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### Shoes Tied into Marketing

Consumerism has changed a lot since its inception, especially the consumerism that surrounds fashion. “Fashion influences many aspects of our lives, it has both economic and social value and provides individuals with a tool to express themselves and create an identity” (Sudha and Sheena 2017). Something as simple as a pair of shoes has so many influences on the person who is wearing them, from how and why the shoes were made, to why the person is wearing them. To delve further into this concept, I will use a pair of my own shoes as an example. They are a pair of Golf le FLEUR\* x Converse One Stars. They are a yellow suede low top shoe, with a white graphic of a flower on each side. The tongue of the shoe is inscribed with the Golf le FLEUR\* and Converse logo, and the outsoles of the shoes are yellow with a white flower pattern over it, the shoelaces and midsoles are also white. I received these shoes this year as a gift from my boyfriend, he bought them second-hand as they were released in 2017. Beyond my own sentiment for these shoes, there are many layers of valuable information embedded into them. The production and consumption of Converse – and sneakers in general – have changed so much throughout time.

Converse is a brand that has had many ups and downs while they struggled to understand how to best advertise and sell their shoes in an ever-changing market. Beginning in 1908 as a boot manufacturing company, the brand did not gain its notoriety until 1917, when Charles H. “Chuck” Taylor began marketing Converse All Stars

(Peterson 2016, 44). Converse All Stars had become the preferred basketball shoes, with Taylor employing very modern methods of seeking out popular players and “[...] personally brought them onto the Converse bandwagon, and got their endorsements for Chuck Taylor shoes” (Peterson 2016). Now, this idea is common practice today, with brands advertising themselves onto any and every professional sports player’s uniform, but in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century this ideal was unheard of and revolutionary. By the late 1940s “nearly every single pro player was wearing chucks and would continue to do so for years. All time greats from Jerry West and Bill Russell, to Pete “The Pistol” Maravich and Julius “Dr. J” Irving [wore the shoes].” (Hunter n.d.). Converse were the official basketball shoe; according to Peterson (2016), “virtually every basketball team in America wore Chuck Taylor shoes.”

However, around 40 years later in the 1980s, Converse struggled to remain as in demand as they once were. A new company – Nike - was on the scene and they brought along new marketing techniques, and newer, younger athletes to collaborate with such as Michael Jordan (this brought about the “Jordans” craze). Converse had a several opportunities to rebrand or try new tactics to market themselves. After the drop in demand for Converse as basketball shoes in the 1980s, there was a surge in popularity for skateboarding in the 1990s. However, Converse was too late in getting themselves involved with these consumers, and therefore lost them to other brands. Along with a series of other marketing mistakes and missed opportunities, this led to Converse eventually filing bankruptcy in 2003. Converse was sold to Cason and Simon, the Footwear Acquisition, then 2 years later, in 2005 they were acquired by Nike, the very brand that pushed them out of market in the first place. Converse now is a very

prominent shoe brand, and ironically, most people in my generation think of them as skate shoes over basketball shoes. Golf le FLEUR\* x Converse One Stars are specifically advertised for the consumers that Converse were disinterested in getting involved with at first.

Golf le FLEUR\* is rapper, Tyler the Creator's fashion brand. These shoes released shortly after Tyler's album "Flower Boy," in which he went with a new sound and a different direction for his music compared to previous albums and singles. Before "Flower Boy", Tyler was known for making very offensive, harsh, and polarizing music, he was even banned from entering the United Kingdom due to some of the lyrics he had written. A review of the album at the time said: "Flower Boy (promoted as Scum Fuck Flower Boy) is Tyler's course-correction, surprisingly meditative and beautifully colored, a collage of memories and daydreams that trades bratty subversion for reflection and self-improvement" (Pearce 2017). This album was so popular it was nominated for a Grammy (Tyler would go on to win a Grammy with his following album "IGOR" in 2020). "Flower Boy" brought change for how the public viewed Tyler. Although he had participated in collabs with Converse and other sneaker brands using his own name or a different brand name, these shoes were the second release of the steady line of Golf le FLEUR\* x Converse collaborations that soon followed. A new fashion line for an already popular artist shedding his previous "offensive" persona and coming into a new era of sound for his music built up the hype for both the album and the shoes. They had symbiotic relationship in the way they promoted each other.

Celebrity endorsement has been around for at least the last 100 years, but it is still a valuable marketing tactic to this day. Not only are these shoes celebrity endorsed, but they have the added layer of being part of a celebrity's fashion line. To a consumer it can seem as though a recognizable face owns and created these shoes, not a faceless brand like Converse (or parent company Nike.) "Celebrity endorsement influences the feelings of the consumers and can also influence the attitude consumers have towards the advertisement and attitude towards the brands, which can increase the purchase intentions and, consequently, increase sales" (Sudha and Sheena 2017). Unless someone is an avid fan of Converse, they are most likely not going to know who owns the brand. So, using someone well known and liked such as Tyler the Creator can make consumers more likely to buy.

These shoes are a prime example of how much marketing and consumerism around fashion, specifically has changed. These shoes were released in November 2017, for \$100 on the Golf le Fleur website. Now, these shoes can be resold from \$200 and upwards of \$400, depending on the quality and size of the shoe. These shoes are a mixture of almost every marketing tactic using celebrity influence and generating hype with low stock (compared to the average sneaker release). These are shoes that only get produced and distributed once. The average Converse One Stars will be continuously made and released, so long that there is a demand for them. However, pairs of shoes that have special colorways, designs, or celebrity collaborations generally have one batch sold, and are never released again. This makes the shoes rarer, which then shoots the resale value up. "[...] brands are generating artificial scarcity by keeping supply below demand, a burgeoning celebrity-driven endorsement culture, the hip hop

culture, and the skate culture are also driving the collaborative apparel market, better known to consumers as the sneaker resale market” (as cited in Slaton and Pookulangara, 2019). Low stock with high demand behind a celebrity influence is common practice for most fashion brands now.

With the ever-changing consumer demands and the rapid pace at which technology is advancing, keeping the attention of consumers is a laborious task for brands to keep up with. Each new technology development can change marketing in unprecedented ways. Therefore, many brands have been leaning into the sneaker reselling culture with websites like StockX, GOAT, and Grailed. This resale market is valued at 6 billion and is only increasing in value as time progresses (Slaton and Pookulangara 2020, 1). Technological advances have changed how consumers react to advertisements, and how advertisements react to consumers. Every website and app consumers interact with has an algorithm to keep track of what they interact with, to then display targeted ads. This is not limited to brands, but also the celebrities they follow or interact with, as well.

This expanding market is changing our culture around fashion; “Fashion aware consumers feel societal pressure to purchase the scarce sneakers” (Slaton and Pookulangara 2020). Each new sneaker release is a limited edition one, with a low stock and many hungry buyers out to purchase not only one for themselves, but to resell others later at a higher price. The resale market only further promotes sneaker brands, with each \$100+ purchase making a statement: “For this brand, I will pay more than they originally asked.” Sneaker reselling is now a norm embedded into consumer culture. Every part of this all relates back to marketing, “Advertising is now a powerful

tool of enculturation, teaching us how to be “successful” in consumer culture” (Guest 2017). Oxford describes enculturation as “the *gradual acquisition* of the characteristics and norms of a culture or group by a person, another culture, etc.” however, it does not seem so gradual now. Since at least the 1990s, this has been a high-speed and continuously changing acquisition, and it is showing no signs of stopping anytime soon. When I started this project, I chose these shoes as the object to focus on for purely surface level and sentimental attachment. They were shoes I had been wanting, as I’ve been a fan of Tyler the Creator for a while, and they were bought as a gift for a special occasion from someone I care about. However, when I zoomed out of the specifics that pertain to me and I found that these shoes and many others are commodities now.

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