A Case Study of Brand Associations for Yeezy Brand

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A CASE STUDY OF BRAND ASSOCIATIONS FOR YEEZY BRAND

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment for the degree of
Master of Science

in

The Department of Textiles, Apparel Design, and Merchandising

by
Garrett Kalel Grant
B.S., Tuskegee University, 2014
August 2018
This thesis is dedicated to my grandfather, A. Grant Sr. You always believed in me and everything I set out to do. I would not be at this very point in my life without your 26 years of guidance in it. I hope that this work acts as a reflection of the lessons, morals, and values you instilled in me over the years. I love you Granddaddy! (R.I.P. Arthur Grant Sr. 3.27.27-11.23.17)
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To my loving and supportive family and friends, thank you for always believing in everything I undertake to do, and I hope that I continue to make you proud!

To Richard, thanks for always believing in my dreams and supporting me through what has been one of the toughest experiences in my life!
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LIST OF TERMS

The following terms have been defined to help understanding the current study:

Adidas is a German sporting equipment company founded in 1949 (Moser et al., 2006, p.468).

Athleisure a mix of business casual apparel and athletic wear; the concept of the athleisure trend was born out of the gap in the marketplace for consumers searching for a balance between clothing items suitable for taking part in athletic activities, made of comfortable material and the latest technology for performance, while also expressing a person’s individual style and appropriate for the workplace (Salminen, 2017, p.21).

Brand a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of them which is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition (Kotler, Saliba, & Wrenn, 1991, p. 442).

Brand associations anything that can be linked to the brand in the consumer’s mind (Aaker & Keller, 1990, p.28).

Brand Concept Maps (BCM) a more accessible and standardized method for producing brand maps (John et al.,2006, p.550).

Brand engagement in self-concept (BESC) an individual difference representing consumers’ propensity to include important brands as part of how they view themselves” (Sprott et al., 2009, p.92).

Brand equity the incremental value created when a brand name is attached to a product (Farquhar, 1989, p.24).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand familiarity</td>
<td>measures a consumer’s direct or indirect experience with a product (Alba &amp; Hutchinson, 1987, p.411).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrity endorsement</td>
<td>any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement (McCracken, 1989, p. 310).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-branding</td>
<td>a form of cooperation between two or more brands with significant customer recognition, in which all the participants’ brand names are retained (Blackett &amp; Russell, 1999, p. 8).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fashion</td>
<td>a way of behaving that is temporarily adopted by a discernible proportion of members of a social group as socially appropriate for certain times and situations (Weisfeld-Spolter &amp; Thakkar, 2011, p. 135).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hip-Hop</td>
<td>genre of music that involves stylized rhythmic music and rapping (Mazzei, 2017).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kanye West</td>
<td>Chicago native rapper born on June 8, 1977 and known for successful ongoing music career since early two thousands (Chambers, 2016).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rap</td>
<td>rhymed storytelling that represents the political and social experiences common to inner-city communities throughout the United States (Dunbar, et al., 2016, p. 280).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sneaker</td>
<td>athletic shoes that are worn for leisure or as a fashion statement (Laitasalo, 2016, p. 3).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yeezy</td>
<td>Clothing line collaboration between Kanye West and Adidas (Schwarts, 2016, p. 103).</td>
</tr>
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ABSTRACT

Brands can thrive in the marketplace based on their ability to generate brand equity. Companies have utilized many techniques to gain brand equity with their consumers. One method that has been very popular has been co-branding. Branding literature explains that one way that brand equity is created is through brand associations. Brand associations are generated through a consumer's direct and indirect experience with a brand. This research looked at a special case of co-branding in the form of the clothing line Yeezy. The purpose of this research is to better understand this special case of co-branding strategy by analyzing Yeezy using the Brand Concept Mapping (BCM) approach. The BCM approach is made up of three stages: elicitation, mapping, and aggregation. The first stage, elicitation, involved the researcher determining what associations consumers have about the Yeezy brand. The researcher completed this stage by surveying a sample to generate words they associate with the Yeezy brand. The survey was completed by 158 participants and produced 62 words to describe the Yeezy brand. The mapping stage involved the researcher using the 62 words uncovered in the elicitation stage as a word bank for a convenience sample to generate individual concept maps about the Yeezy brand; this sample was made up of 57 participants who attend a southeastern university. Finally, in the aggregation stage, the researcher combined the 57 individual concept maps to create one consensus map for the Yeezy brand. Based on the new aggregation rules created by Böger et al. (2017) the researcher was able to create a consensus map featuring 7 first-order associations tied to the Yeezy brand: Kanye, expensive, Adidas, overrated, trendy, sneakers, athleisure.
CHAPTER 1.
INTRODUCTION

Background

Brands serve as recognizable symbols that are attached to products (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Brands are also beneficial to consumers because they ease the decision-making process while creating trust between the consumer and the business (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). A brand is defined as "a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers" (Kotler et al., 1991, p.442). While these basic properties are the components of a brand, a well-known brand has developed beyond this scope (Carroll, 2009, p.146). Brands have developed into a tool that consumers utilize to help create and maintain self-identity (Carroll, 2009, p. 146). Branding as a marketing tool was originally introduced to help businesses create a competitive advantage while increasing both financial success and customer loyalty (Batra & Homer, 2004). Increased competition and number of brand-based marketers provide consumers with numerous options when selecting a brand and has led to less differentiation in the marketplace (Carroll, 2009, p.147). The proliferation of companies using branding tactics has caused marketers to pay closer attention to the consumer perception of their brand when it enters the market (Carroll, 2009). This perception along with the value perceived by the consumer is known as brand equity (Kivak, 2017). To increase differentiation and maintain competitive advantage companies have begun to focus on creating and maintaining brand equity with consumers by focusing less on market share and more on mentally engaging consumers and connecting with them emotionally (Gobe, 2009).
One way that brands have been able to create brand equity is by using co-branding. Co-branding is defined as "a form of cooperation between two or more brands with significant customer recognition, in which all the participants' brand names are retained" (Blackett & Russell, 1999, p. 8). A brand often implements this strategy to leverage brand assets and combine them with another brand to form an alliance and financially achieve greater value together than the brands would generate separately (Rao & Ruekert, 1994). Co-branding as a strategy has been very successful in the fashion industry especially when utilized by luxury brands and mass-market retailers (Oeppen & Jamal, 2014). Fast fashion brands such as H&M and Uniqlo have collaborated with luxury designers to create special co-branded lines (Shen, Jung, Chow, & Wong, 2014). This has been ideal for both fast fashion retailers and luxury designers because the brand equity and brand image of both entities were increased from the partnership (Shen et al., 2014). Sportswear companies have also co-branded with fashion designers such as Puma with Jill Sander, Nike with Junya Watanabe, and Adidas with Yohji Yamamoto (Power & Hauge, 2008). These collaborations took place to help stimulate growth within these organizations because the sportswear industry is considered high profile, with high-profit potential but has high barriers to entry (Power & Hauge, 2008).

Previous research on co-branding has pointed out that the fit or compatibility of the parent brands can have a positive influence on consumers' attitudes toward a newly co-branded product (Leuthesser, Koli, & Suri, 2003). This means that when parent brands are from similar context consumers are more likely to possess a positive attitude towards the co-brand. One example of this is the pairing of sportswear giant Nike and legendary basketball icon Michael Jordan to create the Air Jordan tennis shoe which in 2013 controlled 58% of the U.S. shoe market (Penhollow, 2015). While the need for fit has been prevalent in the co-branding and
celebrity endorsement literature in the past a special case of co-branding has emerged within the fashion industry. This special case is the development of the clothing line Yeezy, produced by rapper Kanye West and Adidas.

In December 2013, Kanye West left his partnership and endorsement deal with athletic footwear giant Nike to secure a new deal with Adidas (Belzer, 2013; Frias, 2016). West's reasoning for leaving the sneaker giant Nike was due to lack of creative control in the development of his brand; an issue Adidas saw as an opportunity to gain a major influencer to help reposition their brand against the competition (Frias, 2016). This move, which received great criticism, turned into a very successful venture for both Kanye as well as Adidas (Highsnobeity, 2016). Some products, such as the Yeezy Boost 350, retail price $350, are currently selling for thousands of dollars on secondary markets such as eBay (Belzer, 2016; Schwartz, 2016). While the Yeezy brand has received major commercial attention for its lines of boots and sneakers the brand has also been quite successful in terms of clothing items at premium retailers such as Barney's (Schwartz, 2016). The success of this collaboration has led to a new partnership between West and Adidas a first for an athletic retailer and a non-athlete (YEEZY, 2016). Reports indicate that thanks to the collaboration with Kanye West, Adidas saw an increase of 5% of sales in North America during 2015 as well as a large increase of market share of the one-billion-dollar secondary sneaker market moving from 1% to 30% (Germano, 2016). As the year 2015 reached its end, Kanye West boldly proclaimed "Yeezy, Yeezy, Yeezy just jumped over Jumpman, ah!" (Graham, 2015). The line infers that Kanye West's shoe, the Yeezy Boost, had outperformed Air Jordan sneakers (Yeezy, 2015). It has also been recently reported that thanks to West's Yeezy brand and the introduction of boost technology in Adidas' sneakers the company has overtaken the Jordan brand as the Number #2 footwear brand in the
United States (Carr, 2017). The commercial success of the Yeezy brand since its launch in 2015 has led to the formation of a long-term partnership between Kanye West and Adidas known as KANYE WEST + ADIDAS (Belzer, 2016).

By offering the rapper more creative freedom when it comes to the Yeezy brand, Kanye West has been allowed to be at forefront of the brand's future, versus in the traditional sense of celebrity endorsement where they are used as a face or spokesperson of the brand. As part of this brand agreement Adidas has provided West with an entire development team dedicated to the production of footwear, apparel, and accessories of Yeezy branded merchandise; this partnership is very pivotal for the apparel industry because it is the first of its kind between an athletic wear retailer and a non-athlete (YEEZY, 2016). The launch of the Yeezy brand with Adidas has been very similar to the success of other sportswear retailers such as Puma and their collaboration with pop-star Rihanna with her clothing line Fenty (Germano, 2018).

The Purpose of the Study

The co-branding success of Yeezy under Kanye West and Adidas has led to the formulation of this study. How can a rapper such as Kanye West have so much influence on the athletic shoe and athleisure industry when he has no actual ties to any sports whatsoever? How do consumers perceive the co-created brand of "Yeezy", the popular singer Kaye West, and his role in the success of the brand? Previous research in the co-branding literature have utilized brand associations to understand how successful brands are perceived in the minds of consumers (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Ambroise et al., 2014; Luethesser et al., 2003; Oeppen & Jamal, 2014). Brand associations are anything that consumers think of when they think of a brand (Aaker & Keller, 1990, p.28). Attitudes toward a brand are created by a consumer's previous experience with a brand (Priluck & Till. 2010). Any experience with the brand creates a structure of multiple
pieces of information including the product packaging, slogan, and advertising. This structure is often referred to as a brand association network. Another important factor to consider when looking to understand the perceptions of a brand in the minds of consumers is brand engagement. Prior research has proposed the idea of brand engagement in self-concept (BESC) and defined it as "an individual difference representing consumers' propensity to include important brands as part of how they view themselves" (Sprott et al., 2009, p.92). The findings of Sprott et al. (2009) reported that individuals with a higher BESC level can lead to an improved brand recall, higher brand awareness, and more favorable brand attitudes. To effectively visualize the structure of brand associations this research utilized a method known as Brand Concept Maps (BCM) to uncover brand associations about the Yeezy brand as well as generate a map detailing how consumers view the brand. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to better understand this special case of co-branding strategy by analyzing Yeezy using the BCM approach. The exploratory nature of this study will be beneficial to co-branding literature in the apparel, accessory, and cosmetic industries where celebrities are often seen as a spokesperson for the brand they are representing or creating new apparel, accessory, and cosmetic lines using their name (Ambroise, et al., 2014; Seno & Lukas, 2007). It will also add to the extensive co-brand literature by gathering direct consumer opinion regarding an influential celebrity like Kanye West in the fashion industry.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions were devised based on the literature regarding brand equity and brand associations: :

1. What associations are attached to the Yeezy brand?
2. Are consumers familiar with the Yeezy brand?
3. Are consumers engaged with their favorite brands?

**Specific Objectives**

This research explored consumer perception of the Yeezy clothing brand. The research sets out to accomplish the following objectives:

1. To uncover consumer generated associations about Yeezy brand
2. To generate a consensus map of the Yeezy brand based on associations created by consumers.
CHAPTER 2.
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The literature review will cover the topics of interest that have guided this research study. First, the review of literature discusses brands and brand equity to explain the importance of brands and brand equity. This section will also cover the benefits of brand equity to both brands and consumers. Second, the review covers the relationship between brand equity and brand associations as well as how brand associations are created in the minds of consumers. Third, this section covers co-branding in terms of different approaches to co-branding as well as the success factors and importance of fit between parent brands. Finally, the review discusses Brand Concept Map (BCM) method in terms of its effectiveness and evolution, and how it has been applied to previous research.

Importance of Brands and Brand Equity

The term "brand" and its usage in language has varied over time. Historically, the term brand comes from the word "brandr" which originates from northern Scandinavian language meaning "to burn" and refers to the practice of owners engraving their products (Khan & Mufti, 2007). A brand is defined as "a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of them which is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition" (Kotler et al., 1991, p.442). Brands are not only seen as the trademark or logo associated with a product; they are made up of the entire experience generated by consumer usage or lack of usage of a product (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). This, in turn, shows marketers the effectiveness of a company's marketing initiatives to
highlight and draw attention to brands (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Marketers utilize brands to
generate value for their organization. Consumers are often willing to pay more for a product
under a well-known brand than a similar product that lacks a prevalent brand identity (Kort,
Caulkins, Hartl, & Feichtinger, 2006). Well-known brands mark up the prices of their products
and use their brand name as the justification; for example, consumers pay premium prices to
consume luxury fashion branded items because of their ability to signal status or wealth to other
people (Bagwell & Bernheim, 1996; Bianchi, 2002; Bikhchandani, Hirshleifer, & Welch, 1992;
Coelho & McClure, 1993; Corneo & Jeanne, 1999; Frijters, 1998). A brand cannot afford to lose
value amongst consumers. In the fashion industry, it is important for fashion brands to maintain
their status amongst competitors in the marketplace to remain relevant in the eyes of consumers,
a loss of status amongst competitors can be detrimental for the value of a brand (Kort et al.,
2006). An example of this can be seen with the apparel retailer Abercrombie & Fitch that
experienced a slump in the 1970s until it was taken over by The Limited in the 1980s (Carbone,
2010). Abercrombie, once viewed as the world's greatest sporting goods store eventually filed for
bankruptcy in the 1970s due to dilution of the brand over time and was required to rebrand after
its acquisition by The Limited to gain favor among consumers once again (Schlossberg, 2016).

In today's society, numerous brands exist and the differentiation between them is seldom
(Carroll, 2009). Differentiation is one way that marketers are able to generate market share
amongst competitors (Pechmann & Ratneshwar, 1991).

One way that brands are able to differentiate themselves from the competition is through
the creation of brand equity (Gobe, 2010). Brand equity is defined "as the incremental value
created when a brand name is attached to a product" (Farquhar, 1989, p. 24). Brand equity within
a brand is built upon the information that consumers link to a brand (Keller, 2003). This
information gathered from consumers is based on numerous sources such as awareness, attributes, benefits, images, thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and experiences (Keller, 2003). The factors listed above are all related to brand knowledge which is a source of brand equity (Keller, 2003). Brand knowledge is vital to brand equity because these information sources become a part of the consumer's memory and affect how the consumer responds to marketing activities (Keller, 2003). Brand equity contains benefits for both the brand itself as well as the consumers.

**Brand Equity Benefits for Brands.** For companies, there have been two motivations to study brand equity (Keller, 1993). The first motivation for interpreting brand equity is to understand from a financial standpoint how a brand is performing in the marketplace to determine what actions a company should take regarding the brand in terms of acquisition, merger, or divestiture (Keller, 1993). Decisions regarding brand equity are often made based on a brand's performance on several dimensions such as stability, leadership, the stability of the market, its ability to go international/globalization, trend, support, and protection (Keller, 1993). The second reason for companies to look at brand equity is for strategically planning the future of the brand based on current performance, this means how can the brand operate more efficiently and continue to make ideal decisions regarding the target market and product positioning (Keller, 1993). Companies are concerned with brand equity because of its ability to help block out the competition while creating growth opportunities for the brand as well as extension into other product categories (Hoeffler & Keller, 2003; Keller & Lehmann, 2006; Severi & Ling, 2013). In essence, brand equity for the company is the additional value a company gathers because a brand is present that would not accumulate if the brand was not present (Keller & Lehmann, 2006).
**Brand Equity Benefits for Consumers.** From a consumer perspective, brand equity influences a consumer's attraction or avoidance of a particular product associated with a particular company (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Initially, a brand is aligned with its product offerings however as time passes and the products are marketed through advertisements, used by consumers, and other activities occur the consumer begins to develop numerous attachments and associations toward the brand and the product that were not originally assigned to their first presentation to consumers (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Brand equity is ultimately decided by the actions of the consumer (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Purchase history and the reasons that influence purchase decisions show which brands have more equity than their counterparts in the marketplace (Villas-Boas, 2004). Consumers who have placed equity within a brand are often more loyal to the brand and willing to pay higher prices for products (Lassar, Mittal, & Sharma, 1995). A key variable used to measure brand equity from consumers is the use of brand associations (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Ambroise et al., 2014; Luethesser et al., 2003; Oeppen & Jamal, 2014).

**Brand Equity and Brand Associations**

Brand associations are defined as "anything that can be linked to the brand in the consumer's mind" (Aaker & Keller, 1990, p. 28). Brand associations are utilized as a dimension to measure brand equity (Aaker, 1996). These associations can be based on thoughts, impressions, experiences, and opinions that consumers hold about a particular brand (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993). Brand associations act as a means of collecting information regarding a product to determine if brand differentiation or brand extension is necessary in order to achieve continued growth by a brand (Van Osselaer & Janiszewski, 2001). The higher the number of brand associations consumers have tied to a product the more it will be remembered by the
consumer and loyalty for the brand is increased (Sasmita & Mohd Suki, 2015) Brand associations can be created by numerous sources in the minds of consumers. Companies often link their brands to people, places, things, or other brands as a resource to build or leverage the knowledge that might not be captured by a company's marketing efforts alone (Keller, 2003).

**People as Brand Associations.** Consumers are unlikely to buy new products when they are unfamiliar with the brand image (Mohd Suki, 2013). A familiar brand image helps consumers become familiar with new products/brands and helps drive sales of current brands (Burt & Davies, 2010; Fall Diallo, Chandon, Cliquet, & Philippe, 2013; Martenson, 2007; Wu, Yeh, & Hsiao, 2011). People are able to elicit feelings in the minds of consumers (Keller, 2003). Based on that logic consumers are known to regularly associate celebrities and/or historical figures to brands (Lau & Phau, 2007). Prior research has shown that celebrities have been more effective than other types of endorsers such as experts, company personnel, or the typical consumer (Friedman & Friedman, 1979). Previous work in the field of celebrity endorsement has determined that consumers model their appearance and behavior after celebrities that they admire (Hoffner & Cantor, 1991). Firms utilize these endorsement figures to capture consumer attention to differentiate themselves from competitors with the hope of influencing purchase behavior (Kamins, Brand, Hoeke, & Moe, 1989).

**Places as Brand Associations.** Places (cities, countries, nations, etc.) have already invested efforts into creating marketing plans for management and planning purposes and have now begun to brand themselves (Florian, 2002). This is based on the idea of differentiating one place from another in terms of uniqueness, in order to stand out amongst consumers (Ashworth, 2009). Consumers construct their understanding of a place through three areas (Ashworth, 2009).
First, the perceptions and images gathered through a consumer's experience with a place (Ashworth, 2009). Second, the representation of a particular place in media such as film, novels, paintings, and news reports (Ashworth, 2009). Finally, the impact of policy efforts such as urban design and planning (Ashworth, 2009). Places often time associate themselves with people such as celebrities in order to gain recognition such as Elvis Presley and his association with the city of Memphis, Tennessee (Ashworth, 2009). Places also utilize building design as a way to differentiate themselves in the hopes of creating an association in the minds of consumers; this is evident in the use of what are known as flagship buildings such as the Coliseum in Rome, Italy or the Empire State Building in New York City, New York (Ashworth, 2009). On top of flagship buildings, places utilize signature districts that serve a specific function for the city as a whole (Ashworth, 2009). An example of this would be the French Quarter in New Orleans, Louisiana which highlights the French influence on the American city. Finally, places utilize cultural events to gain wider recognition amongst people to show they exist and help establish brand associations (Hall, 1989). Events are able to generate experiences that can be linked to the consumer's memory (Keller, 2003).

**Things as Brand Associations.** One way that companies are able to differentiate a brand and garner a perception of superior quality without having to modify the product is through gaining a seal/certificate of endorsement from a third-party industry that is respected by consumers (Kamins & Marks, 1991). These third-party industries are often an independent agency, association, or publication such as the American Medical Association approval, Consumer Reports, or the U.S.D.A. Choice Stamp (Kamins & Marks, 1991). Consumers validate this type of endorsement because it is seen as independent of the brand/manufacturer (Kamins & Marks, 1991). The third party does not give an endorsement to the brand without meeting certain
expectations and standards (Laric & Sarel, 1981; Parkinson, 1975). Numerous examples exist of companies benefitting from third-party endorsement such as Crest toothpaste gaining market share after receiving approval from the American Dental Association (Kamins & Marks, 1991). Companies have also benefitted from being endorsed by the Good Housekeeping seal of approval (Laric & Sarel, 1981). Charitable causes are also links to a brand (Keller, 2003). Causes have the ability to build brand awareness in terms of recall and brand recognition, enhance the overall image of the brand, evoke feelings towards a brand, establish brand attitudes, and create experiences for consumers (Keller, 2003).

### Other Brands as Brand Associations

Other brands that are linked to a brand via product extensions or alliances can help establish attributes and benefits towards a brand (Keller, 2003). Beliefs and associations are often transferred and shared between brands (Rao & Ruekert, 1994). These associations can have positive or negative results on the linkage of the two brands based on the strength of the association when entering a new product category or alliance venture (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Boush & Loken, 1991). The associations that are created in the minds of consumers from brand alliances or co-branding was the focal point of this research. The next section covers co-branding in detail.

### Co-Branding

Co-branding is defined as "a form of cooperation between two or more brands with significant customer recognition, in which all the participants' brand names are retained" (Blackett & Russell, 1999, p. 8). The goal of co-branding strategy is that the co-branded product is positioned so that it is differentiated and difficult to imitate by competitors in the marketplace (Keller, 1998). For co-branding to be effectively implemented between two independent brands each must create their own image and awareness within the minds of consumers (Keller, 1998).
The benefits seen by both independent brands within the partnership is a continuous flow of meaning that promotes exclusivity (Ambroise et al., 2014). There are several approaches to entering a co-branding relationship (Blackett & Russell, 1999).

**Different Approaches to Co-branding.** Blackett and Russell (1999) explain there are varying degrees of partnership that can exist in a co-branding relationship. The lowest level, known as reach/awareness co-branding, involves a primary brand looking to maximize brand awareness through using a partner brand's resources such as a customer database (Blackett & Russell, 1999). The second level, value endorsement co-branding, focuses on aligning brand values in a consumer's mind (Blackett & Russell, 1999). Ingredient co-branding which is the third level of co-branding involves market leading brands acting as a component of a partner brand (Blackett & Russell, 1999). The highest level of co-branding known as complementary competencies involves the highest level of value creation as partners share skills and competencies to produce a co-branded product (Blackett & Russell, 1999). Previous research in the body of the co-branding literature has focused heavily on utilitarian products such as grocery items, and electronics (Oeppen & Jamal, 2014). Often in different industries, the co-branding relationship is ingredient co-branding in which the primary brand owner does a majority of marketing and promotion while the secondary brand acts as a supplier or licensor (Leuthesser et al., 2003). An example of this partnership would be the Intel microprocessor chip and Dell (Leuthesser et al., 2003). The application of co-branding has been applied toward hedonic products such as fashion items with the pairing of luxury brands and mass market retailers (Oeppen & Jamal, 2014). The most memorable example of this co-branding alliance was Chanel director Karl Lagerfeld pairing with H&M (Okonkwo, 2007). Co-branding as a strategy can be very successful when done properly between parent brands.
**Success Factors for Co-Branding.** When implemented correctly co-branding is able to create synergy between the two brands in the relationship and capitalizes on their individual strengths (Leuthesser et al., 2003). Pre-existing attitudes have an influence on co-branding reception by consumers (Simonin & Ruth, 1998). If positive/negative attitudes exist in the minds of consumers about the co-brand this can in turn spill over into attitudes regarding the parent brands of this relationship (Simonin & Ruth, 1998). Co-brands are successful when both entities bring value to the table (Leuthesser et al., 2003). According to prior research, the perceived fit or compatibility between the two parent brands has been linked to positively influence how consumers react to the co-branding venture (Simonin & Ruth, 1998). It is also vital that the parent brands are congruent in the image as well as the product category (Motion, Leitch, & Brodie, 2003). It is for this reason that prior research has highlighted the importance of partner selection before entering into a co-branding relationship (Rao, Qu, & Ruekert, 1999; Rao & Ruekert, 1994; Simonin & Ruth, 1998). One of the major focus areas of co-branding research is understanding the perceptions and associations tied to the co-brand by consumers (Halonen-Knight & Hurmerinta, 2010; Leuthesser, Kohli, & Suri, 2003; Oeppen & Jamal, 2014; Rao et al., 1999; Rao & Ruekert, 1994; Simonin & Ruth, 1998; Washburn, Till, & Priluck, 2000). This research utilized a Brand Concept Map (BCM) method to understand what associations are linked to the co-brand Yeezy.

**Brand Concept Map (BCM)**

The BCM method is based on a group of measurement techniques known as concept maps and has been used previously in the scientific field of study to gain information from people about scientific concepts to see how they are related (Novak & Gowin, 1984). Compared to other mapping techniques BCM provides "a more accessible and standardized approach to
creating brand maps” (John, Loken, Kim, & Monga, 2006, p. 550). This form of data collection is essential to this research because it is important to understand the strong, favorable connections that consumers formulate in their memory and leads retailers to understand their brand equity and importance in the minds of consumers (Keller, 1993). The BCM method is completed with the following three steps elicitation, mapping, and aggregation (John et al., 2006). Elicitation involves gathering salient associations related to the brand being studied based on certain criteria. The mapping stage involves participants creating maps based on the associations collected in elicitation. The aggregation stage contains creating a consensus map based on the maps gathered from individual respondents. The following section will cover background information regarding brand association networks and the development of BCM method.

**Brand Associations Networks.** The formation of brand association networks comes from the study of human associative memory (HAM) in cognitive psychology (Anderson & Bower, 2014; French & Smith, 2013). Human associative memory (HAM) theory has often been utilized in research to conceptualize how brand associations are created in the minds of consumers (Anderson & Bower, 2014; Srull & Wyer, 1989). HAM theory explains that brand knowledge is stored in a consumer's memory as individualized pieces of brand information that are linked together in a complex network of associations based on the brand (Anderson, 1983). Brand information is recalled from consumer memory based on a process known as activation where the activation of one association stimulates another linked association, which spreads to another association within the network causing a chain reaction of activation within the consumer's mind (Anderson, 1983).
While the associations themselves are important, the previous literature shows that the networks in which these associations are linked to the brand are just as critical to understanding the mind of the consumer (French & Smith, 2013; Keller, 1993; Okada & Reibstein, 1998; Teichert & Schöntag, 2010). The network of associations is vital to creating consumer-based brand equity (Keller, 1993). The concept of a brand's image is formulated by how consumer's minds can perceive the brand based on the association network in the consumer's memory (Okada & Reibstein, 1998). The links between associations are an indicator for assessing the strength of the association to the brand (French & Smith, 2013; Keller, 1993; Okada & Reibstein, 1998; Teichert & Schöntag, 2010). According to Keller (1993), "the presence of strongly held, favorably evaluated associations that are unique to the brand and imply superiority over other brands is critical to a brand's success" (p. 6). It is not enough simply for a brand association to exist in the consumer's mind but the association itself must be strong for the brand to maintain superiority amongst competitors. Researchers must understand the mental mapping of brand knowledge in the minds of consumers in order to understand the efficiency of their marketing efforts of a brand (Keller, 2003). One tool utilized to do this is concept mapping techniques.

**Concept Mapping.** Prior research suggests that qualitative techniques can be utilized to identify possible associations (Keller, 1998). Free association is one technique that can be utilized to measure brand association, it is an unstructured method that asks consumers to describe what meaning they draw from a brand and can be conducted on an individual or group basis (Keller, 1993). While this technique is considered helpful it may not produce outstanding results regarding strength of the associations to a brand (Keller, 1993). To draw out strong connections to a brand two categories of mapping techniques are utilized known as consumer mapping and analytical mapping. Consumer mapping techniques gather brand associations
directly from consumers while analytical mapping uses analytical methods to create a brand map from consumer input (John et al., 2006). The Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET) is a popular consumer mapping technique that uses qualitative methods along with in-depth interviews to extract brand association links from consumers (Zaltman & Coulter, 1995). While this technique along with analytical mapping is well known and respected for their insight they are seen as very labor intensive and require special training for the researcher (John et al., 2006). Due to these drawbacks, another method, Brand Concept Mapping (BCM) was utilized to gather information from consumers on associations link to the Yeezy brand. While the original BCM method is well known it has received its criticism regarding the aggregation stage (Böger, Kottemann, Meißner, & Decker, 2017).

**Criticisms of the Aggregation Stage.** John et al.'s (2006) original aggregation stage is completed by the researcher following five steps to form the consensus map. First, associations that are mentioned by 50% of the respondents on their individual maps serve as the core associations for the brand. If an association has a borderline frequency of mention amongst respondents (45%–49%) but has a relatively high interconnectivity, the association will be considered a core association; interconnectivity is determined by the number of connections that association has to other associations (John et al., 2006). In the second step, core associations with a ratio of at least 50% first order mentions and have more superordinate than subordinate connections are linked directly to the brand on the consensus map (John et al., 2006). First order mentions are the quantifiable amount of which core associations are directly linked to the brand on the individual maps. In the third and fourth steps of the aggregation process, the links between core associations as well as the links between core and non-core associations are added to the consensus map (John et al., 2006). In the fifth step, the strength of every link is determined using
the average link strength gathered in the individual maps and is rounded to the nearest integer (John et al., 2006).

Böger et al. (2017) have pointed out several criticisms to the aggregation stage steps created by John et al. (2006) in the original presentation of the BCM method. The first criticism comes from the selection of first-order associations which are referred to as core associations and are determined by having a high ratio of first-order mentions and more super than subordinate connections. John et al. (2006) do not provide valid reasoning for this rule, and Böger et al. (2017) speculate a reason for this way of thinking is to ensure that only the associations that frequently activate other associations are included. The second criticism uncovered by Böger et al. (2017) is with the selection of links between core associations; core associations face the possibility of not being connected to the brand directly by not meeting the criteria of being connected enough on individual maps completed by respondents. The third criticism pointed out by Böger et al. (2017) focuses on the determination of the inflection point, in John et al. (2006) this is determined by looking for drastic increases in a plot displaying the frequencies of the links between associations. Böger et al. (2017) find this rule to be very vague overall and hard for researchers and marketers to interpret or apply. The fourth criticism to the aggregation stage of BCM is concerning the thresholds used to select core associations and first-order associations on the consensus map. John et al. (2006) suggest using 50% frequency of mention for core associations as well as 50% ratio of first-order mentions for first-order associations. Böger et al. (2017) argue that these thresholds adequacy are based on the consumer's knowledge of the brand considered. For this study, the researcher applied the guidelines to aggregate the consensus map used by Böger et al. (2017).
**Previous Application of BCM.** The BCM method has been implemented in various ways to understand brand associations. BCM has been utilized to study the similarities and differences between associations of a product sold in different cultures (Brandt & Mortanges, 2006). The method has also been applied to understand what perceptions shape a student to select a university town (Brandt & de Mortanges, 2011). It has also been utilized in place branding to understand if improvements in a city are helping create brand equity with residents (Zenker, 2014). It has seen extensions and revisions by researchers who wanted to further expand the method (Böger et al., 2017; Schnittka, Sattler, & Zenker, 2012).

**Conclusion**

Brands that possess higher brand equity can charge premium prices for their products and their target consumer base is loyal. Brand equity is critical to the success of any brand seeking to gain and maintain market share in any industry. One way that brand equity is measured is to look at the brand associations that consumers gather about the brand. These associations are key to understanding what a brand is currently doing successfully as well provide companies with an idea of where they can improve performance wise. One strategy that brands are using to gain more brand equity is through co-branding with other brands to combine resources in the hopes it will lead to purchases from consumers. To understand the success of co-branding strategies, parent brands must understand the associations that consumers have regarding the newly co-branded product. A tool that helps draw out the network of associations that are present in the minds of consumers is concept mapping. For this study, the researcher applied the BCM method to gather associations about the brand Yeezy.
CHAPTER 3.
METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to understand the associations regarding the clothing line Yeezy, and how it is viewed in the minds of consumers. A review of the literature covering the topics of brands, brand equity, brand associations, co-branding, and the Brand Concept Map (BCM) was utilized to interpret the findings. To better understand why Yeezy brand was selected as the focal point of this study the following sections will cover Kanye West's brand development in the music and fashion industry. The researcher then covers the methods and procedures utilized to complete this research.

Kanye West- Origins and Brand Development

Kanye Omari West was born on June 8, 1977, in Atlanta, Georgia but relocated to Chicago with his mother following the divorce of his parents at age three (Chambers, 2016). West's initial taste of success in the music industry stems from producing several records for rapper Jay-Z's The Blueprint album in 2002 (Chambers, 2016). Working with Jay-Z would lead West to produce hit singles for numerous prominent artists in the hip-hop industry at the time (Simons, 2007). While this was a great accomplishment for Kanye at the time he struggled constantly to be taken seriously as a rap artist. After falling victim to a horrible car accident Kanye was required to have facial reconstruction surgery and at that time recorded the song Through The Wire while his jaw was wired shut, this would become Kanye's first lead single off his debut album College Dropout released in 2004 (Chambers, 2016). Since his debut, Kanye West has released six studio albums all praised and well received for their direction and content.
West has often been coined a genius for his creative musical prowess and known for his ability to combine sounds from the past with music from the present (Vuk, 2016). His creative ability alongside his bigger than life personality are the components that create Kanye West as a brand (Wade, 2016). His outspoken behavior and ability to go against the norm are the building blocks of his brand (Wade, 2016). Musically, Kanye West entered hip-hop when gangster rap, known for its projection of violence and crime, as a subgenre was at its all-time high and produced a sound that spoke of common everyday life (Simons, 2007). West's ability to bring about a different sound to the hip-hop community would lead to his successful defeat of prominent gangster rap artist 50 Cent in 2007 when both artists released albums on the same day in 2007 (Penney, 2012).

West has used his celebrity status to speak his mind on several occasions, in 2005 he made remarks about President George Bush and his lack of concern for African Americans during a Hurricane Katrina fundraiser (Wade, 2016). In 2009 his commentary to Taylor Swift at the MTV Video Music Awards would solidify his brand image as a celebrity known for sharing his opinion even when unwarranted (Wade, 2016). Kanye West would then go on to interrupt Beck for winning Album of the Year at the Grammy's in 2014 (Kanye's Controversial Moments, 2016). Not only does the rapper create controversy through his opinion but his actions as well. During his Yeezus tour, Kanye brought out a Jesus look-alike at his Seattle show in 2013 (Kanye's Controversial Moments, 2016). The summation of his multiple antics coupled with his creativity in music production has gained him several labels such as egomaniac, self-centered, possessing a god complex while also being known as misunderstood, a genius and acting as a true individual (Kitson, 2018).
Kanye West’s Brand Development in the Fashion Industry. West in his efforts to build his brand has not only diversified himself within the music industry but within the realm of fashion as well. Since his rise to stardom Kanye's wardrobe has often mirrored his musical style and used outside influences as an inspiration; in the early stages of his rap career he was often looked down by his peers on for his choices of color, and form-fitting clothes that were not the norm for rap artists of the early twenty-first century (Penney, 2012). Outside of his own personal style, Kanye has taken part in numerous fashion ventures some successful, like his early collaboration with Louis Vuitton (Business of Fashion, 2017), and others not as well received such as his womenswear line DW Kanye West (Schwartz, 2016). West's latest venture, the launch of his brand Yeezy, born out of a collaboration effort with Adidas has seen great success by staying true to Kanye's brand image of unapologetic transparency and performing in a way that is unexpected within the traditional fashion system (Schwartz, 2016). The rapper turned co-brand designer presents his latest fashions in the most unconventional ways such as presenting his Yeezy Season 4 collection at Madison Square Garden in New York as well as having numerous celebrities dress like his wife, Kim Kardashian, in the latest Yeezy attire (Friedman, 2018).

Why Yeezy Brand and Kanye West?

Kanye West, who is considered a major player in the hip-hop industry today was chosen as the focal point of this research to understand how associations come to the minds of consumers when they think of his brand Yeezy. Based on the literature regarding co-branding it is often vital that partners are carefully selected when entering into this type of relationship; it is also important that the two partners come from a similar context or industry (Motion et al., 2003; Simonin & Ruth, 1998). This research furthers the co-branding literature by studying an example
where two-parent brands have come together that are not from a similar context or industry. Kanye has been able to influence consumers based on his identity, which is also known as his brand. Kanye West can generate value in a way that is unconventional for Adidas and the two exist in what appears to be a complementary competencies relationship in which value is maximized for Yeezy because both entities have brought different skills to the table to create this brand (Blackett & Russell, 1999). This research set out to examine the associations' consumers have developed for the Yeezy brand and how they are connected. Based on the review of literature discussed above, the researcher sought to gather associations linked to Yeezy brand to determine what major themes were present in the minds of consumers when they saw this brand. This research sought to understand how Yeezy brand differentiates itself from other competitors in the clothing, accessories, and cosmetic product categories and create brand equity in the minds of consumers.

**Research Design**

The researcher utilized Brand Concept Maps (BCM) as the research tool to gather data and construct associations from participants in the study. Data collection began after gaining IRB approval from the Human Research Subjects Committee at Louisiana State University, a copy of the form is attached in Appendix A. Figure 1 displays the steps of BCM.
Figure 1. Steps in the BCM process. This figure visually highlights the steps necessary to complete the BCM process.

During the elicitation stage, the researcher identified salient associations for the brand being studied, in this case, Yeezy. The researcher generated a brief survey of questions on Qualtrics™ to gain consumer opinions about Yeezy. The researcher utilized the process for identifying salient associations and ensured that the four criteria guided by the measures for gathering associations in attitude research were followed (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). First, data collected was gathered from the same population as in the mapping stage. Second, data used to identify salient associations were based on consumer responses to open-ended questions. Third, the most frequently mentioned associations were selected to form the final set, based on prior usage of BCM methodology the researcher will use associations that at least 50% of the respondents' stated (John et al., 2006). Finally, it was important when phrasing associations that the researcher utilized exact phrasing gathered from the consumer population instead of phrasing that the researcher would imply.

In the mapping stage, the researcher showed the respondents an example of a completed BCM map and provided an explanation to respondents of how a brand concept map is constructed. The researcher asked respondents to think about what they associate with the brand
using the salient associations gathered in the elicitation stage. These associations were provided
in the form of a word bank along with an initial circle with the word Yeezy in the middle of it to
serve as a starting point to construct the concept map. Respondents completed their map using
the paper provided and drew lines (single, double, or triple) to show the strength of the
relationship between the associations and the brand. The researcher asked the participants
indicate their age on the concept map as well as rate their familiarity with the brand in the middle
of the initial circle for Yeezy using 1-5 scale (1-Not familiar at all, 5-Extremely familiar).

Finally, in the aggregation stage, the researcher combined individual brand maps to form
a consensus map. The researcher applied the rules suggested by Böger et al. (2017) to complete
the consensus map. These rules are displayed in Table 1.
First, the researcher calculated the average of first-order links in the individual concept maps. The first order links were words that are directly attached to Yeezy brand on the individual concept maps completed by respondents. The researcher added the number of links directly connected to Yeezy on each map and divided it by the total number of maps completed to

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**Table 1. Aggregation Rules for BCM**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Rules</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Calculate the average of first order links</td>
<td>Determines how many first order links belong on the consensus map and what associations are directly the brand</td>
<td>• Add the number of links directly connected to the brand on each individual map then divide by the total number of maps collected. Use as a threshold to add associations.  &lt;br&gt; • Place the most frequent mentioned associations connected to the brand on the consensus map.  &lt;br&gt; • If a tie exists based on mentions the threshold can be exceeded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Calculate the average of total links on the map</td>
<td>Determines how many links should be connected to map after first order connections are established and what associations are indirectly connected to the brand</td>
<td>• Add the total number of links on each individual map then divide by the total number of maps collected.  &lt;br&gt; • Subtract this number by the number of first order associations already placed on the map. Use as a threshold to add associations.  &lt;br&gt; • Place the most frequent mentioned associations based on their connections to first order associations on the consensus map.  &lt;br&gt; • If a tie exists based on mentions the threshold can be exceeded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Calculate the average link strength</td>
<td>Determines the strength of the links between associations and the brand</td>
<td>• Add the number of lines (single, double, or triple) for each association on the individual concept map then divide by the total number of maps collected.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. All values calculated using this method are rounded to the nearest integer.
determine the average. This number was rounded to the nearest integer and served as the threshold. The most frequent first-order links and associations were placed on the consensus map until the threshold was reached but in the event of a tie the threshold was exceeded. Second, the researcher will calculate the average total number of links in the individual concept maps and round them to the nearest integer. The average total number of links was needed to determine the number of links that could be added to the map after the first order links were placed on the map. These links served as second-order associations or associations that are connected to one of the first order associations already placed on the consensus map. The average total number of links was determined by adding the number of links on each individual map, including the first order links, and dividing it by the total number of maps collected. The number of links that are added to consensus map was determined by subtracting the average of first-order links that are already located on the consensus map from the average of total links and the result was used as a threshold. The most frequent links between associations and their respective associations were added until the threshold was reached if a tie occurred then the threshold was exceeded. Finally, the researcher calculated the average link strength used in the individual maps to determine the strength of the links in the consensus map. This was completed by adding the number of lines (single, double, or triple) used to represent the link between each of the associations chosen for the consensus map had on the individual maps gathered in the mapping stage and dividing it by the total number of maps collected. The researcher applied this process first for the average link strength of first-order links to Yeezy directly then to the second order associations connected to first order associations on the consensus map.
Sample Selection

Based on the exploratory nature of this research the researcher utilized a convenience sample made up of students from a Southeastern public university. The researcher was interested in this sample group because they are members of Generation Y. Generation Y, also known as the Millennial Generation, is considered to include people who were born between 1977 and 2002 (Parker et al., 2014). This generational group was selected as the sample based on their high involvement with purchasing clothing and fashion related products to express themselves along with having high purchasing power (Parker et al., 2014; Parment, 2013). Also referring to literature regarding celebrities who are opinion leaders they serve as a reference point for comparison amongst consumers and this generation is ideal because Kanye West is considered Generation Y (Rogers, 1995; Shoham & Ruvio, 2008).

The sample size for the elicitation and mapping stages of this research included a range of at least 150-200 respondents to effectively run quantitative analysis on the data collected. The study aimed to target members of Generation Y, respondents who took part in this survey ranged in ages of roughly 18-45. Respondents from the elicitation stage were recruited via social networking outlets such as Facebook™, Instagram™, and GroupMe™ as well as students within an undergraduate apparel design, and merchandising program at a public Southeastern-based university. Respondents who took part in the mapping stage were also recruited from the same southeastern university and were provided extra credit by professors for participating in the study since it is vital to BCM method that the participants in the mapping stage reflect the same population as those in elicitation stage.
Instrument Design

The survey instrument used to gather salient associations about the Yeezy brand asked several types of questions. After gaining consent from the participant the survey measured participants familiarity with the brand measured on a 5-point scale (1-Extremely familiar, 5-Not familiar at all). Brand familiarity measures a consumer’s direct or indirect experience with a product (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987, p.411). Familiarity is also related to other important constructs essential to successful brands such as expertise, prior knowledge, and strength of belief (Ha & Perks, 2005). Two questions regarding the prior purchase and intent to purchase in the future followed. Next, respondents were asked to share their thoughts on the Yeezy brand and were provided spaces to list their top 25 thoughts on the brand. In accordance with BCM research, the answers utilized by 50% of the sample served as the associations for the mapping stage (John et al., 2006). Following that respondents answered eight items measuring brand engagement on a 7-point Likert scale (1-Strongly agree, 7-Strongly disagree) created by Sprott et al. (2009). Consumers who are engaged with their favorite brand are predicted to have positive favorable opinions/feelings, and behaviors such as customer loyalty towards the brand (Hollebeek, 2011). The survey concluded by asking for general demographic information including age, ethnicity, and gender. Respondents who were students from a southeastern university were taken to a separate link to provide information to their instructor to receive extra credit for taking part in the survey. A copy of the questionnaire is available in Appendix B.
CHAPTER 4.
RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to uncover the associations' consumers ascribe to the Yeezy brand that is produced by rapper Kanye West as a co-branding effort with the athletic wear corporation Adidas using the Brand Concept Mapping (BCM) method. This chapter reports the results uncovered from the study based on the steps in the BCM method: elicitation, mapping, and aggregation.

Elicitation Stage

In the elicitation stage, the researcher collected data from respondents using an online survey published on Qualtrics™ to gather associations about the Yeezy brand. All questions presented in the survey were not required to be completed by the respondents which led to a difference in numbers and statistics presented in this section. The survey was completed by 158 participants in total. 53.28% (n=137) of the sample was between the ages 25-34, while the remaining 46.72% (n=137) of respondents were ages 18-24. 67.88% (n=137) of the sample identified as female while 31.39% (n=137) of the sample identified as male and less than 1% (n=137) of the sample preferred not to answer.

In terms of brand familiarity, 31.01% (n=158) of the sample was extremely familiar with the Yeezy brand, 2.53% (n=158) of the sample were not familiar with the brand at all, and the remaining 66.46% (n=158) of the sample had varying degrees of familiarity. The average familiarity across the sample was 2.30. 91.08% (n=157) of the sample have never purchased Yeezy brand before and 63.92% (n=158) of the sample had no intentions of making future purchases of the Yeezy brand. The averages for both previous purchase and future purchase were
1.94 and 1.64 respectively. The researcher ran Pearson correlation analysis on the variables brand familiarity (n=158) and future purchase intention (n=158). Lane (2007) describes Pearson correlation as the measure of the strength of the linear relationship between two variables. This means to determine if a relationship exists between the variables being tested (Lane, 2007). The results showed a significant correlation of .405 (p < .001) meaning that a correlation between the variables exists. According to Cohen (1988), a correlation between .3 to .5 is considered a moderate in terms of strength.

Several statements were asked to the participants regarding brand engagement. The results indicate that 42 participants, about 30.66% (n=137), agreed to have a special bond to the brands that they liked. 27.01% (n=137) agreed that they considered their favorite brands to be a part of them and had a personal connection between brands and themselves. The sample displayed a neutral opinion towards being defined partially by the important brands in their lives based on a mean score of 4.28. 26.38% (n=137) of participants felt a link existed between their preferred brands and how they viewed themselves. The full list of questions regarding brand engagement along with the descriptive statistics is listed in Table 2.
Table 2. Brand Engagement Amongst Consumers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have a special bond with the brands that I like</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I consider my favorite brands to be a part of myself</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>1.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often feel a personal connection between my brands and me</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>1.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part of me is defined by important brands in my life</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>1.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel as if I have a close personal connection with the brands I most prefer</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>1.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can identify with important brands in my life</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>1.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are links between the brands that I prefer and how I view myself</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My favorite brands are an important indication of who I am</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>1.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. n=137
Questions were asked on a 7-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Agree, 7=Strongly Disagree)

The means and standard deviation produced from the participants' responses show the sample's overall attitude towards engagement with their favorite brands. The researcher determined overall brand engagement by finding the average mean score of brand engagement \((\bar{x}/n)\) which is 3.28 and average standard deviation \((s/n)\) which is 1.73. The researcher calculated this by adding the scores listed in Table 2 and dividing by the number of statements \((n=8)\). The results show that overall attitude towards brand engagement is positive amongst participants based on the average score \((x=3.28)\) and that the respondents' opinion on brand engagement range from positive to negative based on the standard deviation \((s=1.73)\). The researcher calculated the coefficient of variation (CV), which is the standard deviation divided by the mean, to determine if this range is significantly high or low amongst the respondents and
determined it was .53. This means that 53% of standard deviation is the mean, which means there is not a large amount of variation among responses regarding brand engagement. Pearson correlation was also used to determine the strength of the relationship between brand familiarity (n=158) and brand engagement (n=137). The results uncovered a correlation of .349 (I have a special bond with the brands that I like), .402 (I consider my favorite brands to be a part of myself), .354 (I often feel a personal connection between my brands and me), .365 (Part of me is defined by important brands in my life), .350 (I feel as if I have a close personal connection with the brands I most prefer), .378 (I can identify with important brands in my life), .309 (There are links between the brands that I prefer and how I view myself), and .349 (My favorite brands are an important indication of who I am) (p<.001). Once again according to Cohen (1988) this is described as a moderate correlation between the two variables. The statistics were run in SPSS and are based on the 137 participants who completed both questions regarding brand familiarity and brand engagement.

The researcher set out to gather associations about the Yeezy brand to understand what things came to mind when they thought of the brand. The survey produced over 1,700 words and phrases that participants utilized to describe the brand. The results did not provide any associations that were utilized by 50% or more of the sample, but to further the research the words generated were analyzed by the 3 experts to determine which words would be utilized in the mapping stage of the study. It was decided that words that were at least used with a frequency of 5, as well as those that were not repetitive in nature, would be included in the word bank. For instance, the top word utilized by survey participants was "expensive" and other phrasing related to this topic such as pricey or overpriced were not included in the word bank.
Also, articles and other words that did not provide proper context were excluded from the word bank. This action provided the researcher with 62 words to utilize in the mapping stage.

**Mapping Stage**

The researcher collected a total of 57 individual concept maps from participants. The sample was made up of students who attend a public Southeastern university and currently enrolled in the Textile Science, Apparel Design, and Merchandising field of study. The average age of the participants was 22 years old. Participants in the mapping stage also displayed an average familiarity with the brand of 3.45 The researcher explained that it was not required for respondents to utilize all the words included in the word bank and to add words that they felt belonged on the map that was not present in the word bank.

**Aggregation Stage**

Based on the aggregation rules proposed by Böger et al. (2017) the researcher first determined the number of first-order associations to include on the consensus map by using the average of first-order links contained on the individual concept maps. The researcher calculated this number by adding the number of first order links directly connected to Yeezy on the individual concept maps and then dividing by the total number of maps collected. The resulting number from this process was seven (M=6.56, S.D.=3.28) order links that are directly tied to the brand but according to Böger et al. (2017), the threshold attained from the maps can be exceeded when a tie exists which lead to eleven words being included on the map. The researcher utilized the following eleven words as first-order associations: Kanye, expensive, Adidas, overrated, trendy, athleisure, sneakers, Kardashian, fashion, popular, and shoes. The researcher then determined the total links that can be included on the consensus map by determining the average
number of links from the individual concept maps. The researcher added the total links present on each individual map and divided it by the total number of maps collected this resulted in sixteen links (M= 15.61. S.D.=5.94). The researcher subtracted the average total number of links by the number of first order links already placed on the map according to Böger et al. (2017). This allowed the researcher to place five links on the consensus map (16-11=5). The researcher added the following five links to the consensus map: Kardashian, Kim, rap, celebrity, and famous based on being the most frequently mentioned on the individual concept maps.

The researcher removed lowest mentioned first order associations (Kardashian, fashion, popular, and shoes) and the secondary links based on the average linkage between them and Yeezy not being greater than .5. This was based on Böger et al. (2017) rules on aggregating associations for the consensus map that all associations that are not directly connected to the brand or other associations must be removed from the map entirely (p. 93). The purpose of this was to remove associations from the concept map that are isolated, associations that are not connected to other associations or the brand itself, because it makes the consensus map more difficult to interpret and does not provide brand managers with a clear understanding of the brand association network (Böger et al., 2017, p.92). The amount of information the participants provided in the individual concept maps possibly caused this result. Some participants provided detail information regarding Yeezy brand and the associations they connect to the brand as in Figures 2. Other participants did not use the same effort to complete the concept maps as shown in Figure 3.
Figure 2. Individual concept maps completed by participants. This figure represents a participant who used 10 or more second order associations.
Figure 3. Individual concept maps completed by participants. This figure represents participants who utilized less than 10 second order associations.
The lack of second-order connections in sample presented a challenge to the researcher in terms of adding more associations to the consensus map. The completed consensus map is shown in Figure 4 and the corresponding mentions and link strength of associations are shown in Table 3 and Table 4.

![Consensus map of the Yeezy brand](image)

Figure 4. Consensus map of the Yeezy brand. This figure is a visual representation of the aggregation step of the BCM method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3. First Order Associations With Yeezy Brand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>First Order Mentions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kanye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adidas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trendy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athleisure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sneakers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kardashian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fashion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. n=57
All averages were rounded to the nearest integer to determine number of lines necessary to complete consensus map
Table 4. Second Order Associations Connected Directly to Kanye West

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Second Order Mentions</th>
<th>Average Link Strength</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kardashian</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rap</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrity</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Famous</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. n=57
All averages were rounded to the nearest integer to determine number of lines necessary to complete consensus map
CHAPTER 5.
DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to uncover the associations that consumers attach to the Yeezy brand. The researcher was able to map out the associations that consumers held towards the Yeezy brand utilizing BCM. Two subsequent research objectives and three research questions were developed to further this research. A discussion of the research results as they relate to the research objectives and questions will are presented in this chapter.

The elicitation stage was completed by 158 participants in an online survey on Qualtrics™ to uncover salient associations that were used to generate the consensus map. The survey generated sixty-two associations for participants to choose from in completing their individual maps in the mapping stage. Averages and descriptive statistics generated during the elicitation stage were generated by Qualtrics™. All averages and descriptive statistics generated during the aggregation stage we calculated using SPSS™ software. In this chapter information regarding the associations generated by the consensus map is discussed along with the consumer familiarity with the brand and overall brand engagement.

Research Question #1: What Associations Are Attached To The Yeezy Brand?

The strongest association to the Yeezy brand based on the consensus map belongs to Kanye West. It was mentioned the most as a first-order association compared to the others by fifty-one of the participants who took part in the mapping stage. A major component of successful co-branding is that the brands entering into the partnership have significant customer recognition (Blackett & Russell, 1999). Kanye has created customer recognition amongst consumers based on his work in both the music and fashion industry. He is often viewed in parallels as a genius as well as possessing a god complex (Kitson, 2018). Brands in today's
society generate value by their ability to disrupt the marketplace by finding innovative and new ways to appeal to customers (Purewal, 2017). Kanye since his arrival into the music industry has always been considered innovative and differentiates himself from other artists in the industry by his ability to go against the norms of the industry since the early two-thousands until present (Bains, 2017). Not only did Kanye West differentiate himself by providing a musical style different to other artists in the industry but between each album he has released Kanye has reinvented his sound as well (Bains, 2017). His first album, *College Dropout* released in 2004, discussed topics such as religion, prejudice, and materialism over soulful based production which was not the focus of other artists during that time (Bains, 2017). Fast forward several years to 2008, Kanye West released his fourth album *808s and Heartbreak* which incorporated such a different sound from his first three albums that listeners did not want to label the album as rap music, furthermore Kanye West expressed emotional sentiments on that album which was unheard of by rap artists during its release (Bains, 2017).

Not only has Kanye been innovative in his musical career but also in his development of the Yeezy brand since its launch. Kanye has introduced his collections for Yeezy in very untraditional methods. He live-streamed his Season 3 show in cinemas and tickets were sold out within 10 minutes the rapper utilized Madison Square Garden to display the line while also releasing his latest album *The Life of Pablo*, a concept that is very removed from traditional fashion runway shows (O’Neill, 2017). Kanye then had carts escort viewers of his Season 4 collection out to Roosevelt Island during New York Fashion Week in 2016 (Friedman, 2018). He continues to reinforce his brand by utilizing these unconventional tactics and while people may not agree with his methods it does continue to produce positive results for the rapper. Yeezy Season 1 sneakers sold out worldwide within 12 minutes and the resale value of these items
surpass the records set by his collaboration with Nike (O'Neill, 2017). A brands ability to innovate leads to continued relevance amongst consumers (Purewal, 2017). This is a trait that Kanye West has mastered, and this is shown by the results showing his strong connection to Yeezy.

Following Kanye West is the association that the Yeezy brand is expensive in the minds of consumers. This result closely resembles the results uncovered from the elicitation stage that placed expensive as the most utilized word that comes to mind when consumers think of the brand (N=104). This ideal of expensive harkens back to effective co-branding strategy in the literature review that co-brands should be hard to imitate as well as well as viewed as exclusive (Ambroise et al., 2014; Keller, 1998). Price points for Yeezy merchandise range from $200-$13,000 online (YEEZY SUPPLY, 2018). The brand could be viewed as expensive in the minds of consumers based on demographics. The average age of participants in the mapping stage was 22.05 years old and the entire sample from the elicitation stage was 34 years old or younger. A lack of access to extra funds to purchase the brand may be the cause of this result. The partnership between West and Adidas wants Yeezy to resemble luxury and high-end fashion goods (Bruce & Kratz, 2007). Because of the collaboration between the two entities they deem it necessary to charge a higher price point compared to other athleisure wear brands available in the marketplace (Bruce & Kratz, 2007). Overrated was another first order association that participants utilized to describe the brand. Much like the association expensive, this result could stem from the idea that Yeezy should not be as costly as it is when looking at other athleisure wear brands in the marketplace.

Athleisure, trendy, and sneakers all tied for first-order mentions across individual maps. While they tied in mentions, sneakers had the strongest connection strength to the Yeezy brand
out of the three associations (.82) which is then followed by trendy (.68) and athleisure (.61) respectively. Sneaker sales in the U.S. rose 2% to $19.6 billion last year, and sports leisure styled shoes have become the largest category in the sneaker space surpassing performance styled shoes (Cheng, 2018). Recent news reports how the growth of this trend has been caused thanks to Adidas, who saw sneaker sells raise 50% in 2017 (Cheng, 2018). As stated in the brand equity literature above, brands can generate value through brand equity (Gobe, 2009). One way that marketers can measure and achieve brand equity is loyalty or support of a brand (Aaker, 1996). Sneakers have been popular amongst consumers since their invention during the industrial revolution; the first major upturn of popularity with this type of shoe was seen with the introduction of the Converse in the 1930s, the first athletic shoe endorsed by a celebrity basketball player (Cunningham, 2008). Consumers of sneakers are often attached to people associated with them, in the traditional usage of sneakers for basketball, this would be the players who wore them to perform in the sport (O'Connor, 2014). Several examples of this phenomenon exist such as Nike with the creation of the Air Jordan for Michael Jordan, the Puma Clyde which featured Walt "Clyde" Frazier's signature, and Allen Iverson's "Questions" that were created by Reebok (O'Connor, 2014). This case is seen as exclusive to basketball shoes due to their versatility in wear on the basketball court as well as in day to day activities (O'Connor, 2014). The success of Yeezy sneakers can stem from the numerous celebrities who have been seen supporting the brand such as Jay-Z, Justin Beiber, Pharrell, the Kardashian-Jenner family, as well as numerous others (Gustashaw, 2015). Support or endorsement from celebrities has been previously linked to brand loyalty as well as increased word of mouth to potential consumers (Bush, Martin & Bush, 2004). Consumers could be buying into this brand because they want to emulate their favorite celebrities (Hoffner & Cantor, 1991).
Matt Powell, senior sports industry advisor at the marketing research firm NPD says "Athleisure rules the runway, and the line between what is an athletic shoe and a casual shoe continues to blur. Brands and retailers must continue to feed this trend" (Cheng, 2018).

Athleisure is defined "as a mix of business casual with athletic wear" (Salminen, 2017, p.21). In 2015, retail sales were stagnant but sales in the athletic category had increased 12% percent, this increase could be attributed to the rise of athleisure wear as a trend in clothing consumption (Green, 2017). Athleisure is driving the trend for new innovations in the textile industry because consumers are looking for versatility in their garments that can be worn to handle several tasks throughout the day (Musante, 2016). The main consumer target market and driver for this trend have been millennials due to their constant on the go lifestyle (Salminen, 2017). The growth of athleisure trend is also being fueled by younger consumers who's focus is to appear physically fit and wearing versatile clothing that supports their lifestyle and day to day changes (Salpini, 2018). Numerous companies such as Adidas, Nike, and Under Armour that focus on creating athletic gear for performance have shifted their focus to include athleisure as a product offering based on the high demand (Park, 2006; Patrick, 2015). Not only are well known athletic brands following the trend but retailers who do not specialize in athletic wear have seen the potential gain available by offering athleisure wear (Musante, 2016; Patrick, 2015; Sherman, 2014). With no apparent end to the trend of athleisure wear, it seems that the growth potential for sneakers appears limitless as apparel retailers must continue to follow the course that the industry is currently headed.

**Research Question #2: Are Consumers Familiar With The Yeezy Brand?**

Brand familiarity reflects a consumer's direct and indirect experience with a brand (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987; Kent & Allen, 1994). The results in the elicitation stage showed that the
sample presented a moderate degree of familiarity with the Yeezy brand with 66% of participants having varying degrees of familiarity and 31% of participants being extremely familiar with the brand. This result coincides with the data aggregated from the individual maps in which participants averaged a 3.45 familiarity with the Yeezy brand. The researcher found this result to be very interesting since roughly 91% of the sample had not previously purchased the Yeezy brand. As stated prior numerous celebrities often wear Yeezy brand in their day to day lives (Gustashaw, 2015). Research has shown that unfamiliar brands gain the most from positive word of mouth (Sundaram & Webster, 1996). As a new brand in the marketplace Yeezy has been able to thrive possibly thanks to the support of celebrities wearing his products and has helped him gain relevancy in this venture.

Kanye West does not use traditional means to advertise his brand, often his wife Kim Kardashian-West is seen wearing the latest Yeezy line on her Instagram profile (Friedman, 2018). Most recently on social media, various celebrities dressed similarly to Kim Kardashian to promote the release of Yeezy Season 6 (Friedman, 2018). Balakrishnan et al. (2014) found in their research that Generation Y members often spend the largest percentage of their time on the internet utilizing social networks. The participants in the elicitation stage were between the ages of 18-34 as well as the average age of participants who completed the maps were age 22. The utilization of social media as the main tool to promote his brand makes it possible for Generation Y members to be familiar with the brand based on their usage of social media platforms like Instagram.

An interesting finding from the research is the relationship between brand familiarity and future purchase intention. The results determined a positive moderate strength relationship between the two variables of .405. Based on the sample this means that as familiarity with the
Yeezy brand increases the intent to purchase the brand in the future increases. Previous research has found that consumer's familiarity influences confidence which affects their intention to buy that brand (Laroche et al., 1996).

**Research Question #3: Are Consumers Engaged With Their Favorite Brands?**

Previous research has indicated that people who possess higher brand engagement possess stronger linkages in their minds with their favorite brands as well as being easier to recall (Sprott et al., 2009). The results indicated that respondents were somewhat engaged in their favorite brands but did not feel that their favorite brand indicate their identity. The sample is made up of members of Generation Y who have been known to seek the approval of others but also prefer a personal style (Wolburg & Pokrywczynski, 2001). While this generational group possesses high purchasing power, tends to shop for themselves, and knows the importance of brands they are also very socially aware and not completely bound to norms (Parker et al., 2014).

The results of the data are aligned with literature surrounding brand engagement based on the correlation between brand familiarity and brand engagement. The correlation between brand familiarity and the eight questions surrounding brand engagement were moderate in strength as well as positively related according to Cohen (1988). This means that as familiarity with brand increased among the sample so was their engagement. Since celebrities are now viewed as brands themselves (Ambroise et al., 2014; Seno & Lukas, 2007) and they can help increase brand loyalty and positive word of mouth (Bush et al., 2004) it is possible that their support of this brand and others like it have caused this type of relationship to occur. Also, consumers want to emulate the celebrities they admire (Hoffner & Cantor, 1991). Not only have celebrities supported Kanye West in the wearing of his clothing but through their attendance of his fashion shows as well such as Rihanna, Beyoncé, Alexander Wang, and Drake (O'Neill, 2017). He is
also often praised by numerous veterans in the fashion industry who support the work he is doing to innovate fashion (O'Neil, 2017). While many may not agree with his development in the industry it continues to increase his growth of the brand which in turn helps consumers stay engaged.
CHAPTER 6.
CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research was to gather the associations that consumer's draw upon when they think of the Yeezy brand. The researcher utilized the BCM method to generate a consensus map based on the associations that participants generated in the elicitation stage of the method. The researcher gathered associations from a random sample using Qualtrics™ and utilized SPSS™ to run descriptive statistics on the data retrieved from the participants. The researcher also sought out to understand participants' familiarity with the brand as well as overall brand engagement with their favorite brands. In the aggregation stage the researcher following Böger et al. (2017) techniques for aggregating data and created a consensus map featuring 7 of the 11 first-order associations connected to the Yeezy brand and none of the second-order associations that were connected to Kanye West directly. This was done to ensure no isolated associations were displayed on the map and that the reader can interpret the map without confusion.

Summary

Participants in the study completed the online survey in the elicitation stage which generated a word bank that consisted of 62 words that would be used by participants in the mapping stage. Participants in this stage were all between the ages of 18-34 and 67.8% (n= 137) of the respondents were female. 74.02% (n=137) of the sample reported their ethnicity as African American/Black. The sample possessed knowledge of the Yeezy brand and had varying degrees of familiarity with the brand. The sample is also engaged with their favorite brands but did not feel that their favorite brands defined their identity. The mapping stage was completed by 57
participants who utilized the word bank provided to create individual concept maps. The average of the sample was 22.05 years of age and their brand familiarity was 3.45. The aggregation stage provided the researcher with eleven associations directly connected to Yeezy brand based on mention: Kanye, expensive, Adidas, overrated, trendy, athleisure, sneaker, Kardashian, fashion, shoes, popular. Only the first seven associations could be directly connected to map based on their link strength. The aggregation stage also yielded 5 words that would be directly linked to Kanye based on mentions by participants: Kardashian, Kim, Rap, celebrity, and famous. Based on the rules by Böger et al. (2017) the researcher did not include Kardashian, fashion, shoes, popular or any of the words connected to Kanye based on the lack of link strength.

**Relation to Relevant Literature**

Brand associations are a vital measure to help create brand equity (Aaker, 1996). The associations that consumers connect to brands make it possible for them to recall a brand and recognize it amongst others in the marketplace. The strength of brand associations can lead to purchasing as well as user satisfaction with a product (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993). The consensus map yielded that Kanye West possessed a stronger association in the minds of the participants when they think of the Yeezy brand compared to the other associations. As stated in the literature regarding brand associations, strong favorable connections can lead to superiority to other brands in the marketplace (Keller, 1993, p.6). Kanye West possessing a strong connection with the brand serves as a source of value for Yeezy and contributes to the brand's success. This also ties into the literature regarding co-branding in which successful co-branding efforts are marked by mutually beneficial partnerships for the parent brands (Motion et al., 2003). The growth of Yeezy over Jordan brand as mentioned by Kanye in the song *Facts* shows the growth of Yeezy has been lucrative for the rapper's personal growth as well. This growth has
also helped the other partner in this venture, Adidas to make leaps and bounds in the athleisure market as being one of the major contributors to the segment (Cheng, 2018).

**Implications**

Implications drawn from this research are practical in nature. Co-branding as a form of celebrity endorsement helps create associations in the minds of consumers. Kanye West as a celebrity and active participant in the development of the Yeezy brand helps make the brand stand out amongst other clothing lines in the marketplace. His involvement with the brand helps generate familiarity with the brand among potential consumers. For Yeezy to continue to thrive in the marketplace it is important that the brand continues to reflect the branding that Kanye West has built for himself over the years as being different, unique as well as controversial. The ability to create controversy has been beneficial to Kanye and will continue to generate value for himself as well as the Yeezy clothing line.

A second practical implication is the value of the hip-hop community in the fashion industry. Luckerson (2013) reported how the pairing of hip-hop celebrities with exclusive lines of shoes has been beneficial to generate value for retailers in the athletic footwear segment. Many well-known hip-hop artists today such as Drake, Eminem, Jay-Z, 50 Cent, have had a line of shoes with major sneaker giants like Nike and Adidas (Luckerson, 2013). Other popular hip-hop artists like Pharrell Williams have taken on numerous fashion entrepreneurial ventures with well-known fashion brands such as Moncler and Louis Vuitton (Ilari, 2009; Miller, 2011). Hip-hop continues to grow in popularity since its inception and artists of this genre serve as a popular marketing tool for retailers to attract consumers and educate them on what brands to take interest in (Smith-Strickland, 2017). Retailers would be smart to enter into similar partnerships like Kanye West and Adidas to help gain a competitive advantage within this segment. Moreover, not
only are hip-hop artists valuable in the athletic shoe segment but other apparel segments as well. For example, rapper Cardi B helped increase searches for Christian Louboutin by 217% after the release of her hit single *Bodak Yellow* in which the artist mentions the designer shoe brand (Fishman, 2017).

**Limitations**

The first limitation noticed in my research is not requiring all participants in the elicitation stage to answer all the questions presented in the survey, this caused a fluctuation in the results regarding brand engagement portion. The sampling method and sample size for the mapping stage of the study limited the number of possible connections that could be gathered regarding the Yeezy brand. The mapping stage was completed by students who attend a southeastern university and are currently enrolled in a textile science, apparel design, and merchandising program at the university. Due to their experience with fashion as a course of study, the responses generated by the sample can be considered as biased and may not reflect an average consumer opinion about the brand. The researcher was limited to only gathering first order associations for Yeezy brand. This could be caused by effort taken to complete the concept map exercise by the student participants. 49.12% (n=57) of the participants of the mapping stage completed the exercise with maps that included ten or less second-order associations. To collect richer data in the future it would be best for researchers to conduct this exercise in one on one setting. Conducting this setting in a classroom setting could have caused participants being distracted by their colleagues who were also completing the exercise. A larger sample size would have provided the researcher with a more accurate depiction of brand associations related to Yeezy in terms of strength of the connection between associations as well as the strength of connection to Yeezy. Also, in the mapping stage, the researcher did not collect demographic
information outside of age. The researcher is unable to make further generalizations about the sample due to the lack of demographic information present and is unable to draw conclusions that could be explained based on cultural differences such as ethnicity or gender norms.

Future Research

Future researchers should look at utilizing a sample that is made up of people who are not only familiar with the brand but also have previously purchased the brand. This would provide the researcher with people who have experience with the brand and can speak from their own relationship with Yeezy directly. It would also provide the researcher with specified information of loyal fans of the brand to better understand the customer profile of people who support this brand. It would also be beneficial for future research to explore the difference between consumers who purchase Yeezy sneakers and those who purchase Yeezy clothing to understand if the associations are similar or different between the product lines. Future researchers could help grow co-branding literature by applying the BCM method to other co-branding efforts being made in the fashion industry to understand the influence the partnership involved has on the brand.
REFERENCES


Burt, S., & Davies, K. (2010). From the retail brand to the retail-er as a brand: themes and issues in retail branding research. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management, 38*(11/12), 865-878.


APPENDIX A
IRB APPROVAL

ACTION ON PROTOCOL APPROVAL REQUEST

TO: Chunmin Lang
Textiles, Apparel Design, and Merchandising

FROM: Dennis Landin
Chair, Institutional Review Board

DATE: March 7, 2018

RE: IRB# 4007

TITLE: A Case Study of Brand Associations for Yeezy Brand

New Protocol/Modification/Continuation: Modification

Brief Modification Description: Title change.

Review type: Full ___ Expedited X ___  Review date: 3/6/2018

Risk Factor: Minimal ___ X ___ Uncertain ________ Greater Than Minimal ________

Approved ___ X ___ Disapproved ________

Approval Date: 3/6/2018  Approval Expiration Date: 2/15/2019

Re-review frequency: (annual unless otherwise stated)

Number of subjects approved: 200

LSU Proposal Number (if applicable): 

Protocol Matches Scope of Work in Grant proposal: (if applicable)

By: Dennis Landin, Chairman

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING –
Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report.
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
8. SPECIAL NOTE: Make sure you use bcc when emailing more than one recipient.

*All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU's Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at http://www.lsu.edu/irb
APPENDIX B
QUESTIONNAIRE

Brand Associations with Yeezy

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your help on this research. The purpose of this research project is to understand associations that consumers form about the clothing brand Yeezy. This is a research project being conducted by Garrett Grant at Louisiana State University. You are invited to participate in this research project because you have a valuable opinion to contribute to this study. Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate in this research survey, you may withdraw at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you withdraw from participating at any time, you will not be penalized. The procedure involves filling an online survey that will take no longer than 15 minutes. Your responses are completely confidential and will be used strictly for research purposes only, and all the responses will be kept confidential and no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study. If you have any questions about the research study, please contact Garrett Grant at 901-653-5108 or ggrant5@lsu.edu. This research has been reviewed according to Louisiana State University IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.

Do you consent to participate in this research project?

☐ I Agree

☐ I DO NOT agree
Are you familiar with the Yeezy brand?

- Extremely familiar
- Very familiar
- Moderately familiar
- Slightly familiar
- Not familiar at all

Have you ever purchased Yeezy brand in the past?

- Yes
- No

Do you plan to purchase Yeezy brand in the near future?

- Yes
- No

What comes to mind when you think of the Yeezy brand, positive or negative, descriptive or expressive? Please list 15 to 25 words/phrases coming to your mind once you think of the Yeezy brand

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
Please let us know how you are related to brands by providing responses to the following statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have a special bond with the brands that I like</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I consider my favorite brands to be a part of myself.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often feel a personal connection between my brands and me</td>
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<td>o</td>
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<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part of me is defined by important brands in my life</td>
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<td>o</td>
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<tr>
<td>I feel as if I have a close personal connection with the brands I most prefer</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can identify with important</td>
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<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
brands in my life

There are links between the brands that I prefer and how I view myself

My favorite brands are an important indication of who I am

What is your age?

○ 18-24

○ 25-34

○ 35-44

○ 45-54

○ 55 +

Please specify your ethnicity?

○ White

○ Black or African American

○ Hispanic or Latino
American Indian or Alaska Native

Asian

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Other

To which gender identity do you most identify?

Male

Female

Prefer not to answer

If you would like to earn extra credits for your course, please select "next" below. This will ensure that your personal information is disassociated from your survey responses

Next

I do not wish to earn extra credits
VITA

Garrett is a candidate to graduate from Louisiana State University with his Master of Science in Textiles, Apparel Design, and Merchandising with a concentration on Merchandising. He was born in Memphis, Tennessee to his parents Aubrey and Margaret. Upon graduating from Wooddale High School in 2009 he went on to pursue his undergraduate course work at Tuskegee University in Tuskegee, Alabama. He graduated Cum Laude from Tuskegee University with a Bachelor of Science in both Sales & Marketing and Accounting in May 2014. After completing his requirements for graduation at Louisiana State University Garrett plans to pursue a career in buying at Neiman Marcus in Dallas, Texas.