Universidade do Minho
Escola de Economia e Gestão

Felipe Borges de Andrade

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Declaração de Integridade

Declaro ter atuado com integridade na elaboração do presente trabalho académico e confirmo que não recorri à prática de plágio nem a qualquer forma de utilização indevida ou falsificação de informações ou resultados em nenhuma das etapas conducente à sua elaboração.

Mais declaro que conheço e que respeitei o Código de Conduta Ética da Universidade do Minho.

Statement of Integrity

I hereby declare having conducted this academic work with integrity. I confirm that I have not used plagiarism or any form of undue use of information or falsification of results along the process leading to its elaboration.

I further declare that I have fully acknowledged the Code of Ethical Conduct of the University of Minho.

B.T. as a strategic pillar for business success in the Sports Shoes market.

Abstract

Major shoe companies have been using brand tribalism as a business pillar more often, and more effectively. This study is dedicated to observe the phenomenon of brand tribalism and how they help these companies make decisions (and sustain them long-term).

Society, in the current globalized context, is increasingly inserted in its virtual social circles and allows for more possibilities of companies' access to consumer-created content. Larger access also makes the collection of information severely easier.

This paper brought a psychological and managerial exploration of this bilateral relationship "consumer-company" in the sphere of consumer behavior of brands, brand tribes and communities (as strategic pillars). A theoretical model was created with different variables as to allow the construction of an analysis. The variables are: 'social', 'defense of tribe', sense of community', 'lineage', 'purchase. Intention', and 'willingness to pay'. Quantitative data of 204 respondents and a descriptive methodology of research were the methods used to validate the theoretical model and the correlation between variables.

The results enabled a view onto how brand tribalism has been used for business success within the sports shoes market. The correlations are of moderate to strong intensity between Brand Tribalism and the consumer's intention and willingness to purchase. These results lead to the belief that customers that engage in brand communities have a stronger desire purchase and are willing to pay more for shoes as brands increase the value of shoes whether physically or with partnership storytelling.

The study brings evidence that brands that invest more in adding value to products with use of brand tribalism and brand community elements will have returns that tend to be increasingly positive. Profitability and sales will increase as brands foster their connection with consumers and the connection that consumers have with each other.

This study can be explored further but it already shows great contribution to empirical knowledge that is already discussed among respected personalities that have worked in this industry and its related entertainment industry for many years thus far.

Key-words: Brand tribalism, athletic shoes, worldwide, strategy, pillar

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List of Abbreviations, and Acronyms

Social - S
Defense of tribe - DOT
Sense of Community - SOC
Lineage - LIN
Brand Tribalism – BT
Brand Community - BC
Purchase Intention - PI
Willingness to Pay – WTP
Not Significant – NS

1. Introduction

We are creatures that grow influenced by many external influences in our families, friends, and surrounding environment. These influences tend to become more personal as time passes and we develop our personalities. Some of us are fortunate enough to have our influences and needs intersect in the middle of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, our social needs. Sometimes, when this happens, we can observe a phenomenon called Brand Tribalism (BT). Such phenomenon consists in consumers that feel a sense of belonging by adopting brands and being associated with a brand tribe (Mitchell & Imrie, 2011; Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009), where a "brand tribe" is defined as those people who are devoted to the same brand (Taute & Sierra, 2014).

This body of work has as objective to observe how brand tribes operate around Sports Brands and their footwear and understand their mutual relationship. For this study to show a full scope of what it is to be shown we shall look at a history of prior attempts by brands of creating brand tribe movement, current attempts, customer responses and byproducts of such relationship.

The overall theme of this body of work will also consist of a higher desire to understand the drivers of engagement created by brands and fostered by consumers. History has shown a mutual effort between brands and consumers that lasts to this day. Brands develop products, consumers react, brands increase the value of such products, consumers create a following for brands and specific products (hoping to acquire more), and so forth. The cycles increase in size and duration as time passes and more products with new or updated technology are introduced to the marketplace. Hence new niches are created and new brand tribes emerge constantly. This allows brands to monitor consumers and maneuver with more ease around their wants and needs (and of course focus on what is more profitable).

A great example is Nike Talk, a forum created and moderated by consumers that runs consistently based of consumer input. The forum was established in 1999 and is still heavily used at the moment. On the other side we have Complex, a magazine (digital since 2017), that was created by the brand Ecko Unltd's founder Marc "Ecko" Milecofsky. Complex is a pop culture magazine heavily invested in the sneaker culture with show hosts that go from Joe La Puma (SVP of content strategy and important sneaker culture influencer) to record artist Trinidad James (co-host of the Full Size Run show). Both forms of media have global reach with millions of viewers, subscribers, and followers and cohabit the space with respect despite of being in opposite sides of the spectrum (consumer generated and brand generated).

Thanks to the long duration of the athleisure apparel movement, the extensive growth of the sneaker market has longevity. That is the consensus of a number of sneaker industry veterans forecasting continued organic growth for this particular market and a further growth in the fashion-sneaker collaboration market as well. The global market for sports footwear generated 134,31 billion dollars in 2018 and was expected to generate

146,09 billion dollars in 2019. With growth as impressive as this one would imagine an oncoming plateau but, according to Euromonitor International, 2020 was expected to remain constant and generate 158,95 billion dollars within the market (Foreman, 2019).

The interest has only intensified in past years. Resale businesses have grown and some have even gone as far as incorporating others through purchase. Stadium Goods, a store founded in 2015 in New York, was acquired by Farfetch in attempt to secure more space in the resale market. StockX and GOAT, originally online companies in the US resale market have expanded to Europe and South America. As of 2022 StockX has an IPO planned for the year with the help of Morgan Stanley and Goldman Sachs, according to Bloomberg (Park, 2022). This is great evidence of their incredible growth since launch in 2016 and the 2018 mark of 1 billion dollars in gross merchandise value. According to Foreman (2019), Stadium Goods' co-founder and co-ceo John McPheters thinks the industry is at "the tip of the spear in terms of consumer interest" and that it is smart to think and bet on the fact that the resale market is going to grow on scale. According to Foreman (2019), McPheters also believes that the growing success of the resale market is partly due to "demand and desirability of shoes being underestimated by brands" which means the brands that produce the shoes could make higher quantities or sell at higher prices if they wanted to.

Collaborations, according to Foreman, were originally about the emotional contact between the collaborator and brands or their shoes but now it has come to who is being paid to wear a product. He cites the rise of influencers such as Kanye West, James Jebbia, Sean Wotherspoon, Yoon Ambush, Virgil Abloh and Pharrel Williams. Specialists in the market say that these musicians, rappers, and relevant designers have grown in relevance and cultural value far more than sportsman (whom used to dominate the collaboration market in the past). Foreman reports that Matt Powell (from NDP Sports) perceives as Adidas having a bigger growth in this niche when compared to Nike but that the most growth perceived has come from smaller brands such as Puma, Fila, Vans, and Reebok. Ultimately, Powell asserts that, in current times, consumers have been shaping the trends rather than the other way around as it was 10 years ago when brands decided what was relevant and consumers only consumed (Foreman, 2019).

One goal of this study is to analyze the overall brand tribe space as in where brands and consumers are positioned. This should allow a better perception of how consumers have been positioning themselves individually as well as collectively and what brands have been doing to engage them. Through these topics we converge into the following question: **'do Sports Brands increase consumers' Willingness to Pay from creating brand tribalism movements around their shoe products and by overseeing the consumers doing it themselves?'.**

This question lifts the need for observation of the following factors: 1 – how have Sports Brands created BT movements in recent years, 2 – have consumers fostered these movements created by these Sports Brands, 3 – how do consumers organize themselves around the footwear industry led by these Sports Brands, 4 – has it been a long term initiative by these Sports Brands and how well has it worked.

A survey will be applied to subjects in, and from, different countries to observe these factors and answer the proposed question. This will allow a broader market perception of how consumers react to this brand strategy.

This body of work consists in a few parts divided and settled into a sequence of better understanding. First - the present introductory part, brief explanations on the general idea and the current level of importance of this study. Second - the literature review that brings in the theory that enlightened the development of this study and specialists' opinions that this will attempt to add knowledge to – which includes scientific publications, scholarly magazines, books and area-specific magazines respected in the wider sports shoe industry media. Third - the context in which this study is included, such as: the brands in question, their most recognizable products, their most recognizable partner-influencers in current times, and its marketing endeavors. Fourth - the theoretical model used to map out all the variables involved and how they relate to each other. This will bring out methods of research, the questions that were asked to the general public via survey, objectives of study in development, all the hypothesis lifted into light, and the data collected. Fifth – the data analysis itself with an explanation and discussion of all the data obtained, correlations found between the work studied and the worked hereby performed and what all the information can possibly bring about in tangible knowledge. Sixth – this body of work's conclusion. This brings in the information obtained and suggestions for future endeavors attempting at replicating and fostering the research embodied in this study.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Psychology

Psychology in the field on consumer behavior analyzes individuals as well as the groups in which they belong and the rationalization of their purchasing habits, the usage they make of products and services, and how they satisfy their needs and desires (Solomon, 2012). Individuals, peers, and brands will influence each other's decisions and habits along their decision making and actions.

2.1.1. Culture and the Self

Different people in different cultures have different constructs of the "I", the "Other", and the interdependence of these (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). This means that many of the aspects that define an individual may be influenced, or even defined, by such constructs. This also applies to markets and consumers.

2.1.2. Consumer Behavior

The American Marketing Association defines the idea of consumer behavior as the dynamic interaction between the environment's events the behavioral and cognitive aspects of an individual (Kire & RajKumar, 2017). This way, the environment (culture), will resonate with the internal aspects of an individual and create a behavioral construct of such individual as a consumer. Such construct includes a sense of identity and belonging that has, as its final result, the perpetuation of cultural patterns through a "mirror" effect of values and behaviors because individuals inherit them and subsequently pass them forward (Kire & RajKumar, 2017).

2.1.3. Brand Attachment

Attachment is a propensity that individuals have of creating and fostering emotional bonds. That can be observed with other people, objects, entities, organizations, brands, governments, sports teams, and so on (Rhajbal et al, 2021). A strong attachment helps explain strong emotions through a certain relationship that may occur and during separation and unwanted loss. Attachment will also fall within the scope of system dyadic relationships in an individual's daily life, is emotionally charged, and a specifically targeted link between two parts. The concept of attachment also transits directly into the concept of possession and is explained by another party's ability to be an object of identity expression and valuable memory (Rhajbal et al, 2021).

Brand attachment is the type of relationship where an individual has a brand as the object with a capacity for reaction and part of an identity system, means of communication, and reference point in the individual's relation to oneself. Brands with emotional charge are the only ones capable of enabling and creating brand attachment with customers (Rhajbal et al, 2021).

The effect of “word-of-mouth” plays a major role in this culture where content is curated by the communities themselves and external influences are just as important (Ruane & Wallace, 2015). These factors shape how consumers form their tribes, show interest in shopping and connect to brands, which subsequently turns into a solid long-term perception of such brands (stronger than any other factor), according to Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009).

Özbölük and Dursun (2017), define co-creation as a “joint creation of value involving the participation of producers and consumers” and value co-creation refers to all the processes which consumers and producers collaborate and participate in creating value (Pongsakornrungsilp & Schroeder, 2011). They also explain that value is generated by the customers and the suppliers who co-create solutions. They suggest that customers co-construct value for themselves and “the customer is always a co-creator of value”. They further explore the value creation through a common set of value-creating practices within nine brand communities providing an extensive review of brand value creation processes. They present a framework for understanding value-creation practices that consist of social networking, impression management, community engagement and brand use practices in which consumers play different roles. These roles identified as evangelizing, customizing, welcoming, badging, competing, empathizing, governing, justifying, staking, milestoning, grooming and commoditizing (Rhajbal et al, 2021).

According to Özbölük and Dursun (2017), each member has his/her own position, rights, responsibilities, recognition and their roles within brand communities that are crucial for community function, preservation and evolution. They have identified 18 social and cultural roles, which include the members who enjoy learning and self-improvement (learner), help others experiencing new products (mentor, back-up and partner), perpetuate the community culture (storyteller and historian), act as a role model or icon for other members (hero, celebrity and decision-maker), welcome and take care of new members (greeter, provider and guide), enable new people and ideas to attract attention (catalysts), find new members and register interactions (talent scout and accountant).

Sierra and Taute (2019) point out that the final touch, not more nor less important, is the collection of data. Just as in any other form of strategy, data is increasingly important. The data collected from tribes, their members, and how they connect and behave with products and brands is extremely important to determine the relevance some tribes have as opposed to others. This is precisely why this study is being carried out. To test possibilities, find relevant information on these topics, and contribute with the ever-growing investigation of brand tribes and their developments.

2.1.4. Self-brand connection

Self-concept refers to the different forms an individual perceives oneself and the brand's concept is the image built by companies to convey messages to their customers (whether through image, texts, videos or other means of publicity) in an attempt to establish a connection (Thanh et al, 2020).

Self-brand connection is the incorporation an individual makes of a brand into their self-concept. Consumers that have a certain degree of self-brand connection and integrate brands into their personal concepts lead to each specific brand consumed being a corresponding concept of the self (Thanh et al, 2020). Brands that manage to connect to consumers as something with which that they can express their lifestyle and personality are the brands that achieve an important place in a self-brand connection. Brand credibility and image will be important in this relationship and will also influence brand loyalty and the connection develops (Thanh et al, 2020).

2.1.5. Brand loyalty

Brand loyalty is the strong commitment a consumer has with a brand. It is a deep commitment that leads to repeated use of such brand, repurchasing from it in the present and in the future given the customer's perception that the brand in question is the better alternative, and protection of the bond one has developed with such brand (Thanh et al, 2020). Here, customers within a tribe or community will often display positive behavior towards their preferred brand and carry it out with other methods such as recommendations and public support (Cheng et al, 2021).

2.1.6. Oppositional Loyalty

Brand loyalty is observed when customers and members of a community or tribe support their preferred brand through positive behavior. This may be carried out through word-of-mouth recommendations, repeat purchases and other behaviors (Cheng et al, 2021). Oppositional loyalty is observed when these same customers and members also display negative behavior towards competitor brands. This may be carried out through refusal to buy from competitors, negative word-of-mouth, personal attack to competitor brands, and personal attack to customers of these brands (Cheng et al, 2021).

Cheng explains that, even in online forums, loyal customers will criticize competitors of their favorite brands' products and will receive criticism from such competitors' customers in return. Each side has their reasons to criticize the other and such reasons may be different but they rarely come to an agreement and still maintain their position of refusal to buy from the other side. These disputes sometimes go as far as personal criticism, far beyond the realm of brands and products (Cheng et al, 2021).

2.2. Marketing

Marketing usually is equated to promotion and sales activities of goods and services but it is in fact far more. Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have values for customers, clients, partners, and society at large (Palmer, 2012).

Marketing as an activity, even more so than a concept, has evolved tremendously with the advent of the internet and prompt connections that were enabled by it. We are constantly experiencing new forms and approaches to marketing as well as the responses to it and the pace in which this happens is only accelerating (Cheng et al, 2021).

2.2.1. Brand Communities & Brand Tribes

Marketing success has its origin in strong brand relationships. Moreover, the relationships between consumers and their esteemed brands have been described as brand communities (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001) and brand tribes (Sierra & Taute, 2019), For example, the Apple brand represents a brand community and iPhone, iPad, and iWatch users are brand tribes within this community (Sierra & Taute, 2019). In this sense, each sports brand will usually categorize a community and their sub-brands will have brand communities around them. The Nike brand represents the brand community while the Nike Sub-brands such as Jordan Brand, Nike Running, Nike Football, and Nike Basketball are to be considered as brand tribes within the Nike brand community. The Adidas brand represents the brand community while the Adidas sub-brands such as

Adidas Originals, Adidas Stan Smith, Adidas IVY PARK, Adidas YEEZY, and Adidas Ultraboost are to be considered as brand tribes within the Adidas brand community.

The average consumer in the United States, according to Shobeiri, Mazaheri and Laroche (2018), is known as a public of high indulgence (enjoys life, fun, and shopping to their full extents). Data in previous research also shows that the nurturing of brand communities or tribes, and direct involvement them, with leads to beneficial outcomes for firms, including ideas for product innovation (one of Nike's main activities), brand advocacy, increased sales, new product adoption, word of mouth, brand loyalty, and consumer recruitment (Sierra & Taute, 2019).

Consumers have, more each day, the power to come together and create their own communities online, phenomenon studied by Widita (2018). This allows campaigns such as Nike's Air Max Day (AMD), created in 2014, to gain strength and number of participant consumers each year. The AMD is a strategy discovered and created by Nike to create an event attached to fixed celebratory dates inside the "sneakerhead" community. "Sneakerheads" are those that identify as aficionados for shoes (sneakers) and are known for having their own community and sub-communities and culture. This allowed Nike to enter such communities and gradually become active part of their very own culture (Jones, 2018). In the same sense, Adidas developed and used their famous campaign "Impossible is Nothing" in 2004. This Adidas campaign was based on the endorsements of public individuals of high-visibility such as Muhammad Ali, David Beckham, Lionel Messi, and Tracy McGrady, aimed at connecting consumers with these public figures' capacities to push beyond boundaries and excelling (Adidas Group, 2004).

Behavior in brand tribe circles includes inimitable rituals, brand appreciation, communal beliefs, and responsibility to the community and its members (Sierra & Taute, 2019). They offer an anthropological view of tribalism consisting of segmentary lineage (kinship that binds tribe members together), social structure (tribe members' perceived sense of unison), sense of community (tribe members' ability to harmonically coexist), and defense of the tribe (tribe members emotionally charged against opposing tribes) (Sierra & Taute, 2019).

2.2.2. Brand identity

Brand identity is a self-portrait of a brand and a mechanism of emotional connection between brands and consumers. It is how a brand portrays itself in regards to its self-identifying attributes as a brand (Thanh et al, 2020). These identifiable attributes will in turn allow customers to emotionally connect with the brand when these customers perceive themselves as sharing the same values and attributes. Such connection often leads to an increase in brand satisfaction and brand loyalty (Thanh et al, 2020). Customer will in turn use this brand identity image to express themselves and their value-sharing self-image. Consumers will usually have higher levels of loyalty and enthusiasm for brands they identify with, which should in turn lead to a higher inclination of purchase (Thanh et al, 2020).

2.2.3. Brand credibility

This concept consists in the quality portrayed by products through their respective brands. First the brand must produce high quality products and be reliable and from that moment forward customers will identify such brand with quality (Thanh et al, 2020). The information economics theory of Herbig and Milewicz (1995) also called brand credibility by the name of brand reputation. For a brand to be considered credible it must be consistent in all its characteristics and inherent benefits, and these must be portrayed and expressed through values, beliefs, and identities. A brand with a high level of credibility will have a high perceived quality and will in turn decrease the customer's decision-making risks on one's brand choices (making the credible brand to be perceived as a better choice) (Herbig & Milewicz, 1995). Brands that offer services will have their reputation and credibility as an element of even higher importance for the fact that services have, in nature, a relatively high cognitive risk arising from the intangible nature of services' benefits (Herbig & Milewicz, 1995).

2.2.4. Relationship Marketing

It is important to strengthen the idea that online communities are places where consumers are creators, co-creators, receivers, and curators of cultural factors of any particular community at hand, according to Schembri and Latimer (2016). Also, companies have created more forms of direct contact with consumers after noticing the increase in their power and influence through those some online communities, according to Kumar and Kumar (2020), and through such realization brands have moved on to create their own communities where they have more access and influence over consumers (as well as information readily available). The central idea behind this is that companies only have to design strategies with more appeal to such communities and that will lead to initiatives that start to become active element of such communities and the culture they surround (given that such communities and their respective leaders accept this as a facilitator object of interest) (Kumar, J. & Kumar, V.,2020).

Research shows that the fostering of and involvement with brand communities leads to profitable outcomes for companies, including brand advocacy, ideas for product innovation, new product adoption, increased sales, integrated marketing communication campaign effectiveness, brand loyalty and brand tribe loyalty (Taute *et al.*,2017). Indeed, they suggest 12 ways in which brand communities create value, evidenced, for example, by evangelizing, welcoming, documenting and customizing.

2.3. Information Technology

Brand communities do not emerge only in real/psychical environment, but also in online environment, as recent internet tools make it easier every day for people to gather around a brand (Özbölük & Dursun, 2017). On the Internet, brand communities are no longer bounded with geographic gatherings of the members, as interaction takes place through the internet; thus, a physical context is not necessary (Özbölük & Dursun, 2017). Many brand communities, at first, emerged in the physical area and added their online presence and functionality at a later stage as the movements grew and spread. In a world where the Internet brings people together, we do not see the consumers who only share their consumption experience, but also the prosumers' creation of their own world. Consumers take upon a variety of roles, including that of a producer, a distributor, a marketer and a user of product (Özbölük & Dursun, 2017).

Özbölük and Dursun (2017) argue that online communities of consumption do not consist of homogeneous members. Some members are long-time product enthusiasts and expert users; others are the newbies who have a starting or an ephemeral interest to the product. They also identify four member types -tourists, insiders, minglers and devotees- in an online consumption community based on two factors: the identification with the consumption activity and the intensity of the social relationships with other members of that same community.

While some members (insiders) show both high levels of brand identification and social orientation toward the community, other members may have lower levels of identification (minglers), lower levels of social relationships with the community (devotees) or both (tourists). These different types of members in online communities refer to subgroups or sub-tribes (Özbölük & Dursun, 2017) in online communities. These differentiators are immensely important on the analysis of product visibility and importance in the marketplace since they define the strength of the position of certain products. Insiders create movements and turn commodities into precious possessions while tourists will adhere to a current movement, grow it but soon abandon it (Özbölük & Dursun, 2017).

Online brand communities also help the firm to spread its message in a relaxed and conversational way. These communities allow marketers to access huge numbers of consumers at low costs (Özbölük & Dursun, 2017). Marketers can also closely interact and contact the members that are highly interested in brand (evangelists and opinion leaders) or highly critical to the brand management (activists) in these communities (Özbölük & Dursun, 2017). New Web technologies have shifted power from marketers to consumers and this shift requires questioning traditional brand management practices. Brand community is a brand community regardless of context but managing an online brand community entails a different strategy because of the uncontrolled nature of the internet (Özbölük & Dursun, 2017). The rise of Web 2.0 dramatically challenges the way companies manage their brands and one of the major challenges for marketing practitioners is losing the control of their brand as the consumers are gradually influencing and controlling the brand content in online environment (Özbölük & Dursun, 2017). Consumers gained a voice that brand managers can no longer ignore and this forces a shift in brand management practices in online environment where it is easy to create, but hard to manage a brand community (Özbölük & Dursun, 2017).

2.3.1. Online Branding

A brand is a promise made by a company to its customers and supported by that company (Rowley, 2004). An online version of a brand is not different, only adapted and brands have adapted constantly to remain relevant in a space where search costs are very low to the consumer.

Exclusivity also plays a factor in the creation of niches and communities (Ringen, 2018). A great example is the creation of mobile applications, currently responsible for launching the most exclusive and coveted shoes of most brands. The applications are known for launching the most exclusive collaboration-based shoes. These collaborations happen with major athletes, artists, designers, and influencers in the entertainment industry - cinema, music, television, and others- as a form of cultural exchange capable of attracting even the most distant consumers to the sneakerhead scenario. Great examples of extremely known mobile applications are Nike's SNKRS (abbreviation of Sneakers), Adidas' Confirmed App, and the JD Sports App (as a leading option outside of the United States).

These relevant concepts, explored along this chapter, are presented in the following table (Table 1) in a summarized manner.

Concept	**Definition**	**Source**
Culture and the Self	Constructs of the "I", the "Other", and the interdependence of these change depending on culture and people.	Markus & Kitayama (1991)
Consumer Behavior	The dynamic interaction between the environment's events the behavioral and cognitive aspects of an individual.	Kire & RajKumar (2017)
Brand Attachment	Emotional attachment customers have with a brand where the brand becomes part of one's identity and memory. Separation leads to strong emotions and emotional pain.	ZINEB RHAJBAL, MOUNA HILMI, & AYOUB RHAJBAL. (2021)
Self-brand connection	Self-brand connection is the incorporation an individual makes of a brand into their self-concept.	Thanh, N. N. D., Thanh, N. D., Thao, N. T. T., & Thanh, T. N. P. (2020)
Brand loyalty	Brand loyalty is the strong commitment a consumer has with a brand. It is a deep commitment that leads to repeated use of such brand, repurchasing, and protection of the bond.	Thanh, N. N. D., Thanh, N. D., Thao, N. T. T., & Thanh, T. N. P. (2020)
Oppositional Loyalty	Consumer approach of acting against brands other than one's favorite brand in addition to appreciating and acting in favor of such favorite brand.	Cheng, G., & Yu, W. (2021)
Brand Communities & Brand Tribes	The relationships between consumers and their esteemed brands.	Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) ; Sierra and Taute, 2019.
Brand identity	Brand identity is a self-portrait of a brand and a mechanism of emotional connection between brands and consumers.	Thanh, N. N. D., Thanh, N. D., Thao, N. T. T., & Thanh, T. N. P. (2020)
Brand credibility	A brand's reputation. The degree of confidence customers feel towards a brand.	Thanh, N. N. D., Thanh, N. D., Thao, N. T. T., & Thanh, T. N. P. (2020)
Relationship Marketing	Forms of direct contact with consumers.	Kumar & Kumar (2020)
Information Technology	On the Internet, brand communities are no longer bounded with geographic gatherings of the members, as interaction takes place through the internet; thus, a physical context is not necessary.	Özbölük & Dursun (2017)
Online Branding	A brand is a promise made by a company to its customers and supported by that company. Now, online.	Rowley (2004)

Table 1 – Main Concepts and Definitions
Source: Author

3. Context of Study

3.1. The market leaders: Nike and Adidas.

3.1.1. Brand History – NIKE

Nike's existence began far earlier than its own name. A track and field coach at the University of Oregon, called Bill Bowerman, was incredibly interested in his athletes' performances and how their footwear could foster improvements in several athletic areas (Jin & Cedrola, 2017). Bowerman experimented with other brands' shoes by purchasing them, tearing them apart, analyzing what was there, and remaking them with his own ideas, designs, and developments. Being the coach of a high-level track team at Oregon University also allowed Bowerman to experiment with his athletes. They would often be seen running in Bowerman's experimental shoes. The first athlete of the University of Oregon to help Bowerman and wear his prototypes in competition was Phil Knight (Jin & Cedrola, 2017).

Knight graduated from the University of Oregon in 1959 and quickly realized that Adidas barely had any competition in the United States market for running shoes. He then ventured to Japan in an attempt to secure a position as a distributor of Onitsuka (now called Asics) in the North American country. Knight quickly realized he needed a good partner for this venture and reached out to Bowerman, who accepted the offer. Knight then became the creator of Nike, or Blue Ribbon as it was called when founded in 1964, and started by personally sourcing customers and selling Onitsuka shoes out of his own car (Jin & Cedrola, 2017).

Onitsuka's relationship with Blue Ribbon came to an end in 1971 and Knight promptly looked for other manufacturers and found them also in Japan, allowing Blue Ribbon to stay in business but also to develop its own line of athletic shoes. As a new manufacturer in the sports shoes industry Blue Ribbon needed its own personality for the shoes that was no longer the Onitsuka's (Jin & Cedrola, 2017). For this endeavor an art student from Portland State University was commissioned to create a logo – for an astounding low price tag of U$35 – and this student originated the Nike logo currently known as "the swoosh" (Jin & Cedrola, 2017). By then Blue Ribbon already had other employees and one suggested the name "Nike" as a new start for the brand. The reason behind it was the meaning of the name. Nike is the Greek mythology goddess of victory. The name was imposing, resonated with the target audience, and had a peculiar pronunciation that attracted the eyes of customers. The two most iconic symbols in the sports apparel world in our current world were officially born (Jin & Cedrola, 2017).

Nike continued to innovate through Bowerman's vision and Knights enthusiasm which helped the company to become a fierce competitor in the 1970s among other athletic footwear companies. A significant amount of Nike's success was attributed – and still is to this day – to significant investments in research innovation in all areas of the design process and performance (Jin & Cedrola, 2017). Nike has always had innovation as a top business priority and that alone has kept the company with a competitive edge. Two priorities in the innovation department, well-regarded by the public, were improving the performance of high-level athletes and preventing injuries (Jin & Cedrola, 2017).

Nike also expanded significantly in the 1970s. It reached a global level of operations through a physical expansion to Canada and Australia in 1974 (Jin & Cedrola, 2017). That added to their local success in the United States allowed for a significant growth in number of employees and sales. Its market share growth came through visibility expansion with the sponsorship contracts with multiple high-profile professional athletes – for example, Jimmy Connors, a tennis star-player at the time – combined with the company's first full-scale advertisement campaign called "There is No Finish Line", in 1976 (Jin & Cedrola, 2017). In the late 1970s Nike developed their most famous impact protection and performance technology – the Nike Air – with the help of former NASA engineer Frank Rudy (Frisch, 2009). The first iterations of Nike air did not work perfectly but with investment the technology evolved into a worldwide powerhouse in athletic shoe performance. In 1977 and 1978 Nike expanded further into the Asian and South American markets, respectively, and by the end of 1978 Nike became the official athletic shoe market leader in the United States (aided by a tremendous growth in the fitness and health market) (Jin & Cedrola, 2017).

The 1980s marked Nike's most aggressive expansion. The company, aided by revenue generated by going public in the stock market, entered the athletic shoe markets in Europe, Asia, Latin America, and Africa. This brought about the establishment of Nike International – the international operations' fulltime lead initiative (Jin & Cedrola, 2017).

The following years brought hardships to Nike as the interest in their main sport – running – declined and the company failed to recognize the stunning growth in interest on the aerobics movement (Jin & Cedrola, 2017). This meant a loss of market share in one front and failure to capitalize on the growth of another. Needless to say, took advantage and made the proper investments. Nike responded with many restructuration initiatives, the selling of more than half of its stocks of Nike Japan to its Japanese affiliate, the lay-off of approximately 10% of its United States corporate office employees, and with strategy aimed at cutting costs (Jin & Cedrola, 2017).

In 1985 Nike makes the most important signing in the history of the brand: Michael Jordan. Needless to say; Michael Jordan went on to become the most powerful star in world basketball history (Jin & Cedrola, 2017). The company creates a shoe line for the new basketball star and launched the Air Jordan. A shoe that had colorways banned by the National Basketball Association, which helped propel sales forward by unforeseen amounts. The Air Jordan shoe went on to become a successful line and further on a brand itself, Jordan Brand, partially owned by Nike and partially owned by Michael Jordan himself (Jin & Cedrola, 2017).

In 1988 Nike launched its most famous marketing campaign known to date – and still ongoing in multiple forms – from television ads to merchandising and athlete public appearances: the “Just Do it” campaign (Jin & Cedrola, 2017). As expected, multiple ads with Michael Jordan were also produced and published. The most iconic ones known beside the phrase icon were the ads with actor and director/producer Spike Lee.

In the mid-1990s Nike expanded its sponsorship deals with prominent athletes and signed new contracts with sports stars Scottie Pippen (Michael Jordan’s teammate at the Chicago Bulls basketball team) and Tiger Woods (one of golf’s greatest to ever play) (Jin & Cedrola, 2017). By the end of the 1990s, in 1999, Nike created a dedicated online division for all-internet matters and went strongly into the e-commerce era. At the same time, the NikeID service (now called Nike by you) was established, enabling customers to pre-order Nike shoes customized with unique colors and materials online (Jin & Cedrola, 2017).

The apparel division of the company focused on sports considered profitable niches at the time, such as golf and soccer (known as football in other countries), and eventually surpassing Adidas as the top brand in the soccer/football market in Europe (Jin & Cedrola, 2017). The company diversified its niche reach even further by entering the surf market, by purchasing Hurley in 2002, and the casual market, by purchasing Converse in 2003. This enabled the brand to also target younger customers attached to these two brands. In an attempt to reach price-conscious consumers Nike also purchased Starter in 2004 – allowing the brand to distribute its products to department stores via attractive discounts (Jin & Cedrola, 2017).

Nike has kept its focus in the past decades and fostered its efforts in prominent star-powered athletes, celebrities, designers, designers, and musicians. The online presence of Nike has grown exponentially, including mobile phone applications with advancements in the smartphone industry (Jin & Cedrola, 2017). Brand tribes and communities around the Nike brand have grown with these advancements as well, especially on the internet side of it all. These tribes and communities have had unlimited access and space to be found and find members, discuss various related topics, all while having unlimited access to brand information in real time.

3.1.2. Brand History – ADIDAS

The brand's early history begins after the first World War when Adolf Dassler and his brother Rudolf Dassler embarked together on the mission of creating new footwear. Adidas' first market stint happened at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin (Lewis, 2020). Adolf gifted a reigning track-and-field star – Jesse Owens – a pair of Adidas track shoes and the brand gained world-wide recognition. The second World War disrupted the evolution and growth of the brand but Adolf and his brother Rudolf restarted activities as soon as they were allowed. In 1948 the two brothers split and this is where the "Adidas" name was born. Adolf kept control of the three stripes and named them after himself. Deriving from an abbreviation and combination of Adolf (nicknamed Adi) and his last name Dassler (specifically the start "das") the Adidas brand's name was born (Lewis, 2020). Rudolf went on to create his own brand, which later eventually became Puma, one of the great athletic footwear companies to this day.

Most of Adidas's growth in its early days were due to their innovation in soccer cleats (Lewis, 2020). Many players around the world switched their gear and started wearing Adidas shoes. They were considered lighter than competitor brand's shoes and feature a screw-in cleat technology. Something new and exciting at the time. The company moved on to the next great thing and diversified by creating its own line of soccer footballs. Many major soccer leagues at the time (and to this day) use the brand's balls (Lewis, 2020). The next expansion of the brand was into athletic apparel lines, featuring famous soccer players and their own kits. The brand was considered to be far ahead its competitors and the greatest athletic apparel brand until the 1970s when Nike grew and became a fierce competitor (Lewis, 2020).

Adolf "Adi" Dassler died in 1978 which meant a dark and uncertain time for the brand but it quickly developed new strategies to prove the Adidas name was still strong and relevant amongst the best brands (Lewis, 2020). Their new marketing push included the sponsorship of rap group Run D.M.C. (creators of the song "My adidas" in 1986) which made shoes and apparel named after the rap group available to the public (with re-edition launches of such line every few years) (Lewis, 2020).

The next few decades into the 1990s were market by ownership issues with Bernard Tapie, change of ownership to an investor group led by Robert Louis-Dreyfus (who happened to have interests divided among other companies), change of name to Adidas-Salomon AG after acquiring the Salomon Group in 1997 and then back to Adidas AG in 2006 after selling it (Lewis, 2020).

Despite these problems Adidas still managed to follow Nike into the store-oriented floor-retail strategy in 2001 and remain among the strongest brands in the market. They acquired Reebok in 2006 and benefited from it greatly until selling it now in 2021 (Adidas Group, 2021).

Adidas also grew significantly with endorsement deals to create attachment through brand communities, and brand tribes. Many of these endorsement deals were with prominent athletes that are worldly recognized such as David Beckham, Lionel Messi, Kobe Bryant (whom, upon expiration of contract, signed a new deal with competitor Nike), Jesse Owens, and Kareem Abdul-Jabaar (Felippe, 2011).

3.2. Sneakers and Athleisure

Athletic shoes have gradually evolved into part of street wear fashion and had communities created around them. Sometimes communities follow concepts, sometimes silhouettes, and sometimes the designers responsible for them.

3.2.1. Nike Air Max & Air Max Day

Images 1 and 2 – Air Max 1 & Air Max 90
Source: Sole Collector

Images 3 and 4 – Air Max 95 & Air Max 97
Source: Sole Collector

Images 5 and 6 – Air Max 0 & VaporMax
Source: Sole Collector

Nike declared March 26, 2014, the inaugural Air Max Day. Nike has been able to excite the U.S. market over limited-edition Air Maxes, too. According to Matthew Welty, from Complex, if someone was to ask the brand if it sells a great amount of Air Max sneakers in the American market, the answer would be a resounding, "Yes!".

Welty states that Nike has been able to turn a legitimate date in the company's history into a marketing frenzy for sneakers that are over 20 years old and has been able to sell some sneakers in the process. Instead of putting together a vast quantity of heavily pushed and promoted advertisements (which most brands do, including Nike itself), the brand simply created a hashtag, contacted some influential folks, and let the whole thing spread organically.

This is a great example of a push into fostering brand tribes. By creating a specific date for the movement around a specific type of shoe, Nike is able to maneuver the customers in this specific tribe to focus their purchases into a specific and small part of the year. This allows the brand to focus releases of Air Maxes around this date and then relocate the brand efforts into other areas for the remainder of the year.

3.2.2. Air Max Day (March 26th) - Activations and Campaigns

In 2015, the second time Nike campaigned the Air Max Day, the brand dressed vehicles as Air Max shoes and drove them around different cities to raise awareness to the celebratory date (as opposed to the shoes themselves as one might initially assume).

Cars are driving around Korea in the shape of the most iconic Air Max models (Park, 2015).

Image 7 – Air Max 95 car
Source: Instagram

Image 8 – Air Max Day Vote Back
Source: Sole Collector

In 2016, the third consecutive year Nike campaigned the Air Max Day, the brand opened space for consumers to decide which Air Max shoes they wanted to purchase. This was carried out by an open vote campaign called "Vote Back", where customers voted for one style to be re-released by the brand the following year (2017) (Richard, 2016). The archives available for choice of voting provided by the brand included all Air Maxes, including original releases as well as collaborations, which dated back to the previous 29 years of releases and models sold by the brand.

In 2017's iteration of the Air Max Day, Nike released the winner of the previous year's campaign "Vote Back" and ran a new campaign "Vote Forward". This new campaign was much like the previous but the shoes that would be voted for were new "to be produced" models designed by a multitude of influencers. DJs, artists, designers and partner retailers were asked by nike to reimagine Air Max silhouettes. The public then had the opportunity to vote for their favorites and see the winner be released the following year (2018) (Richard, 2017).

In 2018, the new campaign featured the release of the shoes selected in 2017's campaign "Vote Forward" and opened a new iteration of the Air Max Day as per usual (Richard, 2017). This new version included workshops to which anyone could sign up for. These workshops were situated in the specific cities of London, New York, Paris, Seoul, Shanghai, and Tokyo. These workshops were hosted by Nike designers and opened space for aspiring designers to come in, choose a silhouette among the ones featured (Air Max 1, Air Max 90, Air Max 180, Air Max BW, Air Max 93, Air Max 95, Air Max 97, Air Max 98, Air Max 270, and the Air VaporMax Plus). The designs were submitted to a panel of judges. Each city chose three designs as semifinalists which were then uploaded to Nike's website for public vote. The top-voted designs were produced and released in each of their respective cities (Richard, 2017).

3.2.3. Jordan Brand & Nike Basketball

According to Kathleen Elkins, from CNBC, Michael Jordan is still the "biggest" (most recognizable and rentable) persona in sneaker sales with an athlete's name on it. Jordan earned 130 million dollars from his contract with Nike in 2019 while Lebron James, second ranked on the list, has earned 32 million dollars.

It all started in Jordan's first season in the NBA. As a promising rising star, Jordan had attention on him and options to choose from. The basketball legend originally envisioned signing with Adidas, his favorite brand at the time, or Converse, the leading brand in basketball star signings (CNBC & Elkins, 2020).

At the time Jordan entered the NBA (1984) Nike was still known as a track shoe brand. They had a good reputation with the running community but nothing further. The other factors in the equation, Converse and Adidas, were determinant for the outcome as we know today (CNBC & Elkins, 2020).

Converse was the most popular and had endorsement contracts with the league stars in Magic Johnson and Larry Bird and unfortunately refused the idea of a contract where Michael would be put ahead of them.

Adidas had other issues and was considered dysfunctional at the time by Jordan's agent, David Falk, who claims Adidas had offers but could not create a shoe line with Michael Jordan's name (CNBC & Elkins, 2020).

David liked the idea of an endorsement with Nike because they were the "upstart". Michael was against it but was convinced by his family and David to visit Nike's campus and have a conversation. Nike offered him a deal that no rookie could turn down and all is history from that point. A great deal amounted to something close to 100 thousand dollars. Nike offered Jordan 250 thousand dollars, stock options, and his own shoe line "Air Jordan". Nike predicted 3 million dollars' worth of sales (of Air Jordans) by the end of Jordan's fourth year in the NBA. By the end of his rookie year Nike had 126 million in sales and the promise of a rising star in Michael Jordan, who now is considered the best basketball player of all time and one of the most respected shoe lines in the world (CNBC & Elkins, 2020).

Until 2016, Jordan's importance and rentability were still growing (as they are, increasingly, to this day). In 2016 he ranked first in the Repucom's Celebrity DBI, according to Kurt Badenhausen (Forbes), which tracks consumer awareness and sentiments across multiple attributes for almost four thousand celebrities in the United States. This means that by that year Michael Jordan was the most marketable, recognizable, and admired person in the U.S. (ahead of icons such as Oprah Winfrey, Tom Hanks, Bill Gates and many others) with public awareness at 98%.

Badenhausen explains Jordan is defined by what he did in Basketball, according to Repucom executive Peter Laatz, and stayed relevant after his retirement from sports through Jordan Brand, his ownership of the NBA team Charlotte Hornets, and the internet viral "Crying Jordan meme".

This information is strengthened by the numbers. Jordan brand had grown 14% in 2015, while the overall basketball shoe market grew only 3,7%, according to research firm SportsOneSource. In terms of niche, Jordan brand had 3 billion dollars in sales in 2015 while Michael Jordan's share of this revenue was around 100 million dollars. Jordan Brand's sales represented 64% of the basketball market that year (Badenhausen, 2016).

3.2.4. Yeezy and Kanye West

Kanye West has been to Adidas, since 2013, what Michael Jordan is to Nike. The most coveted shoes from the Adidas brand as of 2022 are the Adidas Yeezys (cobranded with Kanye's brand Yeezy) but things have not always been as they are now. Kanye had a strong partnership with Nike from 2007 to 2013 and one more shoe released in 2014 while he was already with Adidas (his most famous design to current date, the Nike Air Yeezy 2 Red October) (Ciment, 2021). The time with both brands is considered extremely successful as West has proved himself a worthy designer, currently also holding partnership with GAP.

Kanye, in a partnership with Nike, created and brought into production the now worldly known Nike Air Yeezy 1 in 2007. The shoe was finally released in 2009 and created a frenzy into the sneaker world that hold life and strength into 2022 (Nike, 2009). The original release of the shoe had a retail price of 215 U.S. Dollars and can be found for sale (and actually selling) at prices above 13 thousand U.S. Dollars. The most recognized version of the first Nike Air Yeezy is a prototype worn by Kanye in his 2008 Grammy performance. This specific shoe and color scheme was never produced, making it a rare pair, and was sold in auction in 2021 for 1.8 million U.S. dollars (Blistein, 2021).

Image 9 – Kanye West performs at the Grammys
Source: Sole Collector

Image 10 – Nike Air Yeezy 1 Prototype
Source: Sole Collector

The second iteration of Yeezy came about as the Nike Air Yeezy 2, in 2012, retailing at a higher price of 245 U.S. dollars and was the last collaboration with Nike (Nike, 2012). Pairs of this second iteration are still in the market (resell market only) and still sell for prices that range from 4 thousand to 90 thousand U.S. Dollars, according to Title Magazine.

The end of the partnership between Kanye and Nike came from differences between the two parties on the perceived value of West's aptitude for design. The two parted ways in 2013 when Kanye signed a new partnership with Adidas (Dunne, 2013).

Image 11 – Nike Air Yeezy 2 Red October
Source: Sole Collector

In 2013, Kanye departs Nike and solidifies a partnership with the brand's direct competitor Adidas (Dunne, 2013). The vision followed by the artist and the German brand were to continue the success with the Yeezy brand and propel it forward with Adidas' boost technology with the proposal of unifying style and comfort. The partnership has generated 1.5 billion U.S. dollars as of 2019, according to Title Magazine, proving that Nike should have made the effort and accepted Kanye's business requirements.

Image 12 – Yeezy Boost 350
Source: Sole Collector

Image 13 Yeezy Boost 350 V2
Source: Sole Collector

Image 14 – Yeezy Boost 750
Source: Sole Collector

Image 15 - Yeezy Boost 500
Source: Sole Collector

Image 16 – Yeezy Boost 700
Source: Sole Collector

Image 17 - Yeezy Slide
Source: Sole Collector

3.2.5. Designers

Tinker Hatfield, a renowned shoe designer, is most known as the lead designer of Jordan brand shoes. He was brought in by Nike to design shoes for none other than Michael Jordan. He started designing shoes in late 1985, when athletic shoes were just basic performance footwear (Kim, 2020). When his partnership with Nike and Jordan started, as he describes as a romance, He tried to design the shoes in a way that made possible for the silhouettes to capture the unique characteristics or personality an athlete possesses. Hatfield claims Jordan was the perfect match for him. The unique design, high quality materials, and Jordan's high-profile status helped Nike dominate the shoe industry. The Jordan brand alone brought in more than 100 million U.S. dollars to Nike's total earnings in the early 1980s when the first Air Jordan was introduced on the market (Kim, 2020). To date, Nike has introduced 36 pairs of the main Jordan series (the longest existing line of basketball shoes known) and many other peripheral models and still takes the largest market share in the industry in the world.

Hatfield's most recent endeavor with Nike was the creation of the Nike adapt technology, the adapt technology allows shoes to lace themselves through a small electrical engine placed inside the shoe. The Jordan brand designs end the adapt technology are the most notable ideas created and implemented by Tinker, solidifying his position as one of the most influential designers in this market (Kim, 2020).

Virgil Abloh, who passed away at the end of 2021, has been considered and is still considered one of the most influential designers in fashion and streetwear (Diderich, 2021). His career started far from the runway and the fashion world as an architect and engineer. Virgil earned his degree in civil engineering from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and his master's degree in architecture at the Illinois Institute of Technology.

At the time of his death virtual was an artist, architect, engineer, creative director, and designer for his own brand “Off-White”, the creative director for Louis Vuitton, And design partner with Nike (enabling the bridge for partnerships between these three brands) (Diderich, 2021).

Virgil rose to fame in the fashion industry as a creative partner of Kanye West. He was considered by many as in essence of modern creativity and constantly surprised his peers by the amount of groundbreaking ideas he designed (Diderich, 2021).

Virgil’s brand, Off-White, was launched online in 2013 and held its first showroom presentation in Paris the following year with designs that merged influences that range from Bauhaus to sports apparel (Diderich, 2021). In 2017, he partnered with Nike to reissue 10 emblematic shoe styles. these shoe styles were some of the most known and prestigious silhouettes ever created by Nike. this partnership redesigned the 10 silhouettes into a collection called “The 10”. The collection, the event, and the release were considered the biggest sneaker release event of the year (and until 2021) and this partnership was subsequently extended to a full line of partnership that reissued multiple silhouettes in similar fashion over the years (Diderich, 2021). Every release of an Off-White and Nike partnership is extremely coveted in the fashion and the streetwear industries, drawing an extreme amount of attention and buyers, selling out instantly and reselling at astronomical amounts in the resale market on the very same day. Abloh’s first stint with Louis Vuitton was in 2018, when the designer hosted his first show with the brand in June of that year in marked a new chapter in the fashion industry: the moment when streetwear finally merged with luxury brands and the first time a Black designer had taken the reins of a major luxury brand (Diderich, 2021). Fast forward to 2022 and Nike has a partnership scheduled to release between themselves, Louis Vuitton, and Virgil’s Off-White. Something enabled by the posthumous visionary end only possible because of his work, vision, and trajectory.

Jerry Lorenzo, the owner and designer of the brand Fear of God, partnered with Nike basketball and Nike's designer Leo Chang on a basketball sneaker line in a brand new silhouette for the Nike basketball brand (Hughes, 2018). This new partnership resulted in the new and groundbreaking design of the “Air Fear of God 1”. The Air Fear of God 1 was designed as a performance sneaker, at the retail price of 350 U.S. dollars, but was embraced by the shoe tribes and communities as a coveted streetwear style shoe. Lorenzo still produces his own premium sneakers for his brand fear of God and for other brands as well, with Vans as one of his most notable partnerships between the two brands, but none of his collaborations have had an impact on these communities and tribes as the Nike silhouette. Despite the fact that this was the first performance shoe designed by Lorenzo, many athletes including NBA players have also sought out the silhouette to wear for warmups and/or games (its original intended purpose) (Hughes, 2018).

4. Methodology

This chapter is dedicated to the creation and development of the process of data gathering and analysis. In this sense, this chapter will explain all the decisions regarding the methods utilized to gather the data that will be analyzed.

As research for this study is essential in terms of the ideas and knowledge presented in the literature review, so is the research from the data standpoint. The data researched will show the current state of the knowledge in a practical manner which in turn enables a full perception of the environment studied.

The research purpose in this body of work is to, through the combination of previous knowledge and the acquired data, find the correlation between the BT phenomenon and its capacity to be a vital pillar for long term success within athleisure brands (more specifically to their market share in athletic shoes).

The interest at this moment is to perceive from, the optics of the consumer, whether brand tribes and brand communities foster the growth and health of the athletic shoe market and how brands do the same, from their side, by fostering the environment and needs of these same tribes and communities, as well as how these relationships affect the customer’s Willingness to Pay.

For these reasons, the data will be collected through a quantitative method through a survey applied to customers that own, have bought and actively buy athletic shoes. These customers will be observed based on their purchase patterns, sources of information, demographics, and brand tribe characteristics.

The design of this research will of descriptive character and will explore the bilateral correlation of documented brand efforts and the customers habits observed in the data collected.

4.1. Objectives of study

The detailed objectives of this study match the main question of this study and will aim to rationalize the data and answer such question. These objectives are:

Objective 1: Analyze the profile and behavior of consumer in the context of brand tribes and communities.

Objective 2: Analyze how the customers brand tribes and communities' efforts combined with the brands' efforts affect the consumers' Willingness to Pay.

Objective 3: Comprehend the process through which consumers decide their purchase patterns.

Objective 4: Comprehend if the evolution of strategy of athletic shoe brands has fostered the creation and maintenance of brand tribes and communities according to mutual interests.

Objective 5: Identify the practical ramifications of the brand/community relationship through the analysis of the consumer's behavior in the shoe resale market.

Objective 6: Identify the practical ramifications of the influence that all elements considered will have on the consumers' Willingness to Pay.

4.2. Theoretical Model and Hypothesis

The theoretical model proposed (Image 18) assumes that Brand Tribe elements practiced by customers may lead them into BT and entering brand communities. It also assumes that brands place their efforts into fostering these behaviors and the existence of these tribes and communities by partnering with other designers as well as by making the availability of their shoes more exclusive. The brands' efforts, after being communicated through their ecommerce mix should meet the tribes and communities purchase intentions and ultimately leading to a level of Willingness to Pay that will be studied, analyzed, and evaluated in this model.

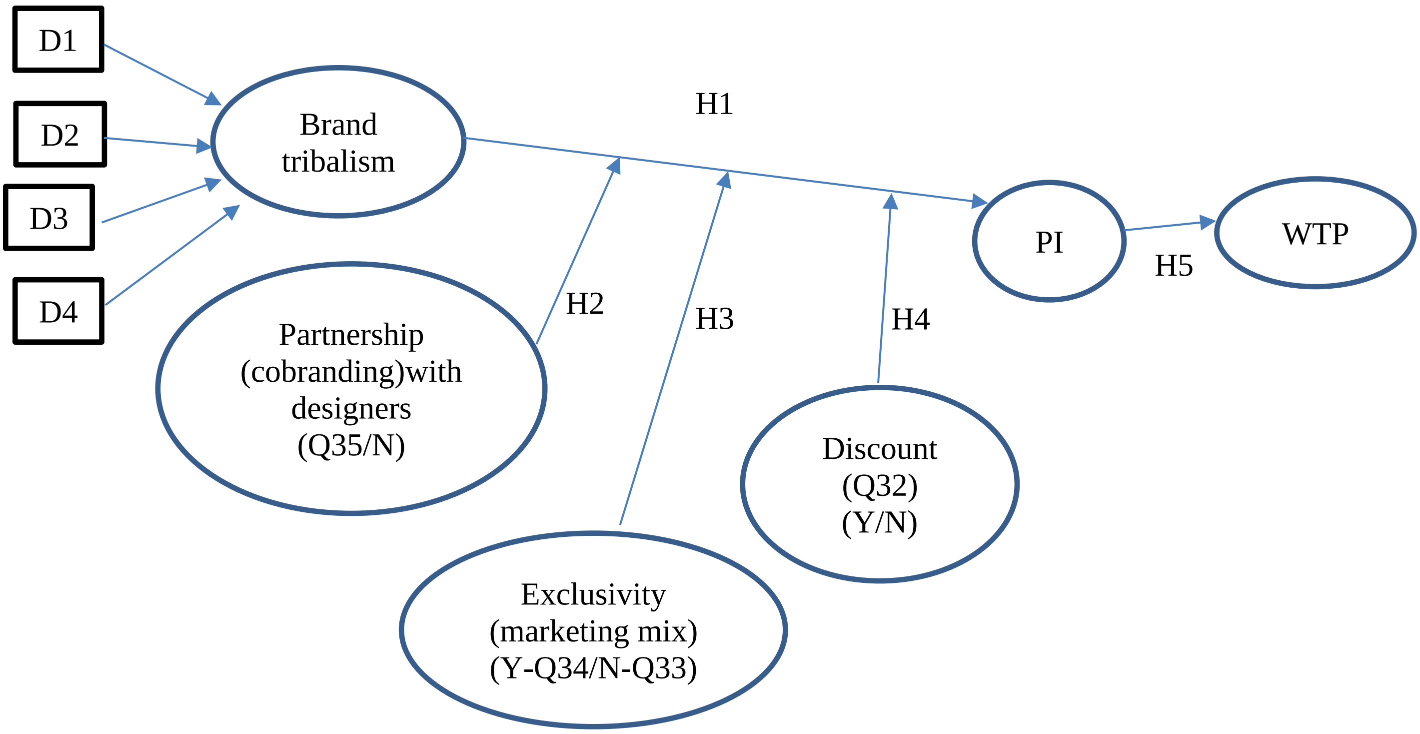

Image 18 – Theoretical Model Proposed
Source: Author

D1 – Social

D2 – Defense of tribe.

D3 – Sense of community.

D4 – Lineage

WTP- Willingness to Pay

PI – Purchase Intention

Using the model cited above and the literature review, the following hypotheses will be considered.

H1 (Hypothesis 1): Brand Tribalism is positively correlated to Purchase Intention;

H2 (Hypothesis 2): Cobranding moderates the relationship between Brand Tribalism and Purchase Intention;

H3 (Hypothesis 3): Exclusivity moderates the relationship between Brand Tribalism and Purchase Intention;

H4 (Hypothesis 4): Discounts moderate the relationship between Brand Tribalism and Purchase Intention;

H5 (Hypothesis 5): Purchase Intention is positively related to Willingness to Pay.

4.3. Operationalization of Variables

In order to make the data collection more objective, it is necessary to operationalize variables when possible. Some of the variables in this study have been previously explored in other studies by other authors and for that reason already use scales with effectiveness and sales tested in scientific literature. In this phase, these previously explored variables were adapted to the needs of the consumers and their information.

The measurement of the variables in this research was carried out through the use of the Likert scale with 7 values, where 1= Strongly Disagree and 7= Strongly Agree. The reason for this choice is the fact that the Likert scale is widely used, respected, and accurate. Some of the work studied in the literature review takes part in the usage of this scale as well.

The operationalization of such variables is presented below and was used for 16 questions: questions 10 through 17, 20 through 24, and 29 through 31.

Variable 1 – Social (questions 10, 11, and 12).

Variable 2 – Defense of Tribe (questions 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17)

Variable 3 – Sense of Community (questions 20, 21, 22, 23, and 24).

Variable 4 – Lineage (questions 29, 30, and 31).

These 4 variables were operationalized in 16 questions based on the scale and questions utilized by Taute & Sierra (2014) in their studies and investigations. The scale was adapted to the context of this study and the questions were translated to Portuguese when applied to Brazilian and Portuguese consumers.

Variables	Questions	Source
Social	10. People who own or wear sports shoes of your favorite brand are unique from those who own or wear shoes of other sports brands.	Taute & Sierra (2014)
	11. You identify uniquely with others who own or wear your favorite brand.	
	12. People who own or wear your favorite brand differentiate themselves from non-owners or non-wearers of your favorite brand.	
Defense of Tribe	13. Whenever your favorite brand is put down, you react strongly.	Taute & Sierra (2014)
	14. You often disagree whenever someone prefers a competitive brand to your favorite brand.	
	15. You won't own or wear any competitor of your favorite brand.	
	16. Your favorite brand fits you personally in a way no other brand will.	
	17. Owners or users of your favorite brand "get it"; non-owners or non-users not so much.	
Sense of Community	20. The friendships you have with other owners or users of your favorite brand mean a lot to you.	Taute & Sierra (2014)
	21. If other owners or users of shoes of your favorite brand planned something, you would think of it as something "you all" would do, rather than something "they" would do.	
	22. You see yourself as part of your favorite brand's community.	
	23. When the opportunity presents itself, you refer to other owners or users of your favorite brand as "us" or "we".	
	24. You feel a sense of co-ownership with your favorite brand.	
Lineage	29. Compared with other brands, people who own or wear your favorite brand share more than just the product or service use.	Taute & Sierra (2014)
	30. Owners or users of your favorite brand's sports shoes have a bond.	
	31. Owners or users of your favorite brand's sports shoes are bound together.	

Table 2 – Constructs and Measures
Source: Author

4.4. Data Collection Method

The data available in this research was collected through a survey. A survey was the best possible method to acquire information from the subjects in a standardized manner. Personal contact was limited during this state of pandemic and so an electronic survey sent via internet link presented the most reliable solution to gather information.

The statistical analysis was carried out computer software SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) which allowed for a fast, accurate, and effective analysis of the data individually, combined, and when correlated. This allowed for a more structured and timely verification of the previously structured hypotheses.

4.4.1. Data Sampling process

The data sampling was carried out through a simple random probabilistic sampling. The survey was elaborated and distributed on the Google Docs platform and sent to the subjects on this study via e-mail, social networks (private groups, open groups, and direct messages), and direct messaging on other platforms. The distribution was made throughout the months of December, January, and February in the most heterogeneous manner possible, allowing for a true random sample.

A pre-test was made with individuals from different nationalities residing in different countries, allowing for cultural diversity to play its part in the process of understanding and answering the survey. This allowed for a wider and more constructive feedback that was used when altering the survey before applying a final version.

4.4.2. Survey Design

This was an anonymous survey designed for a time range between 10 and 15 minutes to complete. Some individuals were more thorough with their information and needed more than the 15 minutes but majority fell within that time frame. The response rate was slightly above 80%, a fairly effective rate.

All questions required an answer in order for the survey to be finalized and submitted and the questions were structured in a way where one could not influence the answer of the next but still allowed for a coherent line of thought. No questions could or would be left unanswered based on the answer of previous questions due to the nature of the research.

The survey is structured in 5 major parts. The first part focused on understanding the main sources of information about shoes that the respondents rely upon as well as who they share that information with. The second part focused on the respondents' purchase patters in terms of brands, quantity, and needs (what they look for when deciding for purchases). The third part explored on brand community factors and the respondents' behavior linked to the communities they participate in (or do not participate in). The next part of the survey comprises the four variables analysed in the conceptual model. Finally, the last part of the survey focuses on the important descriptive factor of demographics, considering the ethnical and national diversity of the respondents.

The model of the survey can be found on Annex 1 – Survey form.

4.5. Data Analysis Method

The analysis was carried out in full, statistically speaking, in the SPSS statistical software. The gathering of numbers makes it far easier to perceive the patterns beyond the consumer behavior and analyze how they behave as community, something extremely important for the nature of this study. In that way, SPSS allowed for a complete processing and analysis of all the data gathered as well as for a stronger interpretation of the information provided.

The overall method of analysis was done in a predominantly univariate fashion, with a few bivariate observations.

5. Data Analysis and Discussion

The survey in this analysis had 204 responses, all of which answered the 47 questions of the survey in full and completely anonymously. The respondents were selected at random in several different countries. This chapter brings the analysis and discussion related to all the data obtained from the survey applied to the participants. Part of the analysis is made separately for each question of the survey; part is made considering the correlation between different questions.

5.1. Sample Characteristics

The demographic aspect of the research was purely informative. The answers in this section do not interfere with the nature of the research but only add information that can be used for further application. The characteristics considered here were: country of birth, country of residence, eventual residence in the United States (given its major level of influence in the world's athletic shoe culture), year of birth, gender, ethnicity, occupation, shoe size, and purchase patterns.

Among the 204 respondents, 150 were male (73.5%) and 54 were female (26.5%). The considerate discrepancy in gender representation shows that the shoe community and culture is still predominantly male but future studies may show a change in this scenario due to current efforts by brands to create and release shoes directed to the female public (both in size range, shape, and design).

The age groups vary significantly (image 19), with the youngest respondent at 18 years of age and the oldest at 60 years of age. The average age of the respondents is 28 years of age, which is also the highest age represented (with 26 respondents, at 12.7%).

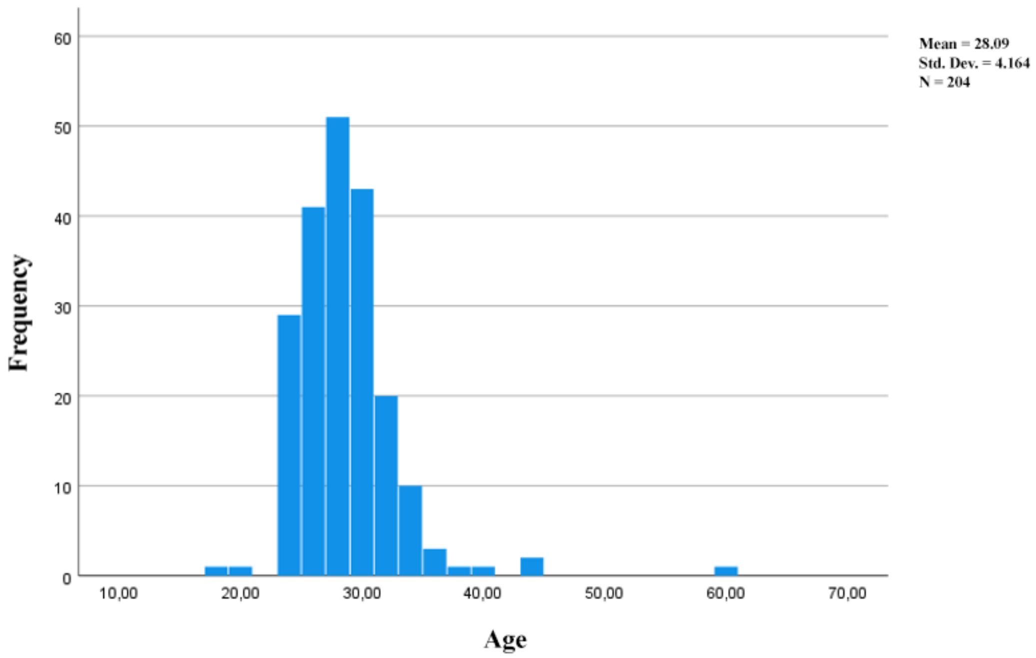

Image 19 – Age groups
Source: Author

The cultural representation (table 3) is extremely varied with 30 nationalities among the respondents, with the highest representation in nationals of Brazil with 85 respondents (41.7%), Portugal with 33(16.2%), and the United States of America with 15(7.3%). Taking in consideration the same three countries in the category of residence: 57 live in Brazil (27.9), 49 live in Portugal (24%), and 26 live in the United States (12.7%). Meanwhile, 82 of the respondents (40.2%) have previously lived in the United States at some point in their lives which responds to the "American influence" when it comes to the local culture surrounding shoes.

Nationalities					
Australia	Brazil	Bulgaria	Canada	China	Denmark
France	Germany	Greece	Ireland	Italy	Japan
Lithuania	Malta	Mexico	Mongolia	Netherlands	Norway
Panama	Poland	Portugal	Romania	Slovenia	South Africa
Spain	Sweden	Switzerland	Turkey	United Kingdom	United States

Table 3 – Nationalities
Source: Author

Ethnicities varied greatly but respondents that identify as White (65.2%), Latin (18.6%), and Black (10.3%) ethnic heritage were strongly prevalent in terms of percentage. Occupation had a conservative outlook, with 59.8% of the respondents working for someone else (or a company), 16.7% work autonomously, and 21.6% not in the work force as students.

In terms of shoe size, the average shoe size is 9 (US) and 42.5(EU) which, coincidentally is known as a "sample size" in most brands. Sample size is the size in which a brand first creates a shoe because it is such a popular size that it makes it more feasible for fabrication to start there and then be resized in later stages before production.

5.1.1. Purchase Patterns

In the first set of data of this category (image 20) we can see the clear factor of a diminishing WTP as consumers own more pairs of shoes, which can be analyzed through the theory of diminishing returns (Britannica, 2017), where the more pairs of shoes a consumer has, the less he needs any extra pairs. Most respondents own 1 to 10 pairs of shoes and vast majority own 1 to 20 pairs, at 167 individuals (82%).

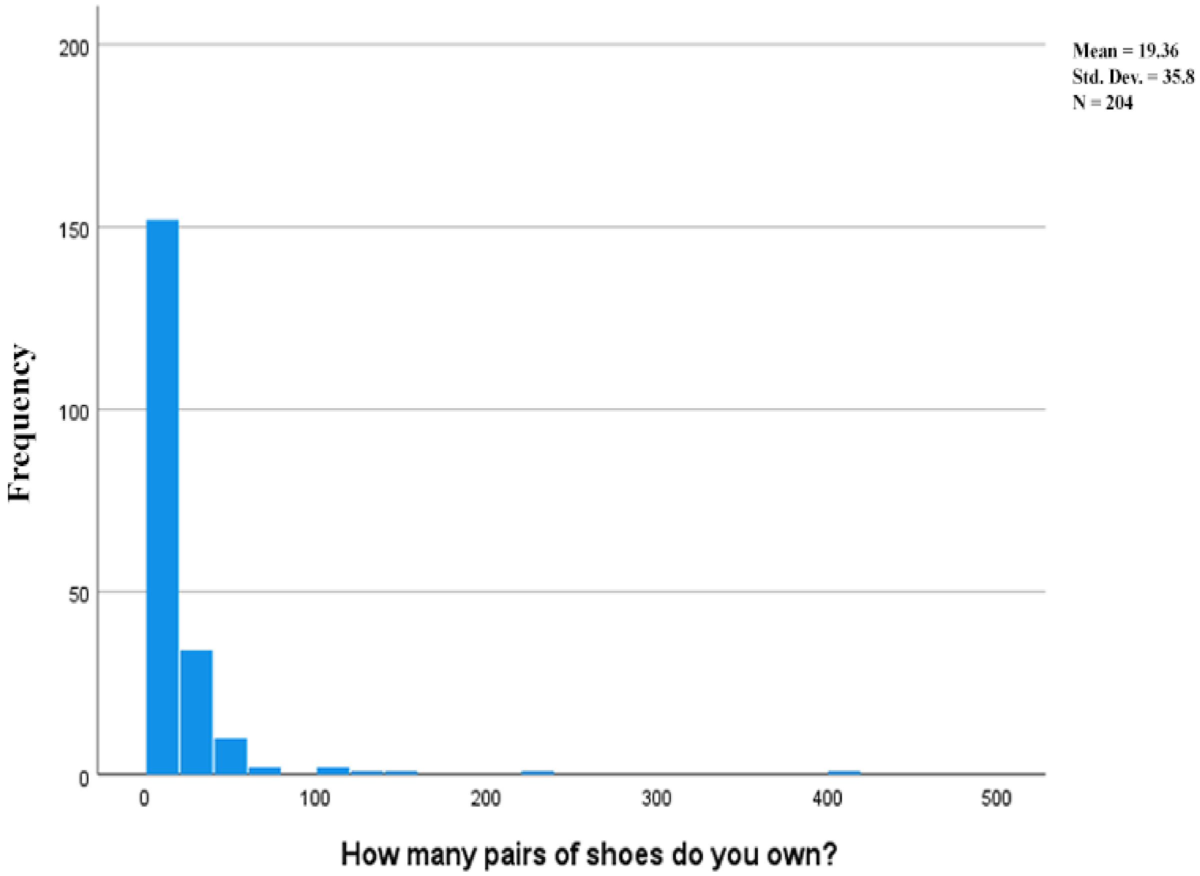

Image 20 – Pairs of shoes owned
Source: Author

In the next data set we can see that these respondents are going through a steady growth in the number of shoes owned (image 21). More than half of the respondents (113 consumers at 55%) currently purchase 2 to 3 new pairs a year, which shows a growing pattern that can possibly drive the previous data set into a higher total amount of shoes owned per person.

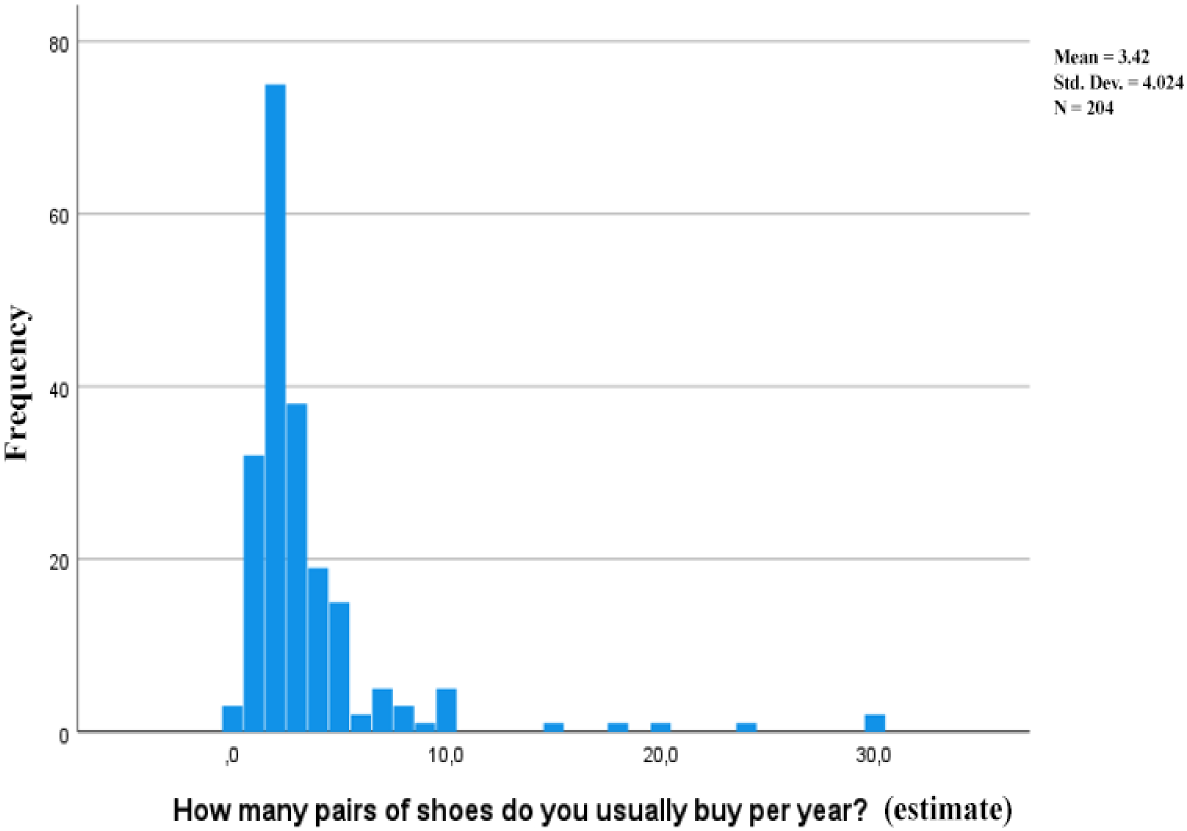

Image 21 – Shoe purchases per year
Source: Author

The respondents seem to have very similar habits when it comes to the purpose with which they wear their shoes (image 22). Casual wear, gym, and sports are strong reasons of wear while collecting shoes is slightly above 10% of the respondents. This part of the respondents that collect their shoes are also the same that own 41 or more pairs of shoes and buy 6 or more per year. Evidently, we start to see two different types of consumers separating in the data collected.

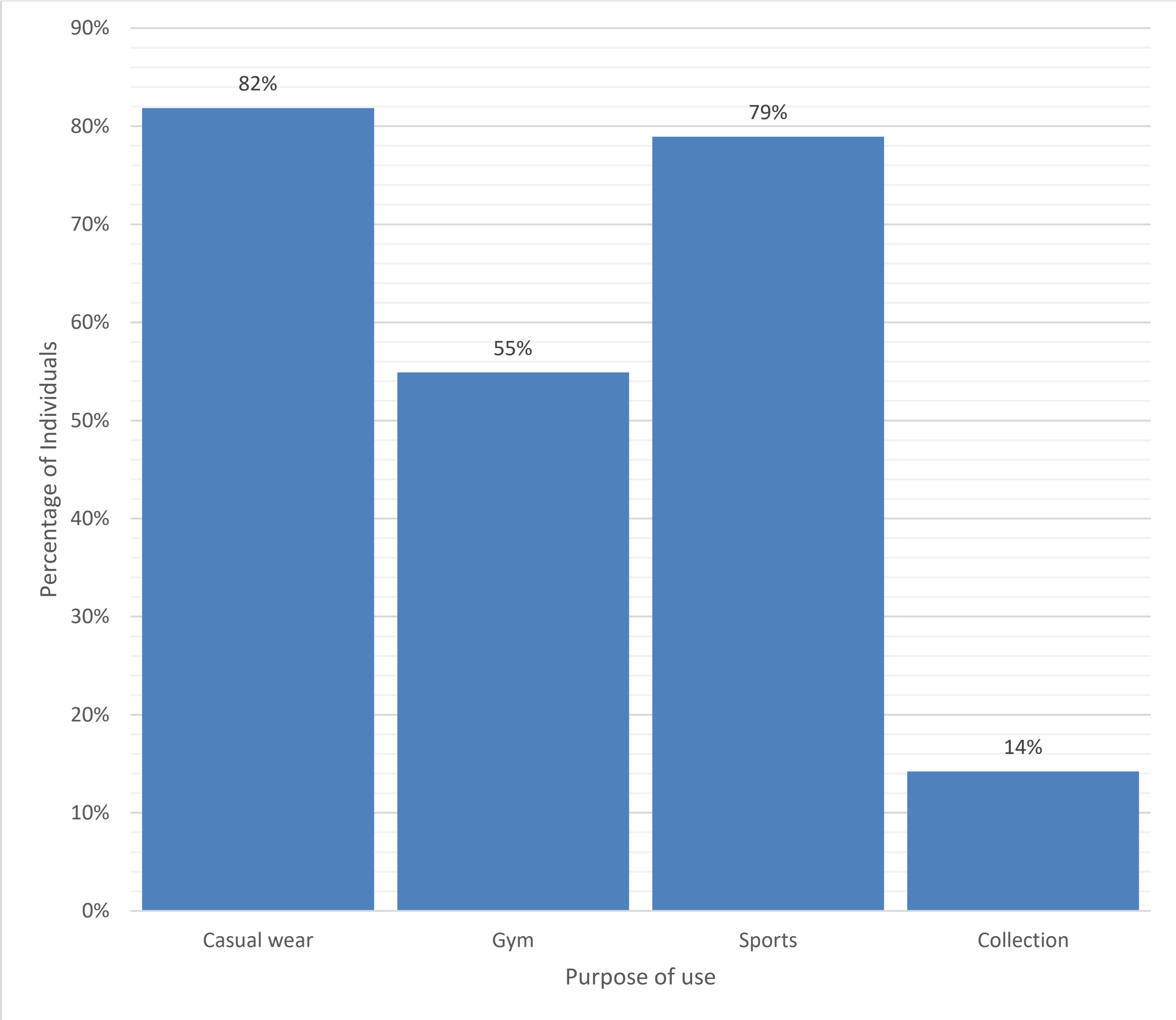

Image 22 – Purpose of use
Source: Author

The price of the most expensive single pair of shoes purchased averages at 201.21 euros per respondent. A retail average, considering that most Nike, Jordan, and Yeezy shoes that are recognized within brand tribe related preferences retail for prices in the 150 to 240 euros range. Also, two outliers (one paid above 1000 euros for a pair and another paid above 2000 euros for a pair) seem to have driven this metric to a considerable raise.

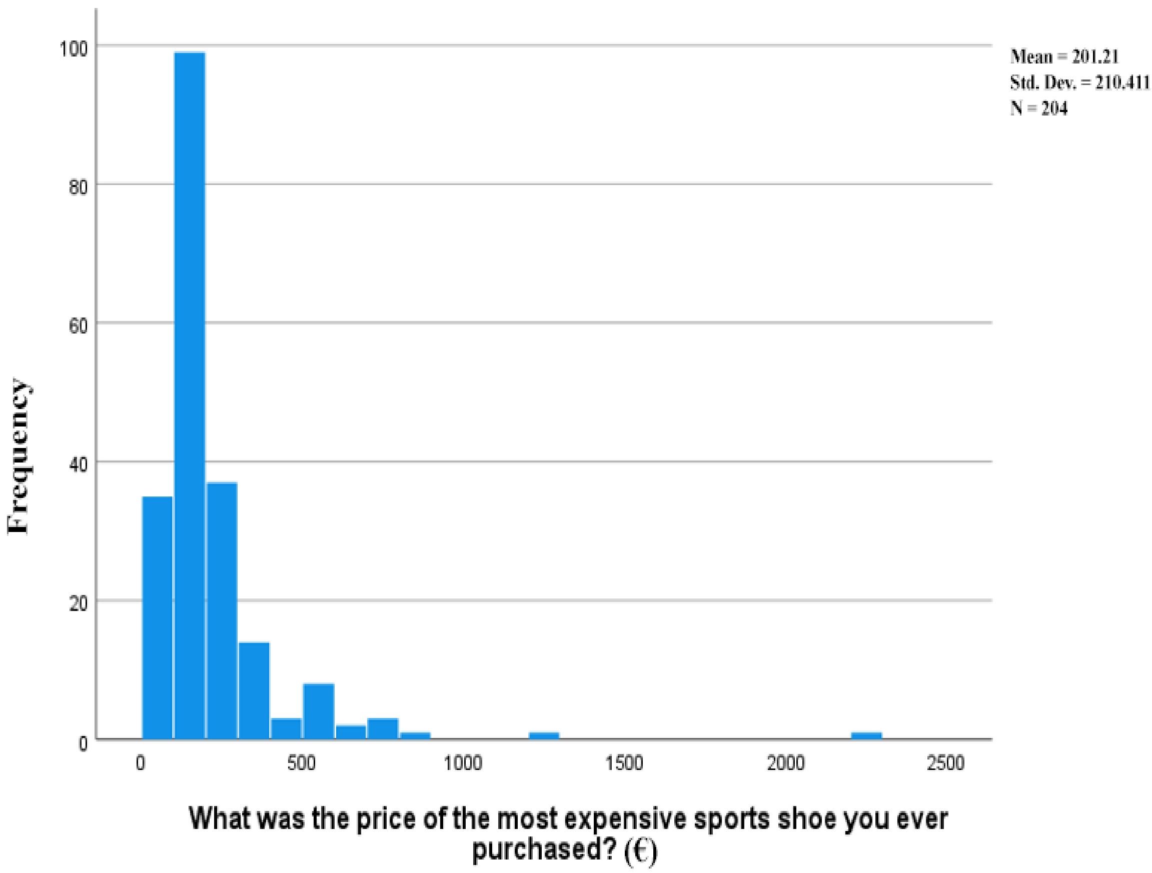

Image 23 – Most expensive purchase
Source: Author

One of the most interesting purchase patterns in this data set is in regards to the favorite brands (table 4 and image 25) and the brands owned (image 24) by the respondents. They match the market leaders as mentioned before in the research, where Nike and Adidas leading with ease. Also, Nike and Jordan brand (which belongs to Nike) are separated because they have different brand communities (although they blend in some instances). Nike leads the research with 184 respondents (77%) owning a pair of Nike shoes and being the absolute favorite brand of 103 of them (43%). These numbers raise even further when Jordan brand is considered, bringing the number of respondents that own a pair of Nikes up even further and bringing Nike to the favorite brand of 51% of the respondents, more than all the other brands combined. This mirrors the research where Nike has been pointed out to be the brand that led the athleisure movement, blending performance shoes (and apparel) with fashion and casual wear.

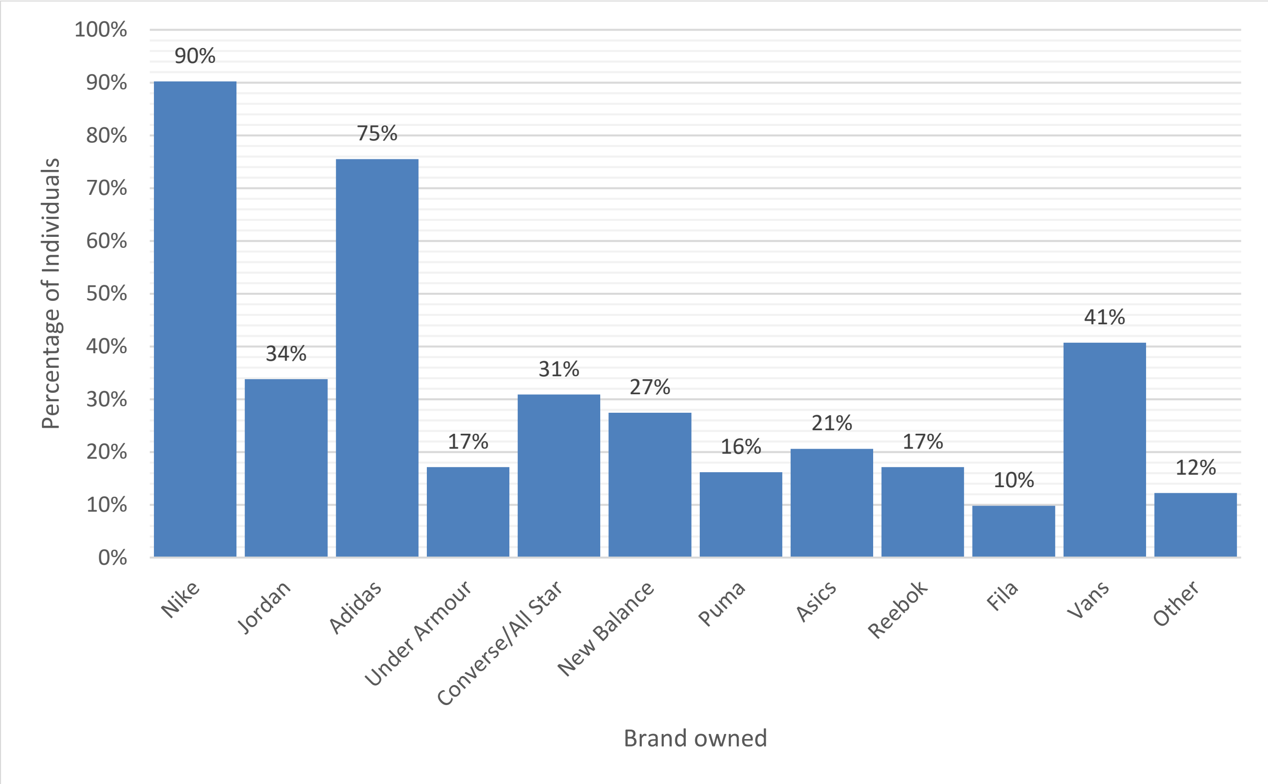

Image 24 – Shoe brands owned
Source: Author

Brand Fondness
1 - I don't like it, and 10 - I like it extremely

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
NIKE	204	8,03	2,426
ADIDAS	204	7,27	2,495
JORDAN	204	6,48	2,903
VANS	204	6,19	2,916
NEW BALANCE	204	5,59	2,788
CONVERSE/ALLSTAR	204	5,49	2,962
PUMA	204	5,26	2,429
ASICS	204	5,10	2,753
UNDER ARMOUR	204	5,00	2,701
REEBOK	204	4,97	2,683
FILA	204	4,10	2,564

Table 4 – Brand fondness
Source: Author

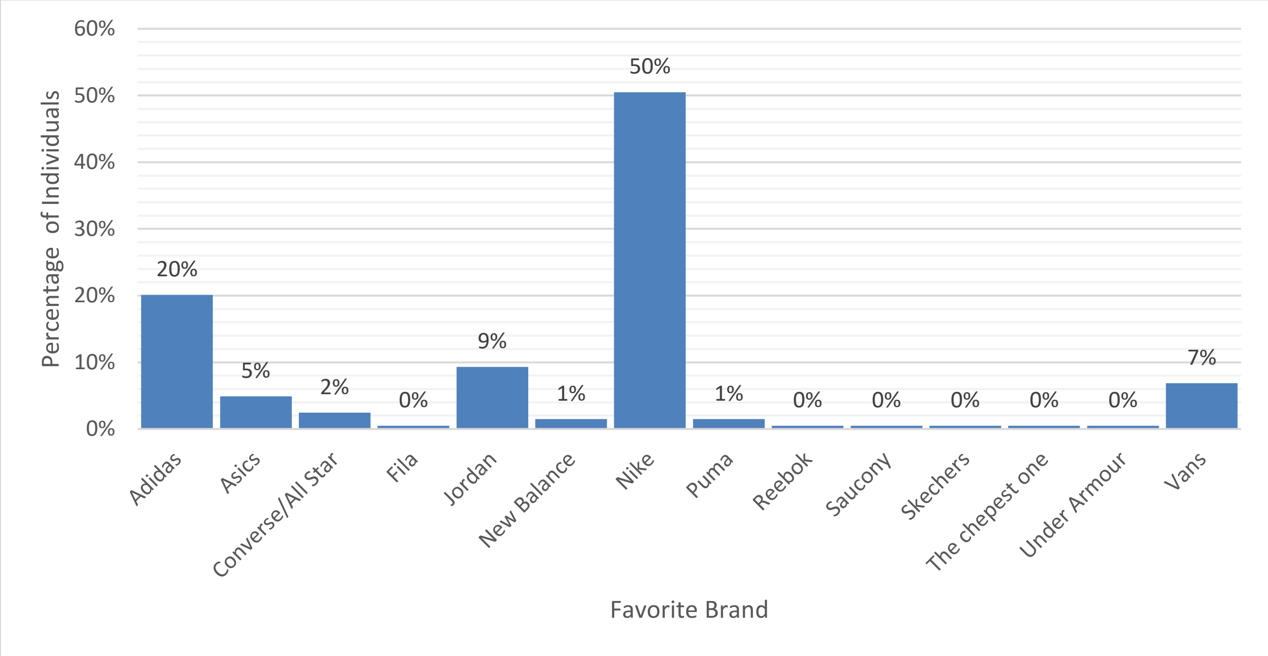

Image 25 – Favorite shoe brands
Source: Author

When it comes to what attracts consumers in a shoe, most of the respondents had similar opinions. The scale of importance used was the Likert scale from 1 to 7 and the results were averaged for an accurate representation of importance of quality desired. Design and quality come first with 6.42 points and 6.31 points respectively. Price and performance appear very close in importance right after, with 5.63 points and 5.52 points respectively.

While buying a pair of sports shoes, what is the level of importance of the following elements?

0 - Not important and 7 - Extremely important (N=204)

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Design (looks, model, colors, materials)	204	6,42	1,174
Quality	204	6,31	1,140
Price	204	5,63	1,556
Performance	204	5,52	1,683
Brand Name	204	4,86	1,718
Distribution Channel (online or physical stores)	204	3,64	2,135
Custom help experience to clients	204	3,53	2,153
Special editions (athletes, artists, other brands)	204	3,29	2,068
Type of Marketing Campaigns	204	2,71	1,693

Table 5 – Shoe elements importance
Source: Author

In this next section of the data, the respondents were subjected to a question about their willingness to pair for certain types of shoes without being exposed to specific shoe models or images. This tests their level of knowledge they have based on what they would be willing to pay with less information. The analysis here shows some interesting points.

The shoe types follow a rank in probable cost. The cheapest possible type being the outlet/discounted shoe, followed by the common/general release shoe, the exclusive shoe, the cobranded shoe, and ultimately the exclusive and cobranded shoe at the highest possible cost.

Interestingly the trend followed here started as a price sensitivity situation, where the respondents were willing to pay, on average, more for the discounted shoes (94.72 euros per pair) than the common/general release shoes (85.74 euros per pair).

In analysis of the higher priced shoes such as the exclusive, the cobranded, and the exclusive cobranded, the respondents preferred the exclusive (at 149.51 euros on average) over the cobranded shoe (at 138.87 euros on average) but had their highest overall perception of value at the shoe that is both exclusive and cobranded.

In the end, the exclusive and cobranded shoe held the most perceived value in the minds on the respondents, as their will to pay proves to be higher as the average amount of money they were willing to pay is the highest of all at 169.12 Euros per pair. Interestingly, the average amount spent on the most expensive pair purchased was 201.21 euros, well above the highest WTP documented.

5.1.2. Purchase intention and willingness to pay

There are levels of uncertainty in any purchase a consumer makes. The more information available, the lower them level of uncertainty and the less information available, the higher the uncertainty. This uncertainty also becomes stronger as the importance of the decision grow, whether it is because of price, quality, or even opportunity.

When it comes to the uncertainty levels, the consumers behaved as expected. As the type of shoe discussed evolved in importance and perceived price, the amount of respondents uncertain about how much they would be willing to pay rose. The lowest value type of shoe (being the outlet discounted shoe) had lowest uncertainty at 6 uncertain respondents and the highest value type of shoe (being the exclusive and cobranded shoe) had the highest uncertainty at 10 uncertain respondents.

This shows that the level of uncertainty grows proportionally to the probable cost of purchase. Meaning customers will need to be more informed before making a decision as the cost of that decision rises.

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
32.a. Would you be interested in buying an outlet/discounted sports shoe?	1	7	6,37	1,096
33.a. Would you be interested in buying a common/general release sports shoe?	1	7	5,20	1,591
34.a. Would you be interested in buying an exclusive sports shoe (only 100 available in your country)?	1	7	4,47	2,113
35.a. Would you be interested in buying a shoe co-branded in partnership with a famous designer/brand?	1	7	4,70	1,876
36.a. Would you be interested in buying an exclusive shoe (only 100 available in your country) AND co-branded in partnership with another designer/brand?	1	7	4,73	1,988

Table 6 – Type of shoe to be purchased (N=204)
Source: Author

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
25. What was the price of the most expensive sports shoe you ever purchased?	204	0	2200	201,21	210,411
32.b. How much are you willing to pay for an outlet/discounted sports shoe?	198	0	400	94,72	55,918
33.b. How much are you willing to pay for a common/general release sports shoe?	196	0	600	85,74	67,644
34.b. How much are you willing to pay for an exclusive sports shoe (only 100 available in your country)?	194	0	1500	149,51	169,726
35.b. How much are you willing to pay for a shoe co-branded in partnership with a famous designer/brand?	195	0	1200	138,87	129,855
36.b. How much are you willing to pay for an exclusive shoe (only 100 available in your country) AND co-branded in partnership with another designer/brand?	194	0	1200	169,12	163,575
N Valid (listed)	188				

Table 7 – Type of sports shoe willingness to purchase (€)
Source: Author

For the last section of the purchase pattern section, the respondents were inquired about their Willingness to Pay related to a pair of shoes that they desire extremely. They were inquired whether they would pay a premium price (far over the normal retail store price) for this desired pair of shoes. Their responses show the uncertainty once again, with 39.7%% claiming that maybe they would (unsure when it comes to the important financial/value decision) and 34.3% saying that they would not purchase the shoes under these conditions.

They were also inquired how much they would be willing to spend on such pair of shoes and the average response was 157.13 euros (lower than an exclusive and cobranded pair of shoes).

Lastly, for this section, the respondents were surveyed on whether they have previously purchased and then resold a certain pair of shoes (table 4). The responses show that 74.5% have never resold their shoes while 25.5% have engaged in some type of exchange related activity with their shoes (a growing trend since the creation and growth of the resale company StockX).

		Paired differences 95% Superior Difference Confidence Interval	t	df	Sig. (2 extremities)
Par 1	32.a. Would you be interested in buying an outlet/discounted sports shoe? - 33.a. Would you be interested in buying a common/general release sports shoe?	1,400	10,364	203	,000
Par 2	33.a. Would you be interested in buying a common/general release sports shoe? - 34.a. Would you be interested in buying an exclusive sports shoe (only 100 available in your country)?	1,088	4,030	203	,000
Par 3	34.a. Would you be interested in buying an exclusive sports shoe (only 100 available in your country)? - 35.a. Would you be interested in buying a shoe co-branded in partnership with a famous designer/brand?	,001	-1,967	203	,051
Par 4	35.a. Would you be interested in buying a shoe co-branded in partnership with a famous designer/brand? - 36.a. Would you be interested in buying an exclusive shoe (only 100 available in your country) AND co-branded in partnership with another designer/brand?	,121	-,386	203	,700

Table 8 – Type of sports shoe Purchase Intention
Source: Author

There are significant differences (significance level, p<0,05) between the purchase intentions on the purchase choice of a discounted shoe or a common shoe (Pair 1). There is also a significant difference between the purchase intentions on the choice of a common shoe or an exclusive shoe (Pair 2). The other two scenarios (Pairs 3 and 4) show no significant difference in purchase intentions, with Pair 3 just above the statistical boundary.

		Frequency	Percentage	Percentage Valid	Percentage Cumulative
Valid	No	152	74,5	74,5	74,5
	Yes	52	25,5	25,5	100,0
	Total	204	100,0	100,0	

Table 9 – Secondary market data
Source: Author

5.2. Sources of information

Consumers have multiples sources of information. This section will separate them in personal sources, media sources, and YouTube specific content for separated and unique types of analysis.

5.2.1. Personal sources

Friends and family are a dominant influence in terms of where most customers participate in discussions, acquire and share information, and form opinion (image 20). These are the people we grow up with and naturally gravitate towards, blending opinions with less resistance and a stronger bond. Among 80.4% of the participants of this study belong in this category.

The second leading category in conversational influence is the work environment and work colleagues. Most of us spend most of our adult lives at work with limited to nonexistent access to our friends, family, and smartphones. This category coming in as a strong second with 35.3% of participants shows that the workplace is still dominant in our daily lives and still has space for originality and fun (just not as much as with family and friends).

The third leading category is Social Media. Most of the people with a smartphone engage in some sort of social media. It is not surprising that 18.1% of the participants of this study also engage in conversation about their shoes here, with this space being known as a dominant advertisement channel with strong opinion forming capabilities.

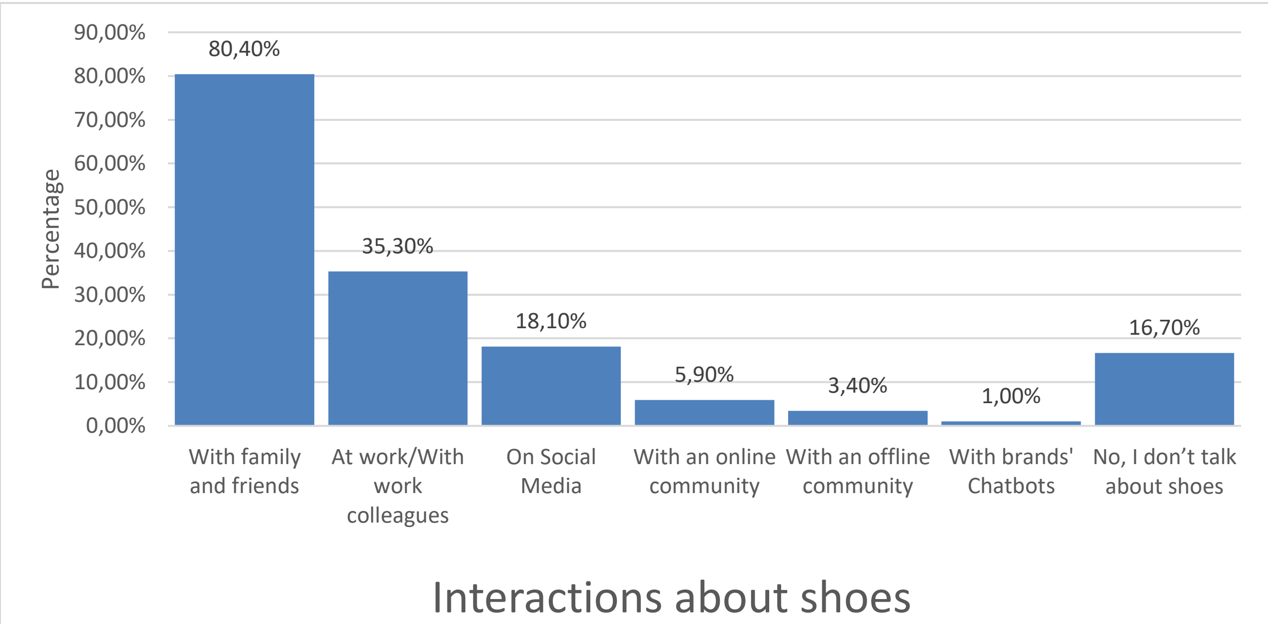

Image 26 – Interactions about shoes
Source: Author

5.2.2. Media Sources

Media, its influence, where we consume it, and how we consume it have all changed dramatically with the evolution of the internet and the on-demand availability an unfathomable amount of diverse content. It is no different with sports shoes (image 27).

Brands have turned increasingly inwards towards online sales, which shows in this research with a leading 70.1% of participants having the websites of the brands themselves as their main source of information about shoes. The other leading categories are Instagram with 63.7% and YouTube with 20.6% of engagement among participants.

Instagram show its growth as a blog/advertisement space that allows for visibility and opinion sharing by coming in second on the research numbers and YouTube proves to remain strong for the amount of more detailed content provided in many different ways.

On the other side of the spectrum is the trust customers still have on store employees. The retail experience has always been and still is extremely solid in the mind and habits of shoppers worldwide, with a strong 23.5% even in midst of an ongoing pandemic.

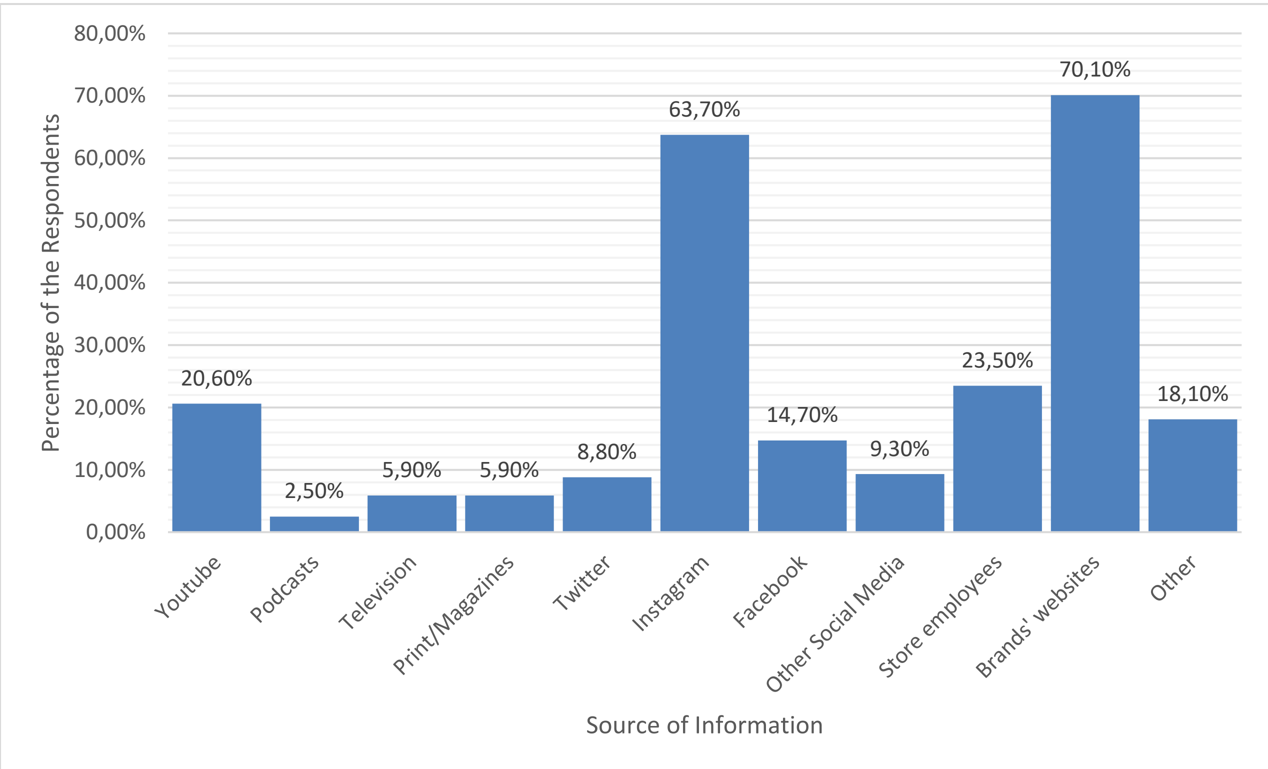

Image 27 – Source of information
Source: Author

	Number of Responses	Percentage
Youtube	42	8,5%
Podcasts	5	1,0%
Television	12	2,4%
Print/Magazines	12	2,4%
Twitter	18	3,6%
Instagram	130	26,2%
Facebook	30	6,0%
Other Social Media	19	3,8%
Store employees	48	9,7%
Brands' websites	143	28,8%
Other	37	7,5%
Total	496	100,0%

Table 10 – Sources of information
Source: Author

5.2.3. YouTube Community content

The most influential YouTube shows in the United States were used for sampling in this area of the study to see if the sneaker communities there have the same impact with other nationalities. Most were inexpressive with only one show, Sneaker Shopping with Complex, with a fairly expressive number at 16.2% of participants knowing the show, 50% more than the second most watched show. Considering 20.6% of all interviewed have consumed YouTube content about shoes, this is very expressive.

Interestingly enough, Sneaker Shopping with Complex is known for bringing in the most influential celebrities and influencers to spend money buying the most coveted shoes. This strengthens the theory that the communities built around shoes are far more influenced by influencers and celebrities than they used to be by media and athletes.

On the other side are the other 76.5% of participants that do not know these shows, or others to extend the issue, but this speaks more on the non-consumption of the American sneaker culture and the negative impact the introduction of advertisement on YouTube videos than it does about the communities themselves.

5.3. Brand Communities

A key data set in this research is how the respondents relate to the concept of brand communities in practicality and the level of which they perceive as if they belong in them (if any).

Vast majority (78%) acknowledges the fact that they do not participate in communities while 15% participate in some kind of community and 7% would be interested in participating but simply do not know how to engage this medium (image 30).

Meanwhile, 95% of the respondents admit to having some level of attention to other people's shoes and 98% of the respondents have previously received some type of compliment to the shoes they were wearing.

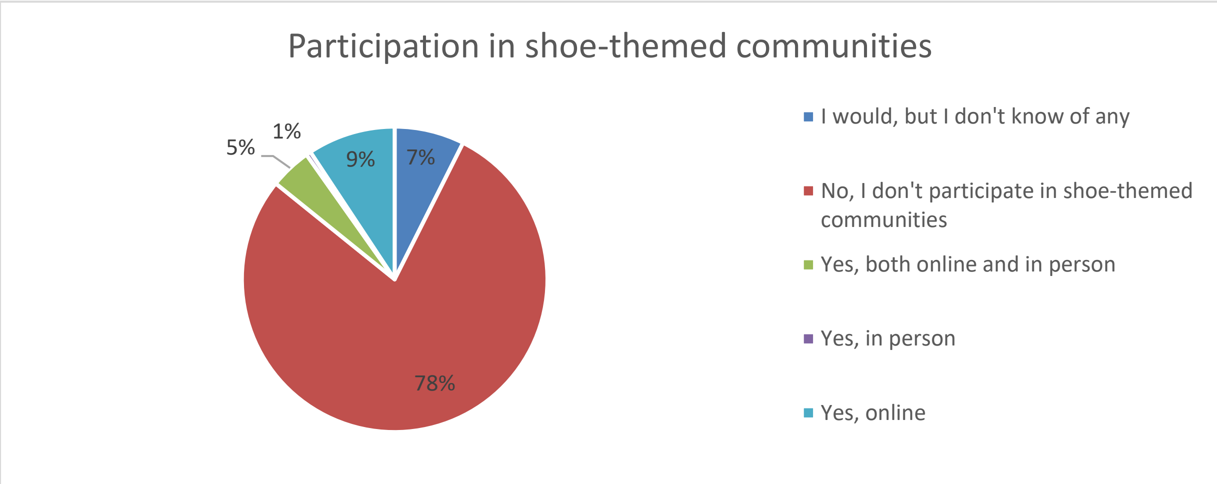

Image 28 – Participation in shoe-themed communities
Source: Author

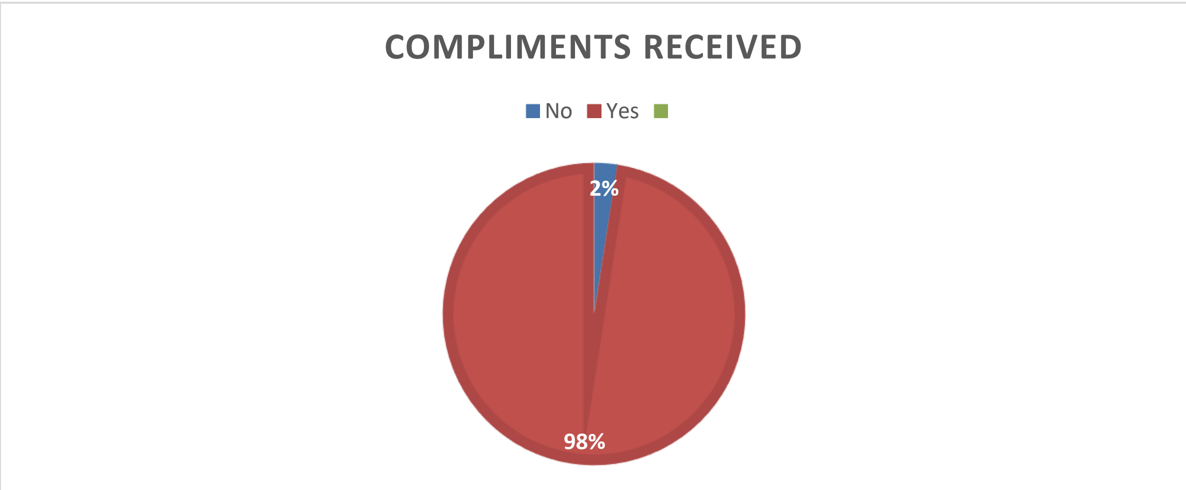

Image 29 – Compliments received
Source: Author

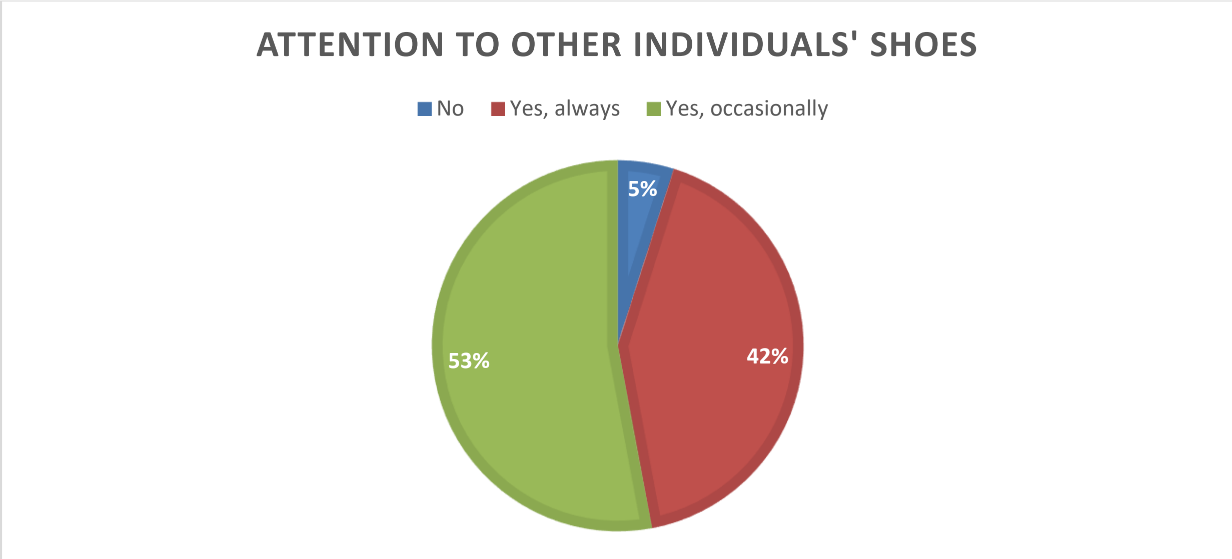

Image 30 – Attention to other individuals' shoes
Source: Author

5.4. Brand Tribalism

Dimensions of Brand Tribalism		
Order	**Variable**	**Cronbach's Alfa**
5.4.1	Social	0.827
5.4.2	Defense of Tribe	0.796
5.4.3	Sense of Community	0.862
5.4.4	Lineage	0.879

Table 11 – Dimension of Brand Tribalism Alfas
Source: Author

The first step in the model's analysis was to analyse its reliability. This was made possible with the reliability test of Cronbach's Alpha made on the variables 'Social', 'Defense of Tribe', 'Sense of Community', and 'Lineage'.

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Cronbach's Alfa if item is excluded
10. People who own or wear sports shoes of your favorite brand are unique from those who own or use shoes of other sports brands.	4,00	2,007	,807
11. You identify uniquely with others who own or wear your favorite brand.	3,17	2,118	,737
12. People who own or use your favorite brand's sports shoes are unique from those that don't own or wear your favorite brand's sports shoes.	2,96	1,988	,736
Total (Social)	**10,12**	**5,272**	**,827**
13. Whenever your favorite brand is put down, you react strongly.	3,17	1,885	,757
14. You often disagree whenever someone prefers a competitive brand to your favorite brand.	2,92	1,861	,733
15. You won't own or wear any competitor of your favorite brand.	2,04	1,526	,773
16. Your favorite brand fits you personally in a way no other brand will.	4,23	1,940	,763
17. Owners or users of your favorite brand "get it"; non-owners or non-users not so much.	3,50	1,858	,756
Total Defense of Tribe	**15,87**	**6,751**	**,796**
20. The friendships you have with other owners or users of your favorite brand mean a lot to you.	2,93	1,934	,841
21. If other owners or users of shoes of your favorite brand planned something, you would think of it as something "you all" would do, rather than something "they" would do.	3,09	1,783	,835
22. You see yourself as part of your favorite brand's community.	3,13	1,916	,831
23. When the opportunity presents itself, you refer to other owners or users of your favorite brand as "us" or "we".	2,47	1,785	,815
24. You feel a sense of co-ownership with your favorite brand.	2,49	1,769	,842
Total Sense of Community	**14,12**	**7,376**	**,862**
29. Compared with other brands, people who own or wear your favourite brand share more than just the product or service use.	3,75	1,675	,886
30. Owners or users of your favorite brand's sports shoes have a bond.	3,35	1,720	,803
31. Owners or users of your favorite brand's sports shoes are bound together.	3,42	1,707	,793
Total Lineage	**10,52**	**4,580**	**,879**

Table 12 – Brand Tribalism Scale Items and Dimensions (N=204)
Source: Author

5.5. Normality of the variables (Skewness and Kurtosis)

The variables were tested as to determine their distribution. An analysis of histograms' characteristics, skewness, and kurtosis was made and, given that the values of asymmetry and kurtosis (in general) are above "-2" and under "2", it was determined they have in fact a distribution close to normality. Here the usage of parametric tests for the analysis of the data is allowed. In this case specifically, the Pearson correlation test is used.

	Mean	St. Dev.	Asymmetry		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Error Error	Statistic	Error Error
10. People who own or wear sports shoes of your favorite brand are unique from those who own or use shoes of other sports brands.	4,00	2,007	-,192	,170	-1,199	,339
11. You identify uniquely with others who own or wear your favorite brand.	3,17	2,118	,448	,170	-1,237	,339
12. People who own or use your favorite brand's sports shoes are unique from those that don't own or wear your favorite brand's sports shoes.	2,96	1,988	,665	,170	-,838	,339
13. Whenever your favorite brand is put down, you react strongly.	3,17	1,885	,534	,170	-,898	,339
14. You often disagree whenever someone prefers a competitive brand to your favorite brand.	2,92	1,861	,625	,170	-,821	,339
15. You won't own or wear any competitor of your favorite brand.	2,04	1,526	1,639	,170	2,007	,339
16. Your favorite brand fits you personally in a way no other brand will.	4,23	1,940	-,289	,170	-1,013	,339
17. Owners or users of your favorite brand "get it"; non-owners or non-users not so much.	3,50	1,858	,115	,170	-,991	,339
S. Total	10,1225	5,27189	,311	,170	-,959	,339
DOT. Total	15,8725	6,75055	,425	,170	-,277	,339
BrandTribalism	50,6373	20,37302	,369	,170	-,506	,339

Table 13 – Brand Tribalism Variables (N = 204)
Source: Author

	Mean	St. Dev.	Asymmetry		Kurtosis	
				Error		Error
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Error	Statistic	Error
20. The friendships you have with other owners or users of your favorite brand mean a lot to you.	2,93	1,934	,552	,170	-,929	,339
21. If other owners or users of shoes of your favorite brand planned something, you would think of it as something "you all" would do, rather than something "they" would do.	3,09	1,783	,353	,170	-,884	,339
22. You see yourself as part of your favorite brand's community.	3,13	1,916	,488	,170	-,889	,339
23. When the opportunity presents itself, you refer to other owners or users of your favorite brand as "us" or "we".	2,47	1,785	1,004	,170	-,177	,339
24. You feel a sense of co-ownership with your favorite brand.	2,49	1,769	,826	,170	-,620	,339
29. Compared with other brands, people who own or wear your favorite brand share more than just the product or service use.	3,75	1,675	-,076	,170	-,607	,339
30. Owners or users of your favorite brand's sports shoes have a bond.	3,35	1,720	,126	,170	-,886	,339
31. Owners or users of your favorite brand's sports shoes are bound together.	3,42	1,707	,075	,170	-,980	,339
SOC. Total	14,1176	7,37563	,559	,170	-,585	,339
LIN. Total	10,5245	4,58036	,009	,170	-,754	,339
BrandTribalism	50,6373	20,37302	,369	,170	-,506	,339

Table 14 – Brand Tribalism Variables (N = 204)
Source: Author

5.6. The correlations of Pearson & Scenarios

The 'Social', 'Defense of Tribe', 'Sense of Community', and 'Lineage' variables and Brand Tribalism are correlated amongst themselves with expressive correlation coefficients.

5.6.1. Scenario 1 – Interest in Outlet/Discounted shoes

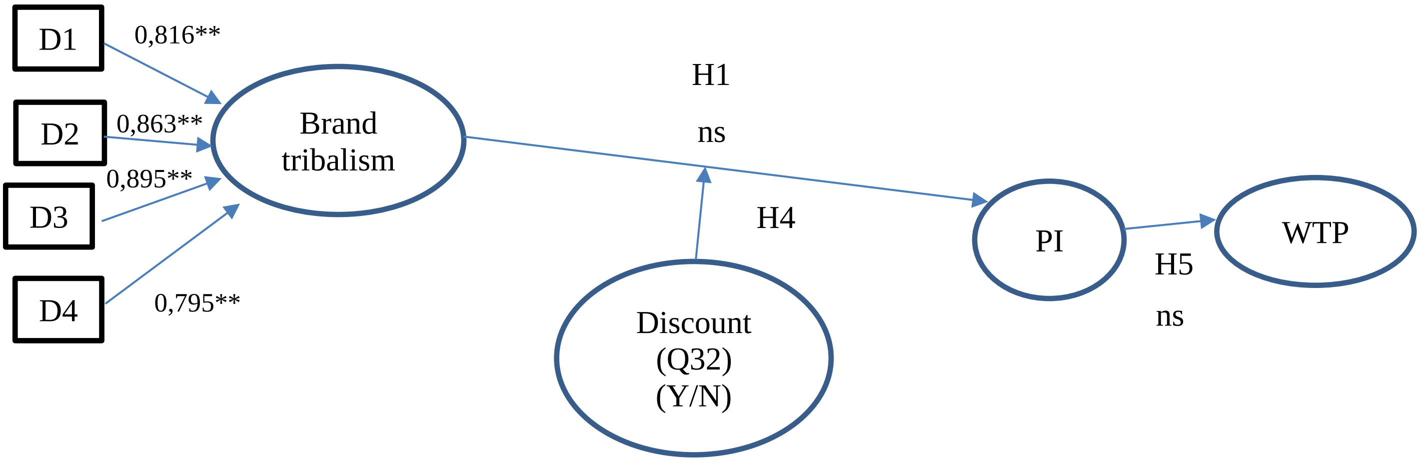

Image 31 – Theoretical Model Proposed for scenario 1
Source: Author

The following data set comprises the correlations between BT and its variables with the consumers' PI and WTB on a situation where the shoe of interest is a discounted shoe that can be found in outlets or in stores on sale. There are no correlations between any of the variables or BT with PI nor WTP in this situation.

		S. Total	DOT. Total	SOC. Total	LIN. Total	Brand Tribalism	32.a. Would you be interested in buying an outlet/discounted sports shoe?	32.b. How much are you willing to pay for that shoe?
S. Total	Pearson's Correlation	1	,633**	,635**	,524**	,816**	-,064	-,040
	Sig. (2 extremities)		,000	,000	,000	,000	,361	,575
	N		204	204	204	204	204	198
DOT. Total	Pearson's Correlation		1	,656**	,579**	,863**	-,002	-,027
	Sig. (2 extremities)			,000	,000	,000	,983	,706
	N			204	204	204	204	198
SOC. Total	Pearson's Correlation			1	,672**	,895**	-,010	,106
	Sig. (2 extremities)				,000	,000	,883	,138
	N				204	204	204	198
LIN. Total	Pearson's Correlation				1	,795**	,090	,096
	Sig. (2 extremities)					,000	,198	,177
	N					204	204	198
BrandTribalism	Pearson's Correlation					1	-,001	,041
	Sig. (2 extremities)						,994	,568
	N						204	198
32.a. Would you be interested in buying an outlet/discounted sports shoe?	Pearson's Correlation						1	-,087
	Sig. (2 extremities)							,225
	N							198
32.b. How much are you willing to pay for that shoe?	Pearson's Correlation							1
	Sig. (2 extremities)							

Table 15 – Discounted Shoe scenario Correlation Matrix (N=204)
Source: Author

5.6.2. Scenario 2 & 3 – Interest in Common VS. Interest in Exclusive Shoes

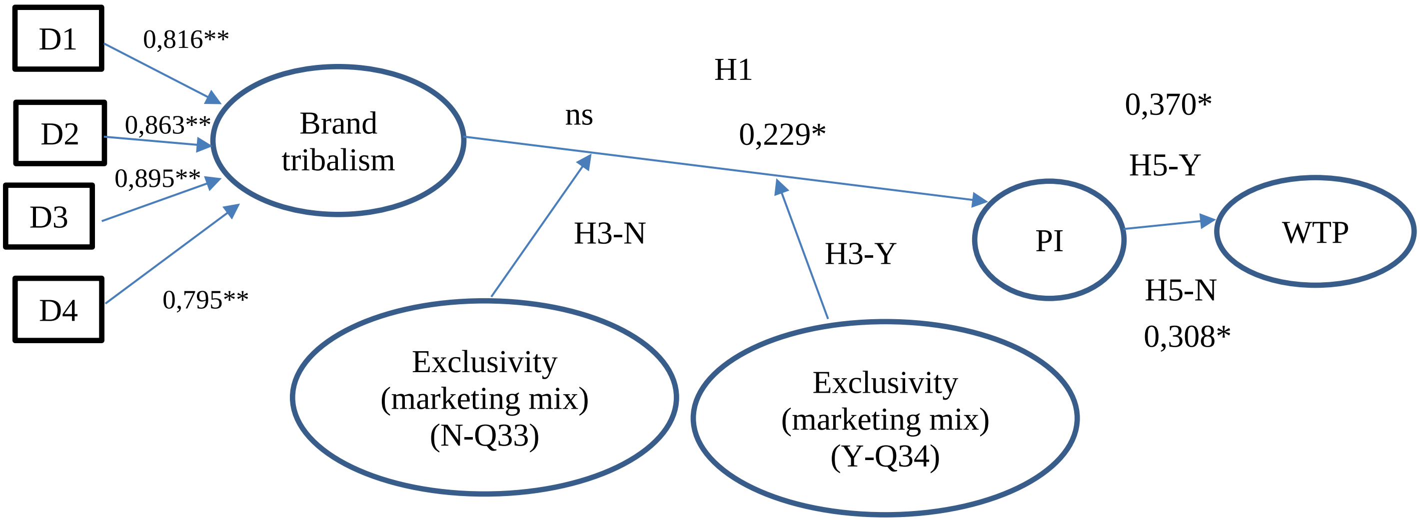

Image 32 – Theoretical Model Proposed for scenarios 2 and 3
Source: Author

This data set comprises the correlations between BT and its variables with the consumers' PI and WTB on a situation where the shoe of interest is either a commonly available shoe or an exclusive shoe. This model portraits both situations together because they are opposites in the spectrum of types of shoes, allowing for a good understanding of the difference in the numbers. For example, there is no correlation between BT and the consumers' PI and WTP when it comes to common shoes (table 15). The opposite holds a different standard. There is a positive correlation with a 0.229 alfa between BT and PI on an exclusive shoe purchase (table 16).

		S. Total	DOT. Total	SOC. Total	LIN. Total	Brand Tribalism	33.a. Would you be interested in buying a common/general release sports shoe?	33.b. How much are you willing to pay for that shoe?
S. Total	Pearson's Correlation	1	**,633****	**,635****	**,524****	**,816****	,069	,106
	Sig. (2 extremities)		,000	,000	,000	,000	,329	,138
	N		204	204	204	204	204	196
DOT. Total	Pearson's Correlation		1	**,656****	**,579****	**,863****	-,009	,073
	Sig. (2 extremities)			,000	,000	,000	,902	,307
	N			204	204	204	204	196
SOC. Total	Pearson's Correlation			1	**,672****	**,895****	,057	**,193****
	Sig. (2 extremities)				,000	,000	,420	,007
	N				204	204	204	196
LIN. Total	Pearson's Correlation				1	**,795****	,016	,057
	Sig. (2 extremities)					,000	,825	,429
	N					204	204	196
BrandTribalism	Pearson's Correlation					1	,039	,134
	Sig. (2 extremities)						,580	,061
	N						204	196
33.a. Would you be interested in buying a common/general release sports shoe?	Pearson's Correlation						1	**,308****
	Sig. (2 extremities)							,000
	N							196
33.b. How much are you willing to pay for that shoe?	Pearson's Correlation							1
	Sig. (2 extremities)							

Table 16 – Common Shoe scenario Correlation Matrix (N=204)
Source: Author

		S. Total	DOT. Total	SOC. Total	LIN. Total	Brand Tribalism	34.a. Would you be interested in buying an exclusive sports shoe (only 100 available in your country)?	34.b. How much are you willing to pay for that shoe?
S. Total	Pearson's Correlation	1	,633**	,635**	,524**	,816**	,117	,106
	Sig. (2 extremities)		,000	,000	,000	,000	,095	,141
	N		204	204	204	204	204	194
DOT. Total	Pearson's Correlation		1	,656**	,579**	,863**	,236**	,076
	Sig. (2 extremities)			,000	,000	,000	,001	,295
	N			204	204	204	204	194
SOC. Total	Pearson's Correlation			1	,672**	,895**	,228**	,152*
	Sig. (2 extremities)				,000	,000	,001	,035
	N				204	204	204	194
LIN. Total	Pearson's Correlation				1	,795**	,170*	,089
	Sig. (2 extremities)					,000	,015	,216
	N					204	204	194
BrandTribalism	Pearson's Correlation					1	,229**	,127
	Sig. (2 extremities)						,001	,077
	N						204	194
34.a. Would you be interested in buying an exclusive sports shoe (only 100 available in your country)?	Pearson's Correlation						1	,370**
	Sig. (2 extremities)							,000
	N							194
34.b. How much are you willing to pay for that shoe?	Pearson's Correlation							1
	Sig. (2 extremities)							

Table 17 – Exclusive scenario Correlation Matrix (N=204)
Source: Author

5.6.3. Scenario 4 – Interest in Cobranded shoes

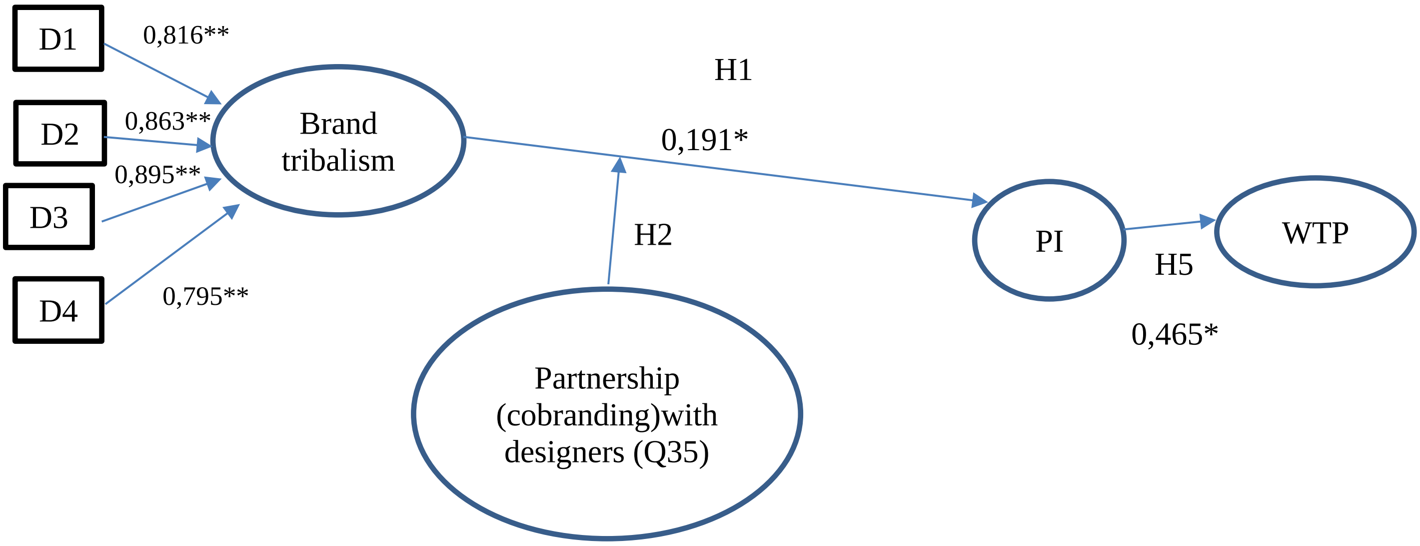

Image 33 – Theoretical Model Proposed for scenario 4
Source: Author

This data set comprises the correlations between BT and its variables with the consumers' PI and WTB on a situation where the shoe of interest is a shoe produced in a partnership of two or more brands. There are many correlations in situation and most hold the highest coefficients when compared to other situations. The correlations exist between all variables and BT with the consumer's PI, all variables and BT (except S) with the consumer's WTP, and a higher correlation coefficient between the consumer's PI and WTP.

		S. Total	DOT. Total	SOC. Total	LIN. Total	Brand Tribalism	35.a. Would you be interested in buying a shoe co-branded in partnership with a famous designer/brand?	35.b. How much are you willing to pay for that shoe?
S. Total	Pearson's Correlation	1	**,633****	**,635****	**,524****	**,816****	,079	,107
	Sig. (2 extremities)		,000	,000	,000	,000	,262	,137
	N		204	204	204	204	204	195
DOT. Total	Pearson's Correlation		1	**,656****	**,579****	**,863****	**,141***	,067
	Sig. (2 extremities)			,000	,000	,000	,044	,354
	N			204	204	204	204	195
SOC. Total	Pearson's Correlation			1	**,672****	**,895****	**,221****	**,265****
	Sig. (2 extremities)				,000	,000	,001	,000
	N				204	204	204	195
LIN. Total	Pearson's Correlation				1	**,795****	**,196****	**,211****
	Sig. (2 extremities)					,000	,005	,003
	N					204	204	195
BrandTribalism	Pearson's Correlation					1	**,191****	**,193****
	Sig. (2 extremities)						,006	,007
	N						204	195
35.a. Would you be interested in buying a shoe co-branded in partnership with a famous designer/brand?	Pearson's Correlation						1	**,465****
	Sig. (2 extremities)							,000
	N							195
35.b. How much are you willing to pay for that shoe?	Pearson's Correlation							1
	Sig. (2 extremities)							

Table 18 – Cobranded Shoe scenario Correlation Matrix (N=204)
Source: Author

5.6.4. Scenario 5 – Interest in Exclusive and Cobranded shoes

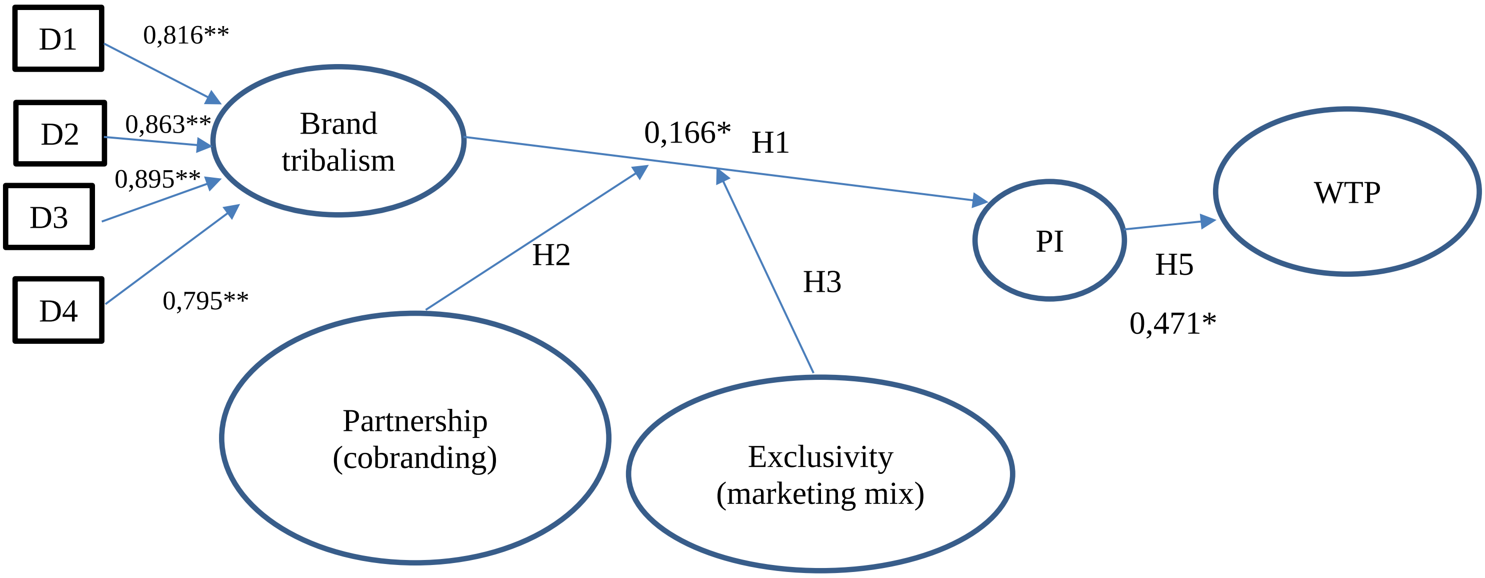

Image 34 – Theoretical Model Proposed for scenario 5
Source: Author

This data set comprises the correlations between BT and its variables with the consumers' PI and WTB on a situation where the shoe of interest is a shoe that is not only cobranded by two or more brands in partnership but is also of exclusive availability. The correlation coefficients follow the exact same patterns as the shoe that is a non-exclusive cobranded partnership (scenario 4) with a slight difference in coefficients.

		S. Total	DOT. Total	SOC. Total	LIN. Total	Brand Tribalism	36.a. Would you be interested in buying an exclusive shoe (only 100 available in your country) AND co-branded in partnership with another designer/brand?	36.b. How much are you willing to pay for that shoe?
S. Total	Pearson's Correlation	1	**,633****	**,635****	**,524****	**,816****	,015	,063
	Sig. (2 extremities)		,000	,000	,000	,000	,827	,384
	N		204	204	204	204	204	194
DOT. Total	Pearson's Correlation		1	**,656****	**,579****	**,863****	**,162***	,028
	Sig. (2 extremities)			,000	,000	,000	,020	,702
	N			204	204	204	204	194
SOC. Total	Pearson's Correlation			1	**,672****	**,895****	**,184****	**,225****
	Sig. (2 extremities)				,000	,000	,008	,002
	N				204	204	204	194
LIN. Total	Pearson's Correlation				1	**,795****	**,187****	**,204****
	Sig. (2 extremities)					,000	,008	,004
	N					204	204	194
BrandTribalism	Pearson's Correlation					1	**,166***	**,153***
	Sig. (2 extremities)						,017	,033
	N						204	194
36.a. Would you be interested in buying an exclusive shoe (only 100 available in your country) AND co-branded in partnership with another designer/brand?	Pearson's Correlation						1	**,471****
	Sig. (2 extremities)							,000
	N							194
36.b. How much are you willing to pay for that shoe?	Pearson's Correlation							1
	Sig. (2 extremities)							

Table 19 – Exclusive and Cobranded Shoe scenario Correlation Matrix (N=204)
Source: Author

5.6.5. Scenario 6 - Influence of Age

This data set comprises the correlations between BT and its variables with the customers PI and WTB on a situation where the object of interest is the age of the consumer. The correlation coefficients suggest that there is no significant correlations of the variables and BT with the consumers' age.

		S. Total	DOT. Total	SOC. Total	LIN. Total	Brand Tribalism	Age
S. Total	Pearson's Correlation	1	**,633****	**,635****	**,524****	**,816****	,017
	Sig. (2 extremities)		,000	,000	,000	,000	,807
	N		204	204	204	204	204
DOT. Total	Pearson's Correlation		1	**,656****	**,579****	**,863****	,022
	Sig. (2 extremities)			,000	,000	,000	,755
	N			204	204	204	204
SOC. Total	Pearson's Correlation			1	**,672****	**,895****	,029
	Sig. (2 extremities)				,000	,000	,682
	N				204	204	204
LIN. Total	Pearson's Correlation				1	**,795****	-,025
	Sig. (2 extremities)					,000	,722
	N					204	204
BrandTribalism	Pearson's Correlation					1	,017
	Sig. (2 extremities)						,814
	N						204
Age	Pearson's Correlation						1
	Sig. (2 extremities)						
	N						

Table 20 – Age scenario Correlation Matrix
Source: Author

5.7. Significance in differences in the willingness to pay between scenarios

All scenario comparisons seem to have considerable differences in raw values but the data comparison proves this not necessarily true. All the paired comparisons show significant paired means' differences. The first comparison, the difference between buying a discounted shoe and a general release shoe, shows a higher willingness to pay (WTP) for the discounted shoe.

The significance level in each of Pairs 2 and 3 also have significant differences (with their significance level p <0,05), where there is a higher WTP for the exclusive shoe in its relation to the next shoe in both pairs.

The fourth comparison, the difference between a shoe that is only cobranded and a shoe that is exclusive and co-branded, evidences a WTP for a shoe that is exclusive and co-branded.

		Mean	N	Standard Deviation	Mean Standard Error
Par 1	32.b. How much are you willing to pay for that shoe?	95,44	193	56,355	4,056
	33.b. How much are you willing to pay for that shoe?	86,55	193	67,717	4,874
Par 2	33.b. How much are you willing to pay for that shoe?	84,58	190	56,765	4,118
	34.b. How much are you willing to pay for that shoe?	152,65	190	170,098	12,340
Par 3	34.b. How much are you willing to pay for that shoe?	150,28	193	169,823	12,224
	35.b. How much are you willing to pay for that shoe?	139,53	193	130,340	9,382
Par 4	35.b. How much are you willing to pay for that shoe?	139,18	194	130,122	9,342
	36.b. How much are you willing to pay for that shoe?	169,12	194	163,575	11,744

Table 21 – Paired WTP Samples' Statistics
Source: Author

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Par 1	32.b. How much are you willing to pay for that shoe? & 33.b. How much are you willing to pay for that shoe?	193	,547	,000
Par 2	33.b. How much are you willing to pay for that shoe? & 34.b. How much are you willing to pay for that shoe?	190	,435	,000
Par 3	34.b. How much are you willing to pay for that shoe? & 35.b. How much are you willing to pay for that shoe?	193	,502	,000
Par 4	35.b. How much are you willing to pay for that shoe? & 36.b. How much are you willing to pay for that shoe?	194	,792	,000

Table 22 – Paired PI Samples' Statistics
Source: Author

6. Conclusion

6.1. General Conclusion

Friends and family are our first experience of a tribe and community where we safely share our opinions and mold them. Coincidence or not, some of the most coveted shoe designs created by major brands' designers are exclusive versions called "Friends and Family" that are made available to select individuals (chosen by the designer of the project and by the brand). It seems that brands understand how the name can impact the opinion of consumers and how they perceive certain apparel. The most outstanding evidence of this idea is the fact that although the respondents of this study do not often engage in Brand Tribe or Community related activities they do so with their friends and family, as these represent the respondents' main source of information and interactions related to shoes.

Television and Magazines/print seem to be increasingly being left in the past as internet content about shoes advance in supply and demand. The on-demand digital media that can be accessed anywhere, paused, and saved seems to be increasingly ahead in the public's opinion.

Following the pattern of progression in shoe purchases, and assuming none of the respondents must forego any one their shoes, vast majority of the respondents would own 21 to 30 pairs of shoes within the next 4 years. This shows brands should focus on availability while being able to maintain exclusivity.

The multi-purpose nature of Nike shoes is well accepted among consumers and that by leading the athleisure movement as well as the evolution of it, Nike solidified its position as the lead brand in athleisure in current times. Other brands have followed these market trend and have benefited greatly from the idea (whether by hiring expressive designers, solidifying strong partnerships, or increasing market share due to increase in demand). The design and material quality aspects of a shoe hold the highest position in customer esteem. This means brands should maintain their natural focus of the multitude of purpose of their shoes for casual and sportswear but also increase investment and expenditure in quality and material development to attract and maintain customers through added and perceived value.

The respondents' preference towards outlet shoes rather than general release shoes is likely due to the fact that shoes at a discount or found in outlets are usually just as good as common/general release shoes or better but at a better price range due to sales events or minor defects that can be easily overlooked. This means that although outlet/discounted shoes are priced lower than general release shoes, the cheaper shoes hold much higher value and the respondents perceive this difference. This does not relate to BT in any way, proven by correlational test results that show that the phenomenon does not influence the PI nor the WTP of the respondents. Therefore, this is a case purely related to value and price sensitivity. The related data evidences this as a separate niche that should be explored differently than the strategies suggested for BT and BC consumers.

On the premium dimension, the exclusive shoes may retail for a lower price than the cobranded shoe but they hold the intangible value of “status” and usually grow in price in the resale market over time more than the cobranded shoe (availability being the key factor) and therefore seems to perceived as more valuable by the respondents. Such perception of value raises even more when the exclusive shoe is also cobranded with a prestigious brand or designer. In the end, the exclusive and cobranded shoe held the most perceived value in the minds on the respondents, as their WTP proves to be higher as the average amount of money they were willing to pay is the highest of all at 169.12 Euros per pair. Interestingly, the average amount spent on the most expensive pair purchased was 201.21 euros, well above the highest WTP documented. This shows that when the right situation appears (subjective to each customer), customers are in fact willing to pay more than average for a desired pair of shoes (retail or resale market).

The respondents seem to perceive more value in exclusivity and premium quality than their personal opinion and taste in shoes. This speaks to the recent trend in major brands’ strategies to collaborate with celebrities and influencers (the opinion leaders in regards to consumption and style). The correlation in the premium scenarios vary greatly: the BT phenomenon influence on the respondents purchase intention is the highest among all scenarios but that does not translate into a highest WTP as well. On the other hand, a co-branded pair of shoes holds high levels of PI and WTP influenced by the BT phenomenon. This brings us to the last scenario where a shoe is both exclusive and co-branded. Here, there is also a positive correlation between BT and the respondents’ PI and WTP but not as strong as when a shoe is only cobranded.

The 74.5% rate of consumers that only bought and have never resold their shoes show a pattern of consumption stronger than a pattern of collection and seems to not engage in participation of shoe related activities other than purchasing, owning, and wearing them. This evidences that brand tribes and communities surrounding shoes and brands are rather small when compared to the overall number of consumers.

With 95% of the respondents having some level of attention towards other people’s shoes, 15 % participating in shoe-themed communities, and 7% willing to participate it seems that the shoe themed community is a small niche where the main issue is the means of entry. Nothing prohibits an individual from observing someone else’s shoes but there seems to be an unknown element inhibiting them from starting conversation based on each other’s shoes. That is in fact how communities are built and fostered, all based on conversation and opinion sharing. If consumers are consuming more than collecting and observing more than engaging in conversation, the data seems to show a tendency of self-expression with personal boundaries.

All things considered, the phenomenon of BT is ever present within different shoe communities and does show visible influence over preferences and purchase decisions even when the analysis is about the purchase options and no specific community is in question.

6.2. Limitations

This study carries a generalized view of purchase options and patterns. This may hinder the respondents' perception of value of each purchase option presented in the survey.

No specific scenarios (survey with pictures of shoes or the opportunity to showcase their most esteemed or most expensive shoes) may hinder the overall specificity of the data and its analysis.

Some demographic representation should be explored further and increased in numbers, such as specific ethnicities, age groups, and profession. The lack of representation of some of them limit the perception of their influence to some extent.

The standard of living of different nationalities helps blend the perception of patterns of consumption but a detailed look into one specific nationality or region per research effort would be more beneficial if research was to analyze specific regional markets.

The limitation of resources also creates barriers to the extension of data findings. Unbiased partnerships with business associations and universities' research teams would greatly foster a better collection of data for a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

6.3. Future Studies

Permission from brands to present real examples as purchase options could significantly increase the respondents' perception of value. Interviews with brand employees would also benefit the representation within the research.

Focus groups with the opportunity to see or touch shoes would also foster the respondents' perception of value (especially in regards to materials and subtle aspects of design).

Research that isolates aspects of purchase could hold further benefits. An example would be isolating a study about price sensitivity situations (such as discounted shoes and general realease/retail shoes) from a separate study about premium situations (such as exclusive and cobranded shoes).

The distribution of the survey in other channels would also increase the overall strength of the data. Making it available to customers in stores (with stores' permissions) and other physical means could influence the perceived significance of the digital means of information procurement and access to the goods themselves.

Rewarding respondents with discounts or merchandise of choice would be a great form of luring them into showing their true patterns of preference when exposed to a real situation of limited choice.

6.4. Recommendations and implications for Management

This study offers many implications for brands and brand managers. This remark is justified by the shown influence BT and BC have on consumer's PI and WTP. The research finds that brand loyalty inside Brand Tribes and Communities is less expressive than the loyalty consumers have amongst themselves and simply to their own purchase habits. Brands should invest less in brand loyalty and focus more on providing a sense of exclusivity while being able to maintain scale. High overall quantities disguised as low regional quantities (per country) would be a great method to maintain customers and avoid losing them to close competitors.

Managers of athletic brands focused on the athleisure movement and establishing a long-term relationship with customers should consider the influence customers have on each other. A great example can be a special focus on the "friends and family" factor and opinion creation through family upbringing. Many consumers consider their peers and friends that are part of a same community as friends and family which in turn opens space for greater mutual influence. In this sense, fostering this family-as-community idea could be done with bundle offers that are available for small groups (whether pre-registered or not).

The suggestion, inferred from data, that the social aspect, the defense of tribe, and the exclusivity aspects have on these tribe and shoe communities PI and WTP opens space for exclusive offers in specific community settings. A great example (and proven feasible) would be the offer of an exclusive shoe to festival goers at a specific music festival. Consumers would be exposed to this exclusivity as communities influenced by a similar taste in music and have the chance to exchange knowledge and opinions not only among themselves but among different tribes and communities as well. Celebrity and popular endorsers could be a great addition to this niche if they are publicly seen wearing the shoes put in place.

Brand managers should perceive shoes for BT and BC as something the consumers cherish as a group and a form of self-expression, not as they used to be when Michael Jordan's image grew with Nike for example.

Shoes that used to be a way of making a customer feel closer to an athlete now serve the opposite purpose. The purpose is to belong in a wider group while maintaining exclusivity and enjoying self-expressing through wearables.

Effective brand strategy in this niche will revolve around how consumers perceive themselves as belonging and feeling exclusive at once. It’s very important to maintain focus on providing tools for opinion leaders to feel interested and share their thoughts, not on forcing a brand’s view and product onto BT and BC through forceful marketing campaigns.

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ANNEX

Annex 1 – Survey Questions

Link: https://forms.gle/tasfZuc6qRkACSKR9

Sports Shoes Brand Communities and Tribes

Hi! My name is Felipe Andrade and I am conducting this survey to collect information for my Master degree's thesis in International Business at University of Minho (Portugal).

All information collected in this survey will be anonymous and will only be used for academic purposes.

The main concept here is to understand how different people with different backgrounds relate to their shoes, their respective brands, and existing communities around them.

Thank you for participating!

1. Do you talk about shoes? If yes, with whom? (select all that apply)

   "With family and friends", "At work/With work colleagues", "On Social Media", "With an online community", "With an offline community", "With brands' Chatbots", "No, I don't talk about shoes"

2. How many pairs of shoes do you own?
3. How many pairs of shoes do you usually buy per year?(give an estimate)
4. For what purpose do you wear your sports shoes? (select all that apply)

   "Casual wear", "Gym", "Sports", "Collection"

5. Your main sources of information about shoes are: (select all that apply)

"Youtube", "Podcasts", "Television", "Print/Magazines", "Twitter", "Instagram", "Facebook", "Other Social Media", "Store employees", "Brands' websites", "Other"

6. Have you ever watched any of the following YouTube shows? (select all that apply)

"FSR – Full Size Run", "The Complex Sneaker Podcast", "Sneaker Shopping with Complex", "Blueprint", "Wear Testers", "I have never watched YouTube shows about shoes", "Other"

7. What sports brands' shoes do you own? (select all that apply)

"Nike", "Jordan", "Adidas", "Under Armour", "Converse/All Star", "New Balance", "Puma", "Asics", "Reebok", "Fila", "Vans", "Other"

8. Even if you don't own any shoe from the brands you like, indicate how much you like each brand. Use a scale where 1 - I don't like it, and 10 - I like it extremely.

“Nike”, “Jordan”, “Adidas”, “Under Armour”, “Converse/All Star”, “New Balance”, “Puma”, “Asics”, “Reebok”, “Fila”, “Vans”

9. When it comes to sports shoes only, which sports brand you consider to be your absolute favorite?

“Nike”, “Jordan”, “Adidas”, “Under Armour”, “Converse/All Star”, “New Balance”, “Puma”, “Asics”, “Reebok”, “Fila”, “Vans”, “Other”

10. People who own or wear sports shoes of your favorite brand are unique from those who own or wear shoes of other sports brands.

1 - Strongly Disagree , 7 - Strongly Agree

11. You identify uniquely with others who own or wear your favorite brand.

1 - Strongly Disagree , 7 - Strongly Agree

12. People who own or wear your favorite brand differentiate themselves from non-owners or non-wearers of your favorite brand.

1 - Strongly Disagree , 7 - Strongly Agree

13. Whenever your favorite brand is put down, you react strongly.

1 - Strongly Disagree , 7 - Strongly Agree

14. You often disagree whenever someone prefers a competitive brand to your favorite brand.

1 - Strongly Disagree , 7 - Strongly Agree

15. You won’t own or wear any competitor of your favorite brand.

1 - Strongly Disagree , 7 - Strongly Agree

16. Your favorite brand fits you personally in a way no other brand will.

1 - Strongly Disagree , 7 - Strongly Agree

17. Owners or users of your favorite brand “get it”; non-owners or non-users not so much.

1 - Strongly Disagree , 7 - Strongly Agree

18. Do you participate in shoe-themed communities?

“Yes, online”, “Yes, in person”, “Yes, both online and in person”, “I would, but I don't know of any”, “No, I don't participate in shoe-themed communities”, “Other

19. Some people participate only in their favorite brand's community. Others participate in several communities, each of them about a single different brand. Select all the communities in which you participate. (select all that apply)

"Nike", "Jordan", "Adidas", "Under Armour", "Converse/All Star", "New Balance", "Puma", "Asics", "Reebok", "Fila", "Vans", "I don't participate in any of the communities above"

20. The friendships you have with other owners or users of your favorite brand mean a lot to you.

1 - Strongly Disagree , 7 - Strongly Agree

21. If other owners or users of shoes of your favorite brand planned something, you would think of it as something "you all" would do, rather than something "they" would do.

1 - Strongly Disagree , 7 - Strongly Agree

22. You see yourself as part of your favorite brand's community.

1 - Strongly Disagree , 7 - Strongly Agree

23. When the opportunity presents itself, you refer to other owners or users of your favorite brand as "us" or "we".

24. You feel a sense of co-ownership with your favorite brand.

1 - Strongly Disagree , 7 - Strongly Agree

25. What was the price of the most expensive sports shoe you ever purchased?

26. While buying a pair of sports shoes, what is the level of importance of the following elements? Use a scale where: 0 - Not important and 5 - Extremely important (Elements can have equal level of importance)

1 - Not importante / 7 - Extremely important

"Design (looks, model, colors, materials)", "Price", "Quality", "Brand Name", "Special editions (athletes, artists, other brands)", "Performance", "Type of Marketing Campaigns", "Distribution", "Channel (online or physical stores)", "Custom help experience to clients", "Design (looks, model, colors, materials)", "Price", "Quality", "Brand Name", "Special editions (athletes, artists, other brands)", "Performance", "Type of Marketing Campaigns", "Distribution Channel (online or physical stores)", "Custom help experience to clients"

27. Have you ever received compliments about the sports shoes you were wearing?

"Yes", "No"

28. Do you pay attention to other people's shoes?

"Yes, always", "Yes, occasionally", "No"

29. Compared with other brands, people who own or wear your favorite brand share more than just the product or service use.

1 - Strongly Disagree , 7 - Strongly Agree

30. Owners or users of your favorite brand's sports shoes have a bond.

1 - Strongly Disagree , 7 - Strongly Agree

31. Owners or users of your favorite brand's sports shoes are bound together.

1 - Strongly Disagree , 7 - Strongly Agree

32. Now imagine you are about to make an online purchase of a pair of sports shoes of your favorite brand.

    On a scale from 1 to 7, how do you feel in the following situations?

    1 – I would not be interested in buying at all.

    7 – I would be extremely interested in buying.

a. Would you be interested in buying an outlet/discounted sports shoe?

1 - I would not be interested in buying at all / 7 - I would be extremely interested in buying

b. How much are you willing to pay for that shoe?

33. Still imagining you are about to make an online purchase of a pair of sports shoes of your favorite brand.

    On a scale from 1 to 7, how do you feel in the following situations?

    1 – I would not be interested in buying at all.

    7 – I would be extremely interested in buying.

a. Would you be interested in buying a common/general release sports shoe?

1 - I would not be interested in buying at all / 7 - I would be extremely interested in buying

b. How much are you willing to pay for that shoe?

34. Still imagining you are about to make an online purchase of a pair of sports shoes of your favorite brand.

    On a scale from 1 to 7, how do you feel in the following situations?

    1 – I would not be interested in buying at all.

    7 – I would be extremely interested in buying.

a. Would you be interested in buying an exclusive sports shoe (only 100 available in your country)?

1 - I would not be interested in buying at all / 7 - I would be extremely interested in buying

b. How much are you willing to pay for that shoe?

35. Still imagining you are about to make an online purchase of a pair of sports shoes of your favorite brand.

    On a scale from 1 to 7, how do you feel in the following situations?
    1 – I would not be interested in buying at all.
    7 – I would be extremely interested in buying.

a. Would you be interested in buying a shoe co-branded in partnership with a famous designer/brand?
1 - I would not be interested in buying at all / 7 - I would be extremely interested in buying

b. How much are you willing to pay for that shoe?

36. Still imagining you are about to make an online purchase of a pair of sports shoes of your favorite brand.

    On a scale from 1 to 7, how do you feel in the following situations?
    1 – I would not be interested in buying at all.
    7 – I would be extremely interested in buying.

a. Would you be interested in buying an exclusive shoe (only 100 available in your country) AND co-branded in partnership with another designer/brand?
1 - I would not be interested in buying at all / 7 - I would be extremely interested in buying

b. How much are you willing to pay for that shoe?

37. In what country were you born?

38. In what country do you currently live in?

39. Have you ever lived in the United States?

"Yes", "No"

40. What is your year of birth.

41. What is your gender?

"Female", "Male", "Prefer not to say", "Other"

42. Which of the following options best describes your ethnicity?

"White", "Black", "Asian", "Latina(o)", "Prefer not to say", "Other"

43. What is your current ocupation?

"Student", "Work for myself", "Work for someone else/company", "Unemployed", "Retired", "Other"

44. What is your shoe size?

"Smaller size", "EU 36 / US Men's 4 / US Women's 4.5/ BR 34.5"
"EU 50 / US Men's 15.5 / US Women's 17 / BR 48.5"
"Bigger size"

45. Think of a shoe you desire extremely. If you can only find this specific shoe you truly desire on a secondary/resale market, would you be willing to pay a premium price (far over retail) for it?

"Yes, I have done it in the past", "Yes, I would", "Maybe", "No"

46. Still about the previous question and the secondary/resale market. How much would you be willing to pay for your extremely desired shoe?

47. Lastly. Have you ever personally purchased and then resold a pair of shoes at a secondary market?

"Yes", "No"

37. In what country were you born?

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Australia	1	,5
	Austria	1	,5
	Brazil	85	41,7
	Bulgaria	1	,5
	Canada	3	1,5
	Cape Verde	1	,5
	Colombia	2	1,0
	Croatia	1	,5
	Denmark	1	,5
	France	6	2,9
	Germany	10	4,9
	Greece	2	1,0
	Italy	7	3,4
	Japan	1	,5
	Lithuania	1	,5
	Mexico	3	1,5
	Moldova	1	,5
	Mongolia	1	,5
	Netherlands	2	1,0
	Panama	1	,5
	Peru	1	,5
	Poland	2	1,0
	Portugal	33	16,2
	România	1	,5
	Russia	1	,5
	Slovenia	7	3,4
	South Africa	1	,5
	Spain	1	,5
	Sweden	4	2,0
	Turkey	1	,5
	Ukraine	1	,5
	United Kingdom	1	,5
	United States of America	15	7,3
	Venezuela	3	1,5
	Zimbabwe	1	,5
	Total	204	100,0

38. In what country do you currently live in?

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Australia	1	,5
	Brazil	57	27,9
	Bulgaria	1	,5
	Canada	5	2,5
	China	1	,5
	Denmark	2	1,0
	France	5	2,5
	Germany	9	4,4
	Greece	2	1,0
	Ireland	2	1,0
	Italy	8	3,9
	Japan	1	,5
	Lithuania	2	1,0
	Malta	2	1,0
	Mexico	2	1,0
	Mongolia	1	,5
	Netherlands	4	2,0
	Norway	1	,5
	Panama	2	1,0
	Poland	2	1,0
	Portugal	49	24,0
	Romania	1	,5
	Slovenia	7	3,4
	South Africa	1	,5
	Spain	2	1,0
	Sweden	5	2,5
	Switzerland	1	,5
	Turkey	1	,5
	United Kingdom	1	,5
	United States	26	12,7
	Total	204	100,0

39. Have you ever lived in the United States?

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	No	122	59,8
	Yes	82	40,2
	Total	204	100,0

41. What is your gender?

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Female	54	26,5
	Male	150	73,5
	Total	204	100,0

42. Which of the following options best describes your ethnicity?

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Asian	5	2,5
	Black	21	10,3
	Latina(o)	38	18,6
	Other	4	2,0
	Prefer not to say	3	1,5
	White	133	65,2
	Total	204	100,0

43. What is your current ocupation?

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Retired	1	,5
	Student	44	21,6
	Unemployed	3	1,5
	Work for myself	34	16,7
	Work for someone else/company	122	59,8
	Total	204	100,0

44. What is your shoe size?

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Smaller size	1	,5
	EU 36 / US Men's 4 / US Women's 4.5/ BR 34.5	6	2,9
	EU 36.5 / US Men's 4.5/ US Women's 6 / BR 35	2	1,0
	EU 37.5/ US Men's 5/ US Women's 6.5/ BR 35.5	7	3,4
	EU 38 / US Men's 5.5 / US Women's 7 / BR 36	11	5,4
	EU 38.5 / US Men's 6/ US Women's 7.5 / BR 37	9	4,4
	EU 39 / US Men's 6.5 / US Women's 8 / BR 37.5	7	3,4
	EU 40/ US Men's 7 / US Women's 8.5 / BR 38	7	3,4
	EU 40.5 / US Men's 7.5 / US Women's 9 / BR 39	7	3,4
	EU 41 / US Men's 8 / US Women's 9.5 / BR 39.5	6	2,9
	EU 42 / US Men's 8.5 / US Women's 10 / BR 40	11	5,4
	EU 42.5 / US Men's 9 / US Women's 10.5 / BR 40.5	12	5,9
	EU 43 / US Men's 9.5 / US Women's 11 / BR 41	15	7,4
	EU 44 / US Men's 10 / US Women's 11.5 / BR 42	30	14,7
	EU 44.5 / US Men's 10.5 / US Women's 12 / BR 42.5	19	9,3
	EU 45 / US Men's 11 / US Women's 12.5 / BR 43	22	10,8
	EU 45.5 / US Men's 11.5 / US Women's 13 / BR 43.5	5	2,5
	EU 46 / US Men's 12 / US Women's 13.5 / BR 44	14	6,9
	EU 47 / US Men's 12.5 / US Women's 14 / BR 45	4	2,0
	EU 47.5 / US Men's 13 / US Women's 14.5/ BR 46	5	2,5
	EU 48 / US Men's 13.5 / US Women's 15 / BR 46.5	1	,5
	EU 48.5 / US Men's 14 / US Women's 15.5 / BR 47	2	1,0
	Bigger size	1	,5
	Total	204	100,0

45. Think of a shoe you desire extremely. If you can only find this specific shoe you truly desire on a secondary/resale market, would you be willing to pay a premium price (far over retail) for it?

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Maybe	81	39,7
	No	70	34,3
	Yes, I have done it in the past	22	10,8
	Yes, I would	31	15,2
	Total	204	100,0

47. Lastly. Have you ever personally purchased and then resold a pair of shoes at a secondary market?

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	No	152	74,5
	Yes	52	25,5
	Total	204	100,0

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
25. What was the price of the most expensive sports shoe you ever purchased?	204	0	2200	201,21	210,411
N Valid (listed)	204				