

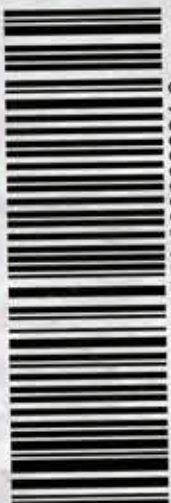
ALEX BODMAN

DG3541 RESEARCH PROJECT (INVESTIGATION)

INSIGHTS REPORT



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How Does Brand, Music and Celebrity Culture Influence Consumer Fashion Habits?

RESEARCH PROJECT / INVESTIGATION

**MADE IN CARDIFF
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH WALES**

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Introduction

Fashion brands today more than ever, have developed a symbiotic relationship with music and celebrity culture, which benefits the celebrity and brand more than it does the consumer.

The celebrity and brand influence on young people, particularly young males are prevalent in today's society with a strong desire to fit in and belong, which is often used by brands to exploit its consumers.

Within this research report will examine how brands music and celebrity culture influence consumer fashion habits and their detrimental effects, such as financial hardship, debt, poor self-worth, image and esteem, also how fashion consumers manifest

inferiority and superiority complexes, affecting mental health and wellbeing in people today.



Why did I choose this topic?

As a designer and a self-professed sneaker head, I willingly buy into the illusion of brand value and celebrity culture. As a victim of the industry, I am curious to investigate the reasons why people like myself, crave branded clothing and gain clout (kudos) for owning and wearing particular brands which are endorsed by celebrities.

For the purpose of this research investigation I will focus on the subject from a male perspective.

I personally believe that street fashion culture could have a detrimental effect on the mental health of vulnerable and impressionable young adults, who are already struggling to fit in to societal norms.

Young people are creating an external image to be displayed to the outside world, competing with their peers to follow a certain celebrity or brand, for example the Yeezy Foam Runners, despite the price on the garments, label or the aesthetics of the fashion in question.

“You might be scratching your head and wondering if this is a joke, but we can assure you it is not. Kanye is changing the game as the Yeezy Foam Runner was just announced for a 2020 release”. Sykes, I. (2020).

This fashion consumerism culture today, could be seen to encourage a judgmental attitude which permeates throughout our society and ostracises groups of people in communities.

This research report will allow me to question why a small logo on a plain black jumper is considerably more desirable than the same jumper without.

As a Graphic Communications student I believe it is important to understand the influence that brands have on young and impressionable people and the ethics within the fashion design world.



Aims and Objectives

This Insights aims to allow a greater understanding of how brands, music and celebrities influence consumer's and their fashion habits. The objective within this research report, will be to investigate and discuss street fashion culture and how celebrity influences, particularly impact on young male consumers.

The differences between rapper and hip-hop producer, Kanye West's approach to design and the way other celebrity brand deals are carried out will be explored.

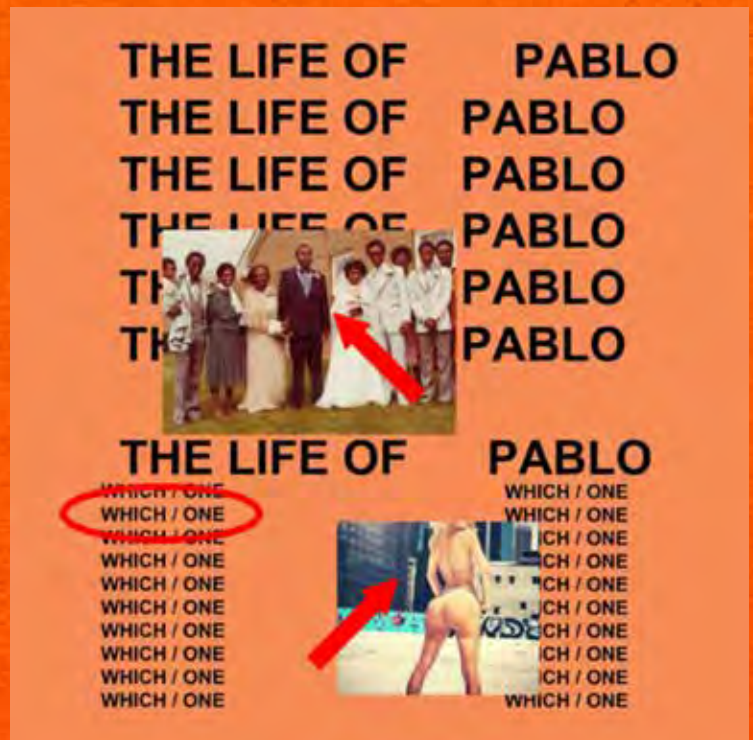
The Yeezy brand which is a collaboration that started between Nike and Kanye West, consisted of Nike releasing three pairs of sneakers under the Yeezy label. However due to disagreements concerning royalties, Kanye and Nike's relationship dissolved. Kanye moved the Yeezy label to work with Adidas, which will be highlighted within the report, how millennials and Gen Z, particularly young males are influenced and attracted to Adidas vicariously through Kanye West's allegiances with any brand he associates himself with.



Aims and Objectives

Further evidence through the research document suggests Music, particularly grime and hip hop also influences young male consumers of street fashion.

This report will discuss how rappers such as Travis Scott, Tyler the Creator and Kendrick Lamar, Designed and endorsed sneakers with Nike and Converse to make limited edition exclusive products for consumers. The collaborations differ to the approach Kanye West takes, in that Kanye has built Yeezy into its own sub brand below adidas, whereas Nike directly collaborates with the aforementioned celebrities to gain endorsement of their fashion products.



This report will investigate how these celebrities have directly and heavily influenced the purchasing habits of their fans, through their music to have an allegiance with a particular brand, for example Kanye West's song 'Facts (Charlie Heat Version)' is a direct 'Diss Track' (a song written primarily to insult another person, or in this case brand) to Nike, the research document has evidenced Kanye's die-hard fans do not associate with Nike.

Aims and Objectives

The report will also be looking at 'Hype Beast' fashion (A Hype Beast is defined as a person who follows fashion trends to be cool or in style with an allegiance to particular brands such as Supreme, Balenciaga, Yeezy etc), and fashion habits such as sneaker collecting, which is currently an emerging culture developing within global societies.



The report will investigate and provide evidence of the behavioural effects of heavy fashion consumerism which often results in, addiction, gambling and also the financial effects of the hype beast lifestyle.

This is evidenced within this report, by interviewing consumers who use the platform to purchase fashion outside of their financial means, resulting in debt and poverty and a damaged perception of their self-image and worth.

The research report will also examine the development of businesses through fashion reselling, for example, Stock X is a fashion reselling website similar to eBay that has been built entirely around fashion culture and the limited exclusivity of garments, and the effects this has on the average consumer will be discussed during this report.

Methodology

Primary, Tertiary and Secondary research methods have been used to source information, many social media resources such as YouTube, Reddit and Instagram have also been used to gather relevant information and evidence to support the report.



For the purpose of gathering evidence within this report interviews as discussed above were held with a number of consumers, retailers, Hype Beasts, and Instagram Influencers, to gain valuable information on their shopping habits as well as their social media habits and the lifestyle of the type of people who are interested in high end fashion.

Methodology

The report also includes an interview with Chris Hassan, the manager of Flannels, which is an upmarket and independent fashion retailer, in Cardiff. The interview provides insight into the purchasing habits of their regular customers.

An online questionnaire will be conducted using Survey Monkey and sharing it on various social media platforms. This will provide statistics which give evidence of the purchasing habits and fashion perceptions of the public.



Secondary research was also gained by reading Mitchell Beazley's book 'Icons of Style, Sneakers' which gave insight into the history of sneakers (trainers / sports shoes) and how foot fashion has evolved over the past two decades into a multi-billion-dollar industry for consumer purchasing power.

The above research methodology has provided substantial information to assist in the identification of problems within the high-end street fashion industry.

Hype Beast culture and its effects on consumerism

The research within this report explored how brands, music and celebrity culture influence millennials and Gen Z consumer fashion, there is clear evidence that young people continuously shape global changes in fashion trends.

The Hype beast platform was founded in 2005 by Kevin Ma a 20-year-old sneaker head (a collector of sneakers) the platform has amassed 28 million-page views a month to date.

Kevin Ma, the founder and CEO of Hype beast, has been labelled as one of the top influencers in streetwear culture.



“So, as a side project I decided to create Hype beast to gather all the fashion, culture, and music news into one place. Slowly, it became my full-time job and now my business” Ma, K. (2018)

HYPEBEAST

As described, the platform 'Hype beast' has developed into a way of life for some consumers of high end fashion, the hype beast, purchases upmarket, high end brands with the intention to 'flex' (flexing is a slang term used by hype beasts and other internet cultures to show off and boast about their possessions and belongings).

The Hype Beast, jumps from trend to trend, keeping in line with the newest fashion releases, and will use platforms such as Instagram, often posting and sharing pictures of their fashion purchases and encouraging followers.

Hype Beasts are a by-product of social media and cannot exist without a media platform which supports the hype beasts feeling of celebrity status.

The goal of the Hype Beast is to seek positive affirmation from fashion, shoes and accessories, which creates a perceived positive feeling.

For the purpose of this research investigation two interviews were conducted with Peter Berry an 18-year-old catering student working a part time job at Wetherspoons on minimum wage and Jake Bullock a 22-year-old Engineer earning on average £30,000 per year. Both follow fashion trends closely and fit within the hype beast ethos, despite not owning the label themselves.



During interview 1, Peter explained that he would purchase high end items with the intention to flex (show off). Peter expressed a feeling of euphoria and excitement by the attention he receives on his Instagram page.

“I love it, I get loads of followers who love my stuff”. Berry, P. (2020)

Peter explained that the good feeling outweighed any negative feelings that he had; however, he also stated that he did get some remorse when looking at his monthly bank statements. Peter explained that he is going overdrawn monthly and has a debt for the fashion items he has purchased.

“I sometimes have to hide my new stuff or I lie about the cost of things I buy from my mum as she is worried about me getting into debt, I want the shoes and clothes and I love the feeling it gives me, it’s like a drug” Berry, P. (2020)

Peter is aspiring to the hype beast culture and during the interview compared the feeling as that of a drug.

The interview with Peter evidences concerning consumer behaviours. Peter is displaying a lack of control over his fashion purchases and there are signs that the Hype Beast lifestyle is developing into an addictive habit for Peter as this lifestyle choice is encouraging secrecy, lies and has started to have a negative impact on his finances.





During Interview 2, Jake Bullock felt in control of his purchases, he described how he strictly limited his fashion purchases to £200 per month, however he later contradicted this statement by saying he regularly spent over £200 going over budget, particularly when a pair of limited-edition sneakers were about to be released.

“I get a massive buzz when I got the item in my basket and make the purchase, then I am on a high waiting for my sneakers to arrive in the post, so I can post the pics on my Insta”

Bullock, J. (2020)



As a relatively new lifestyle approach, there is little study research on the negative impact of Hype beast culture, however there are articles from individuals who state the effects and complications to their lives were substantially negative.

Ben Fullon, describes in an article 'Confessions of a Recovering Hype Beast'

That as a college student he became a hype beast and his addiction to consumer purchasing fashion items complicated his life.

"other shoppers would talk to me and ask my opinion on things, like I was some kind of authority, Me, the awkward kid who had barely had a normal social interaction with anyone until I got to college. After decades of blending in I was finally starting to stick out" Fullon, B. (2015).

"I would do anything to ensure that I always copped a new release. I camped outside stores more times than I care to admit. I ate cheap deli food and dollar slices to offset my spending, if I even ate at all. The most egregious incident was probably the time I paid an employee of a store to sneak us a hoodie—for the full price of a hoodie. If you're doing the math, that's somewhere in the vicinity of \$400 on top of an already \$400 hoodie. But I knew what I wanted. And I knew I had to have it" Fullon, B. (2015).



The research interviews with Peter and Jake has evidenced a similarity in feelings and behaviours described by Ben Fullon within the article above. Further research and study would be beneficial on the negative effects that hype beast culture has on self-worth and how inferior a person may feel if they are not financially able to own a particular brand.

During interviewing Jake explained how he also uses the Stock X service to buy, sell and collect street branded fashion items. Stock X is a relatively new concept in fashion consumerism. Jake explained that he has purchased a pair of 'Off White Nike Zoom Terra Kiger 5' sneakers by designer and owner of Off white, Virgil Abloh.



Jake stated that he didn't like the design of the shoe but had purchased them anyway for the sole purpose of selling them on Stock X.

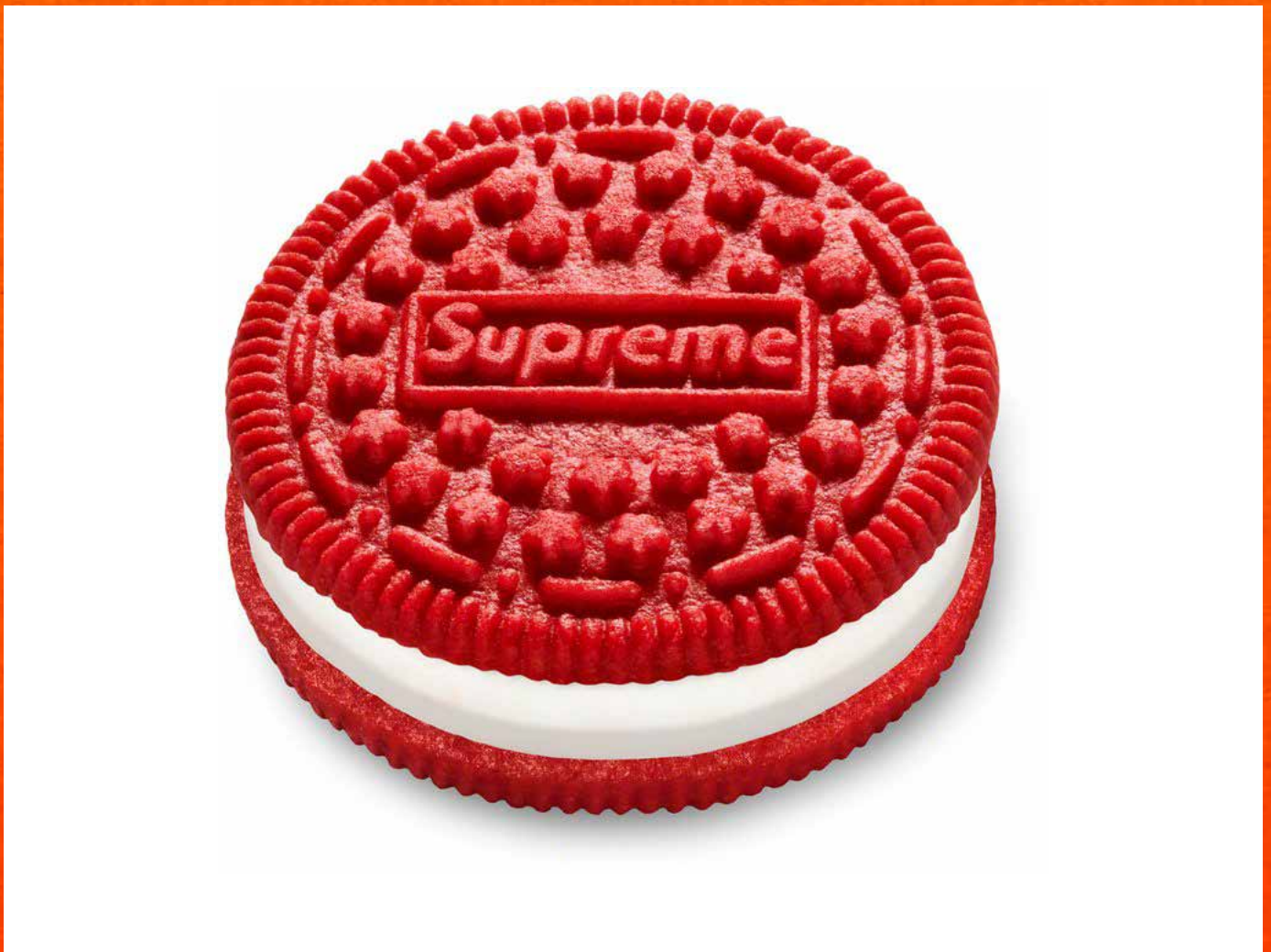
Jake stated "I knew I would make money on the shoes by selling them on, I bought them at retail the moment they dropped, and gambled that they would be a sell-out. I got them at retail price of £180, and I was lucky I sold them for £240".

Bullock, J (2020)

Fashion consumers will purchase items which are sold at retail price by the brand in a purposeful low quantity. The brands use fashion consumers and Hype Beasts to their advantage, by creating a perceived euphoria around the product.

Huge seasonal fashion reveals called collections are announced on social media. This generates excitement amongst brand fans.

The brand is using psychological tactics on consumers by creating a fear of missing out (FOMO) belief which encourages anxiety and impulsive behaviour as a fashion consumer. Further evidence shows that limiting stock release, increases value of fashion items. When saturating a market, it devalues the item.



For example, in Supremes' Spring/Summer 2020 Collection, alongside their announcement of new clothing a whole array of abstract and random items appeared with the logo insert including items such as an Oreo Cookie and Ziplock bags.

stock X

Stock X relies on the above principle to generate sales. If the product sells out, a higher resell value is created. This is the fashion consumers gamble and it does not always pay off.

Jake as a high-end fashion consumer has demonstrated that he is clearly influenced by branding and is utilising the Stock X company to his advantage.



The downfalls of a culture where fashion consumers, are influenced considerably by owning the most recent branding trends, sit alongside companies who are happy to take full advantage of this epidemic. Matt Steiner has developed a bot (website) where for a fee, the bot will attempt to secure specific Supreme items for fashion consumers to buy.

FLANNELS

A new culture has developed within fashion consumerism. In interview with the manager of Flannels Cardiff store, Chris Hassan.

Chris suggested that fashion habits of consumers are highly influenced by branding and celebrity status.

Chris explained that Flannels largest selling fashion products at present, are Stone Island jackets. Chris explained what a typical customer looked like.

“Lots of young people, the Asian clients all spend a lot and you wouldn’t believe how many parents are buying Stone Island jackets for their kids at the moment, they are really popular and flying out the door, young people love designer brands these days, I think it’s about status for them” Hassan, C. (2020)



Chris justifies the cost of high-end fashion and branding by describing it as original art, and when asked whether he thinks musicians, particularly Hip-Hop and Pop artists influence peoples shopping habits today, he answered, " Absolutely that's the reason that Yeezy is one of our most popular brands." Hassan, C. (2020)

Chris discussed his personal preference for the brand Yeezy 350 V2's but is not a fan of the chunkier shoes.

The interview further evidences the how branding, music and celebrity culture is currently influencing consumer fashion habits globally.



The Influence of Music and Celebrity Culture on Fashion Consumers

As discussed in the interview with Flannels manager Chris Hassan, fashion consumers are deliberately and subconsciously basing their purchasing decisions on brands who are collaborating with celebrities and music.

Brand and celebrity relationships are influencing the fashion consumer by creating a desirable image that fans of the celebrity will aspire to.

For example, singer songwriter and rapper George Miller better known as Joji discussed fashion in the Complex interview 'Sneaker Shopping with Joji'.



Celebrity Interviewer Joe La Puma asked about the unreleased sneakers that Adidas had provided him.

“you wore them before they came out, there was Reddit threads, like what is Joji wearing?”

La Puma, J. (2020)

“That’s pretty crazy, those were for a shoot and adidas passed them on to us”

Miller, J. (2020)

Joji wore a pair of Adidas NMD Sneakers for a photo shoot. Fans went mad taking to Instagram and Reddit to discuss what Joji was wearing and how they could get their hands on the sneakers in question.

Fans are genuinely interested in seeing what their celebrity idols are wearing, by watching shows such as sneaker shopping and looking at celebrity Instagram pages.

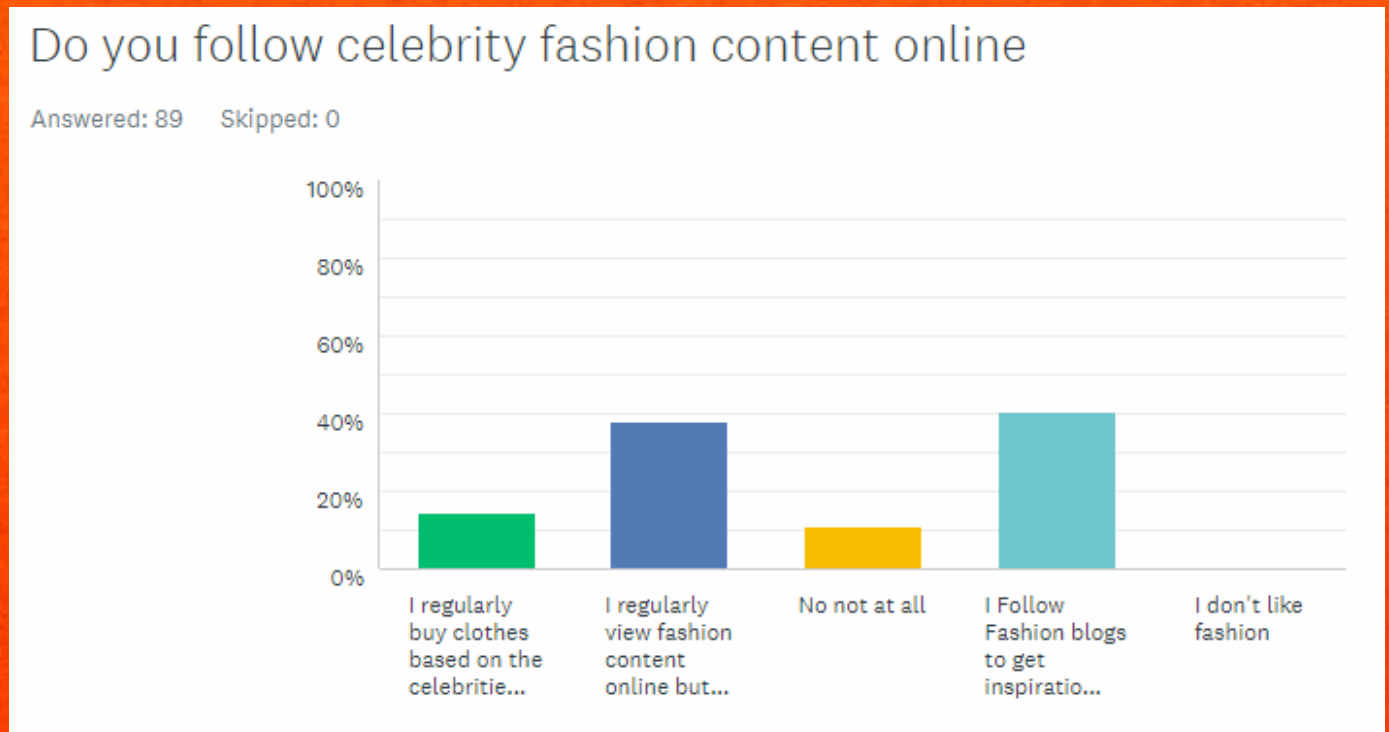
The questionnaire conducted for this research investigation highlights why some fans willingly choose to be influenced by celebrity culture.

The results showed:

40% are influenced and inspired heavily by music and their favourite celebrity.

15% follow celebrity fashion blogs with the intention to purchase and take inspiration from celebrity image.

38% follow celebrity fashion content online with no intent to purchase.



The research questionnaire evidences that celebrity influence is prevalent between 16 to 30 year old participants living in Cardiff and surrounding communities.

Additional Verbal feedback received from fellow students studying at USW agreed with this statistic, stating that they are also significantly influenced by celebrity culture particularly within the music industry. Students disclosed that they all have Instagram accounts and follow celebrity idols, with a view to picking up tips on fashion, and finding out the latest celebrity gossip.

A common theme amongst fashion consumers is their association to particular celebrities, this is particularly prevalent in fans of grime and hip-hop music.

As discussed above Kanye West has developed his brand Yeezy through a partnership with Adidas.

Kanye West fans are faithful to Adidas and his brand Yeezy and will strive to own a pair of Yeezy sneakers. The fashion consumer is attempting to create their image through clout (kudos), the sneakers someone wears gives off perceptions about their character before they even open their mouth.

For example, in the interview with Jake Bullock, when asked whether he felt his style was influenced by celebrity he stated.



“Absolutely! Kanye West has influenced my style especially, I have always loved Adidas clothing and the fact that Kanye works with Adidas, makes me eager to purchase more Yeezy’s”.

Bullock, J. (2020)

Kanye West previously collaborated with Nike from 2009 – 2011, as discussed, this relationship ended due to disagreement over royalties. He has now aspired to build his business model in replication to Jordan's, a collaboration between Nike and the NBA basketball player Michael Jordan.

“When I was in 4th Grade I was drawing Jordan's when my Mom couldn't afford them”

West, K. (2020)



Collaborations Between Brands and Celebrities

It is important to analyse the collaboration between celebrities and branding, in today's society it's mutually beneficial for brands to partner with popular celebrities as this gives the celebrity a feeling of creativity and allows them to release more merchandise under big name brands. This allows the brand to gain endorsement and free advertising from the celebrities in question. The results of these collaborations allow fans of the brands and artists in question to feel like they are gaining a deeper connection with said celebrity in the same way they would when wearing a band t-shirt.



For example, rapper and producer Travis Scott teamed up with Nike to release a pair of Nike Air Force 1 Sneakers on August 10th, 2018. This collaboration is a good example of fashion consumers and fans, feeling connected to the artist through the merchandise as Travis is sending a subtle message of the hard work and hustle he has put into his craft, as well as Travis Scott's iconic imagery without looking overtly like band merchandise, Travis Scott fans connect with Travis through his raw aggressive imagery, that is also displayed within his music and clothing.

“For the most part, Travis Scott’s AF-1 is subtle. On stage, the icon shines bright, reflecting all the hustle and hard work he’s dedicated to his craft. His exuberant energy comes through in the form of multi-color reflective detailing, while removable Swoosh logos and Velcro patches further reflect both the calm, collected and energizing personas he embodies”

Anon. (2018)



The above collaboration is in direct contrast to what Kanye West does with the Yeezy label in building a brand around Yeezy under Adidas, while Travis Scott works directly alongside Nike and uses Nike’s imagery to assist in sales and the aesthetics of the product.

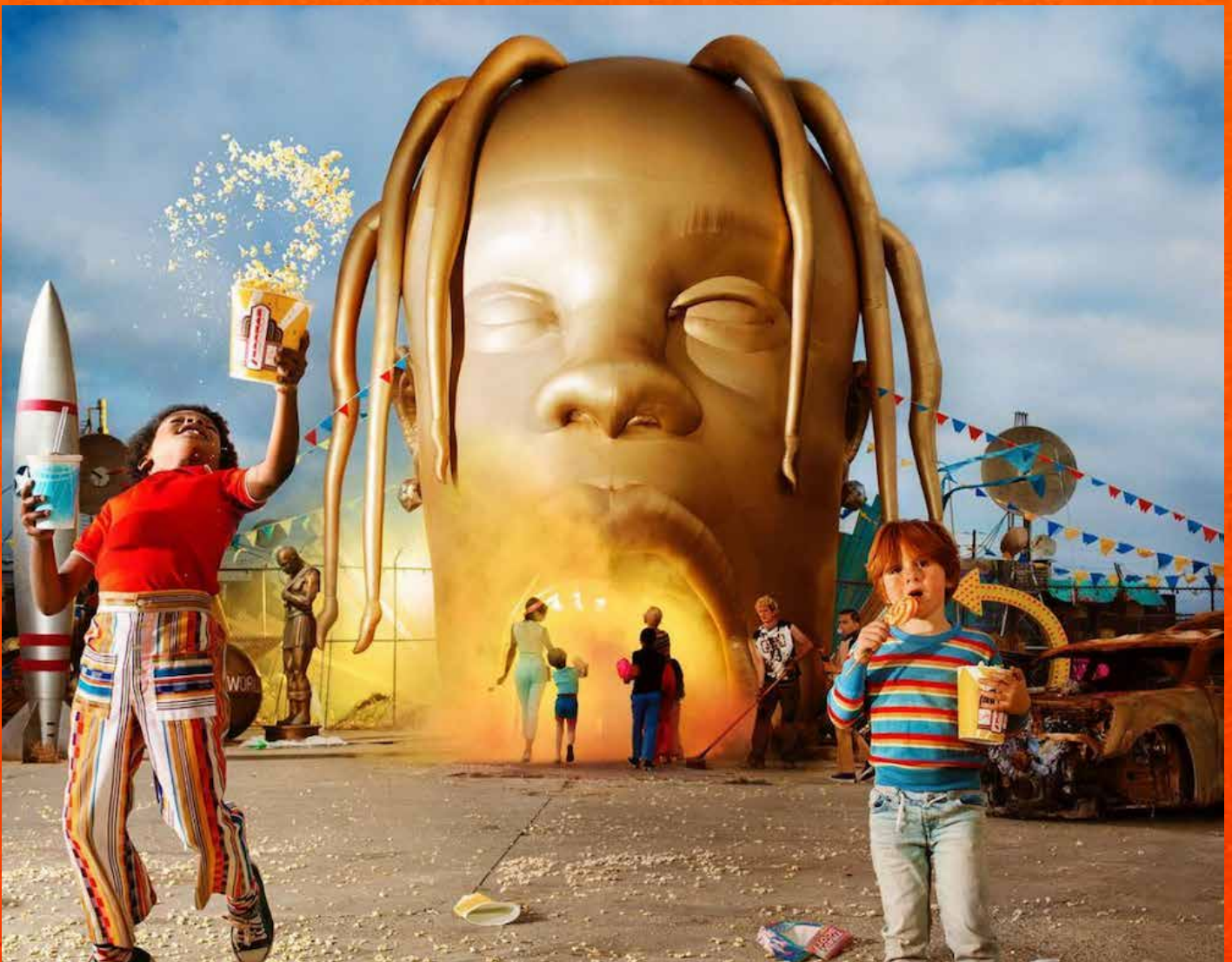
Another noteworthy street wear brand partnership is the collaboration between musician, Tyler the Creator’s brand Golf Wang, under the new brand name ‘Golf le Fleur, and Converse.

Tyler the Creator differs to his hip-hop associates in his style in that he doesn’t want to be referred to as a ‘rapper’.

Tyler’s fans connect with him through his softer and more melodic music, this aesthetic is also displayed in the designs of Tyler’s brand ‘Golf le Fleur’, his sense of style and the clothing that is produced by Golf.

It should be acknowledged that not all collaborations between celebrities and brands are successful, a brand could ruin a celebrity image and vice versa.

The importance of branding and public image go hand in hand as a marriage between the two. For example, it would be unlikely to see the Rapper Drake wearing Adidas clothing as he has had such a long-term relationship with Nike, that it would reflect negatively on, and damage his and Nike's public image. This is evidenced within the song 'Sicko Mode' a collaboration with Travis Scott, Drake raps 'Checks, over Stripes' in reference to the Nike Swoosh Logo, being better than adidas' 3 stripe imagery.



The Fashion Consumer and Brands

Fashion brands seek loyalty from their consumers, and it is evidenced that the fashion consumer is willing to give it. Fashion brands are worn akin to uniforms, as a badge of honour and pride, they are representing themselves vicariously through the brand as are the brands being represented by their customers, both need each other. For example, a large brand with no consumers is impossible as the brands need funding from consumers to stay afloat. On the other hand, the consumer often feels like they need branded clothing for a sense of belonging, the world around them is branded so they feel like they also need to be branded. It's a symbiotic relationship.

People have allegiances to brands based on different schools of thought, for example Hype Beasts and lovers of street wear will align themselves with brands based entirely around aesthetics and the clout that the clothing gives them, but some people who are more ethically conscious might align themselves with a brand like Patagonia who have made it their mission statement to be as environmentally friendly as possible, this makes their customers feel like wearing a Patagonia jacket is a badge of honour, giving the message that they are helping the environment, it's a different kind of bragging rights compared to Hype beasts and Sneaker Heads.

Patagonia sends a clear environmental message to their customers, that they don't want you to throw away any of their clothing, instead offering guides on how to repair garments.

"As individual consumers, the single best thing we can do for the planet is to keep our stuff in use longer. The easy-to-follow repair guides on this page were created in partnership with the experts at iFixit. Repairing your Patagonia gear is highly encouraged and will not void our Ironclad Guarantee." Anon. (2016).

IF IT'S BROKE, FIX IT!

Summary

Over the course of this research investigation I have concluded that many teenagers and young adults are overspending on high end fashion.

It is evidenced within the report that people resort to fabricating the prices of the clothing they buy, lying to themselves and others to offset the guilt of spending too much money on clothing. This behaviour evidences that high end branded fashion can have links with addiction and consumers often show similar behaviour to drug users.

Identifying as a Hype Beast could become a dangerous lifestyle if the consumer is susceptible to being easily led and shows signs of anxiety, if this behaviour is left unchecked it could lead to severe self-esteem issues and financial problems.

Fashion brands are targeting heavy users of social media when they collaborate with celebrities as evidenced by the interview with Joji within this report. Fans and followers of celebrities will converse and generate communities entirely around what the celebrity is wearing, often gaining information to buy the clothing themselves. These fans most likely do not have the same disposable income as the celebrities in question, leading the fans to often spend too much on clothing.

This report leads me to ask the question what can be done to avoid Hype Beast culture and street fashion being detrimental to the mental health of teenagers and young adults?