

# THE REPRESENTATION OF SNEAKERHEAD CULTURE IN SNEAKER FREAKER MAGAZINE

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## ABSTRACT

*This study aims to analyze the representation of sneakerhead culture in Sneaker Freaker Magazine using the circuit of culture theory. The descriptive-analytical methodology is applied to analyze the elements of sneakerhead culture based on characteristics, behaviors, and sneaker as a commodity manifested in sneakerhead culture. In order to complete this study, the researcher adds sneakerhead culture figures as the representation in the analysis. This study shows that the representation of sneakerhead culture in Sneaker Freaker Magazine can be seen by the reflected meaning and constructed meaning through object representation as a unique culture. The representation reflects communities' lifestyle, characteristics, commitment, and behaviors in sneakerhead culture to deliver the constructed meaning and identity.*

*Keywords: sneakerhead culture, Circuit of Culture, lifestyle, characteristics, behaviors, representation, identity*

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## 1. Introduction

The fashion culture has been evolving and developing significantly through the years with good sustainability in a particular situation (Cappetta et al., 2006), exceptionally developing sneakers as fashion's subcultures. The evolution of the fashion industry marks by the emergence of sneaker culture, which influences the rise of sneakerhead culture. Sneakers have been held for a long time to indicate a person's taste and identity in national, regional, professional scope and classify class status and gender. For centuries, sneakers have been a strong indicator given hints about a person's character, social and cultural place, even sexuality (Riello & McNeil, 2006, 3).

Matthews et al. (2020) stated that sneakerhead culture has roots that originated from sneaker culture. The origins of sneakerhead culture were introduced in the United States, which derived from its admiration of basketball sneakers through the figure of Michael Jordan, and Hip-Hop culture introduced by the Run-D.M.C group. Sneakerhead culture is considered unique as the communities indicate a clear sense of group identity related to the motivations, behaviors, and brand identity of sneaker within the Sneakerhead community and their affection for sneakers to be an essential part of their identities (Matthews et al., 2020). Eventually, the term "sneakerhead" refers to African-American men who grew up desiring sneakers worn by hip-hop stars and basketball legends in the 1970s and 1980s (Oleniacz, 2021). Furthermore, after Nike introduced the Air Jordan line and Adidas signed an endorsement deal with Run-D.M.C. as the first pioneer in its kind in the mid-1980s, the art of collecting sneakers became its subculture quickly (Jackman, 2019).

The massive release of sneakers in 1985 was widely regarded as the catalyst for modern sneakerhead culture. The term "modern sneakerhead culture" refers to communities of sneaker collectors and admirers who seek out new sneaker releases with the same passion as people who collect classic cars or Swiss watches (Alleyne, 2015). Meanwhile, sneakerhead is a promising new group of sneakers collectors who are portrayed as young, eager, and, for the most part, uninitiated as art consumers (Binkley, 2020). Whether it is clothing labels or sneaker brands, streetwear enthusiasts who consider themselves sneakerheads are more than eager to be among the first to get their hands on new kicks or even a new drop-in to their collections (Teh, 2019).

Sneakers and sneakerhead culture have been remarkable since strong relationships between sneaker brands as producers and sneakerheads as consumers. For example, the Air Jordan and Dior sneaker was released in June 2020 in a limited quantity of approximately 8500 pairs worldwide. This sneaker set the record for the highest retail price for a single pair of sneakers in history, at around \$2200/pair. Despite the expensive price tag, this sneaker is still highly anticipated and waited for by sneakerheads, as it is said to have sold out in a matter of minutes through the selling on their official website (Ho, 2020). Since the early 1990s, the Air Jordan brand has built massive value and brand equity, and they have been significant in impacting and ruling out the sneakerhead culture. Through this phenomenon, Andrews (2001) stated that Michael Jordan and Nike had played important roles in the evolution of this sneakerhead culture movement. It demonstrates the importance of Air Jordan's representation in triggering the existence of sneakerhead culture.

Meanwhile, the representation of sneakerhead culture in Indonesia exists as a cultural phenomenon that coincides with the rise of the Compass sneaker brand. The cultural phenomenon demonstrates the desired behavior of the sneakerhead culture as communities where hundreds of people are seen lining up waiting for the release of limited sneakers by Compass even one day before the release date was held in the venue (Arbi, 2019). Through this cultural phenomenon, the Compass sneaker brand has constructed and represented the identity of sneakerhead culture. Being a community in sneakerhead culture often means putting in extra effort to acquire highly anticipated sneakers, such as waiting in a long queue, lines for hours or even days to have the chance of purchasing valuable or rare sneakers (Boyd, 2019).

Studies of sneakerhead culture, fashion sneaker, and the application of Circuit of Culture theory, indicate that the study of representation is an interesting topic to discuss and investigate. This research will seek and analyze the representation of sneakerhead culture in Sneaker Freaker Magazine articles using the circuit of culture theory to demonstrate how sneakerhead culture is represented as a community.

The researcher has found that the representation of sneakerhead culture from the chosen corpus has not been explored. Moreover, sneakerhead culture, accompanied by sneakers as its cultural commodities, continuously evolves throughout the years. Thus, the representation of sneakerhead culture creates more than a sense of belonging to the sneakers. Sneakerhead culture has the role in buying, collecting, and selling those pairs of sneakers, but sneakerhead culture also shows an intimacy with sneakers. In addition, this research is expected to provide a new point of view that investigates the growth and development of sneakerhead culture. For sneakerheads, consuming sneakers as their commodity may no longer be only used to protect their feet while walking or running. Indeed, it has become one of the most valuable cultural artifacts which classified the sneakerhead community into certain status symbols representing sneakerhead culture.

## 2. Analytical Framework

This research deploys a qualitative method in which the data that emerged from this study is in descriptive form (Creswell, 2014). This qualitative study using a descriptive design analytical methodology to analyze the data such as pictures, symbols, and narration from the articles in Sneaker Freaker Magazine. Furthermore, this research will be done by searching, collecting, classifying, analyzing, interpreting, and drawing the conclusion of the data to show the representation of sneakerhead culture in Sneaker Freaker Magazine. Meanwhile, this research is conducted using the Circuit of Culture theory and will show the representation of sneakerhead culture constructed and represented in Sneaker Freaker Magazine's articles.

Stuart Hall defines the sequence of representation as one of the most critical aspects of producing culture and obtaining the key to achieving all representation success in a process known as the circuit of culture (Hall, 1997). Representation is represented to get recognition by a particular culture. However, it might refer to a more complex element in using signs and symbols to find the meaning of an object, a language, gesture, and image around us. Moreover, the given meaning of representation on such practices has conventional rules for expressing and interpreting meaning (Sturken & Cartwright, 2018).

In the term of the circuit of culture, Hall (1997) argues that representation determines how producers encode meaning and the knowledge in a particular discourse on how they produce connection with a specific target audience. Thus, in terms of how representation through language works, there are three approaches classified by Stuart Hall. Those are mimetic, intentional, and constructionist. Mimetic refers to something that already exists in the world and the meaning reflected through language, and intentional describes the intended meaning expressed through language, and constructionist where the whole meaning is already constructed and created in such language (Hall, 1997b).

Meanwhile, there are two categories of system representation: mental representation as a concept in representing an object, people, or which is carried out in our mindset. This concept derives from creating complex ideas to create meaning (Hall, 1997). Furthermore, the second system is through language. The concept of languages helps us create and construct a set of signs to represent those concepts and meanings (Hall, 1997). In addition, the term of signs is an understanding of conceptual relation represented through images, words, and sounds that have a particular meaning. Signs are formed into languages that become an indicator to ease us to interpret our thoughts and communicate them to others (Hall, 1997).

The data in this study will be visual text and verbal or written text. The visual will be consist of pictures and symbols. At the same time, the verbal or the written text will be consist of sentences, clauses, phrases, and words in the six articles of Sneaker Freaker Magazine, which indicates the representation of sneakerhead culture.

The selected articles are 7 Rituals Sneakerheads Performs Before Wearing a New of Shoes published on June 3rd, 2021, No Scrubs: 10 Sneakerheads Worth Knowing published on March 8th, 2018, Event Recap: Sneakerheads 'Shoe Some Love' to Those in Need in Germany published on August 17th, 2018, How Designer Collab is Introducing Sneakerheads to Fashion published on March 31st, 2019, Five of soccer's biggest sneakerheads published on June 16th, 2018, and 30 for 30: Drake The Sneakerhead published on October 25th, 2016.

## 3. Analysis & Discussion

After analyzing both visual and written text from the chosen six articles of Sneaker Freaker Magazine, the researcher has found that the representation of sneakerhead culture has a desirable connection to sneaker culture. In other words, the emergence of sneaker culture marks the beginning of bridging and initiating the arising of sneakerhead culture. Through this analysis, the representation of sneakerhead culture drove to create its cultural identity as a community interested in sneakers and considered them valuable as the primary commodity they occupy. However, the representation of sneakerhead culture also drove another identity as a cultural community with desire and admiration for sneakers. It is depicted through their habits, motives, commitments, and adaptive culture, making sneakerhead culture not simply about a community that loves sneakers.

Furthermore, through the analysis, the researcher has found the representation of sneakerhead culture through the indicators such as characteristics, fashion instruments, for example, sneakers, and influential figures as signs in representing sneakerhead culture. In article 1, the representation of sneakerhead culture shows a cultural community called sneakerheads with their unique characteristics as they perform a ritual before wearing their new sneakers to distinguish them. This representation drives sneakerheads' identity through their habit, distinguishing themselves from outsiders not considered part of sneakerhead culture. Meanwhile, in article 2, the representation of sneakerhead defines a community regardless of gender through the figure of women sneakerheads. People can deliver moral values about gender equality, such as women empowerment, inventing new technology through sneakers, creativity, and expressing feelings within the community of sneakerhead culture. Women as the enlightenment subjects reflect as sneakerhead culture's identity.

In article 3, the representation of sneakerhead shows sneakerheads as a global community. The existence of sneakerheads proves sneakerhead culture exists as a community that continues to grow and can be easily found worldwide accompanied by the development of sneakers culture. Furthermore, sneakerhead culture's communities show their commitment and awareness to help others in need by initiating movement and social charities. This representation drives sneakerhead culture's identity as a solid community and is fully determined to support humanity's campaign in helping homeless people through sneakers.

Nevertheless, in article 4, the representation of sneakerhead culture also drives sneakerhead culture's identity as a cultural community that has significant impacts to inspire fashion designers and other brands, including non-sneaker brands, to produce cultural commodities of sneakers for sneakerhead culture. Furthermore, the representation of sneakerhead culture is shown through the process of production and consumption. The production process in the collaboration of Raf Simons and Adidas was inspired by sneakerhead culture. This collaboration represents sneakerhead culture's identity as cultural communities fixated on their interest in consuming sneakers collaborations, and sneakerhead culture as prosumers represented through sneakerheads' entrepreneurship that brings this community into broader fashion culture through sneakers.

Meanwhile, in articles 5 and 6, the representation of sneakerhead culture is shown by the existence of enlightenment subjects through the figures of Neymar da Silva Santos Junior and Drake. Both figures come from the outside world of sneakerhead culture to represent sneakerhead culture. Neymar derives from football, and Drake derives from hip-hop culture. However, their impact in producing cultural commodities through sneakers drives the consumption process of sneakerhead culture. The representation of their admiration for sneakers conventionally constructs their presence as signs to

represent the identity of sneakerhead culture. The existence of enlightenment subjects brought in these articles is unique because figures from different fields can represent sneakerhead culture.

#### 4. Conclusion

As the conclusion from visuals and texts analysis of this research, the researcher found that the representation of sneakerhead culture in Sneaker Freaker Magazine can be seen through objects, influential figures, adaptive cultural things, and its history. The presence of sneaker culture in the fashion sphere has a massive impact on building one of its subcultures called sneakerhead culture. It is because the sneaker culture has a diverse social base that stands in opposition to the mainstream and cultivates a culture where people can celebrate their uniqueness and creativity ("Sneakers and their Subculture - The Three Stage History | Sneakerjagers", 2021). Originally, sneakerhead culture is a cultural community that intends to create behaviors for collecting and buying sneakers. However, the publication articles from Sneaker Freaker Magazine show the difference of sneakerhead culture's representation that has developed a concept of the sneakerhead community is not merely about the shoes, but also lifestyle and commitment.

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