

Commercializing artistic authenticity via collaborative design

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore the value of the artist's authentic identity in fashion design and art collaborations and evaluate the efficiency of collaborative brand projects.

Design/methodology/approach – Through the case study approach, this paper explores the attempts of Adidas to create authenticity by teaming up with artists. It also investigates consumer attitudes toward the brand's collaborative projects via a questionnaire survey.

Findings – Authenticity can be understood in two general aspects: conceptual forms and incarnate forms. Within the value system of authenticity, Adidas' collaborative projects and diverse promotional strategies are to a large degree consistent with consumer aspirations. Nonetheless, the factors that contribute to authenticity via conceptual (e.g. originality, exclusivity) and incarnate forms (e.g. creative process, final designs) occupy different positions in the consumer's mind. This study also reveals that when a brand intends to launch such artistic collaborations, the selection of art style should be treated as an important issue, because specific consumer groups tend to have inclinations toward specific art forms.

Research limitations/implications – More cases should be examined to enable the theory to be generalized to other artistic collaboration practices.

Originality/value – As a pioneering effort in this field, this paper explores the application of artistic authenticity to the fashion world via a collaboration with fashion brands. More importantly, it examines the efficiency of such collaborations and the roles that diverse forms of authenticity play in consumers' minds.

Keywords Fashion design, Arts, Brand management, Consumer behaviour
Paper type Case study

1. Introduction

Collaboration between fashion brands/designers and artists is nothing new. It can be dated back at least to the early twentieth century. Italian fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli's designs in the 1930s constituted a series of collaborations with a group of Surrealists that included Christian Be´rard, Jean-Michel Frank, Salvador Dali and Jean Cocteau (Crane, 1999). However, the phenomenon of associating with artists has recently become quite notable in the fashion market as part of a "crossover trend" that is expressed in a growing number of relevant cases (see Table I). Perhaps, it is appropriate to understand this trend as an echo of the intense interfusion of fashion and art that began in the early 1990s (Moderna Museet, 2004).

The relevant issues of this widespread association between fashion and art are discussed extensively by scholars in the fashion, art and cultural spheres. Their scope of concern covers diverse aspects that range from display and promotion to design (McRobbie, 1998; Taylor, 2005; Kim, 1998). Nonetheless, rather than focus on a specific aspect of the interfusion of fashion and art, these studies take a broad perspective and discuss the multiple forms of artistic crossover. The attitudes of consumers toward such artistic association also tend to be neglected in existing studies. This lack of a specific focus does not mean that such research is unnecessary; in fact, it can provide

	Fashion brands	Artists	Collaborative designs
1.	Longchamp	Tracey Emin	2004[1] Items: bags and suitcases
2.	Stella McCartney	Jeff Koons	2006[2] Items: jersey dresses, bracelets
3.	Mulberry	Julie Verhoeven	2007[3] Items: T-shirts, dresses, scarves, bags
4.	Philip Treacy	Simon Periton	1999[4]
5.	Blaak	Craigie Aitchison	2003[5]
6.	House of Jazz	Sarah Morris	“The frock of the new” project held by Vogue
7.	Sophia Kokosalaki	Peter Blake	Items: dresses
8.	Roland Mouret	Fiona Rae	
9.	Marni	Richard Prince	2007[6] Items: knitted vests, T-shirts and bag
10.	MaxMara	Volker Eichelmann and Ruth MacLennan	2000[7] Items: coats
11.	LeSportsac	Fafi	2007[8] Items: bags, accessories
12.	Gap	Jeff Koons, Marilyn Minter, Kiki Smith, Cai Guo-Qiang, Barbara Kruger, Ashley Bickerton, Kenny Scharf, Glenn Ligon, Rirkrit, Tiravanija, Kerry James Marshall, Hanna	2008[9] Items: T-shirts
13.	H&M	Fredrik Tjernstrom, Cecilia Carlstedt, and Cassandra Rhodin	2007[10] Items: T-shirts, bags
14.	Rude Gallery	Rockin’ Jelly Bean	2007[11] Item: male underwear
15.	Edwin	Kyoko Nakazawa	2003[12] Items: jeans
16.	Louis Vuitton	Stephen Sprouse	2001[13] Items: bags
		Julie Verhoeven	2002[14] Items: bags
		Takashi Murakami	2003[15] Item: bags, accessories
			2005[16] Items: leather goods
			2006[17] Items: Tambour watch
			2008[18] Items: Monogramouflage Collection (bags and accessories)
		Richard Prince	2008[19] Items: bags
17.	Vans	Neckface	2007[20] Items: T-shirts, caps and shoes

Table I.
Artistic collaborative
collections during 2000
and 2008

(continued)

	Fashion brands	Artists	Collaborative designs
18.	Adidas	Robert Williams	2007[21] Item: sneaker
		Wes Humpston	2007[22] Item: sneaker
		Andy Warhol, Playground, and Lee Quinones	2005[23] Item: sneakers (35th Anniversary collection)
		Cey Adams, Bill McMullen Fafi, etc. Fafi	2006[24] Items: sneaker and apparel 2007[25] Items: sneaker and apparel
		Smart, Skore, Can2, Atom, Scien, Siloette and Rime	2007[26] Items: sneaker, clothes and accessories
19.	Levi's	LeRoy Neiman, Cey Adams, Eric Bailey, Usurgrow, Shephard Fairey	2007[27] Items: track tops, T-shirts, and sneaker
		Andy Warhol, Damien Hirst	2008[28] Items: jeans, pants, corsets, jacket, skirts, tees
		Kaws	2007[29] Items: jeans
		Andy Warhol,	2007[30] Items: jeans, tops, sweaters, jacket
		Futura	2000[31] Items: jackets, jeans, and sweatshirts
20.	Reebok	ST/Art	2006 and 2007[32] Items: T-shirt, sneaker
		John Madea	2008[33] Items: sneaker
21.	Gravis	Crash One	2007[34] Items: sneaker
		Stay high 149	2007[35] Items: caps, bags, and sneaker
		Stash, Futura2000, Frost, Kostas and SSUR Cey Adams	2002[36] Items: footbeds (insoles) 2007[37] Item: sneaker
22.	K-Swiss	Grand High	2007[38] Item: sneaker
		Jest	2002[39] Item: sneaker
		Logan Hicks an SIXTEN	2006[40] Item: sneaker
		Doke, Hammo, Ghostpatrol, Satta, Akiro, Jason Schmidt aka JSEN, Melbourne lad Meek, Rone, Phibs	2006[41] Item: sneaker

(continued)

Table I.

	Fashion brands	Artists	Collaborative designs
23.	Married to the Mob	Kaws Fafi	2006 and 2007[42] Item: bikini swimwear 2007[43] Items: T-shirts
24.	Maharishi	Futura Graffiti artist WK Dr. Romanelli, Andrew Brandou	2006[44] Items: T-shirts 2001[45] Items: jackets, pants 2007[46] Items: jackets
25.	2K by Gingham	Yoshitomo Nara, Yusaku Hanakuma, Jean-Michel Basquiat, etc.	Since the early 1990s[47] Items: T-shirts
26.	Uniqlo	Keith Haring, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Manga, etc. Terry Richardson, Nobuyoshi Araki, etc.	2008[48] Items: T-shirts 2007[49] Items: T-shirts
27.	DC	(Artist project) Andre' New York Artist SSUR (Ruslan Karablin) Kaws Shepard Fairey	2005[50] Items: sneaker 2005 and 2007[51] Items: sneaker, hat, fleece and jeans Time (n/a)[52] Items: sneaker 2002[53] Item: skate shoes
28.	Dusty	Andy Warhol	Since 2006[54] Items: T-shirts, jeans, accessories
29.	Comme des Garçons	Kaws Simon Periton Filip Pagowski	2008[55] Item: wallet 2003[56] Items: prints for fabrics
30.	Fornarina	Glenn Barr, Junk Mizuno and Mijn Schatje Miss Van	Since 2002[57] Items: T-shirts 2007[58] Items: T-shirts 2004-2006[59] Items: clothes and accessories

Table I.

more direct suggestions for brands in practice and supplement the development of relevant theories.

With reference to the important position of authenticity in marketing today, this research focuses on an investigation of the contribution of the artist as a modern hero of authentic individuality (Botterill, 2007) to a fashion brand via a case study of the sportswear brand Adidas. It is a further development of a study by Bai *et al.* (2008). On the basis of the existing literature and secondary data concerning Adidas and Louis Vuitton, Bai *et al.* (2008) initially examined the concept of authenticity, its market value, and its connection with the artist; discussed the advantages of artists in building authenticity; and exemplified these theories with two collaborative collections: Adidas' Adicolor and End-to-End projects and Louis Vuitton's collaboration with Japanese artist Takashi Murakami, which focused on visual images and a limited edition of

collaborative products. In this study, we systematically examine the construction of authenticity and its diverse forms, with reference to authenticity and artists, and focus on an investigation of three Adidas projects: Adicolor, the End-to-End project and the Sleek Series. We explore Adidas' performance from the brand and consumer perspective. The investigation evolves around the entire collaborative process as well as the final designs to address the way in which Adidas crafted an authentic image and the way in which it realized that image in reality. The brand's practice is measured via a consumer questionnaire survey.

2. Definition of the artist

In this study, art refers to the visual art spectrum, excluding fashion design. Thus, artists here include painters, sculptors, photographers, graphic artists, multi-media artists, installation artists and the like.

A further definition of the artist in this study is largely based on the opinions of art theorists Dickie (1974, cited in Batschmann, 1997), Batschmann (1997) and O'Doherty (1976, cited in Batschmann, 1997). They all agreed that the institutions that present art (museums and galleries) are key factors in defining artworks. With reference to the analysis of Batschmann, Dickie and O'Doherty, artists here refer to those who have publicly exhibited their artworks within the art system – that is, in galleries and museums. Additionally, because an artist today may play multiple roles, for example, he or she may also be a writer, poet, DJ or designer in addition to exhibiting or selling works of art in museums or galleries, our definition of artists encompasses career artists and those who made their reputation through the creation of art and still have a close connection to the art world in the form of exhibitions, even though some of their undertakings may fall outside of it.

3. Methodology

3.1 Literature review

With reference to the suggestion of Strauss and Corbin (1990), we reviewed both technical and non-technical literature. The former covers reports of research studies and theoretical or philosophical papers that are characteristic of professional and disciplinary writing. These are used as secondary sources of data and as supplementary validation (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The latter includes biographies, diaries, manuscripts, records, catalogues, organizational reports, correspondence, memos and so on. In most studies, these documents are used as primary data or supplements to other instruments (such as interviews and observations) or serve the same purpose as technical literature (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The sources of literature in this study include printed media (articles, theses, books, newspaper editorials, reports and the like) from the Pao Yue-kong Library at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and online databases and web portals (Wakeford *et al.*, 2006).

3.2 Case studies

Case studies present a documented history of a particular person, group, organization or event with a focus on exploring the dynamics that are present within a single setting (Zikmund and Babin, 2007; Eisenhardt, 1989). By examining the frequency with which the same term (or a synonym) arises in a narrative description, a researcher can identify important themes that may be useful in discovering variables that lead to potential explanations (Zikmund and Babin, 2007).

Case studies are appropriate in both exploratory (“what” questions) and explanatory (“how” and “why” questions) research. This type of methodology takes two forms: single- and multiple-case studies. The current research adopted a single-case study design, which is considered appropriate in several situations:

- when a single case represents a critical case and can contribute significantly to knowledge and theory-building by testing a well-formulated theory;
- when it is an extreme or unique case;
- when it represents a revelatory case through which the researcher can observe and investigate a phenomenon that was previously inaccessible to research; and
- when it is conducted as preliminary research, such as an exploratory device or a pilot case for further study (Yin, 1989).

The latter situation is most relevant to this research.

3.3 Proceedings of the case research

In the first phase, we collected data about the brand and then categorized the documents by concept (Table II). Data collection and analysis in the first phase were primarily conducted from the brand perspective. To reveal the effectiveness of the artistic collections under study, consumer attitudes were also measured. This is because, from the perspective of the evaluation of marketing performance, the awareness and attitude of the consumer is an important consideration (Jamal and Naser, 2002). In line with these theories, this study carried out two online surveys that were administered by e-mail to evaluate Adidas’ collaboration with artists from the consumer perspective.

Based on video material that was collected in the first stage of research, the second stage involved the administration of a questionnaire with 14 open-ended and two close-ended questions. These questions requested basic demographic information such as age, sex and occupation and specific opinions about Adidas’ collaborative projects. Through the open-ended questions, the researchers aimed to elicit spontaneous

	Authenticity
<i>Conceptual expressions</i>	Originality Self-expression/self-presentation Genuineness/sincerity/actuality Freedom Exclusivity Non-commerciality/innocence
<i>Incarnate forms</i>	
Visual forms	Hand-crafting Signature (the creator’s name and symbolic image) Final design Creative process Place
Non-visual forms	History Narration Experience Reputation Limited edition

Table II.
Categorization of the
description of
authenticity.

responses and avoid the bias that may result from suggesting responses to individuals (Reja *et al.*, 2003). In addition, as a preliminary survey, these types of questions helped to identify adequate categories for the later stages of the questionnaire design (Lazarsfeld, 1944, cited in Reja *et al.*, 2003).

The questionnaire samples consisted of online viewers of videos of Adidas' collaborations. The company uploaded its videos of these collaborative projects onto YouTube and MySpace to communicate the attributes of the brand and the artists to consumers. The videos not only included the final products, but also the creative process and narrations by the artists. Viewers were given the opportunity to post comments on what they had seen. The researchers managed to contact some of the commentators by sending them messages attached to the questionnaire after registration as a member of YouTube and MySpace. This pilot study collected 30 responses (Appendix 1).

Based on the pilot survey, we developed a second questionnaire survey that consisted of 18 close-ended questions and two open-ended questions (Appendix 2). Similar to the pilot survey, an e-mail investigation was conducted between early January and late April 2008. In line with the languages spoken by the subjects, questionnaires were sent out in both English and Chinese. The sampling frame consisted of Adidas fan clubs and the online forums of bebo.com (an English-language website), Yoho.cn (a simplified Chinese-language website), MySpace.com (an English-language website), Uwants.com (a traditional Chinese-language website), oncity.com (a simplified Chinese-language website) and Superstar.com (an English-language website). A total of 203 responses were collected. During data analysis, the documents and open-ended responses adopted a coding scheme, and the close-ended responses were analyzed in a descriptive manner. The findings of seven questions that are relevant to the study reported herein are displayed in Tables III-IX.

4. Literature review

4.1 *Conceptual and incarnate expressions of authenticity*

According to Taylor (1991), the term authenticity was born at the end of the eighteenth century, built upon an earlier form of individualism, and remains a powerful moral ideal. A review of the literature shows that such diverse terms as originality, self-expression, freedom, genuineness, exclusivity, non-commerciality, history and hand-crafting are used to describe authenticity (e.g. Taylor, 1991; Berman, 1970; Beverland, 2005; Botterill, 2007; Postrel, 2003; Fine, 2003). With reference to their meaning and existing forms in reality, it could be argued that some of these numerous descriptive terms for authenticity in essence share a similar meaning. This research understands authenticity from two general angles: the conceptual dimension, which is abstract, and the incarnate form, which is the manifest expression of authenticity.

The conceptual description of authenticity includes:

- originality;
- self-expression (or self-presentation);
- genuineness (or sincerity, actuality);
- freedom;
- exclusivity; and
- non-commerciality (or innocence).

Table III.
Three of Adidas'
collaborative products

	Adicolor in Spring/Summer 2006	Collaborative products Sleek series in 2007	End-to-end in 2007
<i>General concept</i>	Self-expression, authentic customization and unlimited personal involvement (Adidas, 2005)	Free-thinking (Adidas, 2006)	Originality, uniqueness (Adidas and Footlocker, 2007)
<i>Incarnate forms</i>	Final designs (sneakers, clothing and accessories) with the artists' symbolic images; signature of the creators	Final designs (sneakers, clothing and accessories) with the artists' symbolic images; signature of the creators	Final designs (sneakers, clothing and accessories) with the artists' symbolic images; signature of the creators; creative process from start to finish
<i>Visual forms</i>			
<i>Non-visual forms</i>	The artists' narratives, including their thoughts on art, their personal practice in the art scene, and the like; limited edition (e.g. there were 5,000 pairs of shoes and 2,500 items of apparel in the Taro Okamoto collection)	Historical link by reviewing the Adicolor range launched in Spring/Summer 2006 as a reinvention of the original Adicolor concept in 1983 (Adidas, 2005)	The artists' narratives, including their thoughts on art, their experiences in the art scene, and the like
<i>Promotion channels/ activities</i>	Videotaping the artists' narratives and collaborative products and displaying them through internet channels such as MySpace and YouTube	Exhibition; videotaping the artists' narratives and collaborative products and displaying them through internet channels such as MySpace and YouTube	Documenting the entire process from start to finish, videotaping the artists' narratives and displaying them through internet channels such as MySpace and YouTube; street installations around Europe and North America
<i>Artists involved</i>	British graphic artist Peter Saville, American graphic artist Bill McMullen, San Francisco graffiti artists Twist (Benny Gold and Keith Hufnagel), New York graffiti artist Cey Adams, Scottish artist Jim Lambie, French artist Claude Closky, French graffiti artist Fafi, Japanese artist Taro Okamoto and the artist group Surface To Air	French graffiti artist Fafi	Grffiti artists: Smart, Skore, Can2, Atom, Scien, Siloette and Rime

Issues	Categories	Factors	Percent	Total responses
Authenticity	Conceptual forms	Originality	23.8	332 responses
		Uniqueness	19.9	
	Incaruate forms	Final designs	32.1	302 responses
	Visual forms	Design process	8.6	
		Artists' works	14.2	
	Non-visual forms	Artists' thoughts about art	16.6	
		Artists' reputation	4.6	
		Artists' experience	5.0	
Other issues	Fresh style	20.2%	332 responses	
	Cool style	16.3%		
	Relation with street art	13.6%		

Table IV.
Highlights of the response relevant to the research

	N	Valid	N	Cases Missing	N	Total
		Percent		Percent		Percent
Q5	181	89.2	22	10.8	203	100.0
Q10	120	59.1	83	40.9	203	100.0
Q11	118	58.1	85	41.9	203	100.0
Q12	113	55.7	90	44.3	203	100.0
Q14	66	32.5	137	67.5	203	100.0
Q15	117	57.6	86	42.4	203	100.0
Q17	194	95.6	9	4.4	203	100.0

Table V.
Case summary

Note: Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1

	N	Responses	Percent of cases
		Percent	
13-15	37	18.9	19.1
16-20	87	44.4	44.8
21-25	51	26.0	26.3
26-30	10	5.1	5.2
31-35	5	2.6	2.6
36-39	3	1.5	1.5
Others	3	1.5	1.5
Total	196	100.0	101.0

Table VI.
Age of the respondents (Q17)

Note: Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1

Of these factors, originality and self-expression are the two key forms of authenticity (Taylor, 1991; Postrel, 2003; Benjamin, cited in Brown *et al.*, 2003). Taylor's study showed that authenticity, originality and self-expression which he called self-realization or self-fulfillment, are closely intertwined: authenticity refers to being true to oneself (self-expression), which means living one's life in a certain way that is not an

imitation of anyone else's; this, in turn, embodies originality (Taylor, 1991). These three concepts are closely bound together. It is probably appropriate to say that rooted in the concepts of originality and self-expression are other properties of authenticity, such as genuineness, freedom and innocence. For Taylor (1991), the relationship between these terms gives moral force to the culture of authenticity. Simultaneously, authenticity also means being rebellious against societal rules, and it views social conformity as the enemy because outward conformity tends to devour one's inner nature.

The incarnate forms of authenticity include:

- hand-crafting;
- history;

Table VII.
Being aware of Adidas' artistic collaborations (Q5)

	<i>N</i>	Responses Percent	Percent of cases
Yes	96	53.0	53.0
No	85	47.0	47.0
Total	181	100.0	100.0

Note: Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1

Table VIII.
What branded items co-designed with artists have you purchased? (Q12)

	<i>N</i>	Responses Percent	Percent of cases
Footwear	89	42.2	78.8
Jackets	41	19.4	36.3
T-shirt	47	22.3	41.6
Accessories	13	6.2	11.5
Others	8	3.8	7.1
Nothing	13	6.2	11.5
Total	211	100.0	186.7

Note: Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1

Table IX.
Why did not you purchase some of these products? (Q14)

	<i>N</i>	Responses Percent	Percent of cases
Too expensive	37	39.4	56.1
Not for sale around here	24	25.5	36.4
Overdue information	5	5.3	7.6
I am an artist	2	2.1	3.0
Dislike the designs	17	18.1	25.8
Others	9	9.6	13.6
Total	94	100.0	142.4

Note: Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1

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- place;
 - a connection to a particular person (or organization) whose reputation, narration, and signature confer moral authority on a brand/product, and strengthen the sense of originality and exclusivity; and
 - a limited edition that contributes to the building of exclusivity. A limited edition is a way to further remind consumers of the rare value of a creator's works, because the restrictions on their production or purchase signify their difference from mass-produced products and, in turn, make their designs more valuable.

Additionally, the creative process can also be used to deliver a sense of authenticity. The creative process is in essence a form of self-expression and the expression of originality: the expression of the artist's feelings and emotions, psyche and individuality. Consequently, a work of art is an expression of these phenomena. Therefore, creating a link between the final product and the creative process enhances a product's authenticity (Khatchadourian, 1978; Beverland, 2006).

4.2 Close relationship between authenticity and the artist

In keeping with this understanding of authenticity, individuals who are marginalized from the prevailing social norms or feel rebellious toward them (Hegel and Miller, 1979) or those who are engaged in expressive lifestyle alternatives (Botterill, 2007) have come to epitomize the idea of authenticity. This suggests an intimate relationship between authenticity and the artist: artists rebel against prevailing puritan norms, honor the emotions and hedonism (Campbell, 1987), and aim to search for the real (Meamber, 2000). This contributes to their "expressivist understanding of human life" (Taylor, 1991, p. 61) through their actions and speech and makes them "particularly perceptive commentators on the world" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994/1991, cited in Meamber, 2000). Essentially, artists embrace the capacity to discover an original way of being human, which Taylor (1991) associated with authenticity. In this sense, as "the paradigm case of the human being" and "the agent of original self-definition" (Taylor, 1991, p. 62), the artist logically comes to be the exemplar of authenticity (Botterill, 2007); authenticity is a central defining feature of the artistic domain (Fine, 2003).

Bai *et al.* (2008) discuss the way in which artistic authenticity can be transferred to products: the link between the authenticity and individual spirituality of the creator attests to the authenticity of his or her works. Artists' identities and biographies and their narratives about the creative experience have the magic power to naturalize the production of their art, thus differentiating it from other work that is similar in form, content or intention and investing it with meaning (Fine, 2003, p. 55). Authenticity, which is an abstract concept, becomes incarnate in creative work (Botterill, 2007): for artists, their work contains their spirit and energy and expresses their authenticity (Abbing, 2005); for audiences, visual images are an intuitive way of understanding the artist's spirit and recognizing his or her originality (Szmigin, 2006).

4.3 Categorization of the description of authenticity

With reference to the preceding categorization of authenticity and its relationship with artists, the following framework for the expression of authenticity is developed. As can be seen in Table II, the factors of the incarnate form of authenticity can be further grouped into two categories: visual forms and non-visual forms. The latter covers the invisible factors in people's general perceptions.

4.4 Prevalence of authenticity in marketing as a compromise of brands

Authenticity has significant value in separating a brand from others in a similar category and attracting the attention of consumers who are on a quest for individuality. Moreover, as a marketing strategy, authenticity can be constructed. It is in fact the cornerstone of contemporary marketing (Bai *et al.*, 2008).

Authenticity works in tandem with the new postmodern consumer culture. More specifically, it is a consumer-focused marketing strategy. In keeping with the counterculture movement, the postmodern consumer culture was born in the 1960s and connotes individuality, self-expression and stylistic self-consciousness. People increasingly view consumption as an autonomous space in which they can pursue identities unencumbered by tradition, social circumstances or societal institutions (Holt, 2002). The postmodern consumer culture publicly suggests that regardless of their age or class origins, all people have room for self-improvement and self-expression (Featherstone, 2007). Therefore, to participate in the postmodern consumer culture, brands have to present themselves as the most effective palette for these sovereign expressions of authenticity and offer authentic cultural resources (Holt, 2002). Botterill's (2007) study indicated that successful brands no longer directly promote a mass or modern lifestyle, thus acknowledging the authority of the consumer. This is particularly true when it comes to the sensitive youth market.

5. An overview of three of Adidas' collaborative products

Adidas engages in the creation of authenticity (Botterill, 2007) by placing extensive emphasis on the concepts of originality, self-expression and the exclusivity of the individual person. This is especially prominent in the company's Originals division. The study reported herein examined three of the brand's collaborative projects, which were collected between May and August 2007: Adicolor from the previous year and the Sleek Series/Fafi and End-to-End projects (see Table III). For brevity, this paper adopts a table form to document the way in which the brand fully commercialized the artists' merits to build an authentic image. It can be seen that to approach its core value of authenticity, Adidas used incarnate forms that covered the entire process of collaboration, from creative process to final product.

6. Description of the consumer survey

To allow a comparison between the brands and the consumers' perceptions of these collaborative collections, including their conceptual and incarnate forms, the current research examined consumer attitudes via a questionnaire survey based on a pilot survey (see Appendix 2). Table IV summarizes the highlights of the responses related to the concept of authenticity and other issues, and Tables V-X present the findings of the study.

Table VI displays the respondents' age spectrum. The 16-20 age group (44 per cent) accounted for the largest number of responses, followed by the 21-25 group (26 per cent). Ninety per cent of the respondents were between 13 and 25 years old.

It is showed in Table VII that 53 per cent of the 181 respondents were aware of the brand's specific products.

As shown in Table VIII, among 113 valid cases, nearly 89 per cent (100 out of 113) had once purchased an artistic co-design, among which footwear, jackets and T-shirts were the main choices.

Table IX presents the reasons that the respondents who knew about the artistic projects failed to buy anything or bought only a few items. It can be seen that "too

expensive” (39 per cent) and “not for sale around here” (26 per cent) were the most common reasons given. Around 18 per cent of them said they did not like the designs.

Table X shows that of 117 valid cases, 56 per cent suggested that the collaborative projects had increased their interest in Adidas; 24 per cent gave a negative response; and 20 per cent adopted a neutral attitude.

7. Discussion and implications

As shown in Table VI, 90 per cent of the 196 respondents in the survey were aged between 13 and 25. Although this investigation was limited to online communities, this age group is Adidas’ target. Pi (2007), the marketing vice president of Adidas Greater China, said their main lines were intended for people in their teens and twenties. In this sense, it can probably be argued that the responses to this survey significantly represent target consumer attitudes toward Adidas’ collaborative products.

7.1 The viability of consumer interest in Adidas’ artistic products

In keeping with its core value of authenticity, Adidas describes its three collaborative collections as being characterized by “self-expression”, “authentic customization and unlimited personal involvement”, “free-thinking” and “originality and exclusivity”. According to the preceding categorization of authenticity, the abstract concepts highlighted by Adidas are related to originality, exclusivity (uniqueness) and freedom. To manifest these ideas in their artistic collaborations, the company utilized both visual (the final designs, the signatures of the creators, the creative process) and non-visual forms (the historic link between the artistic products and the brand itself, limited editions and the artists’ narratives). As shown in the consumer survey (Table IV), the conceptual forms of most concern to consumers include originality and uniqueness. With regard to the incarnate forms, the visual forms include the creative process, the final designs and the artists’ works, and the non-visual forms include the artists’ thoughts about art and their reputation and experience. The consumer responses indicate that the meaning of authenticity to the public have been fully identified by Adidas, as highlighted in the collaborative products and expressed by the brand.

This confirms the efficiency of Adidas’ strategy and suggests that, when building authenticity, a brand may need to consider diverse forms of incarnation to maximize market impact, because the consumers who are interested in such products tend to be quite emotion-savvy in their consumption. Thus, their interest is not simply in the final products, but in everything surrounding the products.

	N	Responses	
		Percent	Percent of cases
Yes	66	56.4	56.4
No	28	23.9	23.9
Do not know	23	19.7	19.7
Total	117	100.0	100.0

Note: Dichotomy group tabulated at value

Table X.
Have the collaborative projects made you like Adidas more (Q15)?

7.2 *How consumers balance conceptual and incarnate factors of authenticity*

Although the investigation showed that various forms of authenticity can attract consumers, it also found that these forms represent different positions in people's minds. The following section analyzes the aspects of conceptual and incarnate forms.

7.2.1 *Conceptual factors of authenticity: originality as the dominant factor.* As can be seen in Table IV, two critical factors of authenticity, originality and uniqueness, occupy important positions in consumers' minds. Originality had the highest proportion of responses (nearly 24 per cent).

The significance of this finding lies in two aspects. First, it reveals that people specifically aspire to originality although an aura of authenticity can be created by such means as controlling production and offering hand-made products. In this sense, it can probably be argued that people care more about creativity than other factors because of the close relationship between originality and innovation (Crowther, 1991). Second, in the public's minds today, art is closely related to originality, although the issue of artistic originality is becoming controversial, and many individual artists' works are controversial in terms of their originality or authenticity. This may be because of artists' inherent commitment to originality and self-expression and their long history of serving as symbolic figures who "carry a weight of ideological meaning" and as opponents of the social, political and moral values of modernity (Wilson, 2000). Therefore, no matter how commercial they are, what artists do is still centered on the issues of authenticity, originality and self-expression, and this is conveyed through their statements and behaviour.

7.2.2 *Incarnate forms of authenticity: visual forms favored by consumers.* As can be seen in Table IV, 55 per cent of the responses indicated that the visual aspect is of vital concern to consumers, with 32 per cent choosing the final designs, 9 per cent the design process and 14 per cent the artists' works. This reveals the core position of a brand's visual creation, which is in line with Bovone's (2006) study that found that young people frequently prefer to mediate their spoken language via images to construct their identity and be associated with the idea of authenticity. This accounts for one important advantage that the visual artist has in terms of collaborative projects. They have the technical advantage of being able to attach their authority to visual objects because of their talent in visual creation. Through their expressive use of visual signs, artists transfer their authenticity to fashion brands.

Although the respondents did not rate them as highly as the visual factors, such non-visual aspects as the artist's reputation (5 per cent), experience (5 per cent) and thoughts about art (17 per cent) still made a deep impression, which highlights the importance of moral authority in establishing an authentic aura. This can be seen in the way the collaborative projects reverberated among consumers. As the survey showed, 53 per cent of about the respondents were aware of these specific products (Table VII). From Beverland and Ewing's (2005) viewpoint, these projects could probably be seen as a low-key marketing approach: in this circumstance, each section of such activities plays an important role for the brand and should be given serious consideration in terms of their demand in market. Additionally, with regard to the respondents' interest in the artistic collaborations, the final designs, the artists' thoughts about art and the artists' work were ranked as the three most important factors. This also indicates that although the visual connection is critically important, the non-visual cues related to the artist's spiritual world also exude charisma for consumers.

In short, Table IV shows consumers' multiple interests in such collaborative projects. This indicates that companies can communicate with consumers through a variety of

approaches. What is important for brands is to find a way to balance these two aspects in the process of strategy-making to maximize the potential value of artists.

7.3 Selection of the right style

Adidas showed strategic consideration in terms of the artists' creative styles and image (message), even though those selected enjoy good reputations. Of the three collaborative collections (Adicolor, the Sleek Series and the End-to-End project), two were collaborations with graffiti artists, and 11 of the 17 artists involved (nearly 65 per cent) are graffiti artists. This is to a great degree consistent with Adidas's positioning of itself in the market. The brand is positioned as a street-style label, which naturally points to the graffiti or street artist in terms of collaboration. The company has clearly discerned the current influence of graffiti on the consumer: graffiti has also been thoroughly established as an art form that resonates with a wide audience (Krispin, 2007). In recent years, the artistic and cultural phenomenon of hip hop has become quite influential among youth. Broder's (2006) study showed that hip-hop fashion is the rule rather than the exception among young people. As one of the four key activities of hip-hop culture (rapping, graffiti art, breakdancing and DJing), graffiti art has obvious youth appeal. Briefly, the thriving scene of hip-hop culture constitutes the strategic foundation of the brand. As shown in the consumer survey, nearly 14 per cent of the 332 respondents in the survey showed specific interest in street art (Table IV). This further confirms the necessity of selection of specific art form.

Adidas' practices remind us that art is closely related to authenticity, originality and uniqueness, and if a company wants to boost the authenticity of a brand and breathe new life into it, then, when considering artistic collaboration, it should have a clear picture of which type of art school or genre offers the best crossover. This is because specific categories of consumers tend to show interest in specific art genres. Authenticity is reified in products, and the authentic self requires creative work (Botterill, 2007). The artist's attitude constitutes the qualitative aspect of artistic products. In other words, the artist exhibits his or her art style and confers an image on the fashion brand. This means that the aura of authenticity will make little difference if the products delivering artistic authority do not work with the target consumer. In line with a brand's positioning and target market, the thoughtful selection of an artist's creative style and image further enhances the possibility of success in an artistic collaboration.

7.4 Evaluation based on final purchasing behaviour

An examination of the final purchasing behaviour of consumers may be a direct means of assessing the performance of these projects. As shown in Table VIII, 89 per cent of the respondents purchased at least one item. When the remainder were asked why they had not purchased any items, 65 per cent of their reasons had nothing to do with the design of the products, but rather with their price (39 per cent) and limited distribution (26 per cent). Additionally, as can be seen in Table X, 56 per cent of them said that the collaborative projects had increased their interest in Adidas.

The significant number of positive responses and the appropriate interpretations given indicate that to a certain degree, Adidas was successful from the consumer perspective with regard to its collaboration with artists. In addition, the enhancement of consumer interest in the brand suggests that via these artistic crossover activities, Adidas successfully improved consumer loyalty. The high purchase rate and positive attitudes also suggest that such activities still have significant marketing value, although there are many crossover products on the market.

7.5 Other important issues along with authenticity

Twenty per cent of the survey respondents demonstrated affinity to the fresh style of the artistic products. Although such a variable seemingly has no connection to authenticity, it can be obtained through the authenticity of the artist, because the dimensions of originality include innovation and demonstrating freshness in breaking with existing rules (Crowther, 1991). More than 16 per cent of the respondents also related to the artistic products using the term “cool”. This reveals that in addition to products being authentic, it is also important for consumers that they be “cool”, a demand that could be met through artistic collaborations. These issues will be further explored in later research.

8. Conclusion

Generally speaking, Adidas was successful in its three collaborations with the artists in three main aspects: the identification of consumer demand with rich forms of authentic expression, the extensive acceptance of the collaborative products by consumers, and the improvement in consumer loyalty.

Certain implications can be drawn from Adidas’ practice and the consumer responses, and these may be helpful to those interested in engaging in such collaborative projects. A number of factors are involved in crafting an authentic image, and consumers’ diverse concerns go far beyond the final designs. Nonetheless, specific attention should be paid to several factors to enhance a product’s market impact: on the conceptual side, originality and uniqueness are quite attractive to consumers, with the former being particularly critical, and on the incarnate side, consumers show interest in the entire process of artistic collaboration. The significance of these factors is different, with the final designs, design process and artists’ thoughts being more important for consumers.

9. Future research

As an exploratory device, this research is a prelude to a further case study. In addition to examining new cases via a questionnaire survey, more specific choices will be offered to elicit richer information about informants’ impressions of and preferences for the products. New data collection instruments will also be adopted, including interviews with relevant practitioners and consumers.

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Appendix 1. The pilot survey

1. Since when have you begun to wear Adidas?
2. What do you think of Adidas brand?
3. Where did you get the information about the brand's collaboration with artists?
4. Did you watch Adidas's videos including the interview with the artists, the relevant activities, the design process and the travel around Europe and American (their end-to-end project together Foot Locker)?

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5. What were you interested in in terms of the videos if you watched?
 6. What do you think of the collaborative project between Adidas and the artists in adicolor series/ the end-to-end project/ sleek series?
 7. Did you purchase the brand's items co-designed with artists? What is it if you did?
 8. Please explain the reason if you did not buy.
 9. Was your purchase of Adidas's products influenced by the brand's video about the collaboration?
 10. Does the video/interview provide efficient information to you in terms of your final purchase?
 11. Do you hear about the artists before you know the collaborative project – adicolor series/ the end-to-end project/ the Fafi/sleek series?
 12. What do you think of the artists?
 13. Are you looking forward to the brand's next collaborative project with artists?
 14. Your age: () 16-20; () 21-25; () 26-30; () 31-35; () 36-39; () others
 15. Gender: () Male () Female
 16. Your occupation:

Appendix 2. The survey based on the pilot survey

1. Since when have you begun to wear Adidas?

2. Which aspects of Adidas attract you mostly? (Multiple choices)
 - A A. Its originality
 - A B. Its street style
 - A C. Its functionality
 - A D. Its keeping refreshing
 - A E. Brand name
 - A F. Others (Please specify) _____
3. Which aspects of artists can attract you? (Multiple choices)
(In this context, "artist" means visual artist, such as sculptor, painter, photographer, multi-media artist, installation artist, graphic artist and alike.)
 - A A. Artists' originality
 - A B. Artists' underground identity
 - A C. Artists' freedom lifestyle
 - A D. Artists' legendary experience
 - A E. Their relation with street art
 - A F. Others (Please specify) _____
4. Which kind of art genre do you like? (Multiple choices)
 - A A. Graffiti art
 - A B. Pop art
 - A C. Fine art
 - A D. Comic and cartoon

-
- A E. Nothing special
 - A F. Do not like art
 - A G. Others (Please specify)_____
5. Do you know Adidas once teamed up with visual artists to launch co-designs in past several seasons?
- A A. Yes
 - A B. No (If no, please jump to “Section 3: Q17-20”)

Section 2: (Q6-16)

6. Which one do you know among the following collaborative projects? (Multiple choices)
- A A. The Adicolor series
 - A B. The End-to-end project
 - A C. Fafi/Sleek series
 - A D. 35 anniversary collection by Andy Warhol
 - A E. The Ali by Adidas collection featuring works of art by LeRoy Neiman, Cey Adams, Shephard Fairey, Eric Bailey, HVW8, Usurgrow
 - A F. Others (Please specify)_____
7. Which project above is your favorite? _____
8. Which one of the following did you first know in terms of the artists and the collaborative projects?
- A A. The artist
 - A B. Their collaborative project
 - A C. Sometimes A, sometimes B
9. Where did you get the information about Adidas’ collaboration with artists? (Multiple choices)
- A A. Internet
 - A B. The stores which sold this brand’s items
 - A C. Friends
 - A D. Magazines
 - A E. Others (Please specify)_____
10. What are your interests in terms of the artistic collaborations? (Multiple choices)
- A A. The final designs
 - A B. Design process
 - A C. Artists’ thoughts in art
 - A D. Artists’ reputation
 - A E. Artists’ works
 - A F. Artists’ experience
 - A G. What make these projects happen

-
- A H. In which aspects they took collaboration
- A I. Marketing aspects
- A J. Others (Please specify) _____
11. Which aspects of Adidas's artistic co-designs are quite attractive to you? (Multiple choices)
- A A. Its originality
- A B. Its uniqueness
- A C. Its fresh style
- A D. Its cool style
- A E. Its relation with street art
- A F. The person who designed them
- A G. Others (Please specify) _____
12. What did you purchase in terms of the brand's items co-designed with artists? (Multiple choices)
- A A. Footwear
- A B. Jackets
- A C. T-shirts
- A D. Accessories
- A E. Others
- A F. Nothing
13. Which one(s) of these collaborative projects do your purchasing include:
- A A. One of them
- A B. Two of them
- A C. More than two of them
14. What is the reason that you did not buy some of these co-products? (please ignore this questions if you bought) (Multiple choices)
- A A. Too expensive
- A B. Not on sale around
- A C. Overdue information
- A D. You are an artist too
- A E. Dislike those designs
- A F. Others (Please specify) _____
15. Do the collaborative projects make you like Adidas more?
- A A. Yes
- A B. No
- A C. Do not know
16. Are you looking forward to seeing a new collaborative project between Adidas and artists?
- A A. Yes
- A B. No

Section 3: (Q17-20)

17. Your age:
A 13-15 A 16-20 A 21-25 A 26-30 A 31-35 A 36-39 A Others
18. Your gender: A Male A Female
19. Your interests and hobbies: (Multiple choices)
A A. Surfing
A B. Skateboarding
A C. Rock and Rap music
A D. Football
A E. Basketball
A F. Drawing graffiti
A G. Travel
A H. Reading comics
A I. Dancing
A J. Others (Please specify) _____
20. Your occupation:

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