

# Factors Influencing Consumers' Purchase of Sneakers through Unofficial Channels

Zhongze Lu

North London Collegiate School, Singapore, 109708, Singapore

## ABSTRACT

This study explores the main factors influencing consumers' decisions to purchase sneakers through unofficial channels and how these factors affect their purchasing intentions. Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, including surveys and interviews, the study finds that price and product scarcity are the key driving factors. However, consumers generally have low trust in these unofficial channels. To enhance consumer trust and purchasing intentions, it is recommended that unofficial channels strengthen quality control while maintaining competitive pricing and product availability.

## KEYWORDS

Sneaker market; Unofficial channels; Purchasing intentions

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The sneaker market has undergone significant changes in the past decade, especially with the rise of various purchasing channels. Sneakers, as an important category in sports marketing, have attracted significant consumer attention, particularly with limited releases and supply shortages. These factors have driven the rapid growth of the secondary market, which refers to the market where consumers buy and resell sneakers through unofficial channels, such as offline boutique stores and online platforms like "Dewu" (primarily for buying sneakers) and "Xianyu" (primarily for reselling sneakers). Unlike official channels, sneakers in the secondary market are usually priced higher, especially rare or limited-edition models. However, consumers are often willing to pay a premium to acquire these rare sneakers.

With the rise of the secondary market, consumers face more choices when purchasing sneakers, and buying through unofficial channels has become increasingly popular. Social media influence, product scarcity, brand loyalty, and personal identity recognition are factors that jointly influence consumers' purchasing decisions.

Therefore, this study focuses on exploring these factors to provide new insights into market and consumer behavior research.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Sneaker Culture and the Emergence and Development of the Secondary Market

Sneakers, originally designed to provide athletes with suitable footwear for ball sports, have gradually evolved beyond functional items into cultural symbols, especially among young people. Sneaker culture gained rapid popularity in China in the 1980s and 1990s, not only due to their functionality

but also because of unique designs and brand stories. Sneakers became a way for young consumers to express individuality and follow fashion trends.

The emergence of the secondary sneaker market is essentially a response to the high demand for scarce and limited-edition sneakers. According to a 2023 report from Market Research Online, China's second-hand sneaker market grew rapidly, expanding from 16 billion RMB in 2018 to 28 billion RMB in 2019. This rapid growth highlights the booming secondary market.

The secondary market is defined as the trade market for consumers to buy and resell products through unofficial channels. With the widespread use of the internet, platforms such as "Dewu" and "Xianyu" have greatly facilitated consumer access to rare sneakers, and these platforms have become key sources for limited-edition releases (iMedia Report, 2019).

The emergence of the secondary market is closely tied to the rise of sneaker culture. Sneakers are no longer just athletic gear but have become cultural symbols of identity. Wu Ziyang (2020) emphasizes the role of sneakers as cultural identity symbols, noting that "sneakers are no longer just a type of sporting product but have become a cultural identity symbol." This cultural shift, combined with the scarcity of limited-edition sneakers has driven the rapid development of the secondary market, making it an important route for young consumers to acquire their desired sneakers.

## **2.2. Factors Affecting Consumers' Purchase Intentions**

Consumers' purchasing behavior in the sneaker market is influenced by various factors, including brand loyalty, product scarcity, and the impact of social media. According to research by Guo Lingxi et al. (2018), brand image significantly affects consumer purchasing behavior in the sneaker market, with brand loyalty being a key factor. Moreover, studies have shown that the scarcity of limited-edition sneakers is highly attractive to consumers, with many willing to pay a premium for them (Zhao Yalan, 2020).

The influence of social media is another important factor. As social media platforms have become more popular, consumers increasingly rely on recommendations from influencers and bloggers to make purchasing decisions. Research indicates that "social media plays a critical role in influencing consumer purchasing decisions, especially among younger generations" (Song Xuan, 2019).

Price and convenience are also crucial factors in influencing purchasing decisions. Research shows that "unofficial channels offer price advantages and greater convenience compared to official platforms, attracting a large number of consumers" (Zhou Wenhui et al., 2022).

Based on the existing literature, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

- (1) Price advantages of unofficial channels will influence consumers' purchasing intentions.
- (2) The availability of rare products will influence consumers' purchasing intentions.
- (3) Trust in unofficial channels may affect consumers' purchasing intentions.

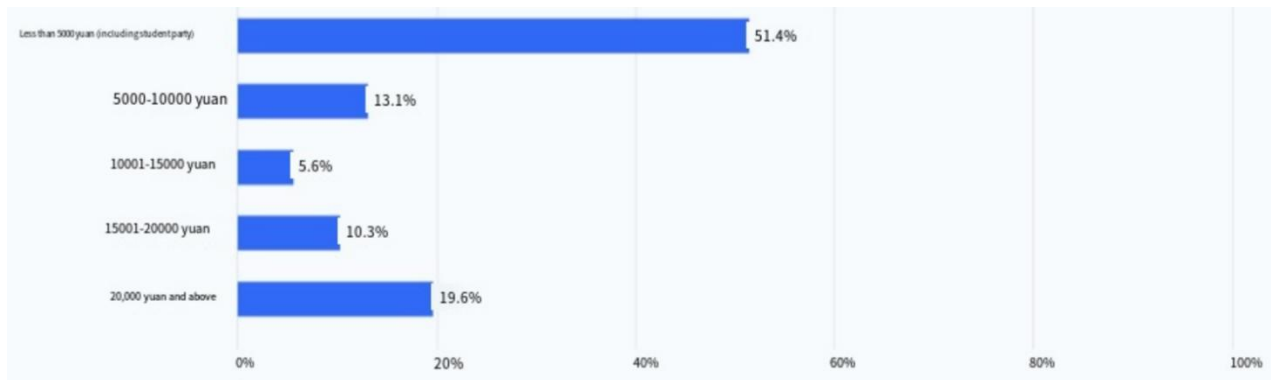
## **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1. Research Design**

This study adopts a quantitative research approach, using surveys to gather data with the goal of identifying the reasons and influencing factors behind consumers' decisions to purchase sneakers through unofficial channels. The target group for this study consists primarily of young males, especially those under 18, through whom the research gathers data on consumer demographics and purchasing behavior.

During the research process, data was collected primarily online with some offline methods. Online surveys were distributed through Tencent's survey tool, with a total of 107 completed surveys.

The gender distribution of respondents was 72% male and 28% female. Age distribution showed that 31.8% of respondents were under 18 years old, supporting previous research (Wang Qifei, 2019) which found that sneaker culture is predominantly popular among younger consumers. Most respondents had an undergraduate education (43%), and 51.4% had a monthly income of less than 5000 RMB. This data provides a reliable basis for analyzing consumer purchasing behavior.



**Figure 1.** People with lower monthly incomes are more likely to buy shoes through unofficial channels

### 3.2. Data Collection

The core focus of the survey was on understanding the reasons for purchasing through unofficial channels, preferred methods of purchasing, and key factors influencing purchasing decisions.

## 4. DATA ANALYSIS

### 4.1. Consumer Purchasing Habits

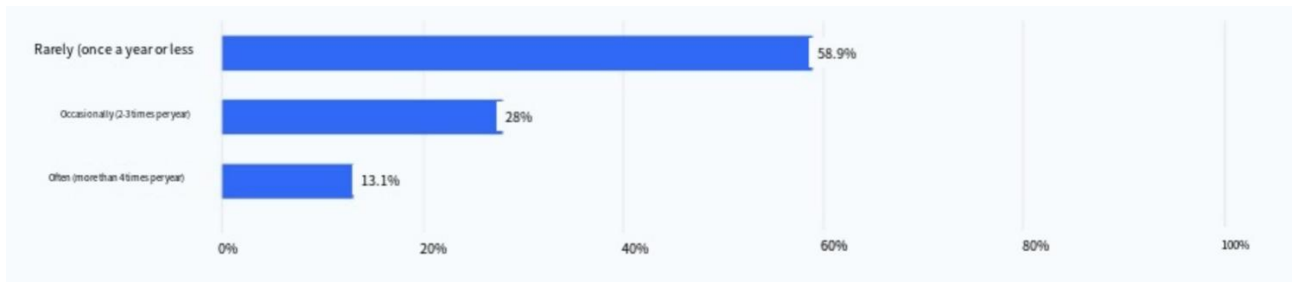
The analysis of consumer age distribution, purchasing frequency, and usage of unofficial channels shows that young consumers, particularly those under 18 (31.8%), are more likely to buy sneakers through unofficial channels. According to the survey, 61.7% of consumers reported having purchased sneakers through unofficial channels, indicating that these channels occupy an important place in sneaker purchases.



**Figure 2.** Survey on consumers' experience of buying sneakers on second-hand platforms

Additionally, the frequency of purchases showed that 35.5% of consumers buy sneakers about once every six months, indicating a relatively rational purchasing pattern. Among the various purchasing methods, online platforms like "Dewu" and "Xianyu" were the most popular, with 60.7% of respondents choosing them.

In contrast, offline boutique stores and recommendations from friends accounted for only 22.4% and 10.3%, respectively, while other methods made up just 6.5%. This data highlights the dominance of online platforms, likely due to their convenience and comparative advantages.

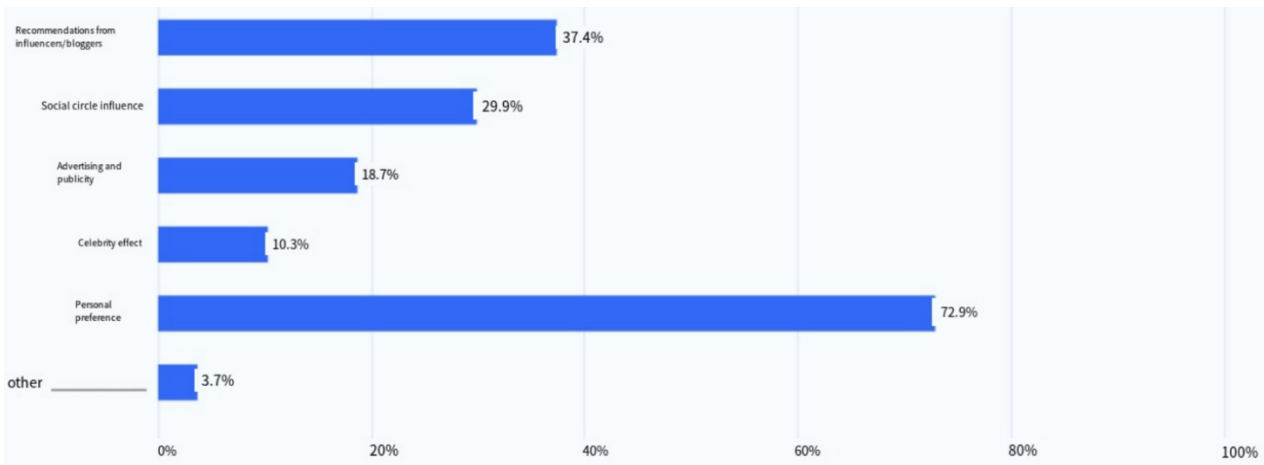


**Figure 3.** Survey on the frequency of consumers purchasing sneakers on second-hand platforms

## 4.2. Perceptions of Unofficial Channels and Influencing Factors

The survey results revealed that 56.1% of consumers chose unofficial channels due to cheaper prices, while 39.3% were motivated by product scarcity (such as limited releases and out-of-stock items). These two factors combined account for 95.4% of responses, clearly showing that price and scarcity are the primary driving factors for purchasing through unofficial channels. One interviewee, a 10th-grade student from Jiaping High School in Shanghai, shared that he often uses "Dewu" to buy limited-edition sneakers, such as the Kobe series, which are not available on official platforms. He believes the quality is still guaranteed when purchasing through the platform.

Some respondents reported that they have never bought sneakers through unofficial channels, likely due to low trust in these platforms or a preference for official channels. "Personal preference" was cited as the main reason for purchasing decisions by 72.9% of respondents.

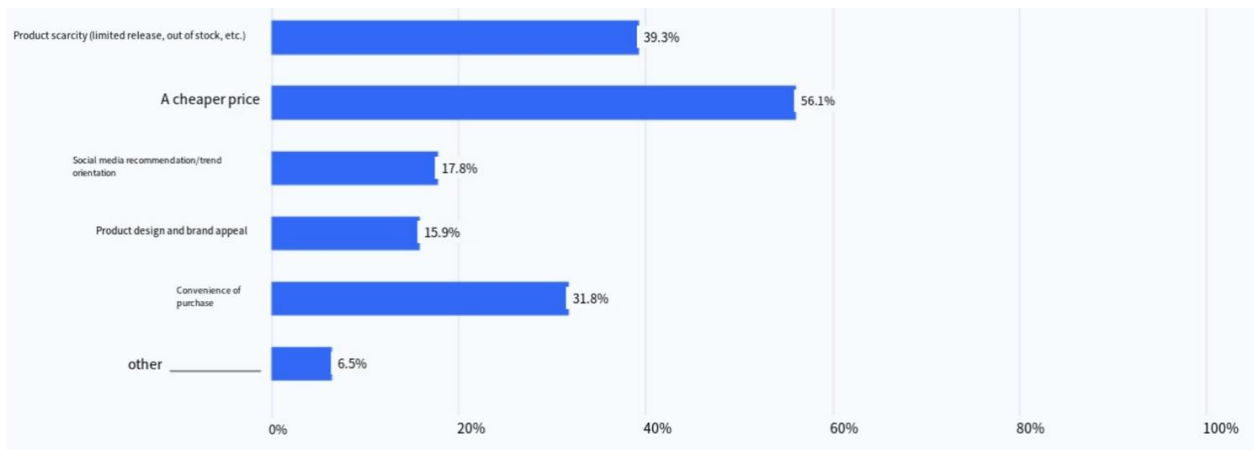


**Figure 4.** Personal preference is the main factor affecting consumers' purchase of sneakers through unofficial channels

## 4.3. How Different Factors Influence Purchasing Behavior

### 4.3.1. Price and Scarcity as Major Drivers

The study shows that the three key factors influencing consumers' decisions to purchase sneakers through unofficial channels are price, product scarcity, and convenience. As shown in the survey, 56.1% of consumers chose unofficial channels due to lower prices, and 31.8% cited convenience as a reason. This aligns with the growing trend of digital consumer behavior, where consumers prefer the convenience of online shopping. Brands should pay attention to this trend and optimize their online sales channels.



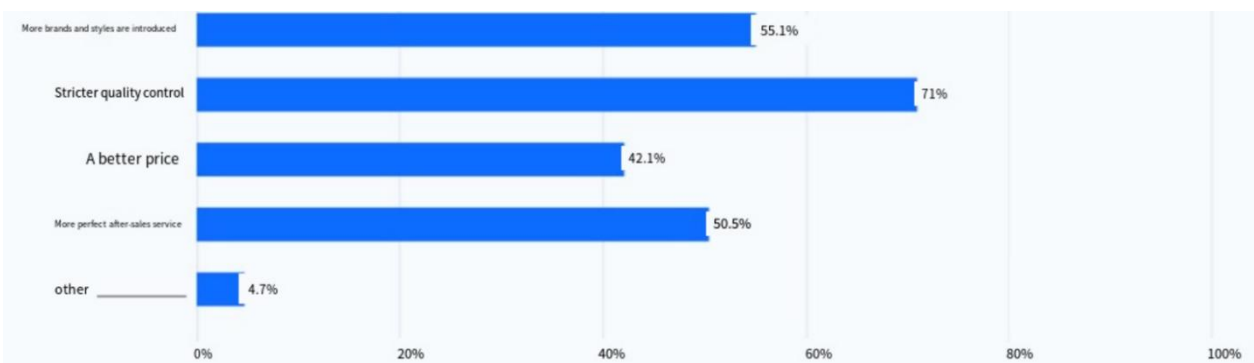
**Figure 5.** Price and scarcity are the main drivers

#### 4.3.2. The Need for Quality Control in Unofficial Channels

Although unofficial channels are popular due to their price advantages and product variety, consumer trust ratings reflect concerns about quality and authenticity. Through data analysis (Figure 6), it can be seen that when choosing unofficial channels, price and scarcity are the main driving factors, accounting for 56.1% and 39.3%, respectively. This indicates that consumers are price-sensitive and tend to seek limited edition and unique styles. One of the study's respondents, Yuan, a 9th-grade student from North London International School, mentioned that she often checks sneakers on the "Dewu" platform because the prices are very affordable and the selection is diverse.

Despite the popularity of unofficial channels, 41.1% of consumers rate their trust level as medium, reflecting concerns about quality and authenticity. This means that brands need to build stronger credibility in unofficial channels. Brands can enhance consumer trust through certifications, user reviews, and assurance mechanisms. At the same time, personal preferences dominate the decision-making process for purchasing sneakers (72.9%), indicating that brands should focus on diversification and personalization in their marketing to meet the needs of different consumers. This could involve customization services, personalized recommendations, and a diverse product line. The importance of personal recommendations in purchase decisions suggests that brands may consider collaborating with influencers or trusted communities to strengthen consumer confidence in their products.

In conclusion, the behavior characteristics of young consumers in the sneaker market show a strong focus on fashion, price, and personalization. When developing market strategies, brands should focus on digital transformation, strengthen the competitiveness of online channels, address consumer trust issues, and flexibly employ strategies such as limited edition releases to meet the expectations and needs of this important consumer group.



**Figure 6.** Consumers expect unofficial channels to strengthen quality control.

To summarize, the data analysis in this study shows that price and product scarcity are the main factors influencing consumers to purchase sneakers from unofficial channels. At the same time,

consumer trust in these channels is generally low, and future purchasing behavior in these channels largely depends on trust and product quality. Therefore, unofficial channels need to strengthen quality control in order to enhance consumer trust and improve the purchase experience.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study highlights that price and product scarcity are the primary factors influencing consumers' decisions to purchase sneakers through unofficial channels. Additionally, personal preference plays a dominant role in purchase decisions. While unofficial channels are attractive due to their pricing advantages and scarcity of products, the overall trust in these channels remains moderate, indicating that quality control and trust-building measures are necessary.

Unofficial channels should focus on enhancing product authentication, improving trust mechanisms, and maintaining competitive pricing. Given the growing reliance on online platforms and the importance of limited-edition releases, it is essential for brands to embrace digital transformation and cater to the preferences of young consumers.

Although this study is limited by sample size, future research should aim to expand the sample size and scope to increase the reliability and generalizability of the findings.

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