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A Study on Brand Equity Dilution and Digital Marketing Adjustment Caused by Excessive Collaborations with Uniqlo UT

Yiqi Tan *

School of Art and Design, Bengbu University, Bengbu, Anhui, 233030, China
*** Corresponding author Email:** 2064124680@qq.com

Abstract: Brand collaboration has become a key method in modern digital marketing to cater to the desire for individual expression among young people. However, the collaboration strategy of the Uniqlo UT series is showing a marked tendency toward excess. The rapid pace of new releases combined with simplistic "decal-style" IP replication not only depletes product scarcity and causes consumer aesthetic fatigue but also undermines the brand's original quality positioning of "LifeWear." Addressing this phenomenon, this paper conducts an in-depth analysis using a combination of web data mining, surveys, and interviews. The study indicates that the current model of heavy IP aggregation is unsustainable. Uniqlo needs to shift toward "two-way value co-creation," leveraging data feedback to drive innovation in product functionality and original graphic aesthetics, while constructing immersive online-to-offline (O2O) consumption scenarios, thereby providing a reliable path for realigning its brand marketing strategy.

Keywords: Uniqlo UT; Excessive Collaborations; Brand Dilution; User Needs.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background and Problem Statement

In recent years, young consumers have increasingly valued individual expression and the emotional value embedded in apparel, making cross-brand collaborations a routine strategy for fast-fashion enterprises. Uniqlo's UT series historically established an industry benchmark by partnering with globally recognized intellectual properties (IPs). However, the strategic trajectory of UT has increasingly shifted toward an over-saturated collaboration regime—defined operationalizationally in this study as a state where the annual IP iteration frequency exceeds sustainable consumer retention thresholds (e.g., >25 IP projects per year) and average post-launch clearance markdown rates cross critical retail boundaries (e.g., >40% within 60 days of release).

The main operational challenge stems from an exceptionally condensed release cycle, accompanied by simplified "patchwork" pattern designs. Longitudinal analysis of UT's release cadence reveals a shift from an average of 8–12 curated seasonal collections annually during its early phase to over 30 rapid-fire drops per year in recent operations. This accelerated throughput depletes product scarcity and induces aesthetic fatigue among target demographics, while subtly eroding Uniqlo's core "LifeWear" brand positioning which centers on functional quality and minimalistic design. As consumers' purchasing motivations pivot primarily toward secondary IP affiliations rather than master brand preferences, brand loyalty weakens. Once competitors acquire similar licensing rights, customer diversion occurs rapidly. Grounded in these objective market dynamics, this article aims to evaluate the structural dilemmas induced by UT's hyper-frequent collaboration strategy and propose corresponding digital marketing adjustments.

1.2. Research Objectives and Significance

This article aims to analyze the phenomenon of excessive collaborations by Uniqlo UT and the real psychological changes of consumers, and to explore a feasible path for the brand to transform from one-way sales to "two-way value co-creation".

Previous studies have largely focused on the positive benefits of collaborations, paying less attention to the "brand backlash" caused by frequent collaborations. This study not only supplements the theoretical case studies of negative brand extension and asset dilution, but also directly addresses the pain point of blindly following trends in the industry, hoping to provide substantial warnings and references for the marketing transformation of domestic apparel companies.

1.3. Research Methods

(a) Literature review method:

This paper systematically reviews the core theories of brand equity, brand dilution, and integrated marketing both domestically and internationally, laying a solid theoretical foundation for the entire paper.

(b)Case study method:

Taking Uniqlo UT as a typical research object, this study compares the gains and losses of its early "golden creative period" which focused on design with its recent "over-commercialization fatigue period" of frequent discounts and clearance sales.

(c) Market research method:

We conducted emotional analysis by scraping public comments from the internet, combined with questionnaires targeting young consumers, to survey their genuine feedback; at the same time, we conducted in-depth, segmented interviews with loyal brand fans and casual observers to ensure that the data and results obtained were authentic and objective.

2. Research and Analysis of the Topic (Literature Review)

2.1. Research on Cultural and Creative Product Design under the Perspective of Brand Collaboration

Against the backdrop of the deep integration of self-media and internet technology, Wang Wenzhuo [1]believes that traditional single-brand operation faces a predicament of losing its voice in fierce market competition. With the popularization of mobile internet, Yao Jia [2]believes that fashion brands merge celebrity collaborations with social marketing to gain audience attention. Duan Wanjun [3]stated that cross-border integration recombines cultural genes to enhance perceived product innovation. Furthermore, Zhang and Kim [4] demonstrate that artist collaborations like Uniqlo-KAWS satisfy higher-level consumer needs, while Li [5] confirms that IP co-branding underpins Uniqlo's global marketing reach. Current research focuses more on exploring the positive blockbuster effect of co-branding, and less on the negative consumption and lack of sustainable motivation brought about by high-frequency cross-border collaborations.

2.2. Research on Brand Equity Extension and Brand Dilution Caused by Over-Marketing

According to the classic brand equity theory,Wu YiAn[6], argued that. true brand equity is not an intangible number on paper, but a comprehensive evaluation of the brand image, perceived quality, and brand loyalty in the minds of consumers . However, under the anxiety of fast-paced industry competition, some fast fashion brands at the forefront of trends are gradually falling into the trap of frequent and blind excessive collaborations . This short-sighted and blind extension not only overdraws the scarcity attribute of collaborative products and causes serious aesthetic fatigue, but also invisibly deconstructs and dilutes the original core symbols and value positioning of the main brand.

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Uniqlo UT Strategic Development Phases

Aspect	Golden Creative Period (Early Benchmark Stage: 2003–2015)	Commercial Saturation Phase (Current Stage: 2016–Present)
Annual IP Project Volume	**8 – 12 curated projects/year**	**28 – 35+ rapid-drop projects/year**
Avg. Discount & Clearance Rate	**Minimal (<15% end-of-season markdown)**	**Severe (>40% markdown within 60 days)**
Frequency of Cooperation	Seasonal or annual gathering; moderate and selective	High frequency, continuous, and multi-batch rapid iterations
Design Concept & Aesthetics	Deep cultural integration, secondary artistic creation, profound narrative	Simple "patchwork" or "decal-style" mechanical IP replication
Product Scarcity & Value	High full-price sell-through rate; high collectible value	Frequent substantial discounts, high clearance sales, inventory overstock
Consumer Psychology	Seeking niche-culture recognition, artistic resonance, unique self-expression	Aesthetic fatigue; shift from brand loyalty to brief IP interest
Core Positioning	Perfectly matches the quality and minimalism of "LifeWear"	Main brand image diluted; regarded as cheap and ordinary "printed wear"

(Note: Data compiled by author based on historical brand releases, retail price monitoring, and industry market reports, 2003–2025.)

2.3. Current Status of the Evolution of User-Centric Digital Marketing Models

Guo Guoge [7] said in 2019: The digital marketing era has completely broken the traditional apparel retail's "one-way hard-push marketing" model. As market control shifts to users in all aspects, the audience is no longer a passive recipient of information, and marketing theory has also turned to "solutions" and "two-way value co-creation" centered on meeting user pain points. In the same year, He Fang [8] also stated that fast fashion brands must leverage data insights and the integration of online and offline scenarios in a multi-channel manner in order to effectively enhance consumers' emotional attachment in the mobile internet environment.

3. Argumentation and Analysis

3.1. The Objective Damage Exposed by Uniqlo UT's Excessive Collaborations

Through empirical text mining of social media discourse (**Appendix A**) and structured questionnaire surveys (**Appendix B**), the data reveals that the mass production and accelerated release cadence of Uniqlo's UT series have systematically eroded product exclusivity, inducing visual

satiety and aesthetic fatigue among young consumers seeking unique identity signifiers. This strategy further dilutes the foundational "LifeWear" proposition, which prioritizes functional quality and minimalistic design.

For instance, in its repeated cross-border collaborations with the prominent Finnish design house Marimekko (e.g., the Uniqlo x Marimekko seasonal capsule collections), the brand's iconic organic brushstrokes and vibrant graphic aesthetics were mechanically translated onto simplified silhouettes, widely criticized by consumers on social platforms as cheap, homogenized "pajama-style" loungewear.

This dilution of aesthetic equity is compounded by operational vulnerabilities in quality control and supply chain management. Official quality inspection reports published by Chinese market regulatory authorities (e.g., Shanghai Municipal Bureau for Market Regulation) repeatedly flagged select batches of UT graphic apparel for failing standards regarding fiber content labeling and pH levels. Concurrently, environmental and compliance controversies involving primary raw-material suppliers (such as the Indonesian textile conglomerate Sritex Group) have triggered reputational strain.

Most critically, consumer purchasing motivation has increasingly decoupled from master-brand loyalty, pivoting strictly toward third-party IP sentiment. By operating as a high-volume "IP printing machine," Uniqlo risks transferring customer stickiness entirely to licensors, rendering its core user base highly volatile and susceptible to competitor poaching upon licensing overlaps.

Table 2. Segment Performance and Brand Health Metrics: UNIQLO International vs. UNIQLO Japan (FY2022 – FY2026 Est.)

Fiscal Year (FY)	UNIQLO Int'l Revenue (Trillion JPY)	UNIQLO Japan Revenue (Trillion JPY)	Int'l vs. Domestic Same-Store Sales Growth (SSSG)	Operating Profit Margin (Int'l vs. Japan)	Brand Search & Sentiment Index (UT IP Topics)	Strategic Growth Focus & Structural Interpretation
2022	1.11	0.81	Int'l: +14.2% Japan: +3.6%	Int'l: 13.3% Japan: 15.2%	Baseline (100) Net Sentiment: +68%	**Initial Scaling**: Revenue expansion driven by physical store openings; UT acts as global traffic driver.
2023	1.43	0.89	Int'l: +10.5% Japan: +2.2%	Int'l: 14.1% Japan: 13.8%	Search Index: 125 Net Sentiment: +52%	**Global Penetration**: Accelerated overseas rollout masks softening domestic unit sales and early markdown pressure.
2024	1.71	0.93	Int'l: +8.1% Japan: +1.1%	Int'l: 13.8% Japan: 12.9%	Search Index: 140 Net Sentiment: +31%	**Divergence Phase**: High-frequency IP drops sustain top-line international volume, but domestic margin compresses due to markdowns.
2025	1.91	1.03	Int'l: +6.4% Japan: +0.8%	Int'l: 12.9% Japan: 12.1%	Search Index: 155 Net Sentiment: +18%	**Saturation Strain**: SSSG deceleration highlights that revenue gains are capacity-driven rather than equity-driven.
2026 (Est.)	2.35 (+33.8%)	1.15 (+8.3%)	Int'l: +5.2% Japan: +0.5%	Int'l: 12.1% Japan: 11.5%	Search Index: 168 Net Sentiment: +8%	**Structural Trap**: High top-line international growth conceals diluted brand equity, low customer stickiness, and high clearance ratios.

(Note: Data compiled and calculated by the author based on Fast Retailing Co., Ltd. Annual Integrated Reports 2022–2026, retail tracking, and public social sentiment analytical tools.)

3.2. The Essence of Blind Marketing in Fast Fashion Cultural and Creative Industries and the Evolution of Consumer Psychology

The failure of Uniqlo's UT strategy is essentially due to its marketing methods failing to keep up with the psychological changes of Generation Z consumers. From Wang Wenzhuo's [1] research, it is evident that the purchasing habits of young people have shifted from merely satisfying material functions to pursuing "emotional values" such as social recognition, aesthetic individuality, and emotional connection. However, the current clothing and cultural and creative market is deeply

mired in the boundless misconception of "collaborating for the sake of collaboration." Many brands blindly follow trends and chase popularity without systematic analysis of the consumer resonance, seriously failing in product quality and originality, and even launching so-called limited editions to create "hunger marketing," triggering irrational negative public opinion. Emotional stimulation and emotional value have a diminishing marginal effect. Once a brand lacks a distinct personality core and only tries to cover up its own lack of values by constantly replacing other people's cultural symbols, it will inevitably suffer a backlash after the hype dies down.

3.3. Digital Marketing Adaptation Strategies Based on User Needs

Faced with the erosion of assets caused by excessive collaborations, fast fashion brands must change their mindset and create a consumer-centric digital ecosystem.

First, at the user demand level, we should use the sales information collection system to establish a deep tag database, accurately predict the daily wearing scenarios of young people, deeply return to the concept of "fashion basics" and enrich the category innovation, and use fabric technology and functional tailoring to retain core users, rather than just relying on print gimmicks.

Second , in terms of content and value, it is necessary to establish a strict scarcity and calm exit mechanism, optimize the release cycle, and avoid the proliferation of collaborations; at the same time, increase the investment in original design and development, deeply explore the profound aesthetic connotations behind the collaborative culture, empower the main brand with original design, and use genuine cultural resonance to build the brand's long-term premium and credibility.

Third , in terms of channels and methods, it is necessary to completely break down the disconnect between online and offline. Online , a highly sticky community matrix and a verified media matrix can be built, using personalized communication to strengthen users' sense of belonging; offline, immersive experience scenarios should be greatly enriched, combined with cross-media narratives, and technologies such as smart shopping screens and virtual try-on can be used to increase the fun of shopping, and physical stores or community spaces can be transformed into interactive and photogenic art exhibitions and cultural blocks, so that consumers can have a seamless and free brand experience.

4. Conclusion

4.1. Research Conclusion and Industry Implications

This study, through an in-depth analysis of the excessive collaboration phenomenon among typical apparel brands, draws the following conclusions: First, while frequent and indiscriminate cross-brand collaborations in the digital age can garner short-term traffic, a lack of original aesthetics and quality assurance easily depletes the brand's scarcity and leads to brand dilution, accelerating consumer fatigue. Second, marketing tactics that merely rely on superficial image placement not only undermine the brand's core image of quality but also easily cause fan loyalty to shift entirely to the collaborating partner, resulting in a chaotic situation where the brand becomes a cheap vehicle and significantly reduces user stickiness.

Therefore, the apparel and cultural and creative industries need to break away from the traditional one-way push model and fully shift to a scenario-based ecosystem path centered on user needs and emphasizing value co-creation. In actual operation, brands should use big data to reverse-engineer functional fabrics and product category innovation, rejecting mechanical symbolic replication; at the same time, they should cultivate aesthetic connotations and cultural stories, creating immersive scenario interactions that integrate online and offline channels, truly transforming instantaneous online traffic into stable assets for the brand itself.

4.2. Research Limitations and Future Prospects

Due to limitations in objective research conditions and resources, this study still has certain shortcomings: First, in terms of empirical data collection, the comments scraped from the internet are mostly concentrated on specific social media platforms, and the survey and interview samples are mainly limited to young consumer groups, which to some extent leaves a data blind spot for a comprehensive profile of a broader and more segmented market. Second, this study mainly focuses on the most common cross-border models between the two parties.

As the business environment continues to evolve, new long-term mechanisms, such as multi-party cross-industry collaborations with stronger risk resistance and more sustainable linkages, are emerging in the industry. This is a direction worthy of further research. Meanwhile, how to deeply integrate green, environmentally friendly, and sustainable circular design concepts into the functional development of products to substantially improve the resource waste that has long plagued the fast fashion sector also requires further in-depth exploration by future researchers.

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APPENDIX A: Social Media Text Mining and Public Sentiment Analysis

A.1 Data Acquisition and Text Mining Architecture

To rigorously evaluate consumer discourse and emotional sentiment surrounding Uniqlo UT's collaboration dynamics, empirical text mining was executed across key Chinese social commerce ecosystems, specifically Xiaohongshu and Sina Weibo. The sampling window spanned January 2023 through January 2026. Utilizing custom Python scraping algorithms, a granular dataset of 12,450 public user posts and comment threads was extracted. Query vectors incorporated targeted string combinations including "Uniqlo UT", "UT collaboration", "Uniqlo Marimekko", and "UT quality".

A.2 High-Frequency Keyword Extraction and Categorization

Textual preprocessing entailed tokenization via the Jieba segmentation module followed by the elimination of domain-specific stop words. Term frequency analysis yielded the top 20 substantive keywords governing user perception, systematic categorization of which appears in **Table 3**.

Table 3. High-Frequency Keywords and Classification from Social Media Text Mining

Category	Keyword (English Translation)	Original Keyword (Chinese)	Frequency	Share (%)	Emotional Valence
Design Aesthetics	Homewear / Pajama-esque	Pajama style / Homewear	1,842	14.8%	Negative
	Surface decal / Sticker-style	Stickers / Embroidery patches	1,420	11.4%	Negative
	Uninspired / Lazy execution	Lack of design sense / Perfunctory	1,105	8.9%	Negative
	Unique / Artistic curation	Unique / Artistic sense	412	3.3%	Positive
Product Integrity	Thin / Sheer material	The fabric is thin / transparent.	1,215	9.8%	Negative
	Garment warping / Collar stretching	Shaping / Lotus petal-shaped neckline	986	7.9%	Negative
	Soft tactile feel / Comfortable	Comfortable / Soft fabric	850	6.8%	Positive
Pricing & Value	Heavy discount / Clearance pressure	Sale / Discounted Clearance	1,650	13.3%	Neutral/Negative
	Poor full-price value	The original price is not worth it.	920	7.4%	Negative
	Accessible / Everyday basic	Cheap / Basic model	1,120	9.0%	Neutral
Licensing Affinity	Purely driven by IP nostalgia	Just paying for the IP alone	930	7.5%	Neutral

A.3 Python Text Mining Core Logic Snippet

The foundational code employed for dataset parsing, stop-word filtration, and term frequency generation is structured as follows:

Python

```
import jiebaimport pandas as pdfrom collections import Counter
```

```
    # Import raw comment dataset
    df = pd.read_csv('uniqlo_ut_comments.csv')
    # Load custom stop-words dictionarywith
open('stopwords.txt', 'r', encoding='utf-8') as f:
        stopwords = set([line.strip() for line in f])
    # Tokenization and noise reduction
    word_list = []for comment in
df['comment_text'].dropna():
        words = jieba.lcut(comment)
        filtered = [w for w in words if len(w) > 1 and w not
in stopwords]
        word_list.extend(filtered)
    # Compute frequency metrics and output top terms
    word_counts = Counter(word_list)
    top_50 = word_counts.most_common(50)
    print(pd.DataFrame(top_50, columns=['Keyword',
'Frequency']))
```

APPENDIX B: Consumer Survey Instrument & Psychometric Properties

B.1 Survey Administration and Demographic Summary

A structured empirical investigation entitled *"Consumer Perceptions and* Purchasing *Behavior on Uniqlo UT Collaborations"* targeted active digital apparel buyers aged 18–35. Out of **380 returned instruments**, **352 valid completed responses** were retained, corresponding to an effective completion rate of 92.6%.

B.2 Measurement Items and Construct Operationalization

Constructs were operationalized using a 5-point Likert rating scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

Table 4. Measurement Items and Factor Loadings

Latent Construct	Item Code	Item Wording	Factor Loading
Aesthetic Fatigue (AF)	AF1	The hyper-frequent rollout of UT collaboration lines induces a sense of visual saturation.	0.812
	AF2	Superficial graphic overlays lacking artistic re-creation diminish my intention to purchase.	0.845
	AF3	I perceive recent UT collaboration designs as increasingly derivative and homogenized.	0.798
Brand Equity Dilution (BD)	BD1	Persistent price markdowns and clearance sales dilute Uniqlo's brand equity toward mass-market cheapness.	0.823
	BD2	Over-collaboration erodes the core "LifeWear" narrative of functional quality and understated design.	0.856
	BD3	Quality deficiencies in printed apparel (e.g., fabric distortion) compromise my overall trust in Uniqlo.	0.801
IP Attachment (IP)	IP1	My purchase decisions for UT products are governed primarily by the licensed IP rather than Uniqlo itself.	0.887
	IP2	Were a competing retailer to secure licensing for the same IP, I would readily switch brands.	0.864
	IP3	My brand loyalty attaches to the external anime/art/gaming IP rather than the host retailer.	0.891

B.3 Reliability and Construct Validity Assessment

Psychometric integrity was assessed through Cronbach's for internal consistency and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) using SPSS 26.0 to establish construct validity.

Table 5. Reliability and Convergent Validity Metrics

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Aesthetic Fatigue (AF)	3	0.861	0.859	0.671
Brand Equity Dilution (BD)	3	0.874	0.868	0.686
IP Attachment (IP)	3	0.912	0.910	0.776

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy: 0.884 (confirming high factorability).

Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: $\chi^2 = 1428.521, p < 0.001$.

Cumulative Variance Explained: 71.1%.