55 Supreme: super-mutant or keystone species of a sartorial ecology?

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Abstract
This paper argues that the behaviours of aficionados of an American urban street-wear brand – seemingly driven by a 'fear-of-missing-out' – may be indicative of a new paradigm in fashion practice. Primary research data is sourced from Supreme's customers, many of whom spend extended periods queuing to obtain the outcomes of collaborations undertaken with selected fashion labels and high-profile players operating in other creative contexts. This captive audience – marooned outside the brand's only outlet in the United Kingdom while waiting to be allowed into the venue under a tightly policed entry system – provided respondents to a questionnaire addressing their purchasing habits and reasons for patronising the label. The strategy of 'scarcity marketing' employed by Supreme is contrasted with an account of more traditional brand-building in the mass-market by casual-wear label Superdry. Using terminologies borrowed from the biological disciplines, the discussion addresses the various interactions between players in a 'sartorial ecology' and locates the outputs of Supreme's collaborative ventures within a taxonomic classification of the domain of material culture. Analysis of the research data suggests that, rather than being victims of a virulent form of marketing 'mind-control', consumers consider Supreme a dependable conduit for accessing otherwise unattainable high-fashion goods. Further, the conclusion argues that it is the collaborating partners who are more vulnerable to the negative impacts of the commercial and creative practices mobilised by this 'keystone species' in the 'sartorial ecology'.

Introduction

Walking through the backstreets of the Soho district in central London one Wednesday afternoon in early 2018, the author's path was blocked by a crowd of teenage boys and young men. It was assumed that these individuals were waiting to purchase tickets for some popular event – given the observed demographic, gaming came to mind. Curiosity piqued, the author made his way alongside the queue, interrupted only by several main roads, to its point of origin outside the sole outlet that American clothing label Supreme operates in the United Kingdom. The store had already closed for the day; scheduled

to re-open at eleven o'clock the following morning when the latest 'drop' – the creative outputs of collaborative ventures between the brand and well-known artists, musicians, sports(wo)men or other fashion labels – would become available. In the interim, several hundred patrons would spend the night outside on the pavement, policed by up to a dozen security guards hired by the company to keep order. A similar scenario had occurred on a regular basis throughout the seven years of the outlet's existence; accordingly it seems pertinent to ask how this particular brand persuades consumers not only to part with substantial amounts of money (for what many observers would characterise as mundane items of casual-wear) but also spend extended periods of time waiting to so to do? In examining this phenomenon, the findings of empirical research conducted on Supreme's customers are presented, together with an account of the brand's commercial and creative strategies located within the metaphorical framework of a 'sartorial ecology'.

Methodology

The primary research objective was to interrogate the specific factors motivating Supreme's patrons to endure an inconvenient and uncomfortable experience in order to be able to purchase the product(s) they desired. To that end, the conducting of *ad hoc* interviews with individuals waiting outside the brand's outlet in Peter Street on consecutive Wednesday afternoons was seen as the optimal method of obtaining qualitative material. This methodological approach had to be revised when the anticipated access was lost following the introduction of a ticketing system in October 2018. The possibility of attaching a set of questions to the e-mails sent to consumers informing them of their success in applying for tickets was considered, but it was felt that this approach would compromise reasonable expectations regarding privacy. Accordingly, propositions originally envisaged as starting points for face-to-face conversations with respondents were finessed to form a more general questionnaire (Appendix I) – hard copies of which were distributed to amenable individuals as they waited to enter the Supreme store on four occasions during November and December 2018. The focus of this version moved away from consumer motivations for undergoing the hardships involved in purchasing the outputs of Supreme's collaborations, towards reasons for patronising the brand and aspirations regarding future ventures. Additional anecdotal information was collected through informal conversations conducted while the questionnaires were being completed. A total of 200 responses were collected, with the quantitative data obtained transposed into graphic formats for ease of comprehension. A further aim was to review secondary source material available in on-line publications and the limited academic literature addressing the brand and its followers. In addition, a chance meeting with a long-term employee of another highly successful producer of casual-wear furnished an opportunity to articulate a contrasting account of a logo-led, brand-building strategy from the apparel sector.

Theoretical framework: a sartorial ecology

In an article addressing creative collaborations between traditional British apparel-makers and Japanese designers it was suggested that relationships between partners might be characterised as symbiotic or otherwise, using a schema more often applied in the natural world.[1] Here, that proposition is expanded within the metaphorical framework of a 'sartorial ecology' which, while limited in scope in comparison with the blue-print for a sustainable redesign of the apparel sector envisaged by Kate Fletcher and Lynda Grose, also recognises that multiple interconnections between organisms are crucial for any system's survival. In her recently published *Fashion Ecology: A Pocket Guide* Fletcher provides a glossary for such an eco-system, assigning the term 'species' to (among other options) specific garment categories. Here, mobilising the nomenclature of the Linnean classification system, 'species' is used to refer to a particular design output in a taxonomy that features a community of actors, ranging from creative entities (including counterfeiters) to consumers.[2] This metaphorical framework acts as the matrix within which a variety of interactions take place, including development of intra-specific relationships between 'classes' from the same 'phylum' (ie. two makers of casual-wear), and inter-specific relationships between 'classes' from different 'phyla' (ie. a street-wear brand and a luxury label). The discipline of biology recognises a range of symbiotic (lit. living together) relationships based on the relative outcomes for the participants, of which three are symmetrical (both parties gain, both parties lose, both parties are unaffected) and three asymmetrical (one party gains and the other is unaffected, one party is unaffected and the other loses, one party gains and the other loses). The differentiated relationships are set out in Figure 1, and examples of how the various dynamics might operate in the context of the 'kingdom' of apparel discussed below.

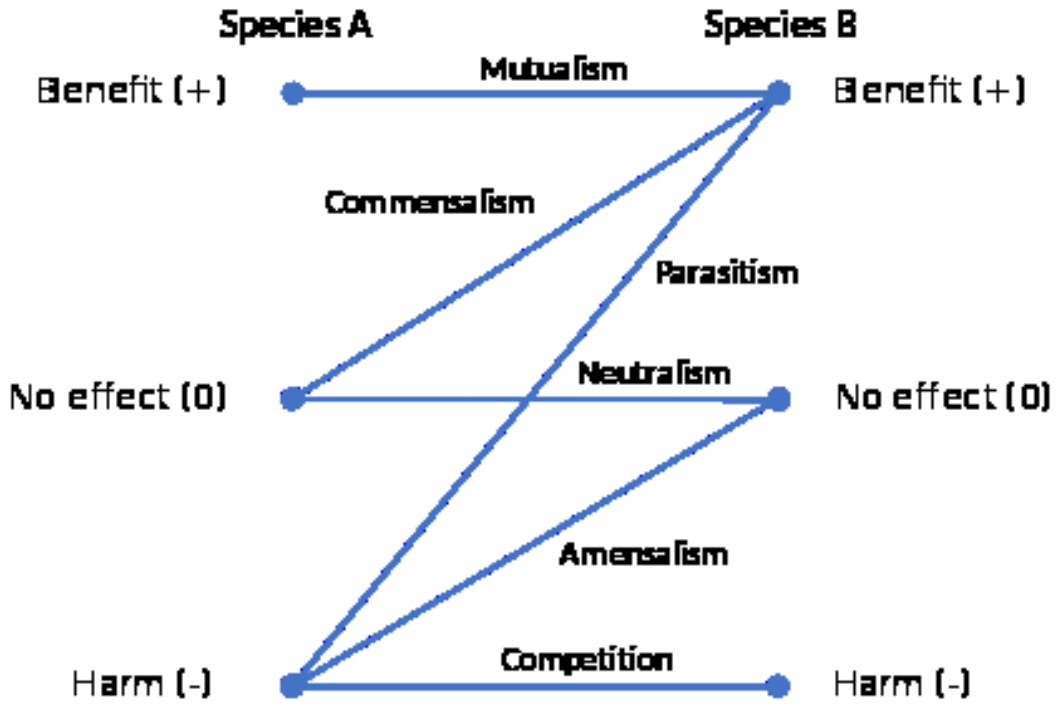


Fig. 1 Symbiotic relationships diagram (Alexander, 2018)

i. Mutualism: both parties benefit from the interaction. The Plover bird picks morsels of food from between the teeth of the crocodile, thereby lessening the reptile's susceptibility to infection. In a 'sartorial ecology' collaborative ventures are predicated on the achievement of this dynamic, although the benefits may accrue in different forms – for example, access to new markets for one partner versus a more desirable profile for the other. Such a relationship is also desirable between fashion producers and their consumers – particularly when the latter plays an active role, such as being involved in customisation.

ii. Commensalism: one party gains from the interaction, the other is not affected. A small arachnid from the order *Pseudoscorpiones* is known to attach itself to the wing-covers of certain beetles – hitching a ride to new environments and hiding from predators – to no obvious benefit for the insect. While it is unlikely that joint ventures in the fashion sector are undertaken in which one party is not anticipated as deriving any benefit at all from the relationship, this is a possible outcome. In a broader context, this dynamic underpins the operation of a fashion system where design ideas developed by one sector of the market are re-presented in another, whether as high-street dilutions of runway looks or designer versions of street-styles. The appropriator gains and, as long as the respective markets are sufficiently distinct, there is no negative impact on the originator.

iii. Parasitism: one party gains from the interaction to the detriment of the other. A particularly unsettling example is that of the so-called 'zombie-ant'

fungus *Ophiocordyceps Unilateralis,* which infects the tropical Carpenter ant and causes the insect to alter its behaviour in a manner that eventually leads to its death. This dynamic operates in the context of the counterfeiting of fashion goods, where those engaged in the practice gain as a result of their illicit activities, whereas the *bona fide* producer can suffer both financial and reputational damage. The fact that there are instances of fake goods being fabricated in the same factories that produce the genuine articles confirms that the participants form part of a sartorial ecology. Clearly, such a relationship is undesirable between fashion producers and their consumers. If the latter feel exploited patronage can be withdrawn; in the reverse case more drastic action is required. Some years ago luxury label Burberry acted to 'price-out' members of a certain demographic who did not fit the profile of the company's preferred customer.[3]

iv. Neutralism: the parties co-exist without interacting. Numerous species may share a particular environment, but a lack of observable change means science does not offer a definitive example of this dynamic. A majority of fashion companies operating within a sartorial ecology neither help nor harm one another.

v. Amensalism: one party suffers from the interaction, the other is not affected. Needles dropped by a pine tree contain an acid that inhibits the growth of grass, although there is no benefit to the tree from the depletion. In a sartorial ecology this dynamic operates in the case of an unsuccessful collaborative venture where one company incurs financial or reputational damage as a result of the initiative, but the other escapes unscathed.

vi. Competition: a Darwinian 'survival of the fittest' paradigm in which rivalries over resources in the form of territory, sustenance, shelter etc. affect all those involved. In a sartorial ecology this is the default position – fashion companies operating in the same market sector compete for consumers in a zero-sum game in which the success of one impacts on other players in the field.

Supreme: shop till you (get) the 'drop'

In the taxonomic 'class' of urban street-wear, one label, started in 1994 in New York, reigns supreme. Under the guidance of founder Jeb Jebbiah, Supreme has become a billion-dollar concern, exploiting a 'scarcity marketing' business model that involves strict control over the supply of creative outputs from collaborations with other fashion brands and high-profile individuals.[4] The erstwhile skate-brand releases product on a weekly basis across two seasons in a calendar year, but each item is only available in limited numbers in-store (of which there are only eleven world-wide) or on-line. The use of web-bots to access the on-line site as soon as it goes live has meant that queuing for the weekly 'drops' is the only way for many consumers to obtain the designs.[5] With as few as half-a-dozen pieces manufactured in certain cases, thriving secondary markets have sprung up, with 1,000% mark-ups of pieces from the most popular collaborations not unusual.[6] The majority of product runs are in

the low hundreds, but even these figures are determined with the expectation that items will sell out. Any remaining goods are removed from the outlets at the end of the week and put into storage or made available on-line.

Jebbiah's vision for the New York outlet as a hangout space for young people with eclectic tastes in the art, film, music and fashion nurtured a sense of authenticity crucial to the appeal of cult brands. When the company started trading it stocked white t-shirts featuring the brand name printed in white Futura Bold Oblique font inside a red rectangle – a logo based on the graphic artwork of Barbara Kruger.[7] This would not be the only instance of Supreme failing to seek permission to reproduce the intellectual property of other creative individuals, but since that time sanctioned tie-ups with globally renowned artists have featured Keith Haring (1998), Jeff Koons (2001), Richard Prince (2006), Takashi Murakami (2007) and Damien Hirst (2009). An initial collaboration with skate-brand Vans has been followed by myriad other ventures, mainly with street-wear labels and makers of sportswear. 2012 saw an alliance with avant-garde Japanese label Comme des Garçons, and Supreme has gone on to work with a number of high-profile fashion brands (see Appendix II). Collaborations are a key feature of contemporary fashion practice; what is striking about Supreme's *modus operandi* is the amount of control that is retained – all ventures are initiated by Supreme and the creative outputs are only available in their outlets, not those of the partner brands. Considered in the context of a 'sartorial ecology' (Example A in Figure 2, below) Supreme expands through the co-mingling of its design DNA with that of other subjects in the 'kingdom' of apparel. Early collaborative ventures were undertaken with 'classes' belonging to the same 'phylum' of urban street-wear.[8] Later, cross-fertilisations took place as partner brands were selected from the distinct 'phyla' of designer-wear (Example B), casual-wear (Example C) and luxury-wear (Example D). On each occasion a new 'order' (more accurately described as 'sub-class') is created, with offspring of these unions displaying the characteristics of Supreme – most obviously manifested in the visibility of the brand's logo. Accordingly, Supreme behaves rather like a virus – constantly mutating in its interactions with the selected host in order to colonise different niches in the existing hierarchies of the 'sartorial ecology'.

Linnean Nomenclature	Example A	Example B	Example C	Example D
Domain	Material Culture	Material Culture	Material Culture	Material Culture
Kingdom	Apparel	Apparel	Apparel	Apparel
Phylum	Street-wear	Designer-wear	Casual-wear	Luxury-wear
Class	Supreme	Comme des Garçons	Levi Strauss	Louis Vuitton

Order/sub-class	Own label	Supreme x CdG	Supreme x Levis	Supreme x LV
Family	Outerwear	Outerwear	Outerwear	Outerwear
Genus	Jackets/tops	Jackets/tops	Jackets/tops	Jackets/tops
Species	Box-logo hoodie	Polka-dot hoodie	Hooded denim trucker jacket	LV monogram-pattern hoodie

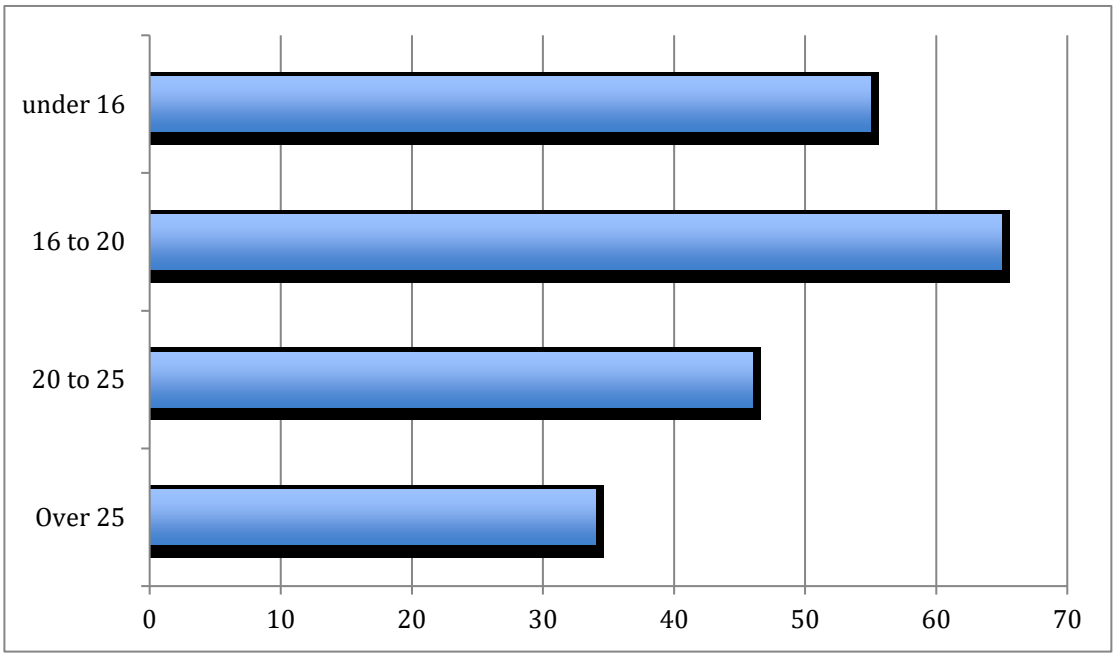
Fig. 2 Supreme and collaborative partners in a taxonomy of material culture

Expressed in evolutionary terms it is as if the brand possesses a dominant gene that masks the recessive versions carried by the partners in the collaborative ventures. However, this quality does not explain how it became, according to 032c magazine, 'the Holy Grail of high youth street culture' (Williams, 2012) for the constituency it serves. Supreme's flaunting of the rules is suggested as the attraction for consumers who 'attempt to assimilate some of the brand's rebellious cool' (Eror, 2016). In addition to its garment offer Supreme produces artefacts, some of which – hammer, nun-chucks, crowbar, flick-knife, fire extinguisher, boxing gloves and roach clip – have connotations with violence or criminality. Indeed, shortly after Gucci Mane completed a prison sentence for drug and firearm offences in 2016, the brand posted a video featuring him wearing a self-portrait Supreme t-shirt. The fact that the rapper had set up the 1017 Brick Squad record label may have inspired Supreme to release a branded house-brick shortly afterwards. This is one of several explanations in an article by Alec Leach (2016) posted on a website dedicated to urban street fashion, *Highsnobiety*. Although the author refers to the re-framing of mundane items as a conceptual art practice, he does not appear to be aware of Carl Andre's *Equivalent VIII* installation at the Tate Gallery in 1966.[9] In his part-travelogue/part-confessional *Supremacist, A Novel*, David Shapiro argues that the company is actually a 'long-term conceptual art project about capitalism, consumerism, property-as-theft…' (Shapiro, 2016: ch. IV). The final reference to Marxist anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's dictum may be justification for the plagiaristic practice documented above, but it is harder to identify an ideological motive in the brand's treatment of its patrons, which has been characterised as 'sado-masochistic' (Fowler 2018). Evidence of what appears to be an ambivalent relationship is made material in the form of the Supreme camp-chair, sleeping-bag and thermos flask – each of which would have lessened the discomfort suffered by those queuing all night had they been able to purchase the item on arrival at the outlet.[10] That tautological conundrum is no longer an issue now that a lottery system for ticketed entrance on 'drop' days has been implemented. On other days of the week customers still form lines well in advance of opening time. These queues provided the respondents to the questionnaire, the findings from which are presented below.

Research findings:

Basic demographic material from a total sample of 200 individuals was collected in the first part of the questionnaire. The sample was spread across the age spectrum (Table I), with approximately two-thirds of respondents either under sixteen or between sixteen and twenty, and one-third either between twenty and twenty-five or over twenty-five years of age. As Supreme only produces adult sizes the proportion of potential consumers in the most youthful category is somewhat surprising, although this fact does not necessarily impact on purchase of items such as the baseball cap or bag that can be used to signal membership of the Supreme community.

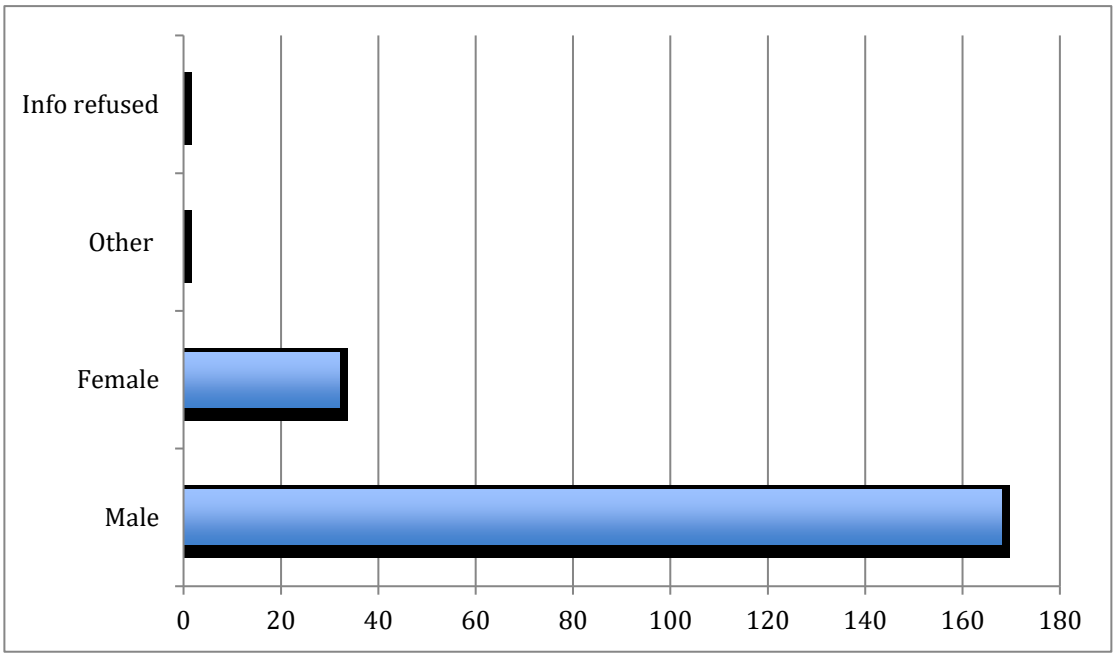
Table I: Your age



n = 200

Neither does Supreme offer womenswear, although a number of the most popular items – t-shirts, hoodies, sweatshirts – are not gender-specific garments. The ratio of female to male consumers (Table II) of 1:5 is higher than expected, particularly as collecting limited edition artefacts is typically a behaviour associated with young men. One reason for this outcome might be that fewer females declined to answer the questionnaire than males. The frequency of refusals and the gender of the individual involved were not recorded at the time of the research.

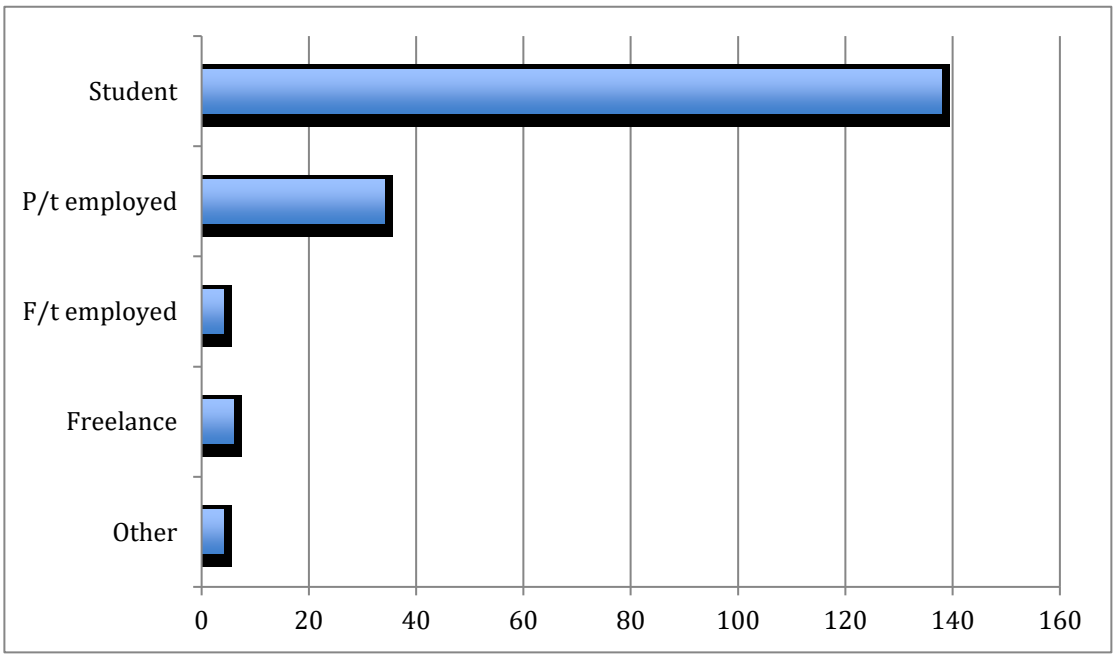
Table II: Your gender



n = 200

More than 75% of the sample indicated an occupational status as student, whether in school or higher education (Table III). Full-time employed was the second largest category, with near-negligible numbers describing themselves as freelance, part-time employed or 'other' (a category intended to cover unemployed or retired).

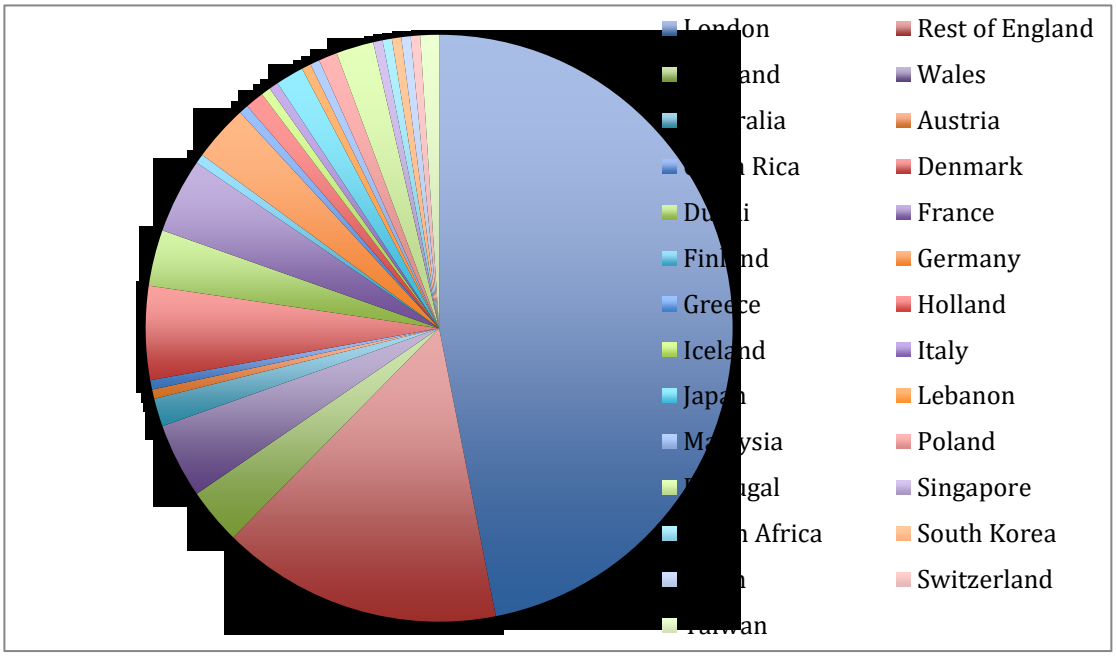
Table III: Your employment status



n = 200

Nearly half the sample had travelled to the outlet from within the Greater London area (Table IV), with a quarter from other parts of the UK (Dundee, Bracknell, Bristol, Cambridge, Cardiff, Coventry, Edinburgh, Newcastle, Sheffield, Swansea, Swindon, Wakefield, Winchester). The remainder cited international locations.

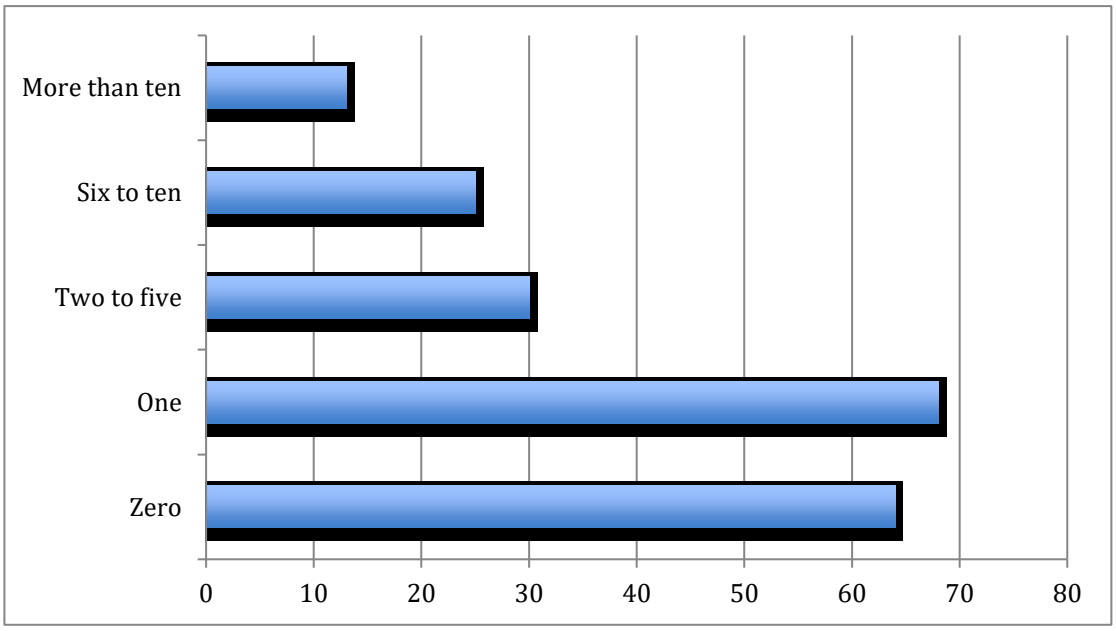
Table IV: Where have you travelled from to reach the Supreme outlet?



n = 200

Approximately two-thirds of the sample already owned Supreme goods, ranging from a single garment to, in one instance, more than thirty items (Table V).

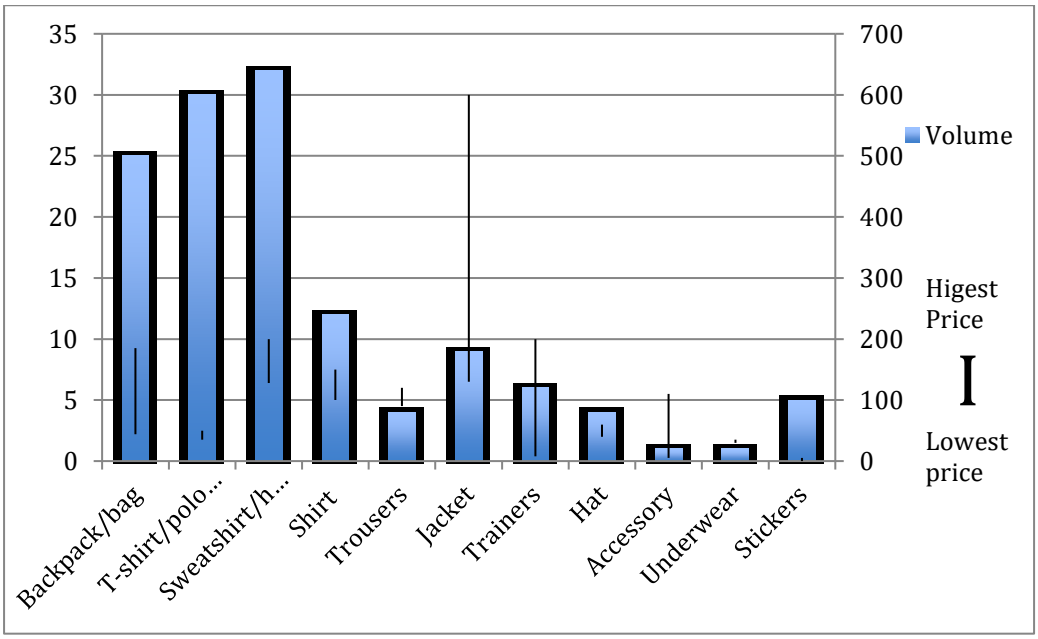
Table V: How many Supreme items do you already own?



n = 200

A wide range of Supreme product had been purchased, often for differing amounts of money within the same category (Table VI). Higher figures may reflect purchase of the more expensive outcomes from collaborations, lower figures the standard Supreme offer. Nearly half of all respondents had bought a casual top of some description.

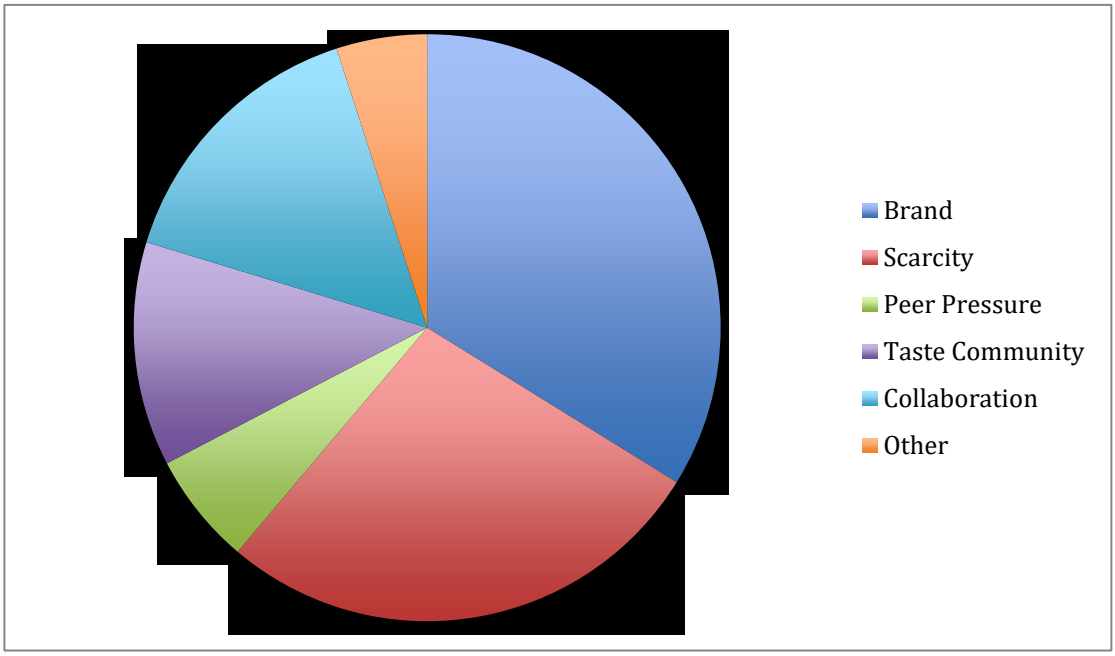
Table VI: Type and price range in £s (right-hand axis) of most recent Supreme purchase



n = 129 (65% response rate; 35% of respondents had not previously bought Supreme)

The two main factors, together accounting for 60% of the total, given by respondents for patronage were that Supreme was a preferred brand and a wish to own limited edition garments (Table VII). Alter (2002) does little more than state the obvious when noting that consumer desire to communicate ownership of a rare item is facilitated by the fact that apparel is suitable for public display. An unambiguous and visible logo, such as that used by Supreme, clearly contributes to the achievement of that ambition. Interest in a particular collaboration was the third most frequently cited factor; it is assumed that this would have been the most prevalent response had the research been conducted on 'drop' days. Just over 10% of respondents recognised the concept of being part of a 'taste community', whereas only a small fraction felt that they were succumbing to peer pressure. Of those who ticked the box labelled 'other', the explanations given were curiosity/research and re-sale. Personal communication with Supreme staff elicited the opinion that a majority of customers who attend the Thursday releases intend to sell on items purchased in secondary markets.[11] While this is less likely to be a factor on other days of the week when the more valuable outcomes from collaborations are no longer available it is possible that a number of respondents, unwilling to admit to engaging in what is widely considered a morally questionable activity, did not answer this question honestly.

Table VII: Reason(s) for patronising Supreme

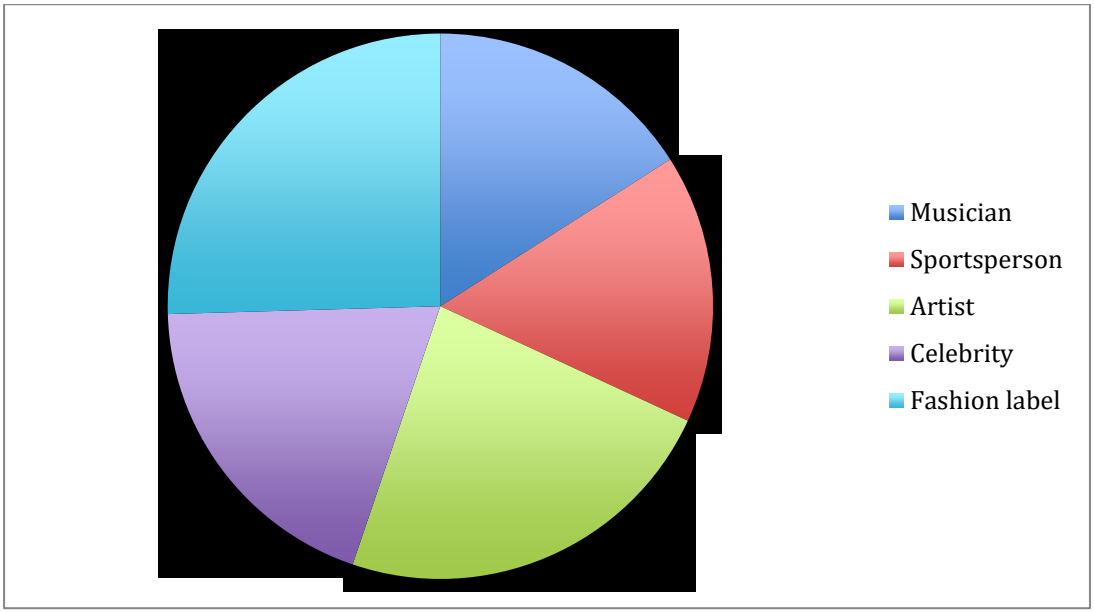


n = 200 (50% of respondents gave multiple answers)

In terms of the type of collaboration preferred (Table VIII), the answers were evenly distributed between the five categories, with other fashion labels (25%)

and artists (24%) ahead of celebrities (19%), musicians and sports(wo)men (16% each).[12]

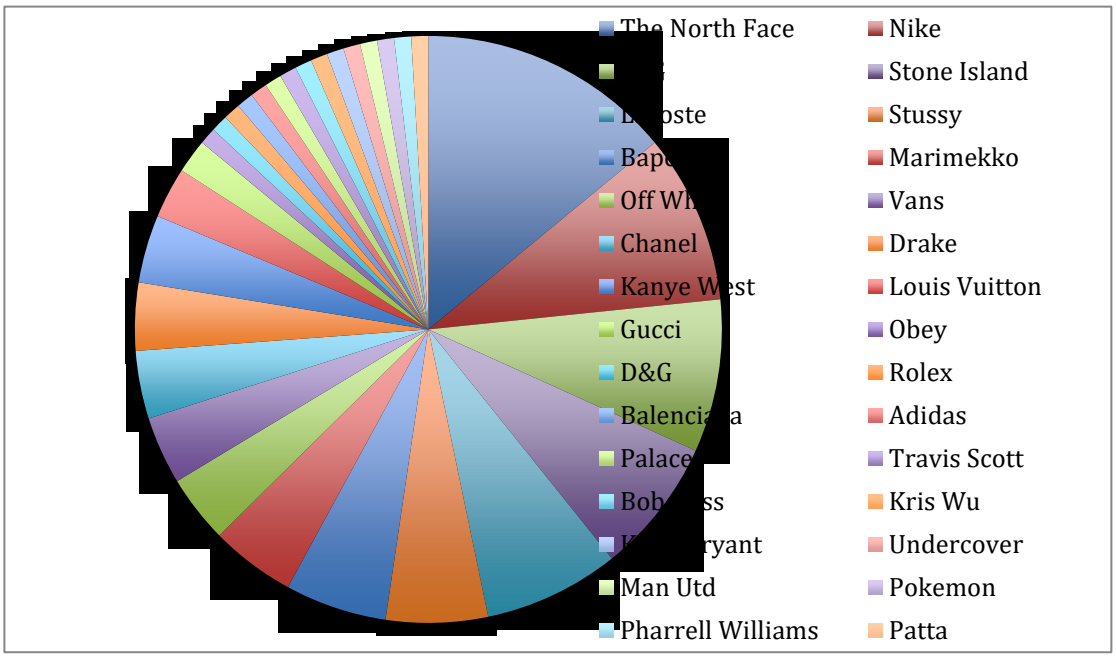
Table VIII: Preferred type of collaboration



n = 196 (98% response rate; 44% of respondents gave multiple answers)

For desired collaborations (Table IX) the most popular were with The North Face, Nike, Comme des Garçons, Bape and Stone Island. Two of the more imaginative suggestions featured Manchester United FC and the Pokemon franchise.

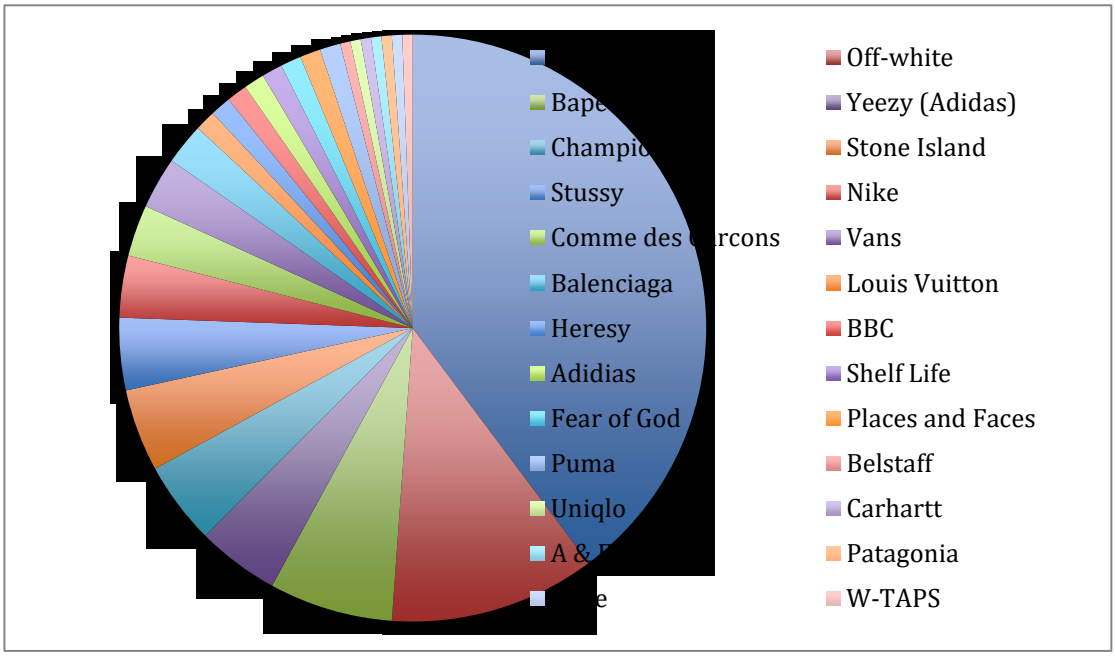
Table IX: Ideal collaborative partner



n = 96 (48% response rate; a small proportion of respondents gave multiple answers)

Of other brands purchased (Table X) Palace was by some distance the most popular alternative, reported by 40% of respondents.[13]

Table X: Other urban street-wear brands purchased recently



n = 135 (66% response rate; a small proportion of respondents gave multiple answers)

Superdry: of mimicry and men

Rivalling Supreme, both in terms of commercial success (albeit achieved in a mass market context) and prevalence of its logo, casual-wear label Superdry has followed contrasting strategy when building its brand. The Cheltenham-based company's antecedents are in a partnership formed between Julian Dunkerton, at the time proprietor of a retailer called Cult Clothing, and designer/joint-owner of skate-brand Bench, James Holder. Superdry was founded while the two were on a research trip to Tokyo in 2003 – the name supposedly inspired by terminology used on packaging of Japanese consumer goods.[14] The brand's signature faux-vintage aesthetic – melding 1950s-style Americana graphics with *kanji* (Chinese characters) – gained a substantial publicity boost in 2005 when an image of footballer David Beckham wearing their Osaka 6 print t-shirt appeared in a calendar. Thereafter, a number of other celebrities also patronised the label, contributing to an annual growth rate far outstripping that of competitors such as Abercrombie & Fitch or Jack Wills. A number of sub-brands have been rolled out to complement the main line (Example E in Figure 3, below): the Orange, Red and Black Labels (Example F), Superdry Snow, Superdry Sport (Example G), and the Idris Elba + Superdry collection (Example H).[15] In 2018 the Superdry Preview line targeted the younger market of 16-24 year-olds; later that year Dunkerton resigned from the

board in order to pursue other interests – leaving a company whose products are available in more than 500 branded locations across 46 countries, including the flagship store in London's Regent Street. While not obviously intended as flattery, the analogy drawn by Imogen Fox (2011) in an article for the Guardian newspaper – regarding Superdry's garments being as ubiquitous in the capital city as rats – serves as a reminder that, in the natural world, *Rattus Rattus* is one of the most successful species of the mammalian class.

Linnean Nomenclature	Example E	Example F	Example G	Example H
Domain	Material Culture	Material Culture	Material Culture	Material Culture
Kingdom	Apparel	Apparel	Apparel	Apparel
Phylum	Casual-wear	Casual-wear	Casual-wear	Casual-wear
Class	Superdry	Superdry	Superdry	Superdry
Order/sub-class	Superdry main label	Superdry Black label	Superdry Sport	Superdry + Idris Elba
Family	Outerwear	Outerwear	Outerwear	Outerwear
Genus	M/F Jackets	M/F Jackets	M/F Jackets	M/F Jackets
Species	Windcheater jacket	Rookie classic jacket	Down puffa jacket	Parka jacket

Fig. 3 Superdry and sub-brands in a taxonomy of material culture

In carving out a niche in the 'sartorial ecology' Superdry has eschewed collaborative ventures in favour of a strategy of mimesis. In the structure of symbiotic relationships 'Batesian mimicry' is a strand of commensalism engendered by any physical manifestation that advantages an organism by dint of its resemblance to, as opposed to interaction with, another species. For example, the insect-like appearance of the Bee Orchid enhances the flower's chances of pollination. During the initial years of the label's operation Superdry was widely believed to be a Japanese brand – a myth that the company did nothing to discourage.[16] The majority of its outerwear features the brand name both in English and the syntactically inaccurate Japanese phrase *kyokudō kansō (shinasai)* that, translated literally, reads 'extreme dry: do it'. The garment label used for the Black Label line bears the legend 'British Design, Spirit of Japan' supported by depictions of the two national flags; further technical information is rendered in barely comprehensible Japanese script. These tactics, together with the frequent use of *kanji* in the prints appear to go beyond mere appropriation of elements of a foreign culture for decorative purposes. Superdry's disguising of its national origins has enabled it to benefit from consumer perceptions of the brand as belonging to the cohort of Japanese labels (Bathing Ape, Goodenough, Neighborhood, Undercover, Visvim, W-TAPS) responsible for making urban street-wear the coolest of fashion choices. Ironically, as Masato Kimura (2016) observes in a report addressing the company's success and 'the uncomfortable truth about cool Japan', the country

is one major site of apparel consumption where Superdry cannot maintain a presence because its mangling of the native language would be regarded as inept, if not insulting. In what might be described as a case of unwitting poetic justice, the outcomes from the company's sole collaborative venture (undertaken with tailor Timothy Everest in 2013) were called the *Sebiro* Collection – using the Japanese word for Western-style suit which is itself a misappropriation of the name of the site of London's tailoring trade, Savile Row.[17]

Conclusion: a keystone species in the sartorial ecology

This paper has examined the creative and commercial strategies employed by urban street-wear brand Supreme, using a metaphorical framework of a 'sartorial ecology'. It has suggested how the range of symbiotic relationships in such a system might operate, including those between fashion companies involved in collaborations and between brands and their consumers. Borrowing the terminology of biological classification, a taxonomy of the domain of material culture is proposed within which apparel labels constitute a 'class', and their collaborations an 'order' (or more properly, a 'sub-class' – a determination based on the fact that the creative outcomes are almost always the property of Supreme). It is suggested that the label acts as a 'super-mutant' in its virus-like ability to interact with other brands irrespective of their membership of any particular 'phylum' in the 'kingdom' of apparel. Supreme, then, is a 'keystone species' – one having a disproportionately large impact on its surroundings (Fletcher 2018) – that has successfully colonised new niches in the 'sartorial ecology'.

The primary research was conducted on consumers whose behaviours were dictated by Supreme's virulent strain of 'scarcity marketing', which limits product availability both geographically (a single UK outlet located in the capital) and temporally (a weekly stock change). Given the difficulties in accessing the on-line platform and prohibitive prices in secondary markets, visiting the outlet in-person is, for many, the only course of action. It might be assumed that these individuals – willing to queue for extended periods and part with substantial amounts of money in order to obtain items featuring limited creative input from the brand – are driven by a 'fear of missing out'. Indeed, when considered in the context of the structure of symbiotic relationships, their engagement in seemingly detrimental behaviour could be equated with that described regarding the hosts of the parasitic 'zombie-ant' fungus. The questionnaire findings provide a more nuanced picture of a mutually beneficial relationship between Supreme's consumers and the brand. Only a small proportion of respondents felt they were acting as a result of peer pressure; considerably more recognised the concept of being part of a taste community. Over one-quarter aspired to own limited edition items and, although few admitted to engaging in the practice of re-sale, such actions indicate an

awareness regarding the value of the goods as tradable commodities. Fully one-third of the sample selected Supreme as their brand of choice, and a number of these had identified desirable future collaborations. The fact that, when listing other street-wear brands recently purchased, several respondents cited luxury labels and avant-garde designers suggests the formation of a new paradigm in fashion consumption – one that enables this consumer fraction to access otherwise near-unobtainable, high-value designs.

In a world where identities are less frequently thought of as being the outcomes of autonomous individual projects, outsourcing responsibility for one's fashion choices to trusted institutions is a logical move, and the hardship endured in obtaining the product a measure of consumer commitment to the label. As menswear designer Kim Jones observed, 'When you see the lines for Supreme in New York or London you see so many different types of people, and they are people you can relate to – they understand high-low, they're smart, they're intelligent, and they're humorous. They know what they want, and they are very loyal …a real aspiration for anybody with a brand' (cited in Sullivan, 2017). This statement supports the position that it is the partner brands entering into collaborative relationships – whether mutual, commensal or parasitic, always more beneficial to Supreme – who are vulnerable to the predatory instincts of the 'super-mutant'. Evidence of the pervasiveness of the Supreme spore came in 2017 when, having been served with a 'cease-and-desist' legal instruction regarding unauthorised use of Louis Vuitton's logo earlier in its existence, the outputs of the urban street-wear brand's collaboration with the luxury label appeared on the runway in the Paris menswear collections.

Notes

1. Cambridge, N. (2016), 'Sartorial Symbiosis or Creative Commensalism? Collaborations between Japanese fashion designers and Western apparel makers', *International Journal of Management and Globalisation*, Vol.16, #1, 38-49.

2. The term 'ecology' is used in the manner proposed by Margaret Maynard (2008) in an account of conditions of production and consumption of fashion photography.

3. The so-called 'chav'.

4. In 2017 the venture capitalist Carlyle Group bought a 50% stake in the brand

5. Software developed by hackers enabling users to 'queue-jump' the digital ticketing system is available for as little as £10.

6. Secondary on-line marketplaces such as GOAT, Graded and StockX provide forums where vendors and purchasers can negotiate with one

another. At the time of writing, of StockX's five most highly marked-up items, four were from Supreme.

7. A t-shirt released in 1997 featured Kruger's *I Shop Therefore I Am* image with the slogan replaced by the brand's name. A print of a section of a Jackson Pollock painting replaced the red background in a 1999 release.

8. One collaboration was with Goodenough, for whom designer Hiroshi Fujiwara pioneered the practice of combining premium pricing with limited supply – thereby introducing the 'scarcity marketing' model of luxury fashion to casual-wear.

9. An arrangement of 120 firebricks

10. Alternatively, these products might be interpreted as demonstrating that Supreme 'gets it' regarding the sacrifices its consumers make.

11. Re-sellers can often be identified from their overt use of shopping lists featuring 'client' orders.

12. Women are not widely represented in Supreme collaborations – an image of Kate Moss posing for a Calvin Klein swimwear campaign in 1994 was reproduced on a t-shirt released in 2004 to celebrate the brand's 10th anniversary.

13. The British skate-brand founded in 2009 resembles Supreme in many respects. Located nearby, it also employs security guards to manage queues for product 'drops'. Following joint ventures with sportswear makers it has recently announced a collaborative venture with Ralph Lauren.

14. The phrase 'Super-dry' appears on cans of Japan's most popular brand of beer, Asahi.

15. This choice may have been influenced by expectations that Elba would be named as the next actor to play James Bond.

16. Personal communication with a member of staff employed by Superdry since the company's inception.

17. An apparently mutually beneficial, albeit short-lived, relationship judging from comments made by James Holder who states, 'we had a lot of shared ideas about quality and pushing design while respecting heritage…We had wanted to do a collaboration based around suiting for some time but hadn't managed to find someone that we felt would work and would work with our customers. When we met Timothy, we knew we had found our man' (cited in Oliver 2012).

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Appendix I: Questionnaire

1. YOUR AGE: Under 16 ❒ 16-20 ❒ 21-25 ❒ Over 25 ❒

2. YOUR GENDER: Male ❒ Female ❒ Other ❒ Info refused ❒

3. YOUR EMPLOYMENT STATUS: Student ❒ Employed f/t ❒ Employed p/t ❒ Freelance ❒ Other ❒

4. WHERE DID YOU START YOUR JOURNEY TO SUPREME? (CITY/REGION of UK or COUNTRY)

5. HOW MANY SUPREME ITEMS DO YOU ALREADY OWN?

None ❒ One ❒ 2-5 ❒ 6-10 ❒ More than 10 ❒

6. TYPE AND PRICE OF MOST RECENTLY PURCHASED SUPREME ITEM

7. REASONS FOR CHOOSING SUPREME (please tick all that apply)

❒ Preferred brand

❒ Desire to own limited edition item/garment

❒ Peer pressure (friends/acquaintances wear the brand)

❒ Participation in a 'taste community' (people you do not know wear the brand)

❒ Particular interest in a specific collaboration

❒ Other (please state)

8. TYPES OF COLLABORATION OF INTEREST (please tick all that apply)

❒ Musician(s) ❒ Sports(wo)man ❒ Artist ❒ Celebrity ❒ Other fashion label

9. WHO WOULD YOUR IDEAL SUPREME COLLABORATION BE WITH?

10. OTHER URBAN STREETWEAR BRANDS PURCHASED RECENTLY

(Thank you for completing this survey (to be used for academic purposes only)

Appendix II. Selected Supreme Collaborations

1996 Vans

1998: Sarcastic

1999: Goodenough; SSUR

2001: Union NYC; W-TAPS

2003: Bathing Ape

2005: John Smedley

2006: Neighborhood

2006: anything; Undercover

2007: Fila; Future Lab; Nike; The North Face; W-TAPS

2008: Original Fake; Visvim

2009: APC; Hanes; W-TAPS

2010: Champion; Stussy; Thom Browne; Vans

2011: Adam Kimmel; Levis; Liberty; Schott NYC

2012: CdG Shirt

2013: CdG Shirt

2014: Brooks Brothers; CdG Shirt; Nike; Stan Smith

2015: CdG Shirt; Stan Smith

2016: Aquascutum; Jordan; Sasquatchfabric; Stan Smith; Timberland

2017: Lacoste; Louis Vuitton; Vanson Leathers