**Disney Collaboration: The Moderating Role of Masstige Brand Types**

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**Introduction**

Recent trends among masstige brands have used Disney characters and exclusive collections to reach young people and youth cultures (Hoshikawa, 2016). However, many researchers argue that masstige marketing is poorly researched (Kumar & Paul, 2018), and no study to date has investigated how a Disney collaboration influences consumer product evaluations and purchase intentions toward masstige brands.

**Literature Review and Hypothesis Development**

Diverse collaboration strategies are well known in the fashion industry, which include, among others, using designers, celebrities, and artists to appeal to the market segment (Kim et al., 2014). Previous researchers showed that luxury brand art collaborations increased positive perceptions of product exclusivity (Kim et al., 2018). Although Disney collaborations are similar to art partnerships, there are differences in how consumers respond. For example, consumers are likely to develop an emotional attachment to Disney characters when they are young and these attachments elicit a sense of nostalgia for products featuring those characters (Hosany et al., 2013). While animated characters generally have positive effects on brand and product perceptions, Disney characters with enjoyable and exciting characteristics may be far from the perceived value and quality expected from masstige consumers. Because the literature on brand character and art fashion collaborations consistently shows that congruency between characters and brands is crucial for successful brand collaborations, Disney characters tend to target mass audiences and are, therefore, less likely to transfer luxury images. Moreover, the image of a luxury brand may be diluted due to an incongruent fit between Disney and the masstige brand.

For this reason, we expect that consumers will prefer traditional masstige products over Disney collaborated masstige products and that the negative effect of a Disney collaboration may intensify for luxury-masstige compared to born-masstige brands. Although the literature does not differentiate between born-masstige brands (i.e., brands that start as masstige brands) and luxury-masstige brands (i.e., traditional luxury brands that have expanded into the mass market), they may be fundamentally different regarding a brand’s origins and heritage. Luxury-masstige brands usually have a long history, during which they acquired a cachet of quality and craftsmanship as well as a brand pedigree (Wuestefeld et al., 2012). In contrast, born-masstige brands start by appealing to a mass market with affordable prices (Truong et al., 2009) and tend to have a shorter history and heritage compared to luxury-masstige brands. Because of the different origins and heritage of luxury-masstige and born-masstige brands, consumers may seek different values when choosing their products. For example, luxury-masstige consumers might value the brand’s logo or timeless design reflecting its heritage. Such products are unlikely to benefit from a tie-in with Disney, which may lower the product’s perceived value and quality. On the other hand, products from born-masstige brands are characterized as accessible, intimate, and ubiquitous, and are less likely than luxury-masstige brands to represent the consumer’s wealth, social status, and identity. Disney characters may align well with the accessible and young brand images of born-masstige brands, which may be perceived as a consistent fit with Disney collaborations. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1:*The negative effects of a Disney collaboration on (a) product evaluations and (b) purchase intentions are stronger for luxury-masstige brands than born-masstige brands*.*

**Method**

The between-subject experimental design was conducted with 2 (Disney collaborated vs. traditional products) × 2 (luxury- vs. born-masstige brand), yielding 4 conditions. As both Gucci and Coach have ongoing Disney collaborated collections, we selected Gucci for the luxury-masstige brand and Coach for the born-masstige brand. For the Disney collaborated collection, we chose eight handbags with Mickey Mouse from each of Gucci and Coach’s official websites. We then found equivalent handbags with their traditional logos for the traditional collection. Among these bags, we selected a cross-body handbag that both Gucci and Coach offer in a similar shape and size. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four handbags. After reviewing the handbag, respondents were asked about fashion product evaluations (Cox & Cox, 2002) and purchase intentions (Dodds et al., 1991).

**Results**

A total of 234 responses were collected via MTurk. All participants were female, lived in the United States, and aged between 18 and 44. A CFA was conducted and confirmed convergent and discriminant validities. A two-way MANOVA result shows that the main effects of a Disney collaboration on product evaluations (F(3, 230) = 26.55, *p* ≤ .001) and purchase intentions (F(3, 230) = 8.50, *p* ≤ .01) were significant. Also, the interaction effects between Disney collaboration and brand on product evaluations (F(3, 230) = 5.73, *p* ≤ .01) and purchase intentions (F(3, 230) = 3.64, *p* ≤ .05) were significant. Further, the planned contrast results showed that in the Gucci condition, participants were likely to have more positive product evaluations (*t* = 5.34, *p* ≤ .001, *M*Traditional = 4.10, *M*Disney = 2.90) and higher purchase intentions (*t* = 3.43, *p* ≤ .001, *M*Traditional = 3.12, *M*Disney = 2.23) for the traditional than the Disney collaborated handbags. For the Coach condition, the product evaluations (*t* = 1.83, *p* > .05, *M*Traditional = 3.40, *M*Disney = 2.96) and purchase intentions (*t* = .70, *p* > .05, *M*Traditional = 2.55, *M*Disney = 2.36) were not significantly different between the traditional and Disney collaborated handbags, while both product evaluations and purchase intentions were lower for Disney collaborated than traditional handbags, accepting H1a and H1b.

**Conclusion**

Although masstige brands have collaborated with Disney as a major brand strategy, no previous study to our knowledge has investigated how Disney’s collaboration influences consumer evaluations of masstige brands. The present study adds to the literature on brand collaborations within the context of Disney. Further, this is the first study to differentiate luxury-masstige and born-masstige brands by examining the moderating role of masstige brands on consumer product evaluations and purchase intentions. Based on the present study’s results, we believe that, in any tie-in with Disney, luxury-masstige brand marketers should emphasize their brand’s traditional logo and design to avoid diluting their luxury image and thereby increase the consumer’s positive evaluation and purchase intention of their product.

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