship, and utilitarian. Lastly, three identified factors of reducing Gen Z's appeal towards Unconventional Brand Collaborations were found and will be presented. These are: disliking or not having a connection to the parent brands, lack of leverage, and lack of authenticity.*

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### 4.1 Uniqueness Values

#### 4.1.1 Uniqueness of the Product

Uniqueness appeared to be a frequently mentioned element when the participants spoke about the reason why they enjoyed certain brand collaborations. It is noteworthy that especially Unconventional Brand Collaborations were mentioned as participants were able to list brand collaborations that they particularly liked or that surprised them. In this case, Lena mentioned that the collaboration of two brands from different industries gave the product a new, unique character that she found particularly appealing. This made her feel like she was experiencing the brand in a new way.

*“It’s really cool because they (IKEA) are a classic company that collaborates with someone (Virgil Abloh) who is very trendy right now. Plus, he had probably not made furniture before either, so, then it also contributed to a feeling that felt very unique and that you now have a chance to get his products in a new way...”*

Lena felt a sense of exclusivity from the partnership between IKEA and Virgil Abloh since designers rarely collaborate with furniture companies. In addition, the Unconventional Brand Collaboration does not follow the traditional brand identity of IKEA, which is known for its standardized furniture and can thus be considered to be unconventional. Following the theory of Unconventional Marketing (Lindgreen & Vanhamme, 2003), products need to be different to stand

out and surprise the consumer. In the example described, Lena was especially attracted to the product because it was exclusive, which set it apart from other brand collaborations. Due to the high increase in brand collaborations (Schieber, 2021), there is now also a wide range of products that have emerged from brand collaborations. Therefore, brand collaborations should go beyond creating a product that just integrates both of their logos. For the consumer to take notice, it must be unexpected and surprising compared to other brand collaborations. This was expressed by Sara as follows:

*“There have been so many collaborations now they're kind of expecting it to be something different... You cannot just pick another brand and put your logo on top of the product. You have to kind of bring two entities together and create value from that spark...”*

The two quotes indicate that consumers are overwhelmed with choices and therefore seek new products. Due to the combination of two unconventional partners, the product stands out from the crowd due to its novelty and unexpectedness (Tynan & McKechnie, 2009).

In general, Lena did not find uniqueness too significant, especially for areas or products that should only provide functional benefits to her. However, Lena expressed a particular interest in interior design and furniture during the interview. Thus, it is worth noting that uniqueness was significant to the participant for products from their fields of interest. This was stated by Lena:

*“It also depends a lot on the product... It's important for furniture. There I actually want to have special, unique things. But if you think about electronics or clothing, it's not too important to me.”*

Further, having products that are distinctive and unique was particularly important to Julia. She described this need as follows:

*“... I feel special when I have it. I have some need to have stuff that stands out and that not many others have. When many others have what I also have, I do not think it is so fun and nice anymore. I probably just want to feel special, haha. You want to stand out from the crowd, and you want a unique style so you might feel a little more unique. You do not want to look like everyone else.”*

The example shows that the participant attempts to distinguish herself from others when she feels too similar to them, as described by Snyder and Fromkin (1980). Furthermore, she doesn't feel special when many other people possess the same item, so she is less likely to be appreciative of items that are not unique. Thus, from being similar to others, she experiences negative emotions (Fromkin, 1970). Unique products are more sought after by consumers with an increased demand for uniqueness (Tian, Bearden & Hunter, 2001; Tian & McKenzie, 2001). For the Gen Z participants, uniqueness and exclusivity were especially important.

During the interviews, participants were asked what they find particularly appealing about brand collaborations and given the opportunity to describe partnerships they would like to see in the future. Emilia, who has shown a special interest in luxury fashion brands during the interview, would find a collaboration between the luxurious clothing brand Louis Vuitton and an ordinary homeware brand particularly appealing and described it with the following words:

*“The coolest collaborations are like, you know, more different. 'Cause obviously all high-end luxury brands are supposed to be very unattainable... but also the fact that it is a high-end brand together with, what do you say, a common brand. That becomes kind of unique. I think that's the uniqueness, the combination, and the collaboration between them. When it is two high-end brands, it's just as, I don't know, we've seen this before, it's just in different shapes.”*

The combination of a luxury brand and a common brand makes the collaboration unique and appealing in her eyes. By working together, the product would appear different to her. Furthermore, seeing these two different brands collaborate would be unexpected, since she is already used to high-end brands collaborating and disliked for example a collaboration between Gucci and Balenciaga. As a result, this differentiating characteristic acts as a kind of leverage, creating something completely unexpected for the customer (Aaker & Biel, 1993). The combination is in turn perceived as unique. The Unconventional Brand Collaboration between IKEA and Virgil Abloh earlier, described by Lena, as well as Emilia's desired brand collaboration between a luxury and an ordinary brand, illustrates that these kinds of collaborations have a novelty and uniqueness factor because they have broken the typical brand image of the brands. To achieve this, an ordinary brand was added to an exclusive brand as well as an exclusive brand to an ordinary one.

The ability to make a statement and be perceived positively is another factor that makes Unconventional Brand Collaborations special to the customer. Mia described the perception she has about someone wearing or owning a sneaker obtained through an Unconventional Brand Collaboration as follows:

*“I think it shows that you're kind of outside the box and a free floater or free thinker. I definitely think so, and also, when you wear a certain pair of sneakers, it's like those that know they now... So, if I see someone wearing those, I'm like “OK, this guy knows what he's doing”.”*

It can be seen that Mia views the owner of a sneaker constructed from an Unconventional Brand Collaboration as independent and following their own path, a Red Sneaker effect as described by Bellezza, Gino, and Keinan (2014). The unique product allows the owner to escape the mainstream (Bellezza, Gino & Keinan, 2014). Furthermore, it implies that other people perceived the individual with the Unconventional Brand Collaboration as someone with a high level of cultural knowledge.

#### 4.1.2 Exclusivity

As previously discussed, brand collaborations are typically limited and only available for a short period. When asked what they find attractive about brand collaborations, participants mentioned the limited availability as another factor that made them unique and therefore appealing. Tobias described this in the following manner:

*“Almost all collaborations will be Limited Edition and there is often such a big hype... Then the only chance you get to buy those brands and so on. You know, it's kind of very unique.”*

Further, it can be seen from the quote that there is a lot of hype and demand for brand collaboration products and because there is only one chance to purchase these products. Sara elaborates on this by stating that:

*“... There's only so many of these, so it does kind of add value in that sense of urgency. Like “oh shit, I need to get this because it's gonna go away”, or whatever. So, in that sense, it does kind of give it this other value because it's a special edition and it's not just like you can get this wherever whenever, it's kind of unique right? So, I think that's what gives it value.”*



Due to its limited availability and high demand, the product is unique and ensures that consumers do not want to miss out on it. Further, the limited availability indicates exclusivity and that these products can become status-singling items. Therefore, as stated by Hodkinson (2016), the consumers develop a fear of missing out on Unconventional Brand Collaboration products.

Communities can develop through the relationship between consumers and brands (McAlexander, Schouten & Koenig, 2002). The findings show that by owning an unconventional product from a brand collaboration, consumers can communicate with others who are familiar with the product. For Sara, the brand collaboration between Adidas and AriZona Iced Tea was particularly appealing not only because she has a connection to both brands, but also because through this unusual combination, she can indirectly communicate her interest to the outside world without it being obvious to everyone. This opportunity was described by her as follows:

*"It's almost like people will only recognize it if they know what it is. Otherwise, they might just be like "oh, it's just a shoe with a design on it". But if you know what it is, you recognize it and go like "oh shit, that's that". You kind of bond with other people because it's like they know what it is as well."*

According to this statement, Unconventional Brand Collaborations can be used to create brand communities. This possibility is particularly appreciated by the consumer and was also highlighted by Adam, who described what makes products special to him as follows:

*"That you can have a pair of shoes that a lot of people haven't seen. So, you can be unique and know that only people who are really familiar with the topic know what you wear on your foot. For everyone else, it's probably just a normal pair of shoes but for those who know, it's a rarity and I think that's pretty cool."*

This can be seen as a form of non-verbal communication, which allows people with the same interests to communicate with each other (Cova, 1997). Consumers can express their uniqueness, or combination of interests, through products of Unconventional Brand Collaborations, and stay connected with others who have similar interests or values (Cova, 1997). Thus, it is possible for a consumer to separate himself on the one hand, but at the same time remain connected with others who also share similar interests. Furthermore, it can be seen that the value of these products is

mainly generated from the consumption and the people who wear them rather than through the production. This relates to the postmodern idea of reversal of production and consumption, where acts of consumption are seen as what mainly creates value and meaning to products for the consumers (Hamoud, 2012). As a result of the Unconventional Brand Collaborations, participants have gained a sense of belonging to an exclusive group of consumers who are knowledgeable about specific brands or fields of interest and thus stand out from others.

## 4.2 Identity Values

### 4.2.1 One Product Combines Two Identities

One of the key factors to why Unconventional Brand Collaborations were appealing to the participants was that they were able to portray two versions of themselves or two interests and combine these in one product. As stated by Belk (1988), consumers favor products that match their self-perception. When they buy a product, they feel like they are expressing themselves and their identities (Belk, 1988). As a result, consumers' perceptions are directly impacted by their self-awareness and by the similarities between them and the product or brand (Belk, 1988). Sara illustrated this when elaborating further on the Unconventional Brand Collaboration between Adidas and AriZona Iced Tea mentioned previously:

*“I thought it was so funny to combine iced tea with Adidas, and that it goes together well. It was like two versions of myself, two of my hobbies combined, you know... It is also representative of the skateboard community here in southern California, which is really popular. It's almost as if kind of ties into that whole skateboarding lifestyle a little bit, it really represents the southern California skateboard lifestyle, you know?”*

The quote demonstrates that the named brand collaborations fit into Sara's lifestyle and strengthens the relationship by capturing and representing key aspects of herself and her life. This can be strengthened by a quote from Tobias. The participant mentioned the Unconventional Brand Collaboration between the trendy fashion brand Acne and the Swedish outdoor brand Fjällräven as appealing, and he had even bought a product. He was asked whether he could identify with the parent brands, to which he responded as follows:

*“Yes, I do not know. I'm probably a bit both, but at the same time neither or either... Both Acne and Fjällräven are very trendy and cool brands. But they are also quite different in themselves. Acne is more “big city” and Fjällräven is more “forest”. It kind of gets easier to identify with them together... It gets a little more mid-type and that's maybe where I feel most at home.”*

In Tobias's point of view, the brands can be seen as opposites to each other since Acne has an urban image and Fjällräven has an image connected to nature. The brands together reflect Tobias' different sides. This connects to the postmodern consumers' juxtapositions of opposites, where everything is viewed as being able to be combined and juxtaposed, consequently leading to the postmodern consumer enjoying paradoxical consumption activities (Hamouda, 2012). The quote from Tobias indicates that Unconventional Brand Collaborations allow the consumer to do this, as the partnership can contain two paradoxical parent brands. Similar to this, Emilia mentioned the Unconventional Brand Collaboration between the sports brand Nike and the luxurious high-end fashion brand Dior as appealing. In the following quote, the participant elaborates on the reasons for this:

*“It's just shoes, but I love shoes and I love sneakers, so I guess that's just why I liked it. It was a cool collaboration 'cause I like Nike, and obviously who doesn't like Dior? So, it was like a cool match... Either I like to dress fancy, or it (her clothing style) can be more like street, so I guess the shoe becomes a little bit of both. That's why I like them, I Think. Cause', you know, it's like a mitch match of my two different styles.”*

This could be seen through the lens of the postmodern consumer, as the postmodern consumer's identity is said not to be given, but rather presented as an open question (Hamouda, 2012). The identity of the postmodern consumer is fragmented, where consumption is paradoxical (Hamouda & Gharbi, 2013), and therefore the postmodern tends to have several identities rather than one (Firat & Venkatesh, 1993; Cova, 1997). Furthermore, this fragmented identity is portrayed through acts of consumption (Hamouda, 2012). The findings from the interview support the literature on the postmodern consumer, and it was clear that Unconventional Brand Collaborations helped the participants to portray two versions of themselves through one product and combine these two different identities. Further, previous literature on brand collaboration highly emphasizes that the brands should find a collaborating partner with a high perceived fit (Childs & Jin, 2020a), and

consequently avoid partners with a low perceived fit. However, the findings show that the participants often found a low perceived fit appealing. The findings indicate that the reason for this is their fragmented identity, where they through Unconventional Brand Collaborations can show multiple sides of themselves in one product. When the parent brands have a high perceived fit, this would not be possible since a high perceived fit entails that the parent brands have a similar identity, are working in the same or complimenting categories (Uggla, 2004), and are equal in terms of brand strength (Balabains & Mitchell, 2021). Therefore, a brand collaboration where the parent brands have a high perceived fit would usually only apply to one of the personalities of the consumer, while Unconventional Brand Collaborations can portray two sides of the consumer.

The participants thought more or less any brands were able to be combined in a collaboration. This can be explained through the literature on the postmodern consumer, which emphasizes the paradoxical juxtapositions of opposites (Hamouda, 2012). The postmodern consumer thinks everything can be combined (Hamouda, 2012), which was shown clearly in the interviews. When the participants were asked for a fictional brand collaboration they would like to see in the future, the answers were mainly Unconventional Brand Collaborations with a low perceived fit between the parent brands. The only common factor was that the participants identified themselves with both the brands mentioned. This can be illustrated through a quote from Julia, who mentioned the lip balm brand Carmex and Oatly, a producer of oat alternatives to dairy milk, as a fictional brand collaboration she would like to see in the future:

*“I love Carmex and I love Oatly! Then you can mix nostalgia with a more modern and contemporary brand... It's kind of the mix, that you can get two different brand profiles in the same product. It would have been very unexpected, but I would have thought it was cool because it shows two slightly odd sides of me.”*

The quote once again indicates that the consumer gains the opportunity to consume paradoxically through Unconventional Brand Collaboration, which the postmodern consumer enjoys (Hamouda, 2012). In the quote above, Julia enjoys the paradoxical combination of a modern brand with a nostalgic one through an Unconventional Brand Collaboration. When answering the same question, to describe a fictional brand they would like to see, Sara described the same factor of identifying with both the parent brands mentioned. In the following quote, she elaborates on why

she would like to see the clothing brand Levi's collaborate with the instrument manufacturer Fender:

*"I really like Levi's 'cause their stuff is good quality and it has a certain attitude and aesthetic to it. I think it would be cool if they collaborated with a music brand that you like, 'cause I also play guitar, so if they did a collaboration with like Fender or something and make a guitar with their aesthetics, I think it would be awesome... I'm a big music fan, like besides art and design and stuff that's probably my top thing... I want to put two different parts of myself together in one product, right? Especially with clothing because I think clothing is just such a form of self-expression. So, I think for me it just comes down to that... I think whenever you're a fan of something, it's cool to be able to represent that, right? So, I thought that would be cool because it's like another way to kind of express yourself through clothing. But also, like express something that you like."*

It is important to Sara that the brand collaboration plays a cultural role and becomes a displaying item of her lifestyle. Through the combination of two sides of her, she is also able to portray a diverse and complex personality. A third quote that illustrates the finding can be seen from Selina, who brought up the collaboration between the clothing brand Vans and the camera brand Leica, explaining what she found appealing about the brand collaboration:

*"I've loved taking pictures all my life and you wouldn't associate Vans directly with cameras, but that's why I was really surprised. I think the design of the camera is great. I think the collaboration is successful and you wouldn't have expected that because they're total opposites... I'm also interested in fashion, and I love to take pictures, so my passions are somehow combined. I just didn't expect that. That's why I think the combination is actually cool."*

These findings illustrate the fit between the collaborating brands is not as important for the participants as previous literature suggests (Uggla, 2004). For the participants, who are part of Gen Z, it is instead more important that the collaborating brands both connect to their identity and as illustrated by the quotes, especially if it connects to two different identities of the consumer. The consumer then works as the bridge between the brands, where the consumer's different identities are reflected in the product. Consequently, the participants found brand collaborations appealing where the consumer itself was the fit, rather than when the brands had a high perceived fit. The

findings, therefore, suggest that Unconventional Brand Collaborations should be viewed as consisting of three partners instead of two, where the two brands are accompanied by the consumer itself. This is contrary to previous literature on brand collaborations, where the focus is merely on the collaborating brands and not on the consumer. The idea of a brand collaboration consisting of three partners instead of two can further be explained through the decentered subject, as explained by Hamouda (2012), who highlights the postmodern consumer's confusion of the object and subject, and that the distinction between these has been diminished. To conclude, the findings from the study suggest that fit between consumers and brands is more important for participants than fit between collaborating brands. The presented findings suggest that it is more important for Gen Z that the product from a brand collaboration has a high fit to the consumer's identities and personality traits rather than the parent brands having a high perceived fit. One key reason why Unconventional Brand Collaborations are appealing to Gen Z is therefore that they can portray several interests and personality traits through the product rather than one, as it would in a brand collaboration consisting of parent brands with a high perceived fit.

#### 4.2.2 Self Extension and Expression

A brand's self-expression function is one of the most important aspects of it, according to Keller and Swaminathan (2019). Through Unconventional Brand Collaborations, people can display several facets of their personalities to the outside world. Therefore, a reference can be made to the self-concept component of Susan Fournier's (1998) brand relationship quality construct, which defines the extent to which a brand, in this case, an Unconventional Brand Collaboration, reflects the consumer's self-concept. The following quote of Martin demonstrates how this allows him to represent his interest in interior design to the outside world. In the interview, the participant described himself as a design fan who was particularly interested in Virgil Abloh's collaboration with IKEA. In particular, he finds that carpets add value and describes them as follows:

*“I think they give the apartment a special touch. They make the apartment special. When you walk into an apartment and see a carpet like that, you know right away that this person is probably creative, is enthusiastic about fashion, but is also interested in the furniture industry and wants to stand out. The person starts right in the hallway to have a gallery, which is why you then expect that in the rest of the apartment are large paintings and art pieces.”*

The interest expressed by Martin in design and interior decoration is a clear indicator that this Unconventional Brand Collaboration matched his self-concept, as described by Ross (1971). Therefore, the product reflects the lifestyle of the participant and allows him to express himself through it, so he finds the product appealing (Fournier, 1998; Munteanu & Pagalea, 2014). This finding was also demonstrated by Sara, who described herself in a previous statement as interested in music, art, and design. In her description of her desired collaboration, Levis and Fender were mentioned. She stated the following reasons for her desire:

*“I think that would be kind of cool if they (Levis & Fender) did something like that...I already dress in a certain way that already kind of lends itself to that. So, I feel like it would just be another extension of the things I like and it's just kind of an extension of me and the things I like.”*

Besides reflecting one's self-concept, Unconventional Brand Collaborations can also serve as an extension of it (Aron & Aron, 1996; Belk, 1988). The interviews also reveal that consumers can express interests through Unconventional Brand Collaborations they may not be able to express with a conventional product. In the past, Pokémon was a huge part of Sara's childhood, but she finds the brand alone too childish for her nowadays, as she has grown older. However, she would find Pokémon in collaboration with a more mature brand more suitable for her and describes it as follows:

*“... At this point, I'm older so it (Pokémon) would need to fit into a more mature and classy way. So, kind of have both this nostalgic element from the Pokémon, I guess, and then also kind of something that represents a more mature version of myself, right. And you can identify yourself through both of them...”*

It is likely that she will not own or display any merchandise from Pokémon alone since she doesn't perceive it as mature enough. However, she thought Pokémon would be more appropriate for her if it is partnered with a more mature brand. As described by Dolich (1969), brands can help consumers transmit hidden components of their self-image to the outside world. Therefore, Unconventional Brand Collaborations can reveal consumers' hidden characteristics, in this case, her enthusiasm for Pokémon. It would probably not be possible to accomplish this through a brand collaboration where the parent brands operate in the same industry or target the same consumers,

as these products would retain this childish sentiment. In this instance, however, when two opposite unconventional brands, mature and childlike, meet, it works.

## 4.3 Relational Values

### 4.3.1 High-End Brands Become Approachable

Previous literature suggests high-end brands collaborate with high-end brands (Childs & Jin, 2020a). The findings contradict these suggestions, as these types of brand collaborations came off as too braggy and elitist in the viewpoint of the participants. As suggested by Balabains and Mitchell (2006), retailer brands can be seen as more or less functional or symbolic. When the participants were talking about brand collaborations consisting of two highly symbolic brands, that were viewed as high-end brands, they tended not to like the brand collaboration. This can be illustrated through a quote from Tobias:

*“It becomes elitist in a way that I do not like. I think it's a little weird... You (the brands) just want this to be a hype, it does not feel like the products will be so different anyway. Then it really feels like they're just doing this to make money on this. They are not trying to make better or more fun products or reach out to a new segment that usually cannot buy their stuff.”*

Selina expressed similar thoughts when asked to bring up an example of a brand collaboration she did not like:

*“I think it gets silly when, for example, Gucci and Balenciaga collaborate. Fendi and Versace also collaborated recently. It's kind of the same company. What does this add? It's like just trying to catch on to this collaborative trend. So, it becomes elitist in a way that I do not like. I think it's a little weird.”*

The brand collaboration between Gucci and Balenciaga was brought up again by Emilia when answering the same question, who expressed similar opinions:

*“Gucci and Balenciaga who did a collaboration quite recently... I know initially that I didn't like the collaboration they did. It felt like just another logo on the same product. It was just weird 'cause it was like the Balenciaga shape of the bag, but it was the Gucci print. Some people*



*obviously found that really cool. But I don't know, I don't Like it... The coolest collaborations are like, you know, more different. 'Cause obviously all high-end luxury brands are supposed to be very unattainable, but when it's two really high-end brands from the beginning, it's just like, I don't know, it just does not impress me. It becomes a bit too braggy."*

However, when a high-end brand collaborates with a partner that is seen as more attainable and less expensive, the participants viewed the high-end brand as more approachable. When Julia described the Unconventional Brand Collaboration between the outdoor brand clothing brand The North Face and the highly luxurious fashion brand Gucci as an example of a brand collaboration she found appealing with a similar motivation:

*"Gucci, which may otherwise have a little too crazy clothes, was also toned down and became more accessible simply. Both in terms of price but perhaps above all because it did not become such a statement to buy and use their garments. You can appear a little bit quirky and upper class otherwise in a bad way, but through this collaboration, I think it was rather that you were cool and kept up well with the trend. I feel a little more at home in these garments while it would have felt as if I was dressed up in their usual clothes. Both for Gucci and The North Face."*

The findings suggest that when a high-end brand collaborates with a more attainable brand, and the partners consequently have a low image fit, the high-end parent is viewed as more approachable and less braggy. It is therefore clear that parent brands in an Unconventional Brand Collaboration can also gain the emotional and symbolic benefits from a consumer's viewpoint, which Uggla and Åsberg (2010) bring up as one of the three benefits brand collaborations may bring. When presenting the scenario of the Unconventional Brand Collaboration between IKEA and Virgil Abloh, the transferability of the approachable element even changed Emilia's perception of Virgil Abloh to such a degree that it even spilled over to his brand Off White as well:

*"Yeah. I think it was super cool because IKEA's motto is value prescription or something. You know, it's a brand for everyone basically and everyone is supposed to be able to afford IKEA. And then you have Virgil and his brand Off White, who are very unique and obviously very expensive. I thought it was really cool also to see a fashion brand collaborate with IKEA which is like the most common brand ever. It was quite humble, I guess. I think it (Off White) is not as casual or something you can wear otherwise. It became so much of a statement of wearing some*

*of those pieces, at least in Sweden, that some people almost got scared of wearing it, you know. I think Off White became so much more approachable in Sweden at least because we always have this “law of Jante” thing where you're not supposed to stick out too much. But after the collaboration, it became more OK to do that in a sense. Yeah, it became more approachable I guess, and it became a little bit more cool too.”*

It can therefore be said that Unconventional Brand Collaborations containing one high-end brand and one more attainable brand can make the high-end brand become a more approachable image. Consequently, the brands can gain emotional and symbolic benefits through a spill-over effect, as mentioned by Uggla (2010) from the view of the consumer. Further spill-over effects on the image of the parent brands will be presented and discussed in the following section.

#### 4.3.2 More Complex Brand Personality

As stated in the previous section, Unconventional Brand Collaborations can have spill-over effects on the parent brands, where they can inherit positive brand personality traits from each other from the consumer's viewpoint. This is in accordance with the findings presented by Uggla (2010) regarding the potential benefits brands can gain through collaborating. For example, when presenting the Unconventional Brand Collaboration between Balenciaga and The Simpsons, Tobias viewed Balenciaga as more innovative:

*“I think it gives the products more value, and the brand gets a higher value maybe because they look more innovative or cool in that way... I think they're pretty ugly clothes, to be honest. The collaboration is cool, but the clothes are simply not my style. But when I look at that company, I still think they think new and are innovative, and I really think that is shown in this Collaboration, it reinforces the image of them as it.”*

Similarly, Selina viewed IKEA as more daring after being presented with their Unconventional Brand Collaboration with Virgil Abloh:

*“IKEA is growing beyond itself and offering something new, and I think that works out. I would say that it (Selina's view of IKEA) has changed in a positive way... The collaboration gives IKEA a new character and that it is unique in this way.”*

Several of the participants also viewed the parent brands as more humoristic when collaborating with an Unconventional partner. This can be illustrated through a quote from Mia, who elaborated on why she found brand collaborations appealing when there was a less serious part involved. She exemplifies this through the brand collaboration between Kalles Kaviar, a brand producing caviar for sandwiches, and CHIMI, who produce sunglasses:

*“I think I like those that are more ironic actually. Because if it's like another more serious brand with a less serious one, then it does feel like a win-win situation where one brand becomes a bit more fun and relaxed and the other becomes more cool. If it's two big fashion houses that collaborate, then I just feel like “OK, this is more like a business scheme”. Well, the same thing goes for Kalles and CHIMI... And there's kind of a bit of humor in it, I mean It's kind of weird that they do that kind of thing. I think that shows that you can dress cool and nice but still take yourself a bit lightly.”*

Similar to this, Björn explains his view of the partner brands in the presented Unconventional Brand Collaboration between IKEA and Virgil Abloh being strengthened through the humor:

*“It definitely looks cool and is something I could identify with more. It's cool with an almost ironic touch, the whole performance is always a bit tongue-in-cheek. I like it very much.”*

To give legitimacy to their relationship with brands, consumers assign human attributes to brands, as described by Fournier (1998) and Levy (1959). The attributes humorous and ironic as mentioned by participants refer primarily to people. The participants were able to assign human characteristics to the collaborating brands that they did not see without the collaboration. As a result, they could identify better with the brands. By assigning human attributes, Aaker (1997) noted that the brand becomes a key element of the relationship. Based on the results, it appears that participants found it appealing that the brands were given a human aspect by the unconventional combination. Consequently, the brands become more emotionally connected to consumers. Several of the brands discussed were also viewed as more daring and cool because of their involvement in an Unconventional Brand Collaboration. This is illustrated through a quote by Martin, who reflects on how the presented Unconventional Brand Collaboration between IKEA and Virgil Abloh affects his view of the brands:

*“For IKEA, I think it's a bit more spectacular because I don't expect it that way. IKEA embodies the Scandinavian ideal of living and is rather restrained. That's why it's so daring, and I think that makes IKEA somehow more interesting because they dare to do more and take up the hip lifestyle and don't keep everything in the classic Scandinavian tones. They also develop themselves a bit further.”*

When presented with the same Unconventional Brand Collaboration, Julia expressed similar thoughts:

*“I think it was fun. It was very smart because IKEA is very generic. Every Swedish home has IKEA furniture. But in this way, it turned out to be very different stuff that was a little more luxurious as well and had a slightly higher price. It was a special edition, so it wasn't that generic either.”*

The findings suggest that the parent brands can gain emotional and symbolic benefits, as well as financial benefits, as presented by Ugglå (2010), through Unconventional Brand Collaborations. Whereas previous literature has mainly focused on these from the strategic viewpoint, it is shown that the brands also can become more appealing from a consumer culture perspective. First, the brands can gain more complex brand personalities through Unconventional Brand Collaborations in several different ways, strengthening the emotional and symbolic values of the brands for the consumer. Moreover, the financial benefits could also be seen as being strengthened as Unconventional Brand Collaborations can make the brands more appealing to a new set of consumers, increasing the perceived value of the product.

#### 4.3.3 Nostalgic Relation

In the interviews, the participants repeatedly named brand collaborations that included one brand which was present in their past or their childhood. Sara highlighted that the Unconventional Brand Collaboration between Pokémon and Casetify, a cell phone accessories brand, was appealing since it reflected parts of her childhood, in the form of the Pokémon brand. She described this as follows:

*“... I'm from the 90's, so I grew up with that (Pokémon). I think there is also the nostalgic factor, at least with that one, because I grew up with that. It was so important to me when I was a kid*

*that I was like, “Oh my God”! Oh, this right here because, you know, it's kind of like that nostalgic factor.”*

Emilia expressed similar when talking about the brand collaboration between Adidas and LEGO:

*“I think that's super cool. I think that attracts a certain type of person. Obviously, it's fun because it's not really for kids. I think that the target group is a bit more explicit, but then I know there's a lot of, you know, people that love LEGO and collect it, so I guess for them that was like super cool. And so, I think they kind of played on that. It probably plays on their nostalgia.”*

It can be seen that the participants are particularly attracted to an Unconventional Brand Collaboration if it gives them a nostalgic feeling. For a brand to be appealing to consumers, it must be part of the self-concept, as described by Ross (1971). From the participants' statements, it can be suggested that consumers are particularly attracted to an Unconventional Brand Collaboration if it gives them a nostalgic feeling. As Kleine, Kleine, and Allen (1995) previously described the relationship between brand and self-concept can also refer to the past and thus be nostalgic. For example, LEGO and Pokémon were part of the participants' self-concept. It can thus be stated that they have built an emotional attachment to the brand through their past (Fournier, 1998). Brands such as LEGO and Pokémon lose the sense of being inappropriate when participating in an Unconventional Brand Collaboration as the other brand has a more mature image. The product then refers to the past and evokes a sense of nostalgia in the consumers without being perceived as inappropriate.

## 4.4 Utilitarian Values

Even though most Unconventional Brand Collaborations seem to be appealing to Gen Z for identity and symbolic reasons, some utilitarian values were also mentioned by the participants. More precisely, several participants viewed both economic and functional aspects of the products from Unconventional Brand Collaborations were increased and perceived them as better.

### 4.4.1 Economic Reasons

Previous literature states that financial benefits are one of the three potential benefits brands can gain through collaborating (Uggla, 2010), as they can reach new consumers (Aaker, 2004). Current

literature views this from a brand managerial perspective. However, the findings indicate that Unconventional Brand Collaborations also can have financial benefits from a consumer's viewpoint. This can be explained as they often entail one high-end brand and one brand operating in a lower price category, where the price of the product most often is set to the less expensive brand's level. This can be illustrated through a quote from Tobias, talking about a fictional collaboration between the high-end brand Prada and the more attainable fast-fashion brand H&M:

*“You can sometimes get these much more expensive brands at much better prices... It is not the same price as a real Prada jacket, but it will still be like “Yes, you are cool because you still managed to get hold of this”, if you understand. So, if H&M would collaborate with Prada then you really want what H&M is good at as well. So, in this type of collaboration, you want it to be seen in pricing, while the design Prada has to solve because they are better at it.”*

Adam touched upon the same theme in the following quote, where he is explaining his view of the presented Unconventional Brand Collaboration between IKEA and Virgil Abloh.

*“IKEA is very well known for its cool design at a normal price. I think the collaboration is very successful because the customer base of both can use the products, for example for interior design. They simply designed cool things. In addition, the price is not as exorbitant as you're used to from Off White and that's why it was a cool collaboration.”*

When asked to describe a brand collaboration Lena found appealing the same topic was brought up, and once again H&M was used as an example, in this case together with the high-end fashion brand Versace.

*“The first one that pops into my head is H&M and Versace. I'm not exactly sure when that was, it's been a few years. It's one of the first ones that I really witnessed, and I wouldn't have thought that such a fast-fashion label would collaborate with a luxury brand and then sell the products for an almost fast-fashion price. That really impressed me and since then I've followed that collaboration a little bit more. They (H&M) do that every few years with different brands... It feels like you're getting the branding of a high-end brand, but you are only paying the price of a fast-fashion brand. The best of both worlds combined... It's clearly recognizable to other people that it's from Versace, but I and maybe only a few others know that I only paid an H&M price.”*

Previous literature states that the parent brands should operate within the price segment (Childs & Jin, 2020a), and be similar to each other (Balabains & Mitchell, 2021). However, when both the parent brands work within the same price range, the brand collaboration cannot offer the consumer a product for a cheaper price than their price range. In the Unconventional Brand Collaborations that entail one high-end brand and one more attainable one, this is however possible. Moreover, the quotes illustrate that the high-end brand is still viewed as luxury and sought after by the consumer. Therefore, it does not lose its luxurious and unique aspects through the collaboration. Consequently, one reason Unconventional Brand Collaborations are appealing is that the consumer can gain products from a high-end brand for a cheaper price than their products would normally go for, while the products are still being viewed as unique and luxurious. Based on the findings, Unconventional Brand Collaborations can bring luxury and exclusive designs to consumers who would not be able to afford them otherwise.

#### 4.4.2 Functional Reasons

Several of the participants brought up functional reasons as a utilitarian aspect that made Unconventional Brand Collaborations appealing. The previous literature is focused on the functional benefits brand collaborations can bring from a strategic viewpoint (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010). The findings suggest the same functional benefits can make Unconventional Brand Collaboration appealing from the consumer's viewpoint as well. This can be illustrated through a quote from Björn, who elaborates on why he found the unconventional partnership between the sportswear producer Nike and GORE-TEX, a producer of waterproof material, appealing:

*“What I have liked a lot recently, and what I have seen with some friends of mine was the example of Nike Air Force One and GORE-TEX. I thought that it was a nice collaboration because functionality meets lifestyle. I found that somehow interesting, because it is also a bit unusual, where two brands, which I would not directly combine, have worked together... I can imagine that I would buy that as my next sneaker. So, as soon I will have to buy sneakers again, I can imagine that I would fall back on these. The Nike Air Force is a great shoe and if it's a bit more robust because I often have to walk the dog here, it would fit me really well.”*

Björn describes the contrast between the brands to be unusual due to one being focused on functionality and one on lifestyle. Nevertheless, by working together the brands were able to

showcase their ideas and strengths. When discussing functionality as an appealing reason for Unconventional Brand Collaborations, examples of what Balabains and Mitchell (2006) would define as one functional and one symbolic brand were most often used. For example, this was the case when Julia elaborated on what she found appealing with the Unconventional Brand Collaboration between Gucci and The North Face:

*“I do not know, but I probably think that otherwise, I may find it a bit boring with functional stuff. But in this collaboration, I think it became functional but still nice for once and where you do not feel quirky when you wear functional stuff. Then I also liked the combination of the two styles, it's not something you've seen so much before, so it simply created something new. Above all, I want my clothes to look good, but here they could be both nice looking and functional, which I do not think that higher-end clothing does otherwise.”*

The Unconventional Brand Collaboration between Gucci and The North Face was brought up again by another participant, who also found it appealing due to functional reasons. In the following quote, Emilia explains what she found appealing about the partnership:

*“I like the Gucci collab with North Face... I enjoyed it 'cause like North Face is more like, you know, outerwear and you associate it with nature. You know, they produce clothes that protect you and stuff. But Gucci is more high-end luxury... I think 'cause it is quite unexpected and quite different, but then it made like a really good match... And also, like obviously functionality, 'cause sometimes you have these luxury products and they're just like luxury without any actual functionality. So, I guess the value comes from the functionality but also aesthetic-wise. I think that's kind of unique in that segment.”*

The findings suggest that the products gained functional benefits through the partnership with an unconventional partner, which would not have been possible otherwise, from the consumer's viewpoint. It can therefore be seen that Unconventional Brand Collaborations can also gain the functional benefits mentioned by Uggla and Åsberg (2010), even though the partner brands have a low perceived fit. This contradicts the previous literature on brand collaborations which highly emphasizes the need for a high perceived fit to gain a successful outcome (Balabains & Mitchell, 2021) and be highly evaluated by the consumer (Charry & Demoulin, 2014). In the quotes



illustrated above, it can even be argued that these functional benefits were gained as an outcome of the fact that two brands with a low perceived fit collaborated.

## 4.5 Factors Decreasing the Appeal

### 4.5.1 Disliking or Not Having a Connection to the Parent Brands

Disliking or having no connection to at least one parent brand was the most common reason participants did not like the presented examples of Unconventional Brand Collaborations. Uggla and Åsberg (2010) describe that two of the biggest risks with brand collaborations are the risk of lost focus in the target groups and the brand's associations. The latter is described as the possibility that a brand loses control over the brand's identity, core values, and associations since the parent brands to some degrees are associated, dependent, and affected by what the other brand does (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010). However, this was mostly not the case for the discussed Unconventional Brand Collaborations, as they only rarely confused or affected the participants' view of the parent brands in a negative way. This can be illustrated through a quote from Tobias, who did not find the presented Unconventional Brand Collaboration between LEGO and Adidas appealing but did not think it affected his view of the parent brands:

*“No, I do not think it affects my image particularly much of the companies. You have known who they are all their lives, and they are such big companies. You don't put a lot of emphasis on a specific collaboration if you don't care about it.”*

Selina did not find the same presented Unconventional Brand Collaboration appealing either. When asked how it affected her view on the parent brands, she also expressed that it did not affect her view of the parent brands:

*“I don't think it makes any difference, it's always a matter of taste whether you like a collaboration or not and just because I don't like the collaboration doesn't mean that I think badly about Adidas or LEGO... I would not say that I develop a negative opinion of the two brands.”*

Based on the interviews, the risk of losing control over the brands association, as described by Uggla and Åsberg (2010), through Unconventional Brand Collaborations seems to be low from a

consumer's viewpoint. This can be explained as the participants tended to only see the brand collaboration as a short-lasting partnership, and not as something that changes their overall view of the brand for the future. Moreover, the risk of losing control and focus on the target groups is described by Uggla and Åsberg (2010) as the consumer not understanding what the brand stands for anymore. Furthermore, this can then lead to an image loss for the brand and is described to be especially at risk when two brands with conflicting brand personalities collaborate (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010). However, the findings indicate that the participants' view of the parent brands and their image was very seldom affected in a bad way. Lena illustrates this when reflecting on the three Unconventional Brand Collaborations presented:

*“Thinking of the three examples, I actually only had a positive connection to IKEA. That's also the only brand where I might see a change in the relationship. With the brands where I don't have a connection to, like The Simpsons or LEGO, my feeling about the brand or my relationship to the brands doesn't change either positively or negatively.”*

Based on the findings from the interviews, most Unconventional Brand Collaborations discussed did not affect the participants' image of the parent brands in a bad way or that made them confused about what the brand stood for. Even when they did not think the brand collaboration was appealing to them, it did not affect their view of the parent brands in a negative way. In most of the interviews, the participants did not mention any negative impacts on their view of the parent brands because of their participation in an Unconventional Brand Collaboration. However, it is noteworthy that there were some counterexamples of this, which can be illustrated by Emilia:

*“I think it depends on who they collaborate with... If they collaborate with a brand that I'm kind of against I'd be like “oh, why would they collaborate with them?”. 'Cause if I like one of the brands, and I don't like the other, I think it's kind of risky for the brand. So, either it will make me like the other brand more or it will make me like the brand I liked from the beginning less.”*

Martin also expressed that Unconventional Brand Collaborations held a risk for the parent brands and exemplified this through the Unconventional Brand Collaboration between the high-end fashion brand AMI Paris and the sports brand Puma:

*“... For me, it destroys the more valuable brand, in this case, AMI Paris, or lowers its value to the outside world. I think in a fashion label like this you have to approach it with humor and create a completely controversial product or work with a controversial brand, but not with a fashion brand that really appeals to a completely different segment... For me, a negative impression has developed of the more expensive AMI Paris brand. I have the feeling that Puma is less qualitative and reduces my quality of thinking about the AMI Paris brand. Before that, they had higher-quality fabrics or felt higher quality. For me, Puma is a sports brand that only makes functional clothing. Accordingly, I feel that the quality has decreased as a result.”*

To conclude, Unconventional Brand Collaborations rarely affected the participants' view of the parent brands in a confusing or negative way. This can be explained as they usually saw it as a short-term partnership that did not affect the overall impression or personality of the parent brands. However, there are some counterexamples to this, and the risks of losing control over brand associations and focus from the target group can therefore be seen in Unconventional Brand Collaborations as well, even though these thoughts were rarely expressed.

#### 4.5.2 Lack of Leverage

In addition to the parent brands having a high perceived fit, previous literature states leverage is an important factor for successful brand collaborations (Aaker & Biel, 1993). This is described as delivering something unexpected that excites the consumer (Aaker & Biel, 1993). Uggla and Åsberg (2010) describe that a major risk in brand collaborations is to lose leverage points for the future, where brand collaborations reduce the future leverage of new partnerships. Previous literature discusses this problem from a strategic and managerial viewpoint, but the findings suggest this is a factor that decreases the appeal for Unconventional Brand Collaborations from a consumer viewpoint as well. This can be illustrated by a quote from Tobias:

*“Recently, I saw that Balenciaga has partnered with Adidas as well. Then it will be bad, Adidas has then collaborated now recently with both Prada, Gucci and then they will have this collaboration with Balenciaga. I understand why Adidas wants a collaboration with Balenciaga, but not why Balenciaga wants a collaboration with Adidas because then you already do what everyone else has already done and used the brand too many times as well.”*

Mia also mentioned the loss of leverage as an important factor when discussing brand collaborations, she did not find appealing:

*“I think I've seen one where I'm just like “this is not nice”. I can't remember what it was, but I think there was also one with DHL & New Black. I mean it's a fun idea, but it doesn't look that good, or the clothes don't look that good, you look like a traffic cone... And it's not really new thinking, I mean other brands have done kind of the same thing with sneakers.”*

When being presented with the Unconventional Brand Collaboration between LEGO and Adidas, Julia expressed similar thoughts:

*“I think the LEGO Adidas one is also, 'cause with sneakers you see these kinds of collabs all the time, It's not really that unique in the sneaker world. Yeah, I don't know. I don't think this is one where I'm like” whoa, that's cool”.*”

The findings suggest that brands that have done multiple previous partnerships or do Unconventional Brand Collaborations that are seen as similar to other brand collaborations are seen as less appealing. In some cases, the parent brands are then seen as being copycats of someone else's idea, and therefore the products are not viewed as unique. The leverage, which is described as an important factor in creating successful brand collaborations by Aaker and Biel (1993), is therefore decreased from the consumer's point of view. Consequently, brands with a history of doing many partnerships, and brand collaborations with products that are similar to products from other partnerships, lose leverage to the consumer and are seen as less appealing.

#### 4.5.3 Lack of Authenticity

The participants were asked to provide examples of brand collaborations that they found unappealing during the interview. On the one hand, the participants identified brand collaborations that they found too predictable and lazy. Examples include simply putting the logo on the product, as illustrated by Tobias:

*“I personally think that some collaborations feel like they are just pasting a logo there. But sometimes it's almost enough I think when it's like two unexpected brands. While if, for example,*

*Gucci and Louis Vuitton do it and you just stick a Gucci logo on a Louis Vuitton bag, it just feels tired...”*

Based on this statement, it can be inferred that consumers have become used to collaborations between brands from the same segment and are no longer as excited about them. This type of partnership is expected by the customer, which is also demonstrated by Sara:

*“...That's more expected too. Then you're like “oh yeah, like of course they're gonna collaborate”... When it's not only high-end brands, you're like “oh, that's really cool”, because you wouldn't expect that.”*

Nevertheless, it is not enough to combine two unconventional brands and create a product. Gen Z consumers are in particular one of the biggest advocates of authenticity (Reyes, 2019). For instance, Adam cited the Unconventional Brand Collaboration between Gucci and the gaming console Xbox as being unappealing. The reason is that he regarded it as two brands trying to get back into the conversation:

*“I just had the feeling that it was used to get back into business, but that there were no serious intentions behind it. Especially with Gucci and Xbox, they're not selling a lot, but just want to get back into the conversation.”*

Participants confirmed that adding merely a logo to a product does not make it authentic to them. Brand collaboration should instead gain real added value through this, as stated by Tobias:

*“I think collaborations must add something. It cannot just be the case that you print a logo on something else.”*

Consumers' perception of the product's price also determines whether they find Unconventional Brand Collaborations engaging and authentic. According to the findings, consumers find Unconventional Brand Collaborations attractive if the price of the product is affordable to both customer segments. This is what Martin described regarding the partnership between IKEA and Virgil Abloh (Off White):

*“Well, one that I particularly liked was the collaboration between Off White and IKEA... The price is also quite cheap, although Off White is a very expensive brand and IKEA is a cheaper*

*brand. I think it's just cool that you can then afford something more special, which of course also corresponds to the values of IKEA.”*

Lena supports this idea by describing what she disliked about a partnership between Nike and Louis Vuitton, and what she considers important in brand collaborations:

*“In my eyes, Nike didn't get much out of the collaboration. It was just for Louis Vuitton to produce Nike shoes but still sell it to Louis Vuitton customers and not to Nike customers. For me, it was confusingly designed... For me at least, if a high-end brand and a lower brand collaborate, it should be accessible to many people and not only to the customers of the high-end brand... For me, it's important in a collaboration that I have the feeling that both sides benefit equally and that both customer segments could be interested in the product.”*

For a consumer to find an Unconventional Brand Collaboration appealing, it must be authentic (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard & Hogg, 2019). The findings suggest this can be achieved by offering a price that is acceptable to both brands' customer segments. In the eyes of consumers, an overpriced product that only reflects a higher class brand is often seen as inauthentic, as the product appears to only be designed to increase the brand's sales. Moreover, just adding a logo to the product is not enough since both brands must contribute to adding value to the product in the consumer's eyes.

## 5 Conclusions

*This chapter aims to answer the research question by presenting the conclusions that emerged from the analysis. It will start with a short reminder of the literature gap and the study's purpose. The suggested definition for Unconventional Brand Collaborations is then presented. Next, the four identified values that make Unconventional Brand Collaborations appealing to Gen Z are concluded and illustrated. Lastly, the factors that make Unconventional Brand Collaborations less appealing for Gen Z will be summarized.*

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The purpose of this research is to explore the phenomenon of Unconventional Brand Collaborations from a consumer culture perspective and to identify factors that are making them appealing to Gen Z. Previous research focuses on brand collaborations from a strategic managerial perspective. However, this thesis views brand collaborations from a consumer culture perspective, where the main target group of Unconventional Brand Collaborations, Gen Z, is in focus. Moreover, previous literature highly emphasizes the need for a high perceived fit between the parent brands to create successful outcomes in brand collaborations (Childs & Jin, 2020a). In the business world, at the time of writing, it can however be seen that many brand collaborations consist of two parent brands with a low perceived fit (Tang, 2020). As shown in the introduction, they are often perceived as highly successful and appealing by consumers. Consequently, a gap is seen in the current literature on brand collaborations, where the phenomenon of Unconventional Brand Collaborations needed to be explored. This was the aim of the thesis, which resulted in suggesting a clear definition of the phenomenon, uncovering four values making Unconventional Brand Collaborations appealing to Gen Z participants, and lastly uncovering factors decreasing their appeal to them. These will be summarized and presented in the following sections.

### 5.1 Definition of Unconventional Brand Collaborations

As there is only limited, or no, previous literature on Unconventional Brand Collaborations, the first step in exploring the phenomenon from the consumer's perspective was seen as understanding what it was. Consequently, it is important to define when a brand collaboration is considered unconventional. Based on previous literature on brand collaborations, three criteria were created for the suggested definition of Unconventional Brand Collaborations, where the brand

collaboration has to meet at least two of the criteria to be defined as unconventional. The three suggested criteria are: (1) low brand-image fit, (2) low product-category fit, and (3) unequal in terms of brand strength.

The three criteria are opposites of previous literature's definition of a high perceived fit between parent brands (Childs & Jin, 2020a). This is highly emphasized to be a critical factor in brand collaborations for them to be successful (Balabains & Mitchell, 2021). Previous literature states that a high perceived similarity between the parent brands leads to a higher valuation from consumers on the collaboration (Childs & Jin, 2020a; Charry & Demoulin, 2014). However, the participants often found Unconventional Brand Collaborations highly attractive and that they were often top of mind for them when thinking about their favorite partnerships. Hence, the next step in exploring Unconventional Brand Collaborations from a consumer culture perspective was to understand the factors that made them appealing.

## 5.2 Appealing Factors of Unconventional Brand Collaborations

The study finds that Unconventional Brand Collaborations are highly valued by the participants. Through the analysis of the data, four main values emerged that influenced the extent to which the participants viewed Unconventional Brand Collaborations as appealing. These all had two or three sub-factors connected to them, that make Unconventional Brand Collaborations appealing for the Gen Z participants, based on the interviews. These are illustrated in figure 5.

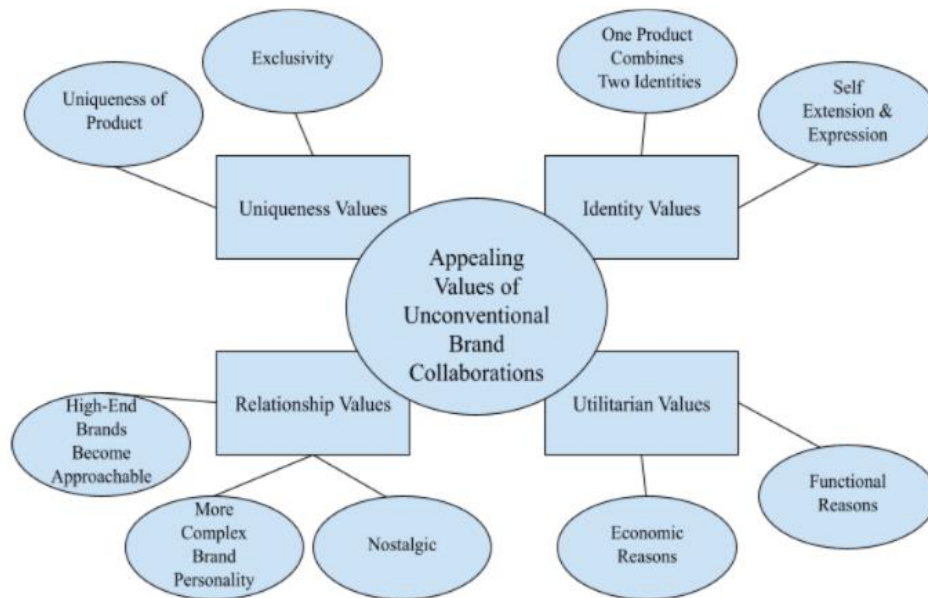


Figure 5 The Appealing Values and Factors of Unconventional Brand Collaborations



The first identified value refers to uniqueness. Unconventional Brand Collaborations have the effect of being unexpected to the consumer, creating leverage for the products, as described by Aaker and Biel (1993) being one of the factors in creating successful brand collaborations. Furthermore, Unconventional Brand Collaborations surprise consumers (Lindgreen & Vanhamme, 2003) and allow them to be unique and stand out from the crowd, causing a red sneaker effect, as described by Bellezza, Gino, and Keinan (2014). Additionally, Unconventional Brand Collaborations are typically limited editions, causing the consumers to develop a fear of missing out. Lastly, consumers can communicate with others who are familiar with the product through unconventional partnerships. Thus, it is possible for consumers to separate themselves on the one hand, but at the same time remain connected with others who also share similar interests. Because of this, Unconventional Brand Collaborations have given participants a feeling of exclusivity.

The second identified value is identity values. The findings suggest that the fit between the parent brands was not of much importance for the participants. Instead, the combination of two opposites was viewed as appealing. This indicates the participants enjoyed the paradoxical juxtapositions of opposites, as mentioned by Hamouda (2012). Based on the findings, Unconventional Brand Collaborations could therefore be seen as allowing the consumer to perform acts of paradoxical consumption. However, the participants found it important that the parent brands individually have a fit for them. The findings suggest that the consumer then works as the bridge between the brands, where the consumer's different identities are reflected in the product. Consequently, the postmodern consumer can fulfill the wish of having a flexible identity (Hamouda & Gharbi, 2013) by portraying several sides of themselves through one product. The findings, therefore, suggest that Unconventional Brand Collaborations should be viewed as consisting of three partners instead of only two as in the previous literature, where the two collaborating brands are accompanied by the consumer itself. Moreover, Unconventional Brand Collaborations were appealing to the participants as they allowed them to both express, and extend, themselves and their identity in ways not possible through a brand collaboration with conventional parent brands (Aron & Aron, 1996; Belk, 1988).

The third identified value is related to relationships. Many of the Unconventional Brand Collaborations that can be seen in today's business world consists of one high-end partner and one more attainable brand. Even though this contradicts suggested partner constellations by previous

literature (Childs & Jin, 2020a), the findings illustrated great benefits from a consumer culture perspective. More than anything, the participants found high-end brands in Unconventional Brand Collaborations became more approachable and gained a more sympathetic image. It could also be seen that Unconventional Brand Collaborations strengthened the participants' image of the parent brands in numerous other ways, such as making them be seen as more daring and humoristic. Furthermore, Unconventional Brand Collaborations are seen as appealing as they allow a more serious brand to collaborate with a nostalgic partner. Therefore, the consumer can connect to their past and evoke nostalgic feelings through Unconventional Brand Collaboration, while still portraying themselves in a contemporary manner.

The fourth, and last, identified value is the Utilitarian benefits Unconventional Brand Collaborations may bring. This includes both economic and functional reasons. The findings suggest that these benefits would often not be possible to gain with a conventional partner, as they would operate within the same industry and price range. Furthermore, increased functionality and reduced price seemed to only have positive effects on the participants' appeal for the products, as the products maintained their luxurious and unique factors.

To summarize, the findings show that Unconventional Brand Collaborations can gain all the benefits of brand collaborations stated by Uggla and Åsberg (2010) from a consumer culture perspective. These self-expressive, functional, and financial benefits (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010) all contribute to making the products from Unconventional Brand Collaborations more appealing.

### 5.3 Factors Decreasing the Appeal

Three main factors were found as having a decreasing effect on the participants' appeal toward Unconventional Brand Collaborations. The first, and most expressed, was that the participant disliked or did not have a connection to at least one parent brand. Uggla and Åsberg (2010) present that two of the biggest risks for brands collaborating are the loss of control of the brand's associations, as well as lost focus in the target groups. These could be explained as the consumers' negative associations toward one of the brands are transferred to the other brand as well when they collaborate (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010). However, the findings illustrate that this effect was very limited to Unconventional Brand Collaborations as they were seen as fun and short-lasting. Consequently, the consumers' negative opinions on one of the parent brands almost only affected

the view of the specific product from the Unconventional Brand Collaboration. Only in a few cases could a negative appeal be seen towards the other parenting brands.

Leverage is said to be an important factor in creating exciting brand collaborations for the consumer (Aaker & Biel, 1993). In parallel to this, a lack of leverage could be seen as a major factor in decreasing the participants' appeal to Unconventional Brand Collaborations. The findings suggest that this risk can appear in two different ways. Either if a parent brand has done many other brand collaborations previously or if the product from the Unconventional Brand Collaboration is similar to a product from another previous brand collaboration.

The third and last factor that decreased the participants' appeal for Unconventional Brand Collaborations is the lack of authenticity. The findings suggest that this risk is greatly increased when Unconventional Brand Collaborations are only targeting one of the parent brands' audiences. This is often done by setting the price of the products after the more expensive parent brand. Additionally, Unconventional Brand Collaborations have a risk of lacking authenticity from the consumer's perspective when they feel like both brands are not participating in creating the product.

## 6 Discussion

*This chapter discusses the theoretical and practical contributions that have emerged from the study. These will be discussed in relation to the aims and objectives presented at the beginning of the thesis. Furthermore, the limitations of the study are discussed and suggested directions for future research are given.*

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### 6.1 Contributions and Implications

#### 6.1.1 Theoretical Contributions

As discussed in chapter 1, this research aims to fill the gap in the existing brand collaboration literature. Previous research focuses on brand collaborations where the parent brands have a high perceived fit. This is emphasized as a crucial criterion to create successful brand collaborations (Childs & Jin, 2020a). However, the business world, at the time of writing, illustrates that brand collaborations with a low perceived fit can be highly appealing to consumers. Prior to this study, there was little, or no, research on brand collaboration between unconventional partners.

Moreover, most previous research on brand collaborations has a brand perspective and views partnerships strictly from a strategic viewpoint. The existing literature, therefore, has little focus on the consumer's perspective on brand collaborations. This may have caused the gap in the prior literature, as it does not explain why a low perceived fit between the parent brands often is highly appealing for Gen Z. This thesis contributes to filling that gap, and consequently extending the literature, by giving a consumer culture perspective on the phenomenon. The thesis, therefore, contributes to future research on understanding the growing phenomenon of Unconventional Brand Collaborations.

This thesis contributed with three main theoretical takeaways on Unconventional Brand Collaborations. First, a definition of the phenomenon was suggested. This can hopefully be helpful for future research in understanding the phenomenon and exploring it further. Second, four main values were presented that make Unconventional Brand Collaborations appealing to the target audience of Gen Z. These all had two or three factors within them, which together create nine factors that explain why Unconventional Brand Collaborations are appealing to Gen Z. This helps

to broaden the current literature on brand collaborations, as existing literature emphasizes that a high perceived fit between the parent brands is needed (Childs & Jin, 2020a). Consequently, the thesis helps to broaden the understanding of brand collaborations, and the consumer's view of them. Third, three factors were presented that decrease the appeal of Unconventional Brand Collaborations for Gen Z. This further helps the current literature to explain why, and in what cases, an unconventional partner is not seen as appealing from a consumer perspective. Additionally, this helps to develop the discussion within the current literature on perceived fit between the parent brands. As shown in the thesis, a collaboration where the parent brands have a low perceived fit can be highly appealing from a consumer perspective, but there are also cases when this is not seen as appealing.

### 6.1.2 Practical Contributions

In addition to the theoretical contributions mentioned above, the findings also provided practical contributions. The findings will help brand managers and practitioners in the search for a collaborating partner with understanding how they can make an unconventional brand collaboration appealing to the consumer, and in what cases an unconventional partner could be an option to consider.

First, the findings revealed that for the surveyed group, the fit between their interests and themselves is more important than that the brands match each other. This insight allows brands that implement collaborations to act in a more versatile way. In particular, brands targeting Gen Z consumers can use this insight to address them more specifically.

Second, during the study, four different factors emerged that made Unconventional Brand Collaborations appealing to Gen Z. The four values uniqueness, identity, relationship, and utilitarian should be considered when deciding whether to implement an Unconventional Brand Collaboration. Additionally, every value has several factors connected to it, resulting in a total of nine factors that made Unconventional Brand Collaborations appealing to the participants. Figure 5 can therefore be used as an aid for brands in the process of planning future Unconventional Brand Collaborations. The findings have shown that the factors individually but also in combination with each other increase the attractiveness of the brand collaboration in the eyes of the consumers. For example, the factor that one product can portray two different identities of the consumer illustrates

the importance of brands researching their consumers and finding what other, separate, interests they have apart from the interest or identity they are targeting. For example, an expensive watch brand may find that their customers often are interested in, apart from watches and luxury, sharks and coral reefs. They could then pursue brands working in that area, creating an Unconventional Brand Collaboration. Since the postmodern consumers tend to have several identities rather than just one (Hamouda, 2012), brands can by collaborating in unexpected ways cater to two of these multiple identities without losing their clear own brand identity. Brand collaborations with a conventional partner may find this hard to do, as a conventional partner requires the parent brands to have a high perceived fit and are most often therefore similar in terms of image. Furthermore, the findings suggest that the participants found the paradoxical combinations of brands in Unconventional Brand Collaborations appealing. Since the postmodern consumer enjoys paradoxical acts of consumption (Hamouda, 2012), this indicates that brands can look for their opposites when searching for brands to collaborate with.

Third, the findings illustrate three factors that decrease Gen Z's appeal for Unconventional Brand Collaboration. These can be used and analyzed by brands when creating Unconventional Brand Collaborations to avoid the risks and the negative impacts these have in the consumer's opinion of both the brands and the collaboration itself. However, the findings showed that most Unconventional Brand Collaborations do not harm the consumer's image of a brand, even if it was not appealing to the participant. This can be attributed to the fact that the partnership is often limited in time. Thus, the findings imply that the risk of harming the image is not higher in an Unconventional Brand Collaboration than in a collaboration between two similar brands.

## 6.2 Limitations and Further Research

One of the limitations of this study is that the sample consists of young adult Gen Z participants. Even though the study intended to interview only participants from the mentioned group, as they were seen as the main target group for Unconventional Brand Collaborations, it can be argued that it would be interesting to conduct the study with participants from other generations as well. The statements made and results obtained cannot, therefore, be transferred to other generations. Consequently, the results may be different when other age groups are studied, which requires further research. However, since a qualitative approach is used, the research is focused on going

deep rather than broadly, and therefore only focuses on the group that is seen as most interested in this phenomenon.

Since there is little literature on brand collaborations from a consumer perspective, most of the literature used and adapted was from a brand perspective. For future research, it is therefore essential to further illuminate the consumer perspective to confirm or extend the results found. The contributions of this thesis can therefore be seen as a suggested starting point for future research on the phenomenon of brand collaborations from a consumer culture perspective.

This study primarily used Unconventional Brand Collaborations, which consist of relatively well-known brands. The examples that were given by the participants also consisted mostly of larger brands. Consequently, this work could not determine whether there are differences in the perception of the Unconventional Brand Collaborations when, for example, smaller unknown brands work together. This would gain further insights on the third aspect of perceived fit, equal in terms of brand strength (Balabains & Mitchell, 2021). The examples brought up by the participants were mostly not unconventional due to the low fit in terms of brand strength, but rather due to low perceived image- and category fit.

The results of the work indicate that brand collaborations also are appealing to consumers when the collaborating brands have a low perceived fit. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to find out in the further course whether the brands must have certain commonalities, such as the same values, or to which extent the brands can be different. There are now many brand collaborations that exist online or in a virtual world, for example between Balenciaga and Fortnite. This development will probably increase in the future, due to Metaverse and the postmodern consumers' hyper reality (Hamouda, 2012). Therefore, it would be important to do further research here. On the one hand, to find out whether there are differences between online and offline brand collaborations, but also to find out how online partnerships are perceived.

On an ending note, this thesis is a suggested starting point for further research on Unconventional Brand Collaborations - The Odd Couple.

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# Appendix A - Interview Guide

*Hi, we are researchers at Lund University in Sweden. Together with my partner, we are currently writing our master thesis. Our master's thesis is exploring a phenomenon that we call Unconventional Brand Collaborations. We have seen that collaborations between brands that are very different are occurring more and more frequently. A good example of this is the recent collaboration between Balenciaga and The Simpsons, where a high-end fashion brand collaborated with a cartoon series. We call these types of collaborations for Unconventional Brand Collaborations, and our study is concerning why consumers tend to find these collaborations attractive and how they use them to identify themselves.*

*Your participation in the study is voluntary and, if you're uncomfortable at any point, you can stop the interview. We will be recording our discussion, but only so we can better remember this conversation. Your identity will be kept confidential at all times. I will be in charge of the interview, and my research partner will take care of the recording and take notes. Do you have any questions about this study or this interview? Are you ok with proceeding with the interview?*

1. Could you describe a collaboration that you have liked?  
*(if a normal collaboration: can you come up with an example of a collaboration which was surprising or stood out for you?)*
  - a. Did you buy that collaboration, why?
  - b. What did you find attractive with the collaboration?
  - c. How did it affect your view of the brands and their products?
2. In general, in what cases are collaborations attractive to you?
  - a. Why do you find these collaborations attractive?
3. Do you believe that a collaboration adds value in any way to the product?
  - a. Would you prefer a product from a collaboration over a normal product? (why and in what cases?)
4. What are two brands that you would like to see collaborate on a project?
  - a. Why?
  - b. Does it portray your personality or lifestyle?
  - c. Would you consider yourself to have an interest in this specific industry / industries?
5. Can you come up with a collaboration that you did not like?
  - a. Why did you not like this collaboration?
  - b. How did it affect your view of the brands and their products?
  - c. In general, what types of collaborations do you tend not to like?
6. Is it important to you to have unique products that stand out, and why?
  - a. Do you find products that portray a unique identity to you attractive, and in what way?
  - b. Have you ever purchased a product even though others told you not to, or it was standing out from the norm? (Explain)

## ----- Section 2 -----

1. Balenciaga x The Simpsons  
*Balenciaga and The Simpsons did a collaboration. Balenciaga produces high-end fashion clothing and The Simpsons is a cartoon series. Balenciaga introduced their new collection in a The Simpsons episode where the characters wore the clothing, instead of doing it on a runaway as it usually is.*
  - Have you seen this collaboration before?
  - Does it appeal to you? (For what reasons?)
  - Do you think the collaboration adds any value to the products, and why?
    - What was your relationship with Balenciaga and The Simpsons before?
    - Has it, or do you think it will, change or influence your relationship with the brands?



## 2. IKEA x Virgil Abloh

*IKEA is a big furniture manufacturer and Virgil Abloh is a designer who was most known for his expensive and luxurious streetwear brand 'off white'. They did a collaboration together where they designed and created a number of furniture and decor items. The items were sold at IKEA and in their price point, but the design differed a bit and was more street fashioned and unique.*

- Have you seen this collaboration before?
- Does it appeal to you? (For what reasons?)
- Do you think the collaboration adds any value to the products, and why?
  - What was your relationship with IKEA and Virgil Abloh before?
  - Has it, or do you think it will, change or influence your relationship with the brand?



## 3. LEGO x Adidas

*This collaboration between Adidas and Denmark's iconic toy company highlights the diverse world of sneakers. This throwback silhouette features shades reminiscent of classic building blocks and brick details to lend playful style. The laces, pieces, and look are all customizable.*

- Have you seen this collaboration before?
- Does it appeal to you? (For what reasons?)
- Do you think the collaboration adds any value to the products, and why?
  - What was your relationship with LEGO and Adidas before?
  - Has it, or do you think it will, change or influence your relationship with the brand?



-----Ending-----

- Open-ended closure: This is the end of my questionnaire, thank you very much for your time. Do you think that there is anything that we have missed in our discussion regarding collaborations, and your view of them? Is there anything else which comes to your mind?
- Snowballing attempt: Do you know of anyone else who has organized a funeral ceremony for a loved one recently? Could you put us in touch?
- Demographic Background: gender, nationality, occupation

# Appendix B - Consent form



LUND UNIVERSITY  
School of Economics and Management

\_\_\_\_\_ *[Thesis title]*  
\_\_\_\_\_ *[your name/s]*

**Interview Consent Form.**

I have been given information about

\_\_\_\_\_ *[thesis title]* and discussed  
the research project with

\_\_\_\_\_ *[your name/s]* who is/are

conducting this research as a part of a Master's in

\_\_\_\_\_ *[programme name]* supervised by

\_\_\_\_\_ *[supervisors name]*.

I understand that, if I consent to participate in this project, I will be asked to give the researcher a duration of approximately 45 minutes of my time to participate in the process.

I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary, I am free to refuse to participate and I am free to withdraw from the research at any time.

I understand that my participation is fully anonymous, and my quotes can be used as data in the research project. I am aware of that the interview will be recorded and transcribed.

By signing below, I am indicating my consent to participate in the research as it has been described to me. I understand that the data collected from my participation will be used for thesis and journal publications, and I consent for it to be used in that manner.

Name: .....

Signed: .....