



# SNEAKERHEADS

*"Souls finding soles"*

Zane Giordano

Megan Fee

Madison Phelan



# Hypebeasts

*They know all of the trends and love chasing down the most sought after new releases*

## Hearing

Discord notification sound, typing on phone, typing on keyboard, Facebook + Instagram notifications, Youtube drop videos

## Seeing

SNKRS app, StockX listings, unworn shoes in closet, comments, hype beast influencers, drop information

## Feeling

Annoyed with not getting a drop, excited when they are able to get the sneakers, frustrated with the gatekeeping, hoping to be accepted, confused by complicated lingo

## Thinking

How can I get those new shoes? Will my bots be able to get this drop? Where can I get these shoes? Those sneakers are so sick!!! When is the next drop? Are those real or fake? How much money can I make off these?

## Doing

Getting bots, clout chasing, joining Discord servers, sharing opinions, reselling + buying sneakers, asking questions online, avoiding creasing sneakers at all costs, cleaning shoes

## Saying

Fire, I need, got 'em!, didn't got 'em, nice colorway, trash, drops, scalped



# Retired Lurkers

*Sneaker lovers who can't keep up with today's fast-paced sneaker culture*

## Hearing

discord notification sound, typing on phone, typing on keyboard, store entry bell

## Seeing

worn out sneakers, vintage sneaker drops, pictures of disrespecting the purpose of a sneaker

## Feeling

Annoyance with the newbies lack of knowledge, longing for the old in-person drop experience, appreciative of sneaker history, overwhelmed with modern sneaker culture

## Thinking

Why don't they appreciate the culture? How can they call themselves a sneakerhead? Am I still a sneakerhead? Do I still want to be a part of this community?

## Saying

"Those are my grails", cringe, LC, QC, GR, RL, bricks, fufu, "I would love to wear those"

## Doing

keeping to themselves online, viewing old drops, appreciating the sneakers of someone walking by, brushing up on sneaker history

Team: Sneakerheadz

Researcher: Madison Phelan, Writer: Megan Fee, Designer: Zane Giordano

Audience Development and Engagement

## **Generations of Sneaker Obsession: The Sneakerhead Community**

### *Audience Intention*

Sneakerheads, individuals who collect, trade and/or admire sneakers, have deep knowledge, respect and nostalgia for sneaker history<sup>1</sup>. Sneakerhead culture emerged during the late 1970's and early 1980's at the start of the hip-hop era, where notable sneakers were introduced to streetwear<sup>1</sup>. Whether a sneaker obsession stems from a personal connection to Michael Jordan or a brand like Adidas, at the core of the sneakerhead community lies a deep love for the chase of rare, limited edition sneakers<sup>1</sup>. Sneakerheads have a strong desire to use these purchases as a tool for personal expression<sup>2</sup>, whether that be to appreciate wearable art<sup>3</sup> or to use sneakers for clout as status symbols<sup>4</sup>. Sneakers have moved from practical sports equipment to a “key component of consumers’ identities” over the last century, becoming key players in both everyday clothing and high fashion<sup>5</sup>. The archived and elicited data, field notes and insights gathered from six in-depth interviews reveal two clear personas within the sneakerhead community as well as how sneakerheads gain satisfaction from buying, selling and collecting sneakers.

The wants and needs vary across the diverse members of this community, ranging from buying sneakers to wear<sup>6</sup>, collecting sneakers for clout<sup>7</sup>, or reselling limited edition drops at a profit<sup>8</sup>. Sneakers do satisfy the functional need of protecting one's feet, but the real need all sneakerheads aim to satisfy is the *emotional* need for self-expression, which falls in the upper half of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Sneakerheads *want* many different things in the process of

satisfying this need, whether it be securing the latest shoe drop or getting their favorite damaged shoe repaired, but these are trivial aspects of a sneakerhead's day-to-day life. In their purchasing behaviors, sneakerheads can range from having experiential needs to possessive needs, some wanting to keep up with the trends of new sneaker releases and others being more concerned with adding sneakers to their collection<sup>9</sup>.

To satisfy these wants and needs, sneakerheads are motivated to reach the satisfying thrill of purchasing shoes online. They chase the excitement of gaining access to a shoe that few others have<sup>1</sup>, and they are very eager to flex this achievement<sup>10</sup>. The variety of motivations sneakerheads experience including connecting with other like-minded individuals over a mutual appreciation for sneakers<sup>11</sup>, mastering all of the information and facts regarding sneakers, and collecting many types of shoes<sup>12</sup>. In fact, it is common for participants to talk about fellow sneakerheads as if they were family<sup>1</sup>. Sneakerheads are extrinsically motivated to purchase shoes in order to fulfill their deep intrinsic motivation to fit in and keep up with others in the community. Money is often not a limiting factor for sneakerheads – their desire to get sneakers is “bound up with narratives of hopefulness and the facilitation of beneficial social relations”<sup>5</sup>.

The strongest negative emotion felt in this community is annoyance, and the strongest positive feeling is satisfaction. Annoyance stems from instances like the inability to get a sneaker because a bot has dominated a limited edition drop<sup>13</sup>, the creasing of a sneakerhead's most prized shoe, or the frustration veteran sneakerheads have with the hype-beast culture developing around sneakers<sup>14</sup>. On the other hand, satisfaction is brought to sneakerheads when they are able to snag a limited-edition shoe online<sup>15</sup>, when they can resell their shoes at a huge profit<sup>8</sup>, when they add a new shoe to their shrine<sup>10</sup>, or when they are able to complete an outfit with the perfect new pair of kicks<sup>2</sup>. Between these emotional extremes, feelings of jealousy, cringe<sup>14</sup> and frustration are

commonly felt within this community, especially when purchasing sneakers or connecting with the community digitally.

With all of this being said, the online sneakerhead community can be divided into two personas: the “hype beasts” and the “retired lurkers.” Hype beasts are the youngest and newest generation of sneakerheads composed of eager individuals who live and breathe sneakers. They commonly use emojis like fire, ice, and gasoline, are highly active in online sneaker chats and social media channels, and are obsessed with the latest and greatest shoe<sup>17</sup>. Hype beasts are constantly thinking of how they will secure the next drop and are usually dealing with a deep internal desire to keep up and fit in with the far more knowledgeable veteran sneakerheads<sup>18</sup>. They share their opinions with others, flex their purchases on social media<sup>19</sup>, and are constantly concerned with maintaining the pristine state of their sneakers.

On the other hand, the retired lurkers are older, more experienced and more sophisticated lovers of sneakers who have a true appreciation for the shoes. These individuals understand the history of sneakers, why shoes are so expensive and are made with limited supply, and why certain shoes carry great significance<sup>16</sup>. They view wearing their shoes as a way of appreciating them and cannot possibly understand why someone would leave them in a box on the shelf<sup>6</sup>. They long for the days of the past where a clean pair of sneakers was considered a “shameful indication that you were a casual or ‘soft’ player”<sup>5</sup>. The retired lurkers also feel nostalgic about the old-school sneaker drops that occurred by waiting in line at brick-and-mortar stores. Now, these lurkers pay attention to online drops, but don’t have the time and energy to keep up with the clout-chasing hype beasts<sup>17</sup>. The lurkers consider these newer, younger hype beasts to be annoying, and feel that they do not appreciate or understand the history of the sneakerhead community<sup>14</sup>. In fact, many retired lurkers are so fed up with the hype beasts tainting the image

of the sneaker community that they cringe at the term sneakerhead, and often do not even self-identify as sneakerheads<sup>16</sup>.

### *Audience Expectation*

The benefits sneakerheads value most within their community interaction is the opportunity to connect with others<sup>11</sup>, learn about different shoes and make money from reselling. Some of the issues these same individuals face include the selling of counterfeit sneakers<sup>20</sup>, bots unfairly buying out limited edition drops<sup>21</sup>, having limited access to sneaker drops in other countries<sup>22</sup>, and the concept of “hive mind,” where individuals exhibit extreme groupthink, suddenly becoming obsessed with one shoe<sup>21</sup>. Depending on the individual, some sneakerheads perceive quality and materials to be very important<sup>6</sup> while others don’t even care about how well a \$200 sneaker fits as long as it looks cool<sup>23</sup>.

The novel insights surrounding the online experience of buying sneakers is an important element in understanding the community. It was found that the Nike SNKRS app, Footlocker, StockX and GOAT were among the most popular platforms used to purchase sneakers online. Additionally, Instagram<sup>24</sup>, YouTube<sup>17</sup>, TikTok<sup>19</sup>, Facebook, Reddit and Discord are several of the most popular social platforms used to share and discuss sneaker-related content. Smart phones and computers are the most widely used technology for sneaker researching and online purchasing, although resourceful sneakerheads will utilize iPads, multiple desktop computers, etc. in addition to their phones to increase their chances of getting a sneaker drop<sup>25</sup>. With that being said, online community interaction between sneakerheads differs by individual, and it was found that most retired lurkers stay to themselves on social sneaker platforms. The lurkers may choose to watch a YouTube review before purchasing a new shoe or occasionally seek out

information about an upcoming drop in their high-level sneakerhead Discord chats, but they have nowhere near the amount of online interaction as hype beasts, who are constantly scanning all social media platforms for the latest information on the next big shoe.

Another novel insight gathered through research that informs new approaches to engaging the sneakerhead audience is the discussion surrounding diverse instances of sneaker brand loyalty. It was found that most sneakerheads are loyal fans of Nike, and that a majority of their sneaker collection consists of swoosh-branded shoes<sup>12</sup>. While some sneakerheads are exclusive collectors of Nike sneakers, most will extend their brand loyalty to a lesser degree to brands like Adidas, Yeezy, Asics, New Balance, Puma and Converse<sup>12</sup>. Additional important insights gathered include the fact that the modes of discovery and entertainment are deeply intertwined within this group, that many sneakerheads are willing to pay big money for fake sneakers if they can't get them on the original site<sup>26</sup>, and that sneakerheads will often invest in a shoe that is blowing up on social media, even if they think the shoes are ugly<sup>21</sup>.

Transitioning to the sandbox demo, the Sneakerheadz team chose to analyze Replika, an artificially intelligent chatbot that users can converse with. Replika provides the opportunity to discover, play and connect, allowing the user to learn about both the chatbot and themselves through free-form or guided conversation. The sneakerhead community is all too familiar with their own type of bots, which are computer systems that dominate the buying process of limited online sneaker drops. These bots buy up a large portion of shoes the moment they are dropped online to resell at large profits and are understandably despised by purchasers within the sneakerhead community<sup>27</sup>.

The opportunity Replika offers to improve communication skills would prove to be quite valuable to the sneakerhead community. It is clear that there is a widening divide between the



hype beast and retired lurker personas, and utilizing a tool like this with guided, educational conversation about sneakers could be used to simultaneously educate hype beasts about sneaker history, help retired lurkers become more tolerable of hype beasts, and bridge the gap between both personas. This type of chatbot may also repair the relationship sneakerheads have with intelligent bots in general. While chatbots and sneakers bots are vastly different, the angst and distaste sneakerheads have towards bots<sup>13</sup> could be lessened if they have a positive sneaker-related experience with Replika, providing an opportunity for further technological advancements within the community.

All in all, from the hype beasts to retired lurkers, across every sneaker Discord channel and SNKRS drop, through every try-on, crease and resale, all sneakerheads share a deep love for buying limited edition sneakers and a desire to express themselves through shoes<sup>28</sup>. This complex community will require an equally dynamic, engaging immersive experience to address their diverse wants and needs.

## Citations

1. Matthews, Delisia, et al. "I Wear, Therefore I Am: Investigating Sneakerhead Culture, Social Identity, and Brand Preference among Men." *Fashion and Textiles*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2021, doi:10.1186/s40691-020-00228-3.
2. "I wear [the sneakers]. I definitely understand why some people don't, because they like to resell them, but I am into shoes for the personal expression, and only really buy shoes to wear them in outfits." - Nolan Weinschenk, sneaker "fan"
3. "It's a cool community -- sneakers are like an art form. It's frustrating not getting a pair of sneakers and not getting the resale before it spikes up in price, and also getting an email that the order is cancelled." - Rory Donald, sneakerhead and college student
4. "There are a lot of people that are just into shoes for the clout and hype. They don't even care about the shoes as pieces of art, but as status symbols." - Nolan Weinschenk, sneaker "fan"
5. Denny, Iain. "The Sneaker - Marketplace Icon." *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 17 Mar. 2020.
6. "Quality and performance matter a lot to me. I care about the materials, how it feels on my foot... I hate when people don't wear their shoes and just have them on display." - Ryan Chiang, sneakerhead and former Champs employee
7. "[Performance] doesn't matter. You don't buy them to wear them, you just get them to put on your shelf and look at." - Chandler Santos, sneaker "lurker"
8. "If I don't wear them, I'll resell them. I realized the shoes were getting a lot of value." - Ryan Chiang, sneakerhead and former Champs employee

9. Adkinson-Jobe, Naseem A., and Stephanie Lawson. "Collector's Relationship to Access-Based Consumption: A Sneakerhead's Perspective ." *The Winthrop McNair Research Bulletin*, vol. 3, 2017.
10. "I wouldn't consider selling [the sneakers]... I like having them in a shrine. It's all about the flex." - Ashlyn Knox, sneakerhead "rookie" and fitness trainer
11. "I have had a few moments where someone has stopped me on the street to ask about my Off-White dunks. I think that it's super fun to connect with people who also get why the shoes are cool." - Nolan Weinschenk, sneaker "fan"
12. "I am 100% brand loyal. I pretty much only wear Nike. I own two or three pairs of New Balance, used to kinda collect Yeezy's, only have three Adidas, one or two Asics." - Ryan Chiang, sneakerhead and former Champs employee
13. "It feels like bots get all of the retail sales and it makes participation in drops a lot less fun." - Nolan Weinschenk, sneaker "fan"
14. "This whole community is cringe. It's just about finding that community within the community. If you know your stuff, we don't really care. Newcomers and know-it-alls ruin it." - Chandler Santos, sneaker "lurker"
15. "Buying shoes is like a thrill. I might not even like the shoes, it's more about the thrill of the process. I want a crazy shoe that screams 'I'm nuts and I'm rich'." - Ashlyn Knox, sneakerhead "rookie" and fitness trainer
16. "I actually hate the term sneakerhead. Most people think sneakerheads are 'hype beast,' trend following. A lot of people don't know the history of sneakers, don't understand the significance, don't understand why they are so expensive, and don't get why they were created." - Ryan Chiang, sneakerhead and former Champs employee

17. "I joined because I saw a lot of influencers I follow on Instagram post pictures in some very hyped sneakers. One model I follow posted a picture wearing the Chunky Monkey shoes and I really wanted them, so I started to research how to buy them, I have watched YouTube videos about specific shoes."- Kalina Mishev, sneakerhead and UT student
18. "I have friends that are into shoes and we often talk about newly announced shoes, and argue with each other if they are cool or not." - Kalina Mishev, sneakerhead and UT student
19. "When shoes drop, I'll tell my roommate, and flex on social if I got 'em. I'm definitely also on the sneakerhead side of Tik Tok."- Ashlyn Knox, sneakerhead "rookie" and fitness trainer
20. "Selling counterfeits as real is terrible and people shouldn't do it, it's extremely scummy." - Rory Donald, sneakerhead
21. "Everyone will say the biggest problem with drops is bots. Another problem is hive mind. If someone posts a pair and gets a ton of likes, everyone will be like, 'this is the next shoe,' even if they are ugly." - Ryan Chiang, sneakerhead and former Champs employee
22. "It's super annoying that drops are different in every country. I'll log onto SNKRS Asia and see the coolest drops ever, but then go to the US drops and they have ugly shoes. How is the US ever supposed to keep up with the other fashion capitals of the world if we don't do this?" - Ashlyn Knox, sneakerhead "rookie" and fitness trainer
23. "I don't even care how my feet feel when I buy a \$200 shoe. Sometimes I'll order a kids 7.5, which is a women's 8.5, even though I'm a size 9. Women's size 9 is the most common shoe size in America! I'll squeeze into the 8.5 even though it's too small." - Ashlyn Knox, sneakerhead "rookie" and fitness trainer

24. “[I connect with the sneakerhead community] mostly through Instagram pages. I follow people that share info about upcoming drops. Other people I follow post cool outfits, which usually have hype shoes as part of the outfit.” - Nolan Weinschenk, sneaker “fan”
25. “I have a very specific routine for SNKRS drops. I set up notifications on the SNKRS app before, set up my payment in advance so I’m ready, set up my phone at 9 a.m., make sure my Wifi is really good.. and set up two different devices with two different accounts on my phone and iPad. I buy on the SNKRS app mostly, or just online.” - Ashlyn Knox, sneakerhead “rookie” and fitness trainer
26. “People are willing to spend \$100 on fake sneakers if they can’t get them through Nike. People only really want to flex – they don’t care if the shoes are real. Only real sneakerheads will clown you for wearing fake shoes.” - Ashlyn Knox, sneakerhead “rookie” and fitness trainer
27. “I don’t try to get drops. The few times I did I just ended up very disappointed because I couldn’t get the shoes I wanted. The difficulty of drops really turned me off from that side of the shoe buying experience.” - Kalina Mishev, sneakerhead and UT student
28. “[Sneakers] are a statement. They really show more about you than any other piece of clothes.” - Chandler Santos, sneaker “lurker”

## Online Platform Interaction Images

### YouTube



#OnTheStreet #FungBros  
**DO SNEAKERHEADS KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT SNEAKERS? | Fung Bros**  
380,833 views • Apr 1, 2019 8.3K 179 [SHARE](#) [SAVE](#) ...



**silverword** 1 year ago

"What the shoe means"

Its a product to make massive profit for companies. Needs no further explanation. Thats how pretentious these hypebeasts are. They want people to think a company like nike exists for the history or culture. If you know anything about big businesses, you know its about the money. Dont get me wrong I absolutely love sneakers, but stop pretending like its some timeless relic that you have to respect. Its mass produced footwear for crying out loud

Show less

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**THE CASUAL** ✓ 1 year ago


You don't have to know the answers to be a sneakerhead. However if you DO know the answers you're something like a sneakerhead historian. Both are fine. Leave it up to the people who study the stuff to shed more light on the history and background.


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**Sneakerheads Try To Spot The Fake Jordans**  
1,880,201 views • Apr 2, 2018 23K 1.7K [SHARE](#) [SAVE](#) ...

 **Shoubie** 2 years ago  
Asking for a friend..... Where did you get these good looking fakes from??  
605 REPLY  
[View 27 replies](#)


 **Mark** 2 years ago  
Moral of the story: Save your money and buy fake Jordan's instead, because even expert sneakerheads can't tell the difference with a close-up view  
6 REPLY

 **Pink Guy** 5 days ago  
The moment I heard GOAT I knew this was just one big paid promo. GOAT is trash and has sold tons of 1:1 reps lmao  
1 REPLY

 **Eastern Prod** 2 years ago  
I just want comfy shoes that don't hurt my feet and don't take long to put on  
185 REPLY  
[View 15 replies](#)

 **Woody World** 2 years ago  
If sneakerheads can't tell the difference, I'm going to start buying knockoffs.  
3.3K REPLY  
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## [Reddit](#)


 **The sneaker and shoe subreddit** [Join](#)  
r/sneakerhead

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Posted by u/Candie12 12 days ago

9  
↓  
↑

Is it worth it to try and get these shoes ?



Air Jordan 1 "Hyper Royal"  
READ MORE: [Jordan 1 Hyper Royal](#)  
Release Date: April 17th, 2021  
\$170



SQUARTS 17 days ago

If you were a sneakerhead you'd understand that sneakerheads don't like resellers.

4 likes Reply Share Report Save



Inevitable-Health618 16 days ago

Lmao. If you can't beat them, join them

1 like Reply Share Report Save



CrazyAdministration8 9 days ago

I hope that you blow all your money on the wrong "investment into this business" and that any sneakers you manage to cop lose you money.

But seriously tho if you can't make a living working part time (try full time maybe 🤖)... It's only a 2 step process if you're considering becoming a reseller:

1. get a loaded gun
2. put it in your mouth and pull the trigger

You're asking a community "how can I put myself between you and the things you enjoy so that I can extort you?"

F\*\*K I HATE RESELLERS

1 like Reply Share Report Save

## Instagram

Verizon 8:03 AM 5% 🔋

< Comments >

 jstnfmgr these worth it? 

7h 9 likes Reply

— Hide replies

 michael.doyle47 @jstnfmgr 20k pairs lmao don't go for them tho 

7h 2 likes Reply

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6h Reply

 daily\_release @jstnfmgr sure 

6h Reply

 carlkhoury\_ Most profitable size? 

7h 4 likes Reply

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 johnnyhoward\_ @carlkhoury\_ I'd say probably 7-9 

7h 1 like Reply

👏 🧡 ❤️ 😊 😂 😭 🤪 🎉

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Verizon 9:41 PM 40%

Cancel Request To Join

decisions.

**Membership Questions** - 2

1 In order to be part of this group, you must:  
-have a BIN price (set price)  
-have ALL PHOTOS TAGGED of items you want to sell or trade

(not having any will result in a mute and post/comment removed)

Would you agree to these conditions?

Yes

3/250

2 Please type out 'Nike':

Nike

4/250

**Group Rules from the Admins** - 5

Group members agree to follow these rules:

Send to Admins

[Link to Interview Code.](#)

[Link to Coded Interview Data.](#)