

Rotation Practices in Sneakerhead Consumer Culture

Qualitative research about how and why sneakerheads rotate

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Abstract

Many consumers tend to switch around the objects they use in their daily lives, like clothing, accessories, and also sneakers. However, existing research does not offer a complete theoretical account of this phenomenon. Existing research theorized job and station rotations. However, these types include the rotation of people rather than objects. This thesis discovered that rotation is the exchange of objects or activities over a certain period. This is transferable to sneakers. Sneaker rotations involve the practice of wearing a different pair of sneakers each day, effectively rotating through the collection daily. Sneaker rotations are theorized based on Practice Theory which is part of CCT. A practice is understood as an interaction between materials, meanings, and competencies. First, sneakerheads determine their current situation when selecting sneakers for their rotation. Elements such as outfit compatibility, intended activity, weather conditions, exclusivity/limitation, and seasonal relevance influence their decision-making. Competencies are required to assess the circumstances they find themselves in during this process. The objects are the five to seven sneakers in the rotation. The meanings are the outcomes of the rotation. These include the feeling of uniqueness, belonging, and appreciation. In the end, this thesis explains rotations within sneaker collections. With the use of multiple methods, such as interviews, netnographic and ethnographic research, a comprehensive process is developed that provides a visual representation of how sneaker rotations are formed. Furthermore, the framework offers insights into why sneakerheads perform sneaker rotations. Last, it explains why and how sneakerheads achieve NFU in their rotations. Therefore, managers have the opportunity to leverage this phenomenon. They need to possess the knowledge to position sneakers to be included in rotations. By adhering to criteria for 'situation determination' the customer's needs are addressed. This results in increased customer satisfaction.

Keywords: Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), Practice Theory, Collecting, Sneaker Rotations, Sneaker Culture

Preface

This thesis is part of the Master of Business Administration at the Radboud University in Nijmegen. During the past school year, I specialized in the field of Marketing. I immersed myself in a comprehensive exploration of its principles and practices. This has been successfully incorporated and reflected within the pages of this thesis.

The research took place within the sneaker culture. It is an extraordinary consumer culture with many aspects that have not been investigated before. Sneaker rotations are one of those topics. During the thesis market, this particular topic captured my attention due to its uniqueness and highly specific research context. I was fascinated by this practice performed by sneakerheads. The profound impact this topic has on their daily lives makes it highly deserving of theoretical exploration.

During the thesis trajectory, I enjoyed discovering the sneaker culture and the practice of rotations. I was fascinated by the interview process as it provided insight into the lives of sneakerheads. Additionally, engaging in ethnographic research was an interesting experience. Attending the sneaker event provided me with a first-hand understanding of the life of a sneakerhead. Also, netnographic research helped me understand the culture and more specifically rotations. It was interesting to see how sneakerheads communicate within communities. Therefore, I would like to thank all participants in the research process. Their support played a crucial role in shaping this thesis.

Furthermore, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Paolo Franco. His guidance and continuous positivity helped me finish this thesis report. His feedback and regular meetings played a crucial role in the ongoing improvement of the thesis. I could always approach him whenever I had questions. His remarkable fast responses greatly facilitated the progress of my thesis writing. Your enthusiasm helped me throughout the whole process. Thank you for everything.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for their support during my thesis process. Their encouraging words uplifted my spirits and maintained a positive mindset.

I hope you enjoy reading this master's thesis.

Vay Roze

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Introduction

Over the past decades, the sneaker market has turned into a multi-billion-dollar industry. Sneaker collecting is an extremely niche market yet has an enormous influence over major sportswear companies (Cassidy, 2018). In 2022, Nike's total revenue was an impressive 46.71 billion US dollars. 29.15 billion dollars of that comes from sales of footwear alone (Tighe, 2022). It is widely accepted that a large amount of money is being exchanged within the sneaker industry. Back in 2016, a pair of Nike Air Jordan IV sneakers were purchased on the resale market for a sum of \$18,500. This specific pair is named 'Undeclared'. It was co-designed by a sneaker boutique. Only 72 pairs were released in the boutique with a price of \$200. In this case, the Nike Air Jordan IV Undeclared was sold by 9250% over its original retail price (Cassidy, 2018).

To help each other obtain limited editions, sneaker communities share their knowledge online. The sneakerhead community has rapidly grown since the 1980s and is viewed as a consumer group. The presence of the internet and social media has made it increasingly easy to create online sneaker communities (Cassidy, 2018). Great examples are 'NikeTalk', Reddit's 'r/sneakers', and Facebook's 'SNEAKERS'. According to research by Choi & Kim (2019), the primary focus of the discussion is on upcoming shoe releases, various brands, opinions on the newest sneakers, and people's intentions to buy them.

It all started in 1980, sneakers became more than just an athletic item. A distinctive group called the 'sneakerheads' has emerged in the marketplace. These sneakerheads have a continuous drive to collect sneakers (Matthews et al., 2021). According to research by Matthews et al. (2021), sneaker collecting is a unique way in which individuals identify with the sneakers that they love and wear.

Nowadays, sneaker rotations have a big impact on the sneaker world, with a lot of people in sneaker communities sharing them. Rotation is the exchange of objects or activities over a certain period. Sneakerheads also perform this process by rotating sneakers. Sneaker rotations involve the practice of wearing a different pair of sneakers each day, effectively rotating through the collection daily. Most sneakerheads determine their rotation beforehand. Therefore, weekly or monthly sneaker rotations are created. These rotations are placed at alternative locations. For instance, in front of the closet, in the hallway, on a separate bench, etc. (Figure 1). These rotations are frequently posted online and shown to their sneakerhead friends (Figure 2).

However, in literature, these sneaker rotations are unknown and have not been theorized before. Rotations are so understudied that the closest identified concepts in academic research are job and station rotations (Ortega, 2001). According to Huang (1999), job rotation is defined as the "*lateral transfer of employees among several different positions and tasks within jobs where each requires different skills and responsibilities*". Due to job rotation employees have the opportunity to learn different skills and experiences. It supports workers in understanding the different steps of the process and how each member of the team contributes to the process. Furthermore, it helps to prevent psychical complaints

when performing a task over a longer period (Huang, 1999). Another example is station rotation. It is a process in which students rotate between different learning stations in which they independently perform a learning activity. Station rotation is a new form of learning which motivates students to conduct assignments alone (Maxwell & White, 2017). These types of rotations are explained and theorized in prior research. Nonetheless, job and station rotations are significantly different from sneaker rotations. Sneaker rotations include the rotation of objects such as sneakers. In contrast, job and station rotations are the rotation of people. Therefore, theories of job and station rotations cannot be translated to sneaker rotations. Additional literature is necessary to understand this phenomenon in the sneaker culture.

However, sneaker rotations are very unknown in the field of Marketing. In literature, rotations are very understudied. Furthermore, academic articles do not provide any theory explaining the phenomena of sneaker rotations. The goal of this research is to address this weakness by providing a theory for sneaker rotations. This results in the following research questions:

“Why and how do sneakerheads rotate sneakers within their collection?”

“Why do sneakerheads include unique sneakers within their rotations?”

By answering the research questions, the developed theory determines the explanation and motives of sneaker rotations related to the collecting of unique sneakers.

Building upon the proposed theory, this thesis offers managerial implications for marketers who wish to leverage the opportunities of the sneaker rotation phenomenon. It helps marketers understand the phenomenon of sneaker rotations which is a huge trend in the sneaker market. In the future, marketers have the opportunity to use their knowledge of sneaker rotations in their marketing programs for the sneaker industry. By gaining insights into the creation and factors influencing sneaker rotations, an effective marketing strategy is developed for sneaker companies. This provides marketers with guidelines on which sneakers to prioritize for promotion to the public. Besides, this research helps marketers fulfil the sneakerheads’ needs. It helps increase consumer satisfaction and positively impacts the performance of a company (Rahman & Safeena, 2016).

Additionally, marketing departments should respond to the need for unique sneakers in sneaker rotations by providing them with the right offers. Sneakerheads have a great attraction towards unique and scarce collections of sneakers. The exclusive nature drives the purchase behaviour of sneaker fans. These limited sneakers are hard to obtain. They are classified as scarce and unique (Cassidy, 2018). Brands need to make use of this behaviour by releasing more highly limited sneakers to create exclusivity around their brand. Sneaker companies attract sneakerheads by offering limited edition sneakers which stand out compared to other sneakers. In the end, this impacts sales and increases financial outcomes (Rahman & Safeena, 2016).

In this thesis, the first chapter consists of the theoretical background. The theoretical background provides an understanding of prior research and knowledge of the topic. It discusses several theories of

CCT. Furthermore, the lens of 'Practice Theory' is introduced as a guiding framework for the research. In the second chapter, the methodology for the research process is described. It emphasises the research methods, analysis process, quality and ethics. The next chapter contains the outcomes of the research. The theoretical framework is highlighted and supported by findings from interviews, netnographic and ethnographic research. Finally, the discussion is elaborated. It explains the theoretical contributions, future research directions, managerial insights, and research limitations.



Figure 1: Sneaker rotation Sven.



Figure 2: Sneaker rotation Mike.

Theoretical background

This chapter presents the theoretical background. It explains background information about the sneaker culture and provides various possible theories applicable to the phenomena of ‘sneaker rotations. The final enabling lens, Practice Theory, is clarified based on the limitations of the various theories. Furthermore, Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) is introduced as a research tradition for this thesis.

Sneaker Culture

Late 1970s and early 1980s the hip-hop culture became known to the world. According to Price (2006), it all started in The Bronx, The United States. The Bronx was a place for the working middle class who wanted to escape the busy life in New York City. After World War II and some city constructions, this massively changed. It became the home of gangs and crews that were known for their violence. Gangs provide a new family to young people who are unsatisfied with their present family. These gangs rely on extreme hierarchies, loyalty, and respect (Price, 2006). In 1979 Kool Herc arrived in The Bronx. A young man who had a passion for music. Together with others he created the first Hip Hop crew. It changed the whole nature of gangs and crews. He motivated leaders and members to have fun and make music together, later called rap music. Even though gangs still exist, the violence of these gangs slowly diminished and Hip Hop was introduced. Various radio stations in the Bronx started playing the music produced by the Hip Hop crews. Over time, numerous radio stations throughout the United States embraced this new genre of music. In today’s society rap music continues to be enjoyed by many people around the world (Price, 2006).

The Hip Hop culture is characterized in many ways, but one of them has a major impact on today’s society; sneakers (Price, 2006). The streets started filling with people wearing Converse Chuck Taylors, Adidas Shell Toes, Pumas, etc. Slowly the sneakerhead subculture came to light. The big popularity came later when Nike introduced the Air Jordan 1s and its collaboration with NBA basketball player Michael Jordan. Over 100 million pairs of Air Jordan have been sold since 1985 (Matthews et al., 2021).

Nowadays sneakers are common in our society. A world without sneakers cannot be imagined. The popularity of collecting unique and scarce sneakers has grown significantly (Matthews et al., 2021). Sneakerheads invest in massive collections consisting of Nike, Adidas, Puma, New Balance, and many more brands. Sneakers refer to athletic footwear, mostly worn for secondary purposes such as comfort or style (Cassidy, 2018). Sneakers were originally designed with athletic uses in mind, but they have been adopted by present generations to express style, conformity, and social status (Cassidy, 2018). The popularity of sneakers has grown enormously in the last few years. This resulted in the creation of the sneakerhead culture. Matthews et al. (2021) define sneakerheads as *“individuals who collect, trade, and/or admire sneakers. It is a self-given name for sneaker enthusiasts”* (Cassidy, 2018).

Over the past years, much academic research in marketing regarding sneaker culture has been conducted. Brace-Govan & de Burgh-Woodman (2008) performed research on sneakers and street culture together with the lens of postcolonialism. From this research, it is concluded that sneakers became an instrument to create a voice within society. Run DMC started a protest by wearing laceless sneakers. This protest was against the image of the African American man as a criminal. Overall, sneakers have come to provide a way for the urban culture to create a sense of both individual and collective identity. Furthermore, researchers found that sneakers can be interpreted differently depending on a person's identity and background. Sneaker culture is therefore seen as very similar to the streetwear culture.

Choi & Kim (2019) agrees with this claim. Choi & Kim (2019) performed research on sneakerhead brand communities. The research concluded that many sneakerheads are a member of online brand communities. A brand community is defined as *"a type of consumer community in which members share interests and/or passion concerning a specific brand culture"* (Choi & Kim, 2019). In these online brand communities, sneakerheads primarily discuss new releases, purchase intentions, and opinions about new sneakers. Also, the withdrawal of online brand communities has been examined. The main reason for withdrawal is the mistreatment by brands. If sneakerheads feel that their voices are not heard by the brand, they will become frustrated and remove themselves from the community. Another insight regards the scarcity of sneakers. According to Choi & Kim (2019), sneakerheads are willing to put more effort into obtaining scarce sneakers than common sneakers. Due to the difficulty of acquiring limited edition sneakers, a secondary market for these shoes has been established.

Slaton & Pookulangara (2022) conducted a study investigating these secondary sneaker markets. The secondary sneaker market transfers the ownership of sneakers over to consumers through the purchase of new or second-hand sneakers. The researchers concluded that popular culture and social media positively influence fashion-conscious consumers. It increases their desire for sneakers offered by secondary sneaker markets retailers such as GOAT and StockX. Fashion-consciousness consumers, like sneakerheads, are constantly looking for new trends which are mostly scarce. This motivates them to purchase sneakers from secondary markets (Slaton & Pookulangara, 2022). In conclusion, secondary markets provide sneakerheads with the opportunity to obtain limited sneakers. It expands their collection, even when the supply is scarce. This encourages consumers to continue collecting and expanding their collections.

Previously mentioned research established that sneaker culture has been a known research topic for a long time and has taken many shapes. Various researchers have theorized phenomena within sneaker culture. This is of input for sneaker rotations and the collection of unique sneakers, such as those working under the Consumer Culture Theory research tradition as explained next.

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT)

The main approach regarding this thesis is the Consumer Culture Theory. CCT is a research tradition in marketing that consists of a collection of theoretical perspectives. It addresses the dynamic relationship between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meanings (Franco, 2022). CCT argues that consumer actions provide insight into how consumers behave and the decisions they make. The marketplace reveals how marketers interact with them. Ultimately, these two forces create a cultural meaning for the consumer's behaviour (Franco, 2022).

The theory links individual-level meanings to different levels of cultural processes and structure. These relationships are placed within historical and marketplace contexts. It helps to understand why and how consumers consume in different social spaces (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). The following theories are different perspectives of CCT.

Theory of Consumer Collecting

Sneakerheads own massive sneaker collections at home consisting of various brands. The practice of collecting objects has been around for many years in our society. Anything can be collected, including sneakers. Therefore, it is an extraordinary phenomenon in modern consumer culture. According to Belk et al. (1991), collecting is defined as *“a selective, active, and longitudinal acquisition, possession, and disposition of an interrelated set of differentiated objects that contribute to and derive extraordinary meaning from the entity (the collection) that this set is perceived to constitute”*. Belk et al. (1991) conducted research in which they investigated collecting in a consumer culture. Their study discovered two basic motivations for consumer collecting. These motivations are legitimization and self-extension. Legitimization is defined as *“the willingness of society to approve or condone behaviour that might otherwise be construed as acquisitiveness, possessiveness, or greed by applying labels to certain activities and people”* (Belk et al., 1991). Collecting therefore depends on the norms and values society gives to the activity. Self-extension is described as *“gaining an expanded or improved sense of self through gathering and controlling meaningful objects or experiences”* (Belk et al., 1991). There is a desire to build an extended self through controlling objects in their collection. In short, it is a way for individuals to create their own identity. It helps to find a sense of meaning and control in their lives. (Belk et al., 1991).

This aligns with another research by Belk (1988). The researcher studied the relationship between possessions, such as collections, and the extended self. He proposed the extended self-theory. It is a theory that explains that possessions act as an extension of an individual's self and its identity. It drives consumers to collect. Self-extension occurs through control and mastery of an object, through the creation of an object, through knowledge of an object, and contamination via proximity and habituation to an object. The collection is even seen as more a part of one's self than isolated consumption items (Belk, 1988).

Research by Ijams Spaid (2018) agrees with the claims of previously mentioned research. They discovered that consumer collecting behaviour is driven by several collecting motives which are influenced by the collector's salient identity. This influences the collector's salient identity reinforcement moderated by goal feedback. It drives them to enact their behaviour which is collecting sneakers (Ijams Spaid, 2018).

Furthermore, different research by Belk et al. (1989) aligns with these claims. They explored the influence of the sacred and the profane on consumers' behaviour. A consumer accords the sacred status to objects, places, and times that are valuable. For the consumer participating in these expressions, it provides meaning in life, joy, and occasionally ecstasy through connection (Belk et al., 1989). Overall, all studies suggest that collecting is a way for individuals to create their own identities, express their status, and find a sense of meaning and control in their lives (Belk et al., 1991).

However, research by Lee et al. (2021) extends this claim with alternative motives. The researchers conducted research investigating 51 journal articles. They created an overview of all relevant motivations for consumers to collect. It revealed a set of six motivations driving the consumption of collectibles. The motivations include achievement through collecting goals, social membership, cooperation and competition, societal and personal memories, legacy, and financial value. These motivations are partly aligned with the research of Belk (1988) and Belk et al. (1991). The two types of research of Belk revealed that consumers collect due to identify development. Lee et al. (2021) defines this as creating personal memories. The additional motivations identified by Lee et al. (2021) are not addressed in Belk's research, thus presenting novel insights into the field of marketing.

Nevertheless, Belk et al. (1991) created a general theory of collecting, but they did not explore the collection of products or brands. Therefore, Scaraboto et al. (2017) conducted research investigating the connection between the curatorial practices of collectors and the materiality of the collected objects. Curatorial practices are *"the acquisition, documentation, and use of collections as well as exhibition, interpretation, and dissemination"* (Scaraboto et al., 2017). The researchers identified three main categories of curatorial practices; organizing, displaying, and storing collected items, wearing and caring for collected items, and acquiring and disposing of collected items. In these practices, materiality is seen as an ongoing part of the relationship between consumers and objects. It is therefore an important part of the consumers' behaviour. Materials, such as texture, colour, and durability, mediate the relationship between curatorial practices and the consumers' behaviour (Scaraboto et al., 2017)

As Scaraboto et al. (2017) examine curatorial practices, Denny (2021) touches upon the ritualization of these practices. The research explains that *"communities of consumption and individual consumers exhibit a wide variety of behaviours and attitudes that problematize, ritualize, and instrumentalize the consumption of this product in various ways"* (Denny, 2021). It indicates that ritualization occurs in diverse forms within the sneaker culture.

Otnes & Shapiro (2007) extend the research of Scaraboto et al. (2017) by examining the relationship between brand collection and consumers' brand meanings. Their research concluded that

brand collecting is an important part of consumer culture. It helps to create and communicate meaning to the consumer. By both personalizing the meaning of the brand in consumers' lives and offering social venues for interaction with the brand, meaning is both personally understood and collectively negotiated. The relationships between the individual consumer, other consumers in the social network, and the brand are augmented. Furthermore, the data demonstrate how an ordinary consumer evolves into a brand ambassador. An ambassador helps shape meaning and create relationships. In short, the researchers concluded that the brand collecting of consumers leads to brand meanings (Otnes & Shapiro, 2007).

Additionally, Saridakis & Angelidou (2018) created a theory of consumer collecting that identifies the different types of collectors. The researchers also defined the motives for collecting behaviour. According to Saridakis & Angelidou (2018), the different types of collectors are:

- Passionate collectors: people who are obsessed with their collections.
- Inquisitive collectors: people who see collecting as an investment activity.
- Hobbyists: people who mainly focus on the enjoyment of collecting.
- Expressive collectors: people who see collecting as a way to express their self.

These types of collectors have different types of interaction with other collectors. Casual collectors are concentrated on collecting but have no intention to connect with other collectors. The social collector focuses on socializing with other collectors. The serious collector also wants to exchange information and knowledge regarding their collections. One of the traits of collectors is collection caring. Collection caring is defined as *“putting a lot of effort into caring for their collectibles”* (Saridakis & Angelidou, 2018). For example, preparing the space for displaying the objects, spending time organizing and cataloguing, etc. Saridakis & Angelidou (2018) presented multiple drivers for collecting behaviour. According to their study collecting behaviour is driven by social, gratification, idea, and value motives. The act of collecting and caring for sneakers provides a complete experience for sneakerheads. Therefore, sneakerheads do not only value the sneaker itself but also the collecting experience. From searching for the sneaker to buying and unpacking the box. The whole experience is valuable for the collector (Saridakis & Angelidou, 2018). This also includes the search for unique sneakers. The quest for limited-edition sneakers not only motivates but also generates a memorable experience for sneaker enthusiasts.

Theory of Uniqueness

The theory of uniqueness states that individuals are motivated to see their selves as different and distinctive from others for meaningful self-identification. The theory of uniqueness argues that *“when the need to feel different from other people is aroused and, in events where the self-perception of uniqueness is undermined, the need to feel different competes with other motives to protect and enhance such uniqueness”* (Abosag et al., 2020). Need for Uniqueness (NFU) is defined as *“an individual's pursuit of differentness relative to others that are achieved through the acquisition, utilization, and*

disposition of consumer goods to develop and enhance one's personal and social identity” (Abosag et al., 2020). The need to be different is driven by the extent to which a friend likes the uniqueness of the object and the similarity the consumers have with a brand. High friends' likeability negatively increases customers' need for uniqueness. Brand similarity leads to increased NFU (Need for Uniqueness) if they see that the similarity they share with a particular brand is not shared by other people in their social group. This gives them a sense of uniqueness and motivates them to feel more closely associated with the brand (Abosag et al., 2020). Therefore, sneakerheads do not lay their focus on the most basic and regular sneakers, mostly unique and scarce sneakers grab the attention of the sneakerhead. On their online platforms, unique and scarce sneaker rotations are displayed to determine their friend's likeability and the brand's affinity.

Sneakers are scarce due to the limited number of releases or high popularity of the product. There are two types of releases. A general release refers to a sneaker that is available in large quantities, at the most popular retailers. A limited release refers to a sneaker that is produced in intentionally limited numbers, usually at a quantity much less than expected demand (Cassidy, 2018). Sneakerheads have a desire for these limited and exclusive sneakers which are hard to find. This desire is reflected in rotations in many ways. Their need to be unique influences how and why sneakerheads perform rotations. It plays a role in selecting sneakers for your collection which has the possibility to indirectly impact rotations (Cassidy, 2018).

The effort of obtaining these sneakers motivates them to collect (Cassidy, 2018). If the sneaker is not available to buy after its release, an option is to look into the resale market. One of the most popular platforms worldwide is StockX. These platforms sell sneakers after their release for a large amount of money. Sometimes even more than double the release price. The more popular or sacred the sneaker, the higher the price. Nowadays, many consumers buy sneakers intending to resell them on the resale market for a substantial profit (Cassidy, 2018). This creates a shift in the purpose of purchasing and collecting sneakers.

Limitations of prior theories

Previously mentioned theories help to understand consumers' behaviour in various ways. All theories have their focus and strength but also contain limitations. The theory of consumer collecting has been examined multiple times over the past years. Many researchers applied this theory in different areas. All theories state that collecting provides an opportunity to create your own identity, find a sense of meaning in life and create self-extension. It helps to understand why sneakerheads collect based on the collector's salient identity (Ijams Spaid, 2018).

However, this research does not help to elaborate on why and how consumers perform sneaker rotations. The theory of consumer collecting indicates how collecting creates self-identity. In this research, a framework is requested. This framework helps explain how the sneaker rotation process is

being performed. Therefore, the theory of consumer collecting has a shortcoming in the context of sneaker rotations.

The theory of uniqueness is a theory that focuses on the need to feel different as a consumer. Therefore, sneakerheads do not lay their focus on the most basic and regular sneakers, mostly unique and scarce sneakers grab the attention of the sneakerhead. The main cause of NFU is the extent to which a friend likes the uniqueness of the object and the similarity the consumers have with a brand (Abosag et al., 2020). In this case, sneakerheads' NFU negatively increases when friends like their sneakers. Furthermore, NFU increases if sneakerheads see that the similarity they share with a particular brand is not shared by other people in their social group (Abosag et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, this theory of uniqueness does not provide a connection between uniqueness and habitual practices, like sneaker rotations. It does not elaborate on which role uniqueness plays in the establishment of sneaker rotations. The theory only explains how the NFU of sneakerheads increases. Therefore, this theory has a shortcoming in the context of sneaker rotations. The intended theory should facilitate the comprehension of how uniqueness contributes to the formation of sneaker rotations. Besides, the intended theory should discover which types of outcomes it yields for sneaker enthusiasts. The theory of uniqueness fails to fulfil this aspiration.

Practice Theory

In this research, the phenomenon of 'sneaker rotations' in sneaker culture is studied under the enabling lens of Practice Theory. Practice theory is conducted for a theory creation of sneaker rotations (Dolbec et al., 2021). The Practice Theory helps us understand why and how consumers perform sneaker rotations in their collections. This is examined by determining the materials, competencies, and meanings associated with the practice (Arsel & Bean, 2013). Furthermore, this study focuses on the 'Need for Uniqueness' in rotations. It examines which role NFU plays in carrying out the practice (Abosag et al., 2020). Adopting the CCT research tradition helps to comprehend consumer actions, like sneaker rotations. In the end, the meaning of their behaviour is adopted.

The rotation of sneakers can be classified as a practice within sneaker collecting. The practice theory is a theory that contains a routinized type of behaviour. The theory consists of several elements, interconnected to one another. The elements are forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, things, and their use, background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion, and motivational knowledge (Halkier et al., 2011). In short, practice is understood as "*an interaction between materials, meanings, and competence with practice as performance*" (Halkier et al., 2011).

The *objects* are defined as the materials which help the consumer perform the practice of consumption. The bodily activities which a consumer undertakes are known as *competence*. This combination of materials and competence creates ritualization in consumers' behaviour, which in turn creates a meaning of the practice known as instrumentalization. The *meanings* represent the core values

of the practice (Arsel & Bean, 2013). Halkier et al. (2011) argue that the existence and interconnectedness between the elements of practice are necessary. It cannot be reduced to one single element.

In marketing and consumer behaviour, practice theory is a useful tool to theorize markets and practices of the market. For instance, sneaker collecting and rotations. Practice theory helps to describe the process of sneaker rotations and how these rotations are established. In the end, the theory supports marketers in understanding why consumers behave in a certain way. Practice theory has been applied in many past academic studies. Arsel & Bean (2015) used practice theory to define taste regime. A taste regime is defined as “*a discursively constructed normative system that orchestrates the aesthetics of practice in a culture of consumption*” (Arsel & Bean, 2015). The article shows an example of how a taste regime influences domestic practices in everyday activities. It determines the objects, doings, and meanings when arriving in your apartment. The objects are your coat and shoes. The taking off of your coat and shoes is classified as a doing. This action has meaning for the consumer, as it makes them feel at home (Arsel & Bean, 2015). This research is useful to similarly apply it to sneaker rotation. It shows how habitual and simple practices can be theorized by practice theory. Coming home is a very routinized practice but creates loads of meaning for consumers (Arsel & Bean, 2015). This is applicable for rotations as well. It is seen as a small and unconscious practice but has a significant impact on the lives of sneakerheads and their obsession.

Gonzalez-Arcos et al. (2021) used practice theory to implement sustainable interventions without creating consumer resistance. The findings show that consumer resistance to sustainability interventions emerges from individual behaviours which are embedded in dynamic social practices. Interventions should not change individual behaviour but should aim on social practices. The researchers created a framework that implements the shift from existing practice to reconfigured practice by using materials, competencies, and meanings (Gonzalez-Arcos et al, 2021). This research is useful to similarly apply it to sneaker rotation. Gonzalez-Arcos et al. (2021) show how you can use practice theory to change consumer behaviour. This can be implemented in sneaker rotations as well. It helps understand behaviour that is caused by the shifting of sneakerhead rotations. It supports the understanding of how rotations are created and why rotations are changed once in a while. Within this research, several methods are used to theorize this remarkable practice.

Methodology

In this chapter, the methodology used in this thesis is given attention. First, the objective of the research is outlined, followed by the method of data collection and analysis. Additionally, the quality of the research is highlighted ending with the ethical and practical considerations of the research. The chapter ends with a table providing the demographic profile of the participants.

Data Collection: Interviews, Netnography and Ethnography

The unit of analysis within this research is the phenomena of sneaker rotations. The goal is to understand why and how consumers perform sneaker rotations within their collections. This research employs a combination of both desk and field research which allows one to view the case from multiple perspectives, also called method triangulation (Myers, 2019). The predominant source is consumer interviews (Arsel, 2017). The consumer interviews provide insight into the perception of the ‘sneakerheads’ (Bleijenbergh, 2015). Additionally, online and in-person observations were performed. Online observations were conducted to gain insights into the current trends within sneaker communities. Besides, real-life examples of rotations were utilized to enhance the understanding. In addition, in-person observations were executed which offered additional background information about the behaviour of sneakerheads (Bleijenbergh, 2015).

The first step of data collection was the development of an interview guide (Appendix A). It helps to conduct a semi-structured consumer interview (Arsel, 2017). Topics have been specified including the main research questions. This created more structure and consistency among the multiple consumer interviews. Furthermore, interviews were conducted until data saturation occurs. This means that the interviews do not give a deeper insight into the topic. Also, new codes do not provide more variability (Guest et al., 2006). In this case, 14 sneakerheads are selected through online research and own personal connections. These 14 sneakerheads need to perform any kind of rotation and have a collection of sneakers. The size of sneaker collections among respondents ranges from small to big. In Table 1 an overview is provided of the respondents and their demographic profile. Pseudonyms are used for the names of the sneakerheads. Data is collected together with a thesis circle team. This team consists of three students in total. Before the interview, the term ‘sneaker rotation’ is clarified so that all participants similarly perceive the phenomena. The interviews took place at the homes of the respondents. If not possible, at a public space or online through video call. The duration of the interview varies between 30 to 60 minutes. Before the interview, respondents were requested to take photos of their previous rotations to use as a topic for discussion.

Second, netnography has been conducted. Netnography requires studying the phenomenon in an online context (Kozinets, 2002). Netnography gives an understanding of the current situation of the sneakerheads and trends playing a role in their environment. Sneaker rotations are a point of discussion

on multiple platforms and communities. Sneaker enthusiasts enjoy showcasing their sneaker rotations online, sharing the process and rationale behind the creation of these rotations. This is of great input for the research question as they help answer why and how rotations are created. Therefore, multiple online platforms were observed over the past weeks, for instance, Reddit, TikTok and Facebook. Each day the communities were monitored for new content. Additionally, social media posts were also analysed. The observations were written down and analysed in the form of field notes.

Finally, ethnographic research is conducted. Ethnography requires getting involved in the world of the phenomenon in order to study it and better understand it (Arnould & Price, 2006). This is captured with field notes which serve as additional information for the interviews. On the 26th of February 2023, a sneaker event has been visited to observe the behaviour of sneakerheads. The event, called Sneakerzone, took place in Nijkerk. It allowed sneaker dealers to sell their sneakers to sneakerheads. Ethnographic research helped provide background information about sneakerheads and their culture. It gained insights into their behaviour involving their passion. The observations reveal their genuine admiration for sneakers in real-life situations. The field notes of the event have been used as input for the results of this research.

Table 1: Participants' demographic profile.

Participants	Gender	Age	Occupation	Sneaker experience	Number of sneakers
1. Qian	Male	23	Master marketing student	6 years	10 – 12
2. Sven	Male	19	PABO student + kitchen staff	1,5 years	13
3. Melissa	Female	22	Shift worker	5 years	20
4. Fleur	Female	21	Law student + waitress	2 years	25
5. Jilke	Female	23	Beauty specialist	+4 years	30
6. Benjamin	Male	28	Lawyer	12 years	30
7. Jayden	Male	21	Pedagogical student + waiter + skate shop employee	3-4 years	35
8. Mike	Male	23	Gym owner	5 years	+50
9. Luuc	Male	25-34	Photographer	+10 years	55
10. Daan	Male	35	Marketing specialist	20 years	70 - 80
11. Tom	Male	26	Marketing specialist	8 – 9 years	+80
11. Josh	Male	30	International relations student + freelancer	15 years	86
13. Pim	Male	38	Teacher + dad	3 years	+/- 100
14. Laura	Female	36	Customer Service Adidas	10 years	+125

Data Analysis

Once the data collection was complete, the interviews were transcribed and analysed using coding. The unit of analysis within this research regards sneakerheads who apply sneaker rotations in their daily practices. First, open coding is conducted. Pieces of data are highlighted and given a label that represents a main theme. Second, axial coding is applied. Similar codes are combined to create an umbrella of codes. In the end, selective coding is implemented to create relationships between multiple codes (Bleijenbergh, 2015). The results were analysed and presented in a coding scheme. It serves as input for the creation of the theoretical framework.

Quality of Research

Hogg and Maclaran (2008) state that two essential criteria must be met when conducting research regarding CCT: authenticity and plausibility. Both of these are discussed in further detail to address the quality of the research.

The authenticity of a study is defined as *“convincing readers, not only that the interpretation is drawn from the data, but also that the researcher has spent time in the field and has experienced the “lived worlds” of the informants”* (Hogg and Maclaran, 2008). In this case, the research is authentic if the data collection and analysis process is well described. The steps from conducting the data to concluding are well explained to prove that the conclusion is drawn from the data. Furthermore, Hogg and Maclaran (2008) demonstrate that the researcher needs to spend adequate time in the sneaker culture. This was accomplished by conducting everyday observations in online communities, talking to multiple respondents, and attending sneaker events. By doing so the authenticity of the research is protected.

The second criterion is to obtain plausibility in the research process. Plausibility is about *“accounting for as much of the information as possible so that there is some degree of well-argued “fit” between the information (or data), and the explanation offered to account for the interpretation offered of the data”* (Hogg & Macalaren, 2008). The plausibility of this research is secured by improving the research questions over time. Initially, a series of research questions were formulated to obtain insights into sneaker rotations. This set of questions was improved after the initial stream of findings to establish a more focused research direction. These questions were designed to validate the findings with input from other sneaker enthusiasts. The interview guide is divided into multiple topics which give answers to the final research questions. In the end, this will secure the plausibility of the research.

Research Ethics

When conducting research, it is important to consider ethical issues. Before the interview was conducted, participants received a plain language statement that outlines the goals and purpose of the research. Furthermore, respondents needed to sign a consent form that grants permission to use their data. It also stated that they can withdraw from the interview at any time and that their anonymity is

preserved. In cases where the respondent is under 18 years of age, the consent form is signed by their parents. For those respondents who only took part in the interview via a telephone call, the consent form was read aloud to them. Their permission is audio recorded as proof. All interested participants were promised to receive the research by email.

Furthermore, responsibility is taken in using the data of respondents for the proposed cause. Sensitive information is not shared and is used only for research purposes. Data is not deformed. Also, references of the source are applied to prevent fabrication. Fabrication is a situation in which claims are being made on incomplete or assumed results (Markham, 2012). This phenomenon is prevented by providing the results with literal quotes from the interviews.

For the netnographic research private details of members of online communities are disclosed to ensure confidentiality and anonymity (Kozinets, 2002). Information is left out or changed with pseudonyms. The faces of online sneakerheads are blurred to protect their anonymity. The same applies to ethnographic research. The identities and personal details of the questioned sneakerheads are not disclosed.

Findings

The outcomes of the interviews, netnographic and ethnographic research are discussed in this chapter. The results provide a theoretical framework that illustrates how sneakerheads establish sneaker rotations within their daily life. The framework consists of a process. Each step is separately discussed and supported by data gathered with interviews and observations. The core of the framework is powered by the practice theory and is divided into competencies, objects and meanings (Arsel & Bean, 2013). First, an explanation of rotations is provided to clarify the concept.

Rotations

Rotation is the exchange of objects or activities over a certain period. There are many forms of rotations; job rotations (Ortega, 2001), station rotations (Maxwell & White, 2017), but also sneaker rotations. Sneaker rotations are the change of sneakers over a certain period. Five to seven sneakers are set aside to wear that week, month or period. This can be done in several ways. The sneakers are placed in the hallway, on special benches or in a separate closet that is rotated every once in a while. Rotations allow sneakerheads to wear most of their sneakers. It also provides organisation within their collection. To understand this phenomenon a theoretical framework (Figure 3) is created which visualizes the process of rotation.

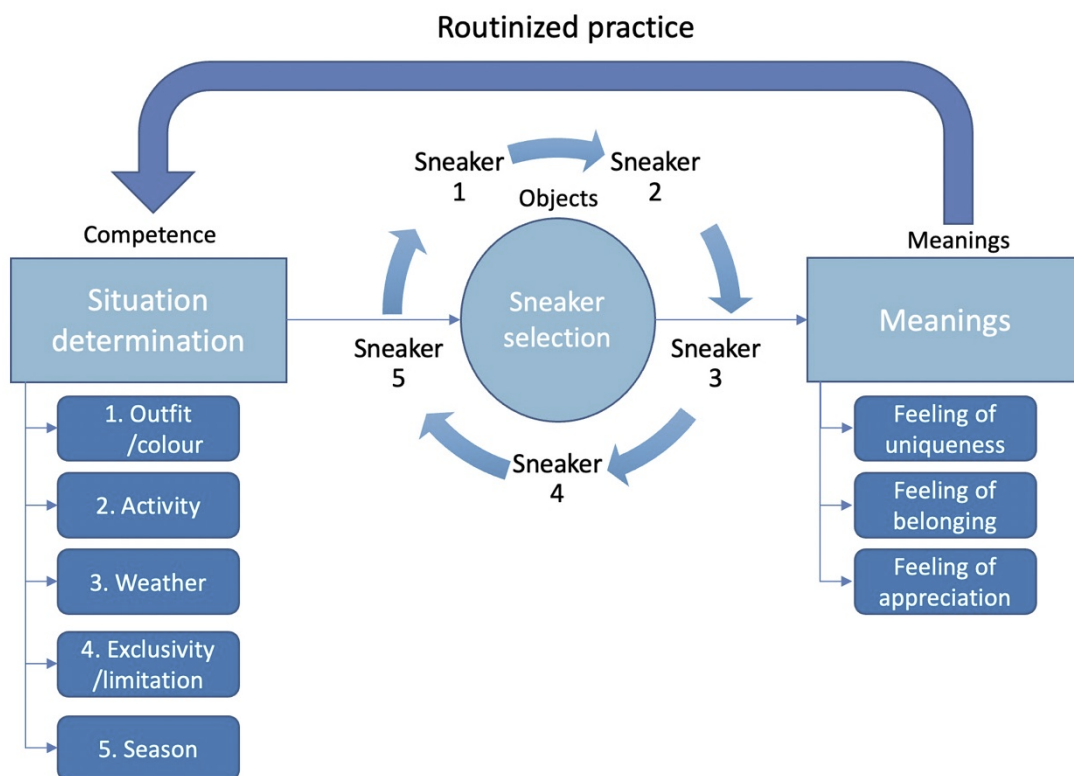


Figure 3: Theoretical framework sneaker rotation.

Competencies: sneaker determination

The first step of the framework is situation determination. It is assigned to ‘competencies’ within the Practice Theory. The competencies are “*bodily activities which a consumer undertakes*” (Arsel & Bean, 2013). In this case, the bodily activity is the process of situation determination and decision-making. Within situation determination, sneakerheads specify the current circumstances they are in. For this process, sneakerheads are required to have intuitive skills to determine the current situation. In the end, this gives sneakerheads guidance in selecting which sneaker to choose for their sneaker rotation. The situation is determined based on five criteria. They are ranked from 1 (most important) to 5 (least important). The following factors are:

1. Outfit/colour
2. Activity
3. Weather
4. Exclusivity/limitation
5. Season

1. Outfit/colour

The first factor that influences their sneaker decision is the outfit and colour they are planning to wear that day. Sneakerheads are required to have the right skills to select their outfit. Therefore, they need to analyse their closet. Sneaker fans need to have proper competencies to choose an outfit from their wardrobe and pair it with a matching sneaker. Sneaker enthusiast Tom described his daily routine when selecting a sneaker based on his outfit. He learned the following:

“In the bedroom, we have a wall where the wardrobe stands against it. That is a separate space. You could call it a walk-in closet, though it has its own doors. And in that wall, we have the shoe cabinets, so to speak. That is convenient. Yes, in the bedroom it is next to the wardrobe. When you get dressed in the morning and you have your outfit, you can easily choose your shoes. That is easy. As of this morning, I had on black pants with a white striped shirt with black stripes. And then I know that it is either a black or white sneaker. So, now I have uh, I do not know if you know them? The Off-White Presto. The all-white ones I am wearing”.

Sneakerhead Gilke is consistent with this claim. She learned that her outfit impacts her sneaker choice. Gilke stated; “*I mainly look at what goes with my outfit!*”. Additionally, Benjamin mostly looks at the colour of the sneaker. He learned that calm colours are his basic principle when it comes to selecting sneakers. Benjamin indicated; “*I notice that my rotation often contains relatively calm colours. That is easy to combine because it goes well with many things. I also have a lot of black and white, which goes together easily*” (Appendix B, figure 6 & 7).

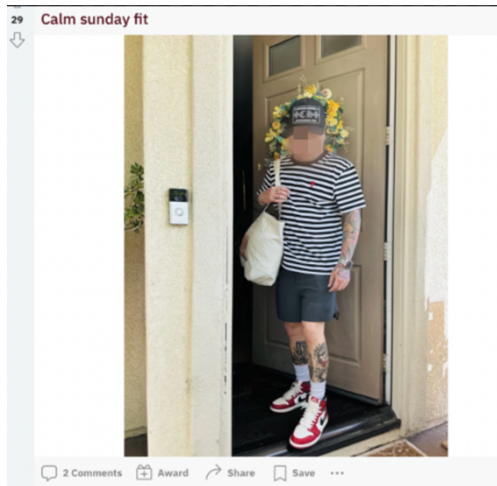


Figure 4: *Outfit Reddit sneakerhead.*

Several Reddit users also learned that the outfit they decide to wear usually dictates which sneakers they choose to wear to complement the look. Online sneakerheads place great importance on the coordination of their outfit and sneakers. One Reddit user wrote, "*Calm Sunday fit*" (Figure 4).

Data from ethnographic research supports this claim. 26 February 2023 Sneakerzone in Nijkerk took place. Various sneaker dealers from all over the world had the opportunity to sell their sneakers. The sneakerheads were noticeably proud of their styles, expressed through the coordination of their outfits and sneakers.

However, according to the interviews some sneakerheads have different opinions. They learned that their shoes indicate their outfit. They pick their sneaker first and then find the clothing that goes along with it. Jayden claimed the following: "*The rotation also really depends on the clothing that is currently out of the washing machine. However, if I feel like wearing a certain shoe, then I will also look at what goes with it*". Josh agrees with this claim. He explained; "*It starts with the shoes and like you said, is it kind of like the outfit works its way up*".

2. Activity

The second consideration is the activity that sneakerheads plan to do that day or week. Whether it is a day at the office, a meal with friends, a trip to the beach, or a walk with the dog, different sneakers are required for each activity. In this case, the competencies are the skills to envision what they are planning to do later that day (Thomas & Epp, 2019). Therefore, they are required to obtain intuitive skills to select the appropriate sneaker for the activity. Sneakerhead Tom has a standard pair of sneakers when walking with his dog.

"I also have 2 to 3 walking shoes so I can go to the forest and the beach with my dog. I have a standard pair of shoes I usually use for walking. And I wear them until they break. Then, I often buy the same pair again because they feel nice for walking".

Tom learned that these sneakers were perfect for walking his dog since they are allowed to get dirty. Therefore, he includes these sneakers regularly in his rotation.

Jayden, who works at a skate shop, has a deep love for skating. He stated that it is not worth it to skate in expensive shoes. His passion for the sport has taught him to choose specific sneakers to wear while skating. He stated the following: "*No way, do not skate on this, because these dunks are worth about 300 euros*".

Pim is a primary school teacher. Due to his job, he learned which sneakers were more comfortable to wear. When he needs to work, he selects sneakers that are suitable for wearing. This influences his choice in selecting sneakers for his rotation. During the interview he explained; *“I basically have four or five pairs of shoes that I wear regularly due to my work, so that's where the rotation mainly comes in”*.

3. Weather

Across various interviews, sneakerheads stated that weather influences their decision in wearing sneakers. In this case, sneakerheads need skills that help determine the weather. These competencies are looking outside the window or checking the weather app. From that point forward they possess the capability to determine the weather and select the appropriate sneaker. Sneakerhead Tom learned the following about weather; *“Yes, so if you're not outside much and it's not raining. Then I think it's fine to wear some breathable shoes. If the weather is really bad, I often take a leather Air Max”*.

Josh learned the same about the weather and his sneakers. He stated the following: *“But there are just certain shoes that you cannot wear when it is hot and there are certain shoes you cannot wear when it is cold”*.

Jayden also indicated that weather is an important aspect of sneaker selection. He learned that he is not willing to wear his expensive and unique sneakers when the weather is bad. Jayden assigns special sneakers to his rotation when the weather forecast expects it to rain. These sneakers are also called beaters.

“If the weather is bad, I quickly put on my Beaters, which are just Superstars or something like that. When it is nice weather, I try to put together the coolest rotation of clothes and shoes. If it is raining all day, you do not wear expensive shoes, because I think that is a shame”.

According to netnographic findings, beaters are sneakers that are allowed to get dirty. They tend to be less expensive and more basic in design. Every week, these beaters are a part of sneaker rotations. They are typically worn during bad weather or for activities that may result in them getting dirty. One Reddit user keeps his beaters in the back of his car, in case it rains (Figure 5). They have the ability to change sneakers to prevent their good sneakers from getting dirty.



Figure 5: Beaters Reddit.

4. Exclusivity/limitation

The next criterion is the exclusivity and limitation of the sneaker that determines its uniqueness. According to various respondents, sneakerheads seek a need for uniqueness within their sneaker rotation. The need for uniqueness is expressed by selecting exclusive and limited-edition sneakers for their rotation. It provides sneakerheads with a sense of uniqueness in comparison to others. In this case, the competencies are the skills to obtain these limited and exclusive sneakers. Many activities are required to access these unique sneakers. For instance, researching sneakers, saving money, applying for sweepstakes, etc. Mike started his sneaker obsession a few years ago and discovered his passion for exclusive sneakers.

“I am always curious and interested in limited things because then you are just a bit different than the rest. And when I walk through the city with those shoes, I usually get compliments from everyone saying they find them beautiful (Appendix B, figure 9).

He learned that being unique makes him stand out from everyone else. Also, he appreciates the admiration it brings. Therefore, sneakerheads desire uniqueness in their sneaker rotation. They hope to elicit a certain reaction from society.

Jayden has put a plan in place for how he wants to save up to buy limited-edition sneakers in the future. He is willing to go to great lengths to get his hands on these exclusive kicks. Jayden learned; *“The sneakers have a special place in my heart and have influenced my daily life, but my focus now is on making money for my future, so that I can keep buying limited editions”.*

5. Season

The final criterion relates to the season. This factor is mentioned last among all the criteria as it holds the least importance when selecting sneakers. According to the respondents, the type of sneaker they would choose to wear depends on the season. Each season has its signature colour scheme which must coordinate with the sneaker. Sneakerhead Pim learned that certain colourway only fits with certain seasons in the year. Pim stated:

“It is obviously also very seasonal, because I think one colourway fits with the winter, and the other colourway fits much more with the summer, so I pay attention to that”.

Jayden agrees with this claim. He only wears certain pairs of sneakers in summer. In the meantime, he keeps them deadstocked, Jayden stated: *“This is my latest pair from my current rotation. I have them deadstock now, as I plan to wear them only in the summer. I just want to be able to show off a clean, white pair during the summer”*.

Deadstocked is a phenomenon in which sneakerheads stock unworn sneakers. Most sneakerheads sell these sneakers for more due to an increase in value. Others undeadstock the sneakers to wear them their selves. Netnographic research shows the phenomenon in practice (Figure 6). A Reddit user deadstocked his sneakers created by the former designer of Off-White in honour of his passing.

697 RIP To A King. So glad I never wore these. Going to keep them deadstock in memory of Virgil. Anyone have any tips on the best way to preserve them in a display?



243 Comments Award Share Save ...

Figure 6: Deadstocked Reddit.

Objects: sneaker rotation

Within the rotations, sneakers are seen as the material of the practice. Materials are defined as the objects which help the consumer perform the practice of consumption (Arsel & Bean, 2013). When selecting sneakers for a rotation, five factors are taken into consideration. These factors are outfit/colour, activity, weather, exclusivity/limitation, and season. This process involves wearing a different sneaker each day. Sneakerheads often plan their rotations, resulting in weekly or monthly rotations. These rotations are shared on social media with other sneakerheads. Netnographic research has shown that sneakers are usually grouped into rotations of five to seven, consisting of a variety of brands, colourways, and styles (Figure 7). Another material regarding rotation is the object of storage. The sneaker rotations are stored in multiple ways. For instance, in closets, on shelves, in boxes, on racks and in hallways. Pim stated the following about his rotation and storage:

“Actually, I store them in my sneaker room with a sneaker wall. And downstairs in the hallway we have a special bench where we have sneaker boxes for our current rotation” (Figure 8).

Pim places his rotation on a separate bench in the hallway downstairs. Multiple sneakerheads have been seen performing this type of rotation, also in netnographic research. A sneakerhead's TikTok video reveals that he places his rotation of shoes on special shelves in his hallway. These are the sneakers he wears for the upcoming week (Figure 9).

Benjamin, who has been involved in the sneaker community for four years, also performs sneaker rotations in his sneaker collection. He declared; *“I have my rotation set up right in front of that closet so I can grab my sneakers the quickest and put them on the fastest”* (Figure 10).

Jilke performs sneaker rotations uniquely. She explained; *“I have a sneaker closet at home, and I switch it up regularly so that I can wear all of my sneakers”*. The rotation of her sneakers is occurring over a longer period than usual. She rotates her collection once in two to three months. This indicates that the rotations take many forms.

And also, Fleur performs a special kind of sneaker rotation. She explained that she has two shelves in her wardrobe. They serve as storage for her sneakers. Within these two shelves rotation takes place (Figure 11)

“Yes, yes, I have two shelves and then I have the shoes that I wear the most or just like the most, I have those on one shelf. I have all kinds of stuff on the shelf below. Only when I have a new pair of shoes. Then a pair of shoes from that shelf goes down” (Figure 11).



Figure 7: Sneaker rotation Reddit.



Figure 8: Sneaker rotation Pim.



Figure 9: Sneaker Rotation TikTok.



Figure 10: Sneaker rotation Benjamin.



Figure 11: Sneaker rotation Fleur.

Meanings

The interviews. netnographic and ethnographic research revealed three feelings evoked by wearing a sneaker rotation:

1. Feeling of uniqueness
2. Feeling of belonging
3. Feeling of appreciation

These feelings are classified as meanings derived from practice. The meanings represent the core values of the practice (Arsel & Bean, 2013). The feelings allow sneakerheads to learn from their experience and inform their sneaker selections moving forward. If there is a lack of uniqueness felt when wearing the rotation, more exclusive and limited sneakers are chosen for the next rotation. When sneakerheads feel isolated from the sneaker community, they choose sneakers that create a sense of belonging. Moreover, when sneakerheads perceive a lack of appreciation, they strive to choose sneakers that receive more compliments. These processes are routinized practices. The rotation is disrupted and recreated after a week, two weeks, or even a month.

1. Feeling of uniqueness

The feeling of uniqueness is seen as; *“an individual's feeling of differentness relative to others that are achieved through the acquisition, utilization, and disposition of consumer goods for the purpose of developing and enhancing one's personal and social identity”* (Abosag et al., 2020). Sneakerhead Mike stated that he has a passion for limited goods, especially sneakers. In an interview, he claimed the following:

“Always curious and interested in limited things, because then you are just a bit different than the rest” (Appendix B, figure 9)

He enjoys standing out from the crowd, and this is something he tries to capture when he puts together his rotation of sneakers.

Sven corresponds with Mike's statement. He explained that he prevents wearing the same sneakers as everybody else. *“I do not like having shoes that everyone else has, even with Air Force. I want an Air Force that is less common, that is what I think is cool. Yeah, yeah. I am not someone who does everything just to be different. I am not trying to make a statement, definitely not. I just do not like being the same, so I go for something different but still stylish”* (Appendix B, Figures 1, 2 & 3).

A sense of uniqueness as a result of wearing a sneaker rotation is a necessary outcome. This encourages sneakerheads to keep coming up with new rotations and achieve this specific feeling. A lack of uniqueness demotivates sneakerheads and creates a feeling of underappreciation. When sneaker fans experience this lack of uniqueness, the following rotation will include more exclusive and limited sneakers to evoke this feeling. It is a continuous learning process.

2. Feeling of belonging

The second feeling that occurs from sneaker rotations is the feeling of belonging. The feeling of belonging is the degree to which people feel socially connected. In this case, sneakerheads achieve to be a part of the sneaker community to create a feeling of belonging. The desire to fit in encourages sneaker enthusiasts to assemble the most impressive sneaker rotations. This gains acceptance in a social group, such as the sneakerhead community (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011).

Laura, an employee at the famous sneaker brand Adidas, expressed how her hobby allowed her to become familiar with numerous sneaker fans. This fostered a sense of belonging in her.

“You also get to know people who are in the same world, so you will share the same interest. You get inspired by them and want to buy something new. Or you see someone wearing a cool sneaker and you go looking for it”.

Furthermore, Josh has a similar claim. Josh is very dedicated to community building wherever he goes. He has been a part of the sneaker community for several years. He admits that the community has some sort of involvement in his sneaker collection. Josh stated: *“So, yeah, the community is an inspiration for choosing what sneakers to pursue and purchase”.*

This feeling of belonging in a social group is a desired outcome of wearing their sneaker rotations. Sneakerheads who experience a lack of belonging feel lonely or left out. When this lack of belonging arises, sneakerheads select additional sneakers into their rotation. These alternative sneakers are chosen to resemble or make an impression on other members of the sneaker community. Similar to before, it becomes a routine learning process wherein sneakerheads strive to find the optimal sneakers that fulfil this sense of belonging.

3. Feeling of appreciation

The last meaning as an outcome of sneaker rotations is the feeling of appreciation. Fagley & Adler (2001) define appreciation as *“acknowledging the value and meaning of something—an event, a person, a behaviour, an object—and feeling a positive emotional connection to it”.* Appreciation plays a great part in the reason why sneakerheads perform rotations within their daily lives. Melissa, who has been involved in the community for five years, clarified that appreciation from others gives her positive energy and confidence.

“Sure, I love to hear people say look at that girl with the great sneakers, she has style. I often ask those around me what they think of my new sneakers. When I look

in the mirror, it gives me so much confidence and power to go outside, with a nice outfit and matching shoes”.

Mike explained that the feeling of appreciation played a major part at the beginning of his participation in the sneaker community. However, after a few years, he attached less value to the opinions of his fellow sneakerheads.

“Since you are new to the community, you might be looking for some appreciation for what other people think of your shoes. I do not have that anymore. It is always nice to get compliments about them, but I am not looking for them”.

Tom shared the same opinion.

“I used to think it was really cool. I was hoping for some kind of reaction and appreciation for the shoes you were wearing. But yeah, yeah, what I say now is that I have really changed, I guess. That does not really interest me that much. I still like it though. It is still nice when you are walking through town and someone stares at your sneakers for a long time or makes a comment about your shoes. That is always nice, but if it is negative it does not bother me either”.

From these statements, it is concluded that sneakerheads do attach value to appreciation by others. However, this could shift in importance as time passes. Receiving compliments from others generates a sense of appreciation. This is a crucial outcome of their sneaker rotation. However, when there is a lack of appreciation, feelings of being undervalued may arise. In such cases, alternative sneakers are selected for their rotation. These alternative sneakers aim at seeking validation and appreciation from others. As mentioned before, this routinized learning process continues until a certain feeling is reached.

In short, this theoretical framework supports the practice of sneaker rotation within the daily lives of sneaker fans. It explains the process of creating a weekly or monthly rotation from beginning to end. Starting with determining the current situation, selecting the right sneakers, and resulting in meanings for the sneakerheads. The process repeats itself again and creates learning opportunities for the practitioners.

Discussion

Throughout the previous sections, we have seen the process of sneaker rotations performed by sneaker collectors. It is classified as a routinized practice that enhances the learning process of sneaker fans. This section discusses contributions to literature and future research directions. Besides, managerial implications are highlighted for the field of Marketing. Furthermore, the limitations of the performed research are discussed.

Theoretical contributions

This master thesis provides an explanation of rotations within sneaker collections. However, there is scarce awareness or theorization of rotations within academics, let alone marketing research. The single academic literature available pertains to job and station rotations. However, these types of rotations belong to an entirely different field. Job rotation gives employees the opportunity to learn different skills and experiences. It helps workers understand the different steps of the process and how each member of the team contributes to the process (Huan, 1999). Station rotation is a process in which students rotate between different learning stations in which they independently perform a learning activity (Maxwell & White, 2017). These two types of rotations are distinctive from sneaker rotations as they involve the rotation of people. However, sneaker rotations involve the rotation of objects. Therefore, existing research is not sufficient. Scaraboto et al. (2017) did conduct research investigating the connection between the curatorial practices of collectors and the materiality of the collected objects. They identified three main categories of collecting. These are organizing, displaying, and storing collected items, wearing and caring for collected items, and acquiring and disposing of collected items (Scaraboto et al., 2017). These main categories reveal all the practices involved with collecting. These are similar to the practice of rotation. When performing rotations, practices of organizing, displaying, storing, caring for, and disposal of items also occur. However, the research of Scaraboto et al. (2017) does not provide any explanation of rotation practices themselves. It solely focuses on curatorial practices regarding collected items.

According to the findings of this thesis research, sneaker rotations regard the rotation of five to seven sneakers within a certain period. As a result, this research offers novel insights into the sneaker culture. With the use of practice theory, a comprehensive process is developed that provides a visual representation of how sneaker rotations are formed. The process of forming a rotation is demonstrated gradually. It highlights each step along the way. It is important to study sneaker rotations as they serve as knowledge for the marketing industry. This study provides insights into the functioning of the sneaker world and the significance of rotations within it. Marketing managers have the opportunity to use knowledge about rotations within future marketing campaigns. These managerial implications are discussed in more detail later in this thesis.

In short, this research is pioneering as it opens the doors for future needed research on rotations. Therefore, future research holds numerous possibilities for the exploration of sneaker rotations. It has the potential to discover the various forms of sneaker rotations. Based on the interviews, it was evident that sneaker rotations do not adhere to a single basic form. Sneakerheads engage in diverse types of rotations. One respondent rotates her closet every once in a while, so she can wear everything within a timespan of two months. Another respondent places his current rotation, consisting of five to seven sneakers, on a bench in his hallway. After a week he replaces these sneakers with others out of his collection. Another respondent has two shelves of sneakers. The above shelf consists of her most worn sneakers. The second shelf consists of sneakers she wears less that period due to weather or other circumstances. Once in a while, she moves sneakers from these shelves. Future research has the opportunity to classify the various forms of rotations to discover if they generate different meanings for sneakerheads. By classifying these forms of rotations, a deeper meaning of sneaker rotations is provided for literature.

Additionally, much is known about the motives for collecting sneakers. According to Belk et al. (1991), anything can be collected, including sneakers. They discovered two motivations for consumer collecting. These motivations are legitimization and self-extension. Another research by Belk (1988) proposed that collections act as an extension of an individual's self and identity. Also called the extended self-theory. Researcher Ijams Spaid (2018) agrees with this claim. He concluded that consumer collecting behaviour is driven by several collecting motives which are influenced by the collector's salient identity. Overall, sneakerheads are motivated to collect because collecting enhances their own identity, expresses their status, and finds a sense of meaning and control in their lives (Belk., 1991). However, the motives for sneaker rotations are relatively unknown within academic literature.

At best, Brace-Govan & de Burgh-Woodman (2022) offer limited insights in their findings section. While some respondents mention the practice of sneaker rotation, the authors do not delve extensively into the topic. Additionally, Denny (2021) touches upon the ritualization of sneaker consumption. The research explains that "*communities of consumption and individual consumers exhibit a wide variety of behaviours and attitudes that problematize, ritualize, and instrumentalize the consumption of this product in various ways*" (Denny, 2021). However, this statement offers limited insights into the practical workings of sneaker rotations. It only indicates that ritualization occurs in diverse forms within the sneaker culture.

Therefore, the framework offers insights into why sneakerheads perform sneaker rotations. It creates a feeling of uniqueness, appreciation, and belonging which drives sneaker fans to develop rotations. This generates a learning process that leads to the development of a routine practice. It is important to study the motives of rotations as it helps managers understand the daily routines of sneakerheads. Without this study, marketing managers cannot respond to the habitual practices of their customers which play a big role in their life.

In light of this contribution, future research should prioritize examining the phenomena of 'deadstocked' sneakers and their impact on the motivations of sneakerheads. It has the opportunity to investigate how this practice alters their rotations in the future. As a result, a more comprehensive process is offered clarifying all the aspects involved with sneaker rotations. Deadstocked was frequently mentioned during the interviews. It would be interesting to examine how this phenomenon influences sneaker rotations. It should also determine where this concept fits within the theoretical framework. Non-academic articles provide the following meaning to deadstocked: "*Deadstocked, also abbreviated as DS, when referring to a pair of sneakers never worn before*" (Sneakersquad, n.d.). Deadstock sneakers need to contain the original box, box lid, and box label. According to a non-academic article by Aldrich (2021), deadstock sneakers are now a very important part of sneaker culture. Many resellers keep their items in the box, untouched, so they can make more money when they come to sell them. Some sneakerheads also "undeadstock" their sneakers to wear them again (Aldrich, 2021).

Last, existing literature does not elaborate on why and how sneakerheads want to achieve NFU within sneaker rotations. Numerous studies have employed the concept of NFU (Need for Uniqueness) in relation to collections, it has not yet been implemented specifically for sneaker rotations. According to Cassidy (2018), sneakerheads have a desire for limited and exclusive sneakers. The effort of obtaining the sneakers motivates them to collect (Cassidy, 2018). Abosag et al. (2020) created a theory explaining the need for uniqueness. The theory of uniqueness states that individuals are motivated to see themselves as different and distinctive from others for meaningful self-identification. This is also defined as the 'Need for Uniqueness' (NFU). The researchers concluded that the need to be different is driven by the extent to which a friend likes the uniqueness of the object and the similarity the consumers have with a brand. In short, this theory states why consumers need to be different from others (Abosag et al., 2020).

This thesis research explains why and how sneakerheads want to achieve NFU in their rotations. According to the outcomes of this thesis, sneakerheads include exclusive and limited-edition sneakers to create a feeling of uniqueness. It makes them feel different than others and appreciated. As a result, sneakerheads generate a feeling of satisfaction when achieving compliments about their unique sneakers. It is important to discover why sneakerheads want to achieve this certain feeling as it influences their choice of sneakers. Without this research marketing managers do not know which sneaker they need to prioritize promoting and selling. Nonetheless, a small number of respondents mentioned that over time, this feeling decreases in significance. Future research should concentrate on studying older, more experienced sneakerheads who may attribute less importance to factors such as uniqueness, appreciation, and belonging. New studies should explore the underlying reasons for this decrease in importance and uncover the factors influencing these perceptions.

Managerial implications

Understanding sneaker rotations makes a significant contribution to the field of marketing. It allows for comprehension of the routinized practice and sheds light on the reasons behind these rotations. Marketing managers have the opportunity to leverage this phenomenon. Marketing managers for sneaker companies need to possess the knowledge to position sneakers to be included in sneakerheads' rotations, thereby showcasing them to the wider world. They need to align the sneakers with the criteria identified in the situation determination. Therefore, marketing managers should create or promote a sneaker as the ideal choice for sneakerheads' rotations. From research, it is concluded that the outfit/colour is the most important factor when choosing a sneaker for their rotation. Marketing managers should promote sneakers that are adaptable enough to complement various outfits. This makes the sneakers suitable for inclusion in any rotation. Also, the weather is seen as an important criterion when selecting sneakers for their rotations. As a marketing manager, it is crucial to adapt the sneakers to different weather conditions, ensuring their suitability for all rotations. They should be breathable for warm weather. However, your feet should remain dry during rainy conditions. This makes the sneaker flexible for all situations. However, this contradicts the NFU of sneakerheads. As sneakers are more flexible and suitable for all rotations, their uniqueness decreases. These are trade-offs marketing managers should consider when addressing rotations.

In summary, by adhering to the identified criteria for 'situation determination', the customer's needs are effectively addressed. According to Rahman & Safeena (2016), customer needs are the problems that customers intend to solve with the purchase of a good or service. Knowing the customer and his needs is most important for a successful business. The more you know about your customers, the more customer satisfaction. Thus, by addressing the needs of sneakerheads with the right sneaker, the more customer satisfaction increases. Customer satisfaction is a marketing term that measures how products or services supplied by a company meet or surpass a customer's expectation (Rahman & Safeena, 2016) The higher the customer satisfaction, the more likely customers are of purchasing your product in the future. In the end, this creates more effectiveness in the sales and marketing efforts of businesses. It not only increases the business performance but also leads to increased visibility as the sneakers are worn more frequently by sneakerheads. As a result, it increases sales and impacts the business outcomes of the sneaker company (Rahman & Safeena, 2016).

Nevertheless, additional research is needed to explore whether sneakerheads prioritize purchasing sneakers that align with these criteria or if other factors have a greater impact on their purchase decisions. Elements such as outfit compatibility, intended activity, weather conditions, exclusivity/limitation, and seasonal relevance significantly influence their decision-making. However, it is crucial to examine whether hype or other factors plays a more significant role in their purchasing considerations. This creates insights for managers into which sneakers they should offer and promote to satisfy customer needs.

Research limitations

This research has been performed based on research restrictions to protect the quality of the thesis research. However, it also contains a few limitations. Existing literature is very scarce regarding sneaker rotations. Therefore, this research is supported with a limited theoretical background. Nevertheless, to solve this issue alternative forms of rotations were used as theoretical background. Sneaker rotations were compared to some general rotation methods, for instance job and station rotations. These two methods are significantly different from sneaker rotations but do provide insight into how rotation practices work. This extends the limited theoretical background and creates more in-depth meaning.

The second limitation is the limited contribution of ethnographic research. Back in February sneaker event Sneaker Zone was visited to give an insight into the sneaker culture. But also, to obtain contributions regarding sneaker rotations. The event gave limited information about sneaker rotations. Visitors were reluctant to discuss their collections, as their primary focus was on acquiring sneakers. Therefore, this part of the research had limited input for the theoretical framework. However, it was a great addition to background information about the sneaker culture. The study revealed the immense passion of sneakerheads in their pursuit of specific sneakers. It provided valuable insights into certain sneaker models' exclusivity and limited availability. Additionally, it shed light on the various factors that are included in the sneaker culture, such as vintage clothing, Funko Pops, and more. However, netnographic research provided valuable insights that were missing from ethnographic research. It offered a comprehensive understanding of sneaker rotations practised within the community. Sneakerheads actively shared their weekly rotations, accompanied by detailed explanations of their chosen sneakers.

The third limitation pertains to the sample. The interview included 14 participants who possessed varying numbers of collected sneakers. This led to a great variation of sneaker collection sizes. However, the majority of respondents were in their 20's. There was a limited representation or absence of individuals of older age groups. As a result, the sample consisted only of sneakerheads of younger ages. Nonetheless, research findings indicated that older sneakerheads reported a decrease in their motivation to collect sneakers. As a result, older participants groups would not offer as much extensive information as the younger motivated sneakerheads.

Additionally, two interviews were conducted via text messaging due to the busy schedules of the respondents. The responses received through text were brief and lacked in-depth information. Consequently, the results provided limited insights into the theoretical framework, as they did not offer comprehensive answers. In contrast, interviews conducted in person or over the phone provided more extensive information for the research, as there were opportunities to further question and dig into their responses. To address this issue, respondents were contacted again and presented with new questions that built upon their previous answers. This approach led to more comprehensive results and a deeper understanding of the subject.

A highly predictable constraint is time. The limited timeframe restricts the depth of the research, preventing a thorough exploration and comprehensive expansion of the theoretical background. It also restricts the search for respondents of different age groups, limiting the generalizability. However, future research has the potential to explore new directions of investigation that have been uncovered by this thesis study.

Future research directions

Future research has the ability to implement the use of diaries within research. Diaries refer to an annotated chronological record or log. Individuals are asked to maintain a diary over some specified period according to a set of instructions (Zimmerman & Wieder, 1977). Diaries of sneakerheads' morning routines create an image of their sneaker selection. It would have delivered more input than ethnographic research for the theoretical framework. These diaries show how sneakerheads make decisions and why they make those decisions. This results in a more comprehensive framework and may include new insights.

As previously mentioned, many respondents were of younger age. Whether the findings are generalizable to the sneakerhead population is questionable. When interviewing a variety of age groups, the results are more applicable to the rest of the population. This protects the quality of the research process. Additionally, in this research older and more experienced sneakerheads revealed that they attribute less importance to factors such as uniqueness, appreciation, and belonging. Future research has the opportunity to explore the underlying reasons for this decrease by including older age groups.

In addition, future research should not conduct the interviews through text messaging. This topic is quite unknown and great understanding is necessary. Therefore, further questioning is needed to dig into the answers of the respondents. This is complex through text messaging. In-person interviews are therefore preferred. As a consequence, this leads to broader and more comprehensive insights.

Last, time is one factor that limited the research process in many ways. More time creates the opportunity to dig deeper into the literature about rotations. This results in a more extensive theoretical background. Besides, more time would have created more thorough research and generated more or other factors for situation determination. Additionally, it might create more or other meanings as outcomes of the sneaker rotation. The extra time also extends the search for a variety of respondents of all ages. It avoids exclusively relying on input from younger sneakerheads.

Conclusion

This master thesis answered the following research question, “*Why and how do sneakerheads rotate sneakers within their collection?*”. Research has been conducted exploring job and station rotations. However, the practice of sneaker rotations is unknown in the field of Marketing. Based on the results of this thesis a comprehensive explanation is given about the practice of sneaker rotations. This thesis identified how sneaker rotations are created and which factors influence the selection of sneakers. It also distinguished meanings that derive from sneaker rotations.

Sneakerheads perform sneaker rotations in many forms. First, they determine sneakers for their rotation. This is dependable upon the circumstances in which the sneakerheads find themselves. Elements such as outfit compatibility, intended activity, weather conditions, exclusivity/limitation, and seasonal relevance influence their decision-making. Competencies are required to assess the circumstances they find themselves in during this process. Sneakerheads make a selection of five to seven sneakers from their collection, which they frequently rotate. These are also defined as the objects of the practice. As a result, sneakerheads experience meanings when wearing the rotation. These are the feeling of uniqueness, appreciation and belonging. Ultimately, this becomes an ongoing process of learning and growth.

Additionally, this master thesis answers a second research question, “*Why do sneakerheads include unique sneakers within their rotations?*”. Numerous studies have been carried out to investigate the concept of the need for uniqueness (NFU). However, the role of NFU within sneaker rotations has not been identified. This thesis explains why sneakerheads desire unique sneakers and how it plays a part in rotations.

From this research, it is concluded that sneakerheads are motivated to collect unique sneakers because it creates a feeling of uniqueness. It makes them feel different from others. Furthermore, it encourages sneakerheads to keep coming up with new rotations and achieve this specific feeling. A lack of uniqueness demotivates sneakerheads and creates a feeling of underappreciation. Therefore, uniqueness is of great importance within the rotation of sneaker fans.

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Appendices

A. Interview guide



Radboud Universiteit

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Project: Sneaker Rotations

Date & Time	
Other comments	

PARTICIPANT DETAILS

Name:	
Age (circle range)	18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65+
Gender:	Male / Female / Nonbinary / Transgender / Prefer not to say
Sneakerhead experience (in years):	Favourite sneaker brands:
Favourite communities:	How many sneakers in possession:

Preparation

Present yourself.

Present topic & goal of the conversation.

Ask to sign a consent form.

Ask to record.

1) Rapport building and General Interviewee Background

- Can you tell me a little about yourself?
 - What do you spend most of your time doing?
 - Can you tell me something about where you are from?

→ *Follow up:*

Who lives with you at home right now?

What do you do in your spare time outside of collecting sneakers?

2) General Sneaker Collection Background

- How did you get into the sneaker culture in the first place?
 - What kinds of things do you do with sneakers?
 - Do you do anything sneaker related with other people?

→ *Follow up:*

Can you remember the first time you bought a sneaker?

How long have you been a 'sneakerhead'?

How many hours a week do you devote to your sneaker collection?

Do you share your collection with anybody else like friends or family?

What keeps you collecting from week to week?

Where do you purchase your sneakers?

What is your favourite sneaker of all time?

What do you think is the most popular sneaker trend at the moment?

3) Specialized Questions About Sneakers

The themes:

- Purchase of the sneaker
- Sneaker rotations
- Sneaker community/social media

1. Purchase of the sneaker

- Can you tell me about the last pair of sneakers you bought?
 - Can you give me a recap of the activities you were involved in?
 - What inspired you in the first place to purchase the sneaker?

Tell me about your thoughts on:

- Sense of belonging
 - Inspiration from others (family, friends, marital relationships)
 - Sneaker trends
-
- Can you tell me more about the purpose of the sneaker when you bought them (re-sale, wearing, deadstocking, etc)?
 - Do you collect unique/scarce sneakers?
 - Why do you collect these sneakers?
 - To what extent do you need to feel different?
 - How do you get access to these sneakers?

2. Sneaker rotations

- How do you define 'sneaker rotations'?
- Why do you create sneaker rotations?
- Which steps do you perform when creating a sneaker rotation?
- Can you tell me about your morning routine and how sneaker rotations play a part in it?

Practice theory

- Materials (objects which help to perform the practice of consumption)
 - Competence (bodily activities)
 - Meanings (a core value of practice)
-
- Rank from 1 (most important) to 5 (least important) which factors influence selecting a sneaker the most? (weather, season, outfit/colour, exclusivity/limitation, activity)
 - Can you show me your current sneaker rotation (take photo)?

Tell me about:

- Storage spaces
- Manner of display (figure, boxes, etc.)
- Caretaking of sneakers
- Brands
- Other collections in your home

- Can you tell me about the time you created the sneaker rotation you were most proud of?
 - Can you give me a recap of what made you choose the sneakers within the rotation in the first place?
 - Tell me about your thoughts on:
 - Season
 - Weather
 - Flexing
 - Repetition
 - Quick flips
 - Celebrity influence
- What did you feel during wearing the sneakers onwards this rotation?
- Do you ever wear sneakers that you haven't shared in your sneaker rotation? If so, why have you chosen not to share these sneakers?
- Do you share certain brands more in your rotations than other brands? If so, which brands mainly make up your sneaker rotations?
 - What is the reason that your sneaker rotations mainly consist of these brands instead of other brands?
- Could you name reasons why some sneakers are deadstocked/undeadstocked?
- Do you think you influence others with your collection or have others influenced you?

3. Sneaker community/social media

- Are you part of a sneaker community?
 - If yes, tell me about your most memorable experience within this community.
- Do you influence others to be part of the community?
- Can you tell me about the last time you shared your sneaker rotation on social media?
- What motivates you to share your sneaker rotation on social media?
 - Share your thoughts on:
 - Flexing
 - Impressing others
 - Showing you are part of a group
- To whom do you want to show your rotation on social media?
- Is the feeling of belonging to the sneaker community important to you?
- Do you see the online sharing of your sneaker rotations as a part of your identity?

- Do you like to share content of not only yourself wearing sneakers, but also other family members? And if so, why?

4) Ending questions

- How do you think sneaker culture has evolved through the years?
- What would be your advice to new sneakerheads?
- What has been the most rewarding part of being involved in the sneaker culture?

5) Wrap up

Is there anything I have left out? Is there anything else you would like to add/discuss? Anything else you like me to know about?

Is there anyone you recommend I should talk to?

6) Closure

Thank the interviewee for his/her time.

Ask them if they would like to receive the research when it is done.

Ask whether they liked the interview with you, any improvements.

B. Photos sneaker collections

1. Sneaker collection Sven



Figure 1: Sneakers Sven.



Figure 2: Sneakers Sven.



Figure 3: Sneakers Sven.

2. Sneaker collection Fleur



Figure 4: Rotation Fleur.



Figure 5: Rotation Fleur.

3. Sneaker collection Benjamin



Figure 6: Rotation Benjamin

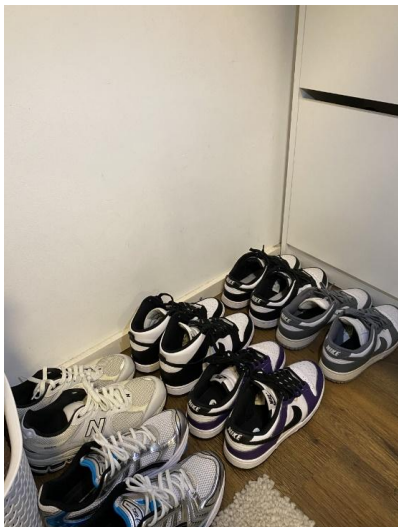


Figure 7: Rotation Benjamin.

4. Sneaker collection Mike



Figure 8: Collection Mike.



Figure 9: Collection Mike.

5. Sneaker collection Tom



Figure 10: Collection Tom.



Figure 11: Sneakers Tom.



Figure 12: Sneakers Tom.

6. Sneaker collection Josh



Figure 13: Collection Josh.



Figure 14: Collection Josh.

7. Sneaker collection Pim



Figure 15: Collection Pim.



Figure 16: Rotation Pim.



Figure 17: Collection Pim.