

Creating the bandwagon effect using a co-branding masstige strategy

Keywords: brand collaboration, co-branding, luxury brands, masstige marketing, bandwagon effect.

Radboud University Nijmegen
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Dr P.J. Franco
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Student
Tijn Pulles
S1064183



Supervisors

Assigned supervisor:

Dr P.J. Franco

2nd Assigned supervisor:

O. Tsoumani

Preface

I am proud to present my thesis 'creating the bandwagon effect using a co-branding masstige strategy.' This thesis is written for the master's business administration with the specialization in Innovation & Entrepreneurship. In the past months, I have done qualitative research on the sneaker consumer culture. I enjoyed doing this a lot since I am a sneaker collector myself. Because of my great affinity with this subject, I could combine my hobby with writing my master thesis. In particular, I would like to thank Dr. P.J. Franco for his excellent guidance over the past months. I am delighted with how our cooperation went during the master thesis period. You gave good ideas and perfect constructive criticism and were always ready to help. It was a great pleasure to work with you. I would also like to thank my fellow students, Tygo Loeffen and Bauke Bakker, for their excellent cooperation regarding the data collection. I have often been able to spar with them about my research effectively. Finally, I would like to thank my parents and girlfriend. Their wisdom and motivating words have helped me conclude this thesis successfully.

I wish you a lot of reading pleasure,

Tijn Pulles

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Abstract

This research investigates how the bandwagon effect is created by using a co-branding masstige strategy. Co-branding is a well-known marketing practice that has never been more popular in the sneaker industry. The existing literature shows evidence of the success of masstige marketing and the positive associations in the consumers' minds triggered by collaborations. Yet there is still a gap in the literature on how the implementation of co-branding could lead to a bandwagon effect when reaching out to the premium-seeking middle-class consumer. In addition, none of these studies looked at possible negative effects if this strategy is not executed well. This thesis aims to cover the most important strategic consideration for a marketing manager or entrepreneur to create the bandwagon effect as a co-branding masstige strategy. The study is done through qualitative research through semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation. Supplementary to the interviews and observation, ethnographic research is used to cover unexplored fields within the data. The findings provide a bandwagon effect framework split up into three themes. (1) The horses, provides an overview of the best practices in co-branding strategies. (2). The wagon, shows evidence of how to create legitimacy and acceptance by the community. (3) The people, is all about the actions the consumers take during and after the product release. The framework is created to help marketing managers and entrepreneurs understand and implement this strategic consideration. To develop the bandwagon effect model even further, I would suggest future research exploring the transferability of the framework to other contexts with similar features or different marginal groups.

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1. Introduction

The "sneaker" has been around for more than a century. The first sneaker was introduced in 1908 by the brand Converse, and in 1917 the still popular converse all-star was born (Converse, n.d.). The sneakers were then mainly used to play basketball and still closely resemble what we recognize today as Converse High Tops [1]. Other companies soon followed this great growth in the interest of Sneakers. Years later, the big brands that we still know today were born—brands such as Adidas, New Balance, Nike, formerly Blue Ribbon Sports and Puma. For a long time, these brands have dominated the footwear industry.

According to Zion Market Research (2018), the footwear industry was estimated at 275 billion dollars in 2019 and will be growing to 375 billion dollars in 2026. One reason for the growth may be related to the demand for premium and luxury fashion products that is on the rise (Deloitte, 2021). One way of creating access to this mass market for premium brands is through the use of collaborations in the sneaker market.

Such joint efforts between sneaker brands and designers were once unusual. However, nowadays, they have resulted in some of the world's most coveted and highly-priced sneakers. (Borges, 2020). For example, Louis Vuitton designer and owner of the luxury brand Off-White Virgil Abloh paired up with Nike and created one of the most 'hyped' sneakers of the century. Take, for example, the Jordan 1 Retro High x Off-White Chicago [2]. These sneakers are offered on the market at Nike prices, which retail at €190,- while giving the feeling of uniqueness and high social status. Nowadays, these sneakers will cost more than 8,000 euros in secondary marketplaces (StockX, z.d.).

This sneaker belonged to the first drop of the 'Ten Series' – a collection of ten different iconic Nike silhouettes adapted by designer Virgil Abloh. "It is nothing short of state-of-the-art design. These ten shoes have broken barriers in performance and style. To me, they are on the same level as a sculpture of David or the Mona Lisa," said Virgil Abloh in an interview with Nike (Nike, 2017). This feeling was also present among consumers. They spent several days camping in front of sneaker boutiques to get their hands on one of these ten sneakers (Denny, 2021). This hugely successful campaign not only affected Nike's brand perception, but Off-White, which was the co-brand in this collaboration, also grew in sales by 172% from 2017 compared to 2018 (Fashion, n.d.).

Collaborations, also known as co-brandings or brand alliances, are a business strategy that involves combining two or more brands in a specific attempt to attract consumers' attention (Keller, 1998). This is an interesting phenomenon to shed light on. Because combining a designer brand with a mass brand like Nike or Adidas has never been as popular as now. Such combinations of brands lead to more symbolic and status values to the product (Desmichel et al., 2020). It can be said that there is an interplay between the symbolic values of both brands and thus strengthen each other. In many cases

within the sneaker industry, there is a dominant brand and a co-brand during cooperation. In the example above, Nike was the dominant brand, and Off-White was the co-brand. Nike is the dominant brand, as Off-White uses Nike's sneaker silhouette to create the design. In many cases, mass brands are used as the dominant brand.

Co-branding is a way of using masstige marketing. Masstige marketing means marketing luxury products to the "mass market," emphasizing the middle class, intending to produce mass prestige (Kumar et al., 2020). Co-branding is informative for a new concept in marketing, the 'masstige' strategy. However, current masstige marketing literature has made a theoretical connection. Nevertheless, this theoretical contribution is very small; this strategy has many unexplored areas.

This new phenomenon provides significant potential because the retail industry functions in an ever-changing business environment with rapidly changing consumer behavior, with a luxury-seeking middle-class consumer. The economic growth in the last century has created the immense market potential for middle-class consumers (Beinhocker, 2007). Indeed, the middle-class market is the largest market in most western European countries (Kochhar, 2020).

Today, masstige marketing has evolved as a powerful alternative for marketers to position their premium brand in a unique way (Paul, 2015). Co-branding is an excellent example of this. If we take a look at designer brand Prada collaborating with Adidas to create an eco-friendly skateboard shoe [\[3\]](#) (Overstandard, 2020). This cooperation creates a unique positioning of both brands toward the target group of brand enthusiasts and skateboarders. Through these collaborations, brands bring one-off creative expressions that could lead to 'hype' around the product. This hype creates masstige by introducing a different consumer group to the luxurious Prada brand.

There is already much research done about co-branding. However, since masstige marketing is a new field of research, there is a considerable literature gap between masstige marketing and brand collaborations. Only a few empirical studies have been done on mass marketing combined with co-branding. In the existing studies about the masstige market and co-branding, the focus is mainly on the prestige-seeking middle-class consumer's phenomena and how to stretch them to pay more than the moderate premium for a product (Kumar, 2020). These studies lack research on how to get consumers to switch to the more expensive segment through co-branding, as co-branding could be a viable option to trigger the urge for a premium brand. In addition, none of these studies described the negative effects of masstige marketing in combination with co-branding.

This study also examines how the negative effects can be reduced or even eliminated. We ask the consumers which collaborations have been successful, but more importantly, which ones have not and why. It is important to remove the negative feelings because the negative impression is more remembered, notable, and weighted more strongly in evaluations than positive impressions (Skowronski & Carlston, 1987). For many middle-class consumers, this type of collaboration is one of the first encounters with a designer brand. As a result, the first impression should be positive.

Furthermore, the research done before was mainly focused on clothing brands. For example, an H&M collaborates with Balmain (Shan et al., 2022). This study focuses on the sneaker community, as this group has different characteristics compared to the global fashion industry. Sneakerheads are those who collect, trade and adore sneakers. Furthermore, the majority are informed about the history of sneakers and are enthused about the nostalgic elements that sneakers contain (Choi & Kim, 2019). This provides different results compared to previous studies, as it involves a different product category, and a consumer community is studied in this thesis.

This research will make a theoretical contribution on how high-end brands, with the use of masstige marketing, can enter the mainstream market with a co-branding strategy. This research will provide managerial implementations for entrepreneurs and marketing practitioners on creating the bandwagon effect by co-branding in their masstige marketing strategy. It will provide strategic considerations for marketing managers and entrepreneurs to help attract middle-class consumers.

The consumer culture theory (CCT) lens is used during this research. It is important to note that CCT is not a theory but a perspective of social-oriented marketing research. This study uses this lens toward the sneaker community to examine social relationships and their shared cultural meanings (Arnould et al., 2019). The strategy for co-branding is used on sneakers to add more symbolic (cultural meanings) and status values (social relations) to the product (Desmichel et al., 2020). CCT enables research into marketing and consumer environments using lenses that take multiple sociocultural views on consumers, consumption, and markets.

Consumers have a shared passion for their consumption activities in the sneaker market environment. During the semi-structured interviews and observation, I also look for clear consumption patterns in the context of masstige marketing and the co-branding strategy and how it will lead to the bandwagon effect. An example of consumption patterns within the sneaker industry is the reason why the shoe is purchased. Is it to collect, resell or wear it (Slaton & Pookulangara, 2021).

The current theory of masstige branding, bandwagon effect, and co-branding will be pushed forward by combining the aspects. Currently, no research has been done on how a mass marketing co-branding strategy can create the bandwagon effect for premium brands. (cf. Shan et al., 2022; Purohit & Radia, 2022; Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012)

In this field of research, it is essential to study this phenomenon in the sneaker industry because marketing managers do not want to make the wrong choices and suffer from brand dilution as a result. Brand dilution is considered to occur when the main brand's beliefs or feelings are negatively impacted due to brand extension (Lau & Phau, 2007). So if the collaboration gets badly perceived by the consumer community.

If this strategy is executed well, it has great growth potential, as the market for middle-class consumers is very large. Take Nike's successful campaign with Off-white as an example. Off-White achieved sales growth of over 172% in 2018 compared to 2017 (Fashion, n.d.).

So it is important to look at how these collaborations can lower the barrier to buying a premium brand and create brand attention. It is interesting to see how the introduction of newer high-end brands can change consumer culture's behavior. One possible phenomenon could be that by wearing a sneaker collaborating with a luxury brand, consumers want this feeling of status again and, therefore, move to a premium brand.

In the upcoming chapters, we will first look at the theoretical background. This chapter will critically examine the current theory of masstige, co-branding, and the bandwagon effect. Next, the research methods are described and substantiated. This will lead into the fourth chapter, which is the findings. In this chapter, the developed bandwagon effect model emerges, and the main criteria of this model are highlighted. The fifth chapter presents the discussion and the theoretical and managerial implementations—finally, a conclusion including limitations and future research agenda.

2. Theoretical background

The theoretical background will provide an extensive literature review on the existing literature on masstige marketing, the bandwagon effect, and co-branding. At the end of this section, the main question of the thesis will be highlighted.

2.1 Masstige marketing

Despite the fact that Silverstein and Fiske (2003) introduced the term "masstige" into a mainstream study through their Harvard Business Review article, the notion is still in its development stages. Even though luxury brands are not something new for consumers, the concept of masstige marketing is very much on the rise. This is because the growing middle class is seeking exclusivity and urge for more premium products. In the following section, I will elaborate on the already existing literature on mass marketing and its limitations.

Masstige marketing is a new chapter in the already existing traditional marketing theory as Masstige is the strategic term for the market penetration of a high-end brand. The term refers to a phenomenon in which premium items are promoted to the broadest number of customers possible by creating mass prestige while keeping prices stable (Paul, 2018). However, the criticism of this statement is that if a premium brand decides to collaborate with a mass brand, a stable price is not mandatory. Retail prices compared to the designer brand may be lower than usual on the products resulting from the collaboration. The prices of the designer brand, which are not in collaboration with the masstige brand, should remain the premium pricing.

Masstige marketing is predominantly a downward extension of luxury brands, and experts have struggled to find a spot for it in current luxury branding literature (Kumar et al., 2020). It suggests that middle-class customers want prestige and are willing to spend more than a modest premium (Kumar et al., 2020). Buying more luxurious products is nothing new. Lynn (1991) found that purchasing luxury products gives customers a distinct sense of status and prestige among peers. By status, it means social standing. When a product's perceived distinctiveness grows, its value rises, resulting in a gain in status in a social hierarchy. An article by Kastanakis & Balabanis (2012) also confirms the phenomenon that status consumption drives people to seek group membership, respect, and social distinction.

The need for uniqueness is an important concept for the materialistic consumer mindset. According to Tian et al. (2001), There are three behavioral components to the urge for uniqueness: (1) Creative choice counter-conformity means that consumers desire social difference from most others, but these choices should also be accepted by their peers; (2) Unpopular choice counter-conformity is the risk of social condemnation by breaking group standards. Consumers may seek for this to

distinguish themselves to amplify their self and social image. (3) Avoidance of similarity implies the loss of interest in or discontinuing the use of items that have become usual. The uniqueness of a product goes hand in hand with luxury brands, but there is also a difference between the types of luxury.

Traditional luxury firms strive for consistency in perceived premium and price (Truong et al., 2009). In masstige marketing, price and premium are further apart. Luxury brands are high-quality, pricey, non-essential products and services that customers view as unique, prestigious, and authentic that offer significant symbolic and emotional value (Tynan et al., 2010). New luxury brand positioning is radically different from those implemented by traditional luxury brand owners to attract middle-class consumers. Often for a lower price, the premium feeling is higher because these luxury co-brands help to create a desirable self-image (Zhan & He, 2012). Creating this desirable self-image by community members who urgently need status but cannot buy the real luxury employs noisy counterfeits to impersonate those they perceive as wealthy (Han, 2010). For example, by using large presented logos or eye-catching designs.

The creation of downward extension by premium brands to appeal to the masses is often done by affordable pricing. An example of this affordable pricing strategy is Versace. A distinction can be made between Versace and their masstige brand Versace jeans couture. Instead of paying €900 for a t-shirt, consumers will only pay €200 for Versace Jeans Couture (Versace, 2022). Marketing managers or entrepreneurs may not be interested in creating downward extensions at a lower price (Dall'Olmo Riley et al., 2013). However, a much greater audience is approached by attracting the middle-class segment. This is done by combining prestige with reasonable price premiums (Paul, 2019). See figure 1 by Paul (2019).

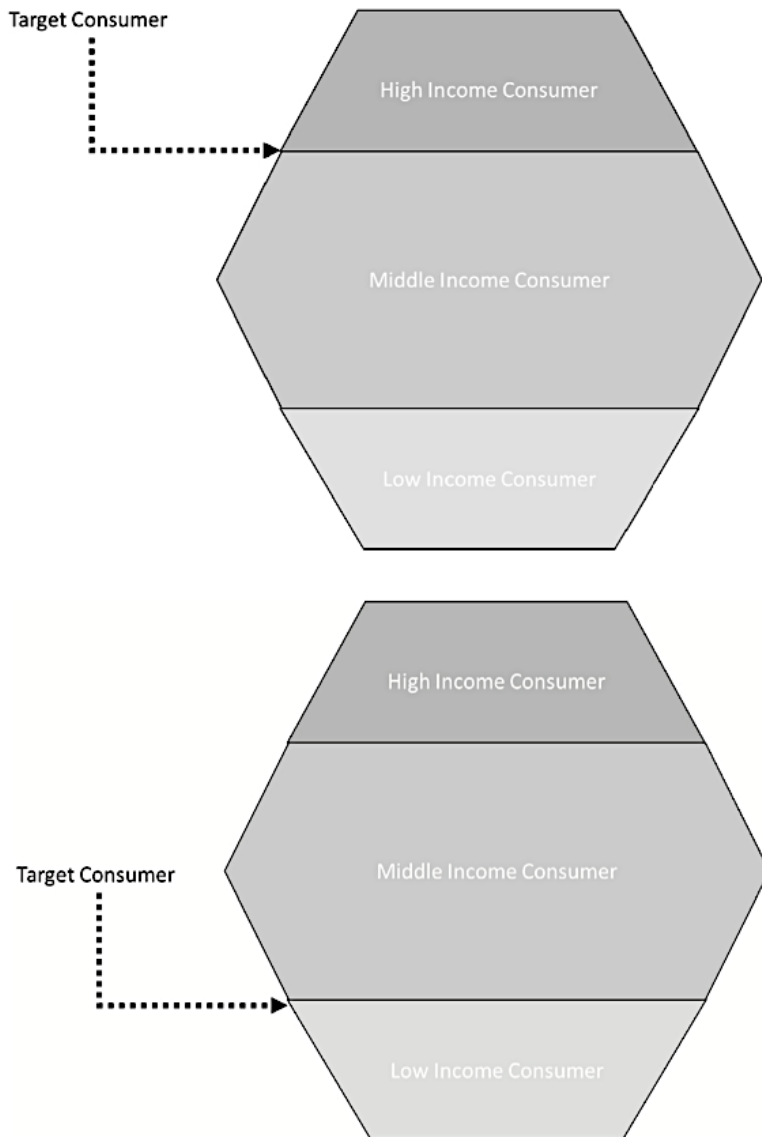


Figure 1 Traditional luxury marketing and masstige marketing (Paul, 2019)

Marketing managers seek to increase sales volume by reducing the margins per sale. This differs from traditional luxury positioning because prices remain high, making it out of reach for the ordinary customer (Paul, 2019). However, a critical note is that a consumer can buy a co-branded product for lower pricing, which was not studied before. Nevertheless, with this co-branding strategy, a consumer gets introduced to the high-end luxury brand, possibly lowering the threshold to rebuy the designer brand for higher pricing. This phenomenon is not highlighted in masstige research yet and will be included in this study.

On the other hand, a price reduction can have adverse effects that lead to brand dilution because consumers who buy luxury goods seek to enhance their status and want to avoid consuming goods (Chan et al., 2015). Brand dilution occurs when a brand's effectiveness and value are reduced by using attributes that do not suit the brand. This brand dilution can happen, for example, by the high-income

consumer who has been buying the products at a premium price for years and now sees middle-class consumers buying a similar product for a considerably lower price. In the next part of the theoretical background, I will discuss the bandwagon effect, which applies to the theory of *masstige*.

2.2 Bandwagon effect

In this section, I will elaborate on an important concept in *masstige* literature, the bandwagon effect. Bandwagon consumers attempt to satisfy their demand for status by consuming luxury products that high-status individuals consume (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012). In the luxury markets, the bandwagon effect arises when customers buy popular luxury products, which automatically triggers further demand (Chaudhuri & Majumdar, 2006). This fits well with the research objective. In what way is the bandwagon effect triggered by these luxury brands after the sneaker collaboration. These products are so-called 'between mass and class luxury' products (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012). In socio-cultural terms, this phenomenon is described as our tendency to adopt particular habits or views simply because many others do (Rikkers, 2002). In the case of these sneakers in collaboration with designer brands, these more expensive brands feel much more available. The community copies the behavior, which creates purchase intentions, leading to repeat purchases. This is mainly because the bandwagon effect is most likely to occur when a product is desirable (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012). These brand communities consist of consumers interacting with the brand, the company, and other consumers to fulfill a variety of similar needs (Coelho et al., 2018).

These studies on the bandwagon effect usually focus on mono-branding and have not yet used collaborations between different brands to reveal this bandwagon effect. To create the bandwagon effect, Kastanakis & Balabanis (2012) suggest producing lower-priced copies of their high-end luxuries that can sell well while benefitting from the latter's image. These luxury products should be retailed in exclusive stores and boutiques.

Other literature about mass marketing suggests that middle-class consumers should have access to the brand only occasionally (Truong et al., 2009). To counter brand dilution, the premium brand must ensure that it remains exclusive and does not become a habit of buying it cheaper (Truong et al., 2009). This is the primary reason sneaker and designer brands launch collaborations in small quantities and occasionally.

Purohit and Radia (2022) discovered in recent research that perceived brand value and brand aspiration are essential dimensions for purchase intentions in *masstige* marketing. Brand aspiration means, in consumer marketing terms, a brand of good quality that will make the consumer feel successful or happy if they own it. Since there is a great scarcity in the supply of sneakers, obtaining them feels like an achievement (Groth & McDaniel, 1993). Brand managers should promote and position luxury brands such as those that assist customers with their appearance and represent their success (Purohit & Radia, 2022). By creating a premium feeling for a mass-market price. This study

looks at what happens next. Do these types of collaborations make consumers more likely to buy a premium brand and hop on the 'bandwagon'.

All studies to date on the bandwagon effect are based on mono-brands, so not with the combination of co-branding, even though this is a widely used strategy. It is very interesting for marketing managers and entrepreneurs to see how this masstige marketing phenomenon with co-branding can create a bandwagon effect among the consumers. In the next part of the literature review, we will discuss the current knowledge about co-branding in detail.

2.3 Co-branding

In this part of the theoretical framework, we will examine the current literature about co-brand or brand collaboration. In this research, the terms brand collaborations and co-branding will be used interchangeably. Both have the same meaning of two brands working together to create a joint product that represents both of their brand identities.

Norris (1992) conducted one of the earliest studies on collaboration in 1992. The majority of the comments in this research were based on supplier/production facility collaboration. Norris has observed that hiring a trustworthy supplier might offer value compared to the competition. Nowadays, co-branding is a growing marketing practice. Marketers strive to transfer the positive connotations of the partner (constituent) brands to a newly established co-brand, the composite brand (Washburn et al., 2000).

Co-branding is, in most cases, seen as a win-win strategy for brands, whether they are perceived as low or high-equity brands (Washburn et al., 2000). Several studies confirm the positive effect of co-branding. For example, Rao et al. (1999), 'the merging of two brands gives consumers more assurance in product quality, leading to better product evaluations and premium pricing.' Brand collaboration is successful if the product can trigger positive associations in the consumers' minds (Helmig et al., 2008). From a marketing perspective, it is also important to know if negative associations can be triggered in the consumer's mind. Negative spillover effects mainly occur when there is a lack of fit between the original and extension product categories (Allan, 1996). There are plenty of examples where this was not the case, but the product was immediately sold out. For example, Skateboard brand Supreme collaborated with Colgate toothpaste [\[4\]](#), which sold out within one day (Takanashi, 2020). The Colgate toothpaste collaboration with supreme lacks product fit since a skateboard brand has little affinity with a toothpaste brand. However, it did sell out within a day, so there was a positive spillover effect.

According to Park et al. (1996), customers' positive attitude toward one brand leads to beneficial direct impacts. A co-branded product consisting of two complementing brands retains a superior attribute profile in consumers' thoughts. This leads to the question of to what extent consumers can switch to a more expensive brand after buying a collaborative design sneaker for a lower price.

Lots of research have been done in the field of co-branding. However, there is still limited research that has been done on co-branding strategy and their effect on the image of luxury brands (Wang et al., 2012). A recent study on luxury co-branding found that Co-branding may help a premium brand extend its market and interact with future prospective customers without harming the company's reputation (Wang et al., 2015). The study by Wang et al. (2015) is limited because they only examined the impact of the luxury brand retailer and their co-branding strategy on potential customers. This study will examine the effect of the luxury co-brand on sneakers and how this causes people to switch to the more expensive segment. By highlighting multiple aspects of the luxury products research field, it is possible to generalize the results to other concepts and industries.

2.4 Co-branding and their effect on masstige marketing

From the two previous sections above, you can see that co-branding has the potential as part of effective masstige marketing practice. These intersections between brands are becoming more common in modern marketing (Blackett & Russell, 2000). The role of collaborations play a major role in today's practice. In this part, we will look at co-branding in a masstige context.

Collaborating between a mass brand and a premium brand gives two different outcomes. The premium brand is looking for a downward extension to capitalize on the upward-looking consumer (Truong et al., 2009). In the case of the mass brand, it is looking for additional value and increased brand equity (Helmig et al., 2008). Consumers may find it difficult to spend more than usual for a mass product, so the prices should remain low. However, not in all cases, because Balenciaga worked together with Croc [5], they created shoes retailing for more than €550,- (Balenciaga, 2022).

A possible solution for this might be that personality fit and product category fit interact and impact customers' perceptions of masstige co-branding (Shan et al., 2022). Possible negative spillover effects can occur when luxury brands collaborate with other mass brands signalling a decrease in exclusivity, which will affect the evaluation of the premium brand (Wang et al., 2015).

Luxury brands are consumed differently because some are valued because they are scarce, while others are favored because they are popular (Amaldoss & Jain, 2008). Some collaboration only occurs a few times a year or even once to maintain the exclusivity and premium feel. For example, IKEA had an exclusive collection made with Off-White [6]. This collection was sold out in one day and will not rerelease. In many cases, the brand's luxury image is used to give a mass product more brand value.

2.5 Bandwagon effect in a co-branding masstige strategy context

The bandwagon effect is a strategy that perfectly fits the co-branding masstige strategy. By using the bandwagon effect, the goal is to acquire status and associate the consumer with the majority of luxury consumers (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014). An important note is that the bandwagon effect is most likely to occur when luxury products are popular. Kastanakis & Balabanis (2012) mentioned that

brands such as Gucci, Versace and Louis Vuitton capitalize on this idea of buying behavior in certain markets because of the massive potential.

One of the first studies of the bandwagon effect describes it as ‘joining the crowd’ and ‘becoming one of the boys’ (Liebenstein, 1950). Within sneaker culture, there is also a strong consumer culture. Purchasing these luxury goods involves intuitive feelings of being connected to a subculture (e.g. sneakers community), which involves collecting, trading and showing your collection to others are essential aspects.

As this field of study in masstige grows in popularity, there is a dearth of research on the bandwagon effect that may occur when luxury brands collaborate with a mass brand. The same symbolic and status value is attached to the product during a collaboration, but often at a lower price (Washburn et al., 2000). In this way, consumers come into contact with a luxury product at a lower price. It will be interesting to see if this triggers the bandwagon effect and then for what reasons or why it does not trigger the bandwagon effect. Status-conscious consumers are primarily concerned with improving their social impact (Chan et al., 2015). It is interesting for marketing managers and entrepreneurs to see if this is a way to remove the barrier for consumers to switch to a high-end product.

To summarize, co-branding a mass brand with a luxury brand is a successful approach for both brands and businesses to reach masstige. Using co-branding adds new symbolic and status value to a product. The ultimate objective is to create a scenario where both parties win and develop a positive view of the brand image, which is more approachable and premium without jeopardizing brand equity. Because having access to potential middle-class consumers, appeals to both mass and premium labels. The novelty impact may entice existing brand consumers to try the co-branded items and become possible new customers of the other brand. So to what extent the bandwagon effect arises among this group in the sneaker community. Furthermore, it looks at how to counteract any negative effects if brand collaboration fails to appeal to the consumers and brand community.

Considering the potential of the bandwagon effect as a co-branding masstige strategy, the following main research question comes to mind: *In what way is the bandwagon effect created through sneakers co-branding as a masstige strategy?*

In addition to this main question, we also look at the negative effects associated with this collaboration: *How can the negative effects associated with a co-branding masstige strategy be eliminated?* Reducing the negative effect is important for successfully creating the bandwagon effect during a masstige co-branding strategy. For some middle-class consumers, it is their first encounter with a more expensive designer brand. In the upcoming methodology section, we will discuss the different methods used to find answers to this main question.

3. Methodology

The methodology section will show the adopted methodological approach and a detailed account of how the research is conducted. This section is divided into three parts, the research context, data collection methods, and the data analysis.

3.1 research context

This research focuses on the sneaker enthusiasts, also called 'sneakerheads'. The sneakerhead community is an extensive group of members linked by their great interest in sneaker culture (Choi & Kim, 2019). Sneakers had a long history of being where it is today. When first introduced, their primary purpose was athletic/basketball performance enhancement. However, it got quickly picked up in the 1980s by the hip-hop and b-boys culture. The first collaboration between a hip-hop group and a sports brand occurred with the song 'My Adidas (1986). by Run DMC. In almost all of their shows, the group wore Adidas tracksuits with Superstars [\[7\]](#) underneath. Rap formation Run DMC was the first who signed a major contract with Adidas (Voorbij, 2021). Things went quickly after Run DMC. Major artists such as Pharrell Williams and Kanye West became popular in the 2000s and helped roll out a new fashion movement by bringing streetwear to the red carpet. These individuals are important tastemakers in the early sneaker world.

A tastemaker is someone or a company that decides or influences what is or will be popular in the fashion industry. Consumers look up to these tastemakers and copy their clothing styles (Zanette et al., 2022). In the case of this research, tastemakers could be fashion outlets like Complex or Highsnobiety or famous people such as Travis Scott or Kanye West who have a big influence on the sneaker community.

The sneakers community as a consumer group has changed in the last years as the sneaker business has grown and become more mature (Gorsler, 2021). A characteristic of a sneakerhead might be that they will camp out in front of the store overnight with the hopes of buying a limited pair of sneakers the next day. The sneakerhead also uses jargon and abbreviations to interact with each other. For example, 'deadstock' means when a pair is brand new or 'grails' when you name a pair of shoes you badly want in your collection (Aaron, 2020). Most of these sneakerheads also participate in online brand communities where they can share and exchange opinions on the latest releases (Choi & Kim, 2019). These online communities are located on social media platforms such as Discord or Facebook.

In addition to these online groups, many sneaker events occur every year. At these events, sneaker collectors gather to trade in the latest releases and sell vintage sneakers. At the event, various stands also sell sneakers and other sneaker-related products like shoe cleaning material and sneaker boxes. All these accessories are used by the collectors to keep the sneakers in good condition.

Furthermore, this study looks at the consumer behavior of this community. To what extent positive or negative feelings are generated by sneaker collaboration with high-end brands. In addition, it examines whether there is a bandwagon effect happening within the community and how this is or is not induced in the consumer consumption pattern. In the next section, I will show how the data for this thesis is collected.

3.2 Data collection

3.2.1 Interviews

The methodological approach for this study is a qualitative research method. The main data collection technique used for gathering the primary data is an open-ended interview. Kahn and Cannel (1957) distinguished abstract and concrete goals for interviewing. Working with a concrete goal will eliminate irrelevant questions. By conducting interviews, the phenomena of interest will be examined.

Qualitative research can go in-depth with the respondents and adjust the questions if necessary (Arsel, 2017). To find the appropriate primary information, in-depth interviews will be conducted with respondents within the sneaker industry. Interviews with the sneaker collectors are semi-structured and conducted primarily in person or online. The advantage of performing the interviews in person is that the interviewer gets a clearer picture of what the respondent is like. If the interview is conducted at the respondent's home, it also allows for seeing the sneaker collection and how it is stored. If the respondent has the preference to do it online, an online environment will be created to conduct the interview.

In some cases, online interviewing is a better choice than offline because the relative anonymity of online communication may boost self-presentation and authenticity compared to face-to-face interviews (Janghorban et al., 2014). This is why I leave the respondent the choice of an online or offline interview.

In case of privacy reasons, after the interviews, the respondents' identities will not be included. For this reason, the respondent can answer more openly, and they do not have to fear any negative consequences (Arsel, 2017). Some questions within the interview have a sensitive subject, for example, about automated 'sneaker bots' software. Sneaker resellers may suffer image damage if this subject is too openly discussed. For the in-depth interviews a participant consent form will send to the participants. Here will be explained what the thesis research is about but will also be elaborated of the consequences of participating in the interviews. In the findings section, other names are used to refer to the respondent.

The Snowball effect is used to achieve multiple respondents. With snowballing, you get access to 'hidden populations' and lead users (Noy, 2008). Lead users are on the leading edge and are in advance of the target market (Lilien et al., 2002). The lead users can be seen as an expert practitioner, so in the case of this research, consumers who have been involved for a long time in sneaker collecting and have their own business within this community.

After each interview, the respondent is asked if they know more people in the sneaker community. In this way, we get in touch with other reliable respondents. To gather sufficient information 14 interviews are conducted. Research by Guest et al. (2006) discovered that after analyzing twelve interviews, new themes appeared rarely. This means that 14 interviews are enough to cover all the most important themes. These interviews will be used to discover patterns among the various respondents. These patterns then play an important role in answering the main question. The interviews will be conducted by various people and touch on multiple topics regarding sneaker consumer culture.

3.2.2 Observation

The second primary research method is through field research. On April 16, 2022, an observation will occur during a sneaker event. The event is called Deadstock Sneaker Market and is based entirely on sneaker consumer culture. There are more than 100 tables filled with sneakers and fashion items, from hype [popular] pairs to ultimate grails [very rare] but also a wide selection of sellers clearing their personal collections.

During this observation and ethnographic interviews will be held. The observation is done using a schedule conducted by two independent observers. Because two independent observers are used, the data found is more reliable. It also allows for more detail because every observer pays attention to different elements. To counteract observation bias, objective observations are important with a neutral view of the situation (Vennix, 2019).

In addition to the observation, also ethnographic interviews are held during the event. Ethnographic interviews are short conversations that occur within the field site's constraints (Arsel, 2017). These short interviews have a more emergent design and consist of more spontaneous questions. These short ethnographic interviews can be used to give answers to patterns that are discovered during the semi-structured interviews. These short interviews are used to gather information from the research population within a specific time frame. Ethnographic field study involves figuring out how a culture behaves (Vennix, 2019). The ethnographic interviews will be recorded and coded with the same method as the semi-structured interviews.

3.2.3 Netnographic research

Supplementary to the interviews and the observation, additional data is gathered using the netnographic research approach in which the researcher applies ethnographic procedures in the online environment (Kozinets, 2009). With this Netnography research approach, I will look at the specific computer-mediated contingencies of today's social environments (Bettany & Kerrane, 2016). In this research it is used to analyze growing trends and the usage of tastemakers, as this is the best approach to study this part of the research. These findings are used to strengthen arguments from the interviews.

Since netnography will only be a small part of the study, the most important and popular articles and youtube videos of Complex will be examined. It should be noted that we accept the limitations of this netnographic research by only looking at a small part of these outlets.

To conclude, the combination of all three data methods is triangulation, which helps gather additional information about the topic. Triangulation can be described as using various research methodologies in the research of the same phenomenon (Denzin, 2007). As qualitative research is primarily multimethod based and the usage of triangulation will strengthen the validity (Jonsen & Jehn, 2009). Combining all of these data methods will help strengthen the results that are found in this research.

3.3 Data analysis

The interviews will be recorded and transcribed and directly transcribed. The advantage of transcribing right away is that you can adjust the questioning for the next interview if you feel it is not covered enough. Because the interviews are recorded, it is unnecessary to take notes during the questions; therefore, the complete focus is on asking the questions (Vennix, 2019).

After the interviews are transcribed and other forms of data are collected, the interviews will be coded. Wester and Peters (2004) differentiated between descriptive, thematic and pattern codes. These could be distinguished into open, axial, and selective coding. Open coding is the first step within the process, and it helps to identify concepts and themes for categorization. The next step is axial. In this process, the themes and the collected data will be refined to go to the next step of selective coding, which indicates links and relationships between the various concepts (Williams & Moser, 2019). Frequent reflection on the collected data is needed to acquire a better image of the phenomena explored in the case. To ensure the quality of the data, peer debriefing is used with fellow researchers. The software program Atlas TI was used to perform the analysis.

The observation scheme and ethnographic interview data found at the deadstock sneaker market are also coded in the same way as the interviews. This ensures that the data can be easily merged to make it a whole. Coding everything the same way will eventually make it easy to analyse it as a total. In the next section, we'll expand on the findings using this data analysis.

In netnography, researchers must approach virtual spaces as participants; online communications and communities' interpretations will gradually emerge into cultural codes to make sense of virtual social spaces (Kozinets et al., 2014). In the case of this research design, the same coding is used as the one from the interviews and the observations. This will create consistency in the data analysis process.

Participant No.	Date	Sneaker Collector?	Reseller?	Wears designer brand	Collaboration created interest in co-brand	Interview Duration
1.	20/02	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	50m55s
2.	02/03	Yes	No	No	Yes	48m39s
3.	03/03	Yes	Not anymore	No	Yes	33m58s
4.	03/03	Yes	No	No	Yes	40m10s
5.	12/03	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	42m24s
6.	13/03	Not really	Yes	No	Yes	39m45s
7.	05/04	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	32m50s
8.	10/04	Yes	No	No	Yes	41m10s
9.	13/04	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	41m40s
10.	16/04	Yes	Yes	No	No	34m32s
11.	20/04	Yes	No	No	Yes	31m06s
12.	25/04	Not really	Yes	Yes	No	52m44s
13.	25/04	Not really	No	No	No	27m01s
14.	28/04	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	27m11s

Table 1 Overview of all interviews

4. Findings



Figure 2 The bandwagon effect framework

My results show how the bandwagon effect is created through a co-branding masstige approach. The findings from the primary research process provide the best practices for implementing this masstige marketing strategy. The bandwagon will stand as a metaphor for the process of masstige strategy and is highlighted in three themes, which are summarized in table 2. It starts with the horse. The two horses are the brand and co-brand that pulls the bandwagon forward. In the interviews, important aspects are offered for the co-brand, for example, the pricing strategy and the influence of tastemakers. This part looks at the process within the co-branding process to make a collaboration successful and attract customers. So how the bandwagon gets into motion and starts moving. Secondly, the wagon represents the consumer community, in this case, that of the sneakerheads. This section shows how the community forms acceptance and legitimacy towards the luxury co-brand and how to get the people on 'the wagon'. Finally, we will look at the people climbing on the wagon, the individual customers. It reveals which tasks they undertake during and after the product's release. In addition, It will show how consumers learn new competencies and assign positive attributes to the luxurious brand. Lastly, how to make these customers enjoy the ride and create a positive experience before and after the release.

Themes	Strategic considerations
1. The horses: What is the best practice for collaborations in order to attract the middle-class customer.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pricing strategy - Exclusivity and availability - Usage of tastemakers
2. The wagon: How to make create legitimacy and acceptance among the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hype around the collaboration - Acceptance of the brand - Recognition by others in community - Value in secondary market
3. The people: What do customers believe in? Action taken by the consumers during and after the product release.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Deeping in the co-brand - Attitude towards buying behavior - Sensitivity towards a hype

Table 2 The process of how the bandwagon effect is created by co-branding as masstige strategy

The first central theme within the findings emerges from the brand and co-brand itself. It has to do with the values that should be added to the product design and launch to develop the masstige stratagem successfully. Furthermore, I look at the influence of tastemakers to successfully create masstige premium and the bandwagon effect. First, one of the most important strategic choices is properly aligning pricing with the target audience. After all, consumers want a premium product at a lower price. Looking at a collaboration of Nike with Off-White, we can see a significant difference in release in pricing if we compare the collaboration with a sneaker of the regular collection of a designer brand.



Picture 1 Off-White sneaker €395 (left) vs. Nike x Off-White sneaker €180 (right)

As seen in the example above, the design is relatively similar to each other. Both shoes have distinct features of the Off-White brand. One of the significant differences between the sneakers is the price. On the left in the image, the shoe from the regular collection costs €395 for retail. In collaboration with Nike on the right side of the image, the sneaker retailed for €180,- on release. Another key difference between both shoes is the availability. The sneaker of the regular collection of Off-White was launched at many different retailers and boutique stores, and it is available for everyone who can afford the price. The sneaker on the right was only available in low quantities for those lucky enough to be chosen by Nike to purchase the sneaker.

The literature argues that luxury for the masses should not be exclusive (Purohit & Radia, 2022). However, in the sneaker co-branding strategy, you see that scarcity and exclusivity play an important role. Scarcity during the launch strategy creates hype around the products. This hype leads to much free advertising for the product, creating a positive attitude towards the brand and creating recognition among the community members. For example, the statement of Siem after the question what his view is on these luxury brands being co-branded on mass brand sneakers.

I think, it doesn't necessarily change my perception because it's pretty limited. And it is also part of those brands. Those brands, luxury expensive brands are also exclusive. And then they are more exclusive because it has a very high price. Not everybody can afford it, so that makes it exclusive. But because there's a very limited stock with Nike, it's also exclusive. And I think especially that exclusivity is where those luxury brands want to steer on. It also ensures that you reach a very large audience. A large group of people who perhaps also buy and wear more luxurious brands. Because these people also often wear Nike and in order to reach them and perhaps to introduce them to a luxurious brand, so that they will look into it. And of course the word of mouth advertising that is attached to it. I see it going everywhere on social media for example.

Here it becomes clear that exclusivity is seen and deployed in different ways. Instead of the high price, the product is made in low quantities. This strategy combines prestige with a reasonable price on the actual product (Paul, 2019). Paul (2019) mentioned that reducing the price should increase marketing managers to seek an increase in sales volume. This goes against many strategic moves and practices by major brands like Nike and Adidas.

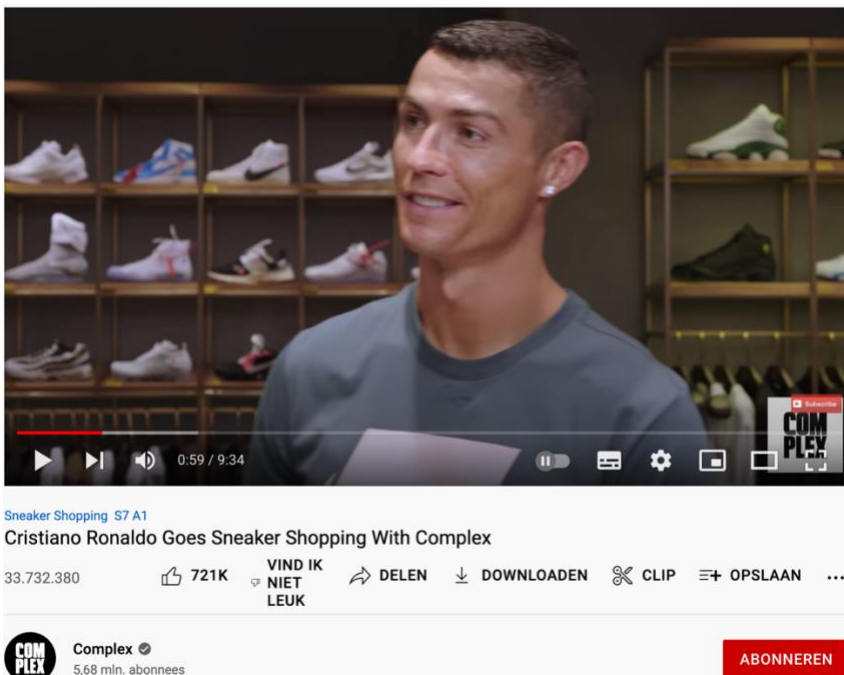
Currently, less exclusive collaborations are created with sneakers, which evokes negative feelings among sneaker collectors. Concepts such as: milked out and over-exploited often recur in the interview, leading to a loss of value in the co-branded products. So the brands have to push forward something that is considered to be exclusive. The best way for these brands is to do that in low quantities of sneakers in a release.

Alternatively, by making sure the collaboration happens less frequently, the consumers will only have access to the co-brand occasionally (Truong et al., 2009). Because these collaborations are very exclusive, a new phenomenon emerges: the shoes are worth more after the release. This is an essential concept among the sneaker community. The importance of the resell value for the community will be discussed more extensively under section 4.2.

In addition to scarcity and reduced availability, tastemakers also play an important role in effectively executing masstige strategy. These tastemakers help create hype, leading to getting the 'wagon' into motion. Notably, large established companies such as Nike do not advertise much for a launch in collaboration with another brand. These companies mainly leave it to outside parties who talk about it and map it out. The so-called tastemaker is a person or company who decides or influences what is or will become fashionable. Consumers learn skills from these tastemakers and embody the

ability to combine things around a premium object (Zanette et al., 2022). So the people and organizations involved get the collaboration going and create the hype.

Lifestyle blogs/magazines such as Complex (5,6 million subscribers on YouTube), Hypebeast (10,3 million followers on Instagram) or Highsnobiety (4,5 million followers on Instagram) play a big part in informing the sneaker community. With Complex as one of the most successful platforms, they have a website, a YouTube channel with over 5 million subscribers and an event that revolves entirely around their own platform. One of their most successful series is about sneaker shopping with famous artists or athletes. These famous artists or athletes can be seen as tastemakers and role models. These online tastemakers have been found as a suggestion after the conducted interviews. The effect of tastemakers was studied through interviews and, as in addition, non-participatory netnography.



Picture 2 Screenshot of Complex's online show Sneaker Shopping

In picture 2 from Complex's show, Cristiano Ronaldo goes on a sneaker shopping spree with Complex. Behind Cristiano Ronaldo in the image, there are a number of sneakers on the wall, some of which are Nike in collaboration with designer brand Off-White. This picture provides an example of how these internet series create a lot of exposure for these collaborations. The picture shows that this episode has been viewed more than 33+ million times. The usage of these role models positively influences the hype around the brand, as these role models influence adolescents' buying behavior and consumption patterns. (Martin & Bush, 2000). Because these role models influence young adults' self-images and lifestyle choices (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997).

Looking further into these role models who determine the new fashion trends, there are plenty of examples in combination with sneakers releases that cause the hype to grow. Role models are used both on a micro, local, and macro, worldwide scale. Giving an example of a local scale tastemaker is Femke Halsema, the mayor of Amsterdam. Just before releasing a Nike Air Max 1 in collaboration with

the Amsterdam premium streetwear store Patta [8]. Femke Halsema was seen and photographed multiple times wearing these limited sneakers. This picture received many positive social media reactions, with people complimenting her 'shoe game' and creating enthusiasm about the new collaboration.

On a macro level, big reality stars have a lot of influence on the hype of a particular sneaker or brand. See, for example, this quote about one of the most popular hip-hop artists of the moment, Travis Scott, in Complex's magazine (DeStefano, 2020).

'This is probably the grandest example of "The Travis Effect" at work. Considered by many to be one of the best SB Dunk Lows of all time, Stussy's ice cream-inspired collab from 2005 [9] was still pretty easy to find floating in the \$400-\$500 range not too long ago. Then Travis wore them. A pair of these sold for \$10,000 on StockX in March 2020. The average resell price on the marketplace is now at \$1,426. You can pretend that Travis has nothing to do with it, but that would be silly.'

In this quote, Complex talks about the so-called "Travis Scott Effect", referring to how the hype around a particular shoe explodes after he is seen wearing this sneaker. This hype made this particular sneaker more high profile, but it also gave the Nike SB model new life. The use of a role model is very important in bringing attention to sneakers and getting the community on board. Marketing managers must consider raising awareness and securing the support of these influential individuals since they may have a significant impact on today's youth (Martin & Bush, 2000).

In this section, I have shown strategic consideration for the brand and co-brand itself. It functions as the best practice for premium brands trying to reach the middle-class consumer through collaboration. Also, how tastemakers positively influence the community's buying behavior and consumption patterns. However, this part is only 'The Horse' that creates motion for the wagon. In the following section, we will look deeper into the community, in the case of 'The Wagon'.

4.2 The wagon

This part of the findings section is all about the community, how these communities get into the wagon, and how these community members pull other people on the wagon. The first major theme within the findings that emerges from the community has to do with the values that should be added to the product design to develop a successfully perceived collaboration. Looking at the results of the interviews, certain aspects are often addressed.

A vital aspect is a change in design due to the co-brand. The expectation pattern of the sneaker community is strongly offset by a clear and visible change in the sneaker's design. This is often seen as a more important element than the brand being collaborated with. Take, for example, this quote from an interview. *'The co-brand is not really important for me, if the design just looks nice, then it looks nice and I don't care if I don't know that brand.'* The community sees collaborations as an opportunity

to significantly change the features and design of the sneakers by the co-brand. It provides an opportunity to express the co-brand over an existing sneaker silhouette.

If minor changes have been made to the sneaker, it can develop strong negative attributes towards both brands. These adverse effects often have to do with not meeting expectations that were set beforehand. Take, for example, this statement from an interview:

Uhhh, yeah, let me think, hmm. I think, I think that was Adidas with Prada [10]. That Superstar. Look Prada is a really nice brand. They make great clothes. Adidas a little less so, but I think that as a collaboration it was really cool. But what they had made was a Superstar, perhaps the most commercial shoe, and then put a little Prada on it. They put it on the market for 400 euros or so. No creativity at all. It almost felt a little arrogant or something from the brand. Like yes, here you want to buy Prada, a simple Superstar with Prada on it. What they did there really anyone can do. There is just no thought to it, really ridiculous.

From the respondent's response, It can be understood that there are strong negative feelings due to little creativity in collaboration. In fact, the sneaker community sees the Adidas Superstar as one of the most commercial shoes. This results in an opposing view from the luxury-seeking consumer because they try to avoid consuming goods (Chan et al., 2015). An ordinary shoe with a small Prada logo does not give the consumers a feeling of being authentic. Furthermore, this incites that design should be creative. An example from a positively received masstige collab is from the interview with Job:

I got those Ben & Jerry's Dunks [11], you know. Yeah, you can't do that without a collaboration. And collaborations just makes for crazy happenings. Nike does this very well then. And 9 out of 10 of those insane sneakers, they're really super awesome.

It is also mainly seen by multiple respondents that the co-brand is involved in the creative process of the dominant brand and must add its trademark to the end product. An example of this is clearly shown in picture 3. The Nike sneaker in collaboration with Ben & Jerry, has clear characteristics of the ice cream brand. Unlike the Adidas superstar with Prada, on this sneaker, only the Prada logo is branded.



Picture 3 Adidas x Prada vs. Nike x Ben and Jerry's

In section 4.1 I already spoke about the tastemakers and how they are responsible for creating the hype. Next, we will look at how this hype plays a role within the community. So how the sneakers are discussed and promoted among others leads to recognition among peers. An example of an excerpt from an interview is how a sneaker collaboration ensured that the designer brand had a more substantial presence in the community. This quote comes from the interview with Stijn on a question about when a collaboration is successful:

Yes, the one from The Ten, from Virgil Abloh with Nike. That was in 2017, I think. When that first started, and yes, that really did dissolve some. That was completely different. That was successful not only for Nike but also for Virgil Abloh's brand, which is Off-White. All of a sudden, you saw everybody wearing Off-White clothes and stuff.

Steeff states that after the success of the first collaboration between Virgil Abloh and Nike, the brand Off-White had a stronger presence among his friends and peers. This collaboration, for example, has greatly increased awareness of the co-brand within the community. As a result, several people started buying the clothing line of Off-White as well. This is verified by the growth in sales the brand has made by 172% from 2017 compared to 2018 (Fashion, n.d.). There were clear positive effects for both brands.

The growing awareness of the brand or product has also brought additional attention to it within the community. The sense of prestige and being part of the community is important. This feeling is created by going along with the hype. Take, for example, this interview quote from the interview with Siem:

And if I am completely honest, the hype around it also plays a big part. I mean, it has prestige, and it is nice when you wear something that you get compliments on it or that people talk about it. Not everyone wants to admit that, but it's true.

The quote states that striving for prestige and recognition by others is essential for choosing a specific product. This confirms the idea of Han et al. (2010), in which consumers who urgently need status but cannot buy actual luxury use noisy counterfeits to impersonate those they perceive as wealthy. Another example of the importance of the mutual reactions was in the interview with Jonna, who mentioned: 'I always hate to say it. However, you know it will get you a little attention from other people around you anyway. You know other people know like, look that is a Jordan 4 [\[12\]](#).' This quote indicates again that the environment plays an important role, which creates a feeling of being part of the community.

As already mentioned, resell value in the secondary market is also important to create legitimacy and acceptability by community members. Because the demand exceeds the supply of these sneakers, it leads to a new phenomenon: the sneakers are worth more after release. This plays an

important role among the community members since a significantly large part of the sneakers collectors also trade in them, see table 1.

The value in the secondary market helps grow the hype around a collaboration and ensures that the co-brand gets perceived well by the community. Take, for example, picture 4 made on the deadstock [never worn] sneaker market. In this sales stall, there are different shoes displayed. The more expensive sneakers sold at the event are displayed in the so-called 'sneaker boxes'. In this picture, all four sneakers are collaborations with Nike and Off-White. The other sneakers placed around these boxes are mono-branded sneakers. The sneakers in these boxes retailed for approximately €120/180 euro's and are now worth more than €1000. The field notes support the idea of resell value as an important aspect of creating legitimacy and acceptability by the community. Take, for example, this quote from the field notes:

'More expensive sneakers are given a more prominent place or even a place customers cannot reach. Many 'do not touch' signs, and for example, Air Jordan 1 in collaboration with Dior is used as a showpiece of the stall.'... 'much attention to the more expensive shoes from the sales stalls. These are viewed more extensively, and visitors show them to each other.'

The photo and field notes indicate that there is more attention to the sneakers that are more expensive in resell value. These give an extra sense of exclusivity and bring more hype to the product. This hype is crucial because it generates a lot of free marketing and publicity as the community talks a lot about it. As more people talk about it, there is great interest within the community, and this causes people to join 'The Wagon'.

Many people will also try to get hold of the shoes without wanting to wear them themselves because they do it purely for the resell value. This, in turn, leads to a lot of interaction from members within the community, which then provides free publicity for the co-brand. The resell value leads to copying each other behavior because people want to own the products with a certain value and prestige within the community.



Picture 4 Stand at Deadstock Sneaker Market

Finally, there is also a downside to the generation of hype within the sneaker community. It is important to remember that less is sometimes more, the so-called 'less is more effect'. This effect fits within the concept of family breeding. This psychological effect means that if you know a brand very well, you can quickly lose your respect for it or become careless in that situation (Norton et al., 2007). So, in other words, the community should be aware of the new co-brand, but it should not become habitual.

A practical example is the sneakers from the Yeezy collection of Adidas [\[13\]](#). These sneakers started as exclusive and only available in small quantities. However, Kanye West has announced that "Yeezy's are becoming for everyone". Initially, this caused enthusiastic reactions within the community, but the negative effects took over after a longer period. Currently, the same comparison is being made for the current Nike x Off-White collaborations. See, for example, this quote from the interview with Stijn:

‘Which, by the way, is what you're seeing now with Nike with Off-White. They are going a little bit in the Yeezy direction. The Ten series were really hard [cool shoes]. Those were the first 10 designs of Off-White shoes with Nike, but now they just keep going. You can also see that in the value of those shoes. It's all becoming less and less exclusive and therefore less attractive. I have some Off-White Nike shoes to sell on, but you can see that the new pairs are worth less than the ones that came before.’

This reduction in exclusivity can quickly turn into negative feelings for both brands. This negative feeling is reflected again in a short interview conducted with one of the owners of a stand at Deadstock Sneaker Market.

Interviewer: And for you as a consumer, has that changed anything? Would you be more likely to buy something from Off-White now, for example?

Owner of the stand: No I don't care that much about it myself I must say. I just sell it. It did start with a passion, but that market has become so saturated that I don't really care anymore.

Interviewer: And why do you find it not interesting anymore?

Owner of the stand: There's just a lot on the market and a lot of people rely on the latest releases, but there are a lot of cool shoes from the past that are also of a much better quality. Now it's all mass production and all crap if you really look critically.

The text above is an example of someone who has been involved in sneakers for a long time. Because he has been familiar with Nike for a long time, he negatively views the brands and collaborations more quickly. If you have been involved for a long time, then learning more about specific others leads to less liking for these individuals, primarily based on solid intuition (Norton et al., 2007).

In this case, it is not due to intuition, but this negative feeling is created due to the many releases of a particular sneaker. It is over-exploited in the eyes of the community. Brands should be careful if familiarity breeding occurs. Brands should seek the proper equilibrium between exclusivity and awareness to create a sustainable ride on the wagon for the community.

To conclude, this middle section serves as a building block for the bandwagon model community. Several things were addressed in this section. To start with, how the community expectations are set high for the change in design. The co-brand is responsible for transferring their trademark into the mass branded product. It shows how the community wants to avoid these consumer goods. In addition to design changes, the secondary market's resell value also plays a vital role. The higher the resell value, the more symbolic and status value is added to the product. Furthermore, the aspect of the creation of hype within the community. Positive about this is that it provides prestige and recognition by others, leading to much free publicity. The downside of building hype is that it might give an information overdose to the community, in contrast to the "less is more" effect. Now that we know what the wagon looks like and how it comes to motion, we will look at the individual consumers in the next section.

4.3 The people

What task do the customers have to undertake to join the bandwagon? What actions were taken during and after the product release? This part will look at the masstige strategy from a consumer's perception of how the individual consumers perceive the strategic consideration by the brand.

First, we will look at the perceived price by the customer. It is important to keep prices constant or raise them slightly from the regular retail price to attract middle-class consumers. Overpricing the product brings many negative effects on the consumers' minds. Thus, it is considered arrogant, and people do not think it fits sneaker culture. Take, for example, this quote from the interview with Abel.

Some Collabs I find really bad, makes no sense at all, like the Collabs they had with Louis Vuitton. I think it's ridiculous. Just an Air Force One Collab with Louis Vuitton and then the shoe is €2500 on release [14]. I think it's really ridiculous, has nothing to do with shoes. Or Nike also had a collab with Swarovski that the whole Air Force one was full of Swarovski crystals [15]. I think that's moronic too. But no, in some of those high-end Collabs they held the original sneaker price. I do support that, but when I see the price specifically worth four times as much because it is a high-end brand, then I think it's really ridiculous.

In this part of the interview, Abel makes a massive statement about the high-end brands that do not charge 'regular' retail prices. This makes the brand collaboration unsuccessful as the product does not trigger positive associations in the consumers' minds (Helmig et al., 2008). In this quote, it is clear that the individual consumer has a very strong preference for the low retail price of the mass brand.

If the prices are right in the consumer's eyes, they want to get in touch with the co-brand. In most cases, this kind of collaboration is why the individual consumer looks further into co-brands. The mass brand has an important role in this, as they can act as a stage for the co-brand to confirm that they are legitimate in the consumers' eyes. Take, for example, this answers towards the question of how their perception of high-end brands has changed after the collaboration with Nike.

Well, at least it is interesting enough for me to think it is okay. Because Nike, of course, has a big position, and they will only start collaborating when the co-brand is big enough or at least interesting enough. For me, it is a trigger to deepening myself into the co-brand. To do some research on that brand and to look further into it. Furthermore, it is also a confirmation that the brand is serious.

Looking at the quote, three things come to mind. First, it is the position of the mass brand. If this position is strong, the consumers perceive the co-brand as legitimate. Second, it signals that the co-brand is interesting enough to collaborate with, and this causes the consumer to delve deeper into the co-brand. Finally, it indicates that the co-brand is perceived credible. Furthermore, these collaborations also make high-end brands feel more accessible. Indeed, this comes to light in the interview with Jeremy.

Such a brand as Ambush, for example. That was always a bit of an obscure brand, so to speak, which is not accessible. But I think that through the Nike and Ambush [16] collaboration, the brand has become more accessible.

Jeremy elaborates on the fact that these collaborations create a feeling of accessibility. The consumers feel that they can also be part of the luxury co-brand. At first, the co-brand feels far away and is considered out of reach, but through this collaboration, it is possible for the consumer to get in touch with these more luxurious brands.

Due to the low availability and high level of exclusivity, not everyone can buy the sneaker during the release. Nevertheless, when a consumer gets access to the sneakers and wins the raffle, it creates a sense of achievement. One main reason for this is that the sneakers in the secondary marketplace are worth more than their retail value. Take, for example, conservation in the interview with Karel:

Interviewer: And what pair of sneakers are you most proud of?

Karel: They are, let's see the Dunks x Ben Jerry's are that.

Interviewer: Okay, do you have the normal box or the special box?

Karel: Well the normal box. I have two of them. One I hit with sneakers early access back then. I would never forget that day too. When I got a message like hey, you can buy the shoes. I was so happy.

Consumers create additional value by getting the sneakers for retail. This is mainly due to the high value the shoes have in the secondary market. The Ben & Jerry from this example retailed for €109,95 and is now worth over €1300,- (StockX, n.d.-b). The feeling that comes up in consumers' minds is similar to winning the lottery. In fact, the consumers feel as if they have won something while still having to pay the retail price. This generates brand aspiration because this will make the consumer feel successful and happy (Purohit & Radia, 2022).

If the consumer owns a pair of collaborative sneakers, it should trigger the urge to combine these sneakers with other designer items. The customers have to value pairing designer clothes with sneakers. Take, for example, this citation from the interview with Joep, after the question if these sneaker collaborations prompted their buying behavior of those designer brands.

Yes, yes, perhaps indeed. I bought an Aime Leon Dore sweater the other day, and that was really purely because I knew it from New Balance collaboration, really purely because of that. So I think so, yes. In my opinion, a high-end brand needs to collaborate to create awareness.

This interview with Joep shows that these collaborations encourage customers to buy other premium brand products, also called 'cross-selling'. Furthermore, other interviews show that customers find it important to combine different premium branded garments. Take this citation from a field interview at Deadstock Sneaker Market on whether they find it important to wear designer items with their sneakers. *'I think that is cool because you want to have a cool jacket or whatever with your shoes. And just because they collab, I think it's cool, and it fits together.'* Joep's interview and the field interview together reflect on how these consumers enter the bandwagon and start their ride. The consumers develop an interest in the co-brand and create an urge toward the status and symbolic values. It is the middle-class customers seeking more premium products.

The need for this phenomenon can be triggered in the consumers' minds by the brand, for example, taking 'lookbook' photos where the model poses in designer clothes paired with co-branded

sneakers. In fashion, a lookbook shows off a clothing line collection, and the brand itself often makes these outlets (El-Demerdash et al., 2017)

Take, for example, picture 5 from the lookbook from Aime Leon Dore in 2022. This picture shows the latest garments from the summer collection combined with their collaborated sneakers with New Balance [17]. This picture depicts two different situations: young people wearing Aime Leon Dore clothing and the collaborated sneakers and, on the other side, a family which exudes accessibility. The individual consumers reflect on these



Picture 5 Lookbook Aime Leon Dore 2022

To summarize, the mass brand plays an essential role in developing positive attitudes toward the co-brand. If the mass brand has a strong positioning in the current market, it helps to convey these positive properties. This mass brand position will ensure interest is piqued, leading the customer to look into the co-brand. If the consumer is already familiar with the designer co-brand, these collaborations make them feel more accessible to the middle-class consumer. In this way, the distance between the consumers and the designer brand is reduced. Furthermore, these designer brands must capitalize on pairing designer clothes with sneakers. By doing so, consumers are more likely to join the bandwagon and enjoy their ride.

5. Discussion

These findings show strategic considerations for designer brands to reach out to middle-class consumers successfully. This study provides empirical evidence of the best practice to reach the middle-class consumer using brand collaborations as a strategy. As the current area of research on masstige marketing is nascent, there is still much room for improvement and new discoveries. The strategic considerations from the bandwagon model will serve as an extension of the past theories about masstige marketing, co-branding and the creation of the bandwagon effect. It will guide marketing managers in making the right decisions when executing a co-branding strategy to reach the middle-class consumer.

5.1 Theoretical implications

First, design changes are very important during these collaborations. The data shows that collaboration is successful when there are strong influences from the co-brand on the design. Only a few studies have been done research in the design fit of the mass and luxury brands. Previous research has shown that low brand personality fit co-branding leads to higher perceived co-branding masstige (Shan et al., 2022). For example, Nike collaborates with a designer brand such as Dior. Our studies emphasize on the fact of what design adjustments need to be done to excel. In fact, design modification can be seen as an important follow-up toward personality fit. If strong consideration is given to the design of the collaboration, it will have a strong positive impact on the success rate.

If the design is not changed enough, consumers will feel negative about both brands even though it has a strong personality fit. Often the negative feelings for the co-brand are the strongest, as they are seen as responsible for the design changes. Another research done by Han et al. (2010) confirms this idea of design changes by the co-brand. Han et al. found that community members who are in urgent need of status and are unable to buy the actual designer products use noisy counterfeits to impersonate those they perceive as wealthy. In the case of this research, the designer trademarks from the co-brand should be transferred over to the sneakers. There is evidence that the consumer view of these collaborations is highly expected to change the sneakers' design significantly. If these expectations are not met, strong negative feelings will be developed towards both brands.

Second, one of the significant key differences compared to traditional luxury is the pricing. In research by Paul (2019), Paul mentioned that reducing the price should increase to seek an increase in sales volume. However, in the case of these collaborations, high sales volume creates brand dilution. The exclusivity-seeking middle-class consumers should have limited access to these collaborations, giving the premium feeling of exclusivity. Even though literature about masstige marketing argues that luxury for the masses should not be exclusive (Purohit & Radia, 2022). In the case of the masstige co-branding strategy, the products should be limited available and create an exclusive feeling among the community members.

This means keeping the demand higher than the supply and only selling it at selected retailers. This way, the same symbolic and status value is attached to the product during a collaboration, but then for a lower price (Washburn et al., 2000). Furthermore, the strategy for low supply is in line with an article by Truong et al. (2009). This article about masstige marketing elaborates that consumers have limited accessibility for the masstige product. The brand can make it more widely accessible, but it should not become habitual.

In this research, there is empirical evidence that sneaker collaborations with high-end brands make it feel more accessible after the release and make the step of wearing a designer brand smaller. Noteworthy is that the collaboration does not occur too often, but the designer co-brand becomes more accessible to middle-class consumers after the collaboration. Meaning that the luxury brands use a different sales channel to reach the middle-class consumer by creating a lower-priced design product in collaboration with a mass brand. It is not the traditional marketing way of getting the collaborated product in the consumers' hands but building community awareness, recognition and acceptance. This strategy must make the leap towards the designer brand smaller and more justifiable for the middle-class consumer. To create the feeling that they can also be part of the more expensive designer brand.

Important to keep in mind that less is often more because there is also a downside to the generation of hype within the sneaker community. Familiarity breeding occurs; this psychological effect means that if someone knows a brand very well, they can quickly lose their respect for it or become careless (Norton et al., 2007). In their research, Norton et al. speak that it is mainly based on intuition. However, there is empirical evidence that it is also happening through logic or critical thinking. The study clearly shows that customers quickly create negative feelings when they see that collaboration is over-exploited. An example of logical reasoning by the consumer is if there is no resell value left on the sneakers. This is a sign of disinterest in the collaboration within the community.

Third, this research also contributes to the existing literature on the bandwagon effect. For brands to achieve this bandwagon effect, consumers should experience prestige and recognition by peers in their environment, and others should approve of their product choices in this environment. Previous literature has shown that status consumption drives people toward securing group membership and attaining respect and social distinction (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012). One way of securing group membership is by taking place in the secondary marketplace for sneakers. Most collectors also become part of the trading aspect in the secondary marketplace. This marketplace is creating a different way of consuming these luxury goods. The value of the sneakers in this secondary market significantly impacts creating brand awareness for these luxury co-brands. Interesting is that high resell value gives an extra sense of exclusivity.

This resell value also creates a feeling of achievement for the consumers. If consumers get access to an exclusive pair for retail, they generate the feeling that they have achieved something. This phenomenon occurs because when a consumer buys a sneaker, it could be worth two, three, or even

four times as much the same day. In this way, the products are very close to traditional luxury items. This leads to brand aspiration as possessing these products will enhance one's status and self-worth.

To conclude, this research has made a theoretical contribution to the novel masstige marketing. It shows how the boundaries of the existing theory are expanded, and new theories are added. The following section will focus on implementing the bandwagon model. the bandwagon model will help marketing managers and entrepreneurs successfully implement the masstige co-branding strategy to reach out to middle-class consumers.

This research provides strong 'state of art' implications for designer brand managers. A marketing manager could use the elements in the theoretical framework to effectively target the middle-class consumer. The strategic considerations in the framework help to exploit and develop a co-brand's strengths and moderate a co-brand's weaknesses. These include design changes, price determination, maintaining exclusivity, and creating recognition, awareness, and acceptance.

First, we will start with the design changes—one of the most important aspects of a successful perceived collaboration. The co-brand should transform its trademarks into a creative new design to meet consumer expectations. The collaboration should be used as an opportunity to think out of the box and develop a never seen design towards an existing sneaker silhouette. If a design is innovative, it ensures positive feelings for both brands. This is important for a designer co-brand, as middle-class consumers are often first introduced to this brand through collaborations.

An example of how not to do it is the Prada x Adidas collaboration [\[10\]](#). This collaboration has been very poorly received within the sneaker community and has often been brought back in the interview as a collaboration that was disappointing. It was just the Adidas Superstar with a small Prada logo, which did not give the consumers a feeling of authenticity. The co-brand should transfer its identity towards the mass product, but the small Prada logo did not make the shoe stand out above the other Adidas Superstars. Furthermore, consumers already saw this Adidas model as the most popular sneakers ever made. The community was so familiar with the sneaker model they instantly created negative feelings towards both brands because the brands were not making up to their expectations.

Second, price determination is essential. Marketing managers must consider the low prices to be attractive to middle-class consumers. Deviating too much from the price of the mass brand will generate strong negative feelings because the high pricing does not make them feel like the designer co-brand is available. Customers are willing to pay more than usual for collaboration. However, it should not deviate too much from the mass brand price.

The too great price difference was also why the collaboration between Adidas x Prada was poorly perceived. The price of the Adidas Superstar was 495 euros, which is four times more expensive than the original Adidas Superstar price. Because of the high price and minimal design creativity, this collaboration was received as arrogant. It had a bigger impact on Prada since they were found responsible for the sneaker design by the respondents.

Third, the co-brand wants to maintain its exclusive and high-status character. A marketing manager must therefore be very critical of his sales channels. The product must be available in limited quantities for only a part of the community. So instead of the high price of traditional luxury brands, make it less available to the consumers. The collaboration must be used primarily to create recognition, awareness, and acceptance for the co-brand to get the community on board and create the bandwagon effect. For example, both brands can opt for a raffle system to maintain exclusivity.

One of the ways of creating recognition, awareness, and acceptance is using tastemakers. These persons or companies significantly impact what or will become fashionable. So these tastemakers can influence the community and create the hype. Marketing managers or entrepreneurs need to consider the people and organizations they involve in the release, indicating future success. As these tastemakers affect the hype, they also affect the value of the sneakers after release in the secondary market. Marketing managers must ensure that the sneakers have value in the secondary marketplace to maintain and sustain the hype surrounding a collaboration after its release. This phenomenon causes the products to come closer to traditional luxury.

It is important for marketing managers and entrepreneurs from the luxury co-brand to create recognition and awareness among middle-class consumers. However, they have to be careful not to inundate consumers with information. This could create familiarity breeding, which leads to generation consumers being careless towards the brand. Overloading with information will lead to the generation of negative feelings by the consumers. Marketing managers and entrepreneurs must seek the proper equilibrium between sending out information and marketing expressions and keeping it to themselves.

A successful example was the launch of "The Ten" by Off-White in collaboration with Nike. It was announced big time, but there was no information about the looks of the ten sneaker designs. It remained mysterious just before the launch of these ten sneakers. This caused many discussions and conversations among people within the community. People tried to figure out what the designs would look like, and they shared this with the community members. In this way, much hype is generated around the launch without Nike itself sharing much information about the products.

To conclude, if marketing managers and entrepreneurs want to reach middle-class consumers, they must use the bandwagon framework carefully to select their strategic considerations for a co-branding strategy. The section above clearly describes where middle-class consumer needs are in relation to a luxury brand in collaboration with a mass-market brand. Marketing managers and entrepreneurs can use this knowledge to implement a masstige marketing co-branding strategy successfully.

6. Conclusion

Considering the dearth of literature about masstige marketing combined with a co-branding strategy, follow-up by the importance of attracting the growing middle-class consumer. Therefore, this study provided a framework to assist marketing managers and entrepreneurs with their strategic consideration while implementing a masstige co-branding strategy. This bandwagon model is created for luxurious co-brands to generate a sustainable relationship with the middle-class consumer.

The main goal of this bandwagon framework is to help marketing managers and entrepreneurs critically look at their strategic considerations to create a state of art collaboration with a mass brand. It helps in understanding the middle-class consumer needs. The bandwagon framework is created by looking at previous literature and carefully looking at the best practices from the field in combination with in-depth interviews and field research.

This study found convincing results regarding masstige marketing, co-branding and the bandwagon effect. The results have led to the rememberable three themed bandwagon framework, including The Horses, The Wagon and The People. The study looked at both positive and negative effects of co-branding. As a result of this study, the framework is ready to be put into practice.

As long as the creation of new knowledge, the current study has some limitations that future research could consider. The current study was conducted among Dutch sneaker consumers. There are many foreign countries where sneaker communities are interpreted differently with different needs. Like countries like, for example, Japan have their whole own fashion culture compared to Europe or the Netherlands. Therefore, masstige co-branding strategy research could be conducted among different cultural dimensions in future research. In this way, managers get a broader picture of the needs of middle-class consumers abroad. Many collaborations between mass brands and designer brands are released internationally. In addition to cultural dimensions, the sneaker cultural consumption is also based different on classes and gender. Brace-Govan & de Burgh-Woodman (2008) did a study on the different ways of consumption between marginalized groups. This research concluded that these groups have different interpretations of symbolic consumption and identity expressed with consumer goods. In order to build the model further, I recommend exploring the difference between the consumer groups.

Also, in future research, researchers could look towards collaborations within different product categories as collaborations between luxury brands and mass brands do not only occur in the sneaker market. There are plenty of other examples where this applies. Consider, for example, Off-White x Ikea or Lego x Louis Vuitton. In-depth studies of different product categories could help generalize the results found in this study. In connection with that, studies of the different product categories can reveal new facts in the perception of the luxurious co-brand. This will help with the transferability of the framework to other contexts that have similar features.

Another point of improvement could be looking deeper into the influence of tastemakers within brand communities. As we know from previous research there are an infinite number of narrative elements that can influence how taste is practiced across class boundaries (Arsel & Bean, 2013). From this research, we know that they can significantly contribute to creating hype around a product launch. However, further research can determine which strategy can contribute the most, taking in mind the 'less is more' approach. Perhaps it can also be studied whether they can also bring adverse effects to the consumers.

Furthermore, this study also discusses the equilibrium between marketing expressions and consumers. If this is too much marketing expression or the information, it creates negative feelings among the customers. For research in the future, it is essential to see where this balance lies and how a (co-)brand can keep the consumer on the bandwagon for as long as possible. In addition to this, further research can start looking at how to get consumers safely off the bandwagon to move on to the next one. At the time of writing, no research has been done on this.

Finally, future research can consider examining a co-branding strategy from a brand perspective. This research is done from the eyes of the consumer. The approach from the brand or organizational perspective could be used to incorporate business-sensitive information into the model. Combining these two approaches will help improve the bandwagon model as more data is processed.

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8. Appendix

Appendix A: List of collaborated sneakers and products

Number	Name	Picture	Retail price	Resell value according to StockX
<u>1</u>	Converse high tops		€90	N/A
<u>2</u>	Jordan 1 Retro High x Off-White Chicago		€180	€7.000+
<u>3</u>	Prada x adidas Luna Rossa 21		€695	€399
<u>4</u>	Supreme x Colgate Toothpaste		€3	€22
<u>5</u>	Balenciaga x Crocs		€950	€1.100+

				
6	Ikea x Off-White		€500	€2.400+
7	Adidas Superstar		€100	N/A
8	Nike Air Max 1 x Patta		€160	€240+
9	Nike SB x Stussy		€110	€2.000+
10	Adidas x Prada		€525	€340+

				
11	Nike SB x Ben & Jerry		€110	€1.250+
12	Jordan 4 Retro		€210	€340+
13	Adidas x Yeezy 350		€220	€300+
14	Nike Air Force 1 x Louis Vuitton x Virgil Abloh		N/A	€50.000 / €63.000

				
<u>15</u>	Nike Air Force 1 x Swarovski		€450	€400+
<u>16</u>	Nike Dunk High x Ambush		€180	€350
<u>17</u>	New Balance 991 x Aime Leon Dore		€275	€500+

Appendix B: Interview questions

INTERVIEW GUIDE
Project: Adoption of Purchasing Machines

DATE & TIME:	
OTHER COMMENTS:	

PARTICIPANT DETAILS

Name:	
AGE (CIRCLE RANGE):	18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65+
GENDER:	Male / Female / Nonbinary / Transgender / Prefer not to say
Profession/study	
Bought first pair of (exclusive) sneakers: (Year)	
Favorite sneaker brands:	
Hours spent on searching for sneakers per week:	

VERBAL CONSENT FORM
PREFACE A FOCUS ON STORYTELLING

Introduction

1. Can you tell me a little about yourself?
2. What do you spend most of your time doing?
3. What do you do outside of searching/ collecting sneakers?

General Sneaker Consumption Background

4. When did you start collecting sneakers?
5. What was your very first sneaker?
6. Which pair of shoes in your collection are you most proud of and why?

7. How many pairs of sneakers do you have? And how many of them are collaborations of different brands?
8. How do you get your information about sneakers?
9. Which sneakerhead pages do you follow?
10. How many hours a week do you devote to sneaker-related activities?
11. Do you search/discuss or interact with sneaker-related topics with anybody else like friends or family?
12. What keeps you searching for sneakers?

Brand Collaborations

13. What do you consider to be the added value of a sneaker collaboration?
14. When is a sneaker collaboration between two brands successful in your eyes?
15. Has there been any collaboration that was not successful/disappointing in your eyes?
 - a. What was the reason this collaboration was not successful/disappointing?
 - b. Has your vision towards this brand changed? If so, in what way?
 - c. Did you still buy the pair of shoes, and why/why not?
16. Would you pay more for a sneaker where two brands collaborate? If so, what is the reason for this?
17. Do you think it is important to be familiar with both brands when buying a collaborative sneaker?
18. Many shoe manufacturers are now collaborating with high-end fashion brands; what's your opinion on these high-end co-brands?
19. Do you own sneakers that have a collaboration with a high-end fashion brand? What is the main reason you bought them?
20. Did the purchase also make you buy from brand X? / Have the more recent drops of collaborations with high-end clothing brands made you more interested in these luxury brands?
21. Do you think this collaboration has changed your perception of the high-end fashion brand?

Brand Loyalty

22. Which brands do you have in your sneaker collection? And how is the distribution (roughly) between these brands?
23. What do you like about brand X? How do sneaker brands wake your interest and/or grab your attention?
24. What key factors influence your choice for a specific brand/release (e.g., design, brand, hype, price, availability/scarcity)?
25. How do sneaker brands create value for you as a consumer?

Purchasing Machines (main questions)

26. When did you figure out you could make money selling sneakers?
27. How did you get in touch with different buyers?
28. What was your first opinion about using bots?
29. Do you think bots are a good or a bad thing?
30. How will the sneaker culture develop/change in the future?
31. Is this a good development?

Purchasing Machines (If they use bots)

- 32. How did your opinion about using bots change over time?
- 33. When did you decide to use bots?
- 34. Did you see a big difference in your success rate (of buying limited sneakers)?
- 35. How do other buyers react when they hear you use bots?

Purchasing Machines (If they do not use bots)

- 36. What are the main reasons for not using bots?
- 37. Who should be responsible for regulating or taking action against purchasing bots? (Brands, reseller platforms, governments, buyers).
- 38. What could sneaker brands improve and/or change to the current sneakerhead industry?

Wrap Up

- 39. Is there anything I have left out?
- 40. Is there anything else you would like to add/discuss? Anything else you want me to know about?
- 41. Is there anyone you recommend I should talk to?

8.3 Observation scheme

Observation scheme								
Date: 16-4-2022 Location: Deadstock Sneaker Market Tilburg		Time: 15:00 - 18:00			Name observatory:			
Event								
What is your first impression of the event? - Does it suit with the sneakerheads?								
--	-					0	+	++
What kind of social interactions do you see?								

<p>What kind of activities do you see?</p> <p>- How does this appear to you?</p>					
<p>What audiences do you perceive?</p>					
Market Stalls					
<p>To what extent is there active buying and selling of Sneakers at the event?</p>	(
--	-	0	+	++	

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In what ways are sneakers in collaboration with designer brands present in the sales stalls?

--	-	0	+	++
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<p>In addition to sneakers, are other clothing items sold at sales stalls? To what extent is this designer brand clothing?</p>	<p>(Wat voor kleding, op welke manier worden deze gepresenteerd?</p>
<p>In addition to sneakers and apparel, will other products be sold at the event?</p>	<p>Omschrijf kort wat dit is</p>
<p>Are there any other patterns or aspects that stand out when observing the market stalls?</p>	

					Visitors
To what extent do visitors wear exclusive sneakers? How many of these are in collaboration with a designer sneakers?					
--	-	0	+	++	
To what extent do visitors wear exclusive sneakers in combination with designer clothes?					
Contact between visitors at the event is closed/open					
Very closed	closed	0	Open	Very open	

<p>Visitors give more/less attention to the sneakers offered in combination with a designer brand in the sales stalls.</p>						
<table border="1"> <tr> <td data-bbox="264 325 392 392">--</td> <td data-bbox="392 325 510 392">-</td> <td data-bbox="510 325 622 392">0</td> <td data-bbox="622 325 750 392">+</td> <td data-bbox="750 325 775 392">++</td> </tr> </table>	--	-	0	+	++	
--	-	0	+	++		
<p>What kind of feeling do visitors elicit from you?</p>						
<p>Are there any other striking aspects or patterns that stand out among visitors?</p>						

Other comments

**Faculty Nijmegen school of management
Master's specialization in Innovation and Entrepreneurship**

PROJECT TITLE: *Creating the bandwagon effect using a co-branding masstige strategy*

PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT

Dear Sir/Madam,

We invite you to participate in this student research project conducted by the student researcher Mr. Tijn Pulles from Radboud University. This student research project contributes toward fulfilling the Business administration master's degree.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to investigate the sneaker consumer culture. In this research, I am interested in three topics:

- Brand loyalty
- Collaborations and views on designer brands
- The usage of purchasing bots

I hope this project will help me better understand a sneakerhead's consumers' minds.

Research Process: The researcher will consist of a set of questions in which you can share your opinion and experience about consuming sneakers. The interview can take place online or via zoom, depending on the respondent's preference. Please note that it is important to see the collection as well. The respondent can do this by showing it when the interview takes place at home. In case it is online, the respondent should send a picture afterward.

The length of these interviews is expected to be between half an hour and one hour and is also contingent on how long you are all willing to participate in this study. All interviews, including any further interviews, are voluntary; you can withdraw at any time, and you can withdraw any data you have supplied (up to the point of analysis/publication).

Confidentiality and Data Use: Only the researchers involved in the project will have access to the raw data in this study. Confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal restrictions. We audio-record the interviews for research purposes. Once we have transcribed and analyzed the recordings, we remove any personally identifiable information from the transcript documents to provide you anonymity. In resulting research publications, you will be referred to by a pseudonym. A copy of the study's results – in full or redacted form - or a summary of the research findings are available to you if you wish to be sent a copy.

Possible Effects: No physical or psychological risks to you are foreseen. You will not be audio-recorded or your personal details collected without consent. With the small sample of participants in this study, there is the possibility that you and your responses may be identified through the outputs of this study.

However, all reasonable measures will be taken to mitigate this risk, including de-identifying any personal information in transcriptions of recorded audio and referencing you using a pseudonym in any written outputs produced from the research.

Providing Consent: Each member of your family over the age of 18 will be required to fill out a consent form to participate in the research or provide verbal consent at the start of a research interview.

Any Questions?

For more information or for a request for the final report to be sent to you in an electronic format, please contact the student researcher Tijn Pulles.

Tijn.pulles@ru.nl

Thank you for your assistance,

Tijn Pulles

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

PROJECT TITLE: Creating the bandwagon effect using a co-branding masstige strategy

Name of participant:

Name of investigator(s):

Student Researcher:

Name; Tijn Pulles

Email: tijn.pulles@ru.nl

Supervisor:

Pao Franco, Institute for Management Research, Radboud University, Nijmegen, Netherlands;

Email: (paolo.franco@ru.nl)

1. I consent to participate in this student project, the details of which have been explained to me, and I have been provided with a written plain language statement to keep.
2. I understand that after I sign and return this consent form it will be retained by the researcher.
3. I understand that my participation will involve observations and I agree that the researcher may use the results as described in the plain language statement.
4. I understand that the data collected and analysed in this project might also be used by the researchers in closely related research projects.
5. I understand that my participation may involve audio, photo and/or video capture if possible and appropriate, and may involve a period of discussion with the researcher over the interview recorded.
6. I understand that persons under the age of consent (under 18) might be present during the interviews at home, and their responses may be collected, and their behaviours observed.
7. I understand that my participation includes:
 - This initial interview with the researcher(s).
 - A potential invitation for further interview(s) with the researcher(s). This is at my discretion.
8. I acknowledge that:
 - (a) the possible effects of participating in the **observations** have been explained to my satisfaction;
 - (b) I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any data I have provided;
 - (c) the project is for the purpose of academic research;
 - (d) I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded subject to any legal requirements;

(e) I have been informed that with my consent the ***observations may be recorded and transcribed. Recordings*** will be destroyed after transcription (but no less than 5 years after the fieldwork). The transcriptions will be retained indefinitely in safe storage;

(f) I am aware that all reasonable measures to de-identify my responses will be taken, including removal of personal information in audio transcripts and using a pseudonym instead of my real name while the interview is being recorded.

(g) Due to the small sample size of this study and in consideration of all reasonable measures to de-identify my responses, I have been informed that there is still a risk that my responses and I may be identified through the outputs of this study.

(h) I am aware that there are legal limitations to the confidentiality of the data collected from me after all measures to de-identify my responses have been taken. This includes that the data provided can be subject to subpoena, freedom of information requests or mandated reporting by some professions.

(i) I have been informed that a copy of the research findings can be forwarded to me, should I desire.

(j) I am aware that this project has received clearance from the Human Research Ethics Committee. HREC no. (1648494.1).