

The Rise of Sneaker Culture: The Streetwear Hype Which is Becoming Luxury.



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## **The Rise of Sneaker Culture: The Streetwear Hype Which is Becoming Luxury. Complications for the Industry and the Community**

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Master in Tourism Development and Culture (TourDC)

Supervisors:

Professor Helena Rodrigues, ISCTE

Dr Guillaume Tiberghien, University of Glasgow

Dr Viana Hassan, University of Malta

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JOINT MASTER

**Tourism  
Development  
& Culture**

The Rise of Sneaker Culture: The Streetwear Hype Which is Becoming Luxury.

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And finally, my mom, who I am sure is somewhere there guiding my pathway in life...

*“Momma always said there’s an awful lot you could tell about a person by their shoes... Where they’re going, where they’ve been...”*

Forrest Gump (1994)

# The Rise of Sneaker Culture: The Streetwear Hype Which is Becoming Luxury.

## Resumo

O streetwear e, em particular, os sapatos de ténis evoluíram gradualmente de uma subcultura para um fenómeno global e tendência de moda. O interesse crescente entre a comunidade conhecida por sneakerheads trouxe novos meios e novas oportunidades para as empresas que gravitam à volta do amor por sapatos de ténis. O que era antes era visto como um par de sapatos para praticar desporto com valor sobretudo funcional é agora considerado uma demonstração de status e riqueza. Um calçado prático e confortável foi substituído por motivações hedónicas que são características do consumo conspícuo.

Uma revisão exaustiva da literatura evidencia que a história e cultura dos ténis, bem como a evolução do mercado de revenda é exaustiva, contudo falta aprofundar os sentimentos dos sneakerheads relativamente à recente mudança das marcas que estabelecem colaboração com marcas de luxo. Consequentemente, o objectivo desta investigação é observar o nível de aprovação dos vários intervenientes da comunidade de sneakers face ao fenómeno da "luxurização" do streetwear. Adicionalmente este trabalho de investigação tem como objetivo responder à pergunta de partida: "Podem os ténis ser considerados um ponto de entrada para as compras de luxo?" e "Qual a importância da colaboração entre marcas para que as empresas de alta moda penetrem na moda de streetwear?".

Foram realizadas 16 entrevistas semi-estruturadas e os resultados da análise com Leximancer foi utilizada para identificarr os temas mencionados pelos entrevistados.

Os resultados mostram que existe uma antítese entre grupos de indivíduos relativamente à sua postura face ao luxo que entra no mundo dos ténis e as oipiniões dependem principalmente da sua função na comunidade dos ténis.

**Palavras-chave:** ténis, sneakerheads, cultura do streetwear, colaborações, preferência de marca, luxo

**Códigos de classificação JEL:** Z32, M31

# The Rise of Sneaker Culture: The Streetwear Hype Which is Becoming Luxury.

### **Abstract**

Streetwear and particularly sneakers have gradually evolved from an underground sub-culture to a global phenomenon and fashion trend. The growing interest among the sneakerheads community has brought in new tools and opportunities for businesses that revolve around the love for sneakers. What was once perceived as a pair of athletic shoes with mostly functional value is now considered a demonstration of social status and wealth. Practicality and comfort have been replaced with more hedonistic motivations that are characteristic of conspicuous consumption.

A thorough evaluation of the available academic literature produced until present day shows that history and culture of sneakers as well as the evolution of resale market have been well documented, however the sentiments of the sneakerheads regarding the recent shift towards luxury through collaborations is missing. Thus, the objective of this research is to observe the level of approval of various actors in the sneaker community to the phenomenon of “luxurisation” of streetwear culture. This paper also attempts to find answers to the questions: “Can sneakers be considered an entry point to luxury shopping?” and “How important are collaborations between brands for high fashion companies to penetrate the streetwear fashion?”. Sixteen semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted for this qualitative research in which Leximancer analysis tool was used to spotlight the essential topics mentioned by the respondents.

Results show that there is a notable antithesis between groups of individuals regarding their stance toward luxury entering the world of sneakers and their opinion mainly depends on their function in the sneaker community.

**Keywords:** sneakers, sneakerheads, streetwear culture, collaborations, brand preference, luxury

**JEL Classification Codes:** Z32, M31

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## 1. Introduction

In early February 2022, the luxury sneaker market reached a new peak with prices unheard of before. The renowned auction house Sotheby's successfully facilitated the sale of 200 pairs of Air Force 1 sneakers in a special collaboration between Nike and Louis Vuitton, designed by the late Virgil Abloh, bearing his distinctive "Off-White" style. The price paid for these 200 pairs? Over 25.3 million USD in total – an astonishing average price of 126 500 USD per pair, with the lowest price of a 6.5 (US) size sold for 75 600 USD and the highest price paid for a size 5 (US) – 352 800 USD (Dunne, 2022). Regardless of the many factors that may have affected the high price, such as this being a special charity event and the first public release of the shoes, with an exclusive leather case, and represents the last grand work of a significant for the streetwear culture artist, these numbers are still unprecedented and surpassed every expectation. This official collaboration between (arguably) the greatest sportswear brand – Nike, and one of the most well-known high-end, luxury fashion houses in the world has been anticipated since 1988, when DJ E-Z Rock wore custom-made white Air Force 1s with LV's iconic recognizable monogram on the swoosh for the art cover of his album "It Takes Two", together with Rob Base (Dunne, 2021). Sneakers have gone a long way from just an athletic shoe, transforming into a fashion icon, sought after by collectors ready to pay exorbitant amounts of money for a specific pair in an aftermarket that is estimated to be worth 10 billion USD according to StockX and expectations are to reach almost 30 billion USD by the year 2030 (Hills, 2021).

Importance and love for sneakers as a fashion attribute whose purpose is not merely comfort and utility, but a statement of the person wearing them, is deeply rooted in all cultural tendencies which dictated the USA in the 80s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – hip-hop, streetwear, basketball, skateboarding, surf, graffiti art (Choi & Kim, 2019; Leeb et al., 2019; Lux & Bug, 2018; Matthews et al., 2021; Slaton & Pookulangara, 2021). They are usually also connected to specific personalities like sportsmen, musicians, and artists. Understanding the relationship between sneakers and culture is difficult but very important to comprehend the evolution of the sneaker industry with all its specific characteristics until the present day. At this moment it would be fair to recognize that we live in a fashion era in which collaborations between luxury brands and sportswear/streetwear brands are an everyday thing and sneakers are the driving tool for designer brands to be fashionable and desired especially by the younger population (Witte, 2019).

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However, the commercial implications for the brands this new trend could hold, have not been academically researched so far. In general, sneakers are a topic virtually disregarded in academic research, no matter its complexity and significant subcultural and economic importance. There has been limited, close to non-existent academic research on high-end, sporty footwear. Sneaker culture, the history of sneakers and the resale market are the major topics on which academic papers have been produced until now (Cassidy, 2018; Denny, 2021; Lux & Bug, 2018; Matthews, 2021). The rising significance of sneakers and streetwear culture in the high fashion world has led to the aspiration of examining and analysing the susceptibility of different actors within the streetwear industry towards the shift of sneakers to luxury to create valuable insights for the brands. The main research objective of this dissertation is to observe the level of openness and acceptance of various personas in the sneaker community to the phenomenon of “luxurisation” of streetwear culture. This paper also attempts to find answers to the questions: “Can sneakers be considered an entry point to luxury shopping?” and “How important are collaborations between brands for high fashion companies to penetrate the streetwear fashion?”. Questions worth finding the answers to considering that in pre-Covid times the global luxury market was estimated to be worth 281 billion EUR (Kering, 2020) and it showed signs of immediate recovery as expectations of financial results of 2021 were to surpass the heights of 2019 (Kering, 2022). Through the course of the research additional important findings such as a “love-hate” relationship towards specific brand(s) are discovered. To successfully complete these goals, 16 individuals were personally interviewed with a semi-structured questionnaire and methodologies of qualitative research were applied to analyse the data. These individuals have different roles in the sneaker industry but what connects them is the mutual love and passion for sneakers. Results show that there is a notable antithesis between groups of individuals regarding their stance toward luxury entering the world of sneakers and their opinion depends mainly depends on their function in the sneaker community.

This paper is structured as follows: In the first part, an extensive overview of the literature produced so far on the topic is done to identify a research gap and justify the research objectives of this dissertation. That is followed by an explanation of the methodology, the usage of Leximancer and the conduction process of the interviews. Analysis of the findings follows with a discussion on the important topics that emerge from the research and finally a conclusion is made with further recommendations.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Overview of Academic Research on Sneakers

A thorough search in the online accessible scholarly literature about “luxury sneakers” has proven that there is limited, close to non-existent academic research on high-end, sporty footwear. However, sneaker culture alone has been scholarly examined in recent years as the hype around this fashion trend is growing and becoming more popular (Ma & Treiber, 2020). Academic work on luxury consumption and consumer behaviour regarding conspicuous goods has been produced in significant amounts, yet in a broader context that does not concretize into the segment of sneakers (Han et al., 2010; Jiang et al., 2021). The “sneaker resale market” phenomenon which is partial to be blamed for the high demand, and subsequently high prices of sneakers that allow us to define them as “luxury” is a relatively new topic, thus, there has been hardly any theoretical work conducted on it (Lux & Bug, 2018). Several books and publications have been written and compiled by sneaker aficionados and collectors, nevertheless, they are not academic in their nature, which is additional evidence that sneakers are a topic disregarded in academic research, no matter its complexity and significant subcultural importance. For example, Kawamura (2016) analyses fashion, gender, and subculture embedded in sneakers through a sociologist’s perspective while Smith (2018) dives deeply into the historical evolution of sneakers from its very beginning to the present day with a strong emphasis on the influence of American culture on the East and West coast (basketball, hip-hop, graffiti). A significant proportion of academic research is rather recent since the phenomenon of (luxury) sneakers and the resale market as a profitable industry has become trendy not long ago (Aaron, 2021).

Since StockX is the only website that provides free accessible information regarding the volume of sales, volatility, prices, average price premium and more, it has been used by scholars as a source of secondary data based on which scientific research has been produced on the sneaker resale market (Lux & Bug, 2018; Ma & Treiber, 2020; Raditya et al., 2021).

Few of the significant works in available literature have explored some factors as price determinants in the sneaker resale market, such as scarcity, collaborations with other brands and influential artists, retail, and resale prices, as well as general interest in sneakers on social media and acceptance by the sneakerhead community (Cassidy, 2018; Slaton & Pookulangara, 2021; Zhu et al., 2020). A comprehensive table with relevant academic work read for the purpose of this dissertation has been put together (see Annex A). The literature touches on three

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general topics that have been defined and will be analysed in detail. Each work has been categorized with the relevant topic with which it is connected mostly.

Scholar literature regarding the last segment “Luxury Sneakers and Collaborations” is barely discussed and can be defined as uncharted waters when it comes to academic research-which is an occasion for scientific work to be conducted on it. Other major topics connected to sneakers that have been explored and are noteworthy to mention are authenticity and counterfeit sneakers, consumer behaviour as well as brand image, however, those will not be analysed in detail since we will focus mainly on luxury sneakers and collaborations between sneaker-makers (Djuhardi & Kusumawati, 2017; Perez, 2021; Rubini, 2010; Zhu et al., 2020). Yet, brand perception and brand awareness are strongly connected to collaborations, thus, that will be also discussed thereafter.

The literature review is organized in a table (Annex A) in the following order: first are works touching on the initial topic; then those covering both the first and second one; after those who cover solely the second one and so forth. Those who coincide are ranked by year and then alphabetical order of author(s). The idea of this structure is to show more clearly the academic work produced on the sneaker craze and its pertinent development in chronological progression. This allows for a more evident, systematized illustration of the interconnectedness of the topics and their complex interdependence. To explain how the sneaker (resale) market works and how its users buy, sell, and behave, we need to understand how it all started – the historical and cultural aspects of the streetwear lifestyle and sneakers. The trend in sneakers has created opportunities for brands in other segments, such as luxury, to penetrate the market, usually collaborating with already established sportswear giants. However, a more thorough look into the table will reveal the missing connection between “History and Culture” and “Luxury” in the scholarly literature presented so far, hence the idea to explore how luxury in sneakers is affecting this and whether luxury brands can successfully sell if they disregard these important factors in the race for creating desirable sneakers.

### 2.2 History and Culture of Sneakers

The sneaker silhouettes that sportswear and designer brands produce nowadays to reflect the fashion trends are far from the design, quality, and purpose of the first created sports shoes. This shift in time has been acknowledged and documented by several sources that trace back the invention of the rubber sole and the athletic shoe to its modern evolution and transformation from a sub-cultural emblem to a global icon (Alleyne, 2015; Braithwaite, 2021; Smith, 2018).

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In his exploratory research Denny (2021) suggests a chronological order in the growth of kicks as hyped footwear that signals status. The eras that can be easily differentiated from his overview are firstly the sneakers as a sportswear shoe for tennis and basketball players in the UK and North America as a firm rubber sole was needed for better grip on the field – this period covers the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to 1930s. As per Alleyne (2015), the First World War was proof that much of the population globally was physically unprepared which gave a boost in training and sports among the masses to improve their body build and physical health, thus there was a need for greater production of sports shoes and their commercialization was a fact.

The second era characterizes the sneakers' close connection to sports personas, music artists and the streetwear culture – endorsements became a thing. Some significant models and their association with important figures that literally changed the game have been acknowledged by Denny (2021) and others: the 1934 Converse Chuck Taylor All-Stars, the first sneaker with celebrity endorsement by basketball player Chuck Taylor, the silhouette of the shoe remains almost unchanged until today and is one of the most recognizable and worn shoes ever made; the 1972 Nike Cortez appearing in the movie *Forrest Gump* (Zemeckis, 1994); the 1973 Puma “Clydes” – the first real collaboration between a sneaker-making brand and a professional player that was marked with financial benefit for the latter with Walt “Clyde” Frazier (basketball player from the New York Nicks in the NBA) being offered 5000 USD and limitless pairs of Puma's as well as adding his own style and opinion not only on the design but also the design of the shoe (Woolf, 2016); the 1985 Nike Air Jordan 1 (see Figure 2.1 and Figure 2.2) – an all-time classic and probably one of the most desired sneakers that was originally banned (Trivic, 2020); the 1986 Adidas Superstars – an iconic shoe that became mainstream, owing its fame greatly to Run-DMC (hip-hop trio from Queens, NY, USA) with their song “My Adidas” being ranked as #1 “greatest sneaker reference in rap history” (Josephs, 2013) and many more. All these examples demonstrate how special the bond between American culture (especially the East Coast) and sneakers in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is and that endorsements and collaborations between brands and famous personalities had a great role in turning some models into eternal masterpieces worn by millions today.

The third period begins with the invention of the internet and technological advancements and goes on to the present day – the era of online sneaker trades, digital communities, and the resale market (Choi & Kim, 2019). It would be positive to say that we are at the brink of a fourth stage – massive collaborations between luxury brands and pricey luxury sneakers becoming the new normal with kicks reaching new heights making them affordable for a selected clientele.



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Figure 2.1

*Michael Jordan wearing the Air Jordan 1's "Banned" during the 1985 NBA Slam Dunk Contest (Oliveira, 2019)*

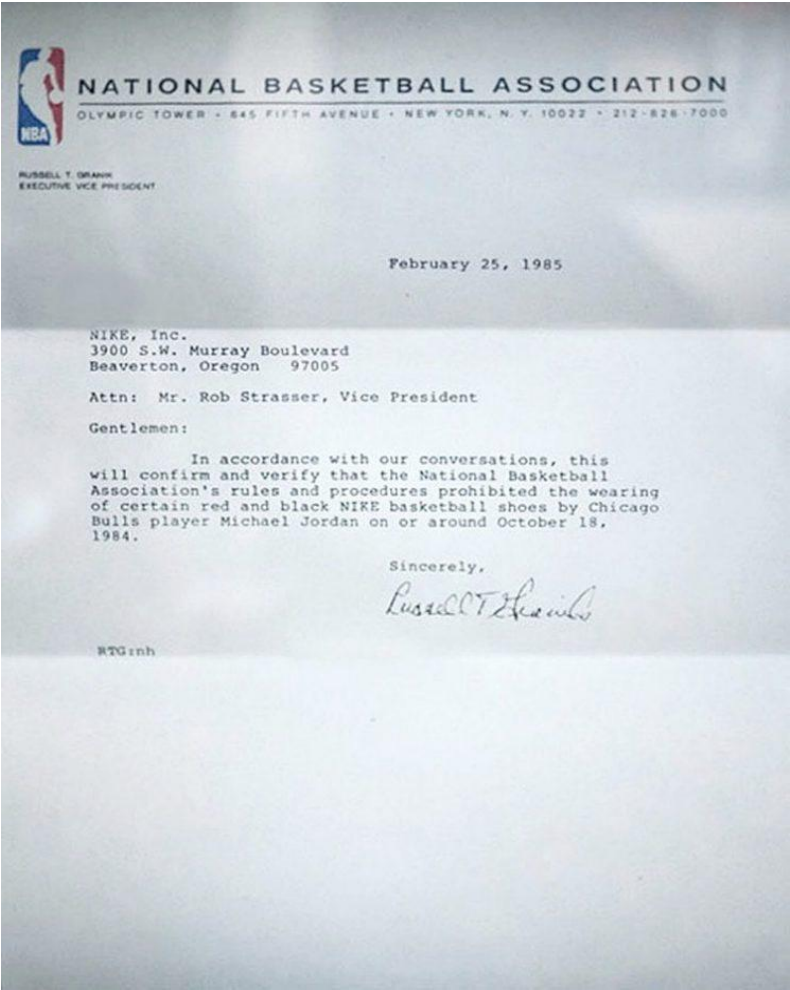


Figure 2.2

*Official letter sent from the NBA to the Chicago Bulls regarding the use of shoes that are not predominantly white in colour (Yahoo! Sports, 2016)*

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Furthermore, sneakers are not only associated with cultural aspects such as music, sports, and art, but also with ethnicities and social status. Brace-Govan and de Burgh-Woodman (2008) interview French communities from former African colonies and make a thorough analysis of the film *Just for Kicks* (de Longeville & Leone, 2005) to find out that sneakers can also be associated with marginalized societies and acts of violence and aggression. Not being able to have laces on your shoes during incarceration for safety reasons turned into a style of wearing the sneakers laceless on the streets in the ‘hood. The authors also consider the desire of owning triple white Nike Air Force 1s (also called “Uptowns” or just “Ups” due to being originally adopted by people in Harlem, NY) as an interpretation of further appropriation of white symbolism by black culture (Brace-Govan & de Burgh-Woodman, 2008).

In their qualitative research, Matthews et al. (2021) conduct 12 semi-structured interviews with self-identified sneakerheads to obtain more information on brand preference among men and the social symbolism of the sneakers they love to wear. Their results show that there is a particularly strong relationship with the past as sneakerheads love retro models that make them feel nostalgic and associate a shoe with the era of the 80s and 90s and their culture. Another important outcome that their study finds is that there is an apparent strong preference among sneakerheads for Nike and the Jordan brand and they touch upon the topic of “brand tribalism” and brand loyalty also recognized by Cassidy (2018), Denny (2021) and Rubini (2010). Lastly, Matthews et al. (2021) conclude that sneakers give a social identity and create a closed community with specific terms, slang, and rules. The distinctive words sneakerheads use and their behaviour is thoroughly reviewed by Choi and Kim (2019) in their exploratory “netnography” research in which they analyse the actions and words within the digital community in a popular sneaker forum. They distinguish three large topics that define sneakerhead online talks – the hype before and around a release of a new model (leaks, information about prices and locations to buy, etc.); the jargon and abbreviation that is being used (crucial for an outsider to understand the conversations between sneakerheads); and again the attraction to models that resemble original colourways released in the past – the so-called OG Retro CWs (“original retro colourways”) (Michael, 2019). Another exploratory research conducted on the topic of customized kicks utilizes the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET) where respondents create a photo collage at the end of the session to express their feelings regarding subjects discussed during the interview (Giebelhausen & Lawson, 2010). In this research, some of the interviewees are quoted to have an addiction to sneakers and cannot give a reasonable answer to why they buy them. In his attempt to also compile a scientifically logical answer on why most sneakerheads collect excessively sports shoes Smith

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(2014) gives examples that are compared to “getting high” with dopamine being released in the body, thus, the term “sneaker-head” being used where usually the suffix “head” is linguistically used in words to describe some sort of addiction (i.e., petrolhead, pothead) (Choi & Kim, 2019). To summarise, it is worth mentioning that most academic papers reviewed above that are connected to “History and Culture of Sneakers” have been conducted as exploratory research with qualitative data and a grounded theory approach has been used (Brace-Govan & de Burgh-Woodman, 2008; Choi & Kim, 2019; Giebelhausen & Lawson, 2010; Matthews et al., 2021).

### 2.3 Sneaker (Resale) Market and Sneakerhead Community

Sneaker aftermarket is estimated to be now worth 10 billion USD according to StockX, one of the most popular online resale platforms, and it is expected to reach almost 30 billion USD by the year 2030 (Hills, 2021). Mainly due to its growing commercial and economic importance it is fair to say that academic work produced about sneakers predominantly covers the topic of the secondary market, known as the resale market. There is a certain complexity in the way it functions and has developed to the present-day causing controversies among the sneakerhead community that could be bothersome in terms of preserving the true love for kicks (Dunne & Jones, 2021). Resale can be defined as the act of purchasing sneakers at a regular (retail) price and selling them later for a price higher than the original through a platform, website or face-to-face to make a profit out of it (Choi & Lee, 2021; Slaton & Pookulangara, 2021). However, the sneaker resale market has some unique features that are deeply rooted in the sneaker culture and the desire of sneakerheads to possess unique and limited pairs which defines their unusual purchase behaviour in it and is worth being studied more closely (Cassidy, 2018).

BoPing (2021) makes an overview of the current sneaker resale market in an empirical analysis concluding that in terms of prices sneakers nowadays can be defined as a luxury while the secondary market of kicks strongly resembles the stock market with fluctuation of prices depending on global events, giving as an example the unexpected and tragic death of NBA retired legend Kobe Bryant that led to an instant increase of prices to all pairs related to him. This is one of the few examples of how unethical the resale market can be and that it has turned to pure business, steering away from the original values of sneaker culture. Explained in simple economic terms, the craving for sneakers creates a demand much higher than the available supply which is kept low by manufacturers and brands on purpose to maintain a certain scarcity that preserves prices and demand always high (Leeb et al., 2019).

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The intentional exclusivity created by brands combined with the hype among sneakerheads has made some sneaker models unaffordable and inaccessible for many enthusiasts, consequently leading to the invention of other options and methods to get your hands on a coveted pair which often includes breaking or getting around the unspoken rules of the sneaker community. Quite a big concern in the sneaker industry is the production of counterfeit shoes and replicas whose quality is sometimes close to or even better than the original, making it hard to distinguish even by the most experienced sneaker aficionados – it is not a secret that even some celebrities have been spotted wearing fakes (Welty, 2017), even though probably unintentionally since they could certainly afford a genuine pair. Djuhardi and Kusumawati (2017) study the inclination of students towards consciously buying fake sneakers as an alternative to high-priced originals suggesting that brands should step up their game in terms of quality and innovation which will minimize the production of counterfeits and justify the high price for the original as sometimes customers feel that cost does not correspond to value. On the other hand, Zhu et al. (2020) propose the use of high-tech, and more specifically blockchain, as means to guarantee authenticity in the resale market and facilitate transparency of all transactions made for a specific pair. Qualitative research conducted by Adkinson-Jobe and Lawson (2017) aspires to understand the attitude of sneaker collectors towards partaking in access-based consumption and renting (out) their favourite shoes. The authors discover that saving money would be the greatest motivator, however, there are significant drawbacks such as anxiety about their shoes not being taken care of properly, hygiene and other discouragements such as sneaker condition that make most sneakerheads reluctant to rent (out) sneakers.

Another notable explorative research done on the sneaker resale market is the one of Lux and Bug (2018) which combines analysis of secondary data obtained from StockX and interviews with four sneaker experts on 13 statements that touch on sensitive topics such as usage of “bots” and authenticity as well as the effect of social media and collaborations. Limited releases are usually sold by a raffle (a chance to buy a pair, in which one should express their interest beforehand) or “drops” (announced or unexpected) in which brands release products for a short time, usually only to exclusive members (Ma & Treiber, 2020; Pedeliento et al. 2021). Since many brands have switched to online sales to avoid physical violence (see Figure 2.3 and Figure 2.4) in brick-and-mortar stores (Choi & Kim, 2019; Ofiaza, 2018; Sakany, 2014) the “fight” for a pair of sneakers has become digital – resellers nowadays use “bots” (robots) to secure as many spots as possible in an online raffle using numerous addresses, credit cards, names, emails, etc., to purchase more pairs that would later resell for profit. Such techniques are considered unethical among the sneakerhead community; however, they have become almost a necessity

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if one wants to have the slightest chance to purchase a pair at retail price (Denny, 2021; Lux & Bug, 2018; Perez, 2021). Similarly, when it comes to offline sneaker shopping, “backdooring” (having connections with the store manager or employee to get a pair before being sold to the public) is another, considered immoral, method that is also very common (Ma & Treiber, 2020).

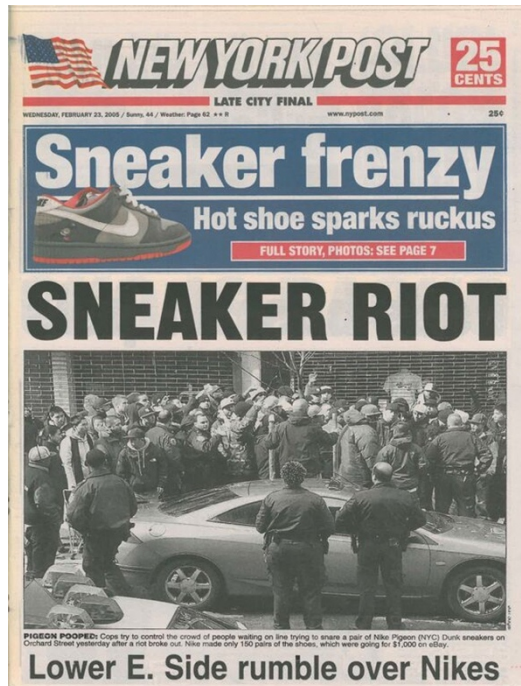


Figure 2.3  
*Release frenzy of Nike SB Dunk “Pigeon” makes a headline in the New York Post newspaper, 2005 (de Berker, 2019)*



Figure 2.4  
*Nike x Supreme sneaker collaboration caused riots in the streets of New York City in 2014 (Sakany, 2014)*

Other contributions to the topic include the one from Choi and Lee (2021) who observe the perception of the term “sneaker resale” on the internet and keywords associated with it through text-mining which gives an interesting visualization of the evolution of the resale market from 2018 to 2020. Their findings show that words used on the web in 2018 can be associated with the introduction of the resale market; 2019 – its growth and 2020 its maturity and recognition as a market of new financial benefits. To recapitulate, out of the limited academic research that has been produced specifically on sneakers, still a large portion of it concerns the resale market, the characteristics that make it unique and the distinct behaviour of the participants within the sneakerhead community.

## 2.4 Luxury Sneakers and Collaborations

Even more limited is the academic literature that focuses precisely on high-end sneakers and collaborations between sneaker brands. Though there is a considerable amount of work regarding luxury, luxury consumption and luxury fashion, conclusions to be withdrawn from those would be highly unsuitable since as it has already been mentioned above the (luxury) sneaker (resale) market is a very specific and unique segment, worth to be studied on its own. In his classic book *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Veblen (1899) explains that wealth itself cannot be vindicated unless it has been manifested loudly and such behaviour is defined as “conspicuous consumption”. Cassidy (2018) investigates the effects of different types of scarcity on consumers’ preferences in the high-end sneaker market. He states that luxury sneakers are unquestionably conspicuous consumption goods, which justifies the buyers’ preference to supply scarce products to display social status and be differentiated from the masses, conveying a certain impression about themselves. On the other hand, the research finds that when one is supposed to buy sneakers for a present or a friend, he would go with the demand scarce product which implies higher appeal by the public, thus is more likely to be fancied by the recipient (Cassidy, 2018). Leeb et al. (2019) argue that while exclusivity in the pure luxury sector is mostly driven by premium prices, exclusivity in the streetwear segment is mostly driven by scarce supply.

Giving an exact definition of a “luxury sneaker” is a hard task. From the above said we could identify all supply scarce sneakers as luxurious due to their purposeful exclusivity, however, a low-quality, largely produced model by a mainstream sportswear manufacturer could be described as luxury as well in terms of price, caused by demand scarcity (not to be confused with supply scarcity) and exploitation by resellers on the market. A vivid example of this is the craze caused by LIDL sneakers released by the German hypermarket chain a few years ago for a retail price of around 16 USD. The hype created among the sneakerhead community, and mostly “hypebeasts” who blindly follow trends, led to a rapid depletion of all the pairs available which could later be found on the resale market for 6000 USD (Ledsom, 2021). It can be argued who would attract more attention amidst fellow sneakerheads – one that wears 1000 USD quiet-luxury Prada sneakers or someone who copped the highly coveted, flashy LIDL ones.

As it can be concluded both supply scarcity created by brands on purpose and demand scarcity supported by sneakerheads and hypebeasts suggest that all limited sneakers or sneakers with high desirability could be considered luxurious due to premium prices – a similar practice in the high-end fashion segment. Yet, the unclear boundaries of the term may hinder the attempts

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to examine the matter scientifically due to possible misinterpretation of luxurious sneakers produced by distinctly established luxury brands (i.e., Gucci, Prada, Balenciaga, Dior, etc.). Diamantopoulos et al. (2021) make an exemplary definition of all those overpriced kicks as “unorthodox luxury sneakers” in their research. Their paper analyses the correlational relationship between perceptions of flashiness and brand value and the price of inexplicably expensive sneakers; however, their results show little to no relationship between these factors and the cost of a sneaker, which makes it even harder to understand the luxury sneaker market. Its characteristics are what make it so special and important to understand and study – it is unconventional and unpredictable, due to its dependency on numerous factors such as pre-release hype, exclusivity, collaboration with other brands or artists, available sizing, cultural factors such as the story behind the shoe (Lux & Bug, 2018). The demand for high-end sneakers has proven to be predominantly from males (Cassidy, 2018; Denny, 2021), thus women’s models with smaller size lines that are sought after by men too are highly overpriced in bigger sizes.

Price trends and predictions in the resale market of luxury sneakers through machine learning is a topic researched by Raditya et al. (2021). They use linear regression and the random forest method to make predictions with data taken from sales history available from StockX. They aim to compare several algorithms and decide which one has a better performance in predicting sneaker resale prices. Like BoPing (2021), they conclude that sneaker prices are extremely difficult to predict, giving again as an example the anomaly in prices immediately after the death of Kobe Bryant and also the end of the partnership between Nike and Kanye West, who now partners with Adidas with the Yeezy brand. A pair of Nike Air Yeezy 2 Red October US 10 size currently goes for 35,000 USD, being sold at retail for 250 USD back in 2014 when originally released (StockX, 2022).

As already mentioned above, collaborations with celebrities and sports figures have long been a marketing tool to increase interest and generate income for footwear-making giants in the industry. However, collaborations between designer brands, combined with limited availability of merch have changed the game and opened the door to this lucrative business for luxury companies (Anyanwu, 2020; Slaton & Pookulangara, 2021). The sneaker segment has become an extremely important division for luxury brands to invest in not only due to its current financial prominence but also because of the future opportunities, it gives for the target groups of Millennials and Generation Z as it might serve as a bridge-to-luxury and entrance point to other high-end goods (Yu et al., 2020; Zhang, 2019). The easiest and safest way for luxury

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Maisons to become approachable and speak the language of the youth is to partner with the brands and icons their potential customers have already loved since their childhood.

In his research de Macedo (2015) analyses the operation and management of luxury streetwear brands such as Stüssy and Supreme – two American brands that are currently considered to be exceptionally popular among sneakerheads and have collaborated several times with Nike and other brands. He argues that collaborations that include Supreme instantly lead to additional value for the goods and great desirability. Supreme has been voted by consumers as the top brand that represents streetwear the most and is famous for its various collaborations with different brands, among which Louis Vuitton (Leeb et al., 2019). The brand's popularity is inexplicable since anything co-branded with "Supreme" instantly sells out and increases its price on the aftermarket. In a documentary made by Complex (2015) called *Sold Out: The Underground Economy of Supreme Resellers*, Supreme's philosophy is characterized as "a girl that gives you her phone number but never answers when you call" comparing it to an irresistible urge to own something hard to reach.

Luxury streetwear according to Pedeliento et al. (2021) is a newly formed, emerging segment that combines different aspects of fast fashion brands, sports brands and pure luxury brands (see Figure 2.5).

Figure 2.5

*Product market categories in fashion*  
(Pedeliento et al., 2021)





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In their comprehensive case study about Off-White – another well-popular luxury streetwear brand adored by sneakerheads, Pedeliento et al. (2021) focus on the importance of collaborations as the main ingredient for the success of the Italian-based brand created by Virgil Abloh. They come up with an interesting proposal that marketing strategies of luxury streetwear brands should take into consideration a “5<sup>th</sup> P” in their marketing mix, adding “partnership” to the traditional product, price, place, and promotion, giving as an example Off-White as the brand that has made the most out of its co-operation with other companies. Off-White has collaborated with fashion brands such as Moncler, Jimmy Choo, Levi’s, Champion, and Timberland but also with brands in different businesses – Evian (water bottling), IKEA (home & furniture), Rimowa (suitcases and luggage) and many others (Pedeliento et al. 2021). However, it owes its current fame and success to the partnership with Nike back in 2017 when Virgil Abloh was given the freedom to redesign “The 10” most iconic sneakers Nike has ever made in an exclusive limited collection pairs of which are now extremely rare to be found and are being sold with excessive price premium (Leeb et al., 2019; Pedeliento et al. 2021). Following this enormous success, the American designer was appointed as men’s creative director by LVMH (Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton) in 2018 (Marain, 2018) where he had an emblematic influence until his unexpected death in 2021 (LVMH, 2021).

Another research by Yu et al. (2020) explores various combinations of collaboration between a luxury brand and brands from 4 other different segments: mass-market, fast fashion, sportswear brand and premium-priced streetwear brands including factors such as uniqueness, distribution channels, and price to define consumers’ desirability towards different styles of partnerships. They conclude that a collaboration between a luxury brand and a sportswear brand (i.e., Louis Vuitton x Nike) is most desirable when the price inclines towards the sportswear brand (lower). The research idea of Yu et al. (2020) comes closest to the objectives of this paper, however, they do not exclusively research sneaker collaborations and do not take into consideration the aspect of culture as a determinant for purchasing decisions. In addition to that, participants in this research are predominantly female as the sample is not focused on examining sneakerheads and people connected to the industry.

Hemantha (2020) makes a qualitative content analysis of social media marketing strategies of the top five fashion brands among which are the luxury houses Hermès, Gucci, and Louis Vuitton and the two biggest sportswear brands Adidas and Nike. The author acknowledges the fact that these brands are heavily associated with public figures such as celebrities, influencers and bloggers and use the connections to successfully advertise through social media. The paper also highlights the importance of storytelling for luxury brands, a marketing tool that is crucial

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for the sneaker segment since for sneakerheads it might be difficult to adopt shoes that have no relationship with the past, with another brand they love, with their favourite artist or referring to a special event.

Han et al. (2010) and Jiang et al. (2021) conduct research that focuses on luxury brand prominence and expression of status through quiet and loud luxury. Han et al. (2010) give as an example Bottega Veneta's strict "no logo" policy on their bags that are branded only on the inside which makes them unidentifiable by the regular viewer, but instantly recognizable by a close community that "knows". An analogous approach can be observed in many sneaker models that are low-key in their appearance so casual passers-by could never imagine the exclusivity and price of the shoes, however, a true sneakerhead would recognize their value from miles and this might evoke feelings of respect towards the owner. Jiang et al. (2021) state that customers are usually charged premium prices for discreet (quiet) luxury with more subtle branding as this gives personal satisfaction of knowing that you own something expensive, however, not showing it off and at the same time, it makes a client part of an exclusive group of few people that would appreciate it. Quiet and loud luxury and branding flashiness is a very interesting topic that unfortunately has still not been researched in terms of luxury sneakers and luxury collaborations.

In conclusion, there have been several academic papers acknowledging the unusual and unpredictable pricing of sneakers that is attributable to several factors such as demand and supply scarcity, exclusivity, relationship with an event or athlete/artist and collaborations between brands. All these components have been recognized to add up value and increase the prices of kicks that could most of the time characterize them as luxury items in terms of the estimated value. The rise of luxury streetwear has also been researched with a few of the most prominent brands such as Supreme, Stüssy and Off-White being analysed and the focus falling on various collaborations these brands have made that led to successful partnerships and popularization of the brands. However, no research concretizes collaborations of (luxury) brands in sneakers and the cultural aspects and complexities sneakerheads might experience.

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### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Approach

When it comes to qualitative research grounded theory approach is an adequate research method that allows efficient collection of genuine conversations from the expert interviews conducted. This research method develops theoretical propositions from empirical data and provides the research worker with the flexibility to let theories and data interact with each other (Choi & Kim, 2019). Additionally, it enhances the capacity of the researcher to apprehend the intuitively occurring dialogue. After a thorough interpretation of the selected articles (see Annex A) and additional sources an analysis of the methods used in those was conducted to create similar research by adjusting the questions and format of the interview to the purpose of this research. A semi-structured (in-depth) interview was created to simplify the analysis of demographics and some numerical data after, while in the meantime, giving the freedom of respondents to express themselves more freely and explicitly and allowing for additional questions to be asked by the interviewer depending on the flow of conversation to obtain more comprehensive and compelling answers. The choice of this method is justified in the research objective of this dissertation, namely, to observe the openness and acceptance of different kinds of actors in the sneaker community towards a shift to luxury. Having semi-structured interviews and more open questions would provide the necessary insights while hearing the stories that accompany each answer would give a stronger and deeper meaning to their thoughts. Along with the aid of Leximancer for the analysis of the results, that would help with the differentiation of keywords and topics with substantial meaning and a clearer distinction of opinions between the groups. Given the results from the interviews, it was decided that respondents will be clustered into 2 big groups to create an antithesis between their sentiment toward luxury entering the world of sneakers: Group 1 (sneaker enthusiasts, sneakerheads and sneaker collectors) and Group 2 (resellers and people that own or work in a sneaker-related business). The main differentiator between the two groups is that the second group has financial benefits from the industry and participates also in the selling part, while Group 1 is purely consumerist. There was also a balance in the number of respondents in the two groups (8vs8). For the purpose of the analysis, each group was given a tag – “sneakerheads-&-collectors” (Group 1) and “resellers-&-industry-workers” (Group 2). Text from all answers to the open question was processed for each group respectively. A concept map (Figure 3.2) was produced based on the data that can be seen in the next section of the results.

3.1.1 Shaping of Interview Questions and Design

The main objective was to structure the interview questions in a logically connected order to create a feeling for the respondent of having a more casual discussion and talk, rather than a strict survey to complete (see Annex B). The selected questions intend to understand the profile of the respondent, his/her cultural connection to sneakers, purchasing habits and opinion on luxury sneakers and luxury fashion through collaborations between brands. A small test was also included (Questions 20 & 21) based on Cassidy's (2018) and Diamantopoulos et al. (2021) works to explore respondents' decision-making on three different types of sneakers. Their initial choice is based solely on the visual presentation of the sneakers (aesthetics, colours, design). Later, they were given the option to change their choice and make an informed decision based on all details regarding the brand, origin of production, quality materials, release date, price on release and current price on retail, exclusivity, and availability (see Figure 3.1) The purpose of this experiment is to understand what factors are of greatest importance to respondents and how they choose the sneakers to wear. In addition to that observation was made on the desire of wearing a purely luxury sneaker or preference for hyped sneakers with collaborations. Intentionally the chosen pairs were of similar colourways, materials, design, and shape ("dad sneakers"), however, the brands, collaborations, price, and exclusivity greatly differ.

Figure 3.1

Making an informed decision on sneakers based on all factors



Brand	Cristian Dior	Nike x Stüssy	New Balance x Studio FY7
Model	B30 Cream	Air Zoom Spiridon Cage 2 Fossil	NB 992 FY7
Made in	Italy	Vietnam	USA
Materials	Calfskin, mesh, and technical fabric; lightweight rubber sole	Hemp overlays with a mixture of cotton slub canvas and cotton mesh underlays; Zoom Air sole	Mesh and suede; leather tongue; ABZORB midsole
Official release date	14 October 2021	3 April 2020	22 October 2020
Retail price*	890 EUR	146 EUR	183 EUR
Current resale price (US 10 size) **	890 EUR	651 EUR (fees and delivery excl.)	2209 EUR (fees and delivery excl.)
Price premium	-	445%	1207%
Availability	Most sizes available on official DIOR website	Available only on resale	Available only on resale
Exclusivity	Widely available	Limited availability	Very rare – only 250 pairs sold, some sizes not even available
Delivery and shipping	Free standard delivery	20 EUR for EU countries	20 EUR for EU countries
Returns	Free within 30 days of delivery	Final sale – no returns	Final sale – no returns
Packaging	Iconic DIOR gift box; dust bag	Nike x Stüssy branded carton box	New Balance branded carton box + Studio FY7 flyer/print

\*Prices and availability accurate as of 23 March 2022, derived from StockX and official DIOR website  
 \*\*US 10 size (43.5 EU) chosen as an average and popular male sneaker size

### 3.2 Data Collection

Most interviews were conducted personally - face to face, or via ZOOM with cameras turned on and screen sharing, with the interviewer completing the form based on respondents' answers and taking notes in real-time. Additional questions were asked to provoke the respondents to give more comprehensive and deeper answers and to help them develop their responses more exhaustively. A small number of surveys were filled by respondents on their own due to the language barrier (poor conversational English) with the strict supervision of the interviewer to provide guidance, clarifications and help if needed. Full anonymity was guaranteed to respondents and consent of video and voice recording was agreed upon before each interview. All 16 interviews were conducted in the period between 21 April 2022 and 6 May 2022. Each respondent was given a "Respondent ID" (R1, R2, R3...) to be identified later (see Annex D). The average length of interviews was approximately 50 minutes.

#### 3.2.1 Target Population

A purposive sampling technique was used with all respondents being carefully picked and seeded to guarantee they are interested, knowledgeable, and experienced in the topic of sneaker culture and industry. Own judgment of eligibility when choosing members of the population to participate in the survey was made based on people's backgrounds and relationship to sneakers and the sneaker business. To acquire relevant contacts and connections in this field and the industry, preparation began months ago when at the end of November 2021, the largest exhibition of sneaker culture in Europe, Sneakerness, was visited by the interviewer in person in Rotterdam, the Netherlands (Sneakerness, 2022) (see Appendix C). Sneakerness is the most famous and visited expo in Europe, hosting editions in different European cities every year (Paris, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Zurich, London, Berlin). It is an event in which sneakerheads from different countries gather to share their common interest and where they have the chance to connect with other sneaker aficionados and buy and sell hyped sneakers. At this event, different stands of international vendors were approached (resellers, custom sneaker makers, brands) and contacts were gathered, while the idea of this research was shared with an agreement of further cooperation and assistance in the completion of a survey and participation in this research. Additionally, personal connections were contacted, and respondents were approached from Facebook groups like "Sneaker Talk Bulgaria", "SNEAKERHOLICS-BULGARIA", "Sneakers Love Portugal" and more. Local sneaker shops in Portugal and

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Bulgaria were also contacted directly. The Snowball sampling technique was used as after every completed interview respondents were asked to further assist the researcher in identifying possibly other potential eligible respondents. This approach proved successful as plenty of recommendations were given by respondents since they have similar acquaintances that have the same interest in the studied subject. The key goal was to have a balanced mixture of respondents with interesting backgrounds and relationship with sneakers who reside in various European countries. Furthermore, an objective to interact with at least 20% of female respondents was set.

### ***3.2.1.1 Group 1 - “sneakerheads-&-collectors”***

In this group, the respondents targeted are the “classic”. “old-school” sneakerheads or sneaker enthusiasts, the passionate collectors, and the people who usually stay true to the retro models and silhouettes and know every detail and story behind a sneaker release. They usually tend to be more strongly connected to the history and culture of sneakers and associate them with artistic and sports influences from the 80s-90s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They have no financial benefit from the sneaker market since they mainly buy kicks and rarely sell items just for profit, rather than trading pairs or making some extra money to buy even more sneakers for their collection. Half of the respondents in our survey fall within this category.

### ***3.2.1.2 Group 2 - “resellers-&-industry-workers”***

The targeted interviewees in this group are mainly people who actively interact in the sneaker market with other individuals by selling sneakers and other streetwear-related merchandise or even their own product. They are aware of the new releases in the sneaker world and observe what trends people tend to like more and which do not. They are also usually more knowledgeable in all brands rather than only the most popular ones and have higher expertise in the production, distribution and selling parts of the sneaker industry. In general, those types of respondents are not only attracted by sneakers as a hobby, but it is also part of their job and they are somehow dependent on the positive development of the sneaker market. These people comprise the other half of our participants.

### 3.3 Analysis Tools and Leximancer

The after process of each successful interview included a transcription of the conversations (see Appendix D). The audio recordings from ZOOM or the voice recordings from the Voice Memos app (from face-to-face interviews) were extracted and then the audio files were imported to Otter.ai, a software that helps with voice recognition and transcription from voice to text. After re-listening of the voice recordings, corrections were made where needed and text was adjusted to a dialogue between the two participants – interviewer and respondent. This platform also helped to calculate the average length of a conversation and gave insights on the most repeated keywords and the percentage of participation and speaking of each participant in the discussion, on average 1/3 of talking was made by the interviewer and 2/3 by the interviewee. Ultimately, when the complete answers to text in consistent sentences were formed, answers to open questions were manually inserted into an already created Excel file in Google Forms to complement the short notes taken during the live interview. Due to the insignificant amount of quantitative data collected it was possible that most of the answers could be manually calculated. Qualitative data (full text) of all open answers were processed with the help of Leximancer. This text analytic software was used to interpret collected data into a visual representation of major topics discussed and their connection to different types of participants in the survey as well as repetition and strength of keywords and word combinations. Leximancer generates a thesaurus and uses a machine-learning algorithm that determines the quintessential topics from the text data which are also grouped into different themes. After results are presented in a concept map of colourized bubbles with each topic (Smith, n.d.). The outcomes of the software facilitate the visual and grouped representation of connected key themes and concepts. Leximancer is widely used in fields such as management, marketing, hospitality and tourism (Rodrigues et al., 2017; Rodrigues et al., 2021).

The qualitative data was analysed using the defined tags “sneakerheads-&-collectors” (Group 1) separating answers of sneaker enthusiasts, sneakerheads and sneaker collectors (R1, R2, R3, R4, R7, R9, R11, R12) from Group 2, tagged “resellers-&-industry-workers” (R5, R6, R8, R10, R13, R14, R15, R16), who are the resellers, owners, and workers in sneaker-related businesses. From the processed text data by Leximancer in which all the answers from open questions were input, we can observe seven major themes that stand out: “pair”, “collaboration”, “Louis Vuitton”, “brands”, “sneakers”, “Jordan” and “designer” visualized in a concept map below (Figure 3.2). Within each large bubble other smaller sub-topics (concepts) have been selected by the software depending on their connection and usage within the text with relevance to the

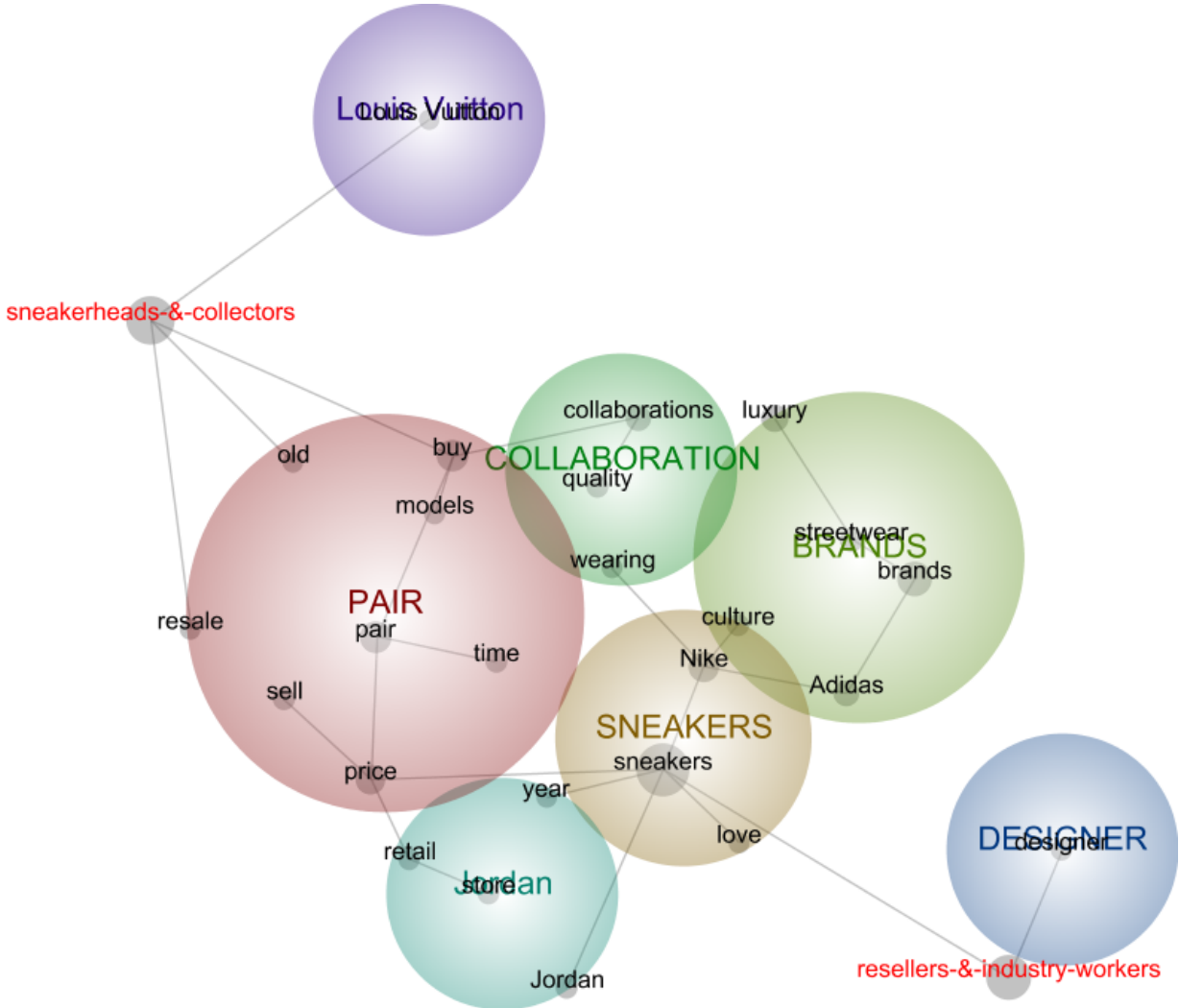


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main themes. The word with the highest hit count is unsurprising “sneakers” with a total of 628 times mentioned, followed by “brands” (272), “pair” (232), “buy” (224), “price” (188), “luxury” (152), “collaborations” (116). The compound concepts that have been identified with significant prominence are “designer & brands” (83% strength) and “designer & collaborations” (100% strength) from the side of “resellers-&-industry-workers”.

Figure 3.2

General concept map of qualitative data gathered



#### 4. Results, Discussion and Contributions to Theory and Practice

##### 4.1 Results

###### 4.1.1 *Sample Characteristics*

In total 16 respondents were successfully interviewed from 9 different European countries – 4 from Portugal, 3 from Bulgaria, 3 from Greece and 1 representative from Poland, Denmark, Bosnia and Herzegovina, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Their socioeconomic status is highly diverse. The choice to interview people from various countries and with different backgrounds and associations with sneaker culture was intentional in an effort to gather multiple opinions on their position regarding the development of the sneaker market and scene and the involvement of luxury through collaborations. The core distinction of profiles is based on the first question: “*I identify myself as:*” where respondents were given the option to choose only one term that best suits their association and relationship to sneakers. Afterwards, the responses were grouped in two separate bigger clusters based on this answer as described above. Summarized and more exhaustive information on demographics and socio-economic status of the interviewees as well as additional quantitative data that could be extracted from some answers is outlined in Table 4.1.

Three of the respondents identified themselves as sneaker enthusiasts (being casually interested in sneakers), 3 of them see themselves as sneakerheads, and two consider themselves sneaker collectors, owning 100 or more pairs of sneakers each for personal use. These belong to Group 1 or the “sneakerheads-&-collectors” group. Two professional resellers have been interviewed, as well as 4 people who work in a sneaker-related business (sneaker shops, retail brands, sneaker convention brands) and 2 interviewees have their own sneaker-related business doing customized sneakers and managing an online media page dedicated to fashion and urban culture. Among the respondents, some individuals are highly experienced in the field which strengthens the credibility of this research and justifies the original idea of conducting expert interviews. R13 is a Marketing Manager at KICKS.PT, one of the biggest Portuguese fashion and sneaker (online) retail stores also operates in almost 20 physical stores in Portugal. The brand started with its first store in 2014 in Porto and the respondent has been working there for almost 7 years now. R16 owns an online media page that focuses on fashion, music, streetwear, and urban lifestyle that keeps up to date with recent trends in the sneaker world and collaborations between brands and luxury. R14 has its own business which started as a hobby and turned into the main

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source of income. In his studio, he creates hand-made bespoke sneakers as per customers' specifications. R15 is the Communication Manager for Sneakerness (the biggest sneaker convention in Europe that brings together experts, professionals, and sneaker lovers from all over the world). He has been working for this brand for almost 8 years now and is also a veteran graffiti artist. In combination with two aspiring young resellers who have knowledge of current trends in the resale game and an average of 48 pairs of sneakers for each owner, the sample can be defined as representative of connoisseurs in the field. It is important to be noted that those individuals have explicitly agreed to reveal their job positions without disclosing their real names.

In terms of gender proportions, expectedly, the majority (75%) of the interviewees were male as Cassidy (2018), Denny (2021) and Matthews et al. (2021) describe the sneaker market as ruled predominantly by men. Initial expectations were for lower responsiveness and representation from females; however, an attempt was made to contact as many as possible. The average age of respondents is 28 years with 50% belonging to Generation Z (18-25 years old), Millennials (Generation Y, 26-40 years old) making up 38% of the group and only 12% aged between 41-55 years (Generation X). The two biggest groups, Generation Y and Z are in fact the most important to be studied since they are the target groups of designer brands who try to attract the youth and create a gradual and smooth transition from streetwear to luxury through collaborations (Yu et al., 2020; Zhang, 2019).

In terms of education and occupation: 44% of respondents have completed a high school degree, 38% have Bachelor's degree, 12% - have a Master's degree and 1 respondent has decided to not share that information. 38% of all interviewees are working full-time, the same amount is currently only studying, 12% work part-time, while 12% combine studies and work together. Given the relatively young age of the respondents matching the age group interested in the sneaker market the fact that a significant part is still completing their studies was expected. 38% of the people surveyed earn 12000 EUR or less per year, 18,5% make between 12001 and 25000 EUR, and 18,5% have earnings in the range of 50001 to 100000 EUR. Unsurprisingly these 3 highest earners come from well-developed North European countries (Belgium, the Netherlands and Denmark) where the living standard is considerably higher. Another observation that stands out is the fact that both resellers that were interviewed did not want to share information regarding their income.

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Table 4.1

*Summary of demographic and socio-economic characteristics of respondents*

Respondent ID	Profile	Gender	Country	Age	Education	Occupation	Annual gross income in EUR	Sneaker collection (pairs)	Retail / Resale Proportion	Most expensive sneakers (EUR)	Favourite brand
R1	Sneakerhead	Female	Bulgaria	44	(N/A)	Working part-time	12000 EUR and less	100	100 % Retail - 0 % Resale	150	Jordan (Nike)
R2	Sneaker collector	Male	Portugal	28	High school degree	Working full-time	(N/A)	100	100 % Retail - 0 % Resale	800	Nike
R3	Sneaker collector	Male	Bulgaria	19	High school degree	Only studying	12000 EUR and less	104	90 % Retail - 10 % Resale	350	Nike
R4	Sneaker enthusiast	Male	Greece	27	Bachelor's degree	Only studying	12001 - 25000 EUR	10	70 % Retail - 30 % Resale	350	Nike
R5	Works in a sneaker-related business	Male	Bulgaria	26	High school degree	Working full-time	12000 EUR and less	100	100 % Retail - 0 % Resale	220	All
R6	Reseller	Male	Poland	23	Bachelor's degree	Only studying	(N/A)	10	80 % Retail - 20 % Resale	300	Nike
R7	Sneakerhead	Male	Denmark	28	Bachelor's degree	Working part-time	50001 - 100000 EUR	70	50 % Retail - 50 % Resale	800	Nike
R8	Reseller	Male	Portugal	20	High school degree	Only studying	(N/A)	15	80 % Retail - 20 % Resale	350	Nike
R9	Sneakerhead	Female	Bosnia and Herzegovina	22	High school degree	Only studying	(N/A)	17	100 % Retail - 0 % Resale	170	Nike

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<b>R10</b>	Works in a sneaker-related business	Female	Greece	22	High school degree	Studying and working at the same time	12000 EUR and less	6	70 % Retail - 30 % Resale	250	adidas
<b>R11</b>	Sneaker enthusiast	Male	Greece	22	Bachelor's degree	Only studying	12000 EUR and less	3	0 % Retail - 100 % Resale	450	Yeezy (adidas)
<b>R12</b>	Sneaker enthusiast	Female	France	22	Bachelor's degree	Studying and working at the same time	12000 EUR and less	10	80 % Retail - 20 % Resale	200	Nike
<b>R13</b>	Works in a sneaker-related business	Male	Portugal	25	Bachelor's degree	Working full-time	12001 - 25000 EUR	30	100 % Retail - 0 % Resale	220	ASICS
<b>R14</b>	Owns sneaker-related business	Male	Belgium	40	High school degree	Working full-time	50001 - 100000 EUR	40	90 % Retail - 10 % Resale	1700	Nike
<b>R15</b>	Works in a sneaker-related business	Male	The Netherlands	43	Master's degree	Working full-time	50001 - 100000 EUR	80	50 % Retail - 50 % Resale	950	Nike
<b>R16</b>	Owns sneaker-related business	Male	Portugal	32	Master's degree	Working full-time	12001 - 25000 EUR	80	90 % Retail - 10 % Resale	400	All
<b>Overview / Recap / Average</b>	<b>Group 1</b> (sneakerheads, enthusiasts, collectors); <b>Group 2</b> (resellers; own/work in sneaker related business)	75% Male / 25% Female	9 Different countries	28	44% High school degree; 38% - Bachelor's degree; 12% - Master's degree; 6%- N/A	38% Working full-time; 38% Only studying; 12% Working part-time; 12% Studying and working	38% 12000 EUR and less; 25% Prefer not to say; 18,5% - 12001 - 25000 EUR; 18,5% 50001 - 100000 EUR	Each respondent owns 48 pairs on average	78% of sneakers bought on retail / 22% on resale	Average 480 EUR spent for most expensive sneakers	Nike favourite brand for 69%; 12% adidas; 12% like all brands equally; 6% ASICS

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Regardless of the relatively low annual earnings of most of the respondents, this does not seem to be an impediment to them from spending a substantial amount of their income on sneakers with the average amount spent on the most expensive sneakers for the whole sample being 480 EUR. All respondents have declared that they spend more than 200 EUR per year exclusively on sneakers for themselves. This means that the lowest earners spend a minimum of 2% of their total annual income just on sneakers. The only people that buy more than 20 pairs of sneakers per year are the two collectors (R2 and R3). Three respondents have disclosed that they spend more than 2000 EUR per year on sneakers, with one of them (R3) being a 19-year-old student only with an income of less than 12000 EUR, meaning that a minimum of 17% of his income goes directly for kicks.

The majority of the sample has a strong preference for buying their sneakers mainly at retail prices with an average of 78% of the sneakers they own being bought at normal prices, trying to avoid resale as an option which implies overpaying (22% of sneakers owned were bought in the aftermarket on higher prices than usual). Foreseeably, a strong preference is observed regarding a specific sneaker brand, with Nike being described as a favourite brand by 11 out of 16 people (69 %). These results confirm the theory of Cassidy (2018), Denny (2021) and Matthews et al. (2021) regarding “brand tribalism” and brand loyalty for specific brands and an apparent strong fondness among sneakerheads for Nike and the Jordan brand. 12% prefer Adidas, the same amount 12% like all sneaker brands equally and one respondent is an ASICS fan.

### 4.1.2 Other Important Findings

In terms of the most important factors regarding purchasing sneakers, 50% of respondents put *quality* in 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> place (out of 10) or 63% placed that trait in the first three places. *Aesthetics* was another factor that proves to be of high significance as 63% of the interviewees said that the way the shoe looks and its style and design is the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> most important thing for them when choosing sneakers. In fact, *aesthetics* turned out to be the main decision-making factor during the experiment conducted (Questions 20 & 21) as all respondents initially ranked each sneaker solely on this characteristic. The purpose of the experiment was to observe the choice of people based mostly on brand preference and decision between exclusively designer brand sneakers (exhibit “A” – Christian Dior) and two different collaborations, one with demand scarcity (Exhibit “B” - Nike x Stüssy) and supply scarcity (Exhibit “C” – New Balance x Studio FY7). However, it turned out that respondents made their choice purely on looks so the original

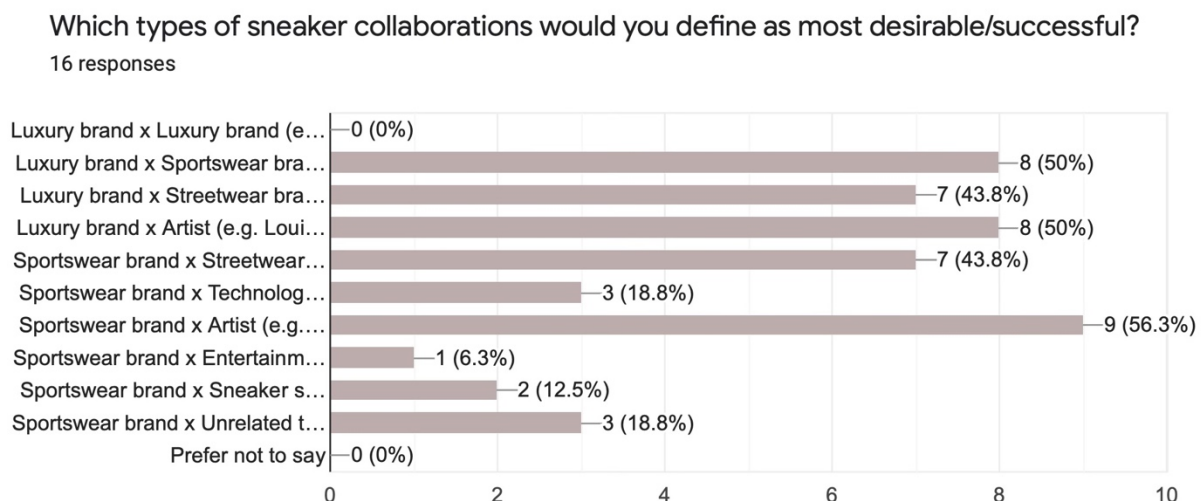
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idea of proving the hypothesis that most respondents would prefer the collaboration sneaker in front of the luxury one just because of the brand or the collaboration itself could not be proved, however, an important insight was gained on the weight and importance of aesthetics. In effect, the two pairs of sneakers representing collaborations with a streetwear brand and with an art studio were highly preferred over the luxury branded sneakers, although, the motivation behind the choice was made on design, rather than on branding and partnerships. Two of the respondents (R8 and R12) chose the Dior's at first glance, 7 chose the Nike collaboration with Stüssy, 6 of them preferred the New Balance and 1 respondent decided to not participate. In connection with the scarcity factor, *popularity* was put on 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> place in terms of importance by 75% of interviewees making it clear that the more popular the shoe is, the more undesirable as people want to wear something different, rare, and unique. The other factors received various rankings so no significant conclusions could be drawn.

One of the most insightful results observed concerns Question 17: “Which types of sneaker collaborations would you define as most desirable/successful?” where each participant had the opportunity to pick 3 types of collaborations between brands of different segments (Figure 4.1). 48% of the answers include the involvement of luxury brands as a recipe for success when it comes to sneaker collaborations.

Figure 4.1

*Preferred types of collaborations between brands*



## 4.2 Discussion

Four major topics have emerged after careful analysis of all the data gathered and through the help of themes created by Leximancer:

1. Disparity of opinions between Group 1 and Group 2 regarding their susceptibility to emerging luxury brands in the sneaker market.
2. Brands: A “love-hate” relationship with Nike (Jordan) and the “rejuvenation” of Louis Vuitton through Supreme and Virgil Abloh.
3. Collaborations – the “magic formula” for success for luxury brands to enter the world of sneakers and streetwear culture.
4. Sneakers as a gateway to luxury.

### *4.2.1 Disparity of opinions between Group 1 and Group 2 regarding their susceptibility to emerging luxury brands in the sneaker market.*

Interpretation of the text from open questions by Leximancer has been beneficial to easily recognize that there is an apparent antithesis between the two groups examined: “sneakerheads-&-collectors” (Group 1) and “resellers-&-industry-workers” (Group 2). It is important to be mentioned that to our knowledge, this is the first research of its kind connected to sneakers that makes differentiation of the interviewees between their association with the industry regarding their commercial interest in it. Group 1 can be considered as purely consumerist, while Group 2 participates actively in both buying and selling or has direct financial benefit from the sneaker industry. Most of the research conducted so far concerning the gathering of primary data has largely ignored the business side of sneakers. A small exception makes the research of Lux and Bug (2018) where 4 expert interviews are conducted, where 1 of the people is purely buyer and enthusiast, while the others are also resellers, however, all Germans and the size of the sample is quite insignificant.

Results show that “sneakerheads-&-collectors” (Group 1) have mostly negative emotions towards luxury brands and the inception of designer brands in the sneaker market. R1 believes luxury brands have no place in this industry and blending brands from different segments is irrational.

R1: *“I’m not a fan of collaborations between Haute couture brands and sports brands. I mean if I produce ice cream I will not put onion in it... It’s all mixed up for my taste.”*

Similar opinions have R4 and R7:



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R4: *“As a Nike fan, collaborations of the type with Louis Vuitton for example are a bit too much for me - the two companies are completely incompatible in the fashion world and are two different planets.”*

R7: *“I don't think that Adidas and Prada or Gucci should be making a collab. I think it looks ridiculous. I think it doesn't attract anybody... It raises more laughs than curiosity in a way.”*

The two sneaker collectors from the sample (R2 and R3) with more than 100 sneaker pairs each believe that all this is just a trend:

R2: *“You have a billion-dollar resale market... The (luxury) brands know that, so they will go that way too... Luxury brands are just catching the wave. They want to make more money... They always have ugly sneakers... It's just for people who usually want to show off. I don't believe these people really like sneakers. Just “Oh look! That's \$100,000 sneakers on my feet!”. They are horrendous, but who cares? It's Louis Vuitton, it's Gucci's, Prada, Balenciaga, whatever...”*

R3: *“I'm not really big on designer sneakers, because I think they're a fad. I don't really like what they're doing... Whatever high luxury trend there is, I think people will always stay true to their Jordans and their Adidas Superstars, the classic silhouettes.”*

An even stronger and more antipathetic stance on designer brands is expressed by R11:

R11: *“I despise luxury brands in general. They don't belong in the sneaker game because first and foremost sneakers and streetwear, in general, are populist by nature while luxury brands are elitist. Luxury brands are ruining the identity of streetwear. Streetwear is by the people, of the people, for the people. It's called “street” wear for a reason. The average consumer of a luxury brand doesn't even know what a street looks like.”*

Such a negative response toward luxury could be associated with the origins of sneaker and streetwear culture as described by R11. As Brace-Govan and de Burgh-Woodman (2008) describe there is a strong connection between poor, marginalized communities, and sneakers. Denny (2021) also extensively reviews the core values hidden within the history and culture of sneakers tightly connected to the era of the 80s and 90s in the USA, the hip-hop music, basketball in the neighbourhoods, funk, illegal graffiti, and breakdancing. Matthews et al. (2021) reveal how love for sneakers is even stronger as it relates to the past of sneakerheads and their youth years. That creates a feeling of nostalgia, and a drastic change of what people have adored for so many years in the face of luxury brands changing the game can seem like a threat.

On the contrary, the attitude towards designer brands in Group 2 (“resellers-&-industry-workers”) proves to be evidently more favourable and responsive.

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R5: *“It's getting people that wouldn't actually buy sneakers into sneakers in one way or another. Because there are usually some people who only buy designers but once they see that designers are starting to make sneakers, they may get into sneaker collecting in general. So, I think it's a good thing for the community to grow, especially with collaborations like the upcoming Adidas x Balenciaga. And we can't go without mentioning the Dior x Jordan one.”*

R6: *“I believe that it was a very good idea for luxury brands to enter the sneaker market because they gained a broader audience. Even price-conscious customers who don't buy luxury clothing are willing to spend money on an expensive pair of sneakers. Luxury brands brought streetwear on a higher level; streetwear can be associated with wealth now.”*

R8: *“I think it's great and I think it's the new wave and what is going to be popular in the next couple of years because people really gravitate towards luxury brands and streetwear and it's a combination that I think goes very well together.”*

R13: *“I believe that there's room for everybody in the market. I believe that everybody likes different stuff. I believe that even the people who actually buy sports products will maybe sometimes buy a fashion product.”*

Participants in the survey from Group 2 believe that the involvement of luxury brands in the sneaker market is not merely a trend but the future. They think that it is a natural evolution of things which gives a chance for the community to grow and at the same time opens doors for new, wealthier customers to enter the exciting world of sneakers and streetwear.

De Macedo's (2015) case study on the luxury-like management of streetwear brands such as Supreme and Stüssy suggests that both streetwear professionals and streetwear consumers aged 15-50 should be inquired to have a better insight into how the consumers are driven to some brands and their “social tribes”. Our research includes such individuals, and it is apparent that people involved directly in the sneaker business are more open-minded towards change and inclusivity of luxury brands in the market.

An even more thoughtful point-of-view is provided by R16.

R16: *“Every single one of high fashion brands has a pair of sneakers because I think at this point, it's kind of validation. You used to have the “It bag”, the seasonal bag, that's going to be the best seller and that people are going to buy to flex. But nowadays, I think it happens a lot with sneakers - you have the “It sneakers”. What brand is going to do the sneaker of the season... It's not like high fashion is tapping into sneakers and street culture DNA. It's the street culture that found its way to the high fashion world and it's basically spreading... I think it's the other way around. It's not like high fashion is tarnishing streetwear culture, it's the other way around - streetwear culture is invading high fashion.”*

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This respondent gives an interesting opinion of perceiving the change in fashion in an opposite way. In his opinion streetwear is overtaking luxury houses rather than the contrary. This harmonious symbiosis between streetwear, luxury and other brands can be traced back to all the extremely successful collaborations that Off-White started, thoroughly discussed in the study case by Pedeliento et al. (2021) praising the visionary and pioneer in this field, the late Virgil Abloh.

### 4.2.2 Brands: A “love-hate” relationship with Nike (Jordan) and the “rejuvenation” of Louis Vuitton through Supreme and Virgil Abloh

Simply loving or hating different segments of fashion involved in the sneaker market is not pertinent unless specific examples of brands are named. An important observation to be made connected to the previous dominant topic is that from participants in Group 1, 7 out of 8 stated that their favourite brand is Nike (Jordan), while in Group 2 answers are much more diverse 4 x Nike (Jordan), 2 have no specific preference of brand and said they enjoy wearing pairs from different kinds of brands, 1 loves Adidas and 1 has a strong preference for Asics. This again shows a more conservative stance even on brands from the side of “sneakerheads-&-collectors”, while “resellers-&-industry-workers” prove to be more open to other brands than the unrivalled leader Nike. Cassidy (2018), Denny (2021), Matthews et. al. (2021) and Rubini (2010) recognize in their works that there is an apparent love for Nike (Jordan) among sneakerheads in which brand love is discussed. However, no research looks more deeply into that relationship and tries to understand what it is based on and whether this “love” can actually prove toxic for one side. We find some very interesting confessions regarding blind love towards Nike and people declaring loyal to it while having some serious complaints, mostly concerning the quality of shoes. Below are a few of the revelations.

R2: *“Nike, Nike, Nike team for life... Quality, quality control. Today it's horrendous. Come on... I have pairs from 2004 and 2002 that are in a better state than today's sneakers, the quality is really bad.... I'm loyal to Nike.”*

R3: *“I'll quote Travis Scott: "Nike boys - we don't do three stripes (Adidas)". I mean, it definitely has to be Nike. I think they have the best shoes currently... I try to not buy directly from Nike as much as possible. Because, I think they do have great shoes, because they do have great designers, but they're a very nice example of corporate greed. I think they've actually stolen more from the culture than they have given.”*

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R7: *"I have to be honest with you. I'm aware it's a brainwash, it's a long, long, brainwash... Maybe I am lucky, but I have a lot of people who've been complaining the last year or so regarding quality and issues and shipping and whatever... I would choose Nike over any other brand. Any moment. I'm not going to question that. Like not even for a second, which is my own choice, my own decision to live my life living like this."*

R9: *"Nike. I have mostly Nike shoes. But the quality is really bad. That's my opinion. I have the "Bleached Aqua", the Air Max and the sole after maybe three months was really bad."*

R5: *"...as much as I like to sh\*t on Nike for putting out garbage shoes most of the time. Still, I think mainly in my collection there are Nikes."*

R8: *"I would say in the last half a year Nike has been really disappointing because of the amount of stuff they've been putting out. They've been putting out tens and tens of stuff to the point where shoes like Jordan 1s and Dunk Lows aren't even hyped anymore... Nike has been putting out stupid amounts of stock and besides that, the quality has decreased... Lots of shoes come in with glue sticking to the sides. The materials aren't as good as they used to be, like very plasticized."*

R14: *"Nike because I've grown up with it. (Dissatisfied with) the quality... quality and availability, of course. The fact that they are really going for the hype factor and want to keep everything very exclusive."*

R15: *"Yeah, just looking at the brand it has to be Nike. Disappointed me in a million ways. But still, it's my favourite brand. And that's sort of the "love-hate relationship" I have with them. The quality can be sh\*t, to be honest. If I compare them with New Balance, for instance, and then especially the more expensive range, the "Made in the USA", then the Nike stuff is just crap basically... they're not really giving back to the sneaker community, I would say. They could do way more there, especially to their most loyal customers."*

Respondents admit their loyalty and love towards the brand, however, there are some heavy accusations of quality issues, corporate greed envisioned in increasing prices, limiting release numbers, and disregarding the community that built them as a brand. Those insights validate the fact that Nike (Jordan) is undeniably the number one sneaker brand that has its loyal tribe of followers that will carry on with buying their shoes, however, it raises doubts about how long that will continue if they neglect the voice of their customers. Evidently, even hardcore fans of the brand are highly dissatisfied with their business strategy and level of production and materials which must be taken into account, otherwise, other brands, such as the mentioned New Balance or even luxury brands that are well known for their premium quality can step up their game and increase their market share. As already discussed above results from our survey

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show that *quality* is the 2<sup>nd</sup> most important factor after *aesthetics* when it comes to buying sneakers, so improving that aspect of their shoemaking should be a big concern for Nike in the future if they want to keep their clientele. Results by Djuhardi and Kusumawati (2017) show that customers are inclined to buy counterfeit sneakers if the quality of the sneakers sold by brands does not justify the high price of the original product. Cassidy (2018) also examines the most important factors for sneakerheads when it comes to buying kicks however in his 6 factors *quality* is not included, while similar results in his study confirm that *aesthetics* are a top priority.

Apart from the Jordan Brand and Nike, another (luxury) brand is intensively mentioned in this research. Respondents acknowledge the “rebirth” of Louis Vuitton as a designer brand through integrating elements of streetwear in its line and most precisely via its exciting Supreme collection back in 2017 and assigning Virgil Abloh as men’s creative director in 2018.

R2: *“Louis Vuitton was most probably dead. And all of a sudden, they make a collaboration with Supreme... Louis Vuitton x Supreme. That was something that everyone keeps talking about. That changed the way people see streetwear... If Virgil wasn't there and made the collaboration with Louis Vuitton with that Air Force's, no one would care again about Louis Vuitton or buy their sneakers.”*

R3: *“One thing I would like to mention is Virgil Abloh's work with Louis Vuitton. I think he did a lot while he helped Louis Vuitton in the sneakers he released... They're very reminiscent of 80s basketball sneakers. They do bring a sense of nostalgia while maintaining the luxury and being true to the street. Also, Louis Vuitton back in 2009 with their, collaborative collection with Kanye West. Mixing streetwear-like, influenced people and luxury brands, it is something for sure. And the Louis Vuitton x Supreme collection was a thing to talk about.”*

R5: *“Louis Vuitton x Supreme. That collab in general was probably the most successful streetwear-luxury brand collabs, like ever. That way you get the luxury people that are into luxury fashion more into streetwear stuff. And people who are into streetwear stuff get to feel a bit more of the high end...”*

R10: *“Louis Vuitton collaborated with Virgil Abloh. Vuitton certainly needed to catch up, considering that Kering’s Balenciaga, Gucci, and Alexander McQueen brands have been serving up hot sneakers constantly in recent seasons. Brands now see sneakers as a key driver for business, sparking a new conversation with the younger generation.”*

Representatives from both groups tend to have a similar stance that combining luxury with brands and artists that have proved themselves in the streetwear culture is a recipe for success and a smooth transition in approaching and targeting another group of buyers that would not

think of purchasing a 20k Louis Vuitton bag in the past. These findings complement similar research conducted by Yu et al. (2020) regarding “young consumer’s decision-making for luxury co-branding combinations”. They conclude that “luxury brand collaborations with sportswear and premium priced streetwear brands are more likely to result in higher desirability among consumers compared to collaborations with fast fashion and mass-market brands”. However, at the time of their research one of the collaborations suggested “Louis Vuitton x Nike” (luxury-sportswear) was still fictional as well as their other two suggestions (x H&M as a fast-fashion brand and x Target as a mass-market brand). As they propose, alternative research methods, such as interviews could capture deeper insight into consumers’ expectations of luxury co-brands since the most desirable combinations of luxury and non-luxury brands’ collaborations have not been widely explored yet. Our research also confirms the statement that luxury collaborations force consumers who have not been interested before in luxury to become more aware of it and familiar with designer fashion products with examples shown below.

#### *4.2.3 Collaborations - the “magic formula” for success for luxury brands to enter the world of sneakers and streetwear culture*

As results from Figure 4.1 show half of the respondents believe that collaborations with luxury brands would be most desirable and successful in the world of sneakers. These findings are also extensively discussed in words by the interviewees with examples from both “sneakerheads-&-collectors” and “resellers-&-industry-workers” sharing their attraction towards such partnerships.

R3: *“I’m wearing a Nike shoe, but it has a touch of Sacai (Japanese luxury brand) on it, or touch of Dior, you know. I’m mixing both cultures; I’m doing the best of both worlds.”*

R4: *“Many luxury brands collaborate with other brands in order to popularize themselves in the desired target group of younger customers... everything labelled Supreme is instantly desirable, no matter the price or the item. If you want to be trendy and sell, just partner with Supreme.”*

R7: *“Balenciaga had a collaboration... You know, many of the companies had a collaboration, but the one that was driving the collab game was Nike and Off-White. I think afterwards, it became popular for everybody. Pretty much. You can see a football/soccer player, getting off the field and then he’s putting on a pair of Nike x Off-White Jordan 1, which in theory is a basketball shoe.”*

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R9: *"I like Nike x Off-White collab. I think that's the best collab that ever happened in the sneaker world."*

R12: *"I think it's nice to have these kinds of collaborations. For example, Dior and Converse, it's nice because you have the classic mixing with the luxury."*

R5: *"I think it's great because in general, you're getting more people and ideas into designing one product, and you can create a more interesting product that way. You should be getting something completely new."*

R6: *"I think it compliments each other. Sportswear brands specialize in sports sneakers while luxury brands specialize in fashion and more elegant models. So, a collaboration of Adidas and Prada means that fans of Adidas will have a chance to buy a premium model of their favourite brand and Prada fans will have a chance to purchase better quality sports sneakers with fashionable design and prestigious values."*

R8: *"I really love the idea because I think that's where the designers can get more creative and we can get a shoe that really stands out, that has something completely different from what it would usually be without the collabs so that's what really makes the shoe stand out and be unique and be more desirable for how unique it is."*

Our respondents unite on the idea that collaborations are something sneakerheads love and that makes a sneaker more special and sought after. These findings validate the hypotheses of Lux and Bug (2018) that "brands need collaboration partners to be relevant to the resale market" and add more insight into the fact that "the significance of athletes as collaboration partners is declining in favour of musicians and fashion designers". Ma and Treiber (2020) also come to a conclusion that "sneakers that are part of a brand collaboration and sneakers that feature a celebrity signature have a positive effect" on sneakerheads' decision-making. However, our interviewees refine the idea of simply doing collaborations without meaning or story behind it, as they believe that would not be successful.

R15: *"I can definitely see the appeal for the audience. Like, this is what they're buying into, I would say. That's good marketing. Create a story around it, make it exclusive. You can also put it this way: There are a lot of collaboration shoes out there, but if you would take the collaboration part out of it, and it would be like a general release. Nobody would care about that shoe."*

R13: *"I think that the main one, the most successful that people would want is luxury brand and artists. I think that's the one kicking in right now."*

R13: *"I believe that the brands have to be super smart on doing a partnership. Because they actually have to do it for the customer, not for themselves. They have to go on a way that the*

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*customers understand why they're partnering up, they can't just do it for revenue or, or do it for exclusivity, or just to be a headline in the news, they have to do it because the customers would actually appreciate it if that happens.”*

R16: *“Luxury and streetwear. Absolutely. You know, the thing is, this is not really set in stone because it always depends on the brands involved. For example, luxury brand and sportswear brand. It's a very successful combination. But it's a very successful combination because it's Dior, and it's Nike, or in this case, Jordan. For example, is Fila x Fendi a successful collaboration or a desirable collaboration? But it's the same thing. It's a sportswear brand with a luxury brand, but is it really desirable? So I'm not so sure this is actually set in stone... The streetwear and the sneaker ecosystem, it follows a lot of the logic behind hip-hop in general. And hip-hop brought something to the music business that was not really common, which was artist collaborations... But think about it in the 80s or the 90s - this was not happening. You wouldn't think of a collaboration between Nirvana and Aerosmith or whatever. That could be a really crazy big deal. And what changed was the way people work. Collaborations used to be something special. And now they are just different models of branding. I want to do something that you do, but I don't want to copy you. So let's make this together. I bring my DNA you bring your DNA and let's just make something. Collaborations used to be a special thing, now it's just Tuesday, you know... I very much prefer to see Prada collaborating with Adidas for the Superstars than seeing Prada trying to make their own Adidas Superstar. Because before what you were seeing and before creative directors that really were into the sneaker culture and the streetwear culture going to high fashion brands... In the early beginning of the luxury brands doing sneakers which were a few years ago, it was really bad, because high fashion brands, they were just copying popular sneaker designs...”*

Our findings show that collaborations between brands as mere partnerships will not necessarily guarantee a favourable outcome for both companies involved in it unless there is a real idea, purpose and story behind it and the brands that come together for a project have a common ground and take into consideration the deeply rooted aspects of sneakerhead culture. Luxury brands must take into consideration the cultural side of sneakers and incorporate elements of them in their work with others.

### 4.2.4 Sneakers as a gateway to luxury

Essentially, none of the previous studies to our knowledge has examined the scope of luxury fashion attracting direct customers to exclusive luxury products through its involvement in



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sneakers. Our research finds some important discoveries on that topic that can be considered crucial for future marketing strategies on the side of luxury companies. Brand awareness is just the starting point for some of our respondents.

R2: *“We hear more about the brands... And we start to explore brands... Maybe I don't like the sneakers, but the clothing. One piece or another, it's interesting.”*

R7: *“I think it's an inevitable part of the evolution. You know, because when you decide to not be a simple sneakerhead or old school one, but you decide to go for a few of the collaboration pairs, you just become aware of these companies.”*

R9: *“Luxury brands are sneaking through the middle class that doesn't have enough money to buy it, but they want to be part of the luxury brands, they want to because they see it all the time.”*

R14: *“Since this is a business to me, of course, it raised my interest. And it may inspire me to change my way of thinking or designing.”*

R13: *“It makes you look at it (luxury market), not necessarily attract. But at least makes you look and makes you close to it. For example, Prada was a brand that never told me anything. But then they decided to do a partnership with Adidas, and well, of course, I had to check it out. I had to see the product, I googled it to see more information. Because... well okay, it's Prada, let's see, I know Prada because it's a big name, but where are they as a brand?”*

Even if some of the people do not have the financial means to afford luxury or are not interested in buying a product from a designer brand, the introduction of luxury sneakers and collaborations in the sneaker market has unavoidably led to the recognition of those brands by many.

And it does not stop there. Some respondents give clear examples of how their love for sneakers turned them or their friends into high-end shopping.

R5: *“When I started being obsessed with sneakers, I was like, I don't care what I wear, I just want the best shoes I can find. Whereas now is... it's got me completely into fashion. And sneakers are mainly an afterthought, just to complete the whole look I'm going for. So, definitely, sneakers are an extremely big gateway to fashion in general, not just luxury, I think.”*

R8: *“Currently I am a bit out of it (buying sneakers for reselling). But because I've moved to what I told you before (luxury clothing) ... I actually had never really thought about it that way. But you know, streetwear is like an entry point for luxury brands. People start getting into streetwear, they start understanding a bit more about clothes and about fashion. And then they usually gravitate more towards the designer brands. It's like a process.”*

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R15: *“I think that that goes for a lot of people, especially men, I would say where it starts with sneakers. And then year over year, you grow your interest in other fashion, I would say. What I can see in my own circle is definitely growing up... I've always been a watch guy. And I can definitely see what's happening there in the last few years. A lot of the sneaker guys are growing and becoming interested in luxury watches... That's definitely the movement.”*

R5: *“...in the watch world, there's a collab happening with Omega and Swatch. And it's Omega-made with Swatch materials for Swatch price. And for starters, a lot of the hardcore Omega fans were like: “Oh, no, this is really ruining the image of the brand!”. But at the same time, people like me who can't buy an actual Omega, that's something that puts you a little bit closer to that dream of owning that watch. And when you can spend 250 euros to buy the Swatch x Omega, you're one step closer, and you'll probably get really into and it'll be easier for you to get to the actual luxury item in the future. If you have that transition point.”*

R16: *Luxury brands get to tap into an exciting young market with money, clearly with money, because even sneaker collectors... If you have more than 50 pairs of sneakers, how much money have you invested in sneakers? You can buy a bag. You can totally buy a Louis Vuitton bag. So, they get connected to a younger generation with money and the sportswear brands they get to be perceived as luxury... Louis Vuitton x Supreme was clearly an opportunity that was born from seeing how young people connected to that type of streetwear that was spending a lot of money, but really a lot of money. And they said, okay, let's try to tap into our possible future clients, with the collaboration that says something to them now. And obviously, older Louis Vuitton fans, and especially older women probably didn't even notice it happened. But then again, even if they did, whom do you prefer to tap into? A 70-year-old client that has 10 or 20 years more of spending, or an exciting new segment that is not really working with luxury brands, but they are spending the same amount of money on other types of brands, but they have enough money to spend on your brand. And you are investing in the public with 20 years old, that have 50 years of spending ahead of their life.”*

Two male interviewees make a direct relation with an affection that grew from sneakers to luxury watches, a market with a global revenue estimated to be 47.92 billion USD in 2022 with an expectation of annual growth of 2.69% (Statista, 2022). It is astounding to think that customers of sports shoes that started buying kicks of their favourite basketball player 20 years ago would now turn to be interested in such a valuable market just by gradually transitioning into different segments through this process. In addition to that, most sneakerheads from Generations X and Y that fell in love with sneakers in the decades of the 80s and 90s are now in their prime productive years with independent income that allows them to glance at luxury

pieces. They are not the 13-year-old teenagers anymore that had to beg their parents for a pair of Jordans. The involvement of designer brands in the sneaker market is not just an opportunity to win shares within the pie chart of sneaker shopping, but an immense opportunity to target future clients and convert their interests and focus on high-end products in general.

#### 4.3 Contributions to Existing Theory

This study greatly supplements existing literature on the topic of sneakers by exploring the relationship of streetwear culture with the recent invasion of luxury brands in the market and their success through collaboration. It also explores a completely new tendency of a shift in consumers, especially male and younger generation, from sneakers to luxury. Besides, it is the only study so far that makes a distinction of the roles different actors have in the sneaker industry, putting them into groups and exploring similar tendencies in their way of thinking, especially towards the involvement of luxury. What substantially differentiates this research from others is that it includes various perspectives from different personas within the sneaker market. If we could rank them in order of involvement and interest in the field – enthusiasts, sneakerheads, collectors, resellers, workers in sneaker-related businesses, and owners of sneaker-related businesses. Additionally, this is the first research to our knowledge that comprises such a diversified sample of European countries (9) and has such a big proportion of female respondents (25%) that are exclusively connected with sneakers. In terms of geographical and social variety undeniably this study significantly improves the academic knowledge we have on the European sneaker scene with the sentiments of its participants. For comparison, similar studies so far that involve the collection of primary data and surveys were conducted mainly conducted in the USA.

In Matthews et al. (2021) study, the one that probably comes closest to our research, 12 semi-structured interviews were conducted regarding brand preference with only 25 to 44-year-old male sneakerheads and enthusiasts. As they say, “females are slowly becoming a more visible part of the sneakerhead community”, thus our research focused also on including as much as possible women’s point-of-view on the matter. All respondents in their research are from the USA (9 African Americans, 2 Hispanic and 1 Caucasian). Their suggestions specifically are that “future research should seek to engage a broader group of self-identified sneakerheads in order to more fully encapsulate the depth of this community and its shifting cultural norms; researchers should seek to engage female members, adolescent members, members from Gen X, and those across a variety of geographic locations” – something that our research does

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exactly. Diamantopoulos et al. (2021) research also covers the geographic area of the USA, similar to Giebelhausen and Lawson (2010) and Adkinson-Jobe and Lawson (2017).

Cassidy's (2018) experiment on preference towards supply scarcity products studies 95% male respondents with the majority of them aged 18-23, again from the USA. The average sneaker collection of the participants in his sample is 14,34 sneakers and the average highest price paid for a single pair of sneakers is 352.58 USD (approximately 336 EUR). On average our respondents own 48 pairs of sneakers and have paid on average 480 EUR for their most expensive sneakers. It is fair to say that the characteristics of the sample interviewed in our study testify to greater validation for the matter studied and give it higher credibility. Not only in numbers but also when looking in detail at every partaker interviewed and their experience in the industry, as already noted some highly competent individuals took part in this research. Moreover, our study also contributes to findings regarding the most important factors that concern sneakerheads when deciding on sneakers, namely highlighting the importance of *quality* after *aesthetics* as a critical element.

Another research that comes close to this study is Lux and Bug (2018) where 4 expert interviews are done with 4 Germans (3 resellers and 1 buyer). Their study is not anonymous and collects opinions on 13 different hypotheses. They touch upon the phenomenon of collaboration, with the main focus on the shift from brands partnering with sportsmen to mostly artists and creative designers, however, luxury brands are not involved. Furthermore, this research is small-scale and comprises respondents from one country.

Yu et al. (2020) study the likeness among young customers of possible collaborations involving luxury brands, giving as an example Louis Vuitton. Two of their suggestions for partnerships with a designer brand (sportswear brand – Nike and streetwear brand – Supreme) were an inspiration to further develop their study making it more specific in the area of sneakers and giving real examples of successful and desirable collaborations (3 out of 4 of their examples at the time of the research were fictional).

### 4.4 Practical Implications

The findings of this research come to provide some substantial implications for brands involved in the sneaker industry. Not all sneakerheads appreciate the inclusion of luxury elements in the sneaker game and their susceptibility towards designer brands is constrained. The fact owes to the strong cultural attachment of most hardcore and conservative sneakerheads to classic brands, silhouettes and association to a specific period related to the birth of the idea of sneakers and

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streetwear. Although there is a mutual consent that collaborations prove to be a successful marketing strategy to smoothly enter the sneaker market and raise brand awareness among designer brands, high-end fashion enterprises must take into consideration the deeply rooted cultural elements that drive the love for sneakers since its early days. There is a noticeable preference for brands such as Nike (Jordan), Supreme and Off-White in terms of desirability and attractiveness, thus luxury brands partnering with them would provoke higher interest among sneakerheads. Critical factors for success in shoemaking are mainly aesthetics and quality, as well as purpose and idea when it comes to collaborating. Luxury brands should concentrate their efforts not entirely on attracting customers merely for their sneakers but find a common language with them to create an effortless transition from shoes to other segments of luxury fashion (accessories, leather, jewellery and more). The study also proves that people that are involved in the selling process of sneakers and have financial benefits are more receptive to luxury, thus they should be a point of reference to luxury brands as to what would be successful and desired by the sneaker community and what not.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusions

The results of this paper come to prove that there is a considerable division among the different actors in the sneaker community regarding their acceptance of the way streetwear culture is heading, namely in the high-end segment of luxury fashion. The “old-school” sneakerheads and collectors can be defined as more conservative and non-approving of the recent trends where we see designer brands aggressively entering the market with their sneakers or through various partnerships. On the other hand, people that are directly or indirectly involved in the selling process of the sneaker industry and are not pure consumers acknowledge the shift of the course streetwear is taking and anticipate its development more positively.

In general, respondents are united behind the idea that sneakers can be regarded as a bridge towards high-end fashion demand and collaborations between brands from different segments play a big role to grant access for the upper scale designer market. Additionally, the individuals interviewed in this qualitative research predominantly approve of the “luxurisation” of sneakers when this is done through collaborations and believe that partnerships between brands make them more interesting and desired. Specific examples are given with the most successful brands and collaborations named.

During the course of the research other important findings are made such as the phenomenon of inexplicable love and loyalty towards a specific sportswear brand despite its continuous flaws and disappointments, especially in the quality of the product. To summarise, through extensive dialogue with passionate sneakerheads and various experts in the field, we have come to a conclusion that the switch from streetwear to luxury is a fact and the most successful way for brands to achieve that is through collaborations that take into account the rich history and culture of sneakers. This research can be of use for brands in the streetwear and luxury segments in order to understand their clients better and remodel their marketing and producing strategies.

### 5.2 Limitations

This qualitative research has a limited number of respondents since the analysis required with such methodology is laborious and more complicated. Quantitative research would be more appropriate to extract specific figures on the spending and purchasing power of the respondents to analyse their potential to be converted to full-time luxury buyers.

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Additionally, the type of respondents missing that would be ideal to share their opinion and insights are workers/owners of the luxury business. This research mainly includes the sentiments of people in the sneakerhead community but lacks the point of view of the high-end fashion industry figures that could contribute with an important vision of where luxury is heading through the involvement with streetwear culture.

### 5.3 Suggestions and Recommendations

Luxury brands must take into consideration the historical aspects of streetwear culture and the origin of sneakers and incorporate elements of the rich culture that includes loved brands, sports figures, artists, music, and stories behind a specific release. Simply collaborating without deeper meaning behind it would not guarantee success. A specific niche sector and an apparent trend that is worth examining is the transition from sneakers to luxury in young men and especially their preference for jewellery and watches. Another suggestion is that similar research is conducted in a reverse way – studying the shift of luxury brands towards streetwear – interviewing sales managers and artistic directors of designer brands regarding the shift of luxury towards more sporty outlooks in contrast to old-fashioned luxury where more strict and traditional silhouettes and designs were observed.

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**Annexes**

**Annex A - Overview of literature categorized in essential topics that cover the sneaker**

<b>Author(s) &amp; Year</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Keywords</b>	<b>History and Culture</b>	<b>(Resale) Market and Sneakerhead Community</b>	<b>Luxury, High-end and Collaborations</b>
Brace-Govan and de Burgh-Woodman (2008)	Sneakers and street culture: A postcolonial analysis of marginalized cultural consumption	consumption, diaspora, experience, hybridity, marginalized consumption, postcolonialism	✓		
Giebelhausen and Lawson (2010)	Sneakerheads and Custom Kicks: Insights into Symbolic Mass Customization	marketing, customization, Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique, ZMET, self-expression, exclusivity	✓	✓	
Choi and Kim (2019)	Sneakerhead brand community netnography: Exploratory research	sneakerheads, brand community, retro branding, rarity, perceived inequity, netnography	✓	✓	
Denny (2021)	The sneaker–marketplace icon	sneaker, sneakerhead, sports shoe, marketplace icon, consumer, culture	✓	✓	
Matthews et al. (2021)	I wear, therefore I am: investigating sneakerhead culture, social identity, and brand preference among men	sneakers, sneakerhead, social identity, brand preference	✓	✓	
Adkinson-Jobe and Lawson (2017)	Collector’s Relationship to Access-Based Consumption: A Sneakerhead’s Perspective	(N/A)		✓	

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Djuhardi and Kusumawati (2017)	The Influencing Factors on Consumer's Attitude Towards Counterfeit Branded Sneaker Shoes And Their Impact To Purchase Intention	brand image, social factor, personality factor, attitude, purchase intention		✓	
Zhu et al. (2020)	Frenzy Sneakers after Market: From Price Control to Block Chain	block chain, sneaker market, sneaker trading platform, price-premium, transaction transparency, consumption		✓	
BoPing (2021)	Analysis on the Current Situation and Future Development of Sneaker Resale Market	sneaker, resale market, sneaker reseller		✓	
Choi and Lee (2021)	Recent Changes in Consumer Perception in Sneaker Resale Market	resale, sneaker, sneaker resale, shoes-tech, social big data analysis		✓	
Cassidy (2018)	The Effect of Scarcity Types on Consumer Preference in the High-End Sneaker Market	(N/A)		✓	✓
Lux and Bug (2018)	Sole Value – The Sneaker Resale Market	sneaker resale, resale market, digital assortments, market analysis, fashion merchandising, retail marketing, fashion retail		✓	✓
Ma and Treiber (2020)	Hedonic Pricing in the Sneaker Resale Market	sneakers, resale markets, secondary markets, hedonic analysis		✓	✓
Diamantopoulos et al. (2021)	Regarding Air Jordan Brand Unorthodox Luxury Sneakers, What is the Correlational Relationship Between Men's Perceptions of Traditional Luxury Factors and Price?	(N/A)		✓	✓

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Pedeliento et al. (2021)	A New Paradigm in the Luxury Fashion Industry: Off-White and the Rise of Luxury Streetwear	(N/A)		✓	✓
Raditya et al. (2021)	Predicting Sneaker Resale Prices using Machine Learning	sneaker resale; machine learning; linear regression; random forest; prediction		✓	✓
Slaton and Pookulangara (2021)	Collaborative consumption: An investigation into the secondary sneaker market	collaborative market, fashion consciousness, popular culture, purchase intention, sneaker resale, social media		✓	✓
Han et al. (2010)	Signaling Status with Luxury Goods: The Role of Brand Prominence	luxury, status, conspicuous consumption, brand prominence, branding, reference groups, associative/dissociative motives, counterfeit goods			✓
de Macedo (2015)	The Evolution of Streetwear The newfound reality of Streetwear and its luxury-like management	streetwear branding, luxury branding, brand management, consumer tribes			✓
Hemantha (2020)	Retaining the Cachet of Luxury Fashion Brands on Social Media Through Storytelling and Narratives	(N/A)			✓
Yu et al. (2020)	Exploring young consumer's decision-making for luxury co-branding combinations	co-branding, luxury, non-luxury, fashion, conjoint analysis, decision-making			✓
Jiang et al. (2021)	Quiet versus loud luxury: the influence of overt and covert narcissism on young Chinese and US luxury consumers' preferences?	luxury consumption, overt narcissism, covert narcissism, young luxury consumers, loud luxury, quiet luxury, social attitude function			✓



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**Annex B - Final selection of interview questions**

	<b>Group of questions</b>	<b>Question asked</b>	<b>Purpose / Intention</b>	<b>Relation to academic research</b>
<b>1</b>	Introductory questions - relationship with sneakers and cultural influences	I identify myself as: (sneakerhead, collector, reseller, etc.)	To understand the personal perception of the respondent as an individual within the sneakerhead community and justify his/her expertise.	Matthews et al. (2021); Slaton and Pookulangara (2021)
<b>2</b>	Introductory questions - relationship with sneakers and cultural influences	Which is the first pair of sneakers that you vividly remember getting and believe started your interest in sneakers?	To get a story of when and how the respondent got interested in sneakers and how it all started. Is that connected somehow to cultural influences – music, sports, etc.? Let the respondent share an interesting story.	Matthews et al. (2021); Giebelhausen and Lawson (2010)
<b>3</b>	Introductory questions - relationship with sneakers and cultural influences	What is your most expensive purchase of sneakers (in EUR)?	To find out the how much sneakerheads are willing to spend for a pair of sneakers and can they be a target for purely luxury sneakers and other items.	Cassidy (2018)

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4	Introductory questions - relationship with sneakers and cultural influences	How many sneaker pairs do you currently own?	To understand the number of sneakers the respondent can afford to have.	Cassidy (2018); Matthews et al. (2021)
5	Introductory questions - relationship with sneakers and cultural influences	Popular artists are known to have a great influence on today's sneaker market and trends. How do you believe that affects the sneakerhead culture?	To see if sneakerheads believe today's influencers have positive/negative effect on the sneaker market. Does that lead to further popularization, consequently, demand and price increase?	Diamantopoulos et al. (2021); Giebelhausen and Lawson (2010); Lux and Bug (2018); Pedeliento et al. (2021);
6	Purchasing preferences and buying factors	How do you usually buy your sneakers?	To understand the purchasing behaviour of the respondent and the distribution channels he/she uses.	Cassidy (2018); Jiang et al. (2021); Lux and Bug (2018); Slaton and Pookulangara (2021); Yu et al. (2020);
7	Purchasing preferences and buying factors	Of all the sneakers you own what portion was acquired through regular retail price	To understand the proportion of sneakers bought via resale market on higher prices (due to scarcity, demand, etc.)	Cassidy (2018)

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		and what portion through the resale market on a price higher than the retail one?		
8	Purchasing preferences and buying factors	What is your opinion on raffles, bots, backdooring and other techniques used by resellers to acquire sneakers?	To see the opinion of the respondent on the sneaker market and techniques used to acquire sneakers for profit and not for personal use. Since this largely affects prices and availability, it may contribute to sneakers becoming a luxury.	Lux and Bug (2018); Slaton and Pookulangara (2021)
9	Purchasing preferences and buying factors	Please rank the following factors in terms of their importance when shopping for sneakers from 1 to 10, with 1 being most important and 10 being least important:	To understand which the most important factors are that buyers consider when making a purchasing decision.	Cassidy (2018); Yu et al. (2020)
10	Purchasing preferences and buying factors	Do you have a favourite brand of sneakers?	To understand brand affection and see who the most loved brand by sneakerheads is.	Giebelhausen & Lawson (2010); Jiang et al. (2021); Lux and Bug (2018); Matthews et al. (2021); Yu et al. (2020)
11	Purchasing preferences and buying factors	What is your opinion about luxury brands that have entered the sneaker market?	To see if respondents like the idea of luxury brands making sneakers.	Jiang et al. (2021) Pedeliento et al. (2021)

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<b>12</b>	Purchasing preferences and buying factors	Do you believe that luxury brands change the cultural identity of sneakers and the origins of streetwear culture?	To see if sneakerheads believe that sneakerhead culture loses its identity due to high involvement of luxury brands in the sneaker segment.	Diamantopoulos et al. (2021); Matthews et al. (2021); Pedeliento et al. (2021)
<b>13</b>	Purchasing preferences and buying factors	Have you ever bought or considered buying sneakers in the high-end, luxury segment?	To see the intentions of respondents in buying sneakers from luxury brands.	Jiang et al. (2021); Pedeliento et al. (2021)
<b>14</b>	Purchasing preferences and buying factors	Would you say that your attraction toward sneakers has raised your interest in luxury brands and luxury fashion in general?	To understand whether sneakers can be considered as a potential entry point to high fashion industry in general and other segments of luxury.	Jiang et al. (2021); Pedeliento et al. (2021)
<b>15</b>	Purchasing preferences and buying factors	Do you think that sneakers are becoming more exclusive and unavailable for the casual sneakerhead? Would you define them as luxurious goods?	To understand the opinion of sneakerheads on current pricing trends in sneakers and if the usually high prices are concerning for them. To understand if they perceive sneakers as luxury goods.	Cassidy (2018)

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16	Collaborations	What do you think about sneaker collaborations between brands?	To understand the opinion of respondents on collaborations between brands when it comes to sneakers. Does this make a sneaker more appealing and desirable?	Lux and Bug (2018); Pedeliento et al. (2021); Yu et al. (2020)
17	Collaborations	Which types of sneaker collaborations would you define as most desirable/successful?	To explore the preferences in terms of sneaker collaborations between types of brands and other companies or influential people.	Yu et al. (2020)
18	Collaborations	What types of sneaker collaborations are you interested in seeing in the future?	To see whether sneakerheads have desires of specific collaborations that are still not explored by brands	Yu et al. (2020)
19	Collaborations	How do you think collaborations between brands affects the reputation and fanbase of each brand when there is a mismatch in the segment/level of the brand (e.g., Luxury brand x Sportswear brand)?	To explore brand love and brand tribalism and whether collaborations can unite fans of two brands or create disappointments when a brand you love collaborates with another one that sneakerheads might not prefer.	Yu et al. (2020)
20	Experiment – pure luxury and collaborations with demand and supply scarcity	You are free to choose a pair of the sneakers shown below to get for yourself.  Please rank them from 1 to 3 by your personal choice and liking (1 - most desirable, 3 – least appealing)	To see the choice sneakerheads would make on similarly looking sneakers but greatly differing in quality, price, availability, exclusivity, segment. The respondent does not have any information on the sneaker except how they look like.	Cassidy (2018); Diamantopoulos et al. (2021)

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21	Experiment – pure luxury and collaborations with demand and supply scarcity	Please have a look again at all three pairs of sneakers with all details available this time? Now that you have more information about them would you change your decision and your choice? If yes, what made you choose another pair?	Respondent can now make an informed decision on sneakers. It is interesting to see if he/she will change his choice now and why.	Cassidy (2018); Diamantopoulos et al. (2021)
22	Open question – Free discussion	Please feel free to share any other opinions concerning the sneaker market and luxury sneakers that have not been discussed so far. Is there something else that you would like to add to this topic?	To give the chance and opportunity to respondent to freely discuss anything else that feels is important to the topic but hasn't been mentioned so far.	Matthews et al. (2021);
23	Demographic and socio-economic questions	What is your age?	To prove the theory that sneakerheads are mainly Millennials and Generation Z.	Cassidy (2018); Slaton and Pookulangara (2021)
24	Demographic and socio-economic questions	What gender do you identify as?	To prove that sneaker market and community is predominantly presented by males.	Cassidy (2018); Slaton and Pookulangara (2021)

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25	Demographic and socio-economic questions	Where are you currently living?	It is important to understand the geographical location of the participant since market opportunities for both offline/online shopping differ greatly.	Jiang et al. (2021);
26	Demographic and socio-economic questions	Current occupation (study/work/unemployed)	Hints the purchasing power and free time of the respondent.	Slaton and Pookulangara (2021)
27	Demographic and socio-economic questions	Highest level of education?	To understand if sneakerheads have high education.	Slaton and Pookulangara (2021)
28	Demographic and socio-economic questions	Annual income	To understand the purchasing power and capability to spend.	Slaton and Pookulangara (2021)
29	Demographic and socio-economic questions	How many pairs of sneakers do you buy per year?	To understand how often the respondent is involved in purchasing actions.	Matthews et al. (2021)
30	Demographic and socio-economic questions	How much do you usually spend on sneakers average per year?	To see what percentage of annual income (previous question in Demographics) the individual spends on sneakers.	Cassidy (2018)



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*Annex C - Own photo archives from visiting Sneakerness Rotterdam in November 2021*



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*Annex D - Transcripts of Interviews (R3 – sneaker collector & R8 – reseller)*

**R3 Transcript (sneaker collector)**

Thu, 4/21 9:31AM • 49:09

**SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

sneakers, pairs, nike, brand, shoes, people, collaborations, luxury, buy, resale prices, wearing, adidas, luxury brands, culture, sneaker culture, jordan, dunks, basketball sneakers, release, models

**SPEAKERS**

NIKOLAOS METOS, R3

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

So, first of all, thank you very much for agreeing to take part in this interview for my thesis. And to be recorded for this. The first question is: “How would you identify yourself as?”. You can choose one of the definitions that really describes you best? ... Which of the definitions best fits yourself?

**R3**

I think I'd go for a sneaker collector since I think two weeks ago, I hit 104 pairs that I own. So that will be the best one to describe me.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

I would like you to tell me in more details what was the first pair of sneakers that you remember getting and believe that really started your interest in sneakers? Like how old were you then? And was it a gift? Or you decided to buy them? And do you make any connection with this pair with some influential person or some artists, sportsman?

**R3**

Oh, well. So the first pair I remember that I really wanted was a pair of High Top Chuck's (Converse All-Star) 70s the navy (colour) ones. And I was maybe 10 years old back then and my parents got them for me. And I would really like to share that it was very uncomfortable for me at the time, so I just left them. And the second shoe that I got that really got me into sneaker

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collecting actually was the Yeezy V2 (Kanye West x Adidas), the Beluga's. Because when the Yeezys dropped in 2015, me loving Kanye, I really wanted to get a pair but they were very exclusive - I couldn't get to them, they had high resale price. So I did manage to hit a retail price on V2 beluga. And I still have them. And that was back in 2016. If I'm not mistaken.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

And what's like the most expensive purchase of sneakers that you've bought? Do you remember, in euros? And what's the brand and exact model?

**R3**

Yeah, well, actually, most pairs that I get, I try to either get them for retail or under retail price. So my collection is pretty, pretty slim in in the pricing that I've paid. But I recently made a purchase for a sample pair of Nike Dunks, they're the "Dubai" Dunks. And they are I think limited to 50 pairs in the world and 10 samples of those 50 pairs. So I got a sample of one of those pairs, which is quite rare. And I paid 350 EUR since the person was just selling out their collection because he claimed he was done with sneakers. And he just needs you know some money for them, which is a pretty steal price. But still 350 euros I think that's most expensive shoe I got, yeah.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

Do you plan like to keep them for you for a long time? Or do you plan to let's say, use them as an investment and resell them in the future for higher price.

**R3**

I will use them as an investment, because I own more than 100 sneakers and there are pairs that I like but not enough to keep for myself. And if I can sell them to you know another collector who would appreciate them more, I'd be happy to do it. You know I if I resell, I try not to put a huge markup on them. I want to have a fair price. It's a win win situation, I get a little profit and a person will get a pair that they really like for an affordable price.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

Okay, and you already told me you have around 104 pairs.

**R3**

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I'm currently selling some of them because I think that it's not the healthiest addiction a person could have financially. So I'm slimming it down but now they are 104, yes.

### **NIKOLAOS METOS**

As you know, and already mentioned about Kanye, popular artists are known to have great influence on today's sneaker market and the trends currently going on. How do you believe that affects the sneakerhead culture in general. Below you can see some of the influential figures and artists that are rocking some of the models that are really known.

### **R3**

Yeah, well, I think it's, it's very, very connected. Like, you know, what celebrities wear and what sneakerhead culture is because there's a thing called the "Travis effect". And the "Travis effect" states that whatever Dunk (Nike model) Travis wore during a six month period of time, it will have crazy resale prices and the most outstanding one was the Nike SB Dunk "Paris". And the thing is, they had crazy resale prices in the first place. And like 10 to 15000, he wore them courtside during a basketball game, they skyrocketed. And the last pair I saw was like \$130,000. And I mean, geez. Plus, the Ultra Boost (Adidas model) Kanye wore during 2015, the Ultra Boost became one of the most hyped Adidas shoes because of that, whatever rappers are currently wearing, like Kanye and Travis, and there's many other influential figures, but these are just to name a few. It just it becomes a hit. I think it's part of the marketing. That's why like, for example, you know, they get a lot of free stuff, so they can put it on, they could be literally used as billboards for the shoes.

### **NIKOLAOS METOS**

How do you usually buy your sneakers? You already told me you try to stick mainly to retail, but in terms of online, offline? And for example, do you try to buy directly, let's say from Nike, do you try to buy from some other retail stores? Do you buy, from other sneakerheads on Instagram or Facebook, social media. In terms of buying, like, what's your pattern?

### **R3**

Well, I mainly stick to online platforms like Craigslist, for example, or eBay, but just local ones, because many people sell their shoes there, and they don't really have knowledge of the value. So it's very easy to get very lightly worn pairs for a great price. I've gotten 2013 "Chicago's" Jordan 1 Highs for 20 euros or something like that. Completely legit, which is

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amazing. And yeah, also, I follow a lot of different pages on Instagram and on Facebook. So I'm always scrolling through them, you know, connecting with different people that are into sneakers and trading with them or selling or buying, you know, so yeah, I do mainly stick to online, for sure.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

You said you also try to stick to retail and not overpay a lot when it comes to sneakers.

**R3**

I try not to buy from Nike directly as much as possible. Because, I think they do have great shoes, because they do have great designers, but they're like a very, very nice example of corporate greed. I think they've actually stolen more from the culture than they have given.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

There is a upcoming question related to that.

**R3**

Yeah, so I try to stick to secondhand as much as possible or just like outlets, that not connected to Nike,

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

So for the sneakers that you've bought so far what is the portion of retail and resale, maybe something like this? Because you said mainly retail.

**R3**

Yeah, so I think I've gotten 90% of my shoes for retail or less.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

Here comes the next question. Like I mentioned before, what's in general your opinion on raffles, bots and backdooring and other techniques used by resellers to acquire sneakers? And in this photo below? It shows like the son of Nike's North America ex-VP... Yeah, so no need to explain to you right, you already know...

**R3**

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I know the situation. I think that everybody has their way of hustling and getting their money and that's completely okay. I think that people who say that resellers have ruined the culture, I think that's a stretch because reselling kinda has become the culture. You know, always being on the hunt for something always trying to make a profit for something, but it reaches lands that are just not okay. Like when Virgil Abloh passed away and resale prices of Off-White's doubled. I can't lie, I've worked in a sneaker store, and I've backdoored stuff. Just because it was it was simple. Like, I could do it. And it was general release Nike Dunk's so it wasn't anything crazy. Like all the hype releases, I've kept in the store, because I think people could, you know, go and get them. Like, what, I could buy Nike Dunk's with the discount that I work there, I will buy them for like 75 euros, sell them for 200. Like, for a young person that is struggling to get money, that's a very good way. It may be not the most clever and good way for people who really love sneakers, but it is a way. So I'm not against it, not completely with the lens of it.

### **NIKOLAOS METOS**

Below, you can find like 10 different, important factors for you regarding sneakers. When you buy a sneaker, what's the most important thing that you look at? So from what I understand starting with quality you really like when you buy shoes, is it the first thing that matters to you - quality?

### **R3**

So yeah, I think functionality. I think it will be a eight maybe if I really like the shoe I don't care about how functional it is. So I think price would be the second most important thing for obvious reasons. Then the third most important will be the story behind the shoe. I think that does a lot for a shoe. Then an association with the artist. Because I mean, the story behind the release and usually association with the artist, they sometimes overlap. So yeah. Then it will be aesthetics. Then comfort. Then exclusivity.

### **NIKOLAOS METOS**

Okay, you already have put functionality here. We can change it if you want.

### **R3**

Yeah, I think functionality still is there. Then it's gonna be brands and collaborations. And the last thing will be popularity for me.



**NIKOLAOS METOS**

And do you have, let's say a favourite brand of sneakers that you predominantly buy and what makes it so special for you? Has this brand ever let you down sometimes and what are your future expert expectations from this brand?

**R3**

Okay, so I like I will quote Drake. No, actually. I'll quote Travis Scott: "Nike boys - we don't do three stripes (Adidas)". I mean, it definitely has, it has to be Nike. I think they have the best shoes currently. Even though most of their models are actually old, the newer ones are not as good. So I think the story behind you know, creating the brand and being Blue Ribbon Sports (original name before Nike), you know, that has to do a lot for me liking it because it was bold move from Phil Knight (founder and owner of Nike). But you know, just the legendary models they have like all the older Jordan lines, all the basketball sneakers and the cleats they make just all their association with athletes. There's a lot to like about Nike and I think the best shoe designers in the world are there. I mean, Tinker Hatfield, come on. You can't not love Tinker Hatfield. I think something that really, you know, let me down was when they sued Warren Lotas, if you know the case. Because Warren Lotas made bootleg of the Dunk.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

Yeah, but come on. I mean, they're like basically the same.

**R3**

Yeah, they're basically the same thing. But the thing is that when Blue Ribbon Sports, you know, Nike was open. Phil Knight was a was a salesman for ASICS, right. Because he was a really good salesman, when he sold his pairs out, you know, ASICS said: "Okay, so we're not supplying you with any more pairs until next month". So what he did is he used his waffle maker to make soles, and he kind of made a bootleg of the ASICS that were selling, and branded it as a Blue Ribbon Sports shoe. So the whole origin of Nike is bootleg, and you can't knock on someone who's bootlegging. You know, keeping in mind the fact that you your origin story is someone who bootlegged the shoe - I think that's it's offensive. I mean, I do get trademarks, and etc. But you know, there's many other cases of bootlegging that is considered okay, and the sneaker culture like for example, the "Bapesta" (Bathing Ape) - that's an Air Force 1, like come on, and although the Rick Owens' sneakers, they take classic silhouettes and just made them

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chunkier. So that's also considered okay, they never really had any lawsuits. I think not sure, though. So yeah, they do disappoint on occasion.

### **NIKOLAOS METOS**

So what's your opinion about luxury brands, for example, that have entered recently the sneaker market? And can you name some brands that they're currently making sneakers like luxury ones? And do you know some marketing strategies that they use?

### **R3**

Um, so I'm not really big on designer sneakers, because I think they're, they're a fad. Like, I don't I don't really like what they're doing. But one thing I would mention will be Virgil Abloh's work with Louis Vuitton. So I think he did a lot while he helped Louis Vuitton in the sneakers he released.. They're very reminiscent of 80s basketball sneakers. So they do bring a sense of nostalgia, and while maintaining the luxury and being true to the street. But yeah, also Louis Vuitton back in 2009 with their, collaborative collection with Kanye West. That also, you know, mixing streetwear-like, influenced people and like luxury brands, it is something it is something for sure. And also the Louis Vuitton x Supreme collection was a thing to talk about, they only have like one pair of shoes. But still, you know, the whole mixing streetwear and luxury. I like it, the inner Hypebeast in me likes it. But I think at this point in time it looks very cheap. I think it's a played out trick. Because, you know, every, every next release it just collaboration. There's no originality or creativity.

### **NIKOLAOS METOS**

Do you believe that luxury sneaker brands change the cultural identity of sneakers and the origin of streetwear culture? And if yes, how do they do it? And do you consider it as a threat to the sneaker culture, with sneakers, like luxury brands do?

### **R3**

I don't think that luxury brands could change the culture or identity of sneakers. I don't think they're that accessible, so it's normal that not a lot of people could afford them. And something that is not affordable, not everyone can get, I don't think you can have that much of an impact. Because people they stay true to the street. So whatever high luxury trend there is, I think people will always stay true to the to their Jordan's and their Adidas Supertars or you know, the classic silhouettes.

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**NIKOLAOS METOS**

And have you ever bought or considered buying any sneakers in the high end luxury segment for example?

**R3**

I myself have bought a pair. It is the Louis Vuitton x Virgil Abloh, low top trainers.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

Would you say that your attraction towards sneakers has raised your interest in a way to luxury brands and luxury fashion in general? Do you think that your love for sneakers has made you start looking at the luxury segment.

**R3**

I do think that is true for a short period of my life. Because in 2017 and 2018 I think many people that were publicly wearing very cool sneakers, they were also wearing this Gucci collection that you know, it featured a lot of stitching and a lot of very vivid colours on their things like the the Gucci jeans with a snake. Like many people were wearing low top Dunks with those Gucci jeans. So for a period of time I did really wanted to get something high end. But with time I realised it doesn't make a lot of sense for a teenager to own a Louis Vuitton wallet. I don't have a lot of money anyway, why would I have an empty Louis Vuitton wallet? It just doesn't make sense. So yeah, for some time, yeah. But now I'm, I'm out of that, like, I don't really do high end.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

And do you think that sneakers are becoming more exclusive and unavailable for the casual sneakerhead? Like would you define them as luxurious goods?

**R3**

Mostly yes. I think that while they may not be as exclusive in their production numbers, you know, reselling has done a lot for casual sneakerheads... actually has done a lot of damage for them, since many people buy 20 or 30 pairs, so, you know, getting a pair for retail, it's nearly impossible on like every retro release on like, even general releases. So it is kind of a luxury to be able to get some of those pairs.

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**NIKOLAOS METOS**

If understood correctly, you mean the main thing that has made sneakers nowadays exclusive and a luxury to get your hands on it's not scarce supply but demand scarcity, just because of the hype, right?

**R3**

Yeah, while there are there are some releases are pretty scarce, like some SB (Dunks) releases of like 50 or 60,000 pairs compared to like a million, or like 600,000 for the Jordan 11 "Cool Greys". I think it's mostly demand scarcity.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

What do you think about sneaker collaborations between brands? And do you believe they they make a sneaker more desired? We already talked about some some of them, and what are your thoughts in partnership for example, between giants like Nike and Adidas and luxury houses like Dior and Prada respectively.

**R3**

For a long time collaborations were a main selling point. And I think it was because there were more exclusive than regular releases, which, you know, made them more sought after. And you can say "Oh, look, so I'm wearing a Nike shoe, but it has a touch of Sacai (Japanese luxury brand) on it, or touch of Dior, you know. I'm, mixing both cultures, I'm doing the best of both worlds." So I think that's why they were big, for a long time, still are, just not as cool as they used to be. I'm okay with collaborations as long as you know, they, they have some creativity to them. I just not really seeing like, the same silhouette and different kind of ways.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

Which types of sneaker collaborations would you define as most desirable or successful?

**R3**

That will be one of them luxury and sportswear. Then they will be again, luxury and streetwear. The third one would be really, really, really hard. I think for a success, it will mostly be a sportswear brand and an artist. Because we've seen that a lot. Even though like, you know,

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sportswear brands and sneaker shops also do a lot but not as much as the sneaker brand as a street sportswear brand and an artist.

### **NIKOLAOS METOS**

What types of sneaker collaborations are you interested in seeing in the future? Like do you have something specific in mind that you really like to see?

### **R3**

Um, that's pretty interesting. I think I want to see another Undefeated (Sneaker store) Jordan 4. Because the Undefeated Jordan 4 is a "grail" for many people. Absolutely inaccessible. It's like 30 or 40 grand. And, you know, making a public release of like, some kind of Undefeated Jordan - that would be amazing. I would buy that. Like, I would pay resale that.

### **NIKOLAOS METOS**

And how do you think collaborations between brands affect the reputation and fan base of each brand, when there is a mismatch in the segment and to the level of the brand?

### **R3**

Well, I think that fan bases are not something that is constant, I mean, it always changes. While we're there diehard fans that will always stay it is pretty much an in and out of the fan base. So whatever brand does, it's gonna have people that like it, and people that don't like it. For you know, luxury brands collaborating with streetwear brands and sports brands, I think that would brush off some of the, the bigger clients that really have a lot of money from luxury brands, because they wouldn't like how accessible what they're wearing is becoming for many other people because luxury brands, there really are just status symbol for the most part. We don't have to talk about quality or ethical, you know, ethical making of the garments. It's more of a status symbol with this point. So whenever, you know a regular 18 year old could get their hands on like, I don't know they could land a Prada Superstar (x Adidas), for example, you know diehard fans wouldn't like that because they want that brand to be exclusive to their, to their tax bracket.

### **NIKOLAOS METOS**

You're free to choose a pair of sneakers as shown below to get just for yourself - the ones you would get like first and the ones you least select, you can just choose.

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**R3**

So I would definitely get the New Balance's first. Then the Stüssy's and then the Christian Dior's.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

Now you can change your choice based on informed decision and more information about each pair.

**R3**

On the first note, I'm very well aware of the resale prices of the New Balances and the in the Stüssy's, so I don't need any information on that. I think that New Balance... they make quality shoes. So while they do have a high price point, you know, like 990s like 991s, and twos and threes and fours and the V 995s. They're pretty expensive for retail. I mean for me personally, but they do make very comfortable and very quality shoes. So you know me buying a pair of New Balance, I know that it's going to last. And I do have two pairs of New Balances. Actually I have 990v5 and 2002R are and they're one of the most comfortable shoes I got. So they look great. I think the dad sneaker wave with the Yeezy 700s and everything that happened I did a lot for New Balance. But they look great, like especially like the 550s the new ones that are also like vintage basketball sneakers. So I think they're doing great, they have great shoes quality shoes, then I'll take Nike because I think the silhouette is interesting. And it's yeah,

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

Now that you know more about the shoes, like how rare they are, what's their current price, etc? Would you like to change your mind from the previous decision, or no?

**R3**

Not really. I'm still sticking with my decision.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

Okay, great. And this is one of the last questions. You're absolutely free to share any opinion on what we've discussed so far. You can add something else. If you think that we missed something you're completely free to share, what do you think in general about the sneakerhead culture or collaborations, luxury.

**R3**

I think my personal opinion on the sneaker market and on the sneaker culture as a whole is people are not informed enough on the archives of different brands, you know, of old silhouettes, old models, old collaborations, and they put way too much into new releases, and, you know, wanting to have the latest shoe or the latest collaboration. And I think that is what made resale prices where they are currently. So we know if people took a second to actually, build their own tastes around something rather than follow the hype. And start buying older models and looking for different things like not just Air Force's and Dunks and Jordan 1's. I think that resale prices will soar and people will be genuinely way happier. And you will see way less people wearing the same shoes and it will be way, way more versatile and friendly community. And you can be able to you know, learn something new about a certain shoe from someone else. So I think, you know, the sneaker culture is missing lots of reading on the topic of sneaker culture.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

And the final questions are just you know, some like demographics, like your age, you said you're 19, right. What gender do you identify us?

**R3**

As male.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

And where are you currently living?

**R3**

Sofia, Bulgaria

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

Yeah. You're currently studying, working part-time, full-time, studying and working?  
Unemployed?

**R3**

So I'm just studying the moment.

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**NIKOLAOS METOS**

And what's the highest level of education you have achieved?

**R3**

Currently a high school degree. It's my first year in my university.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

What is your approximate annual income in euros? If you don't like to mention...

**R3**

I think it's less than 12,000 for sure.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

Okay. How many pairs of sneakers do you buy per year? More than 20. And how much do you usually spend on sneakers average per year?

**R3**

More than that, more than 2000.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

More than 2000. Yeah. Okay. That's interesting. Okay, that's it. Thank you very much.

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## **R8 Transcript (reseller)**

Thu, 4/28 11:26AM • 28:42

### **SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

sneakers, collabs, luxury brands, shoes, brand, designer brands, wear, buy, price, nike, sportswear, luxury, retail, hyped, lots, dior, jd sports, pairs, collaborations, jordan

### **SPEAKERS**

R8, NIKOLAOS METOS

### **NIKOLAOS METOS**

Can you in the beginning tell me more about yourself? What are you doing connected to sneakers, just about yourself? How old are you? What exactly do you do with sneakers? What's your connection with fashion and sneakers?

### **R8**

So, I'm 20 and I started getting into sneakers and streetwear type of stuff I would say when I was around 14 what I think really got me into it was this brand called BAPE (A Bathing Ape), it's not really a sneaker related, sneaker specific, but I think that was the brand that really got me into it. And from day one there and I just started, watching a lot of stuff, a lot of rappers how they dress what they wear, the brands and stuff like that. And yeah from there on, I started buying stuff. I was very young, so I didn't have a lot of money. So I would for example, buy T-shirts, wear them for a bit and sell it and do it like more like as a hobby.

### **NIKOLAOS METOS**

And from these options below, which one would you choose to best identify yourself?

### **R8**

I would say reseller.

### **NIKOLAOS METOS**

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Can you tell me which is the first pair of sneakers that you remember getting and believe that started your interest in sneakers? How old were you then? Was it a gift? Did you buy it by yourself? Are you still wearing those shoes?

**R8**

The first one... I think the first pair of more hyped sneakers I had were BAPE x Puma collab. I traded them with a friend of mine. He's actually my business partner now. And yeah, those were my first type of sneakers, I would say.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

Do you remember what's the most expensive purchase of sneakers that you've made in euro? The brand and the model?

**R8**

I would say Jordan 1, I forgot the name... I think it's like this blue denim look. Air Jordan 1 "Hyper Royal". It was a 2021 release.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

Do you remember what the exact price was?

**R8**

Like 400-350, around the price 350.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

And do you still keep them, do you still wear them?

**R8**

I never wore them. I sold them. Almost immediately. I usually when I pay high prices for sneakers I don't like to keep them because I think I couldn't rotate them any easier.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

Okay. Do you know how many pairs of sneakers do you currently own? Only sneakers, not shoes in general.

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**R8**

For my collection? I would say probably around 15.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

Okay. You know, nowadays popular artists are known to have great influence, as you already mentioned about seeing some people wearing sneakers. How do you believe that affects the sneaker culture in general?

**R8**

I think it's what drives the sneaker culture. For example, if you see Travis Scott posts a picture wearing Dunks that instantly increase like 200, 300 euros in price and you know Kanye West doing collabs with Nike, Adidas. Travis Scott doing one of the most hyped shoes of all times. I think it's really what drives the culture. If it wasn't for the rappers, influencers, then there will be no culture.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

And can you tell me a bit more of how do you usually buy sneakers? Online, offline? Do you buy directly from the brands or from some shops? Do you use social media a lot to buy?

**R8**

Currently I am a bit out of it. But because I've moved to what I told you before (luxury clothing), but when I was really into it, I think where I got the most sneakers were in store. How did I do it? Okay, so there are several ways to do it there. It depends on the shop, you try to go if it's FootLocker, they usually announce if they have a release, or if they don't announce it, there are ways to find out, then they have the calendar on the website, you can check out they might not drop in store, but it's a good indication that it's going to drop in store, but also have restrictions where they will let only buy one pair per person and you have to do schemes to get around. That kind of stuff. Then you have JD Sports, which was the store where I got the most lucky, I would say because they do random restocks and random releases. So if I went that, for instance, in a random weekday at 8 AM, it opens at 10, I would know if they drop a certain shoe and there would be no line, no people trying to buy and I could buy 30 pairs. I think that was the most I bought in that time.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

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But as far as I know, you also use a lot social media, like Instagram a lot.

**R8**

Okay, that was where I think I made the most money, was in store but lots of people also text me that they want to sell the shoes and stuff like that. But when that happens, it's hard for me to get them for retail. So I usually not make a lot of money often online. I also had times where I was running bots, but I didn't really did that well doing that. Online was very hard for me, it's very challenging, because lots of people are doing the same things. And I think most of the pairs end up going to the best botters in the game, which can sometimes look like 800 pairs at a time, so it's very hard.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

For the sneakers that you own, what's the portion that you think you bought from retail and resale? From what I understand you mainly try to stick to retail?

**R8**

I would say 80% retail. But in my collection, it's like 40% retailer or less.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

Okay. And the next question is something we already mentioned. What's your opinion about raffles, bots, backdooring and other techniques that usually resellers use to acquire sneakers?

**R8**

I really support it. Lots of people are against botting and against backdooring and all that kind of stuff. But for me, I personally see it as a business. And I mean, if you are good at botting, if you have the connections if you know how to get your way in this business scheme. It's on you and I think it's great. I don't really have much against it. Botting is a really competitive market but sometimes costs lots of money and the price fluctuates a lot so it's like a real business. I don't have anything against it.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

Here you can see some factors when it comes to buying shoes like sneakers. And you have to rank them from 1 to 10 with the ones that are most important to you to least important.

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**R8**

Okay, so quality 7. Okay, price.... Probably in 1 because I will keep shoes that I think I really got a good deal on. Okay. Brand/collaborations...

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

And popularity? How popular the shoe is?

**R8**

I would put it in 9 because I don't really like wearing stuff that's popular.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

Okay and exclusivity?

**R8**

2.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

Comfort, functionality? Oh, okay. All of them have to be different. Yeah. Aesthetics, like design, how the shoe looks?

**R8**

So put the popularity in 10.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

Okay, so it's the least that you care.

**R8**

Yes. Aesthetics you can put 4.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

Okay, association with artists/influencers/sportsmen as you mentioned, Travis?

**R8**

7 and 9, so good. 9 in association and 7 story behind.

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**NIKOLAOS METOS**

Okay. And do you have a favourite brand of sneakers? Do you buy predominantly from one brand and what makes it special?

**R8**

Nike.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

And has it ever let you down as a brand?

**R8**

Sometimes... I feel more recently the most. For example, I would say in the last half a year Nike has been really disappointing because of the amount of stuff they've been putting out. They've been putting out tens and tens of stuff to the point where shoes like Jordan 1s and Dunk Lows aren't even hyped anymore. So if I go to the FootLocker or JD Sports or any other retail store, I will see Jordan 1 Highs and Dunk Lows for retail. That one year ago, that was completely impossible - you would never see a Jordan 1 for retail now you got colorways that look good and don't sell and it's very rare that a shoe sells for a decent price these days because Nike has been putting out stupid amounts of stock and besides that the quality has decreased.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

What you say is basically they have increased the supply and oversaturated the market?

**R8**

Yes and decreased the quality. Lots of shoes come in with glue sticking in the sides. The the materials aren't as good as they used to be, like very plastified.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

What is your opinion about luxury brands that have entered the sneaker market? Can you name some of them? And do you know some marketing strategies that they use?

**R8**

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I think it's great and I think it's the new wave and what is going to be popular in the next couple of years because people really gravitate towards luxury brands and streetwear and it's a combination that I think goes very well together. Some of the most popular brands I would say Off-White, Louis Vuitton is doing stuff in that sense too... Gucci. Gucci just had a collab with Adidas. Yeah...

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

And do you believe that luxury brands change the cultural identity of sneakers and the origin of streetwear culture?

**R8**

I mean, I never really thought about it that way. But yes, of course it changed it. It changed the course and... I really never have thought about it... That's because, you know, I think we're very used to see streetwear associated with luxury brands, some people mixing between Nike shoes and luxury brands sweater. I think we're so used to seeing it that it's a bit hard to define how it changed the streetwear culture.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

And have you ever bought or considered buying sneakers in the high-end, luxury segment?

**R8**

Prada Cups which are like more sports shoes.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

The America Cups?

**R8**

Yes and I love it, I think it's the new wave.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

Would you say that your attraction towards sneakers has raised your interest in luxury brands and luxury fashion in general? Have you started buying luxury items after buying sneakers? And do you think that sneakers are entry point into the luxury market?

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**R8**

I totally agree. I think what you said is 100% right. I actually had never really thought about it that way. But you know, streetwear is like an entry point for luxury brands. People start getting in to streetwear, they start understanding a bit more about clothes and about fashion. And then they usually gravitate more towards the designer brands. It's like a process.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

Do you think that sneakers are becoming more exclusive and unavailable for the casual sneakerhead. Would you define them as luxury goods nowadays?

**R8**

I think two years ago, you could say it. Right now I think I don't agree with that. Because what I already said. (The market) is oversaturated, you can get them anywhere for retail. What was the second part of the question?

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

Would you define sneakers as luxurious goods?

**R8**

Yes, yes, definitely. Of course it really depends on the sneaker but you know some sneakers go for 1000s of dollars. This is definitely a luxury good.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

What do you think about sneaker collaborations between brands? Do you believe that they make a sneaker more desired? And what are your thoughts on partnerships between sportswear giants like Nike and Adidas and luxury brands like Dior and Prada for example?

**R8**

I really love the idea because I think that's where the designers can get more creative and we can get a shoe that really stands out, that has something completely different from what it would usually be without the collabs so that's what really makes the shoe stand out and be unique and be more desirable for how unique it is.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**



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Ok. Here you can choose three possible variations of collaborations. Which one of those do you think would be most desirable and successful in the market?

**R8**

The second - luxury and sportswear. Okay, so I would put luxury and streetwear. And luxury and artist. The reason I only I stick to luxury brands is because I think those collabs... they are more rare. They usually get more hype, because it's not very usual for designer brands to do lots of collabs. So they get more hype, I think.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

What types of sneaker collaborations are you interested in seeing in the future?

**R8**

Good question. So I think everybody wants to see... I think it's impossible scenario at least for now. But Kanye with Nike collab.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

Kanye to return to Nike?

**R8**

Yes. Everybody wants to see that, I think.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

So you would like him to go back to Nike and work with them?

**R8**

Yes.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

How do you think collaborations between brands affect the reputation and the fan base of each brand when there is a total mismatch in the segment level of the brand, luxury and sportswear for example?

**R8**

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You know, I think designer brands are very aware that they need to keep the products exclusive. So when we see collabs like that, the stocks are very low and the prices, they don't go to the street or sportswear brand, they keep the price in what would be the designer brand and the quantities that they send out are very limited and most of the times they are way more limited than it would usually be even with designer brands. So I would say as far as keeping it exclusive...it's more exclusive to have designer brand collab than to have just a designer brand item. So the fans of the brands I think they like it even more but as far as the diehard fans of the streetwear brand that is affiliated with designer brands I can see where you're coming from saying the brand might have changed but I don't really see it... I think everybody likes it when there are collabs, I don't think there are many people hating on collabs.

### **NIKOLAOS METOS**

And here it's just a very small experiment. You have to make a choice between those 3 pairs and rank them. What would be your first choice just by seeing them? I have put on purpose similar colorways, similar material and similar design.

### **R8**

I think I would go with the Dior's. A, B, C. Yes. But I really like the New Balance, I just don't really like the colour.

### **NIKOLAOS METOS**

Okay. And why did you make this choice? Just based on the look?

### **R8**

Yes. Just based on the looks, yes. Maybe Dior influenced me a bit maybe because it's just Dior.

### **NIKOLAOS METOS**

And now you can change your choice making an informed decision. I will give you like all the details the shoes...Would you change your decision after this?

### **R8**

I mean, when you asked me the question, I answered it, like, as if I was wearing them. So if the question is the same as if I would wear them, I remain with the same answer. I don't really

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wear stuff, if I 100% don't like it. And you know, I could say I don't really care too much about the story and everything behind it. I really am mainly focused on what I really like. Yes.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

So how the shoe looks, it's one of the most important things for you to wear? And here it's the last question. You're free to say whatever you want if we haven't mentioned something and you want to just share, you know, to add something... I don't really have nothing to add. And these are some just social-, demographic questions. You said you're 20, right?

**R8**

Yes.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

What gender do identify as?

**R8**

Male.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

Okay. Where are you currently living?

**R8**

Portugal.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

And you're currently only studying, working part-time?

**R8**

Only studying.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

What is the highest level of education you have achieved?

**R8**

88

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High school.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

And what's your approximate annual income in euros? If you don't want to say you can choose this option.

**R8**

Like I normally do reselling. It's not really a steady income. So maybe, prefer not to say yes. Okay.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

And how many pairs of sneakers do you buy per year for personal use, not for reselling. You can choose from those options.

**R8**

I'd say 6 to 10. Most of the shoes I buy for myself I wear and maybe sell them later. Not every, but a lot, so... That could be higher.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

And how much do you usually spend on sneakers average per year? You can choose from one of those options.

**R8**

For myself?

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

Yes.

**R8**

I would say 600-1000.

**NIKOLAOS METOS**

Okay, thanks a lot.