

The Versatility of Sneakers

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**Abstract**

While conducting my research on the history of sneakers I developed my theory. This stated how the sneaker business is successful and continues to evolve. Questions I asked while conducting my research was who created the first sneaker, how were sneakers created, what sneaker brands emerged, and what type of sneakers did these brands release. Research methods that were used was researching decades of sneakers on credible websites. During, my research I discovered sneaker brands that dominated the fashion culture each decade. I learned how sneakers in the beginning were worn for comfortability then in later decades became a fashion statement. Also, I concluded how celebrities signed endorsements with sneaker brands and even created their own sneaker. Based on my finding's sneakers are versatile, sneakers progressed over the years, and sneakers have an immense role in the fashion business.

*Keywords:* sneakers, business, fashion, brands

### The Versatility of Sneakers

Sneakers are the most consistent and revolutionary innovation in fashion history. Can you guess how far back sneakers began? How were they created? Can you guess the first pair of sneakers? The answer is unbelievable but first, we have to address how sneakers were made. In 1839, a chemist and manufacturing engineer by the name of Charles Goodyear created rubber soles to be used in shoes (Giesswein, 2020). An innovation that caused growth in the production of sneakers was a sewing machine that fixed soles to the upper part of the sneaker. Years later in 1870, the first pair of sneakers emerged by the Liverpool Rubber Company and were called Plimsolls. These sneakers were beachwear shoes described as “comfortable” and the material was “rough” (Strother, 2019). However, some negative effects about plimsolls was that both the left and right foot of the sneakers looked identical. The first sneaker company was U.S Rubber which made Keds in 1916. Sneakers are a huge success still to this day and continue to evolve. The main reason for this conclusion is due to the history of sneakers, different successful brands, celebrity endorsements with brands, how they became a fashion statement, celebrities who made their own sneakers, and how they contribute to current fashion trends today.

### The Birth of the Twenties & Thirties Brands

During the 1920's and 1930's sports became the focus and sneakers were being made for more comfort. In 1923, Chuck Taylor had an endorsement with the brand Converse. Converse at the time were creating basketball sneakers. Adidas also emerged around this time by a man named Adolf Dassler. This sneaker gained a great amount of success and even Olympic star Jesse Owens wore track shoes by Adidas in the Berlin Olympic games in 1936 when he received gold medals (Strother, 2019). The decade of the 1930's shows the introduction

to classic sneaker brands. But, because of the Great Depression happening at this time people and many businesses suffered. Therefore, this was a reason for brands slowly developing.

### The Emergence of New Brands

The decades of the 1940's and 1950's remained stagnant as far as new sneaker brands. At this time period shoes were worn more than sneakers. Also, sneakers from the previous years such as Keds and converses were still popular. In the 1950's sneakers were permitted in schools because of less strict dress codes (Shuck, 2018). This was a big deal at the time because not only did they become a fashion statement, but they were also not considered acceptable. This changed the way kids dressed forever. In 1961, New Balance released their first pair of sneakers by the name of "The Trackster" and they were specifically made for track and cross-country sports. The real progression of brands took off in the 1970's. Brands such as Nike, Vans, Reebok, Puma, Onitsuka Tiger, Saucony, and K-Swiss emerged, and they arrived at a perfect time. At this time, more sports were popular such as track, tennis, wrestling, and basketball. These brands catered to what people wanted at the time. The brand Nike original name was Blue Ribbon Sports and was created by Phil Knight, and Bill Bowerman. Nike's first sneaker design of the swoosh logo is the most legendary design made to this day. This swoosh design was created by a design student who attended Portland University and went by the name Carolyn Davidson. Their first sneaker was released in 1972. It was known as the "Moon shoe", the colors of the sneaker were blue with white laces, and the white swoosh logo. Vans was another upcoming brand at the time. It was founded by Paul Van Doren. This sneaker targeted customers who enjoyed to skateboard and were into punk rock. The first shoe they released was the Vans #95 but, today it is known as the Era. It is known for the two different colors on the

sneaker which is the blue and red. Also, the iconic “Vans off the wall” logo appeared on the sneaker. Other brands such as Puma, Reebok, and K-Swiss all have iconic logos and trademarks. They also represented sneakers for sports at that time.

### The Legendary Sneakers of the 1980’s

The 1980’s was the decade of legendary releases. Some brands were starting to shift from just being a sports sneaker into a fashion statement. In 1984, basketball player Michael Jordan collaborated with Nike to make the masterpiece known as Air Jordan 1’s. These sneakers were designed with the iconic Nike swoosh, and the “jumpman” logo. The first ever pair had colors of red, white, and black laces. They were designed by Nike’s creative director Peter C. Moore. When this sneaker first emerged, it was seen as problematic by the National Basketball Association. They felt that this sneaker violated the rules that a player’s shoe must be mostly white and complement their basketball jersey’s. It went so far to the point where every time Michael Jordan wore those sneakers, he had to pay \$5,000 which Nike paid for. Even still these sneakers continued to grow and succeed. Many people even try to imitate them. As they are still iconic and popular to this day. Another brand that appeared during this time was L.A Gear. Which was established by Robert Greenberg in 1983. Greenberg originally began by making skating shoes, but he branched out to making women’s workout sneakers. From there L.A Gear took off. In 1987, as more people started learning about the brand it became more popular. These sneakers stood out with their bold and shimmering studs. L.A Gear also had brand endorsements with a few celebrities but, in the end, it ended up being harmful to the company’s longevity. One celebrity they worked with was Abdul-Jabbar which was not the best idea because he did not appeal to the younger crowd (History of LA Gear, 2018). Another legendary

entertainer they collaborated with was Michael Jackson but because his album was not released their sales decreased. Unfortunately, later in 1998 the company filed for bankruptcy and L.A Gear came to an end. Other brands such as Nike which had Air Force 1's that were released in 1982. Adidas had Adidas Centennial in 1985. New Balance had New Balance Worthy in 1985. Reebok had Club Champion sneakers that were released in 1984. Some honorable brands at the time were Puma, Wilson, Gucci Tennis, Vans, Fila, and Converse.

### 90's Iconic Sneakers & Fashion

The 90's was the decade of everything. Fashion, sneakers, entertainment, diversity, and culture. Since fashion was so eccentric for its time, sneakers complemented it. A sneaker brand that dominated the 90's was Nike. Some of Nike's most famous sneakers that are still worn today were released at this time. Such as the white, red, and black Air Jordan 5's that were released in 1990. This sneaker was made with "multiple lacing" and a "reflective tongue" which made the sneaker noticeable (Edler & Bengtson, 2011). Another iconic Nike sneaker released 1991 was Nike Air Hurrache. The design of this sneaker was unique because of the cut of the ankle piece and the colors of white, blue, and purple. Since, Nike was the top brand other brands like Reebok, and Fila took inspiration from them. In 1992, Reebok collaborated with basketball player Shaquille O'Neal. Together they released two sneakers called "Shaq Attaq" and "Reebok Shaqnosis" which came out in 1993. The "Shaq Attaq's" were blue, black, and white with the Reebok logo on the side of the sneaker. The "Shaqnosis" were designed with a black and white hypnosis pattern which is why the sneaker has the name. In 1995, Reebok released the sneaker "Reebok Kamikaze" a black and white zig zag pattern. These sneakers were made with described as comfortable because of the cushion inside. Other brands released the same year

such as Converse, Fila, Nike, and Etnies Rap which was founded by Pierre-Andre Senizergues. Since, the 90's was so diverse there were many other brands as well as shoes people were wearing.

### 2000's Brand Collaborations

The 2000's was more years of diverse fashion and sneakers. People at this time had more of their own style and wore what they wanted. The 2000's was the decade of brand collaborations. In 2000, Nike released Air Force 1's "Cocoa Snake" that were brown with snakeskin, a black Nike swoosh and black laces. Two years later Nike released Air Jordan "Retro 1's Patent. These sneakers were basically the original or the "OG's" of Jordan's, the only difference was that they were patent leather. The Retro 1's Patent were white, red and black. Many people admired this sneaker because it was the original but updated. Nike continued to release more colorways for Air Force 1's. Shortly after, clothing brands began collaborating with sneaker brands which was new and unique. In 2004, Supreme NYC and Nike collaborated and together they created "Delta Force 3/4 Pro." They designed three pairs of sneakers. One pair was white and tan, the other pair was orange, and the last pair was blue. These sneakers were perfect for skaters. In 2005, DC shoes and SSUR collaborated and created "The SSUR." These sneakers had a creative colorway. A year later, Supreme NYC worked with another sneaker brand known as Vans. Since both brands target skaters this collaboration was a success. They released "Half Cab" suede sneakers with different designs of stars and sidelines. All Supreme and Vans collaborations are popular still to this day. The same year the brand Bathing Ape worked with artist and designer KAWS to create "Chompers" which were huge. Even the rapper Jay Z was seen wearing them. In 2007, designer Jeremy Scott worked with Adidas to release a



sneaker called “Money Runways.” These sneakers definitely made a statement with a cream color of money print all over them, wings in the back, and the green adidas logo on the tongue of the sneakers. Jeremy Scott is known for his creative designs, so it is no surprise that this sneaker showed that. Also, the same year the brand ALIFE created a sneaker with Puma called “1<sup>st</sup> Round.” According to Complex, they even came with ten different pairs of laces. In 2008, Nike collaborated with an artist named Michael Lau to create “Crazy Force 1’s.” This sneaker had padded leather and was made with “quilted leather” (Puma & Carbone, 2011). The year 2009, Kanye West collaborated with Nike to make “Nike Air Yeezy.” They were made in three different colors such as black, and two neutral colors. Although, his sneakers with Nike were a success he left them five years later and began to work with Adidas a few years after. From here the shift into the twenty tens began.

#### Glance at The Twenty Tens & Celebrities Sneakers

During this decade, many sneaker brands are creating more colorful and standout sneakers. Celebrities were beginning to emerge with their own sneakers following Kanye’s Yeezys. Even designer brands such as Balenciaga, Dior, and Louie Vuitton were creating their own unique sneaker. In 2010, many brands were releasing more of a colorful sneaker that went with the time. In 2011, The Nike Mag was created and is still considered one of the greatest sneakers of all time. The next year, Nike began to make neon sneakers that were made of knit material for people who played sports. In 2013, chunky sneakers became more popular with sneakers like Adidas “Ozweego”, Y-3 “Quasa”, Fila’s. This trend of chunky sneakers continued. This same year Adidas and Kanye West agreed to collaborate. Then two years later the “Yeezy Boost 750” were released. The pair was a light brown color, limited edition so they sold out as

quick as 10 minutes (Hui, 2021). A few months later he released another pair known as the “Yeezy Booth 350’s.” They were made in different colors such as black and white. Kanye West continued to create more Yeezy sneakers, and the sales continued to increase. His success with Yeezy’s paved the way for other celebrities to create their own sneaker. The singer and businesswoman Rihanna worked with Puma to produce a platform sneaker called “PUMA Creepers.” Three pairs of sneakers were released with colors that consisted of pink, blue, and cream. This sneaker was targeted towards women and was an accomplishment for the brand. The “Creepers” started a trend of platform sneakers. Later, the sneaker was released in more colors. Rapper Travis Scott was also another celebrity to release sneakers. In 2017, he collaborated with Nike to design his twist on Nike Air Force 1 Low’s. This sneaker lived up to its hype with the ability for people who bought the shoe to dye them. The blue “Cactus Jack” sneakers by Scott and Nike were released in 2018. The most iconic sneaker released by Travis Scott was the brown and tan with a reverse Nike check, Air Jordan 1’s. Everyone wanted to get their hands on these sneakers, and they sold out fast. These sneakers are still being resold by online brands like Stock X. Travis Scott continues to release sneakers to this day.

### From Sneaker Stores to Online Apps

The way that people purchase sneakers today is different from how it was years ago. Back then, people had to actually go to a physical store to try on and buy a sneaker. But, now with apps like Stock X, Nike SNKRS, Goat, Flight Club, and even the Footlocker app purchasing sneakers is something that can be done in the comfort of a person’s own home. Although, there are some negative outcomes since many people use these apps. People have to enter raffles in order to win sneakers which can be hard. Mainly, because people who resale

sneakers and are “sneakerheads” use bots to win the sneakers. According to an article by Highsnobiety, they stated “this allows bots to find product IDs for each size and automatically add the product to cart before the release” (Danforth, 2016). This makes it easier for people to purchase any and as many sneakers as they want. Resellers make a profit from selling sneakers that sold out on apps, and even in stores by selling them for a higher price. For example, on Stock X the sneaker Mocha 1’s are being resold for close to \$500. It is interesting to see how the buying and selling in the sneaker world is changing.

#### “Sneakerhead” and Current Innovations

Previously mentioned before was the term “sneakerhead.” What is a sneakerhead? A sneakerhead is an individual who owns many sneakers, buys every pair that is released, and has a collection of different sneakers. These people stay notified on release dates, and they use sneaker apps to be the first to have the sneaker. Different types of sneakerheads have their own style. Some of them dress in streetwear, or high fashion. Moving on to sneaker innovations today. Last year in February, Nike released “The Adapt BB 2.0.” This sneaker has power lacing and are perfect for basketball players. These sneakers also have a futuristic feel to them. Nike also recently announced that they will be releasing a white, and celestine blue sneaker that can be put on without hands. This is convenient because an individual can just put them on and go with no struggle. Plus, these sneakers look extremely comfortable. Many sneaker companies will continue to release more innovative sneakers, so let us see what the future holds. Sneakers have become more of a fashion statement. Just your sneakers alone can make an outfit. With the direction sneakers are going in it is exciting to see what’s next in store.

Nike Air Jordan 1's Original



Travis Scott x Air Jordan 1's

Rihanna Fenty Puma Creepers



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