

Collecting like the collective

A qualitative research into the sneaker community using the
social identity theory

Radboud Universiteit



MASTER:	BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
SPECIALIZATION:	MARKETING
COURSE MODULE:	MAN-MMATH-2022-FM-JAAR-V
AUTHOR:	R. BOSMA (RICK)
STUDENT NUMBER:	S1087890
DATE:	23-06-2023
SUPERVISOR:	DR. P.J. FRANCO (PAOLO)
2ND EXAMINER:	O. TSOUMANI MSc (OLGA)

Preface

The thesis *Collecting like the collective* is the final product of the Master's program in Business Administration with a specialization in Marketing, at Nijmegen School of Management, Radboud University.

This research takes place within the context of the sneaker community. This is a world that I have begun to immerse myself in over the past few years, and have developed a love for. Therefore, I am also extremely happy and thankful to be able to finish my school career with a research project on a subject close to my heart.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Franco for his guidance throughout the process. Dr. Franco's positive, constructive, and qualitative feedback has resulted in a thesis I am proud of. The freedom and encouragement I received throughout the process, enabled me to write a thesis that I one hundred percent stand by. In addition, I would like to thank Ms. Tsoumani MSc for her guidance as a second examiner and her presence at the defense.

Also, I would like to note that Dr. Franco's specialty, the consumer culture theory (CCT) approach, which will be discussed in this thesis, is a research method that appealed to me greatly. It was refreshing to use this research method and to see the stories that sneakerheads shared with me come to life in my thesis.

On that note, I would like to thank the participants of the study for their cooperation. The conversation I had with the sneaker enthusiasts about their passion has confirmed to me how beautiful and culturally rich the sneaker world is, and how it can bring people together.

I hope you enjoy your read.

Rick Bosma,

Nijmegen, June 23, 2023.

Abstract

Existing academic literature on collecting argues that collecting is about individualization and being different from others. Through the eyes of contemporary collecting literature, someone's collection serves as tangible evidence of the uniqueness of the collector. However, it appears that this does not hold for all collections. When looking at the context of the sneaker community, it appears that a lot of sneaker enthusiasts, who are also referred to as sneakerheads, are wearing and collecting the same sneakers. This raises the question: "Why do people who want to be unique buy the same things?"

By drawing on collecting literature and adopting the social identity theory as an enabling lens, this research aims to better understand how sneakerheads develop their identity through their group membership in the sneaker community, and how this affects their collecting behavior. In doing so, this research builds on contemporary collecting knowledge, as well as provides new insights into consumer culture theory (CCT). To address the research question, a qualitative research approach was used in the form of semi-structured interviews with sneakerheads, and netnography within the online sneaker community.

The findings of the study show that sneakerheads develop their identity through their group membership in the sneaker community and that this has a large impact on their collecting behavior. The findings show that sneakerheads are more likely to buy sneakers that they perceive to be between the borders of the values of others in the sneaker community. This leads to the situation where a few sneaker brands are popular, and the variety among sneaker collections is low. Additionally, the findings show that sneakerheads are very susceptible to the hype in the sneaker community. The results show that hype increases the purchase intention and the price sneakerheads are willing to pay for a certain sneaker. The findings of the research resulted in managerial implications concerning the product innovation process and marketing campaign recommendations to improve purchase intentions among consumers and increase the price consumers are willing to pay for a product.

Keywords: Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), Collecting, Social identity theory, sneaker community, hype.

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1. Introduction

The hobby of collecting is a widespread phenomenon that is viewed as a constructive and fulfilling pastime activity (Belk, 1988; Belk et al., 1991). Traditionally, collections are viewed as a way for collectors to be individuated and different from others (Belk, 1991). Consumers can collect basically anything. From Pokémon cards to favorite sports jerseys, and from LPs to posting cards. When you think about a certain product, chances are that somebody in the world is collecting it. When looking at all the things consumers can collect, and the endless possibilities on how to personalize collections, you would expect that collections would look very different, as traditional collecting literature argues that collectors want to be unique (Belk, 1991). It appears that this is not necessarily the case. It seems that collections can end up looking very similar. This raises the question: “Why do people who want to be unique buy the same things?”

For example, when looking at the sneaker industry, and the endless sneaker possibilities the industry has to offer, you would expect that sneaker collections would look very different. This is not the case. Sneakerheads all seem to collect and wear the same sneakers.

A way to look at this phenomenon is through contemporary collecting literature. However, this can only offer a partial answer to this question. Traditional collecting theory argues that collections can provide a basis for identity formation for many collectors (Belk et al., 1991). The collection serves as tangible evidence that the collector is unique. The fact that traditional collecting literature sees collecting as an individual activity is surprising. When looking at the context of the sneaker community, it is clear that collecting can also be a very social activity.

A research tradition that researches social phenomena, and how these affect consumer behavior, is consumer culture theory. CCT is a research tradition of different theoretical perspectives that address the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meaning (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Although CCT does research on social phenomena and collecting in the context of the sneaker community seems like a very social activity, there has been very little research on how group membership can influence the behavior of collectors. Therefore, to answer the research question, the social identity theory is used as enabling lens (Dolbec et al., 2021). The social identity theory explains that people define their identity based on their membership in a certain group (Islam, 2014). This in turn shapes their behavior, to reinforce their place within a social group. Using the social identity theory within this research context makes it possible to gain insights into how group membership

shapes the identity of a collector, and how this, in turn, shapes their collecting behavior. This will extend contemporary collecting knowledge, as this research sheds light on the social influences that impact collecting behavior, which has not been extensively researched before. Also, using the social identity theory as an enabling lens within the context of CCT provides the opportunity to extend the scope of the theory, as the social identity theory has not been used extensively within the CCT research context.

The research context that is examined in this research, in order to make a contribution to collecting literature and CCT, is the sneaker industry. The sneaker industry is a rapidly growing industry. In 2021, the industry was valued at \$78.59 billion. It is expected that this growth will continue, with an expected compound annual growth rate of 5.2% from 2022 to 2030 (Grand View Research, n.d.) Because of the fast-growing industry, the sneaker community is also growing fast with people developing a passion for sneakers every day. The sneaker community consists of sneakerheads, who feel strongly connected to the sneaker culture (Denny, 2021). Within the sneaker community, individuals communicate both in person and online. The sneaker community is known for its large online community which emerged over the last two decades (Choi & Kim, 2019). The community distinguishes members from non-members through the usage of alternative language conventions that are not understood by non-members of the sneaker community (Suen, 2016). However, the sneaker community is very inclusive, as everybody can be part of the community as long as they understand the language that is used by the members. The sneaker community is an international community with social and cultural influences from all around the world (Brace-Govan & De Burgh-Woodman, 2008). Although the sneaker industry has grown rapidly over the last years, and sneakerheads are characterized by unique behavior, limited research has been conducted in this particular field (Choi & Kim, 2019).

This research starts with an elaboration of the academic and social relevance of this research, and by addressing the CCT research approach that this study incorporates. This is done by providing an overview of prior research that has been done on the subject and by discussing relevant theories that will be used to address the research gap. After that, in Chapter 3, the methodology that is used to attain the research goal is discussed. Hereafter, in Chapter 4, the findings of the study, which were gathered through semi-structured interviews and netnography, are discussed. Chapter 5 elaborates on the theoretical contributions this study makes, as well as the managerial implications that flow from the findings of the study. After this, the limitations of the study are discussed. Finally, in Chapter 6, the study concludes with a conclusion.

2. Theoretical background

This chapter will discuss the theoretical background of this study. First, the research approach of this study is discussed by elaborating on consumer culture theory. After this, the research context of collecting is discussed by providing an overview of relevant contemporary collecting literature and connecting this to the context of the sneaker community. Hereafter, the enabling lens that is adopted to address the research gap is discussed, the social identity theory. This chapter concludes with a paragraph that elaborates on how the social identity theory is used to gain knowledge to extend contemporary collecting literature.

2.1 Consumer Culture Theory

Consumer culture theory is a research tradition of different theoretical perspectives that address the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meaning (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). The researchers within the CCT research tradition study consumer culture – how consumption and markets interplay with, and shape customers' lived experiences and social relations (Franco, 2022). CCT involves research within the domain of consumption. This domain is characterized as the acquisition, use, and disposition of commercially circulated products, services, knowledge, images, and experiences by groups and individual actors (Arnould et al., 2019). CCT has a different view on the meaning of culture than the traditional consumer research domain. Traditionally, consumer research is seen as a fairly homogenous system of collectively shared meaning, ways of life, and unifying values shared by a member of society. CCT describes culture as the thing that consumers do and believe, rather than an attribute of character. It sees consumer culture as a dynamic network of economic, symbolic, and social relationships or connections (Arnould et al., 2019).

CCT research applies to research on the sneaker community, as the sneaker community is full of social and cultural influences from all around the world (Brace-Govan & De Burgh-Woodman, 2008). The purchases of sneakerheads involve the intuitive feeling of being connected to a subculture (Franco, 2022). The purchasing process and the usage of sneakers by sneakerheads are far removed from the rational considerations a consumer may make over a pair's features in more traditional marketing perspectives. For example, within the sneaker community people feel the desire to collect dozens of pairs to enable them to feel the excitement of successfully displaying their cultural competence to others through the pairs that they wear (Denny, 2021). This makes the usage of the social identity theory as enabling lens very suitable for the context of the sneaker community.

2.2 Collecting

To gain insights into why sneakerheads collect and use the same sneakers, the first step is to look at what collecting theory tells us. Within the umbrella of CCT, there has been a lot of attention to collections from consumers. Belk (1988) argues that consumer behavior cannot be understood without gaining some understanding of the meaning that consumers attach to possessions. In his research, Belk (1988) investigated how consumer possessions can become a part of a person's extended self. Belk argues that a person's possessions serve as a reflection, as well as a tool to shape an individual's identity. Collecting is seen as a specialized form of consumer behavior. Consumer behavior typically refers to acquiring, using, and disposing of products (Belk et al., 1991). In collecting, the primary focus of the behavior is acquisitive, because it is about gathering more of something. Collecting can be seen as a basic urge or instinct and as a fundamental and universal human activity (Macdonald, 2006). Collecting is the active, and longitudinal acquisition, possession, and disposition of an interrelated set of differentiated objects that contribute to and derive extortory meaning from the entity that this set is perceived to constitute (Belk, 1988; Belk et al., 1991).

Traditional collecting theory argues that collections can provide a basis for identity formation for many collectors (Belk et al., 1991). Collections enable them to feel individuated and different from others. The collection serves as tangible evidence that the collector is unique. Belk et al. (1991) even argue that by definition each collection tends to be unique, as it is a one-of-a-kind creation by the collector. This, according to Belk et al. (1991), leads to a heightened sense of individuality and autonomy upon those who possess them. This would mean that sneaker collections would all be very unique, and that sneakerheads would be very individualized. However, the opposite is true. It seems that collections and the sneaker rotations of different sneakerheads are very similar. Sneaker rotations are 5 to 7 pairs from a sneaker collection which the sneakerhead consciously decides to wear for an upcoming period of time, most commonly a week.

A reason for this could be that although sneakerheads want to be unique, they do not necessarily want to be individualized. They want to be part of a social group: the sneaker community. It seems that the social influences from the sneaker community play an important part in the identity development and collecting behavior of sneakerheads. It looks like sneakerheads behave in a way that they think is in line with the values of the sneaker community, to be recognized and be able to show their competence to fellow sneakerheads within the community. The behavior of sneakerheads seems to be shaped by the need to be part of the sneaker community and differentiated from social groups outside of it. In other words,

sneakerheads want to be part of the same ingroup and want to be different from the same outgroups. This phenomenon is explained by the social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979).

2.3 Social identity theory

The social identity theory was used as enabling lens in this research. The usage of a theoretical enabling lens can enable original contributions to research (Dolbec et al., 2021). Combining, applying, and inventing using theoretical concepts make it possible to position the findings within consumer research and marketing conversations. Moreover, the combination, application, and invention with the use of a theoretical enabling lens require considerable knowledge and confidence in weighing up how contributions can be made, which strengthens the quality of the contributions of the research (Dolbec et al., 2021).

The premise of social identity theory is that individuals define their identity based on their membership to a certain group (Islam, 2014). The theory explains that in many social situations, people think of themselves and others as group members, rather than as unique individuals (Van Lange et al., 2012). Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory (1979) argues that individuals categorize themselves into different social groups to define their membership within society at large and that this drives their behavior.

The psychological process that describes how individuals make this categorization consists of three phases: social categorization, social identification, and social comparison (Van Lange et al., 2012). Social categorization refers to the categorization of ingroups and outgroups. An ingroup is a social group someone identifies with. Outgroups are social groups someone does not identify with (Islam, 2014). This categorization is based on social identification, which means that people differentiate their group from other groups, based on their unique group characteristics and norms (Matthews et al., 2021). In the sneaker community, a true sneakerhead is embodied by the norm of understanding sneaker history and possessing a true love for the culture. According to the social identity theory, the establishment of an individual's identity through membership in a group serves as a reinforcement of the group's interests (Matthews et al., 2021). This means that individuals behave in a manner that they perceive to be between the borders of what is expected of them by their ingroup. A study by Thompson and Sinha (2008) revealed that long-term membership in a brand community, the ingroup, increases the likelihood of adopting a new product from a preferred brand and simultaneously decreases the likelihood of adopting new products from opposing brands.

Lastly, the psychological process consists of social comparison. This refers to the process through which characteristic group features are interpreted and valued (Van Lange et al., 2012).

The feeling of belonging to a group can lead to a bias called ingroup favoritism (Brown, 2000). This means that individuals tend to evaluate their ingroup more positively than outgroups. This occurs because belonging to a group can be an important part of an individual's self-esteem. Therefore, group members can feel threatened when the values of their ingroup are challenged (Leaper, 2011).

2.4 Social identity theory and collecting

Although CCT emphasizes the influences symbolic and social relationships have on our behavior, the social identity theory has had minimal representation within CCT research (Arnould et al., 2019). This is surprising, as social identity theory is built around the influences social groups have on our behavior (Van Lange et al., 2012). Social influences are neglected by collecting literature. Belk et al. (1991) do argue that collecting can result in the establishment and maintenance of a social network with other collectors. However, Belk et al. (1991) did not investigate how these social groups, and an individual's willingness to be a part of a specific group, can shape how individuals build their identity, and how this, in turn, shapes their collection.

There are few instances in collecting research where the social identity theory is discussed. Lee et al. (2021) argue that collecting enables consumers to connect socially and become part of collecting communities. Therefore, the social identity theory is relevant, as individual consumers feel an emotional significance from being part of a community. In the study by Lee et al. (2021), it is explained that consumers can use collectible items to gain membership to social groups, with peers judging one's items to gain acceptance. A study done by Long and Schiffman (1997), examined the phenomenon of "Swatch Fever", which refers to the collective excitement and collecting of Swatch watches in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This study showcased how collecting can lead to irrational consumer behavior within large groups, like traveling hundreds of miles to purchase a watch or paying premium prices for watches. There is also an example of a study on sneakers culture that used the social identity theory. Matthews et al. (2021) used the social identity theory to examine brand preferences and brand identity, as this has not been extensively examined. The findings of the study showed that sneakerheads have a clear sense of group identity as it relates to motivations, behaviors, and brand identity within the sneaker community.

Although these studies discussed the social identity theory, the studies did not discuss ingroups and outgroups and how these groups can affect the identity and collecting behavior of collectors. Moreover, the studies did not discuss that the motivation of individuals to be part of a certain group can result in collections that all look similar. The reason why sneaker

collections, which could enable collectors to be unique and different, all look similar has not been researched before. To address this research gap, this research attempts to answer the question: “Why do people who want to be unique buy the same things?”

3. Methodology

This chapter will elaborate on the rationale behind the methodology that was used to collect data to answer the formulated research question. First, the research approach to collect data is discussed. Second, the methods that were used to collect data are elaborated on. This is followed by an elaboration on how participants were chosen, how the data was analyzed, and how data saturation was researched. The chapter concludes by covering how the research ethics of this study were guaranteed.

3.1 Research method

To answer the formulated research question, a qualitative research method was chosen. Qualitative research is about understanding that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their environment (Hudson, 1998). Qualitative research is intended to understand the interpretations of people at a certain point in time and in a particular context. It is about learning how individuals experience and interact with their social world (Merriam, 2002). This qualitative study is a systematic exploration of cultural information to identify patterns, follow these patterns, connect these pattern to larger sensitizing constructs, and eventually make meaningful statements about to a larger audience (Markham, 2012). A qualitative research method is appropriate to address how social groups influence the behavior of sneakerheads, as this gains new insights on how the social world shapes consumer behavior.

3.2 Data collection

In this research, semi-structured interviews were the main method to collect data. Semi-structured interviews provided the opportunity to collect data in a versatile and flexible way. When conducting semi-structured interviews it is important to allow participants to talk freely (Arsel, 2017). This enables the researcher to break down preconceptions and revise theorizations. One of the main advantages of the semi-structured interview method is that it is successful in enabling reciprocity between the interviewer and participant, making it possible for the interviewer to improvise follow-up questions based on the responses of the participant (Kallio et al., 2016). This is essential in this research, as this provides the opportunity to dive deeper into interesting responses by participants to get a deeper understanding of the factors that influence the behaviors of sneakerheads. The questions of the semi-structured interviews

were determined before the interviews using an interview guide. The interview guide covered the main topics that were discussed during the interviews (Kallio, 2016). The interview guide served as an outline of the interviews, listing key points of exploration, provisional questions, and planned probes and transitions (Arsel, 2017). This ensured that different important topics were discussed during the interview. The interview guide that was used to collect data can be found in Appendix A.

3.3 Netnography

Within this research, netnography served a complementary role to the main data that was gathered through semi-structured interviews. The usage of the social identity theory as enabling lens made netnography an excellent tool to collect data (Kozinets, 2002). Netnography is a qualitative research method that takes traditional ethnographic research to study cultures and communities that are emerging through online communication. This makes it suitable for research using the social identity theory, as netnography makes it possible to examine how social relations and interactions shape consumer behavior (Kozinets, 2002). Netnography uses publicly available information from online forums to identify and understand the needs and decisions influences of online consumer groups. Netnography provides the opportunity to observe naturally occurring behaviors within online communities. Because netnography is naturalistic and unobtrusive, it allows continuing access to informants in a particular online social situation. This access can provide opportunities for consumer researcher and consumer marketer relationships. Because the sneaker community is very focal online on discussion forums like Reddit, netnography provided valuable insights into consumer behavior within the sneaker community.

A non-participatory netnographic approach was used to collect data (Bettany & Kerrane, 2016). This means that there was no active online participation in online discussion forums within the sneaker community. This approach was chosen because this approach ensured that the integrity of the online conversations within the sneaker community was maintained. During the observation of the online sneaker community, reflective field notes were made. These field notes recorded observations regarding sub-text, pretexts, contingencies, conditions, and personal emotions that occurred during this research (Kozinets, 2002). These field notes served as written reflections and are valuable for contextualizing the data.

Netnography was mainly used to gain a deeper understanding of the sneaker industry, as it is a great way to see how sneakerheads socially interact with each other online. This helped to put the findings of the interviews into perspective. Moreover, netnography was a useful tool to

examine whether the results of the interviews were a good reflection of reality within the sneaker industry.

3.4 Participants

When doing qualitative research, it is important to choose a sample based on the premise that the choice will enable appropriate data to be collected, thereby allowing the research aim to be met (Saunders, 2012). Within qualitative research, a researcher can choose between a probability sampling technique and a non-probability sampling technique. When using a probability sampling technique, the researcher chooses participants at random. This effectively eliminates the researcher's judgment from the choice of participants (Saunders, 2012). When applying this technique, a researcher starts by specifying the population, after which a random sample of participants is chosen. This provides a basis to argue that the data statistically represents the population. When using the non-probability sampling technique, a researcher chooses participants based on his judgment regarding important characteristics of the population that is being studied, concerning the data required to address the research goal. This means a researcher actively chooses appropriate candidates to involve in its research, while actively excluding others (Saunders, 2012).

In this research, a non-probability sampling technique was chosen. To meet the formulated research aim, it is important participants have enough knowledge about the subject that is at hand. Participants were therefore chosen based on my judgment of important characteristics of the population, the sneaker community, that is being researched.

First, because the social identity theory serves as an enabling lens, it is important that the participants feel a connection to the sneaker community. This made it possible to test how involvement in the sneaker community shapes their behavior. Therefore, in the process of selecting participants for the research, it was made sure that the participants felt a connection to the sneaker community. Second, participants were selected based on their online appearance on social media. Different social media platforms, like Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Reddit were analyzed to find sneakerheads who share their collection and sneaker knowledge online. The low threshold to make contact on these social media platforms made it possible to come into contact with a lot of sneakerheads and assess whether or not they were suitable for the research through an online conversation. Third, personal relations were used to select participants. These participants were selected through personal conversations I had with them and my knowledge about their sneaker passion. Through these personal conversations, I was able to ensure these participants have enough knowledge about the subject that is being researched.

The sneaker community is an international community with cultural influences from all around the world (Brace-Govan & De Burgh-Woodman, 2008). Therefore, participants were chosen from different places in the world. The majority of the participants came from The Netherlands, but there were also participants from the US, France, and Denmark. An overview of all participants, alongside personal and sneaker-related information about each participant, is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant overview

Name	Gender	Age	Occupation	Sneakerhead experience	Sneakers in possession
Justin	Male	36	Customer Serves Adidas	10 years	125
Berend	Male	38	Teacher	3 years	100+
Scott	Male	30	Freelancer	15 years	86
Mark	Male	26	Marketing specialist	9 years	80
William	Male	35	Marketing specialist	20 years	70-80
Patrice	Male	25-34	Photographer	10 years	55
Karim	Male	23	Gym owner	5 years	50
Aron	Male	21	Student + waiter	4 years	35
Leonie	Female	23	Beauty therapist	4 years	30
Joshua	Male	28	Lawyer	12 years	30
Merel	Female	21	Student + waitress	2 years	25
Vanessa	Female	22	Production employee	5 years	20
David	Male	19	Student	1,5 years	13
Ryan	Male	23	Student	6 years	10-12

3.5 Data saturation

The number of interviews that are needed to make reliable statements regarding the findings of a research, depends on when data saturation is reached. Data saturation is reached when new data does not radically change the findings of the research and hereby a researcher can develop properties of a category (Guest et al., 2006). This means that doing additional interviews will not result in new data that will impact the findings of the study. In this study, data saturation had been reached after 14 interviews. This is because the data did not significantly change after the last interviews. Therefore, it was chosen to stop collecting data, as new data no longer significantly impacted the findings.

3.6 Data analysis

To analyze the data that was gathered, an inductive approach was used. An inductive approach allows findings to emerge from themes in raw data, without the restraints structured methodologies impose (Thomas, 2006). By using an inductive approach, a theory can be built by looking for and analyzing significant patterns in data (Sabherwal & King, 1991). The purpose of a qualitative inductive approach is to condense extensive and raw data into a summary format, to establish links between the research objective and the key findings from the raw data, and to develop a model or theory about the underlying structure of experiences or processes which are evident in raw data (Thomas, 2006). To be able to properly analyze the raw data, the data was transcribed and coded. The coding process started with open coding, moving to axial coding and theoretical coding (Myers, 2019).

3.7 Research ethics

An important part of research ethics is that participants of research know what they are getting involved in. To make sure participants knew what the research is about, what was expected of them, and what they could expect from the interview, a plain language statement was drafted. The plain language statement discussed the context of the research, the purpose of the research, the research process, confidentiality and data use, and possible effects. The plain language statement also provided the participants with the possibility to ask questions when things were unclear to them. The plain language statement that was used in this research can be found in Appendix B.

Because netnography was applied to collect data, the research had to follow certain ethical guidelines. The guidelines regarding ethical social science research in cyberspace concern four procedures (Kozinets, 2002). First, the researcher should disclose his or her presence and intentions to the online community members during the research. In this study, this was done by asking permission from private sneaker community owners to join the community and sharing my intentions with the observations I wanted to make within their online community. Second, the researcher should incorporate feedback from members of the online community that is being researched. Third, the researcher should take a cautious position on the private-versus-public medium issue. This was done by contacting members of the online sneaker community to obtain their informed consent to use any specific postings in this research. Fourth, the research ensured the anonymity and confidentiality of informants. Confidentiality refers to the agreements with persons about what may be done with their data. In practice, confidentiality typically means ensuring nobody other than the researchers know

who participated in the study (Kaiser, 2012). To ensure the anonymity of the participants of the interviews, the names of the participants were altered with pseudonyms. Also, because of the nature of the semi-structured interviews in which the personal information of the participant was discussed to provide context to the findings, some transcripts are slightly modified to protect the identity of the participants (Markham, 2012).

To ensure the confidentiality of the personal information of the participants of the research, participants of the interviews were asked to sign a consent form. In this consent form, participants were informed about what the researchers will, and more importantly, will not do with the data that is gathered through their participation. The textual consent form and the verbal consent form can be found in Appendix C and D.

4. Findings

In this chapter, the findings of the research will be discussed. Data gathered through semi-structured interviews and netnography are showcased in a conceptual framework. The findings serve the purpose to answer the research question: *“Why do people who want to be unique buy the same things?”*.

4.1 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework is illustrated in Figure 1. The conceptual framework is a pyramid that is divided into two different layers: ingroup identity forming sneakerheads and outgroups. The two different layers are based on the enabling lens of the research, the social identity theory. Three different themes emerged from the study: hype, the popularity of specific sneaker brands, and the variety of sneaker collections. These themes will be discussed and connected to the social identity theory.

Recall from Chapter 2, the theoretical background, that the premise of the social identity theory is that individuals define their identity based on their membership to a certain group (Islam, 2014). Tajfel and Turner’s social identity theory (1979) argues that individuals constantly categorize themselves into different social groups to define their membership within society at large. The creation of group identities leads to the categorization of ingroups and outgroups. An ingroup is a social group someone identifies with. Outgroups are social groups someone does not identify with (Islam, 2014). In the context of the sneaker world, sneakerheads see the sneaker community as an ingroup and everything outside of it as outgroups. Because sneakerheads view the sneaker community as superior to other social groups, due to ingroup favoritism, the behavior of sneakerheads is formed by the need to reinforce their place in the sneaker community (Brown, 2000; Matthews et al., 2021). This behavior relates to the sneakers

that sneakerheads wear, which sneakers they are posting online, and the sneakers they talk about with fellow sneakerheads.

The top layer of the pyramid is called ingroup identity forming sneakerheads. This is because the research is specifically focused on the identity-forming of sneakerheads that feel like they are a part of the sneaker community. The bottom layer of the pyramid is called outgroups. Although our society is full of different social groups, from the perspective of the sneaker community that is being researched, all social groups other than the sneaker community are seen as outgroups. The bottom layer of the pyramid is bigger than the top layer of the pyramid because the sneaker community is just a fractional part of all the different social groups in our society.

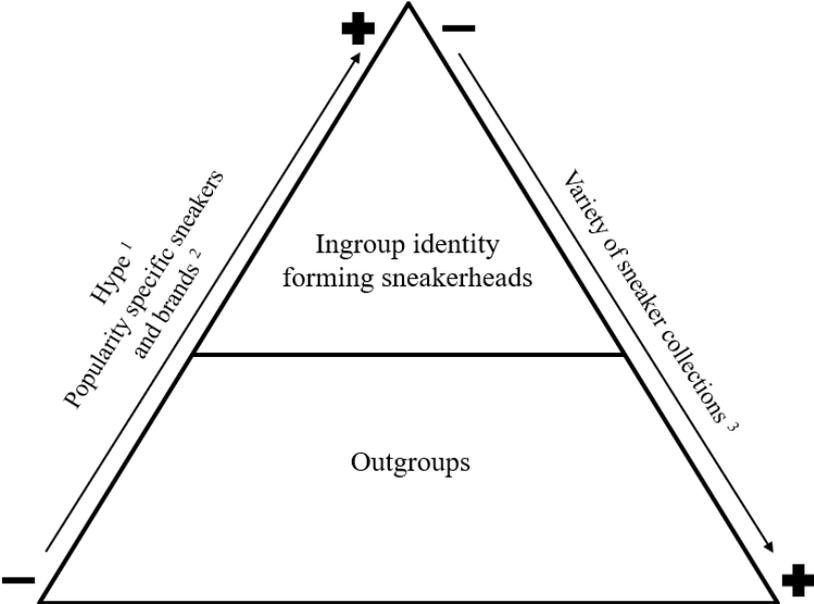


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

4.2 Hype

The first theme that emerged from the interviews and netnography is the influence of hype on the behavior of sneakerheads. Within marketing, hype is referred to as a set of prelaunch activities leading to the creation of a supportive market environment (Wind & Mahajan, 1987). For the purpose of this research, keeping in mind the research context of the sneaker community, hype is referred to as the collective excitement among sneakerheads about a certain sneaker or sneaker release. The findings show that people who are a part of the sneaker community, the ingroup, are influenced by hype when it comes to their purchasing behavior and what kind of sneakers they wear. Outgroups, on the other hand, are not influenced by the

hype surrounding sneakers. This is because they do not feel the motivation to be part of the sneaker community.

When reviewing the interviews and online sneaker communities, it becomes clear that sneaker hype enables sneakerheads to showcase their competence to others in the sneaker community. This is because when a sneakerhead obtains a hyped sneaker, it showcases their knowledge about the current trends within the sneaker community. Moreover, sneakers that are hyped are more difficult to come by, since the demand exceeds the supply. Therefore, when sneakerheads get a hold of a sneaker that is hyped, it shows the community his or her ability to obtain the sneakers others are failing to obtain. Scott explained this in his own words:

“It is a bit of a status thing, you know, not to be gratuitous in academic research, but it's a dick measuring contest, you know, who can get their hands on the hottest shoe fast enough. [...] And you had been able to get your hands on these sneakers and other people were excited to see that shoe being worn, because, for a lot of collectors, this is art.”

Sneakerheads are also influenced by others in the community. When sneakerheads see others in their ingroup wear or post certain sneakers, they are more inclined to want this pair too. This could be the result of the same reasoning. Because sneakerheads want to be a part of the sneaker community, their behavior is formed in a way that ensures that they are acknowledged by this community. When they see certain sneakers get worn or posted a lot, they could feel like obtaining that specific sneaker will reinforce their place in the sneaker community. Sneakerheads want to be acknowledged by others within the sneaker community, therefore it is important for them to know how the community feels about a certain pair before they purchase them. This also becomes evident when looking at the online sneaker community. Figure 2 shows a post on the discussion forum Reddit in which a sneakerhead asks fellow sneakerheads whether or not they are going to buy an upcoming release. This post resulted in a discussion among sneakerheads, with 3 thousand up-votes and almost five hundred comments.



Figure 2. Reddit post on an upcoming release

Joshua discussed the connection between hype and social media as follows:

“I follow multiple Instagram pages and when you see something get posted on multiple Instagram pages, it does add to that hype. I am partly influenced by Insta because there is just hype being created around the release.”

Ryan argued in his interview that he believes social media plays an important role in the increasing amount of hype in the sneaker community. He said:

“In general, I think there is more hype now than there used to be. The marketing is better and people are more exposed. You just get a lot more information about the hypes and when something comes out. I think because of that, the hype is also growing on yourself. For example, you used to see something once on a certain website. Now you constantly get a stimulus that is repeated over and over again. As I said, I think social media plays a big role in that.”

Because sneakerheads seem to find it very important to show their identity and competence to others within the sneaker community, it is no surprise that the results show that sneakerheads find it important to keep track of the last trends in the community. This is because being knowledgeable about the trends and hypes in the sneaker community can protect their place in the community, as it makes them feel like they know what is expected of them by their ingroup.

Vanessa explained this process in her interview:

“Yeah, I use apps to see what’s going to come out soon. So that makes you go with the hype. When something is new and it gets a lot of attention, you think, I want that one. Even if it's not in my size. And especially on Instagram. When I see a pair of shoes and I go to the comments and see people commenting: "I want those" or "I'm waiting for those" I think oh, those are special because people are waiting for those.”

For one participant, Justin, it was the combination between his sneaker passion and his job that motivated him to keep up with the latest sneaker trends:

“I try to keep up with the trends and hype as much as possible. [...] So you were actually always triggered to have the latest sneaker and go with the hype. Because I worked in the store, I was also well aware of the latest trends.”

4.2.1 Purchasing behavior

The results indicate that hype has an important influence on the identity-building of sneakerheads. When there is a lot of hype surrounding a certain sneaker, sneakerheads are more inclined to purchase the sneaker. Joshua for example mentioned:

“The hype surrounding a sneaker does contribute to whether I wear the sneaker because before this I never actually wore New Balance. [...] That does affect my purchases. I find that if there is a lot of hype around a sneaker I am more inclined to want the sneaker too. It's just that simple. I am always influenced by that.”

This is because hype enables sneakerheads to get acknowledged by others in the ingroup. Buying sneakers that are hyped shows their competence to others in the community. For sneakerheads, this is something very valuable, because they want to be able to differentiate themselves from outgroups. The need to be acknowledged by the ingroup and be different from outgroups enables sneakerheads to develop their identity through their group membership. This is because this need drives their behavior, which in turn leads to their identity development.

The need for sneakerheads to be a part of the sneaker community becomes clear when looking at the purchasing behavior of sneakerheads. Individuals who identify with the sneaker community are willing to pay a lot of money to buy certain sneakers, so their place in the sneaker community is reinforced. Moreover, the influence of hype is well illustrated by the fact that hype can change behavior in a short period. Joshua, for example, said that Nike had always been his only favorite sneaker brand, but that changed in the last year due to the rising popularity of New Balance in the sneaker community. Today, his sneaker collection consists of different New Balance pairs and the brand is now among his favorite brands. Joshua mentioned:

“The hype surrounding a sneaker does contribute to whether I wear the sneaker because before this I never actually wore New Balance. You see that more everywhere these days. And I do go along with that hype.”

This means the purchase intention of sneakerheads can be changed in a short period, as long as there is hype involved.

This story focussed on the positive hype and excitement in the sneaker community around certain sneakers or brands. Looking at the results of the interviews, the opposite is also true. When there is negative hype surrounding a brand or sneaker, the purchase intention of sneakerheads to buy from that specific brand will decrease. Negative hype in the sneaker community occurs when the brand image of a certain brand is damaged and it is followed by collective outrage among sneakerheads. When there is a lot of negative hype surrounding a sneaker or brand, it becomes clear that a certain sneaker or brand does not align with the values of the ingroup. Therefore, individuals do not want to associate themselves with that particular sneaker or brand, since this threatens their place in the community because their behavior is different than the behavior of others in the ingroup. As the social identity theory explains, individuals that want to be part of the ingroup and behave in a manner that they think aligns with the values of the ingroup and what is expected of them by others in that community. A well-known example in the sneaker community is the image damage that Adidas and Yeezy suffered as a result of different controversies surrounding the American rapper and founder of Yeezy, Kanye West. In the interviews, this example was brought up multiple times. Vanessa

for example mentioned: “Also now with all the Kanye West stuff, I really wouldn't buy sneakers from that.”. Moreover, negative hype goes even further than affecting purchase intentions. Negative hype also has a negative influence on what sneakerheads are wearing. Sneakerheads who already have sneakers of a certain brand that suffered image damage in their possession will no longer wear these sneakers. Even though they already bought them. Joshua, who addressed that he has multiple Adidas pairs in his collection, said the following:

“Hype also works the other way around. If there is less hype around a sneaker, I wear the sneaker less. With a brand like Adidas, where Yeezy was doing very well at first but this brand experienced image damage, I notice that I do get influenced by that. In fact, I never wear Adidas anymore.”

This is due to the same reasoning as before. Sneakerheads do not want to behave in a way that does not align with the values of the ingroup. Sneakerheads think that wearing sneakers that the sneaker community is against could jeopardize their place in the community.

4.2.2 Collaborations

An important driver of hype in the sneaker community is collaborations. A collaboration between different brands, or a collaboration between an artist or athlete and a brand, can cause a lot of excitement in the sneaker community. Collaborations work very well in the sneaker community, as it brings out the best of different worlds. Combining the image of a rapper, or the achievements of an athlete with a sneaker seems like a match made in heaven. Sneaker collaborations enable sneakerheads to develop their identity, because of the hype that is paired with it. Sneakerheads are more inclined to buy a certain collaboration because it shows the sneaker community they managed to get the sneaker collaboration everybody wanted. Joshua explained how collaborations influence his purchasing behavior as follows:

“I always find those collaborations very dope. There's always so much hype around it. Because of that collaboration and the hype, I bought a sneaker in a type I would never normally buy. Those were Air Max Ones, which I normally never buy. [...] Because there was a lot of hype around it, it attracted me. I think the hype was because of the collab with Nike.”

That collaborations can create hype also becomes evident when looking at the online sneaker community. Figure 3 shows a post on Reddit regarding the release of the collaboration between Nike Air Jordan and Travis Scott. The release created a lot of excitement among sneakerheads, as this was a highly anticipated collaboration. This resulted in a lot of traffic surrounding the post, with over five hundred likes and two hundred comments. This increases the hype surrounding a sneaker, as it shows how much sneakerheads are excited about the release. This

could make sneakerheads even more inclined to purchase the sneaker, as buying the sneaker will likely result in positive feedback from fellow collectors in their ingroup.

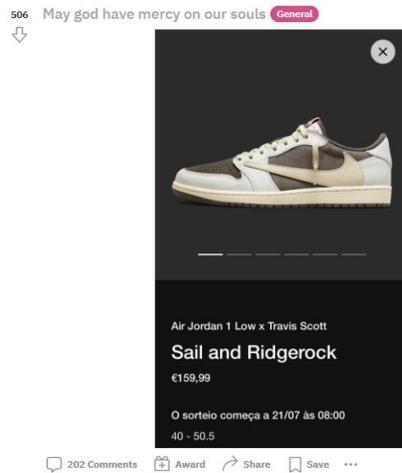


Figure 3. Reddit post on an upcoming release

For an outsider, a sneaker collaboration might seem cool or interesting, but for a sneakerhead, a sneaker collaboration can be truly impactful. Sneaker collaborations could have an impact throughout the life of a sneakerhead. Scott said the following about the collaboration between Jordan and Nike and the impact it has had on his life:

“[...] Just, you know, just a celebration of Michael Jordan's career, the significance of his achievements versus like, my own achievements and connection to that and my own career. In some way, he gave me faith in having my own achievements. The NBA shaped, you know, the sneaker culture that was so important, and the basketball culture that was so important to Miami. So, yeah, I would say that there was like a heavy association with these narratives.”

Justin also mentioned that new sneaker collaborations can influence his behavior, as he mentioned:

“You then start searching online again for something new or you see another awesome collaboration comes along, that can be a trigger again.”

Re-releasing sneaker collaborations can cause a lot of excitement in the sneaker community. In an interview with Joshua, when talking about the collaboration between Aimé Leon Dore and New Balance, Joshua said:

“By re-introducing those sneakers, there was a lot of hype that got created around New Balance.”

In the interview with Merel, she brought up another example of a re-released sneaker pair that resulted in a lot of hype:

“Take, for example, those Jordan 1985s. They re-released those a couple of times in different colorways. So, I really liked that those came out again. I indeed like collaborations with celebrities, like Jordan for example. I really like that.”

For sneakerheads, it is very rewarding to obtain sneakers they have been eager to get. For them, it is very exciting to finally be able to get something they have invested a lot of time and energy, and often money, to get. Moreover, being able to show that they managed to get their hands on a rare pair of sneakers, enables them to showcase their competence to others in the sneaker community. This reinforces their place within the community. In an interview with Justin, he elaborated on his experience with trying to obtain a sneaker he wanted:

“The collaboration between Adidas and Kanye West had been going on for about 2 years at that time, so yeah, I already had one of his first Yeezy's. I already knew that this model just fits perfectly and I just like when something comes out that's a little bit different in terms of color or in terms of print so when I saw that zebra print I was like this is just cool. I already knew it was going to be a limited edition so I was like, it's going to be hard. That made it extra fun. I'm like, okay, this is just going to be exclusive to the market, and this is really going to be a hunt. I can still remember that I was sitting on the couch with two phones, an iPad, and a laptop all at the same time. [...] I had a lot of nerves because of the enthusiasm so to speak, but then once you have them in your hands, you are really euphoric and happy.”

The limited availability of the sneakers seems to reinforce the purchase intention of sneakerheads. Being able to showcase one's competence to others in the sneaker community seems very important when sneakerheads are seeking out new pairs of sneakers to buy. This is also the case for Berend, as he said:

“I'm mostly a Nike fan, but also Adidas. I always ask myself: what are they offering and how limited is it? I think that is the most influential factor.”

The limited availability of sneakers and sneaker collaborations can also cause disappointment among sneakerheads, as the high demand also causes many people to be unable to purchase the sneaker. A part of the disappointment and frustration can come from the fact that individuals who want to show their competence to other sneakerheads are not able to do so because of the limited availability. Merel, for example, expressed her frustration after mentioning that she participated in multiple sneaker raffles, which are lotteries that allows the winners to buy a sneaker, but she has not been lucky enough to win anything:

“Yeah, just the Travis Scott Jordans. Yeah, those come out again, when is it tomorrow or the day after tomorrow, so I'm going to try to get those. I really like them. I've really participated in everything. I've never succeeded. That's really terrible.”

In the sneaker community, it is commonly known that famous collaborations go for a lot of money on the re-sell market due to the hype surrounding the sneaker and the often limited availability. This is also something that Ryan mentioned in his interview:

“I think that the limited quantity in which the sneakers are released is the main reason the price goes up.”

People within the sneaker community seem to know in advance which sneakers will be very hyped and therefore will increase in price on the sneaker market. Joshua explained how this process works for him:

“With a trained eye, I can filter pretty quickly which sneakers will be hyped. I look for certain colorways or collabs. In those cases, I don't necessarily need to see on Instagram which sneakers are being hyped. I now often see sneakers that I know in advance will go hard.”

Although the prices of these collaborations are often very high, sneakerheads seem to be willing to pay the price in order to obtain the sacred pairs everybody within the sneaker community wants. Obtaining the sneakers that showcase their competence to fellow sneakerheads, and being unique within the ingroup as not a lot of sneakerheads will be able to also obtain that specific pair, apparently is worth a lot of money. Sneakerheads also seem to exploit the drastic price increases on the re-sell market to generate resources for their identity development. This is because re-selling sneakers enables sneakerheads to obtain the financial resources to further invest in their passion by purchasing the sneakers they want. This, in turn, helps sneakerheads to stabilize their place in the sneaker community. Berend explained how re-selling enables him to buy other sneakers:

“The bit of money makes it interesting. Take for example a Travis Scott collaboration, the rapper collaborates with Nike, then you 100% know that this sneaker is sold out within a minute and obviously will multiply your investment if you get your hands on it [...] If I can get my hands on a pair of Travis Scott sneakers that I don't really want, I can sell them and make a nice profit. What I actually earn extra with that, I can buy the sneakers I would rather have. So yes, in that respect I am sensitive to the hype. And then indeed I am influenced by artists, influencers, and celebrities who have shoe collaborations.”

For another participant, Joshua, the ultimate goal was the same: use his knowledge of sneakers and sneaker reselling to further expand his sneaker collection. In doing, he reinforces his place in the community because he can get the sneakers he wants and the ability to showcase these sneakers to others within the community. In the interview, he mentioned the following about this process:

“I just saw opportunities to make money from it on something that I enjoy and find interesting anyway. And I could then possibly keep a pair myself because I would get multiple pairs with those bots and scripts. That was actually kind of the goal. There were also situations where I only bought one pair and I didn’t resell because I wanted it for myself.”

4.3 Popularity specific sneaker brands

The sneaker community would seem to be a community where it is all about standing out by wearing unique sneakers. This is because sneakers enable individuals to show their identity to others through what they wear. But if sneakers are about standing out, then why do sneakerheads seem to buy the same things? When reviewing the data from interviews and online communities, it appeared that a very select group of brands are popular in the sneaker community.

First, this became clear when looking at the sneaker rotations that were shared on social media by the interviewees.



Figure 4. Sneaker rotation Patrice



Figure 5. Sneaker rotation William



Figure 6. Sneaker rotation Berend

Figures 4, 5, and 6 showcase the popularity of specific brands in the sneaker community among sneakerheads. The sneaker rotations that were posted on social media by the participants reveal that the sneaker rotations look very similar. This is because of the reoccurring sneaker brands and sneaker types in the different sneaker rotations. The same pattern occurred when looking at the rotations the interviewees showed in their homes and what sneakerheads were sharing on online sneaker forums. Nike is the main brand of the different sneaker rotations. New Balance is also present in most of the sneaker rotations. Moreover, when looking at the different sneaker types, it becomes clear that there are just a few Nike sneaker types that seem popular among

sneakerheads. Three Nike sneaker types are the most popular among sneakerheads. These sneaker types are Nike Air Max, Nike Air Jordan, and Nike Dunk.

The fact that sneakerheads all wear the same brands, is in line with what the social identity theory tells us. People who want to be part of the sneaker community, behave in a way that reinforces their place within that community. When sneakerheads see that a few brands are popular in the community, they are more inclined to also buy these brands, since they want to be part of the ingroup.

4.3.1 Nike

Before each interview, the participants were asked what their favorite sneaker brand is. 13 out of the 14 participants mentioned Nike among their favorite sneaker brands. The only participant that did not mention Nike among his favorite sneaker brands, is working for competitor brand Adidas. The love for Nike among sneakerheads became very clear in the interviews. Leonie said: “I’m a Nike fan myself so all my sneakers are Nike! These are nice and I like them”. Mark mentioned: “It just grew that way. I really love the brand”. The love that Merel has for Nike is also very evident. She mentioned that her collection only consists of Nike. Joshua, who expressed that Nike and New Balance are his favorite sneaker brands, said: “When I look for sneakers, I actually filter first by the brand”.

The observations done in the online sneaker community showed similar results. The online sneaker community is dominated by Nike. The majority of posts and discussions on discussion forums, like Reddit, are about Nike, as in Figure 7. Whether sneakerheads talk about upcoming releases, their sneaker collection, their sneaker rotation, sneakers on their bucket list, or talk about memories they made in the sneaker community, there is one reoccurring theme: Nike.

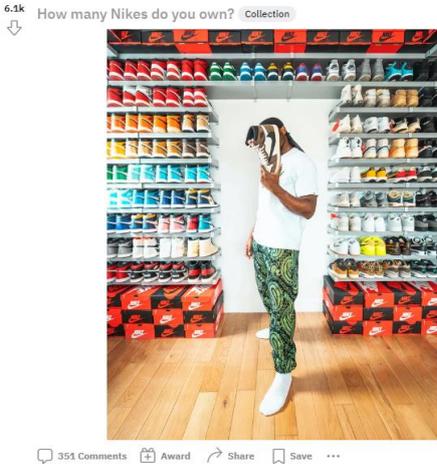


Figure 7. Reddit post about Nike

4.3.2 *Stories and legacy*

In the interviews, it became clear that the love for Nike in the sneaker community comes from the appreciation of the legacy and the stories that are connected with the brand and its sneakers. The sneakerheads appreciate what Nike has contributed to the sneaker community. Joshua, for example, said:

"I actually see Nike more as a very mainstream brand with a sporty look. And in the sneaker community, the Swoosh is just legendary, it's as simple as that. Nike is such a strong brand that a lot of people want to associate themselves with it. I think Nike is actually one of the few consistent brands in the sneaker game, and I think that will continue to be the case."

Because Nike is seen as a legendary brand in the sneaker community, it enables sneakerheads to show others they appreciate the work Nike did for the sneaker community. Moreover, wearing Nike sneakers let other sneakerheads know that you are aware of the status Nike has in the sneaker community.

The interviewees also feel a lot of nostalgia when it comes to Nike, as they often connect the brand with their childhood. William for example mentioned:

"I think when I was younger, let's take the Air Max 97 Silver Bullet, it was so different from any other shoe you had ever seen. Then I just started looking at who designed these shoes, what was the inspiration, and all these stories. And I found out that many Nike pairs, almost any older Air Max pairs, had this great story and some good designer story behind it, and really liked that part because it has some creativity to it. I don't know, it is just appealing to me. It could have been Adidas also, but it just was these shoes that are appealing to me. I really like the sporty look of Air Max."

Sneakerheads are very positive about the stories that are connected with Nike and its sneakers. It seems that these stories add to the depth of the sneaker appreciation, as it enables sneakerheads to connect a sneaker with other things they love. For example movies, tv-shows, artists, or sports teams. Individuals can be part of different ingroups. For example, individuals might feel connected to the sneaker community, and at the same time feel connected to a sports team. When these two communities collaborate, it provides them the opportunity to show others they feel connected to different communities. Berend, for example, mentioned in his interview:

"I buy sneakers with a story. Nike Air Max for example has sneakers based on animated movies. I bought the Funko pops from 'Call Me Susan' because this is very cool."

One participant, Scott, also argued that the popularity of products that are connected to stories goes even further than just the sneaker community. He thinks that this applies to the consumer market as a whole. He mentioned:

“Nowadays, we don't buy products, we buy stories, we buy experiences. We tie it into part of ourselves, in our self-identity. Which is all good and fine, you know. So, there was definitely some of that going on for sure.”

4.3.3 *Basketball*

Another important connection sneakerheads make with Nike is the connection between Nike and basketball. The collaboration between Nike and basketball legend Michael Jordan is an important factor that contributed to the popularity of the brand, according to the participants. The love for Michael Jordan among sneakerheads is very clear in the sneaker community. Patrice, for example, brought an ode to the basketball legend on social media (Figure 8).



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Figure 8. An ode to Michael Jordan by Patrice

In the interview, Patrice explained:

“90% of my collection is Nike or Nike Jordan. The rest is Asics, Adidas, and Fear of God. Nike is mostly about history and basketball and the legend Michael Jordan.”

The popularity of Jordans in the sneaker community could be because a lot of people within the sneaker community also feel tightly connected to basketball. These individuals view both the sneaker community and the basketball community as their ingroup. Jordan and his collaboration with Nike sneakers allow sneakerheads to associate themselves with both of these ingroups. Wearing Nike Air Jordan sneakers connects individuals to basketball and the legacy of Jordan, as well as to the sneaker community and the legacy of the Nike brand. This way, individuals can show their competence to the basketball community as well as the sneaker community, all by wearing one type of sneaker. Some

sneakerheads argue that the success of Nike is a result of its collaboration with Michael Jordan. They even go as far as stating that Nike is strongly dependent on the famous collaboration. Berend, for example, mentioned:

"Of course, you know that the Nike brand falls and stands with Michael Jordan, as far as sneakers are concerned. I think the Jordans are one of the best-selling and best-running parts of Nike worldwide. So yeah, then you can't avoid being influenced by the basketball culture and the sneakers associated with that."

An important part of the appreciation sneakerheads have for Nike and the connection to basketball is nostalgia. Sneakerheads connect their love for Michael Jordan, Nike, and sneakers back to their childhood. Patrice said the following about his childhood:

"Michael Jordan marked my childhood, seeing him wear those pairs and play those legendary games made me want to buy them to look like him."

The love for Michael Jordan played a big part in the start of a sneaker passion for many sneakerheads. This was also the case for Scott. He told the following story about how his sneaker passion started:

"I actively and consciously became aware of my style and footwear choice when I was 15 years old. I was in middle school and it was just shortly before the time LeBron James came from Cleveland to Miami to play for the Miami Heat. And Miami is a place that's dominated by basketball culture. And in order to be a part of the conversation or to participate in style, you had to have basketball shoes, right? Obviously, yes. And so that is where it started, right? It started with Michael Jordan's sneakers."

The purchasing behavior of sneakerheads can be impacted very heavily by collaborations. Because people can show their competence to different communities at once, it seems that their motivation to purchase a certain sneaker multiplies. Scott told the following story about how his love for Jordan and sneakers influenced his buying behavior:

"I felt like it was something that was missing from what was existing in my wardrobe. So, I think at the time when I was younger, I was trying to fill pieces in my wardrobe, combined with getting your hands on things that were culturally significant. I'll give you a perfect example. I was born in December of 1992, right? The year Michael Jordan won his second NBA championship in. And the shoe that he wore for that championship was the Air Jordan Seven. Right? So, the Air Jordan Seven was the shoe that released the year that I was born. And it was my favorite Jordan for a long time. Right. And I just feel like I needed to have all the colorways. So, there was like a black and red pair that were called the playoffs because that's what the shoe he wore in the playoffs. That were the Raptor Sevens. Which was based off of the colors of the Toronto Raptors. There was the Flint Sevens, which is like a white. And purple, right? It was. And then there was my favorite one, which is the Bordeaux. The Bordeaux Duck seven. And it was black. I had a zigzag pattern

on the tongue. So, I remember being young and I remember thinking I needed those shoes because that's where Michael Jordan won the championship in the year that I was born.”

4.4 Variety of sneaker rotations

The findings indicate that within the sneaker community, the popularity of sneaker brands is very specific. Similarly to the specific sneaker brands that are popular in the sneaker community, there are also just a few specific sneaker types that are popular in the community. As mentioned earlier, Nike is dominating the sneaker community with an honorable mention to New Balance which is rising in popularity over the last couple of years. Although Nike has a very large number of different sneakers and variants that release almost every day, the findings indicate that the majority of the sneakerheads wear specific Nike models. These models mainly consist of Nike Air Jordan, Nike Air Max, and Nike Dunk. This notion also becomes evident when looking at what the participants post on their social media platforms.



Figure 9. Patrices Jordan collection



Figure 10. Williams' Air Max collection



Figure 11. Berend his Air Max Collection

Figures 9,10 and 11 show that sneakerheads are very selective about their sneaker preferences. This notion is not only present in what the participants share on social media, but this was a pattern that appeared across the interviews and through the netnography on the online sneaker community. It becomes clear that sneakerheads develop their collection by focusing on collecting different variants of the same sneaker type, instead of buying different sneaker types. This behavior could be influenced by the need to be part of the sneaker community. Certain sneakers are very popular in the community. For sneakerheads, it could be appealing to buy these sneakers, as it is clearly in line with what sneakerheads expect others within the community to wear. Wearing different sneaker brands or sneaker types makes them more related to the outgroup than the ingroup. Therefore, sneakerheads avoid this by buying the same sneakers over and over again. This directly means that the variety of sneaker rotations is very low among sneakerheads. When looking at outgroups, the opposite is true. People in the

outgroups are not influenced by the few sneaker types that are popular in the sneaker community. Therefore, their consideration set is much broader when it comes to the purchase of sneakers. This in turn leads to more variety when it comes to the sneakers they wear. Because the preference of sneakerheads is only selective of a couple of different sneaker types, sneaker rotations look very similar. The main way sneaker rotations vary across sneakerheads are the differences in colorways that sneakerheads buy. This enables them to behave within the perceived boundaries of the ingroup, while still being unique through the variants of the popular sneaker they are wearing. This will ultimately result in very similar sneaker collections among sneakerheads. This notion is no different for Joshua. His sneaker rotation mainly consists of Nike Dunks and Nike Jordans. He said the following about this in his interview:

"I'm more of a fan of Dunk Lows in particular. I've had Jordan ones and such, but that's less for me. Dunk Lows are my favorite, the last pair I bought were also Dunk Low, so that appealed to me for that reason. [...] Currently, I actually buy mostly Jordans and Dunks, nothing else really."

This love for Nike Dunk and Nike Air Jordan was very evident in multiple interviews, as Vanessa said:

"I'm more into Nikes, so to speak. And especially with Dunks or Jordans. I know all the latest releases from those."

Moreover, these sneakers are also the favorite sneakers of Merel:

"I sometimes look at those and then I do think, yes I want to buy one. I really like Jordans, but those are being resold for a lot of money. At least when I was looking for them. And I like dunks. I have the most of those, I really like those too."

Some sneakerheads developed a love for these specific types of sneakers at a later stage of their sneaker passion. Leonie for example mentioned:

"I have been into shoes for over 4 years now. For 2 or 3 years I am specifically into Dunk and Jordans."

One explanation for the fact that some sneakerheads develop their specific interest after a short period, could be that it takes time for them to understand the values and preferences of the sneaker community. First, when an individual is getting to know the sneaker community, he or she could have very different preferences. This is because, then, their consideration set is much broader. However, when getting more familiar with the ingroup, and their behavior is shaped by being a part of the community, their preferences all begin to look the same.

5. Discussion

In this final chapter, the key findings are discussed. The key findings are positioned within the research context by elaborating on the contributions to collection theory and CCT. After this, the managerial implications that the findings uncovered are discussed. Lastly, this master thesis closes by elaborating on the limitations of the research.

5.1 Theoretical contributions

The findings of this study mainly contribute to collecting literature, as the findings mainly highlight factors that influence collecting behavior which have not been extensively examined before in collecting literature. Additionally, the study provides new context into consumer behavior research and CCT research.

First, this study adds to the collection literature by explaining how identity is built through group membership, and that this, in turn, shapes their collecting behavior. Traditional collecting literature argues that a person's possessions serve as a reflection, as well as a tool to shape an individual's identity (Belk, 1988; Belk et al., 1991). The traditional look at identity building through collections is purely individual. It is argued that collections enable consumers to feel individuated and different from others. The collections serve as tangible evidence that the collector is unique (Belk et al., 1991). This, according to Belk et al. (1991), leads to a heightened sense of individuality and autonomy upon those who possess them.

The findings of this research show that identity building through collecting is not only individual but that social influences can have a large effect on the behavior of collectors. This notion has been neglected by traditional collecting theory. Sneakerheads develop their identity through the sneakers they obtain because of the need to be part of the sneaker community. They want to show their sneaker knowledge and competence through the sneakers that they wear to fellow sneakerheads because this reinforces their place within the sneaker community. This means that sneakerheads tend to buy and wear the sneakers that they perceive to be between the borders of the values of the sneaker community. This leads to the situation where a few specific sneaker brands are popular, and the variety among sneaker collections is low. In other words, sneakerheads all buy and wear the same sneakers, as sneakerheads do not want to deviate from the values and preferences of the sneaker community. Through these findings, this study contributes to collecting literature, as it shows how social group membership impacts collecting behavior.

There could be done further research to find out whether or not the findings of this study are generalizable across different industries and communities. This research had a specific focus

on the sneaker community, and how identity formation through group membership influences the behavior of sneakerheads. The findings of this study could for instance be generalizable to the technology sector. When looking at the smartphone industry, it seems that group membership could play a role in the purchase intentions of smartphone users. The smartphone industry is being dominated by Apple and Samsung (StatCounter, 2023). The rivalry between Apple and Samsung, and the brand communities involved, have been researched in multiple instances (Hollebeek & Chen, 2014; Pan, 2020). Research found that when it comes to smartphone choice, people are likely to place themselves in two different categories, either those in favor of Apple phones or those in favor of Samsung phones. Although these communities have been researched before, research on how group membership shapes the identity of these individuals, and how this, in turn, shapes their buying behavior has not been extensively examined before. Future research could therefore examine how group membership within an Apple or Samsung community influences the buying behavior of individuals within these communities. By doing so, this could strengthen or impair the findings of this study.

Secondly, the findings of this study indicate that sneakerheads are very susceptible to hype. The hype surrounding a sneaker within the sneaker community increases the purchase intention and the price sneakerheads are willing to pay for a sneaker. This is because, for sneakerheads, obtaining sneakers that are hyped by the community enables them to showcase their competence and sneaker knowledge to fellow sneakerheads which reinforces their place within the sneaker community.

This finding contributes to collecting literature, as it showcases a new concept that has not been examined extensively before in collecting literature. The closest collecting literature has come to describing hype as a factor that affects collecting behavior was a study by Long and Schiffman (1997). This study examined the phenomenon of “Swatch Fever”, which refers to the collective excitement and collecting of Swatch watches by a group of collectors. However, this study did not discuss how hype and social group membership are related, and how this influences collecting behavior. The findings of this study show how hype and collecting behavior are related, and how it is influenced by identity development through group membership.

Future research could examine the influence of hype on collecting behavior further. Further research on this topic will increase the knowledge of hype within the collecting literature and could strengthen or impair the findings of this study. Future research could examine whether the results of this study are generalizable across industries and communities. Gaining more insights into the influence of hype on collecting behavior could be very valuable

for managers, as the results of this study show that hype can increase purchase intention and the price a consumer is willing to pay for a product.

Future research could, for example, do research on the influence of hype on collecting behavior within the fashion community. It is expected that hype in the fashion community makes people who identify with this community more inclined to buy certain products that are hyped and that collectors in this community are willing to pay more money for products that are hyped. This expectation is formed based on the similarities between the sneaker community and the fashion community.

Within the fashion industry, there are different trends and hypes that a lot of people follow. This could be the case because fashion enthusiasts develop their identity through group membership, similar to members of the sneaker community. It seems like these individuals want to wear clothing that is in line with the values of the ingroup they want to belong to, the fashion community. Fashion enthusiasts could be inclined to wear clothing that does not deviate from the fashion standard because this jeopardizes their place within the fashion community. This leads to the situation where fashion enthusiasts are wearing the same clothing, even though fashion enables them to be unique, just like what we see in the sneaker community. Obtaining a product that is hyped in the community, enables fashion enthusiasts to show their competence and fashion knowledge to others in the community. This could be valuable for these collectors, as this reinforces their place in the fashion community. In conclusion, future research could examine whether fashion enthusiasts are susceptible to hype in a similar way as sneakerheads. By doing so, this research gains knowledge on the influence of hype on consumer behavior and could provide managers with insights into which factors increase purchase intention and increases the price consumers are willing to pay.

Third, this study contributes to consumer behavior literature. A study by Thompson and Sinha (2008) within the realm of consumer behavior literature, discussed how social identification with a social group impacts purchase intention. The study showed that social identification with a social group produces a bias in favor of that group, which increases the likelihood of adopting new products from a preferred brand and simultaneously decreases the likelihood of adopting new products from opposing brands. Thompson and Sinha (2008) focused on conventional buying behavior. The findings of this study extend this insight to the context of collecting. Moreover, the study by Thompson and Sinha (2008) mainly discussed how ingroup favoritism can affect purchase intention. This study goes further by explaining how individuals develop their identity through group membership, and how this, in turn, shapes their behavior. lastly, the study by Thompson and Sinha (2008) only focused on the purchase

intention of members of a social group of newly introduced products, where this study found that group membership can increase the purchase intention of both old and newly introduced products.

Future research could examine whether social group membership increases purchase intention for both old and newly introduced products when it comes to conventional buying behavior. This will broaden the knowledge about the influence of social group membership within consumer behavior literature.

Lastly, this study contributes to CCT literature by showing that the usage of the social identity theory as enabling lens could potentially provide valuable insights into CCT literature. The findings of this study show that group membership can have a large impact on the behavior of collectors. It appeared that sneakerheads feel the desire to be acknowledged by the ingroup and to be different from the outgroup. This shapes their identity, and, in turn, shapes the collections of these consumers. Although CCT research studies the effect that symbolic and social relationships have on our behavior, and the research tradition extensively examined how social influences shape consumer behavior, the social identity theory has had minimal representation within CCT research (Arnould et al., 2019). This means that within CCT research, group membership and ingroup and outgroup identification have had minimal attention.

Because the findings show that group membership can have a large impact on consumer behavior, and the fact that the social identity theory has had minimal representation within CCT literature, future CCT research could further examine how group membership impacts consumer behavior. Using the social identity theory within the CCT research context makes it possible to gain insights into how group membership shapes the identity of a consumer, and how this, in turn, shapes their behavior. By doing so, this gains knowledge on how symbolic and social relations shape the behavior of consumers.

5.2 Managerial Implications

The findings of the research resulted in managerial implications concerning the product innovation process, community engagement, and hype, to improve purchase intention and the price consumers are willing to pay.

First, the findings showed that sneakerheads who develop their identity through group membership are likely to buy the same sneaker models but in different variations. The sneaker models that were highly represented in the sample and in the online sneaker community were Nike Jordans, Nike Dunks, and Nike Air Max. It appeared that the main difference between sneaker collections is the colors in which sneakerheads buy the sneaker models. This is because

buying a popular sneaker model, but in a different colorway allows sneakerheads to be unique within the borders of the values of the sneaker community. This is something managers could take into account when developing new sneaker models. It could be more profitable for a sneaker brand to release a popular sneaker model in different colorways than to invest in the development of different sneaker models. Moreover, when re-releasing old popular models, it could be profitable to release them in multiple variants and colorways. It appeared that product depth is more valuable than product width when it comes to the sneaker community.

The findings of this study are likely to be generalizable to other industries where there is a significant sense of identity formation through group membership involved. This is because the findings showed that group members behave in a manner that reinforces their place in their group, which is in line with what the social identity theory tells us. This is likely to be similar in other social groups and communities. Therefore, the managerial implication to focus on product depth instead of product width could be valuable for managers across different industries where consumers develop their identity through group membership. Future research possibilities, like research on the influence of group membership on consumer behavior in the fashion industry, provide the opportunity to increase the power of this recommendation.

Second, through the usage of the social identity theory, the results of this study show that the behavior of collectors is influenced by others within the community they are a part of. It appeared that through the social influences from the sneaker community, sneakerheads ended up collecting and buying the same products, as they perceived these products to be within the boundaries of the values of the sneaker community.

Managers could leverage this by stimulating social interactions in the community they seek to sell their products. Managers can stimulate social interactions by organizing collecting and trade fairs, or by stimulating interaction through talking groups or online discussion forums. If managers facilitate social interaction and hereby create an association between their brand and a community, it is expected that this will have a positive influence on the collecting behavior and purchase intention of collectors. This is because when there is a positive association with a brand within a community, others in the community are likely to adopt this positive association, as the results show that group membership results in behavior that is in line with the values of the community.

Third, the findings showed that hype has a large effect on the behavior of sneakerheads. When there is a certain amount of hype surrounding a sneaker, sneakerheads are inclined to purchase that sneaker. The hype surrounding a sneaker within the sneaker community not only increases the purchase intention of sneakerheads but also the price sneakerheads are willing to

pay for a sneaker. This is because, for sneakerheads, obtaining sneakers that are hyped by the community enables them to showcase their competence and sneaker knowledge to fellow sneakerheads which reinforces their place within the sneaker community.

For managers, it is recommended to try to create hype surrounding the products they are offering. The findings of this research show that limited editions, collaborations, and social media attention create hype around a sneaker. These findings are expected to be generalizable across different industries and communities, as it is shown that group membership shapes the behavior of those in the ingroup. Therefore, these are the topics managers could utilize to create hype surrounding the products that they offer.

First, this research showed that limited edition products increase hype, as obtaining products with limited availability enables consumers to show their competence to others in their ingroup. Therefore, offering limited edition products is likely to contribute to hype across different industries and communities. Second, managers could start to offer products with collaborations with other parties like brands, artists, or musicians. The findings of this study showed that these types of collaborations increase hype in a community. This is because this enables members of different communities to associate themselves with different ingroups at once. Third, it is recommended that managers try to create hype on social media. The findings showed social media can be an important driver of hype, as it is a useful way to reach a lot of people and simultaneously enable members of a community to interact with each other. Managers could try to create hype on social media by setting up teasing campaigns for upcoming product releases, interacting with the audience, using branded hashtags, encouraging user-generated content, setting up giveaways, or facilitating consumer contests. The goal is to engage with the target audience to increase the hype surrounding a product. It is expected that this will increase the purchase intention of consumers and increase the price consumers are willing to pay for a product.

5.3 Limitations

This study was conducted with the social identity theory as the enabling lens. The behavior of sneakerheads was examined by using this particular theory. In reality, there are also influences other than identity development through group membership that affects the identity formation of sneakerheads. Therefore, the conceptual framework that was developed using the enabling lens is only a simplified version of reality. Also, the social identity theory focuses on the fact that people's behavior is mainly driven by the need to belong to a social group. In reality, besides the need to belong to the sneaker community, there could be other motivations for buying

certain sneakers. Although the developed diagram is a simplified version of reality, it does emphasize the importance of social influence and how it can affect collecting behavior. This is a research topic that had been neglected by collecting literature, so the findings of this study provide new insights into this underexplored topic.

This study is written with a specific focus on sneakerheads. Sneakerheads serve as the ingroup in this study. The outgroup are all social groups that do not identify with the sneaker community. The data of this study is entirely made up of sneakerheads. This is the case because of the limited period in which the study is performed. All the time available to collect data was used to gain insights into the collecting behavior of sneakerheads. This is because this is a field that has not been examined extensively before, so new insights within this community are very valuable. Also, this study is about how group membership can affect an individual's collecting behavior. Group membership, and the urge to be part of the group, are highly present in the sneaker community. On top of that, the influence of group membership, and how it affects the behavior of collectors has had minimal attention in collecting literature. Therefore, all the time available was devoted to gaining as much insights from sneakerheads as possible. Future research could investigate how sneakerheads behave as opposed to other social groups. In that case, it is clearly defined which social group is the outgroup.

The results of the study are based on 14 interviews. This could be viewed as a relatively small sample. However, data saturation has been reached, which means that doing more interviews will not impact the findings significantly. Therefore, the results of the study are reliable. To increase the power of the study even more, there could be done further research with a larger sample. This research could be a study on sneakerheads, but also on other industries where there is a significant sense of community involved, as the results of this study are likely to be generalizable to other industries and communities.

6. Conclusion

This master thesis answers the question: "*Why do people who want to be unique, buy the same things?*".

The findings of the research address the research gap between traditional collecting literature and the phenomenon that is at hand. While traditional collecting literature argues that collecting is about being different, individuated, and unique, it appeared that collections within the sneaker community were the opposite of unique, very similar. To address this research gap the social identity theory was used as enabling lens. The findings of the study show that sneakerheads develop their identity through their group membership in the sneaker community

and that this has a large impact on their collecting behavior. Sneakerheads are more likely to buy sneakers that they perceive to be between the borders of the values of others in the sneaker community. This results in a situation where sneaker collections become very similar. On top of that, the findings show that sneakerheads are susceptible to hype, which increases the purchase intention and the price sneakerheads are willing to pay for a certain sneaker.

The findings of this study contribute to contemporary collecting literature in two ways. First, this research showed how social influences, specifically group membership, can affect identity development which in turn shapes collecting behavior. Second, this research showed that hype, an unexplored topic in collecting literature, has a large impact on collecting behavior. Additional to the main contributions, this research contributes to consumer behavior literature by extending previously found findings to the context of collecting literature. Also, this research addresses research opportunities within CCT literature by addressing how CCT can benefit from the usage of the social identity theory, a theory that had not been used extensively in CCT research.

Based on the findings of the study, future research opportunities were discussed to gain further knowledge about the influence of group membership on consumer behavior, on the influence of hype on consumer behavior, and to further extend the knowledge within consumer behavior literature and CCT literature.

Lastly, the findings of the research resulted in managerial implications concerning the product innovation process, community engagement, and hype. Based on the findings of the research, it was recommended to managers across industries to focus on product depth instead of product width, to stimulate social interactions in the community they seek to sell their products, and to try to increase hype surrounding products they are offering. It is expected that these managerial implications will increase the purchase intention of consumers and increase the price consumers are willing to pay for a product.

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Appendices

Appendix 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):	Favorite sneaker brands:
Favorite 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 favorite 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 rotation
- Sneaker community/social media
- Family consumption

1. Purchase of the sneaker

- Can you tell me about the last pair of sneakers you bought?
 - Can you give me a recap of activities you were involved in?
 - What inspired you in the first place to actually 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 have the 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 (core value of practice)
- Rank from 1 (most important) to 5 (least important) which factors influence selecting a sneaker the most?
 - Weather
 - Season (autumn, spring, summer, winter)
 - 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.)
- Care taking 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. Community & Social media

- Are you part of a sneaker community? If yes, tell me about your most memorable experience within this community.

- How do you influence others being 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?
- 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?

4. Hype

- Are you familiar with the term "hype" in the sneaker community?
- Do you follow hypes and trends in the sneaker community? If so, in what ways?
- Are your sneaker purchases influenced by hypes and trends in the sneaker community?
- Have you ever bought sneakers because they were hyper? If so, can you tell me about a specific time this happened and why you bought the sneaker?
- Do you ever wear sneakers in your rotation that are hyped to belong better to the sneaker community?
- In the early stages of your sneaker passion, did hype have a bigger influence on your purchases than now, or has the influence of hype on your purchases remained the same?
- Has the variety of sneakers in your sneaker rotation increased or decreased over the course of your sneaker passion? Do hype and trends play any particular role in this?
- What form of hype has the most influence on your sneaker consumption?
(For example: celebrity endorsement, collaborations, limited editions, etc.)
- Does following hypes and trends enable you to better express your own identity through your sneaker rotation?

5. Family consumption

- Do you share your passion of sneakers with others in your couple/family?
 - Can you tell me about the last time you talked about your sneaker collection with your couple/family?
- How would you describe your own identity and that of your couple/family?
- How do you share this couple/family identity with others?
- Can you explain if your love for sneakers have benefits or drawbacks regarding your couple/family?
- What tensions exist between you and your couple/family concerning your sneaker collection?
- What factors influence your family's decision making when it comes to buying sneakers?
- In the future, would you pass on your passion for sneakers onto your wife/husband/children?
 - What is the best family memory you have related to sneakers?

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?

Closure

Thank the interviewee for his/her time.

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

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

Appendix B: Plane language statement



Radboud Universiteit

Faculty of Management Sciences

Nijmegen School of Management

PROJECT TITLE: *Sneaker Rotations*

PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT

Dear Sir/Madam,

We invite you to take part in this student research project being conducted by the student researchers Vay Roze, Rick Bosma and Esmee Frederique Schut through the Nijmegen School of Management at the Radboud University. This student research project contributes towards the fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Science, specialization of Business Administration degree being completed by the student researchers.

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to gain an understanding of the consumer behavior of sneakerheads within their sneaker culture. Specifically, this research aims to identify the factors that influence sneakerheads' collections, rotations, buying decisions and the impact of sneaker culture on the daily lives of sneakerheads being part of sneaker communities. Additionally, this research will explore the motivations and attitudes of sneakerheads towards their beloved sneakers and the culture surrounding them. We hope this project will help us better understand the way that sneaker rotations are being shaped.

Research Process: The researcher will ask you questions about the ways you collect and rotate your sneakers, ranging from the purchase of the sneaker, towards the activities of sneaker rotation, whether celebrities endorsements affect you and how you are involved in sneaker communities and social media. Please note that this will likely require you to talk about the spaces in your home where you store sneakers and how the collection influences your life. Since we are carrying out these interviews in-person at your home, you are more than welcome to demonstrate and show the researchers these storage spaces as part of our interview.

The length of these interviews are expected to be between one hour and two hours and are also contingent on how long you are all willing to participate in this study. This is at your discretion. Further interviews following the initial interview are possible and may allow you and the researchers to further continue our discussions. Participation in any future interviews are at your discretion. All interviews including any further interviews, as well as your family's overall participation is voluntary; you can

withdraw at any time, and you can withdraw any data you have supplied (up to the point of analysis/publication).

Confidentiality and Data Use: Only the researchers involved in the project will have access to the raw data in this study. Confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal restrictions. We audio-record the interviews for research purposes. Once we have transcribed and analysed the recordings we remove any personally identifiable information from the transcript documents to provide you anonymity. In resulting research publications you will be referred to by a pseudonym. A copy of the results – in full or redacted form - of the study, or a summary of the research findings are available to you, if you wish to be sent a copy.

Possible Effects: No physical or psychological risks to you are foreseen. You will not be audio-recorded or your personal details collected without consent. With the small sample of participants in this study, there is the possibility that you and your responses may be identified through the outputs of this study. However, all reasonable measures will be taken to mitigate this risk, including de-identification of any personal information in transcriptions of recorded audio and reference to you using a pseudonym in any written outputs produced from the research.

Providing Consent: You will be required to fill out a consent form to participate in the research, or provide verbal consent at the start of a research interview.

Researchers:

Name	email
Dr. Pao Franco (Supervisor)	paolo.franco@ru.nl
Rick Bosma (Student Researcher)	rick.bosma@ru.nl
Vay Roze (Student Researcher)	vay.roze@ru.nl
Esmee Frederique Schut (Student Researcher)	esmee.schut@ru.nl

Any Questions?

For more information or for a request for the final report to be sent to you in an electronic format, please contact the student researchers at the Nijmegen School of Management via e-mail.

Thank you for your assistance,

Vay Roze, Rick Bosma & Esmee Frederique Schut

Appendix C: Participant consent form



Radboud Universiteit

Faculty of Business and Economics Department of Management & Marketing

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

PROJECT TITLE: SNEAKER ROTATIONS

This is a student research project contributing towards the fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Science, specialization of Business Administration degree being completed by the student researchers Vay Roze, Rick Bosma and Esmee Frederique Schut..

Name of participant:

Name of investigator(s):

Student Researcher:

Name;

Email: (email)

Supervisor:

Pao Franco, Institute for Management Research, Radboud University, Nijmegen, Netherlands;

Email: (paolo.franco@ru.nl)

1. I consent to participate in this student project, the details of which have been explained to me, and I have been provided with a written plain language statement to keep.
2. I understand that after I sign and return this consent form it will be retained by the researcher.
3. I understand that my participation will involve observations and I agree that the researcher may use the results as described in the plain language statement.
4. I understand that the data collected and analysed in this project might also be used by the researchers in closely related research projects.
5. I understand that my participation may involve audio, photo and/or video capture if possible and appropriate, and may involve a period of discussion with the researcher over the interview recorded.
6. I understand that persons under the age of consent (under 18) might be present during the interviews at home, and their responses may be collected, and their behaviours observed.
7. I understand that my participation includes:
 - This initial interview with the researcher(s).
 - A potential invitation for further interview(s) with the researcher(s). This is at my discretion.
8. I acknowledge that:
 - (a) the possible effects of participating in the *observations* have been explained to my satisfaction;

- (b) I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any data I have provided;
- (c) the project is for the purpose of academic research;
- (d) I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded subject to any legal requirements;
- (e) I have been informed that with my consent the ***observations may be recorded and transcribed. Recordings*** will be destroyed after transcription (but no less than 5 years after the fieldwork). The transcriptions will be retained indefinitely in safe storage;
- (f) I am aware that all reasonable measures to de-identify my responses will be taken, including removal of personal information in audio transcripts and using a pseudonym instead of my real name while the interview is being recorded.
- (g) Due to the small sample size of this study and in consideration of all reasonable measures to de-identify my responses, I have been informed that there is still a risk that my responses and I may be identified through the outputs of this study.
- (h) I have been informed that a copy of the research findings can be forwarded to me, should I desire.

I consent to the researcher observing behaviour

yes **no**
(please tick)

I consent to interviews being audio-taped

yes **no**
(please tick)

I consent to the use of a pseudonym instead of my real name after the interview has been transcribed and the usage of this pseudonym in resulting outputs of this study.

yes **no**
(please tick)

I wish to be notified when outputs of this research project are published and receive a summary of research findings (If yes, please also provide your email address below)

yes **no**
(please tick)

Participant signature:

Date:

Participant contact email:

Appendix D: Verbal participant consent form



Radboud Universiteit

**Faculty of Business and Economics
Department of Management & Marketing**

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

PROJECT TITLE: SNEAKER ROTATIONS

Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given adequate time to read the participant information sheet and ask questions. You will then be asked to give your verbal consent before participating in the study. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time for any reason and withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied. You can refuse to answer any individual question and request for the researcher to not use certain types of information at any time. You will not be penalised or disadvantaged in any way for your decision whether or not to participate in this study.

With your permission, interviews will be audio-recorded permission and then transcribed. The data will be transcribed, and then personally identifiable information will be removed. All information collected will be strictly confidential and will only be retained for the purpose of this study. Confidentiality, privacy and anonymity will be ensured in the collection, storage and publication of research material. To protect the privacy participants, direct identifiers such as names, places, occupation, institution and email addresses will be replaced with pseudonyms when transcribing interviews. Identifiable personal data will be anonymised using pseudonyms.