HOW DOES GENERATION Z PERCEIVE H&M AND LUXURY DESIGNER CO-BRANDINGS? QUALITATIVE INSIGHTS FROM TURKEY

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ABSTRACT

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Master Program in Marketing Communication and Public Relations

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In recent years, streetwear fashion has been the main trend in the clothing and apparel industry. The increasing number of individuals from Generation Z prefer fast-fashion products, which are easier and more affordable to access since their expectations from the fashion industry are different from individuals that came before them. As a result of this trend, the luxury designer brands are devising new strategies to reach customers like Gen Z. For this purpose, the collaborations between streetwear and luxury brands are visible in different segments of the clothing and apparel industry. One of the most prominent collaborations in this area is between Swedish fast-fashion brand H&M and luxury designers from all around the world. Since H&M is one of the popular brands among Generation Z, this study analyzes the perception of them on H&M and designer collaborations. In-depth interviews are conducted with30 participants between 18-25 years of age who follow H&M and designer collaborations. The results of the study shed light on insights related to consumption habits, approach to H&M and luxury brands, and their interests in these collaborations.

Keywords: brand perception, fashion collaborations, H&M, luxury fashion brands, streetwear, Gen Z

ÖZET

Z JENERASYONU H&M VE LÜKS TASARIMCI İŞ BİRLİKLERİNİ NASIL ALGILIYOR? TÜRKİYE'DEN KALİTATİF İÇGÖRÜLER

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Son yıllarda giyim ve hazır giyim endüstrisinde sokak modası ana trend olmuştur. Z kuşağının giderek artan sayıdaki bireyleri, moda endüstrisinden beklentilerinin kendinden önceki bireylerden farklı olması nedeniyle erişimi daha kolay ve daha ekonomik olan hızlı moda ürünlerini tercih etmektedir. Bu trendin bir sonucu olarak lüks tasarımcı markaları Z kuşağı gibi müşterilere ulaşmak için yeni stratejiler geliştiriyor. Bu amaçla sokak giyimi ve lüks markalar arasındaki işbirlikleri giyim ve hazır giyim sektörünün farklı segmentlerinde kendini gösteriyor. Bu alandaki en önemli işbirliklerinden biri, İsveçli hızlı moda markası H&M ile dünyanın her yerinden lüks tasarımcılar arasındaki işbirliğidir. H&M, Z Kuşağı arasında popüler markalardan biri olduğu için, bu çalışma onların H&M ve tasarımcı işbirliklerine yönelik algısını analiz ediyor. . H&M ve tasarımcı işbirliklerini takip eden 18-25 yaş arası 30 katılımcı ile derinlemesine mülakatlar gerçekleştirilmektedir. Çalışmanın sonuçları, tüketim alışkanlıkları, H&M ve lüks markalara yaklaşım ve bu işbirliklerine ilgileri ile ilgili içgörülere ışık tuttu.

Anahtar Kelimeler: moda iş birlikleri, H&M, lüks moda markaları, sokak modası, Z jenerasyonu

Dedicated to my one and only family who support my academic career with as much enthusiasm as I do.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In today's world, the consumption habits of individuals are continuously evolving in fashion products as fashion styles have been changing over the years. Increasingly, consumers are oriented towards fast-fashion products to keep up with the trends. Especially with the influence of social media, more and more individuals want to buy fashion products to look fashionable. This leads fast-fashion brands to create collections to meet the increasing consumer demands and find new ways to attract consumers' attention to their brands. Although fast-fashion brands are becoming more popular, the demand for luxury still exists. In fact, the demand for luxury brands has always been high among consumers (Kapferer, and Michaut, 2014). In a sense, luxury goods are perceived as a status symbol (Bellezza et al., 2017). Thus, consumers want to gain these status symbols and use them in their everyday life (Husic, and Cicic, 2009). Still, these luxury goods are not accessible for the majority of the global population. Also, luxury brands are experiencing certain problems with increasing sales numbers (Nueno, and Quelch, 1998). In most cases, majority of the consumers prefer simpler fast-fashion versions of luxury products (Wang, and Griskevicius, 2014). In recent years, new trends have emerged in the fast-fashion industry. This trend, which is called co-branding or brand collaboration, involves cooperation between a fast-fashion brand and a luxury brand. Such efforts can generally be seen attention-grabbing for the fashion industry and apparel sector. Fast-fashion brands such as H&M are allocating their resources to find the luxury brand designers and to work with them to offer new collection with collaborations.

It is important to understand how such collaborations between fast-fashion brands and luxury brands are viewed by the consumers. However, it is an important measure and understanding the perception Generation Z consumers as they will be the main consumer segment in the future. Born directly inside the technology and internet, the members of Generation Z have significantly different characteristics and consumption habits than the other generations. Since this generation is more informed about the products due to their internet access and more opportunities to compare the products before purchasing, their consumption habits are entirely different than other generations (Turner, 2015). In addition, the members of this generation tend to prefer fast-fashion products to a luxury brand when it comes to considering price/performance ratio (Wang, and Griskevicius, 2014).

According to the consumption habits of Generation Z, collaborations between H&M and luxury brands can offer various advantages for these consumers. Understanding the brand perception and preferences of this generation can significantly help fast-fashion brands to devise strategies to meet the needs of this key consumer segment. Furthermore, understanding the perceptions of individuals from Gen Z living in Turkey gives insights for their current and future consumption. Turkey offers great opportunities for brands, especially for fashion brands, due to its high percentage of young population. Positive perception towards such collaboration across the Turkish youth can significantly contribute to the marketing and expansion practices of these fast-fashion brands. Since H&M is a popular brand in Turkey, the perception of Turkish Generation Z members towards the brand collaboration could provide important insights into the future of the fashion industry. Therefore, this study focuses on the perception of Generation Z towards H&M and luxury designer collaborations in the Turkish market through the brand perception construct offered by. The findings of this study will help fashion brands to review their marketing strategies according to the brand perception construct (Chen-Yu, Cho, and Kincade, 2016) as well as find new ways to address the needs of these future consumers.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Fashion Branding

Fashion has a long history as it dates back to the beginning of humankind. While everything started with simple materials and simple methods, it is possible to see more complex and elegant forms of fashion nowadays. Jones, and Stallybrass (2000) stated that the word “fashion” was included in the English Dictionary in 1568. However, fashion can be traced back to the era of Roman and Egyptian. Although the styles and fashionable items were different, it is clear that people in those periods followed a certain sense of clothing.

Evolutions of fashion can be analyzed from different perspectives. Riello (2011) expressed that fashion has two different forms, which are the immaterial and material forms. İdeas are the conception of a re the conception of a design while a material is a non-abstract form

Fashion is a dynamic process so that the way we dressed has changed significantly over the long years. In the Roman period, the clothes signified the wealth and social status of an individual (Petersen, 2009). Steele (2001) reflected that the modern use of fashion might have been stemmed from the 18th-century use of fashion. However, Tungate (2004) stated that fashion in the modern sense was born in the 19th century in Paris. It was through the end of the 19th century when the first fashion brand was created in England (Brand, 2011). Charles Frederick Worth took the leading step in the fashion industry and changed this field from the ground (Cole, 2011).

Although beginning of modern fashion seems ambiguous, Fashion has been part of our life for centuries. Also, it has changed form and evolved into our current sense of fashion. According to Tungate (2004), French designers like Chanel, Dior, and many other popular fashion brands have emerged on the path started by the English designers in general. As time passed, fashion evolved with modern designers who push the limits of the imagination by offering various forms of dresses, skirts, pants, shirts, and accessories.

The past objective of fashion, designing wearable clothes, has been transformed to making a statement in the current fashion world (McNeil, 2018). As Barnard (2002) expressed, clothes were connected with beauty back in Plato's time, which corresponds to 400 BC. However, clothing and fashion have a stronger meaning in today's world. They are even used as a way of communication (Schofield, and Schmidt, 2005) to deliver a message to the consumer groups. From this perspective, it is possible to indicate that fashion also helped to form current understanding of the individuals.

Okonkwo (2016) expressed that brands and branding evolved from different components such as marks, names, and logos. Branding is the result of emotional and psychological effects of the consumer side as well as financial value on the seller side. Based on this definition of branding, it is obvious that branding affects the entire sales channel from the seller to the customer. On the consumer side, the emotions that a brand evokes are considered an important element. On contrary, there is no room for emotions on the seller side since the seller side of the branding concept is mainly interested in the financial value generated by the branding efforts.

In today's world, brands have become important financial assets. Therefore, brands are regarded as more than just a name and a logo. Clifton (2009) explained that brands are often considered as an intangible asset of an organization where the value of this asset is as high as a real and physical asset. From this point of view, it can be considered that brands have high value for organizations. Naturally, brands are not tangible assets such as products and services. Yet, in some cases, the name of a brand can make a higher impact than a product or service.

Our world has become more digitalized. With the increasing use of the internet, the consumption habits and behaviors of consumers have been changing as well. Meanwhile, users want to see different brands in different sectors. Edelman (2010) stated that consumers want to see what the brand offers and promises clearly when they are making a decision.

Okonkwo (2016) declares that brand positioning, which is different from market positioning, can be defined as the visibility of the connection between the consumer and the seller. Brand positioning has evolved in many ways. Currently, the majority of brands are adopting online channels to promote their brand. Such a practice is called online branding in which, brands focus on creating a strong online presence. As mentioned above, the internet and digital technologies have become an integral part of products and services. Therefore, brands are increasingly focusing on online environments for their branding efforts. Rowley (2004) stated that the basic step to conduct an online branding activity is to build a website that transfers the message and reflects the values of the brand. An integrated brand message and values can help to create a consistent brand image. Then, such an image would help to consolidate the relationship between the brand and the customer. At this point, it is important to consider how brands are positioning themselves both in the physical world and the online world.

One of the branding practices in the fashion industry is viral branding. Holt (2004, p. 34) indicated that viral branding targets the tastemakers since they are the initial users and promoters of the product. Currently, these tastemakers are commonly referred to as influencers. Truong, McColl, and Kitchen (2009) expressed that the new luxury consumers are different from the old luxury consumers in terms of income, age to reach higher income, and financing. As Okonkow (2016) further explained, this change has led many brands including luxury brands to change their brand positioning and branding efforts.

2.2 Streetwear Brands and Fast-Fashion

The fast-fashion has become one of the common practices in the fashion industry. There are different factors that push fashion and clothing companies to offer new products faster to the consumers. Bhardwaj, and Fairhurst (2010) noted that there is high competition in the fashion market in today's world so that it is forcing clothing brands to offer new and fresh products to meet these demands. In this sense, fashion brands feel compelled to meet the high competition demands imposed by the sector. In return, such high competition demand led the fashion brands to find new means to keep up with the market dynamics. In line with the increasing demand, fashion brands both in streetwear and luxury fashion are searching for new ways to take place in the fast-fashion industry.

Furthermore, streetwear brands are increasingly focusing on fast-fashion consumption. Cachon, and Swinney (2011) stated that there has been an increasing trend among the fashion companies such as Zara and H&M towards the fast-fashion. On the other hand, there have been different views on the meaning of the fast-fashion. These differences are often caused by the factors containing what the fast-fashion refers to. When the meaning of fast-fashion is considered, Bhardwaj, and Fairhurst (2010) expressed those retailers in the fashion industry should decrease the time to deliver their products to the consumers by speeding up the process which results in fast-fashion. In general, the fast-fashion can be regarded as a process with accelerated manufacturing, customer delivery, and sales cycle. These three components might be the main factors determining the practice of the fast-fashion. However, there are other factors contributing to the development and widespread application of this new practice.

The main factors in the fast-fashion, as expressed by Cachon, and Swinney (2011), are fast manufacturing, fast delivery to the consumers, meeting the uncertain number of demands, and manufacturing trendy fashion products. In addition to these factors, Bhardwaj, and Fairhurst (2010) claimed that the factors that have changed in the fashion industry have led to fast-fashion which included a decrease in the mass production practices, a higher number of fashion seasons in one year, and the changes experienced in the supply chain of the fashion industry.

Furthermore, as expressed by Bruce, and Daly (2006), the main objective of fast-fashion practices is to deliver to customers in the shortest time possible as well as considering the cost factor. An article on Forbes reported that the fast-fashion giant (H&M), has closed 160 stores and organized a huge sales campaign due to $4 billion worth of unsold clothing products (Stein, 2019). There is no doubt that cost is an important variable in the fast-fashion industry. In this sense, the fast-fashion is a multi-dimensional field with numerous variables to be considered during application. However, there is another important dimension especially in terms of sales and demands. One of these important dimensions is related to consumer behavior and changes in consumer behaviors, especially related to differences between the generations.

As the fast-fashion becomes more widespread especially among the clothing industry companies, consumer behavior also changes in line with these trends. In terms of consumer behavior, Cachon, and Swinney (2011) stated that consumers are expecting a sale of the products which leads to delayed purchasing. This delayed purchasing among the consumers might lead to problems such as pricing for the clothing companies. Aviv, and Pazgal (2008) claimed that different factors such as demand uncertainty, behaviors of the consumers, and the limited number of products should be considered in the pricing strategy as the dynamic pricing increases in the fashion industry and other similar industries. Therefore, fashion brands need to understand these changing consumer behaviors and devise new strategies to manage the consumption trends.

There has been an increasing interest in the streetwear market. Shukurova (2018) stated that streetwear has gained an important market share in the fashion industry for the past decade. This statement is further supported by data collected from the fashion industry. According to the data published by Statista (2020), the size of the apparel fashion market in the US has reached $1.9 trillion. This market size of the fashion industry clearly illustrates the value of the sector.

Just like any other sector, marketing activities in the fashion industry, especially in the streetwear sub-branch, require dividing the customer based on different characteristics. This is called market segmentation and it is an integral part of any marketing activities in any sector. Without market segmentation, it is not possible to address the consumers in the right way. Accordingly, different factors should be evaluated in terms of market segmentation in fashion and streetwear branding. Shuruova (2018) explained that segmentation in any sector, including the fashion sector, is performed in accordance with demography, geography, socio-cultural habits, psychology, use purpose, sociocultural, and hybrid conditions. All of these factors that are considered in the segmentation are also formed by consumer habits.

Nowadays, consumer habits, especially streetwear consumption, can be influenced by many factors. Savignac, Parmentier, and Marcoux (2012) expressed that those bloggers who are also consumers can influence their audience in terms of cloth consumption. Individuals are now following influencers on social platforms to decide which products or clothes they will consume. The main consumer of the fashion industry is shifting. Currently, Generation Z has become one of the main fashion consumers around the world. Furthermore, Shuruova (2018) expressed that the consumers of Generation Z have been stable customers as they could be considered as good customers. In this sense, the consumer habit of this generation is gaining more power and influence in the fashion sector. When brands in the streetwear industry are involved in branding activities, both customer habits and consequent customer segmentation should be considered.

As expressed above, brands must understand how consumers see streetwear brands. Statista (2019) conducted research on consumers and showed that 62.4% of the consumers regarded streetwear fashion as a style that will be always fashionable. Based on this data, it is obvious that more than half of the consumers think streetwear will continue to be a trend and popular area in fashion. Moreover, streetwear fashion can be present in different settings as well. Chang et al. (2017) stated that fashion is an important and indispensable part of cities around the world. In this sense, fashion contributes to the identities of people living in the cities in one way. Furthermore, Chang et al. (2017) noted that people living in the cities are using the street as their runways. Accordingly, it can be stated that individuals regard fashion as a way of self-expression to show what they like, what they want to wear, and consequently what they want to consume. Streetwear fashion brands need to consider these desires and consumption habits of the users to better position their brand and engage in more efficient branding activities.

Since the trends in fashion is changing, the consumer and consumption habits in this sector are changing as well as, Macedo (2015) stated that streetwear currently targets a larger audience including individuals in their 50s who have witnessed the birth of this fashion trend rather than young people between 15-19 years old. Naturally, the consumption habits of people from different generations will be different. In this sense, correct customer segmentation processes are required for branding activities.

In addition to the consumer aspect, there is also the designer aspect in streetwear. Collins (2018) reported that the designers think the key element to creating a streetwear fashion brand is to find something to change and start changing that thing. However, this desire to change in the designers often stems from consumer habits. Therefore, understanding the needs and desires of the consumers plays a key role in streetwear branding. For this purpose, this study aims to understand the perception of Generation Z at the intersection of streetwear brands and luxury brands. By considering the views of this new consumer segment towards the luxury brand and streetwear brand collaboration, it is possible to better position the brands and engage in an efficient branding activity.

In the broader sense, luxury has been subjected to various changes. A report prepared by Achille, Marchessou, and Remy (2018) showed that digital luxury shoppers and digitally influence sales are becoming the key trends in the luxury fashion sector. As argued by Vecchi, and Buckley (2016), massification increases the demand as well as the product range in terms of items with higher accessibility. Accordingly, more consumers can gain access to more products and consume these products in a fast way.

One of the discussions in luxury fashion and fashion, in general, has been the sustainability of the fashion process. Massification of the fashion sector has led to sustainability concerns in this field. Vecchi, and Buckley (2016) claimed that consumption habits and use of natural resources as well as fashion somehow have an unsustainable nature due to production scale. As fashion uses natural resources and the consumer of this sector tends to have high demand, the chances for this sector to be sustainable are low. Therefore, achieving sustainability in the luxury fashion sector can be challenging. However, there are some options to overcome this problem. Vecchi and Buckley (2016) expressed that luxury brands can overcome the issues related to sustainability in the fashion sector by designing with local resources and as well as with a holistic approach for design, production, and delivery stages. Using local resources with sustainable design and manufacturing processes can significantly decrease the less sustainable structure of the sector.

The fast-fashion is unsustainable in terms of design, manufacturing, and delivery. Joy et al. (2012) suggested that the fast-fashion has an unsustainable nature due to its disposable structure. As consumers use and easily dispose of the products they purchase, the waste amount is increased. As expressed by Joy et al. (2012), the fast-fashion is often referred to McFashion in the sense of Mcdonald's clothing where it offers a new design with lower prices and in the quickest way possible. This analogy of McDonald's clearly shows the consumption-oriented structure of the fashion industry.

Sustainability is a more common practice in the luxury fashion segment compared to the fast-fashion segment. Joy et al. (2012) expressed that luxury brands such as Stella McCartney, Ferragamo, and Vivienne Westwood are currently manufacturing ecologic and sustainable clothing and fashion products. Luxury brands tend to select and use more environmentally friendly products to manufacture their products. Additionally, consumers of the luxury fashion segment are believed to have an influence on the other consumer segments. Godart, and Seong (2014) state that luxury fashion can be a means to introduce sustainable fashion as the main consumer segment might have an impact on the other consumer segments. In this sense, luxury brands and luxury brand consumers might be utilized to create more sustainable fashion for the remaining consumer segment.

Luxury has changed significantly over the years. For sure, current trends of luxury are different from the trends of the past. Genderless clothing is one of these new trends in the luxury fashion area. Reis et al. (2019) expressed that genderless clothing transposes national reality and is visible at an international level in terms of androgynous fashion. In addition to genderless fashion, luxury brand and streetwear brand collaborations are increasing around the world. Maguire (2019) expressed those collaborations between luxury fashion brands and streetwear brands as they can lead to hype among consumer segments and expand the market to gain new customers. Thus, the market segment for the luxury fashion brands can expand as they reach new customers and sell their products to these customers. In this sense, the collaboration between these two different segments of fashion might generate higher accessibility across consumers.

Furthermore, Maguire (2019) reported that this collaboration called the streetwear movement generated a higher demand based on the scarcity of fashion products and adopted by different brands. Over the course of time, H&M has collaborated with 19 luxury fashion designers for 15 years (H&M, 2020a). In the latest collaboration with Giambattista Valli, the collection was haute couture-inspired with detailed work while the design, manufacturing, and style reflected the designer without being manufactured in the Paris atelier of the designer (H&M, 2020a). Accordingly, the execution of the collection follows the fast-fashion style of H&M while this collaboration reflects the style of the luxury brand designer. Therefore, it is possible to manufacture more products with certain scarcity and offer this collection to a larger audience than the limited audience of luxury fashion consumers. In this sense, luxury fashion brand and streetwear brand collaborations might play an important role in the new consumption era.

2.3 Luxury Brands and Luxury Fashion

Luxury brands and luxurious branding mainly focus on high-quality products with a unique purchasing experience. Luxury brands have different dynamics than medium-segment brands. Such a difference is more visible in fashion brands. While the offered products and services might be similar in different segments, the difference is caused by how these products and services are offered.

Keller (2017) defined luxury brands with ten properties where they form the basis for luxury brands. The first property of a luxury brand is the preservation of the premium image. The image control process plays a key role in the branding process. Additionally, luxury brands need to generate intangible brands. As expressed above, intangible assets of a brand can, in some cases, be stronger than products or services of the brand. Another crucial point of luxury branding is keeping the high-quality products, services in the same line with the purchasing experience. In fact, a complete product and service cycle can contribute to the consumer journey explained by Edelman (2010). Wang (2015) expressed that those brands should focus on complementary elements such as brand logo or packaging to increase the value of the luxury brand. Another property of a luxury brand is the ability to create links with personalities, countries, etc. The other property is related to marketing. Wrobleski (2019) explained that luxury brands should be selective about their channel choice while traditional and online marketing channels are perfectly blended in the current environment.

Choi (2017) argued that pricing is also important in this field. Choi further stated that luxury brands should use a premium pricing strategy where the number of campaigns and discounts must be limited. Wrobleski (2019) further noted that the brand structure should be managed with care to clearly define the competition. Another important aspect of luxury branding is the protection of trademarks. In luxury branding, it is important to prevent counterfeits and protect both the tangible and intangible assets of the brand (Keller, 2017).

There has been a significant change in luxury branding. The brands are currently offering products that can be purchased by the middle-class or even lower-income class. Fiske, and Silverstein (2003) expressed those accessible super premiums have been introduced in luxury branding. For example, Belvedere Vodka, which is a premium brand, is sold for $28 per bottle. On the other hand, Absolute is sold for $16 per bottle even the premium brand is still at the affordable end of the price range. When these factors are considered, it can be observed that there is a great shift in luxury branding practices. Increasingly, luxury brands are changing their target segments from high-income and upper-middle class to middle-class and lower-middle class. This shift is reflected in the fashion industry in the form of streetwear brands and luxury fashion brand collaborations.

Fashion and especially luxury fashion have been changing since the first days of human history. Atwal, and Williams (2017) stated that luxury and status along with quality and exclusiveness have been used together for a long time. When someone talks about luxury or luxury goods, these words are associated with higher status and higher quality. However, the perceptions towards luxury brands have a different outlook. Tungate (2004) suggested that luxury has been used instead of overpriced products with average quality which are perceived as luxury goods due to marketing efforts. According to this suggestion, it could be clear that luxury might not be entirely associated with high-quality and high-status.

The 21st century has experienced changes in different sectors. Miller (2001) reported that the transition to the 21st century offers opportunities in terms of technology, economy, society, and governance. The change at the society level shows that the consumer of this age is significantly different from the consumer of five decades ago. The changes in the consumer and consumption level and characteristics can also be observed across the luxury brand consumers. Ryding et al. (2016) stated that the luxury industry is experiencing democratization. In this process, tailor-made products are being replaced by ready-made products. The change in luxury fashion consumption leads to this change from haute couture to ready-made clothing. Moreover, new luxury brands can enter the luxury fashion market as it is now easier to enter the market with developments in technology and the internet. As new luxury fashion brands can enter the market more easily than the previous decades, there might be significant changes for the luxury brands of the past. As more consumers want to access as well as use luxury brands and luxury apparel, the luxury fashion sector is facing challenges. These challenges are further increased with the changing consumer demographics.

Luxury counterfeiting is one of the aspects of luxury brands and luxury brandings that needs to be considered in detail. The Economist magazine (2015) reported that luxury product counterfeiting has been one of the greatest problems around the world accounting for more than $1.8 trillion market cap as 2015. A recent article by Fontana, Girod, and Kralik (2019) stated that the market for luxury goods counterfeiting accounted for approximately $4.5 trillion in 2019. When the 2015 and 2019 data are compared, it is observed that the counterfeit market for luxury goods is expanding at a high speed. In 4 years, the total market capacity has increased by $2.7 trillion. Furthermore, it is predicted that the problem will continue to be one of the biggest problems in the luxury goods sectors as suggested by the 2015 and 2019 data.

One of the reasons for the increased number of counterfeit luxury products is explained by Fontana, Girod, and Kralik (2019) as luxury brands becoming just mere symbols of status. Yet, these brands fail to be then that by offering tangible characteristics. Additionally, counterfeit products are purchased since a consumer believes that these products act as an alternative to real luxury products (Perez, Castaño, and Quintanilla, 2010). As consumers assume that these luxury brands do not have tangible attributes and there is an alternative with similar properties i.e., brand name and logo with lower prices, they tend to increase their purchases. This can explain the significant increase in the counterfeit luxury goods market in the last 4 years.

The main problem in the mind of the consumers has been the question of whether it is worth paying as much as $2.500 on a branded product which is made in China than to purchase a counterfeit of the same product which is also made in China (Fontana, Girod, and Kralik, 2019). This problem might be considered as one of the driving powers of Generation Z to purchase counterfeit luxury goods. To decrease the number of counterfeit luxury product purchases, luxury fashion brands must follow different strategies. In this sense, it is important for luxury fashion brands to understand the strengths of the brand rather than simply fighting against the counterfeiting activity itself (Fontana, Girod, and Kralik, 2019). Accordingly, luxury fashion brands need to understand their consumers better to better reflect the strengths of the brand. Therefore, it is important to understand how luxury brands and luxury branding have changed before and after Generation Z.

Luxury brands have been around us for a long time. Tungate (2004) expressed that Jean Castarade has mentioned an ivory figurine almost 30.000 years ago shows the first signs of luxury consumption. It shows that luxury might be as old as humankind. However, from the beginning of the humankind, almost 30.000 years ago till the 21st century, luxury brand consumption has naturally been changed a lot. Atwal, and Williams (2017) stated that the 1980s and 1990s mark the start of Western luxury consumption to gain status and better appearance.

The consumers of luxury often have different characteristics for different generations. Unity Marketing (2006) reported luxury consumers of the baby boomer generation to have an iconoclastic view of the world with intemperance. This approach of this generation has transformed the luxury fashion industry into an individualistic consumption. However, Generation Z has entirely different characteristics and consumption habits than this baby boomer generation as well as Generation Y. Hemantha (2019) stated that Generation Z has a higher digital purchasing experience with high pragmatism compared to Generation Y with the less digital purchasing experience.

Juodzbalis, and Radzevicius (2015) suggested that Generation Z members in Asia are highly interested to purchase luxury goods that attract the attention of the marketers for achieving higher market share. While the demand from Generation Z towards luxury fashion brands is increasing, luxury fashion brands should understand the consumption characteristics of this generation and how Generation Z approaches luxury fashion and ready-made apparel.

Juodzbalis, and Radzevicius (2015) defined Generation Z as more mature than baby boomers, Generation X, or Generation Y. Mainly, Generation Z is described with materialistic and realistic properties. Generation Z consumer segment offers great opportunities for luxury brands as this generation is still at the beginning of their life without a high number of career responsibilities (Hemantha, 2019). Accordingly, understanding how Generation Z sees luxury brands and ready-made fashion products such as streetwear is important to better position the brands to reach more consumers.

2.4 Collaborations In the Fashion Industry

Collaborations in the fashion industry have a long history. As noted by Gordon (2017), one of the first fashion collaborations was made in 1999 by Supreme when the brand worked with DC Shoes to make a sneaker with Supreme brand. Accordingly, it is possible to state that these collaborations have existed in the fashion sector since the 20th century. However, the collaboration between a luxury brand and a streetwear brand is a relatively new concept. Bobb (2019) stated that the start of fashion collaboration dates back to the 2010s while Karl Lagerfeld and H&M collaboration back in 2004 is one of the most important steps in this new business. Karl Lagerfeld's collaboration has marked an entirely new stage in the entire fashion industry. This process affected both the fashion industry and other industries as well. The increasing number of non-fashion brands started to show interest in collaborations with fashion brands as well. Jang (2006) expressed that the collaboration between fashion brands and the industry is at a high level.

The high level of collaboration has also led to view this collaboration at a different level. Bobb (2019) explained that collaboration in the fashion industry might be regarded as an important and applicable marketing strategy. Marketing is an integral part of any industry including the fashion industry. As collaborations in the fashion industry have become a new means of marketing, the interest in such practices has increased among different participants of the sector. Celebrities as one of the most important participants of the fashion industry started to be more interested in working with fashion brands. As Bobb (2019) explained, there has been a wide range of celebrity collaborations with fashion brands such as Rihanna with Puma, Beyonce with Balmain, Cardi B with Fashion Nova, and Kanye West with Adidas. This has been only the beginning of a new implementation field in the fashion industry.

Fashion brands and other industries have taken a step forward in working together. In addition to collaboration, Ahn, Kim, and Forney (2009) suggested that co-marketing alliances that occur between different sectors such as fashion and furniture that result in Armani x Casa or Samsung x Armani collaborations are another way of fashion brand interaction. While this is relatively different from the collaboration in the fashion industry, co-marketing alliances can reflect the direction and scope of how these new practices can entirely change the fashion landscape.

While there are some studies (Gordon, 2017; Shen et. Al., 2014) focused on the brand side of the fashion collaborations, it is also important to evaluate the consumer side of the fashion collaborations. Without consumers, it is not possible to talk about any fashion brand either luxury or streetwear. Therefore, the views of consumers are important in terms of the widespread implementation of these collaborations. Gordon (2017) expressed that each collaboration between brands should include a meaningful cultural exchange element rather than a cash-oriented approach. If the entire collaboration is money or revenue-oriented, then the reaction from the consumers might not be at desired levels. The cultural exchange between the brands might enable the consumers to feel closer to the brand and change their purchasing habits as well as purchasing decision-making processes (Gordon, 2017).

The consumers of the fashion industry have different demands. Shen et al. (2014) stated that consumers perceive luxury brands as fashion brands with a higher status that can be purchased for higher prices. This perception is an important motivation for the consumers' purchase decisions. However, collaborations between luxury fashion brands and streetwear brands are making luxurious brands more accessible to a wider consumer range. Sherman (2019) clarified that with luxurious fashion brands and streetwear brand collaborations on capsule collections, the average consumers have the chance to purchase and use luxury brands. Therefore, an increasing number of consumers can access these luxurious brands without paying that much compared to directly purchasing an item from the brand. Yet, this might lead to changes in consumer perception. In terms of consumer perception, Shen et al. (2014) stated that the need for uniqueness is one of the key drivers of the consumers towards fashion co-branding in the fast fashion. More collaborations in the fashion sector might decrease this sense of uniqueness. Shen et al. (2014) further noted that consumers' willingness to purchase a product reflects the purchase perception. In this sense, fashion brands need to consider the perception of consumers towards these collaborations to better evaluate the collaboration opportunities and to utilize the opportunities that would benefit both the brands and the consumers.

2.5 Brand Perception

Brand perception is one of the key elements to drive consumers to purchase certain products and services. The brand concept is tightly connected with perception itself (Wright, 2006). Therefore, it is important to understand the perception concept at the first stage and then look into the brand perception aspects of this concept. According to Wright (2006), perception is one of the key elements in marketing practices. In these marketing practices, different elements such as color, music, and smell are used. While these elements can be used individually, it is possible to combine color and music or smell and taste simultaneously. Therefore, the perception of an individual can be affected by one factor or by multiple factors. In addition, perception can be influenced by past experiences, culture, and feelings of an individual (Wright, 2006). Attribution theory is one of the most important theories associated with perception and human behavior. Fiske, and Taylor (1991) defined this theory as the use of information by a social perceiver to find an explanation for the things they are experiencing by gathering information and interpreting or judging it.

In terms of marketing and communication, color plays an important role (Wright, 2006). Each marketing campaign should be created to match the positive perception of the target audience. Wright (2006) expressed that Tesco's brand is associated with the red, blue, and white color while Ikea is associated with yellow and blue color as well as McDonalds is associated with red and yellow color. When an individual sees these color combinations, the brain will be stimulated so that the individual will perceive the color combinations to remember the brand that uses these combinations. From this perspective, it is clear that human perception is subject to change with the right stimulus. Colors can be used as a strong communication tool as they can stimulate the senses of people while affecting the perception of individuals. However, color is not the only factor that has an impact on the perception of consumers. For example, the “Just do it” slogan by Nike or the “The pause that refreshes” slogan by Coca-Cola can be given as the most important elements of audio stimuli (Wright, 2006).

One of the current topics in consumer perception has been the cultural differences between individuals (Pantano, 2011). As expressed by Solomon, and Stuart (2005), exposure, selection, and interpretation can be identified as the three aspects of consumer perception. A consumer is first exposed to certain stimuli such as color or sound. Then, the same consumer selects among these stimuli. The last stage of perception is interpretation. Accordingly, there might be regional or authenticity aspects that might influence consumer perception (Pantano, 2011). The information can be collected according to the selection, accidental or intentional behavior, social desirability, hedonistic relevance, and personalism (Jones, and Davis, 1965).

Communication strategies necessitate an understanding of consumers' behavior. It is important to focus on the factors affecting consumer perception. Consumer perception is an indispensable factor in the purchasing decision journey (Lumen, 2021). Since perception can be shaped by learning, past experienced, and expectations, brands must be consistent with their brand image. A previous customer with a bad experience with a brand will probably have a negative perception towards that brand. In this sense, customer retention and customer loyalty could be the two key factors for brands to focus to influence consumer perception (Mack, 2019).

The way consumers perceive the brands and act according to their perception have always attracted the attention of marketers to understand the consumers in a deeper manner. Various researches are conducted to learn brand perception with consumer differences, consumer choices and their cultural background Consumer perception is a multi-dimensional field that requires special attention to individual consumer properties and characteristics to ensure better communication. Accordingly, social psychology theories can be used effectively for strong communication and consumer retention strategies.

From this perspective, it is important to focus on this aspect of brand perception as well. In terms of brand perception, Forouid et al. (2018) explained brand perception under six components which are brand association, perceived quality, brand awareness, brand image, brand fondness, and product country image. In this sense, brand association is about emotional attachment, defining the brand and sense of belonging to the brand. This concept is also related to brand loyalty. Perceived quality is about how consumers understand and evaluate the quality of a brand or products/services of a brand. Brand awareness among these components is about the knowledge level of the consumers regarding the brand. Brand awareness would be high if the brand is known by a large audience. Brand image is defined as the thoughts and images formed by marketing communication activities in the minds of the consumers The marketing communication activities play a key role in creating and reflecting the image of a brand. Therefore, brand image and marketing communication efforts are interrelated. According to Foroudi et al. (2018), brand fondness has three key components which are emotional association, functional association and attitudinal association. All of these three components define brand fondness and how much a consumer prefers a brand. The last component which is the product country image is highly related to Keller's (2006) holistic approach and the fact that some brands have special connections with their home country. All of these brand perception components proposed by Forouid et al. (2018) play a key role in evaluating how consumers perceive a specific brand.

2.6 Generation Z

Generation Z, also known as the "Zoomers", represents the individuals born between 1995 and 2010 (Dimock, 2019). Since this generation is directly born into technology and the internet, the individuals in this generation are often called digital nomads (Dimock, 2019). Compared to previous generations such as Millennials, the internet is at the center of their life. These individuals are subjected to the internet technology and mobile systems as well as social networks from very early ages (Dimock, 2019). Therefore, most of their behaviors and habits are highly influenced by the online world and what happens on social networks. According to a study by McCradle (2021), Generation Z is composed of 2 to 2.5 billion individuals approximately. When this number is considered from the perspective of brands and businesses, 2 to 2.5 billion represents a giant new consumer segment. In a near future, these individuals will become the new active consumers in the market. Each member of this generation is going to be the luxury or retail consumer of the future. Yet, both brands and businesses need to understand the habits and behaviors of this new generation as they significantly differ from the previous generations we have experienced until today.

Mobility plays a key role in the life of generation Z (Dimock, 2019). Also, the influence of social media and social media celebrities is significantly effective (Dimock, 2019). Today, these individuals find influencers more trusting than any giant and corporate brands (Dimock, 2019). From this perspective, it is possible to state that social media and influencers have become vital source for this generation. The individuals in this generation are huge supporters of social campaigns such as the LGBTQ+ and BLM movement (Amed et al., 2019). The involvement in such campaigns shows that this generation has a different approach than the traditional identity definitions. The members of this generation expect to build their own communities rather than trying to fit in an existing community (Amed et al., 2019). The rules of society are no longer valid as the members of this generation are making their own rules and communities (Solomon, and Rabolt, 2009). The sub-cultures are gaining more and more interest all around the world (Solomon, and Rabolt, 2009). All of these different perspectives and attitudes change how Generation Z views the brands and engage in consumption habits. Therefore, it is important to understand the core characteristics of this generation before conducting a study to understand their attitudes towards and perceptions of luxury and street wear brands' collaborations in fashion.

The consumption habits of each generation are different from its predecessor. In the past, fashion and the rules of fashion were determined by the upper class. Also called trickle-down theory, fashion was the main playground of the upper classes and aristocracy (Amed et al., 2019). However, things have significantly changed in today's world. Today, fashion is highly connected with the sub-cultures as well as the lower classes. The trends are set by the lower classes and the decision power of the high classes in trends has disappeared (Solomon, and Rabolt, 2009). In this sense, this shift in the fashion world reflected the consumption habits of Generation Z (Solomon, and Rabolt, 2009). This generation no longer considers brands as the products of the high and elite culture they intend to belong to (Solomon, and Rabolt, 2009). Instead, Generation Z is more focused on making their own trends inspired by and empowered by their own subcultures (Solomon, and Rabolt, 2009).

The passive consumer role is no longer desired. A participatory design approach is one of the main desires of these individuals (IBM Institute for Business Value, 2017). The individuals in this generation care about personalizing their products (IBM Institute for Business Value, 2017). From this perspective, brands need to find new ways to enable the individuals in Generation Z to take part in the product design process in some way. For example, the customizable products of Nike can be one of the methods employed by the brands for more consumer involvement (Nike, 2011). Such involvement can help brands communicate with Generation Z easier. In addition, customization enables Generation Z to be a part of a community to which they feel close. With customization, they can create symbols specific to the sub-culture they belong to (Nike, 2011). Thus, this inclusive aspect can be regarded as a multi-layered structure that has both cultural and social components. The sense of belonging to the community they want is highly popular among Generation Z. The discrimination and the boundaries between different groups are eliminated to bring an environment where anyone can be a member of any community (Nike, 2011).

Besides, Generation Z is keen on making detailed research before a purchasing decision (Francis, and Hoefel, 2018). This research process involves searching about the product properties, price comparisons as well as brand approach and brand image. Especially price comparisons play a key role in the decision-making process of these individuals (Francis, and Hoefel, 2018). The individuals in Generation Z actively use social media channels and their favorite social media celebrities to make their product research (Francis, and Hoefel, 2018).

Another key property of Generation Z is their attitudes towards the social responsibility aspects of the brands. Today, brands need to engage with social and environmental problems. Brands need to raise their voice and have their unique voice to defend a cause. The individuals of Generation Z want to take part in these movements. Brands need to reflect their opinions about social issues. In addition, Generation Z expects the brands to either organize or take part in the campaigns organized for such social issues. For example, #metoo, #blacklivesmatter, and #timesup campaigns have been followed by brands (Amed et al., 2019). Participation in these campaigns by the brands plays a key role in the purchasing decision-making process of Generation Z. The members of this generation prefer the brands and businesses that take a stand for social and environmental issues rather than just trying to sell their product (Solomon, and Rabolt, 2009).

All of these consumption habits indicate an entirely new marketing landscape for the brands and especially for the luxury brands. Today, luxury brands including fine dining, luxury clothing, and accessories sectors need to re-structure themselves to meet the different needs and expectations of Generation Z. Luxury and consumption of luxury are changing for this generation. Currently, affordable fashion is becoming increasingly widespread all around the world (Solomon, and Rabolt, 2009). This could be regarded as a major threat for the brands. If brands fail to adapt to the changing consumption habits and behaviors of this generation, then the future might bring more risks.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, Generation Z has different characteristics and perceptions when it comes to luxury brands and fast-fashion brands. 95% of Generation Z interacts with luxury brands by using social media channels (Muret, 2019). Such interaction can be a breakthrough in terms of luxury brand interaction for this generation. In an environment where an increasing number of luxury fashion collaborations are visible, the perception of this generation plays a vital role as they will become the key consumer segment in the near future.

When it comes to luxury fashion brand collaborations, Adidas and Hey Tea collaboration can be given as an important example in the Chinese market (CCI Team, 2020). China is one of the most important markets in the luxury brand consumption sector. Chinese consumers cannot give up on luxury consumption (Muret, 2019). It is estimated that the luxury brand consumption among Chinese consumers will increase from 35% to 40% in 2025 (Muret, 2019). These numbers express a market with high revenue potentials for the fashion brands and the apparel sector in a generation.

In general, most of the studies on Generation Z and luxury fashion collaborations focus on the Chinese market (Muret, 2019). The most important reason for such focus is the potential of the Chinese market in terms of consumers. A study on Chinese Generation Z consumers shows that 67% of the Generation Z consumers prefer the products as a result of collaboration between fast-fashion brands and luxury brands (Muret, 2019). This number is highly promising for the fashion brands and fashion industry. These brands can use luxury brand collaborations to address the Generation Z members.

Another study on the Chinese Generation Z consumer revealed that these consumers want mega collaborations among luxury brands and fast-fashion brands as they want to have products that are new, innovative, and stand out in the crowd (CCI Team, 2020). These studies show that Generation Z in China is open to luxury brand collaborations in general. One of the reasons for such collaborations to be attractive among Generation Z consumers is that such collaborations are perceived as cool by these individuals (Muret, 2019). This generation is often interested in how they perceive the brand rather than how other individuals perceive the brand. Besides, a sense of coolness is considered an important value among the members of this generation (Hanssen,2018). Furthermore, the collaborations between Nike and other brands are also favored by Generation Z members.

2.7 Previous Research and Research Gap

Consumers' brand perception plays a key role for brands. As the brans understand how consumers feel about a certain product, they can make important decisions such as continuing to manufacture the product, discontinue manufacturing it, or introducing a new product line to meet the changing demands.

Fast-fashion brands gained importance across marketing and communications research as the demand for such brands increased over time. Brands such as H&M attract the attention researchers in the fields of marketing and communication (Dach, and Allmendiger, 2014; Bonilla et al., 2019; Loureiro, Serra, and Guerreiro, 2019; Shen et al., 2014; Bin, Choi, and Chow, 2017). When the literature is reviewed on regarding the perception of Generation Z for luxury brands collaborations of the fast-fashion brand H&M, the majority of the research related to H&M focuses on the Chinese market or the sustainability acts of the brand at the international level (Dach, and Allmendiger, 2014; Bonilla et al., 2019; Loureiro, Serra, and Guerreiro, 2019; Shen et al., 2014; Bin, Choi, and Chow, 2017).

Dach, and Allmendiger (2014) focused on how the sustainability efforts of the H&M brand contributed to consumer perception and consumer awareness. The authors investigated the corporate website of H&M and applied a semi-structured survey to the consumer to measure their perspectives on brand awareness. However, this study focused on general consumers rather than a specific group such as Generation Z. Also, the main idea of the study was to reveal the perceptions of individuals in terms of the sustainability of H&M (Dach, and Allmendinger, 2014). They found that corporate images affect people's perceptions of web-based corporate sustainability communications.

Bonilla et al. (2019) examined how Instagram influencers interact with the fashion sector via brands such as H&M. This study mainly focused on understanding the relationship between H&M as a fast-fashion company and Instagram users. Since Generation Z is considered as the major social media and especially Instagram users, understanding the relationship between these individuals and H&M brands is important. The authors investigated the level of interaction and engagement between the Instagram users and the H&M official account. This study's main focus was on the content of the message, the communication strategy of the company while the product category presented in the post (Bonilla, Arriaga, and Andreu, 2019). The study found that content of the message influenced the purchasing decision. The message that was more intimate for the consumers drove more sales.

Also, there were studies related to social media and fashion brands in the related literature (Loureiro, Serra, and Guerreiro, 2019; Shen et al., 2014; Bin, Choi, and Chow, 2017). However, these studies often focus on luxury brands alone without considering the fast-fashion brands or the collaborations with the fast-fashion brands. Loureiro, Serra, and Guerreiro (2019) investigated the social media engagements of fashion brands. This study compares how fashion brands communicate on social media. For this purpose, the authors focused on 6 luxury fashion brands to determine the online communication strategies of these brands.

On the other hand, Shen et al. (2014) focused on brand loyalty in designer luxury and the collaborations between luxury brands and fast-fashion brands. The co-branding efforts of H&M with other luxury brands have been investigated by the authors in terms of brand loyalty. The authors stated that the best outcome for the brands was mergers rather than co-branding efforts. This means that brands need to merge with other brands rather than working together with brands to create a single brand from two companies. However, the results declared by the authors also indicated that the collaboration between the luxury brands and fast-fashion brands such as H&M can significantly benefit both parties (Bin, Choi, and Chow, 2017).

Mrad et al. (2018) investigated the designer brand and fast-fashion brand collaborations for H&M among the UK consumers. The fast-fashion retailer H&M has been involved in various collaborations with different luxury brands. The authors investigated how the consumers reacted to such collaborations between the luxury brands and H&M as a fast-fashion brand. The participants were selected from the UK. The results of the study revealed that the brand awareness for H&M was increased with these collaboration projects including word-of-mouth marketing and self-expressiveness of consumers on different platforms (Mrad, Farah, and Haddad, 2018). Although this study focused on H&M and luxury brand collaborations, the age group of the participants is not clearly defined. It is not possible to understand the perceptions of Generation Z for such collaborations. For this reason, a more specific target group is required for research. Also, the study has been conducted in the UK so that the results represent the consumption habits and perceptions of the individuals in that country.

Shen et al. (2014) investigated the impacts of co-branding in the fast-fashion industry with H&M. Co-branding is one of the most common practices employed by H&M over the last decade. This collaboration between the luxury brands and the fast-fashion brands is often referred to as “fast-fashion co-branding”. The authors considered the consumer perspectives for H&M in terms of product uniqueness and product purchases when it comes to fast-fashion co-branding. A survey was designed and applied by the authors to participants in Hong Kong. The results obtained by the authors indicated the consumers' desire for uniqueness when it comes to fashion brands (Shen et al., 2014).

Ginman et al. (2010) explored the collaboration of H&M with the luxury designers in the early days of this collaboration which include Karl Lagerfeld project. The authors found that the H&M collaboration with the luxury designers had a positive impact on H&M as the brand can get attention from new consumers. The authors concluded that collaborations with suitable partners can significantly contribute to both parties while the consumers continue to have confidence in the luxury brands even though they engage in collaboration with a fast-fashion brand (Ginman, Lundell, and Turek, 2010).

Another study by Alexandra, and Cerchia (2018) investigated the brand equity side of H&M by considering the luxury brand collaborations. For this purpose, the authors applied a literature review to understand the effects of brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand association on consumer behavior. This study only investigated the existing literature without measuring the perception of the real consumers.

In another study that focused on consumer perception towards fast-fashion brands, Jiang (2020) investigated the perception of Chinese and British consumers towards fast-fashion brands such as H&M and Zara. The author conducted a comparative study to better understand and reveal the consumption and perception differences between two different countries. A survey was conducted on Chinese participants and British participants to measure the consumption attitude and consumption behaviors of these participants towards H&M and Zara (Alexandra, and Cherchia, 2018). The authors found that Chinese participants had more positive consumption attitudes and behaviors than British consumers which lead to more purchasing among Chinese consumers.

Kim, and Ko (2012) conducted research on Korean consumers to understand the impact of six different collaborations in two different sectors which included H&M and Sonia Rykiel as well as Uniqlo and Jill Sander, Levi's and Jean Paul Gaultier, LG and Prada, Samsung and Armani, and LG and Levi's to understand the effects of the collaboration type and brand sensitivity. For this purpose, the authors identified four factors to evaluate which were emotional value, perceived quality, symbolic value, and brand association. The results revealed that the collaboration type and the brand sensitivity affected strategic marketing elements on consumer responses (Kim, and Ko, 2012).

When the studies in the Turkish literature are analyzed, it is observed that the consumer perception studies are generally limited to other generations such as Generation Y. Furthermore, the studies related to Generation Z and consumption perceptions mainly focus on the consumption of electronic goods such as smartphones (Arıkan, and Kılıç, 2017; Durmaz, and Dağ, 2018).

A study conducted by Arıkan, and Kılıç (2017) investigates the shopping style of the Generation Y consumers based on gender. The authors focused on apparel shopping behaviors and perceptions of Generation Y consumers. A survey was conducted for participants between 18 and 36 years old. The consumption behaviors and perceptions of Generation Y were divided into 7 factors of quality awareness, brand awareness, search for innovation, hedonistic consumption, confusion due to a wide range of options, brand loyalty, and fashion awareness.

In terms of brand loyalty, a study by Durmaz, and Dağ (2018) investigated the impacts of brand uniqueness on brand loyalty for smartphone brands in Turkey. The authors applied a survey to participants and found that continuity, originality, and uniqueness sub-dimensions of the brand contributed to brand loyalty. The studies in the Turkish literature lack any examples including Generation Z in the fashion and apparel sector. The main focus for these studies has been smartphone consumption or Generation Y.

When these studies in the global and Turkish literature are considered, there are only a few studies that focus on the brand collaborations between luxury brands and fast-fashion brands such as H&M. Furthermore, the literature review revealed that these few studies that focus on the fast-fashion co-branding practices are conducted in either China or Hong Kong. On the other hand, the literature review regarding the Turkish studies shows that there is a research gap in terms of fashion brand studies regarding Generation Z as well as fast-fashion co-branding practices. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the perceptions of Generation Z regarding the co-branding efforts of the fast-fashion brand of H&M and various luxury fashion brands around the world. Such investigation is expected to reveal the perceptions of the Turkish Generation Z consumers which will play a key role in the future in terms of consumption.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The consumers often buy new products based on how they look, what color they are, what is the design and whether the product is popular among other users. Furthermore, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association, brand fondness, brand image, and product country image also play a key role in the consumers' brand perceptions (Foroudi et al., 2018). All of these factors must be considered to better understand how the consumers perceive a brand. In addition to that, the brand perceptions might differ according to various generations. For example, the products and services preferred by the baby boomers would significantly differ from the products and services preferred by the Generation Z. The main reason for such difference in product or service preference is due to different characteristics and worldviews of these different generations. As Dimock (2019) expressed, Generation Z is called the Zoomers and this generation spends a lot of time on the internet and digital environments. As the time spend on the internet and digital environments increase, the consumption behavior of this new generation might be different than the previous generations. From this perspective, this study concentrates on the brand perception of the members of Generation Z who will become the main consumer base in the near future.

Brand perception is one of the key components in marketing field as well as the fashion industry. Brand perception is related to how consumers or potential consumers understand or view of that brand in various terms such as quality, price, reputation (Foroudi et al., 2018). One of the main drivers for consumers to purchase a product is based on the brand perception they have towards that product. The perception of a brand by consumers and potential consumers can impact the brand loyalty as well as the purchasing intention (Foroudi et al., 2018). If a consumer perceives a brand as a high-quality brand, the purchase intention might increase (Foroudi et al., 2018). On the other hand, the lack of uniqueness might have a negative impact on the purchasing intention (Foroudi et al., 2018). In these terms, brand perception is linked with numerous factors. Therefore, it is important to consider the factors and elements influencing this brand perception. H&M is one of the largest ready-made fashion brands around the world. In the last decade, H&M brand collaborated with various luxury fashion brands and launched special clothing products and accessories with these brands.

The theoretical framework of this study is built on the study presented by Foroudi et al. (2018) focusing on the perceptional components of brand equity by considering the path to brand loyalty and brand purchase intention. The reference study investigated the Latin American consumers in terms of brand perception. Furthermore, the main focus on this study is the fashion industry. There are only few studies that focus on consumer perception in the fashion industry as the fashion industry sector is a relatively undiscovered area. By focusing on this industry, it is possible to provide insights to fashion marketers and brands regarding the views and opinions of their customers.

The study suggest that the brand perception management is strongly linked with various brand equity perceptional elements. This means that the perceptions of the consumers towards a brand is one of the key indicators for brands to consider in terms of managing their brands. When the brand perception is considered, it is necessary to determine and interpret the customer brand perception constructs. In general, the definition of the brand perception can be provided as the customers' associations and beliefs about a brand (Foroudi et al., 2018). These brand associations and beliefs might be positive or negative. In either case, brand perception has a strong emotional side as it is built on beliefs and conceptions about a brand, its products or services.

From this perspective, it can be seen that the brand perception has various factors and components. However, it is possible to classify these factors and components under 6 main titles which are brand association, perceived quality, brand awareness, brand image, brand fondness and product country image (Foroudi et al., 2018). These 6 factors play a key role for the consumers to create a brand perception. The current study attempts to investigate at what extend do these 6 factors of brand perception are visible for the A income segment generation Z consumers in Turkey in terms of H&M and luxury brand collaborations. Since high quality brand perception is linked with fondness, association and loyalty, it is important to provide an in-depth analysis and investigation for these components (Foroudi et al., 2018). Accordingly, the current study is based on a preliminary questionnaire and an in-depth interview model to further investigate the components that impact the consumer perception.

According to Maxwell (2008), a research design should consider five key elements which are the goal, conceptual framework, research question, methods, and validity.

All these five elements are considered in this study to design qualitative research. The research question focused on understanding the perceptions of Generation Z towards the luxury brand collaborations of H&M. First, a survey is designed to select the participants of the research among the followers of a fashion blogger? who shares the latest trends in fashion to ensure the participants belong to Generation Z and are aware of the collaboration. The survey and interview questions used in this study are provided in Appendix A and Appendix B. In most cases, a pilot study is beneficial before conducting the real study. The main benefits that come with the pilot study can be summarized as follows. As expressed by Woken (2013), a pilot study enables testing the created hypothesis for refining these hypotheses to better address the objectives of the study. Further, a pilot study will provide new insights to the researcher that were not predicted at the beginning of the study. Thus, the researcher can address these problems and include the unforeseen circumstances to the main study. Malmqvist et al. (2019) suggested that certain adaptations can be made based on the results of the pilot study which would further improve the quality of the study. When these benefits of conducting a pilot study are considered, it was necessary to apply the research questions to a small group, who provided valuable information about how to modify or the questions in the designed research.

3.1 Sample Selection

The participants of this study are selected with criterion sampling, which is among the purposeful sampling methods for qualitative data collection along with data analysis processes (Palinkas et al., 2015). Since this study is designed as a qualitative study, it is appropriate to use one of the purposeful sampling methods. The criterion sampling method involves selecting the individuals that meet certain criteria determined before the sample selection process (Palinkas et al., 2015). For this study, the criteria are selected as to be a member of Generation Z who shops from H&M brand's collaborations with other luxury designers and brands at least once. The gender specification is not the main focus of this study so that it is not taken into account while selecting the participants in this study. For the pilot study, 30 participants were selected for the in-depth interviews. The reason for this selection is based on a study by Palinkas et al. (2015) suggesting that criterion sampling which is about choosing participants to meet the purpose of the study will provide more accurate results about predicting and validating the hypothesis.

The conceptual framework is designed on H&M as the fast-fashion brand and its collaborations with luxury brands and designers. For this purpose, participants from Generation Z and A socioeconomic status (SES) are selected. The main reason to choose the A SES level is that this group tends to be more interested in fashion and buying fashion products. The main idea behind this study is to better understand the views of generation Z towards fast fashion and luxury fashion brands to help brands to position themselves better to address to the needs of this new consumer segment. The goal of this study is to find out whether such collaborations are favorable for Generation Z members as well as whether such collaborations contribute to brand value. For this reason, the conducted survey and in-depth interviews consisted of a series of questions to reveal the demographics, consumer preferences, and behaviors of the participants and their general opinions about H&M and its collaborations. Therefore, in-depth interviews are included with the participants to determine the main themes and categories that participants would like to highlight. In this study, the collections prepared for the collaborations of H&M with Balmain in 2015, Kenzo in 2016, Erdem in 2017, Moschino in 2018 and Giambattista Valli in 2019 were examined. These collections, based on the recognition of the Balmain cooperation in Turkey, include all the collaborations made until the pandemic period, with increasing consumer interest and PR activities since 2015. Furthermore, these collaborations are the most admired and followed collections by Generation Z in Turkey (detailed interviews have proven this). Also, these collaborations were chosen in order to examine the brand perception of the Z generation, which is at the A-class socio-economic level in Turkey, as well as the cooperation understanding among different segments.

Table 1. Demographic information of the participants

Participant	Age	Education Level	City
Participant 1	26	University	İstanbul
Participant 2	21	University Stud.	İzmir
Participant 3	20	University Stud.	Ankara
Participant 4	26	University	İzmir
Participant 5	23	University Stud.	İstanbul
Participant 6	23	University Stud.	İzmir
Participant 7	20	University Stud.	Ankara
Participant 8	21	University Stud.	İzmir
Participant 9	26	University	İzmir
Participant 10	21	University Stud.	Ankara
Participant 11	18	University Stud.	İzmir
Participant 12	22	University Stud.	Ankara
Participant 13	22	University Stud.	İstanbul
Participant 14	22	University Stud.	İzmir
Participant 15	26	University	İzmir
Participant 16	23	University	İzmir
Participant 17	18	University Stud.	İzmir
Participant 18	18	University Stud.	İstanbul
Participant 19	26	University	İstanbul
Participant 20	19	University Stud.	İstanbul
Participant 21	18	University Stud.	İzmir
Participant 22	26	University	Ankara
Participant 23	19	University Stud.	İzmir
Participant 24	24	University Stud.	Ankara
Participant 25	23	University Stud.	İstanbul
Participant 26	21	University Stud.	İzmir
Participant 27	26	University	İzmir
Participant 28	22	University Stud.	İzmir
Participant 29	19	University Stud.	Ankara
Participant 30	19	University Stud.	İstanbul
Participant 31	23	University Stud.	İzmir
Participant 32	22	University Stud.	İzmir
Participant 33	26	Master's Degree	Ankara

After completing the pilot study, the questions in the designed survey were reviewed. The review showed that the questions are well-designed to measure the key objectives of this study. Thus, the initials questions in the survey were not modified or changed. The designed survey was applied as it is to the main study group. This study aims to investigate the perception of younger generation consumers especially gen Z consumers to purchase and follow fashion products and fashion brands. For this purpose, semi-structured interviews are conducted on a group of participants. In all studies, sample size and sample size selection play a critical role. As expressed by Whitehead at al. (2016), the sample size must be justified with both for the main participant group and the pilot participant group. Accordingly, choosing a high sample size with recurring answers can lead to statistically insignificant results which would then cause inconclusive results. Therefore, the pilot participant group of this study was limited to 4 participants and the main participant group of this study was limited to 33 participants. The participants selected for the interviews were from İstanbul, Ankara, and İzmir provinces of Turkey. The participants are between 18-26 years old with the average age of 22.05 years old. While 5 of the participants gad undergraduate degree, the remaining 12 are high school graduates. All of the participants reported A level family income.

Demographic information of 33 participants who participated in the in-depth interviews is given in the Table 1. This table, which consists of age, education level, city of residence and household income level, allows us to better analyze the answers of the participants to the open ended questions.

3.2 Data Collection

The questions of the survey are designed to determine the participant group. The questions which are provided in Appendix A aim to find the right group to conduct the in-depth interviews. Conducing an in-depth interview on an unrelated group will prevent obtaining meaningful results. As suggested by Palinkas et al. (2015

), the participant group for this study should be selected by criterion sampling to obtain more accurate results. For this purpose, a pilot study is conducted which determined the criterion that the participants must meet to participate to that study. During this pilot survey, consent is collected from the participants. The in-depth interview questions are included to have detailed input about the perceptions of the participants regarding H&M and luxury brand collaborations. Boyce, and Neale (2006) suggested that in-depth studies adopt open-ended questions which provide clearer answers to discover the research topic in more detail. This study focuses on discovering the ideas of the generation Z regarding the collaboration projects between fast fashion brands and luxury brands. Therefore, it is important to get as much as information and data possible to uncover the underlying reasons and ideas. Furthermore, the study by Foroudi et al. (2018) adopted a similar study design to investigate the brand perception. The open-ended questions in an in-depth interview can be designed in a way to explore all the components and factors that are desired to be investigated. In this study, brand association, perceived quality, brand awareness, brand fondness, brand image, and product country image related to brand perception are investigated. The experiences and expectations of the participants towards these collaboration projects are investigated. The interviews lasted about 45-60 minutes. Such interviews are important to uncover the real thoughts and views of individuals regarding a certain topic. In addition, the unexpected answers could also be reviewed in the interview process which could further contribute to the study as it is expected to understand and explain the investigated topic in more detail. Accordingly, open-ended questions would create an environment for the participants to freely express their real views and ideas (Boyce, and Neale, 2006). Therefore, the in-depth interview questions of this study are designed with open-ended questions. Keeping it in mind, the in-depth interview is designed to cater to various sets of questions to reveal the underlying perspective. The most important thing to be considered here is the main characteristics of generation Z which are outlined in detail above. Gender also plays a key role when it comes to perceptions about brands and fashion. This study includes both male and female participants. When it comes to gender, Generation Z reimagines gender without a definite set of rules and boundaries (Kenney, 2020). The perception of gender is more fluid in this gender. Since Generation Z has more fluid gender norms, this study did not consider any gender differences or set any gender criteria to select participants.

The interviews were transcribed and the participants' answers were grouped under certain categories and themes. These themes depend on the conceptualization of brand perception suggested in the study of Foroudi et al. (2018) to reflect the perceptions of members of Generation Z towards the collaboration of H&M as a fast-fashion brand with luxury brands and designers. Finally, the obtained results are compared with the annual reports of H&M that are published to assess the overall financial and social impacts of the company in that year. For this purpose, the 2020 annual report by H&M and the 2021 first-quarter report by H&M are used to reveal more recent data about the company.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In today's world, consumers increasingly fast fashion brands over luxury brands. As suggested by Cachon, and Swinney (2011), the fast fashion trend among the fashion companies such as Zara and H&M is increasing more than ever. However, the behavior to such shift to fast fashion brands might have various underlying reasons. First and most importantly, the brand perceptions of the consumers might be changed. In addition to that, the number of collaboration projects between fast fashion brands and luxury brands are increasing more than ever. Luxury brands are open towards new projects that involve fast fashion brands with high coverage across a wide range of consumer base. As these brands opt for following the fast fashion practices which involve releasing collections almost throughout the year, the consumers are feeling the necessity to buy new products. The findings of this study consist of content analysis conducted from the interviewed participants and by considering the brand perception framework presented by Foroudi et al. (2018). Accordingly, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association, brand fondness, brand image, and product country image which were the six key factors proposed by Foroudi et al. (2018) were adopted for evaluating the results obtained from this study. The detailed comparison of the results obtained from the survey applied in this study and Foroudi et al. (2018)'s framework is presented in the discussion and conclusion sections. The findings section only provides the findings of this study based on the applied research method.

In most cases, Generation Z sees the collaboration between fast-fashion brands and luxury brands as a way to access relatively expensive luxury brands. Yet, the second-hand consumption of luxury brands is not favored as much as these collaborations. While there is still demand luxury second-hand consumption to brands such as Chanel and Balenciaga (Muret, 2019), the general tendency for Generation Z is to purchase luxury brand collaboration products with fast-fashion brands. This perceptive shows that luxury fashion collaborations will continue to play a vital role in the fashion industry. As an increasing number of brands engage in such collaborations, their chances to increase their revenues and brand awareness might increase. These brands need to follow methods to handle the unique needs and consumption characteristics of Generation Z. Therefore, both the luxury brands and the fast-fashion brands need to have an in-depth understanding of the fashion and fashion brand perspectives of Generation Z.

The participants of this study stated that they are looking for environmental sustainability, innovation, and dynamic design while shopping H&M brand. Another finding of this study is that the participants defined H&M brand as young, basic, accessible, sustainable, and colorful. Besides, the participants expressed that such collaborations allow luxury brands more accessible to the different segments of the consumer mass.

All three participants emphasized that accessibility of the brand also enabled them to follow the brand without putting in too much effort.

This study presents the findings and the views of the participants to better explain these findings. All of the participants are coded as participant 1, participant 2 … participant 33. The direct quotations from the participants will provide in-depth information about their perceptions towards H&M and luxury brand collaboration. Almost all of the participants (n=33) expressed that they are following fashion trends. This might be mainly related to the age group of the participants. For example, participant 6 expressed that:

> *"I am frequently checking the online shopping platforms of ready-wear brands and of course, I follow them on social media via influencers. In addition to that, I specifically visit the Instagram pages of the brands to check the products."*

Participant 17 expressed that:

> *"I am following fashion as much as I can. But I frequently check what is on the market in new seasons and during discount periods."*

Based on these views and the similar views of the other participants, it can be said that the participants are following the fashion brands both on regular basis and for special events such as new seasons releases and discount periods.

The answers provided by the participants were evaluated based on Forouid et al. (2018)'s framework for brand perception. The answers provided by the participants of this study provide important insights for brand perception and purchasing intention.

Findings for each component of brand perception are presented under a separate title. Presenting the results of each component under a separate title is believed to provide better insight for the six key components which are brand association, perceived quality, brand awareness, brand image, brand fondness and product country image.

4.1 Brand Awareness

Brand awareness is a key component of brand perception. The level of knowledge about a brand and getting notified about the news of a brand might have a significant impact on purchasing intention as well as other components. Therefore, this study attempts to measure the brand awareness component of the brand perception. Accordingly, the brand awareness aspect of H&M and the luxury brands in the collaboration projects were investigated with a series of questions regarding how well the consumers know H&M and other luxury brands. When the participants were asked which luxury brands they know among these collaborations, 94% stated that they knew Kenzo, 88.23% stated that they knew Moschino, 76.5% stated that they knew Balmain, 70.5% stated that they knew Erdem, and 35.3% stated that they knew Giambattista Valli.

Also, when the participants were asked to state why they follow these brands, all participants expressed that they follow fashion and brands via digital environments. Most of the participants follow fashion brands on Instagram. For example, participant 21 stated that:

> *"Absolutely on digital media. I follow both social media platforms and professional fashion platforms. At the same time, I am really active on Instagram. I have subscribed to e-newsletters of fashion brands. I frequently get emails from these brands."*

In addition to that, participant 32 stated that:

> *"I rarely read fashion magazines. I might have slight traditional media habit but I mostly follow digital media. I continue to follow people on Instagram especially influencers."*

As these answer show, the participants prefer digital media platforms and especially Instagram. Today, Instagram is an important online platform where individuals share their daily lives as well as exciting moments. Furthermore, individuals can find new ideas, inspirations and discover new brands from this social media platform. The sponsored posts and the discover section of this social media network enable Instagram users to see similar contents to the contents they share and follow. From this perspective, it is important to consider the influence and scope of Instagram on the fashion choices of individuals. Brands working with influencers might have a better chance to reach to generation Z as the individuals from this generation are getting information online. The information collected from the printed media is rare for this generation. Instagram is playing an increasing role in our everyday lives. Therefore, it is possible to state that this social media platform penetrates to daily aspects of our lives and shaping our fashion decisions.

When participants were asked where they follow these luxury brands, all of the participants stated that they follow the luxury brands on Instagram. For example, participant 4 stated that:

> *"I don't think I saw them in any other place than Instagram."*

Participant 11 expressed that:

> *"At this point, social media is the key determinant for me. I can say that I generally know about these processes over Instagram and influencers."*

Participant 23 said that:

> *"I can say I directly get to know them from influencers. I don't need to research anything before about the details. Influencers already promote the collection to me."*

When these answers are considered, it can be seen that Instagram and influencers play a key role to promote the luxury brand collaborations. The posts on this social media platform are an important element to expand the coverage of the luxury brand collaborations.

All of the participants stated that they have shopped from H&M and they are planning to continue shopping from this brand. When the participants were asked whether they know about the luxury brand collaborations of H&M, all of the participants stated that they know about these collaborations. However, the extends of their knowledge varies. To give an example, participant 6 stated that

> *"Sometimes these collaborations are popular and sometimes we don't hear about them. I also get to know the very popular collections. I clearly remember Balmain, Kenzo and Erdem."*

On the other hand, participant 8 stated that:

> *"I try to follow every year but I can think of Balmain, Kenzo and Erdem at once."*

Participant 15 stated that:

> *"Although I am not a big fan, I check out which brands they have collaborated that year. The first brands I can remember are Balmain, Kenzo, Alexander Wang and Versace."*

The participants were asked to list three affordable fashion brands they can think of. The main idea for these questions is to understand which brands do participants perceive as affordable. The affordability might depend on the household income and individual income. Therefore, it is possible to see that while one individual defines certain brand as affordable, others might find that brand expensive. The majority (70.5%) of the participants listed H&M as an affordable fashion brand. On the other hand, 58.8% of the participants listed Zara, 47% of the participants listed Pull&Bear, 17.6% of the participants listed Bershka and Stradivarius as affordable fashion brands. Some of the other brands listed as affordable by the participants were Mango, Trendyol Group, Koton, LCWaikiki, Twist, İpekyol, and Mavi. When these answers and the family income level of the individuals are considered, the definition for an affordable brand is similar among these participants. High-income participants expressed more expensive brands, while lower-income expressed stated affordable brands. Thus, the results obtained from this study will be more consistent as the participants have a similar perception about what is an affordable brand and what is a luxury brand. When the participants were asked to list the fashion brands that collaborate with luxury fashion brands, 94.11% listed H&M. Only Participant 4 didn't list H&M among these brands. This also shows that the participants follow H&M and know this brand. In addition to H&M, participant 14 added Lacoste, Trendyol and Adidas; Participant 9 added Adidas; Participant-6 added Mavi and LCWaikiki and Participant 4 added ZARA.

In addition to the mode of coverage, the participants were asked to evaluate the communication between them and the fashion brands that collaborate with luxury brands. The answers for these questions were different. While some of the participants believed that the communication is good as they get to know the brand and the collection, others believe that the brands only focus on social media without considering the other groups. For example, participant 9 stated that:

> *"I think it is very successful. The brand can reach more higher achievements than they want with these communication campaigns. Thus, I believe they get very efficient results from this communication."*

Participant 15 said that:

> *"I think the communication is at a level it should be. I think they can make larger and more serious campaigns. As a result, these are huge campaigns and these efforts are insufficient at certain points in terms of showing off."*

Participant 27 said that

> *"There is the fact that the communication efforts are conducted directly over the influencers. Therefore, I think it is incomplete when we look at it from a broader perspective. I think they need to do a more effective communication effort to go beyond the individuals influenced by influencers."*

When the participants were asked whether they followed these luxury brands on social media, the majority of the participants stated that they are somehow subjected to these luxury brands whether in their Instagram page or as sponsored posts.

4.2 Perceived Quality

Perceived quality is another important aspect of brand awareness. Perceived quality might be an important driver for the consumer purchasing behavior (Chen-Yu, Cho, and Kincade, 2016). Therefore, the questions were designed to measure the perceived quality of H&M. When participants were asked to define H&M, different qualities of the brand were emphasized. The reason for different qualities might be due to the inclusivity and diverseness of the brand. Each individual might have seen a different aspect of the brand and listed this aspect to define H&M. The most highlighted qualities of the brand were being basic, comfortable and affordable. Participant 17 stated that:

> *"I think the products it produces are simple and basic. They are not that vivid but they are attractive and functional. This is the image I perceive in general. This is what I see about this brand when I close my eyes."*

Further, participant 26 stated that:

> *"I directly think of a brand with basic and comfortable clothes. It generally has bigger stores in shopping malls than its competitors. I knew there are some policies about recycling but I am not sure."*

Participant 28 stated that:

> *"I directly think about the discount season. Since it is on discount frequently, H&M started to lose its quality perception in my mind. The stores are generally complicated and tight. Therefore, you get lost inside throughout your shopping experience."*

Participant 16 stated that:

> *"If I talk about plus-size perception again, I think it is something good to have such a brand from Scandinavia which has skinny people. As a plus-size individual and as someone who fought with it for years, I like the feeling that H&M makes me happy with my body. I can say that I love the brand more in recent years compared to previous years."*

The perceived quality of the participants for H&M is similar to the brand's own white paper. H&M (2020) defines the brand quality in its own white paper as basic, environmentally conscious, inclusive, comfortable and simple. Since the participants' perception of brand quality overlaps with the brand value claimed by the brand itself, it is possible to say that brand quality is compatible with how consumers perceive the quality of this brand.

Participants were asked to evaluate why the collaboration collections are this popular and the collections run out of stock on the first day. The most common answer from the participants was that the collections are limited and there are only few products in the collection. Also, the participants stated that the prices play a key role as they can buy a collaboration product from a luxury brand which they cannot buy in their daily lives. For example, participant 11 stated that:

> *"I think the main reason is buying a luxury brand with an affordable price. Therefore, if I can buy a really good product from a very low price and if the product is limited, why wouldn't I go stand there in the queue?"*

Participant 14 said that:

> *"I did something similar for AdidasxYeezy collaboration so I can clearly understand these people. I think it is the pure desire to get the limited product. I don't think it is about prices because AdidasxYeezy collection had higher prices than a regular Adidas and I showed the same reaction. I think it is all about the instinct to have that product."*

Participant 32 said that:

> *"If you market a luxury-looking product and affordable product to people as limited edition, this is normal. But I think black market is no different than fraud. I think such things must be prevented by laws."*

When these answers were considered, the main reason for the popularity of these collaboration collections are unclear. While some of the participants claim that it is due to achieving luxury brands with affordable prices, others suggest that it is pure instinct. The findings of this study were evaluated based on Forouid et al. (2018)'s framework for brand perception. The answers provided by the participants of this study provide important insights for brand perception and purchasing intention. The details of these two elements will be explained in the discussion section

4.3 Brand Association

Brand association is a wide concept constitutes and emerges various perceptions about a brand. According to Foroudi et al. (2018) a powerful link exists between brand awareness and brand association. Since brand association consists of one's all thoughts and ideas about a brand, it would not be wrong to argue that brand association is based on brand knowledge and brand image (Foroudi et al., 2018).

The participants of this study also suggested the symbolic value of the collaboration exists between H&M and luxury fashion brands. One of the participants stated that H&M gained prestige and value by collaborating with luxury brands. The increased prestige aspect was also expressed by another participant of this study. Another participant suggested that H&M changes its target segment to middle and upper-middle-class by collaborating with luxury fashion brands. These statements show that such luxury fashion brand collaborations add value to the luxury fashion brand and increase its symbolic value among the consumers. The participants further provided their perception about these luxury brands. For example, participant 28 stated that:

> *"Balmain would be snob and glamourous, Kenzo would be sporty and colourful, Moschino would be fun and cool and Giambattista Valli would be assertive with exaggeration."*

Participant 27 stated that

> *"Erdem would be elegant and noble, Moschino would be energic and party-girl and Kenzo would be dynamic and colorful."*

Participant 21 stated that

> *"Kenzo would be young and dynamic, Moschino would be childish but rebel, Balmain would be cool and mature, Erdem would be noble and Giambattista Valli would be glamorous and flamboyant."*

When these views of the participants regarding the luxury fashion brands are considered, it can be seen that the perception about these brands are formed as a result of the sensory inputs. Sensory inputs are provided to the consumers through the colors and lines of these brands. Thus, consumer create an identity related to the brand which defines its structural properties and its function. Most of the participants used similar words to define each of these brands. Balmain was mainly defined as snob and serious, Moschino as energic and fun, Erdem as elegant and noble, Giambattista Valli as glamorous and Kenzo as sport and colorful. Accordingly, it is possible to express that these brands create an image that is perceived similarly by the participants.

4.4 Brand Fondness

In general, brand fondness has three major components which are emotional association, functional association and attitudinal association (Foroudi et al., 2018). In today's world, the emotional association for brand fondness is driven by the social media platforms and social media influencers (Ge, and Gretzel, 2018). As these influencers use and promote these brands and the products, their followers who are the key consumer audience become more fond of the brand (Foroudi et al., 2018). Since the participants can easily shop from H&M, an accessible ready-made clothing brand, they are also sympathetic and interested in the luxury brand collaborations developed by this brand. In addition, the popularity of luxury designer collaborations on social media and the mediums consumed by Generation Z encourages consumers to follow these collections.

Some comments of the participants about brand fondness are given below.

Participant 18 commented that

> *"I should state that dealing with luxury brands is like a game for me. Their entertaining world which only for "exclusive" people excites me. Although I can't follow their every activity, most of the time I want to know the current developments. It gives me pleasure to enter that exclusive life as much as I can."*

Participant 24 stated that

> *"In my opinion, since luxury fashion brands are especially desired and preferred brands, those who want to have these limited and affordable products of these brands exhibit such behaviors. Plus, people develop a passion (fondness) for these products as these products are highly praised by some well-known people."*

4.5 Brand Image

Brand image is a key component of brand perception. A positive brand image will lead to a positive brand perception which will increase the purchasing intention and purchasing behavior (Foroudi et al., 2018). Brand image measurement might be challenging as there are multiple components linked to this factor. In this study, brand image is measured with the recommendation level. If a consumer recommends a product or a brand to another individual, the brand image can be considered as positive (Frank, Gianfranco, & Eva, 2019). When participants were asked which H&M collaboration they would recommend, there were mixed answers. One participant said Karl Lagerfeld as this was the first collaboration collection while others focused on different qualities such as the luxury image of the brand or the design style that is closer to their age. For example, participant 8 stated that:

> *"Kenzo and Erdem are younger and I think they capture our generation more. The others are more old-fashioned brands."*

Participant 14 said that:

> *"I don't see the collaboration purely as clothes or products. I think they are all an object of desire. Therefore, having them must be important for me and for the people around me. These collections (Stella McCartney, Balmain, Erdem) are the collections everyone would want to have."*

Also, the participants were asked about the impact of such collaborations on the image of the luxury brand and the ready-wear brand. The participants stated that such collaboration efforts worked for both of the brands. While the luxury brand became affordable and expanded to a larger audience, the ready-wear brand gained further popularity. Participant 8 stated that:

"I think the collaboration is profitable for both parties. While H&M gains prestige, luxury brands get the chance to expand their sales volume with different customer audiences."

On the other hand, participant 9 stated that:

"I think it is something bad for the luxury brand followers. Why can someone have a brand I paid a lot for a lot cheaper? I can say that it is positive for H&M but I can't say the same thing for luxury brands."

Participant 11 stated that:

"I think both brands can get what they want with this collaboration. Both more customers and more sales. Therefore, everyone is winning with these collections. I don't think anyone is negatively influenced at the end of the day."

Participant 16 stated that:

"I think both parties win. Everyone achieves their final objective which is more sales as a result of this collaboration."

4.6 Product Country Image

Product country image is one of the most challenging aspects of brand perception. The measurement of this component requires a local brand and local consumption. In terms of Turkey, product country image does not play a significant role. In Turkey, consumers prefer foreign brands over the local counterparts and there is often huge demand for foreign products and brands. The product country image might be evaluated with the fact that H&M collaboration projects are sold-out and there is black market demand for these products. A sample comment of a participant about product country image is given below.

Participant 12 stated that

"I know that H&M is a European brand. In my opinion, this is obvious in their designs. I see that it reflects the Scandinavian style, especially in the winter season. Scandinavian is deep and warm, because the designs carry the style of

the land where the brand was born. Deep, because the history of the brand is very rich. Hot because I know whatever I buy from H&M will keep me warm."

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The fashion and apparel industry are changing every day, especially among young consumers. Therefore, it is better to understand what Generation Z thinks about fashion in general and fashion brands in special. This study investigated the views of the members of Generation Z towards the collaboration between H&M as streetwear and fast fashion brand as well as other luxury brands such as Giambattista Valli, Moschino, Kenzo, Erdem, and Balmain. For this purpose, a pilot study is conducted with 4 members of Generation Z. When investigating the views of the members of the generation Z, it is important to build on the existing views on brand perception. Brand perception is the key driver for individuals to make a purchasing decision for a product or a service. This purchasing decision is irrespective of luxury consumption and can be linked to any consumer products. The brand perception framework presented by Forouid et al. (2018) plays a key role in understanding the components of how the consumers purchase a product or make a purchasing decision. As expressed above in the methodology section, the perception elements regarding the brand equity influences the brand perception management. In this regard, understanding the elements of brand perception for generation Z can provide important insights for brands to manage their brand perception for generation Z can provide important insights for brands to manage their brand perception. The findings of this study indicated that the members of Generation Z are keen to purchase products and clothes from such collaborations. These individuals defined such collaboration attempts as a way to be accessible and more affordable. The competition in the fashion industry in today's world is high and both streetwear brands and luxury brands are forced to create new and fresh products to meet these demands (Bhardwaj, and Fairhurst, 2010). The demand for popular and trendy products for Generation Z is as high as the rest of the consumer population. However, purchasing luxury brands all the time might be challenging for the members of this generation. In this case, the collaborations between fast fashion brands and luxury brands offer an opportunity to the consumers to purchase luxury brands at more affordable prices. This affordable and accessible aspect is also emphasized by the participants of the pilot study. Therefore, further attempts by different brands to expand and spread such collaborations might benefit both the fast-fashion and luxury brands. Since the main objective of fast-fashion practices is to deliver to customers in the shortest time possible as well as considering the cost factor, such collaborations can expand the brand reach for the fast-fashion as well as the luxury brand (Bruce, and Daly, 2006). Understanding the emotional and behavioral components of what triggers the purchasing decision among the consumers is important in various terms. For example, brands can alight their marketing campaigns or collaboration projects to meet the needs and expectations of the consumers. Further, the new products or services that will be launched in the future can be designed by considering the consumer perception. This enables the fashion brands and marketers to position the brand in a higher segment by devising their products as well as their promotional activities.

The results obtained from this study were similar to Arıkan, and Kılıç (2017) study even though the target audiences were different in both studies while the results showed that the individuals consume and purchase apparel and fashion products based on different factors such as quality awareness, brand awareness, innovation, and fashion awareness. The results were also in parallel with the study by Kim, and Ko (2012), who examined Korean consumers' perceptions. They indicated that emotional value, perceived quality, symbolic value, and brand association were among the main factors to choose luxury collaborations with H&M as well as other brands. The brand perception is linked with brand association, perceived quality, brand awareness, brand image, brand fondness and product country image by Forouid et al. (2018:465). In Turkey, H&M is perceived as a preferable brand among the generation Z as suggested by the answers provided in the findings section. The consumers have previous knowledge about the designs and styles of the luxury brand as they follow H&M from social media. This is related to the brand awareness aspect of the brand perception. As suggested by Forouid et al. (2018), as the consumers are more aware of the brand and the efforts of the brand, the consumers tend to purchase those products. The brand awareness is an important factor to lead to a high-quality brand perception. Thus, when this luxury brand collaborates with a ready-wear brand such as H&M, the consumers expect the same level of design and quality from this collaboration. The basis for our perceptions is highly connected with psychology. Therefore, different psychological theories should also be considered when these results are evaluated. A study by Bachmann et al. (2019) indicated that owner-based luxury value is related to brand loyalty, brand attachment and brand engagement. Accordingly, ownership of a luxury product can play a significant role on the perception of the consumers. In terms of H&M and luxury brand collaborations, owning a product that is produced with limited numbers can significantly increase the value of that product as well as the brands.

Understanding the perception of generation Z can play a key role for the future of the luxury brands and ready-wear brands. Generation Z is rather different than the previous generations in terms of consumption habits and brand perceptions. For this generation, product country image which is reflected on the social media platforms play an important role. As suggested by the participants of this study, the participants check Instagram posts and other social media outlets to follow influencers who consume products of H&M and luxury brand collaboration. The Instagram posts shared by the Turkish influencers and other influencers help them in their decision-making process. Therefore, there is a high demand from the brands to work with influencers to promote the collections and new collaboration projects.

This is further supported by the fact that massification increases the demand as well as the product range in terms of items with higher accessibility (Vecchi, and Buckley 2016). The results obtained from this study also support this idea as more and more consumers want to buy these products because of their accessibility as well as to increase the demand for these products. Since price comparisons play a key role in the decision-making process of these individuals (Francis, and Hoefel, 2018), finding affordable luxurious products without too much effort might also be the key reason for Generation Z to follow and purchase products of such collaborations. Further, these brand segments can gain a larger market segment due to the massification and promotion of their products via social media and influencers. The participants of the pilot interview stated that they follow these brands from social media as well as influencers. Accordingly, it is important to consider social media and influencers as an integral part of Generation Z's decisions when it comes to purchasing fashion products. Although the participants of the pilot study do not follow any of the brands from Instagram or any other social media, they frequently check the Instagram accounts, official websites, and influencers. When the answers collected from the main study group are considered, Instagram and influencers continues to play a key role. The participants in the main study group suggested that they are following the luxury brands on Instagram as well as the influencers and H&M. However, some of the participants from the main study group believed that Instagram and influencers aren't enough alone to attract attention to the collaboration projects. The participants believed that brands need to find new strategies to reach to larger audience who are not active on social media and who do not follow the influencers. Therefore, brands can devise a different strategy to reach the members of this generation. Still, the findings show that these new strategies should be web-oriented as almost none of the participants are following these brands from printed media.

When all of these factors are considered, it is important to understand how the members of generation Z choose and buy certain products. Also, it is important to discover how the perception of generation Z are shaped when it comes to make the purchasing decisions. A study that focuses on the consumption habits of generation Z can provide important insights both to fast fashion brands and luxury brands in terms of brand equity, brand perception and brand positioning. The members of the generation Z are often influenced from the views of other individuals and influencers they have seen on social media. Especially Instagram influencers play a key role in their purchasing decisions. On the other hand, there are various other factors that might influence their decision as the new form of marketing is shifting towards the digital environment where everyone is more visible. The increasing visibility across the peers might also drive the need to purchase the latest products that are popular on the social media. Furthermore, brand image and brand awareness might also be some of the important factors in the decision-making processes of the generation Z consumers. Therefore, the main research idea of this study is derived from these questions to investigate the main drivers for this generation to purchase a product presented as a result of fast fashion brand and luxury brand collaboration.

In short, Generation Z is following the collaborations between H&M and luxury brands and purchase some of the products offered in these collections. The brands need to address the daily habits of this generation to expand their reach. Also, brands need to consider the brand perception of this generation as most of them believe that ready-wear and luxury brand collaborations are a good way to buy the products they cannot buy otherwise. However, another key topic to be considered here is suggested by Forouid et al. (2018) expressing that fashion industry needs to be more interactive for brand loyalty and brand purchasing intention. As suggested by the findings of this study, the brand purchasing intention is mainly driven by the Instagram and other social media influencers. The members of the generation Z are highly influenced from social media posts that include the products from H&M and luxury brand collaboration. Most of the participants stated that they do not follow the social media channels of luxury brands or H&M on a regular basis. This is an important indication for H&M and luxury brands in terms of reaching their target audience. At this point, it is necessary for brands to find new ways to attract consumers on their social media platforms for promotional purposes. Also, brands need to re-address the gender and create almost gender-free collections to target this new audience (Kenney, 2020). Working and collaborating with social media influencers might be the easiest method to do that. Still, the interaction between the brand and consumers should be increased for driving brand purchasing intentions.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This study focuses on Generation Z and collaborations between a fast fashion brand and a luxury brand. The perceptions of this generation play a key role for the entire fashion sector, especially for the clothing brands and designers. In general, the brand perception of any consumers is based on six key elements such as brand association, perceived quality, brand awareness, brand image, brand fondness and product country image as suggested by Forouid et al. (2018). Understanding the perception of this generation, as well as their consumption habits, play a key role for the brands to position themselves in the highly competitive market. Further, understanding the key elements for brand perception can significantly help the brands to position their products and brands better in the highly competitive market. The results in the study showed that the members of the Generation Z prefer such collaborations due to accessibility and affordability. The accessibility factor is highly related with the brand awareness factor of brand perception. The participants of this study stated that they know H&M and some of the luxury brands which contribute to positive perception regarding the collaboration projects. Further, the consumers suggest that the design of the luxury brands and the scarcity of the products play a key role to drive their purchasing decision. In addition to that, social media platforms and especially Instagram are the most important places that these consumers get to know the luxury brands, ready-wear brands such as H&M and collaboration between these luxury brands and ready-wear brands. This is also related to brand awareness as the participants are inform about the brand via social media and influencers. However, the brand awareness here is due to third parties such as the social media influencers rather than the official social media channels of H&M or the collaborated luxury brand. The consumers are following influencers especially Instagram influencers to make their purchasing decisions. The products presented by the social media influencers contribute to brand image and turn these products into desirable commodities. All of the participants in this study stated that they follow influencers and they know about luxury brands and brand collaborations via these influencers. This further suggest that the fashion industry needs to be more interactive in terms of brand purchasing intention. Expanding the scope of influencer marketing or influencers collaboration projects can significantly benefit to brands in terms of brand perception and brand loyalty. The participants were interested in H&M and luxury brand collaborations and purchased the products in these collaborations due to their luxury and affordability perception. In this sense, the collaboration project is linked with luxury consumption which is related to brand association. The perception of luxury is one of the main drivers for purchasing a product for individuals who have participated in this study. In addition to that, owning a product that an influencer posts on social media is also an important factor for the generation Z members. When these factors are considered, it can be seen that the brand perception of generation Z generation Z is highly driven by the decisions of other individuals called the influencers. Accordingly, the brands need to find new ways to address generation Z to drive their purchasing decision by considering social media and influencers as the key marketing outlets.

When the participants' answers are compared with the brand's statement on the official website and in the annual reports, it is clear that these views are parallel with what the brand is trying to achieve (H&M, 2020b). The H&M brand positioned itself as a sustainable, environmentally friendly, affordable, fashionable, and dynamic brand (H&M, 2020b). The participants of this study affirm that such a brand image is reflected on the consumer side. This study that investigates the brand perception of generation Z based on collaboration projects between H&M and luxury brands has certain limitations. This study is only limited to a pilot group in Turkey. The luxury product consumption in Turkey might be comparatively lower than other countries in Europe or the US. Therefore, future studies need to address the luxury product consumption in Turkey and other countries and provide an insight about the perception of generation Z accordingly. The study was first applied as a pilot study to better test the hypothesis created. Also, the pilot application enabled further improving the questions in the survey to collect clearer answer. On the next stage, the survey is applied to a 33-individual group selected with criterion sampling. Thus, the data collected from this participant group revealed more accurate representation of the perceptions of the Generation Z. However, it is possible to expand the number of participants. Thus, more comprehensive research on Generation Z in other countries can provide better insights into their perception along with how well these collaborations work. Also, a comparative study between the Turkish consumer group and consumer groups of the other countries can be an important benchmark in this field. Nevertheless, it is clear that the members of Generation Z are more tech-savvies than their predecessors and engage with brands in the digital environment rather than the traditional environment. Also, the consumption habits are more focused on relaxed, comfortable, and affordable fashion which is reflected with collaborations rather than high-priced luxury brands. Thus, this generation has the potential to revolutionize the entire fashion and apparel industry with their brand perceptions, brand loyalties, and consumption habits. Approaching this topic from different perspectives can further highlight the potential areas for both fast fashion brands and luxury brands.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Survey Questions

Survey Questions: These questions are prepared to identify the in-depth interview participants.

1. How close do you follow fashion brands? (Multiple choice)
    - Closely
    - I Follow
    - Average
    - I Don't Follow
    - Never
2. Which fast fashion brands do you follow closely?
3. Do you know about the fashion brand collaboration projects?
    - Yes
    - No
4. If yes, can you give examples?
5. Do you want attend our Zoom interviews?
    - Yes
    - No
6. Name and surname?
7. Date of birth?
8. Which city in Turkey are you living?
9. What is your email address?
10. Can you please any social media accounts we can contact you?

Appendix B. In-depth Interview Questions

In-Depth Interview Questions: The survey questions will be asked to 30 participants selected after the pilot study.

1. What is your age?
2. What is your education level?
3. Which city do you live in?
4. Which economic class are you in?
5. Do you regularly follow updates about fashion brands?
6. Do you follow these updates on digital media or traditional media?
7. Can you list affordable fast fashion brands? What are the top 3 brands that come into your mind?
8. Which fast fashion brands do you remember that collaborate with luxury fashion brands?
9. How well do you know H&M?
10. What do you think about this brand?
11. What comes into your mind when we say H&M?
12. Can you define H&M with 3 adjectives?
13. Why?
14. Have you ever shopped or thought of shopping from H&M?
15. Do you know H&M's annual collaboration with luxury fashion brands?
16. In recent years, H&M is preparing collections with **Balmain, Kenzo, Erdem, Moschino ve Giambattista Valli.** Which of these brands do you know?
17. What personal traits would these brands have?
18. Why?
19. Why do you follow the luxury brand collaboration projects you have mentioned?
20. How and where do you know about H&M's collaboration projects with these luxury brands?

21. What do you think about the communication via these collaboration projects?

22. Do you follow any of these brands on social media or do you see any of the contents of these brands in digital environment?

23. How do you think such collaboration projects impact the bran images? What do you think about that?

24. H&M did its first luxury brand collaboration in 2004 with **Karl Lagerfeld**. Over the years, the collections continued with brands such as **Stella McCartney**, **Comme des Garcons, Versace and Isabel Marant**. In the last 5 years, the brand collaborated with **Balmain, Kenzo, Erdem, Moschino and Giambattista Valli.** Which of these collaboration projects will you recommend to the people around you?

25. Why?

26. Do you think such collaboration projects represent H&M or the luxury brand? What do you think about the representation of these brands?

27. The products of these collaboration projects are sold out in a few hours and we can see these products on the black market with high prices in a few hours. People also spend hours in the queue in front of the stores. Why do you think these collections are this popular?

28. Did you continue to follow these brands when collaboration projects ended or the popularity decreased? If not please explain why?

29. Do you wish to add anything?