

**Beat, Bonds,
and Belonging:**

Understanding Live Hip-Hop Music in Social Identity
Formation Among Young Adults in the Netherlands

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ABSTRACT

Over the past fifty years, hip hop has evolved from an avant-garde genre to a scene-based genre, rapidly industrializing and commercializing. In the Netherlands, despite the development of the Dutch hip-hop scene, the consumption of live hip-hop music remains a relatively niche form of cultural engagement. While numerous studies have explored the interplay between young adults' identity formation and music consumption, research specifically focusing on live performance participation within the Dutch hip-hop context is sparse. This study investigates how hip-hop culture, live music consumption, and identity formation interact among young adult hip-hop fans in the Netherlands. It examines how these fans perceive their participation in live events in relation to their social identity formation. Employing the research question, "How do fans perceive the role of live hip-hop music in the construction of their social identity?" this study utilized a qualitative approach, conducting 13 in-depth interviews with Dutch residents aged 18-28 who identify as hip-hop fans, encompassing both male and female participants. Through a hybrid thematic analysis, findings indicate that live hip-hop events serve not only as forms of entertainment but also as platforms for fans to express and reaffirm their social identities. These events enable fans to showcase their affiliation with the hip-hop community, distinguish themselves from fans of other music genres, and engage with cultural groups through shared totems and rituals, thereby building a sense of belonging around the culture and live music consumption. The study also suggests further research could explore the role of cultural omnivorism in young adults' identity formation, as it reveals mixed patterns in music consumption. Future research could also focus on specific subcultural groups, such as the smaller mosh pit community, to delve deeper into ritual participation in live performance settings.

KEYWORDS: Hip-hop, Live Music, Social Identity, Subcultures, Totemic Rituals, Collective Effervescence

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1. Introduction

Originating in New York, United States, the root of hip hop is often traced back to a birthday party on the streets of West Bronx in 1973. This event was hosted by Clive Campbell, more widely known as DJ Kool Herc. At the party, Campbell introduced a groundbreaking DJing technique by extending the drum breaks in tracks to enhance the dance experience. This technique later became a cornerstone of hip-hop music (Davidson, 2009). Fifty years on, hip hop has evolved into one of the most prominent music genres, influenced by varied cultural backgrounds and gaining traction globally, especially among young adults, becoming one of the most important components of the popular industry nowadays (Mitchell, 2001; Sciullo, 2018). The rapid evolution of the genre over half a century has transformed it from an avant-garde genre rooted in African American urban communities to a scene-based, and eventually industry-focused genre attracting commercial interest around the world (Lena & Peterson, 2008). Despite its quick rise in popularity, the culture and genre of hip hop are still relatively nascent, with only a handful of music festivals specifically targeting hip-hop aficionados worldwide. The participation of hip-hop artists in broader, non-specialized music festivals occasionally sparks controversy, which highlights the ongoing challenges and debates within the music industry concerning the integration of hip hop into the wider live music scene, as exemplified by the negative receptions Kanye West and Jay-Z faced when headlining at non-hip-hop festivals (Denham, 2015; Paterson, 2008). Moreover, even with its widespread popularity, the live hip hop scene is mainly associated with subcultures, marked by unique dynamics and norms among fan groups at live-performance settings, has received little research attention (Dowdy, 2007; Fearing et al., 2018).

This study delves into the relationship between the identity formation of fans and their experiences at festivals and concerts within the hip-hop scene. It centers around the key research question: How do fans perceive the role of live hip-hop music in the construction of their social identity? The research aims to explore how fans construct their sense of self through engagement in these live events. In this study, the term “fans” refers to individuals actively engaging with the hip-hop music scene, beyond general participation in live settings. This engagement surpasses merely attending live performances and emphasizes the depth and quality of subcultural participation. It includes interacting with social and fan groups within the culture and

adopting its cultural practices. Unlike passive and casual consumers, as Duffett (2013) argued, these fans exhibit a high degree of emotional investment and active participation in their chosen fandoms. This level of involvement allows them to intertwine their self-identity with the pleasures associated with popular culture, and also distinguishing themselves from the general audience of the other specific culture.

Thus, the research examines both the collective identity formed through shared experiences and individual self-engagement in the music festivals and concerts. This involves understanding how fans perceive themselves and are perceived by others in their social groups, focusing on aspects as cultural affiliation, group belonging, and social interactions within the subcultural festival scene. Live performances offer a unique form of music consumption that demands greater commitment from fans towards the music genre and the artists, compared to recorded experiences. While audiences typically select shows that resonate with their cultural identity, leading to a deeper, more personal engagement with the genre or artist. This involvement in live music creates an immersive experience that strengthens the connection between the audience and the performance, thereby nurturing a sense of unity and community among fans in their music consumption (Brown & Novak, 2008).

In the realm of hip hop, this term transcends the boundaries of merely being a music genre; it represents a comprehensive music scene. This music scene encompasses various subcultural elements not limited to music but also embracing dance, graffiti art, fashion, and a unique lifestyle. Events like festivals and concerts provide a dynamic platform where fans can actively engage with these cultural elements. For some fans, they become spaces where fans can showcase their adherence to these aspects, interact within cultural groups, and deeply associate their social identities with the hip-hop elements prevalent in these gatherings. For other fans, even if they do not display a deep degree of cultural engagement, these settings allow them to build a deeper connection with the culture and fan community, further constructing their identity based on cultural and live event participation.

Employing a qualitative methodology, this study involves conducting 13 semi-structured interviews with young adults aged 18-28, who self-identified as hip-hop fans residing in the Netherlands and frequent attendees of live performances. The research utilizes a qualitative thematic analysis that integrates both inductive and

deductive approaches. The theoretical underpinnings of this framework rest upon several key constructs: the theory of social identity, the analysis of subculture and music scene, the combined concept of totemic rituals, and the phenomenon of collective effervescence. This framework probes into the mechanisms through which fans cultivate their personal and social identities anchored in their dedication to the hip-hop subculture. It scrutinizes the way fans integrate rituals and emblematic totems into their interactions with peers at festivals and investigates the emergence of a shared sense of collective excitement that not only heightens the group's unity but also amplifies individual self-awareness within the festival/concert scene. The study seeks to further understand how young adult hip-hop enthusiasts construct their identities within the hip-hop culture. It places a specific focus on the scene of concerts and festivals, examining how these fans navigate and engage cultural conventions during such events and in interactions with fellow enthusiasts. Additionally, the study also delves into comparisons between newcomers and seasoned attendees of these events, potentially examining variations based on subcultural commitment.

This thesis aims to explore the social identity formation of young adults in relation to hip-hop culture, with an emphasis on the role of live-performance settings and the cultural practices fans engage in there. As hip hop continues to expand its cultural influence globally, it's crucial to comprehend how fans identify with and navigate their relationship with the culture and their group. This understanding is vital not only for sociological research that aims to dissect identity formation among young adults within specific subcultural music scenes in our globalized, contemporary world but also for practical applications by businesses, creators, and festival organizers within these subcultures. It enables them to tailor their strategies more effectively by taking into account the cultural connections among consumers and event attendees. Moreover, it allows them to incorporate the diverse experiences and narratives present within the subcultural community into their business plans, ensuring a more authentic and resonant engagement with their audience.

Regarding research contributions, while there are existing studies centered on music festivals and identity formation (Davis, 2017; Karlsen, 2007; Rudolph, 2016), few specifically address the role of the hip-hop genre in this context. Hip hop uniquely fosters a deep connection between artists and audiences through interactive performances, emphasizing a community-centric approach. This unique connection and community focus stem from its grassroots origins, diverse forms of artistic

expression, call-and-response interactions, and direct audience participation. These elements collectively enhance community formation and cultural engagement within the hip-hop culture. Furthermore, the incorporation of a rich tapestry of elements also collectively enhances communal bonds, reinforcing a shared sense of belonging and unity among its fan base.

Additionally, while much of the research on hip-hop centers on the United States (Clay, 2003; Haaken et al., 2012; Nguyen & Ferguson, 2019), studies exploring hip hop's influence in the Netherlands are relatively few and fragmented, particularly in relation to the live performance aspect of the hip-hop scene (Gazzah, 2010; Krims, 2002; Walter, 2006). This is particularly noteworthy given the increasing influence of hip-hop culture and its process of relocalization within Europe. Consequently, the Netherlands, with its burgeoning immigrant population and diverse environment, presents itself as an ideal location for such studies. This research thus aims to fill the geographical gap, providing new insights into youth identity formation in relation to cultural consumption, specifically within the contemporary Dutch hip-hop scene.

2. Theoretical Framework

As mentioned, the theories underpinning the research question are comprised of four distinct parts: social identity theory, hip-hop subculture, music scene, and fandom, totemic rituals, and the concept of collective effervescence. This section will address each conceptual component, offering a theoretical foundation for investigating the formation of social identity among hip-hop fans at music festivals and concerts.

2.1. Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory (SIT), introduced by Tajfel and Turner in 1986, offers a comprehensive understanding of how individuals perceive themselves in relation to their social groups. The theory examines the interplay between personal and social identity. While the personal context focuses on the aspects of individual characteristics and personal experiences in shaping individual behaviors and attitudes, the group context focuses on the power of norms, values, and characteristics of the group, further reflecting a shift from personal to social identity (Brown, 2000).

A crucial aspect of Social Identity Theory (SIT) in shaping an individual's identity involves differentiating between in-group and out-group members. This process of identifying with a group and verifying membership enhances self-esteem and fosters a sense of "positive distinctiveness" linked to group affiliations. According to Brown, the formation of intergroup differentiation is driven by three main factors: the individual's subjective identification with their ingroup, the evaluative comparison between groups, and the comparability of outgroups.

First, when individuals identify subjectively with an ingroup, they cultivate a profound sense of belonging within that group. This process involves more than just perceiving themselves as group members; it integrates this membership into their core identity. Such a deep connection within the social group often leads to behaviors and attitudes that favor the ingroup over the outgroup. For example, a fan deeply immersed in the hip-hop scene might adopt dress, slang, and behaviors characteristic of the hip-hop community, thereby linking their identity to the culture and enhancing their group belonging.

Second, the evaluative intergroup comparison entails assessing one's own group against others. These comparisons frequently result in a bias that favors one's

own group. This bias plays a crucial role in intergroup differentiation, prompting individuals to highlight differences between their group and others. For instance, a hip-hop fan might compare their community with the EDM (Electronic Dance Music) subculture, focusing on hip-hop's authenticity and social messaging, thereby considering the hip-hop community superior to the EDM scene (Harrison & Bodenheimer, 2011).

Last, when an outgroup is perceived as comparable or similar, it intensifies the ingroup's need to establish its distinctiveness. This often results in efforts to highlight or exaggerate differences to maintain a unique group identity (Brown, 2000). In the case of hip-hop fans, they may emphasize unique elements of their culture, such as a focus on lyrical content, African American cultural roots, or streetwear fashion, to further distinguish their culture from other music genres like EDM (Harrison & Bodenheimer, 2011).

While Stets and Burke (2000) connected intergroup relations to identity theory, he further explored the relationship between identity theory and Social Identity Theory (SIT). According to his perspective, in intragroup contexts, akin to role-taking in identity theory, individuals aim to emulate others, adopting a group perspective to fulfill the group's expectations. Conversely, in intergroup interactions, as highlighted, individuals emphasize the differences rather than the similarities with other groups.

Hornsey (2008) further elucidated the nuances of intergroup and intragroup relations by integrating Self-Categorization Theory (SCT) into Social Identity Theory. While SIT primarily addresses intergroup dynamics, SCT delves into the intricacies of intragroup interactions. SCT emphasizes the ways in which individuals classify themselves and others into diverse social groups, outlining three distinct levels of self-categorization: the superordinate level (human identity), the intermediate level (social identity), and the subordinate level (personal identity). The superordinate level, being the most inclusive, represents an individual's general self-perception as a human being. The intermediate level focuses on specific social groups, such as being a fan of a particular music genre. The subordinate level however, highlights individuality and differences within the social group, where personal characteristics and traits distinguish one person from another (Abrams & Hogg, 2010). Together, these levels plays a role in individuals' self-perception, their perception of others, and their behavior across different groups and contexts, suggesting a more dynamic and fluid

framework for understanding social identity. Intragroup differentiation mainly occurs at the intersection of the intermediate and subordinate levels, where individuals within the same social group further distinguish themselves through personal approaches (Hornsey, 2008). For instance, within the hip-hop community, one fan might emphasize their deep knowledge of underground hip hop, while another could focus on mainstream hip-hop trends. Despite both fans being part of the same broader group, they differentiate themselves based on specific interests and knowledge. This differentiation can lead to the formation of a hierarchy within the group, where various degrees of expertise and interests mark social distinctions among members. This process illustrates the continuous negotiation between the intermediate level of social identity and the subordinate level of personal identity. As individuals further differentiate themselves within the intermediate level of social identity through personal identity traits, smaller, more distinct social groups form within the broader group. These social identities are derived from group memberships that are more specific than human identity but less personal than individual identities (Deaux & Martin, 2003).

Within the framework of SIT, this study investigates key aspects related to the main research question, focusing on group identification and the formation of sense of belonging among hip-hop fans. It examines how fans adopt the norms, values, and behaviors of the hip-hop scene to construct their self-identity through cultural engagement, analyzing the sense of positive distinctiveness fans develop from their commitment to the culture, and exploring how they use hip-hop culture to build their self-identity through a sense of uniqueness within the fan group. Additionally, the study assesses how hip-hop fans differentiate their group from fans of other music genres, examining their perceptions of other music scenes and how they reinforce group affirmation through ongoing comparison and differentiation. Furthermore, it delves into the dynamics within the hip-hop fan group itself, investigating the interplay between social identity formation and cultural participation among young adult fans. This includes an examination of how fans within sub-segments of the hip-hop group assert their identity within specific approaches, which may further reinforce their sense of identification with the sub-culture groups through intra-group relations.

2.2. Hip-hop Subculture, Music Scene, and Fandom

This section explores subculture theory, music scenes, and post-subcultural theory, emphasizing their relevance within hip hop culture. Additionally, it also examines hip-hop fandom, attempting to define the term ‘fan’ as used in the research question and explaining its relationship to the study, while also addressing the distinction between fans and general participants or audiences of live music performances in this context, further contributing to the theoretical framework of the research.

The term ‘subculture’ is frequently employed in sociological and anthropological studies, though its definitions are varied and often debated, leading to ambiguous usage that encompasses a wide range of meanings under its umbrella (Hebdige, 2012). According to Hebdige (1999), subcultures emerge through group interactions and symbolic actions in the context of late industrial culture, serving as a collective response to the prevailing cultural and social environment. These groups are influenced by socio-economic factors such as age or class, but are not exclusively defined by them. Subcultures typically demonstrate their resistance not through direct political actions but through the symbolic use of distinct styles, embodying elements of counter-hegemony.

Thus, historically, the concept of subculture has often been linked with counterculture, with both originating as contrasting ideas to mainstream culture. This contrast was initially a means to preserve the existing power dynamics and reinforce the hegemonic system (Ulusoy & Schembri, 2018; Williams & Hannerz, 2014). According to Gramsci, hegemony extends beyond political and economic control to the imposition of worldviews, values, and norms that become the ‘common sense’ of society (Lears, 1985). Here, subcultures and countercultures offer alternative perspectives and values to challenge this cultural hegemony.

Over time, the distinctions between subculture and counterculture have become clearer. As counterculture is characterized by a personal and politically motivated rejection of prevailing cultural norms, subculture is associated with specific groups within a broader culture—often the working class—who display their social standing through unique cultural expressions that typically diverge from established norms (Williams & Hannerz, 2014). Contrary to earlier theories that viewed subcultures as either directly opposing mainstream culture or magically resolving

social tensions, current perspectives recognize the nuanced cultural values and practices of subcultures. These include diverse worldviews, lifestyles, musical preferences, and ideological beliefs. In the postmodern era, subcultures are often linked to symbolic consumption patterns, where the behavior of consumption within these groups is closely connected to the performance and construction of individual identities (Ulusoy & Schembri, 2018).

The theory of music scenes is a pivotal extension of subculture theory. While subculture theory, closely tied to counterculture, emphasizes a sense of community formed through subcultural commitment, it has been criticized for its rigid link between music and the class background of its participants, offering a limited perspective on how music intersects with everyday life. In contrast, the concept of a music scene proposes a more inclusive and flexible understanding of involvement in music, showing fewer constraints related to participants' gender, ethnicity, and class (Bennett, 2004).

Bennett (2004) further developed this idea by introducing three dynamics of music scenes: local, trans-local, and virtual. Local scenes focus on the socio-economic environment of a specific area, highlighting how local dynamics influence the consumption, production, and interaction among cultural stakeholders within a particular music style. Trans-local scenes, on the other hand, operate on a broader, more global level, emphasizing how a music style can transcend its original location, impacting various regions and countries, and thereby fostering a more globalized music culture. Virtual scenes shift from the physical world to the digital realm, examining how the internet and online platforms create spaces that diminish the distance between music fans, contributing to the construction of a broader virtual community.

Post-subcultural theory departs from traditional subcultural theory's emphasis on class and structural determinism. It addresses the complex nature of young people's cultural interactions and proposes an alternative way to consider cultural consumption in a globalized context. This theory focuses on the fluidity and fragmented nature of youth identity formation, which is not solely confined to fixed class-based structures. It highlights the individualized nature of youth identity in relation to subcultural consumption by emphasizing individual agency, choice, and diversity in cultural expressions. This shift critiques the class determinism of traditional theories and suggests viewing cultural expression as a temporary

engagement rather than a firm commitment. Bennett (2011) further explored post-subcultural theory in his article, suggesting a combined application of post-subcultural and subcultural frameworks. This approach allows for the examination of the roles of class, ethnicity, and gender in shaping youth cultures while adopting a nuanced approach that addresses new cultural dynamics and the ways young people navigate their identities through music, style, and media. This combined approach seeks to overcome the shortcomings of post-subcultural theory, such as its oversight of resistance to mainstream norms, and offers a more adaptable framework for examining cultural dynamics and youth identity, often overlooked in traditional discourse.

This study primarily concentrates on the concept of subculture amidst the complex theoretical discussions surrounding counterculture, subculture, and music scenes, emphasizing the cultural participation and engagement of young adult hip-hop fans. While live event locations serve as a medium for young fans to interact with the culture and community, they are not the primary basis for this cultural participation. Moreover, as Hesmondhalgh (2005) pointed out, while the term ‘scene’ is prevalent in popular music studies, its use is often ambiguous. Although its meaning varies, sometimes highlighting a specific geographical location and at other times a broader cultural context, the concept of a music scene is intrinsically linked to the idea of “location,” whether this is understood in geographical, global, or virtual terms. In this research, we reinterpret the notion of subculture in a modern context, focusing on the subcultural dimensions of hip hop fandom. It investigates how enthusiasts of this music genre, particularly hip-hop aficionados in the Netherlands, congregate based on their shared interests, examining the collective engagement with hip hop. While hip hop has often been deemed a counterculture due to its roots as a powerful voice for marginalized and economically disenfranchised communities, especially those confronting racial injustices, its narrative has significantly transformed (Blair, 2004; Lena & Peterson, 2008; Smith, 2007). With the dawn of the new millennium, hip hop has seen commercialization, expanding its influence globally and impacting artists across the world, evolving from a localized, scene-based genre to an industry-based genre (Blair, 2004; Motley & Henderson, 2008). This expansion has woven hip hop into the tapestry of mainstream pop culture and has also allowed it to evolve into a “glocal subculture,” (Mitchell, 1998) where it maintains its original ethos while adapting to local cultures as it spreads internationally. Consequently, this study

situates hip hop and its communities primarily within a subcultural framework in the Netherlands, rather than as a counterculture.

According to Blair (2004), youth subcultures are closely linked with music, which becomes a tool for young people to form common meanings and a shared identity. As the production of mainstream music grows, there is an increased demand for varied cultural offerings, enabling music consumers to derive a sense of uniqueness and self-stylization from these products (Bader & Scharenberg, 2010). Hip hop, a subculture with significant global influence, has a profound impact on young adult fans. It fosters its own subgroup through its distinctive values, specialized knowledge, and fashion, engaging fans in the music and its surrounding culture. This engagement helps fans to carve out their identities within the culture, particularly through their cultural participation and the acquisition of subcultural capital.

Additionally, engagement within a particular culture reflects varying degrees of fandom, indicating that individuals avidly follow the music, lives, and careers of specific artists or genres. This engagement includes activities such as attending events, collecting related objects, and interacting with fan communities (Shuker, 2012). While historically, such displays of fandom have been perceived negatively, often associated with pathology or deviance and viewed as passive consumerism. However, academic perspectives have shifted, now recognizing fandom as a form of self-expression. Fans actively participate and contribute, thereby empowering themselves and gaining a sense of identity and community through their interaction with the culture and community (Duffett, 2015). This is also why the research uses the term 'fans' rather than 'participants' or 'audiences,' as it emphasizes a deeper, more passionate level of cultural participation and highlights the specific community-oriented approach related to the culture.

In summary, employing subcultural theory in this research facilitates a deeper exploration of how fans interpret and internalize the themes and messages conveyed through hip-hop subculture, and how this shapes their self-perception and expression within the context of exclusive live events. While the study primarily utilizes the concept of subculture theory, it also incorporates the theories of music scene and counterculture. Subculture theory is prominently mentioned and applied when emphasizing hip-hop culture in general, particularly fans' cultural engagement and participation, highlighting community interaction based on mutual genuine interests. The concept of 'scene' is included when discussing the location of hip hop, either

emphasizing live events as spaces or the genre's trans-local aspects. Counterculture theory is referenced in relation to the social class aspects of the culture, such as when interviewees highlight their hip-hop engagement in relation to their racial background or perceive their participation in hip-hop culture as a form of anti-mainstream expression. By concentrating on the subcultural aspects of hip hop, this study examines how young adult fans' cultural engagement with hip-hop music in live settings contributes to shaping their social identities through both personal cultural consumption and interaction with the fan community inside and outside of live-performance scenes.

2.3. Totemic Rituals

The society we live in contains a variety of rituals and totems that are often perceived as 'naturally' embodied, even though they are not formally recognized as such. In the context of social events like live performances, these totems and rituals are presented in various forms. For instance, the co-presence of a group of fans may form a collective totem, symbolizing unity and shared passion. The attentional focus on specific artists or DJs becomes a totemic symbol of admiration that holds cultural significance. Rhythmic movements and dancing, the expansion of physical or emotional energy, and the use of ecstatic substances like alcohol or caffeine, all contribute to this modern version of totems and rituals. These elements go beyond the traditional definitions as suggested by Durkheim, representing a contemporary evolution of collective symbolism and shared experience (Marshall, 2002).

The study of totems and rituals is deeply linked to Durkheim's exploration of religion, where he proposed that religion's effectiveness stems from communal belief systems distinguishing sacred elements from profane ones. Religion, according to Durkheim, is primarily about fostering community, with totems and rituals playing crucial roles in demarcating sacred times and nurturing communal bonds. In the context of live performances, the collective experiences and shared symbols recognized by participants can be seen as a modern version of Durkheimian totems and rituals. These events serve as spaces where individuals engage in these rituals and interact with numerous totems, transforming the space into a sacred one. When individuals enter this sacred space and participate in these ritualistic practices, a sense

of community is fostered. This essence of community-building through shared rituals and totems thus mirrors the core principles of a 'religion' as described by Durkheim.

Totems, traditionally symbolic objects often represented by animals or plants, hold ancestral or spiritual significance for a group, clan, or community. Durkheim's analysis of totemism revealed that a totem acts as a unifying symbol, central to the social group's identity and essential for maintaining familial or communal ties, regardless of the clan members' physical proximity (Serazio, 2013). As such, a totem is a focal point for worship and reverence, transcending individual relationships and binding the clan members into a moral community, irrespective of their familial ties or geographical locations (Zhu & Ilsinger, 2023). In relation to the research topic, the totem of live performance is frequently manifested in physical, such as fashion items, including merchandise from specific artists or festivals, wristbands, flags, or even the performers or artists themselves, whom fans idolize (Barrière & Finkel, 2022). However, it is important to note that totems that provide group affiliation and sentimental value are often perceived symbolically. This includes the shared presence of other fans and the experience of ritualistic performances, which will be explored in greater depth in the following section.

While totems represent culturally significant symbols, rituals involve behaviors and practices among clan members, incorporating totems into ceremonies or habitual actions (Serazio, 2013). These rituals reinforce the group's values, beliefs, and norms, enforcing compliance with clan rules and fostering group cohesion. Through rituals, cultural differences are bridged, commonalities are celebrated, and boundaries are drawn with out-groups. Moreover, rituals are not random practices, they are rather built and maintained through social agreement and practices. These rituals enable both individuals and groups to assign meaning to their actions and behaviors, consequently contributing to the formation of social frameworks and hierarchies. Thus, when individuals engage in these rituals, interpret their significance both within the group and on a personal level, and navigate the dynamics of power and status among their peers, they not only reinforce their social connections but also carve out their cultural identities solidifying their sense of belonging to a particular cultural group (Marsh, 2004).

In his exploration of interaction ritual chains, Randall Collins (2004) builds on Durkheim's concept by focusing on rituals and group solidarity, shifting from broad social structures to micro-level, face-to-face interactions. Collins argues that macro

social structures are rooted in these micro-scale interactions among people, where rituals play a central role in facilitating these interactions, enabling a deeper understanding of social dynamics (Collins, 2004; Henry, 2001). He identifies four key elements of interaction rituals: barriers to outsiders, which foster a sense of exclusivity within the social group; shared emotions among ritual participants; a mutual focus of attention on a common activity or topic; and bodily co-presence, with individuals physically sharing the same space (Van Haperen et al., 2020). During these rituals, individuals either gain or lose emotional energy (EE), with low EE linked to passive feelings and high EE associated with enthusiasm or confidence, leading to stronger group solidarity. Consequently, an individual's life story can be viewed as a series of interconnected social interactions or rituals they have experienced, shaped within the framework of interaction ritual chains (Collins, 2004).

In the live hip-hop scene, one commonly observed ritual is the mosh pit. Although this form of 'extreme' dancing originally emerged from punk and hardcore scenes, it has been adopted by the hip-hop community relatively recently. Despite limited direct research on the connection between mosh pits and hip-hop, the practice embodies core elements that align with the four components of interaction rituals. With bodily co-presence occurs as fans gather closely in live settings, boundaries to outsiders distinguish those not participating in the pits, often indicating individuals unfamiliar with mosh pit etiquette or its underlying principles, such as ensuring everyone's safety. The mutual focus of attention in mosh pits typically centers on the artist or the music being performed, with artists sometimes directing the crowd to create space or fans waiting for a specific beat to engage fully. Finally, shared emotional experiences in mosh pits foster a sense of excitement and community among participants (Lau, 2005; Riches, 2011).

Vandenberg's research, however, supports Collins' theory regarding totemic interaction rituals in the context of concerts. According to Collins, concerts and music festivals are forms of informal rituals, more leisurely than solemn, yet they still create a space for solidarity and belonging. In these events, artists act as ritual leaders, and the symbols displayed become totems that demarcate symbolic boundaries among fans (Vandenberg et al., 2021). Vandenberg notes, however, that the power of these interaction rituals diminishes when the format of the performance shifts, as in her study of streamed concerts. The absence of physical co-presence and a shared focus of attention, key elements in Collins' interaction ritual chain, leads to challenges in

providing rhythmic engagement in virtual music experiences. This results in lower emotional energy and group solidarity, further highlighting the importance of physical presence and direct interaction for interaction rituals (Vandenberg & Berghman, 2023).

The recognition and practice of totems and rituals are often deeply linked to specific groups, as highlighted in this study of a particular fan group sharing a passion for hip-hop culture. Here, Jones' study on fan-related tattooing and sacred identity adeptly merges the concept of totemic rituals with fan studies. This approach brings the theoretical framework of totemic rituals into the more specific context of genre and fan culture, where she suggests that musicians often serve as totemic figures igniting fan engagement. According to her perspective, totems and rituals within fan communities facilitate the transformation of the sacred into a form of affective relationship. This relationship manifests as a passionate engagement with both the subject (such as a musician or a band) and fellow fans, distinguishing the fan space from the ordinary world. The choices and distinctions made within this space mark it as separate and unique from everyday life. In this context, the term "clan" refers to a specific fandom. Totems and rituals within these fandoms are tools used to forge and deepen connections within the fan community. These elements not only celebrate the object of their fandom but also create a shared identity and a sense of belonging among the fans, reinforcing the bonds within the community (Jones, 2015).

Therefore, by embracing the theory of totemic rituals, this research seeks to explore how totems and rituals within fan groups contribute to the broader social identity that is constructed based on the fandom. This investigation is particularly focused on live performance settings, where fans of a subculture converge as a clan. In these gatherings, they incorporate subcultural symbols and practices into what is considered a 'sacred' scene, distinguishing themselves from those outside the fan group and their 'profane' everyday life. Moreover, the research not only considers the positive aspects of these rituals, as suggested by Collins, in terms of generating high emotional energy among cultural consumers but also explores the negative outcomes, such as failed rituals, which indicate lower emotional energy resulting from negative live performance experiences. Specifically, it investigates instances where performances or individuals' ritual participation in the live setting do not meet fan expectations, leading to feelings of disconnection from the ritual group and the totemic leaders (the performers). This approach aims to gain a deeper understanding

of the dynamics of these rituals and symbols and how they reinforce collective identity and social cohesion within the fan community.

2.4. Collective Effervescence

As described by Durkheim, collective activities and symbols serve as markers distinguishing sacred from profane times within a clan. Central to this concept is the experience of heightened emotional excitation during these ‘sacred’ times, a phenomenon Durkheim termed “collective effervescence.” This phenomenon is characterized by the intense emotions experienced by individuals as they engage in group activities, perceiving themselves as part of a moral or biological tribe. This shared emotional state thus, not only fosters a sensation of sacredness but also enhances a sense of communal belonging (Gabriel et al., 2020).

Collective effervescence arises when members of a group, despite their diverse backgrounds or histories, participate in collective activities, leading to a shared emotional experience. This shared experience, a cornerstone of collective effervescence, transcends individual differences, fostering a sense of unity and common purpose. Through these shared emotional experiences, individuals in the group develop a stronger sense of belonging and derive greater meaning in life from their social interactions. This concept suggests that the collective experiences within a group are not merely aggregations of individual emotions but are fundamentally transformative, creating a cohesive social bond and reinforcing the group’s collective identity belonging (Gabriel et al., 2020; May, 2010).

Originally, the theory of collective effervescence was used to describe the mysterious and rare scenes in traditional religious contexts. However, in recent years, this concept has been adapted to more contemporary settings, perceived as a part of everyday life, such as festivals, sports events, and concerts. The focus of collective effervescence has shifted from just the interaction among groups to also include the influence of environmental factors, exploring how specific events contribute to this shared sentiment (Liebst, 2019; May, 2010). This research specifically examines the social dynamics within hip-hop culture in live performance settings, aiming to understand how fans develop a shared identity. This is achieved not only through interactions with other fans and engagement in subcultural practices, such as rituals and totems, but also by considering how the environment of concerts or festivals

plays a role in fostering collective effervescence, thereby enhancing the fans' sense of social identity within the hip-hop subculture.

3. Research Design

3.1. Research Question

Under the main research question “How do fans perceive the role of live hip-hop music in the construction of their social identity?”, a qualitative study comprising semi-structured interviews with young adult hip-hop fans aged 18-28 residing in the Netherlands will be undertaken. The interviews' findings will undergo thematic analysis using a hybrid method that incorporates both inductive and deductive approaches within the theoretical framework. This research design, coupled with the primary question, allows for an in-depth examination of the fans' interpretive processes regarding hip-hop culture, live performances, and their social identity construction within this subculture scene. To dissect the main question, it is further broken down into three specific sub-questions.

1. How do young adult hip-hop fans construct their social identity in relation to hip hop?
2. How do young adult hip-hop fans perceive symbols and rituals encountered at hip-hop events in relation to their social identity?
3. How do young adult hip-hop fans recount shared experiences at live performances and their interplay with personal identity and community bonds?

These three research questions establish a framework for exploring how fans utilize live performances as a nexus for connecting their subcultural identities to a broader social identity within the hip-hop community. Each sub-question corresponds to an existing theory within the framework, individually investigating the fan's view concerning the hip-hop music scene and their cultural engagement, the fan's active involvement in the culture and activities in live events, and the personal interpretations that nurture or reinforce a sense of community during their cultural participation and consumption in these live settings, facilitating a structured and comprehensive examination of the topic.

3.2. Data Sample

The data sample for this research specifically includes young adult fans in the Netherlands who have participated in hip-hop music festivals or concerts in the past year, thus representing the target participants for the semi-structured interviews and resulting in a purposive sampling approach. Unlike existing research predominantly focusing on the hip-hop scene in the United States (Clay, 2003; Haaken et al., 2012; Nguyen & Ferguson, 2019), this study shifts its lens to the Netherlands. Here, hip-hop festivals are a relatively niche form of cultural consumption, but are becoming increasingly popular among young adult music enthusiasts, representing a vibrant and emerging music scene. Additionally, with mainstream hip-hop artists typically choosing only a few key locations in Europe for their tours, and with major hip-hop festival brands acquiring local festivals in recent years—such as Rolling Loud buying the main festival brand Woo Hah—the live performance scene in the Netherlands is increasingly monopolized by the entertainment company Live Nation, resulting in a relatively small range of choices for live performances in the country (Live Nation Entertainment, Inc., n.d.; Van Loon, 2022). The concentration of live events thus amplifies the subcultural ambiance for the target audiences, as their choices for live hip hop experiences become more curated and exclusive. Furthermore, the data sample not only focuses on the aspects above but also strives to include interviewees from various racial and gender backgrounds. This approach aims to enrich the exploration of the research question by incorporating minority cultural and gender perspectives in the live hip-hop scene in the Netherlands. These two aspects are often addressed in relevant research, as hip-hop culture is deeply intertwined with issues of race and socio-economic conditions and has historically been perceived as male-dominated (Hunter, 2021; Payne, 2024). This further provides scholars with opportunities to reexamine its role from a contemporary perspective. Specifically, in the Netherlands, the increasing number of immigrants and internationals residing in the country contributes to a diverse cultural landscape within a globalized context. Compared to other European countries, the hip-hop scene in the Netherlands is relatively immature but is showing a rapid trend of growth (De Roest, 2021; Haijen, 2016), further making it essential to include these perspectives in the research to examine the complex interplay of identity formation in relation to the music scene.

The criteria for the purposive sampling in this study are thus as follows: (1) young adults aged 18-28, (2) residing in the Netherlands, (3) self-identifying as hip-hop fans, and (4) having attended hip-hop festivals or concerts in the past year. In the initial phase of the study, participant recruitment was strategically targeted towards online hip-hop communities and events. This involved engagement with Instagram festival pages, group chats, and local hip-hop events. A dedicated Instagram group chat was created for the upcoming Rolling Loud Europe festival to facilitate this process. Additionally, recruitment efforts were extended to the followers of @moshpitsdaily, an Instagram page dedicated to live performance videos and mosh pit culture. Local hip-hop events, specifically ‘Du Weef’ and ‘Encore Amsterdam,’ were also utilized for recruiting potential interviewees, with the researcher attending these events in person to extend invitations to prospective participants. This approach aims to reach a wide range of individuals, including festivalgoers, concert attendees, and fans of artists and creators within hip-hop culture, both through social media and in physical settings. Subsequent participant selection leveraged snowball sampling techniques, inviting referrals from initial participants in order to enhance the diversity and the depth of the research data.

The study culminated with a cohort of 13 participants with diverse occupations, all of whom currently reside in the Netherlands and represent a diverse range of cultural backgrounds and origins. This data sample includes five individuals who were born and raised in the Netherlands. The remaining eight participants comprise three of Chinese nationality, one of German origin, one Portuguese, one Italian, one South African, and one American, with their ages ranging from 20 to 26. In terms of gender distribution, the group consists of nine individuals self-identifying as male and four as female, reflecting the relatively male-dominated nature of hip-hop fan base (Arthur, 2006).

Respondent	Name	Gender	Nationality	Age
R1	Domonique	Male	Dutch	23
R2	Elizabeth	Female	Chinese	26
R3	Hoyin	Male	Dutch	23
R4	Jasmine	Female	Chinese	26
R5	Joy	Female	Dutch	20

R6	Linping	Female	Chinese	23
R7	Marco	Male	Italian	20
R8	Mike	Male	Dutch	24
R9	Musa	Male	Dutch	22
R10	Pedro	Male	Portuguese	24
R11	Philipp	Male	German	23
R12	Sam	Male	American	23
R13	Solly	Male	South African	22

Table 1: Participant Demographics

3.3. Procedure and Operationalization

The study employed a qualitative methodology, utilizing semi-structured interviews to facilitate participants in sharing their individual experiences. This approach enabled an in-depth, intimate examination of how participants construct meaning within the context of subcultural affiliation, cultural engagement, and identity formation.

In the research process, participants first received a consent form, which they signed to confirm their understanding and acceptance of the interview conditions and their rights. An introductory overview about the research was provided after they signed the form (details of which are in the appendix under ‘interview guide’). Given the substantial length of the interviews, provisions for breaks were arranged during. The interviews were carried out in two formats: face-to-face and via Zoom, to accommodate the scheduling needs of the interviewees. Conducted in English, the interviews followed a structured set of questions related to four theoretical concepts. These questions were divided into four measurable parts as per the interview guide. Additionally, follow-up questions were asked to clarify and gain deeper insights into the participants’ views on the topic. Each interview lasted approximately 50 to 60 minutes.

As mentioned, the theoretical framework of the research is operationalized in the different sections of the interview guide. Each subsection corresponds to a broader theoretical perspective, with four main concepts that collectively provide a framework for exploring the perceptions of hip-hop fans at live music events in relation to their social identity formation through a deductive approach. The subsections focus on the

following areas: hip-hop subculture, totemic rituals, collective effervescence, and social identity, further operationalizing the corresponding theoretical concepts.

The hip-hop subculture centers on how individuals cultivate their personal and social identities through engagement with the culture. It delves into the ways that individuals align their sense of self with the wider hip-hop community, not solely via the music but through a holistic embrace of the culture, which encompasses music and live performance participation as integral components of their lifestyles. This section explores how individuals first become interested in the culture and why they continue to engage with it, delving into the specific cultural aspects that resonate with them and the deeper significance this holds for their sense of self by examining the personal and emotional connections that fans have with the culture, the section aims to understand the personal significance fans attribute to the culture and how it profoundly connects to their self-identity. Additionally, the section investigates how fans integrate the music scene into their daily lives and engage with the community, revealing the social and internalized dimensions of the subculture. As mentioned, although hip hop as a music genre is growing in popularity with an increasing listener base, its cultural roots, originating in America, are undergoing a phase of relocalization in the Netherlands, where there has been a rapid expansion in the genre's popularity in recent years. Despite this growth, large concerts in the Netherlands are relatively rare, and music festivals dedicated to the hip-hop genre are a comparatively new phenomenon compared to more established mainstream genres, resulting in the formation of a unique subculture among live hip-hop music attendees. Consequently, this section further focuses on the consumption of live hip-hop performances by young adults in the Netherlands, a form of engagement that remains limited and exclusive. It delves deeper into the level of fans' active participation and commitment to the hip-hop scene. This niche experience of hip hop, distinct from mainstream consumption, underscores its subcultural character. Within this framework, the research thus poses the sub-question: "How do young adult hip-hop fans construct their social identity in relation to hip hop?"

Shifting focus to the realm of totemic rituals, the research examines the significance of symbols and rituals within the space of live hip-hop performances. It considers how these cultural elements, experienced during festivals and concerts, contribute to the construction of a shared cultural narrative within the hip-hop scene.

Live performances serve not just as venues for musical enjoyment but also as arenas for communal celebration and shared passion within hip-hop. Fans gather to create and engage in rituals that reinforce their identity and belonging within the hip-hop community. Specifically, the totemic rituals section investigates the distinctive aspects of live performances that might carry totemic significance, setting these events apart from more mundane settings. It looks at how particular events or moments in live hip-hop can embody collective rituals, fostering emotional and symbolic interactions between performers and the audience, and among fans. This exploration of totemic rituals also includes instances where rituals may not fully succeed. Participants are asked about moments when they felt alienated, further probing the boundaries of the hip-hop community as defined by its rituals and symbols. This inquiry examines how individuals might feel included or excluded from these experiences and how such dynamics influence their sense of connection within the subculture. With the sub-question “How do young adult hip-hop fans perceive symbols and rituals encountered at hip-hop events in relation to their social identity”, this facet of the research seeks to understand the deeper meanings ascribed to these shared experiences and how they act as a conduit for the collective expression of the subculture.

Collective effervescence, however, is linked to totemic rituals but further emphasizes the individual yet interconnected experiences in the interaction rituals within live music performances, probing into how personal, exclusive experiences and the event’s atmosphere contribute to feelings of community and belonging. It explores the formation of a shared emotional connection among attendees at hip-hop events, allows participants to reflect on how various live settings (festivals vs. concerts) might foster different levels of collective effervescence, and sees how moments of collective effervescence may lead to enduring social connections. Moreover, this section extends the idea of collective effervescence beyond the events themselves, taking into account the anticipatory excitement and the residual feelings, and how these collectively enhance the overall experience of collective effervescence. Therefore, under this theoretical lens, the pertinent sub-research question “How do young adult hip-hop fans recount shared experiences at live performances and their interplay with personal identity and community bonds?” aims to investigate how a physical space is transformed through the collective energy of the event, becoming a place that is imbued with the ‘spirit’ of the hip-hop community and fostering long-lasting bonds among fans.

Social identity offered a comprehensive yet direct approach to addressing the main research question, blending relevant theories and summarizing insights from the previous three sections. It re-evaluated how individuals incorporate their experiences from live events and the cultural significance of hip hop into their self-concept, and examined their perceptions and the perceptions others have of them, both within and outside the subculture, in terms of cultural engagement. Specifically, the theoretical concept was made more concrete by exploring how individuals view the relationship between the culture and their personal background, culture, and self-identity, and how their affinity influences their social life. It also looked at how they establish cultural boundaries within the hip-hop community, confront stereotypes associated with their fandom, and ultimately forge a sense of belonging and self-image through engagement with the culture and community.

In summary, the theoretical concepts are thus logically operationalized by initially examining the respondents' overall engagement with hip-hop culture. This exploration is followed by an analysis of live events, focusing on fans' experiences related to specific rituals and practices in these settings. The discussion then delves deeper into the collective emotions and energy derived from these rituals and totems within the hip-hop scene. And ultimately, it leads to a formation of a broader sense of community affirmation and belonging in relation to the research question.

3.4. Data Analysis

The qualitative analysis of this study is composed by a series semi-structured interviews serve as the primary data collection method. This approach allows a guided conversation that remains closely aligned with the underlying theoretical frameworks: hip-hop subculture, totemic rituals, collective effervescence and social identity. At the same time, semi-structure allows participants to share their experiences actively and candidly, which combining enables the research to delve into the specified thematic areas while remaining open to emergent themes that participants may highlight, reflecting the dynamism of their lived experiences (Adams, 2015).

The thematic analysis is, however, be conducted using a hybrid approach that synergizes both inductive and deductive methods using the software Atlas.ti. The deductive component aligns the data with established theories, facilitating a structured interpretation of responses and maintaining consistency in the research. This theory-

driven approach enhances the validity of the research findings by keeping the focus on established theoretical concepts. Meanwhile, the inductive component is responsive to the emergence of new themes that may expand or challenge the existing theoretical framework. This data-driven approach follows a bottom-up method, enriching the results and potentially uncovering new insights based on the participants' responses (Proudfoot, 2023; Swain, 2018).

By integrating both inductive and deductive methods, this methodology not only interprets data within the context of existing theories but also adapts and evolves these theories based on the data from interview participants. This increases the flexibility and depth of the research topic exploration while maintaining a systematic and robust theoretical foundation. Furthermore, this mixed approach facilitates a dynamic interchange between theory and data, enabling the researcher to refine the theoretical framework based on new insights provided by the data. This enhances the adaptability of the analysis process, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the complex phenomena and resulting in findings that are both empirically grounded and theoretically informed (Proudfoot, 2023).

The research adheres to the six-step thematic analysis procedure proposed by Braun & Clarke (2006), utilizing the Atlas.ti. Initially, the original audio from semi-structured interviews is transcribed into text. This text is then reviewed extensively, with notes taken and annotations made to capture preliminary impressions. Following this, initial open coding is performed to highlight parts of the data that are relevant to the research topic or appear interesting. After the initial coding, these codes are further organized and condensed into broader themes that either align with existing theoretical concepts or suggest potential new ones. These categories are then further reviewed and refined based on theoretical concepts, culminating in their definitive formulation for the ensuing report (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The analysis results in four main themes, each with several subcategories, illustrated in the code tree: Subcultural Fandom and Identity Formation in Hip Hop (three subcategories), Inclusivity and Exclusivity (three subcategories), Rituals and Collective Effervescence at Live Events (four subcategories), and Totem and Sense of Community (three subcategories). Notably, the category of symbolic totems under the last theme links to two categories related to rituals, reflecting the totemic role rituals play in community and social identity formation. The subsequent section will explore each theme and category in detail, demonstrating how the analyzed data connects to

theoretical concepts and addresses the research question concerning hip-hop fans' perceptions of live events' role in their social identity construction.

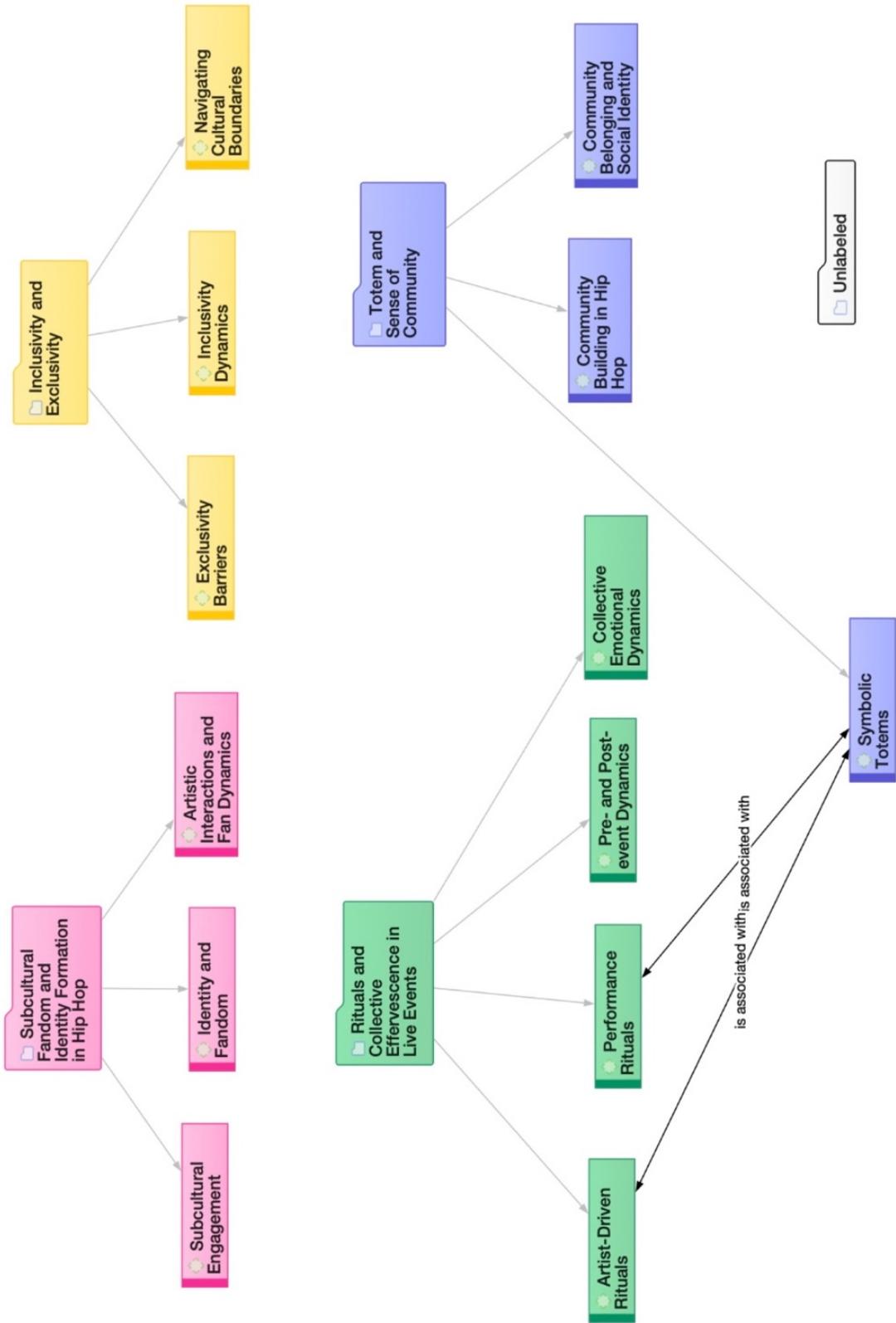


Table 2: Code Tree

4. Result

As mentioned above, the findings are presented under four themes, each addressing a different perspective of the theoretical concept: Subcultural Fandom and Identity Formation in Hip Hop focuses on fans' general engagement with the music and culture, exploring how they incorporate the culture into their sense of identity; Inclusivity and Exclusivity however, examines fans' perceptions regarding the fan community, particularly how they establish boundaries between insiders and outsiders of the group; Rituals and Collective Effervescence shifts the focus to live performances, analyzing fans' ritual participation and experiences during group gatherings, and the sense of belonging and bonds they feel at these events; Lastly, Totem and Sense of Community revolves around the concept of community, investigating how fans perceive their relationship with the fan community in their daily lives, and how they connect community formation with both inside and outside live event experiences.

4.1. Subcultural Fandom and Identity Formation in Hip Hop

The section Subcultural Fandom and Identity Formation in Hip Hop explores how fans integrate hip-hop culture into their daily lives, blending their self-expression with the niche music scene. It examines how these fans perceive their identities within the hip hop fandom, how they interpret the artistic expression and messages in hip hop, and how their interactions with artists enhance their connection to the fan community and shape their self-perception. The aim of the section is to answer the sub-question of how young adult hip-hop fans construct their social identity in relation to hip-hop, within the theoretical framework of hip-hop subculture and music scenes. Under this part, the discussion is divided into three sub-themes: subcultural engagement, identity and fandom, and artistic interaction and fan dynamics.

4.1.1. Subcultural Engagement

In exploring the engagement of fans with hip-hop culture, several interviewees described their perception of the hip-hop scene in the Netherlands as relatively 'niche.' This characterization stems not only from the genre's historical origins but also from the nature of its live performances. Notably, Elizabeth, one of the interviewees, detailed her transition from experiencing hip hop as a "mainstream"

genre in America to a more niche cultural expression in the Netherlands. She attributed this change to significant “demographic differences”, specifically citing that “hip hop does not reflect the lifestyle of Dutch people.” Elizabeth’s insights highlight how, in her view, the socio-economic conditions and racial identity that shape hip hop in the U.S. do not resonate with the predominantly white Dutch population, thereby relegating it to the status of a subculture in the Dutch scene. Here, she emphasized the countercultural aspect of hip-hop, noting its deep roots in racial issues and its reflection of specific socio-economic conditions (Smith, 2007). This focus on a particular social group makes the culture a relatively niche taste when it transcends to a different location, becoming more subcultural in the Netherlands. Elizabeth’s perception of her unique engagement with hip hop also underscores how fans use subculture to build a sense of distinctiveness in relation to their identity, further highlighting the intertwining of the trans-local aspects of the music scene and subcultural engagement (Blair, 2004).

Another perspective offered by respondents is that hip hop’s niche status is compounded by the limited presence of major international artists and the small number of significant music festivals, which typically occur only in the summer. This scarcity makes the live hip-hop experience an exclusive affair for fans, further emphasizing its niche appeal in the Netherlands. Attending live performances becomes a form of cultural consumption that is less accessible, leading fans to develop a more dedicated sense of fandom through attendance. This tightens the link between live performance attendance and their fandom identity, creating a sense of distinction from those who do not participate in the live event scene. This situation also exemplifies the trans-local character of the music scene, where hip-hop genre transcends its original geographic and cultural environment within a globalized music industry (Bennett, 2004). It adapts to different demographic compositions and social issues than those typically addressed in American hip-hop, resulting in a distinct mainstream appeal. In this context, live events serve as mediators that facilitate the transition from local to global, reinforcing the cultural presence of hip hop in the local context. These events also act as a form of subcultural participation, distinguishing hip hop from other local ‘mainstream’ cultures as it adapts locally, further highlighting its unique place in the perception among fans.

Furthermore, exclusivity of live hip-hop events extends beyond the infrequent appearances of international artists and the limited availability of hip-hop festivals.

Attending these live events also becomes a crucial part of the cultural experience and self-expression within the hip-hop community, especially compared to other forms of music consumption. According to the interviewee Marco, the exclusivity arises from a comparison with today's online streaming platforms as well. Marco argued that streaming services provide 'easy' access to music, which he perceives as 'plastic.' He explained:

I think, as the world we live in right now, with all these streaming platforms, music has become a bit more, let me say plastic, because you can hear it as many times as you want, in the order you want. And it's something that makes me think. I think listening to the same song in a live performance is a whole other thing. Because you feel the energy of the artist, and you really feel what he's trying to do with this song.

Marco believes that live performances offer a more authentic and unique music consumption experience. Fans interact directly with artists, and unlike streaming, they have little control over the playlist, which enhances the authenticity and 'aura' of the experience, making it more genuine compared to the routine music consumption on streaming platforms. This aligns with Benjamin's concept of 'aura'. While digitization has democratized the music industry, it has also introduced challenges in maintaining authenticity due to the ease of music distribution and mechanical reproduction, which diminishes the aura by detaching it from its unique presence in time and space (Askin & Mol, 2018; Hansen, 2008). In contrast, live hip-hop performances retain their unique, unrepeatable nature and the direct interaction between artists and fans. This presence is lost in streamed music, which Marco refers to as "plastic," underscoring live hip hop as a form of resistance to mainstream music consumption patterns. This also highlights a subcultural practice that prioritizes authenticity over convenience in a live setting, with fans pursuing authenticity as a way of seeking distinction from those who opt for convenience and digital access.

4.1.2. Identity and Fandom

While live performances play a role in engaging fans with hip-hop culture, most interviewees emphasized that attending these events is not necessarily a core

value of fandom. Instead, fandom is more profoundly connected with active and deep engagement with hip-hop culture in general, or in other words, incorporating the culture into daily life. This includes frequently exploring and consuming cultural products such as music and fashion, and importantly, using these cultural elements as a means of personal expression. For many fans, hip hop takes a part in their daily routines in significant ways, such as their choice of music, the language they use in social interactions, their behaviors, and in some cases, their artistic expressions, including music creation and graffiti arts. Marco, who views hip-hop as an “art that includes many forms,” notes that the genre offers everyone a way to express themselves. Specifically, he considers rapping a straightforward form of expression, explaining that “all you need is a beat and your words.”

Furthermore, the role of hip hop to fans extends to significant life decisions, emotional coping, and social interactions. Sam, a live-performance vlog content creator, shared how crucial the culture has been to his personal growth and lifestyle:

I think without hip hop, I really wouldn't even know what I'd be doing right now. You know, I'd probably still be working the same job and be very routine-based. But I like hip hop because it's very spontaneous. When you see a new festival lineup in a different country or in the states, you're like, 'Whoa, that's an opportunity for me to go out there and discover new people and new places.' So yeah, it really helped me out. I got to meet new people and be around different things that I wouldn't be involved with if I just didn't like music or didn't pursue it.

His perspective aligns with the subculture theory, which suggests that certain styles of music transcend the genre itself. To fans, this music carries symbolic meanings that contribute to the construction of an individual's identity. This, in turn, helps them navigate various social landscapes and assert their place within a broader cultural dialogue (Blair, 2004). Additionally, this orientation towards self is sometimes also linked to specific messages inherent in the music itself.

According to interviewees, a prevalent method of self-expression in hip-hop music is through its lyrics, which can shape listeners' views of its message in both positive and negative ways. This interaction contributes to both of individuals'

alignment with the culture and their understanding of the music relative to their self-identity. Positively, the artistic message is often associated with ‘empowerment.’ For example, some female fans find that the music of female rappers boosts their self-confidence. These artists use bold lyrics to share their experiences as women, inspiring their listeners to “be a strong woman”, as Joy mentioned.

Additionally, hip hop frequently addresses the experiences of minorities, deeply intertwining with black culture. It is being perceived by participants serves not only as a medium for black people to express achievements—considering the success of many artists from this demographic—but also connects more profoundly to their original social backgrounds. Black artists use music to narrate their authentic stories and heighten social awareness. This theme resonates not just with black interviewees but also with those from other minority backgrounds. For instance, Elizabeth, living as a minority in the Netherlands, also mentioned that she feels a stronger connection to hip-hop culture because it reflects her own experiences (being an Asian) in a similar context.

4.1.3. Artistic Interactions and Fan Dynamics

It’s worth noting that the connection between music and fans is not merely about receiving messages. In some cases, individuals actively use music to forge a connection with their cultural identity. Take Joy’s story, for example:

I guess you know, being half-black but raised in a predominantly white community, there was always this feeling that I had to assert my identity. You know, like, ‘See, I’m still black, right?’ It seems silly now, but when I was 12 or 13 years old, I felt compelled to constantly prove my blackness to everyone. This was the case with both my friends of color and my white friends. So, connecting deeply with the music I loved, and not just settling for what I considered basic white music, was really important to me.

Here, music serves not only as a means for individuals to express their identities but also as a tool for affirming identity within a culturally diverse context. This function underscores the subculture’s symbolic resistance to mainstream culture, and also highlights the role of socio-economic factors in shaping subcultural identities

(Ulusoy & Schembri, 2018). However, not all minorities embrace the concept of affirmation in hip hop. Jasmine presents a different perspective, viewing hip hop as a “community-driven culture” deeply rooted in the specific experiences of black community. This connection sometimes leaves her feeling alienated from its social messages, despite being a minority herself, because she perceives a “differentiation between minorities”, which underscores the fluidity of identity within subcultural interactions and is also mirrored in some interviewees’ responses to negative stereotypes associated with hip-hop culture.

Despite hip hop serving as a tool for social consciousness, encouraging listeners to reflect on personal biases and social issues through its storytelling, not all messages within the culture are perceived positively by fans. Some interviewees noted that hip hop is often associated with negative stereotypes that can negatively influence listeners. This includes the normalization of drug use, violence, materialism, and misogyny, which can lead some to feel disconnected from the culture. Therefore, they argue that it’s important to critically engage with these messages or to “separate the art from the artist” when the artist’s behavior or speech is deemed inappropriate. This approach allows them to appreciate the art while distancing themselves from any negative aspects or stereotypes associated with the culture. Hoyin provided an example to explain why sometimes the messages in hip-hop lyrics “should not be taken seriously” in his opinion:

Music is like a TV series—it’s meant for your enjoyment, to relax and be entertained when you’re off work and not being serious. ... Like, I don’t like watching romances or reading romance books. Because I think that’s made up by someone who is a human and who has emotions as well. So they’re projecting their best life or best lifestyle or love. They fantasize, they will just write it in a book or make a series out of it. Or they will write a song about it. And that’s how I see hip hop and other genres (of music).

The critical approach here aligns with post-subcultural theory, which suggests that individuals’ engagement with culture tends to be more flexible and temporary. It also reflects individuals’ negotiation between intermediate and subordinate levels of self-categorization, where fans within the same hip-hop culture social group

differentiate themselves further through their personal approaches and experiences (Hornsey, 2008). Although fans may incorporate elements of hip hop into their personal or group identities, this identification is often fragmentary rather than whole. This perspective allows fans to engage with the culture and their fandom more critically, continuously negotiating and reinterpreting based on individual experiences and socio-cultural interactions, and presents a more nuanced view where personal and collective identities intersect and diverge, reflecting the complex dynamics within cultural engagement (Robards & Bennett, 2011).

4.2. Inclusivity and Exclusivity

Inclusivity and Exclusivity examines fan engagement within the hip-hop subculture by focusing on three key areas: fans' views on the inclusiveness of hip hop, their perceived place within the culture, and whether specific criteria or requirements exist for joining the fandom. This exploration highlights the internal sense of exclusivity inherent to the culture, as well as how fans externally use hip hop to set themselves apart from other music scenes. It also considers what fans see as the unique aspects of hip hop and how these traits shape their interactions with the culture. Combined with the first theme, this section aims to provide a more coherent answer to the first sub-question of how fans construct their social identity in relation to hip-hop by zooming in on the fan community. Under this section thus, three sub-themes are discussed: Inclusivity Dynamics, Exclusivity Barriers, and Navigating Cultural Boundaries.

4.2.1. Inclusivity Dynamics

Hip hop is often regarded by fans as a broad and inclusive culture, accommodating a variety of tastes through its numerous sub-genres and diverse forms of artistic expression, from fashion and graffiti art to music and breakdancing, as well as skateboarding. Some interviewees believe that this variety makes hip hop appear “democratic”, offering fans the freedom to engage in their preferred mode of participation within this rich cultural framework, essentially making it a “something for everyone” culture. Particularly in live settings, fans experience a genuine sense of belonging when they are “surrounded by people with mutual passion.” In such environments, differences like age or social hierarchy seem irrelevant. Live events

create a utopian space for fandom where, as Domonique highlighted, “the only thing that matters is the love for the music and the culture”. This highlights the positive distinctiveness of group affiliation, where hip hop’s diversity and acceptance offer fans a sense of inclusive norms. The “democratic” nature of the culture helps fans feel valued and respected, fostering a positive self-perception and further strengthening group affiliations and self-esteem (Brown, 2000).

Interestingly, some respondents identify themselves as hip hop fans while also enjoying other music genres. This flexibility is another reason why not only hip-hop culture but various music genres are perceived as inclusive by respondents, as fans can seamlessly shift between different music scenes. Their sense of belonging is not limited to hip hop but extends across various musical communities. Dominique shared a personal example, describing his involvement in both the hip hop and techno culture, where he found a familiar sense of belonging in both:

In the past, I developed a strong love for techno, but I still have a deep connection to hip hop and its scene. I’ve met many wonderful people in the techno community, and in some ways, the techno and hip-hop scenes are quite similar. It depends on the type of techno you go for, as some people in that scene can’t relate to hip hop folks. But there’s also a kind of techno where people are welcoming and familiar, and I’ve always felt comfortable in that scene. I never thought I would say I liked both the techno and hip-hop scenes, but I do, and I don’t see a problem with that. I remain deeply connected to hip hop, even if I attend more techno parties nowadays.

The argument presented highlights an intriguing point about integrating the concept of cultural omnivorism with social identity theory (SIT). While cultural omnivorism suggests that individuals consume a broad array of cultural products across multiple genres, appreciating diversity over exclusivity, this perspective aligns with the interviewee’s preference for various musical scenes. Additionally, considering SIT, it appears that individuals cultivate a blended social identity by engaging with diverse music genres. This engagement allows the respondent to find meaningful connections and a sense of community across various groups, rather than confining himself to a single genre. Consequently, allowing individuals develop their

identity through affiliations with multiple social groups, enriching and adding fluidity to the discourse on social identity (Friedman, 2012).

A further observation made by respondents regarding inclusivity in hip-hop culture pertains to the definition of a “true” fan. When asked about the criteria that constitute genuine fandom, many respondents emphasized authenticity, conceptualizing it as a sincere passion for music appreciation. They argued that being a fan should not be constrained by particular knowledge or criteria but should be grounded in a genuine appreciation of hip-hop’s musical elements, such as flow and rhythm. They contend that one’s motives should be rooted in authentic passion rather than superficial interests like gaining popularity or financial benefits. Sam exemplified this sentiment, stating that certain content creators working in his field should not be regarded as true fans:

I think it’s someone who goes just for clout or something like that, you know, pretty much like they are just going to these shows and stuff because they know that they can get an audience from it. Because I just know people who make other videos and podcasts and stuff, and I don’t really see it being their passion. It’s (hip hop) just something that they saw working and they just stuck with it.

This concept of authenticity aligns with McLeod’s six semantic dimensions of authenticity in hip-hop, which explore how the genre uses claims of authenticity to maintain its identity and cultural purity: Social-Psychological (‘Staying true to yourself’ vs. ‘Following mass trends’), Racial (‘Black’ vs. ‘White’), Political-Economic (‘Underground’ vs. ‘Commercial’), Gender-Sexual (‘Hard’ vs. ‘Soft’), Social-Locational (‘The street’ vs. ‘The suburbs’), and Cultural (‘The old school’ vs. ‘The mainstream’) (McLeod, 1999). In this context, authenticity is based on the social-psychological dimension, reflecting the idea of ‘staying true to yourself.’ Fans are appreciating hip-hop for its artistic and musical qualities, not merely its superficial popularity or potential financial gain linked to following mass trends. For fans, constructing a social identity around hip hop involves more than just consuming the music; it requires an alignment with the values and elements they perceive as intrinsic to the culture. By emphasizing authenticity of staying true to themselves, these fans

foster inclusivity within the community, grounded in a personal, authentic approach to hip-hop culture.

4.2.2. Exclusivity Barriers

While the previous statement emphasized the general appreciation within the fandom, the exclusivity of hip-hop fandom is also recognized by some respondents, highlighting both McLeod's dimensions of authenticity and the Bourdieusian cultural capital adapted in hip hop. Respondent further defined a "true" fandom as one characterized by a profound engagement with the music. This includes understanding the genre's history, participating in discussions, and delving deeply into the lyrics, the artists' backstories, and the context of their work. In live settings, the motivations for attending events are also highlighted, with respondents emphasizing genuine interest and appreciation for the artist or genre, rather than merely attending because of friends or just to be part of a party. This highlights various levels of exclusivity within this social group, drawing distinctions between dedicated fans and general attendees by measuring accumulated cultural capital, which includes specific knowledge, skills, and cultural engagement in relation to hip hop. This dynamic further delineates an in-group (dedicated fans) and an out-group (casual listeners) within the same hip-hop fandom (Bourdieu, 2018; Hornsey, 2008)

Moreover, respondents made a clear distinction between "trend followers" and "true fans." This differentiation reflects their perceptions of the genre's popularity and the prominence of specific artists or individual "viral songs," which serve as a marker of their identity. Typically, "trends" are associated with mainstream artists or hit songs that have become popular on short video platforms like TikTok, eliciting mixed reactions from the respondents. On one hand, they express some degree of pleasure seeing the genre attract more listeners. However, more commonly, fans find themselves disliking a song once it becomes viral. For example, Mike mentioned the artist XXXTentacion to illustrate this point:

I started listening to XXXTentacion before he got big. ... When he died, it was a huge deal, and suddenly, everyone knew about it. People started listening to his music and genuinely caring, but they should have done that before. When the media announces someone's death, it doesn't suddenly give you the right

to claim, 'Oh, yeah, I listen to this artist.' I think if you were there from the start, you have more experience because you truly understood it from the beginning. You're not just following mainstream hype.

In this context, the cultural capital within the fandom is established through early engagement with certain artists who remain relatively underground. As the artists gain media attention and attract new fans, the original followers often feel a sense of disconnection, perceiving the artists as becoming "mainstream." This creates a status distinction between "original" and "new" fans, unintentionally dividing the fan community. This phenomenon reflects the concept of subcultural capital as proposed by Thornton (1997), which encompasses knowledge, styles, and practices valued within a particular subculture. Here, it highlights how fans differentiate themselves from the "mainstream," emphasizing the subordinate level of personal identity over the intermediate level of social identity through subcultural capital, which creates a status hierarchy within the social group (Jensen, 2006). Similar to cultural capital, subcultural capital functions as a means of further distinction or self-categorization, causing some fans to feel alienated from those who are not perceived to possess the necessary cultural capital (Holt, 1998).

However, the distinction among fan groups can also foster a more intimate sense of belonging within sub-genre fan groups, as noted by respondents when discussing their live events experiences. Several respondents mentioned that compared to mainstream concerts, attending shows of lesser-known artists provides a more unique sense of community and affiliation. One reason is that these "underground" artists typically perform in smaller venues, allowing for greater potential engagement among fans. Another key reason, highlighted by interviewee Philipp, is that in these smaller venues, "you are automatically connected to everyone there" because "it's really about the music" and "they genuinely like the music, as they wouldn't attend a concert of an unknown artist if they didn't truly enjoy it." This illustrates the emergence of positive distinctiveness within fan groups of internal music scenes, categorized under 'Underground' vs. 'Commercial' in the semantic dimensions of authenticity in hip hop. The preference for underground artists reflects a purity of fans' taste in hip-hop, enabling them to cultivate a more niche social identity in an exclusive live setting and engage with others who share a preference for

underground aesthetics, distinguishing them from fans of commercial music (McLeod, 1999).

4.2.3. Navigating Cultural Boundaries

The distinctiveness manifests both internally within the fan group and externally, as fans establish clear boundaries between their scene and others. Respondents believe that hip hop stands out due to its unique qualities. Musically, it allows artists to blend rapping and singing, and it also has distinctive ties to fashion trends that set it apart from other genres. This sense of distinction is further highlighted in the participants' live event experiences. They expressed feeling a stronger sense of community at hip-hop shows compared to those of other genres, attributing this to specific rituals. For instance, Linping compared her festival experiences in hip-hop and techno. She observed that at hip-hop events, there is more physical interaction among fans, particularly in mosh pits. In contrast, at techno festivals, "people tend to dance alone or with their friends and rarely interact with strangers". These differences made her feel "more connected" with fellow fans at hip-hop shows, emphasizing how specific interactions and rituals in the live setting distinguish the hip hop from other cultures.

In some instances, boundaries between social groups are not deliberately established by the groups themselves, but rather are imposed by external forces, illustrating the complex dynamics at play in defining social identities across various contexts. This process of boundary setting is negotiated between different genres and fan bases, scene by scene. For example, when discussing collective rituals at live events, Sam highlighted how metal fans often contrast themselves with hip hop fans:

I've noticed a trend recently with a lot of metalheads and punk fans. They like to discredit hip hop fans by saying things like, 'Oh, your crowd sucks,' or 'your mosh pits are weak.' You know what I mean? That's kind of my scene because I like the mosh pit stuff, but that's something I've noticed on Reddit and Discord. Metal and punk fans really like to boast, 'We've got the best mosh pits,' and they kind of rip on hip-hop fans, like, 'Why are you moshing to that song?' Some people say hip-hop mosh pits are weak because, for some

reason, metalheads and punk fans like to hurt each other. I've seen that. ... So, since people in the hip-hop community are usually just pushing and not punching, they're like, 'Oh, that's weak.'

The tension between the two fan groups mentioned above was not a recurring theme in other interviews conducted for this research, but the author has observed similar sentiments in several online forums. In this scenario, although the two music scenes share similar rituals, a distinction is still being established—either overtly or subtly—between them. On the hip hop side, the cultural boundary is more subtle, demonstrating a passive form of differentiation from other genres. This further underscores the uniqueness of hip hop in terms of the different styles within the same ritual, opting for “pushing” rather than “punching” to emphasize a less aggressive style compared to the confrontational norms of metal and punk scenes. This type of external distinction focuses less on denigrating others and more on affirming their own cultural norms, thereby fostering a distinct group identity among fans of different music scenes, reinforcing in-group solidarity and distinctiveness (Stets & Burke, 2000).

4.3. Rituals and Collective Effervescence in Live Events

The section of ‘Rituals and Collective Effervescence in Live Events’ centers on cultural practices and the mutual engagement of fans in live settings. It first examines artist-driven rituals at these events, investigating how artists contribute to forming and practicing collective rituals. The focus then shifts to performance rituals, emphasizing fans’ interactions and participation in these shared traditions. This combination of rituals showcases how collective effervescence is built through group activities and shared interests, with also highlighting the role of pre- and post-event experiences in shaping these rituals and building collective energy. This section provides a framework for answering the sub-research question of how young adult hip-hop fans perceive symbols and rituals at hip-hop events in relation to their social identity. It delves into each element of the live event setting, including pre- and post-event experiences, and examines how collective effervescence is formed through these processes. Four sub-themes are thus discussed in this section: Artist-Driven

Rituals, Performance Rituals, Collective Emotional Dynamics, and Pre- and Post-Event Dynamics.

4.3.1. Artist-Driven Rituals

The sub-theme of artistic rituals explored how artists initiate the collective rituals and how fans participate in them. It aimed to understand fans' perceptions of the artists' involvement and roles during live performances. According to respondents, live events offer a unique experience that allows fans to immerse themselves in the aura surrounding the artists, unlike regular music listening. This ties into the previous section of Artistic Interactions and Fan Dynamics. Although artists act as symbolic figures who shape collective rituals among attendees during live events, their leading role is seen as confined to that specific setting. Respondents argue that artists' behaviors outside of these live performances do not contribute to their iconic status at these events, as Musa mentioned "I think it's just important to just enjoy the music and not incorporate a lot of things that you see your favorite artist is doing (outside the event)." This contradicts Turner's study on celebrity culture, which argues that fans often incorporate artists' actions and public personas outside of performances (Turner, 2013). Musa's statement suggests that fans do not always embrace celebrities' public personas in their personal identities. Instead, they critically appreciate the artistic aspect, focusing on the art rather than the personal life of the celebrity. This further emphasizes the significance of artists and their work during live events, where they act as modern 'totems,' embodying a shared identity for fans. The aura around the artists becomes a unifying focal point for the community, but outside these events, the artists lose their totemic symbolism, and their behavior does not elicit the same collective rituals or emotional resonance, which aligns with Collins' argument that the ritualistic power is tied to the specific context where the interaction ritual is most potent. Outside this context, the mutual focus of attention and shared mood dissipate, and the artist's symbolic power diminishes (Collins, 2004).

While respondents acknowledged the leading role of artists in shaping and practicing collective rituals, they often note that the style of these rituals depends on the artists' style and their music during live performances. There is a clear distinction between two types of energy that artists channel to the crowd, which then form two distinct styles of rituals shaped by the artists' differing approaches: high-energy rituals

such as mosh pits and subtler energy rituals such as singing along or waving. Sam illustrates this crowd adaptation with an example:

I feel like it depends on what mood you're in. When you attend a live show, you don't 100% know what the artist on stage is going to play, so you're just kind of going along with them. And it's like, they might play something super high energy, and then you start moshing, going crazy, or they might play something slower, more like a dance melody.

Sam's insight highlights the audience's responsive nature, where they adapt their behavior and rituals in real time based on the artist's mood. Despite the unpredictability of events, this establishes a shared experience of following the artist's lead, creating spontaneous yet collective rituals that align with the energy radiating from the stage. This emphasizes the critical role of mutual focus in the interaction ritual chain, shaping collective physical engagement (Van Haperen et al., 2020).

Another element of artist-driven performances involves the role of lyrics and the artist's active engagement with the audience, fostering an intimate connection between the fans and the performer. Elizabeth highlighted this by noting that at concerts where artists focus on lyrical content, there is a blending of lyrics and showmanship that deeply engages the audience emotionally, creating a powerful and shared live experience. This connection between the artist and the audience can sometimes be non-verbal, as Marco illustrated with his experience at a Travis Scott concert. He described a moment where, at the end of a song, he locked eyes with Scott who raised his arm—a gesture Marco mirrored. He recalled feeling as if he and Scott were the only ones present at that time, a moment of profound connection that still resonates with him. In this case, both the lyrics and verbal or non-verbal interactions acted as symbolic gestures, transcending the performance in a more profound way. This served to connect individuals to the crowd around them while simultaneously creating a sense of intimacy between artist and audience, fostering unity in the live settings.

However, such symbolic acts from artists are not always perceived as successfully energizing in artist-driven rituals. In some cases, these actions are viewed as reasons why fans feel alienated at live events. For instance, Dominique recounted

his first experience seeing Playboi Carti, an artist reputed to have “one of the best live performances” due to his dynamic crowd engagement:

I’ve really seen 200 different American rappers, and only about 10 of them can truly perform live. ... For me, if you’re a good rapper, you perform live. You might use playback, but you try to deliver most of your lines live. Even if it’s 70% or 60% live, it doesn’t have to sound perfect; I’m fine with that. ... I saw Playboi Carti, I really have to say, this guy was the biggest disappointment I’ve ever seen. I traveled to Germany, like the crazy far areas of Eastern Germany. And then I saw him, and he didn’t even perform live. He was just shouting and screaming in between tracks. I thought, ‘Who is this rapper?’ It was such a disappointment.

In this instance, Dominique’s experience with the artist Playboi Carti exemplifies a failed ritual, where the artist’s symbolic actions did not meet Dominique’s expectations for a genuine performance. The anticipated display of rapping skills was lacking, eroding the emotional connection between the artist and the audience, which further left individuals feeling alienated by the artist’s symbolic gestures. Similarly, Sam’s experiences also underscore this notion of failed rituals stemming from unmet expectations. He felt fatigued and alienated after hearing the same song repeatedly and was disappointed that the artist did not preview new music. This highlights the ritualistic nature of live performances, where providing new and dynamic content usually re-energizes the audience. According to Collins (2004), successful rituals generate emotional energy and a sense of solidarity among participants, but when expectations are unmet, these rituals can fail. In this case, the lack of novelty in the live setting prevented the formation of a meaningful collective experience, which also illustrates that artist-driven rituals heavily rely on symbolic actions to engage the audience emotionally and fulfill their expectations, while when these symbolic actions fall short, the ritual also fails, causing a breakdown in communal connection and emotional engagement of the audiences.

4.3.2. Performance rituals

While artists play a crucial role in performance rituals, the presence of these rituals is also considered essential to their live shows. As Mike described his live experience by saying, “You’re not really there to listen to him—you’re there more for the crowd,” highlighting that the collective rituals and emotions generated through specific artists’ performances are an integral part of the individual live experience.

Moreover, respondents argued that different live settings prioritize rituals differently. In this case, concerts offer a more intimate, focused environment centered on the artist and their performance with fewer distractions, whereas festivals emphasize the collective energy of both the crowd and the performers. As Pedro explained:

For example, if I go to a concert right now, and it’s like this hip-hop artist, that is pretty calm, you know, then it would be nice to go to a concert instead of going to a festival, on the festival::: more of the people would like to, you know, go into mosh pits. I think a concert is more like, a calmer thing, than a festival.

This comparison underscores the differences in focus that fans have in varying live settings. At concerts, the availability of seats and standing areas can limit ritual participation, whereas festivals, typically held outdoors with standing-only arrangements, encourage broader participation in rituals. This distinction also results in different types of rituals across these settings. Concert rituals are usually artist-centered, involving activities like singing along, clapping, and swaying. In contrast, festivals encourage fans to participate in activities like dancing, forming mosh pits, and collectively moving to the rhythm, demonstrating a different scale and nature of ritual participation in each setting.

Regarding the specifics of mosh pit rituals, respondents also highlighted certain criteria that define a successful mosh pit, one of the primary factors being mutual interaction between the artists and the crowd. According to Solly, a typical scenario involves the artist “opening a big circle before the beat drops” and then, when the beat drops, “everyone just runs into each other and they go crazy.” This illustrates a dynamic energy exchange between the artist’s performance and the

crowd's reaction. In the words of the respondents, a mosh pit is often described as "spontaneous," which is also considered a hallmark of a successful mosh pit ritual.

Moreover, another key term often mentioned by participants in successful mosh pit rituals is "safe." In contrast, an unorganized, unsafe mosh pit is also seen as a failed ritual. Such environments can cause individuals to hesitate to participate, and this concern is especially pronounced among some female participants, who expressed feeling vulnerable and disconnected from the crowd in these situations. Failed rituals, thus according to participants, are frequently associated with misbehavior during the performance of such rituals in live settings. This includes not knowing the music or lyrics, moshing to a song that is not appropriate for such activity, and failing to take care of others within the mosh pit, which suggests the potential importance of subcultural cultural capital according to Thornton (1997), as successful mosh pits rely on participants collectively embodying the necessary cultural norms and understanding how to engage properly. When these norms are absent, barriers to outsiders in the interaction ritual chain are lost, causing the ritual to fail, disrupting the communal energy, and leaving individuals feeling disconnected from the experience (Collins, 2004).

However, it's important to note that not all rituals in live performances attract universal participation. There is a varied level of engagement in performance rituals, tailored to individual preferences and comfort levels. While some thrive in the intensity of mosh pits, others prefer to enjoy the music from a safer distance. Here, Dominique shares his perspective on mosh pits:

I don't know. But that's (mosh pits) not my thing. I don't understand why.

Because, of course, a lot of hip-hop performances do have a lot of energy. But many people combine energy with strength. Yeah, in the man or, I don't know how to say it, in the person. They think they have to use all the power they have and jump into a mosh pit against other people. And at the end of the day, they've lost their energy, and a lot of people got hurt. A lot of people were (forced) involved who didn't want to be involved, you know?

In this scenario, although Dominique acknowledges that mosh pits are a performance ritual enabling fans to release their energy and foster a sense of solidarity

and shared purpose, he does not see them as essential to live events. Here, ritual like mosh pits does not consider generate a sense of collective effervescence for the fans because the norms of mosh pit culture clash with their personal preferences and comfort. Instead, some fans prefer to engage with the music from a distance, maintaining their own enjoyment without the communal fervor of moshing, which further underscores the adaptive nature of rituals, where the successful creation of collective effervescence relies on participants having a shared understanding and willingness to engage in appropriately, highlighting the importance of a shared mental state as an essential part of the performance of rituals (Collins, 2004).

During the interview, the respondents described another scene of a failed mosh pit ritual, linking it to a disruption of collective effervescence. Sam recalled a moment where a spontaneous mosh pit devolved into orchestrated attempts by certain individuals to stand out:

A good mosh pit usually happens when the pit opens up, and there isn't a 'main character'. You know what I mean? It's not about someone wanting to be at the center, like they want people to record them. They won't say 'record me,' but that's what they aim for. I lowkey don't like that. The best mosh pits are when you're just opening the circle so when the beat drops, everyone clashes together—that's how it should be. But when one or two people are just showing off, taking over repeatedly, that ruins it. That's not a good mosh pit, in my opinion.

According to his argument, mosh pits function as collective rituals during live performances, fostering a sense of shared emotional energy among the group of fans. However, when an individual stands out, their behavior disrupts the ritual's original purpose by shifting the focus from collective unity to personal performance. This diminishes the collective effervescence, as others no longer move in unison but instead respond to those "seeking attention". He further elaborates on this disruption with the use of technology like phone recording during live shows. Comparing phone use at concerts in America and Europe, he notes that the lower prevalence of phones in European shows results in a more cohesive crowd, as people are immersed in the moment together instead of staring at screens. This highlights the fragile nature of

collective effervescence, where observing performances through a screen shifts the focus from the present shared experience to the future act of sharing or viewing it later, ultimately reducing group unity and the sense of collective effervescence.

4.3.3. Collective Emotional Dynamics

While the collective effervescence can be interrupted when the mutual focus of attention is disrupted by individuals standing out during supposedly collective rituals, in some instances, individuals standing out can also be seen as a form of energy transmission. Pedro offered an example from a live event where an attendee attempted to energize the crowd. At a moment when the audience seemed disengaged, this person radiated their emotional energy to those around them, increasing the crowd's engagement. This interaction not only made the individual feel a deeper connection with the people around him through their shared interests but also highlighted a dynamic exchange of energy. Similarly, such energy transmission is evident when artists share their energy with the crowd, and the audience reciprocates as well, creating a collective effervescence that amplifies for both the artist and the audience. These examples underscore the transformative power of collective effervescence in a live setting, where the transformation begins at the individual level—an attendee or an artist energetically engages—and this energy spreads to the larger crowd, fostering emotional and spiritual connections among all participants and strengthening their social bonds and collective identity (Gabriel et al., 2020).

Moreover, the layout of collective effervescence at live events is divided based on participant responses. Interviewees highlighted that the energy is more intense closer to the stage and diminishes further away, due to decreased crowd engagement and interaction with the music and performance. This indicates that performance rituals vary across different event areas, leading to a diverse distribution of collective effervescence. Consequently, even though fans attend the same events, they experience varying degrees of collective emotions and connections within the fan community.

However, as previously mentioned, the artist's performance and music style play crucial roles in shaping the style of rituals, which in turn builds the different styles of collective energy. For instance, the mosh pit is described as the "peak" of collective energy, marking a burst of intense energy that erupts spontaneously in a

short period. In contrast, singing along represents a more relaxed and subdued energy. Pedro provided examples from two live performances he attended, where he felt a connection with the crowd, yet the styles of collective effervescence differed:

There are probably two instances. The first time I went to a Travis Scott concert, I felt a connection because of his high energy. You match with the artist's emotions, jumping around, screaming, and having the best time of your life just like he does. ... The similar experience happened at my first Ski Mask concert. He played a set of songs and did a tribute to one of his best friends who had passed away. It connected your spirit and emotions with everyone there, especially the artist.

Although these forms of energy differ—one being more intense and physical, and the other more reflective and emotional—they stem from the same core principle: both are achieved through collective rituals in live settings. In these scenarios, individuals mirror specific behaviors according to the artist's performance, united by a shared passion for the music in the live experience. Crowd energy here, whether intense or subdued, directly builds the live music experience for audiences, enhancing or diminishing the enjoyment of the attendees.

4.3.4. Pre- and Post-event Dynamics

The beginning and ending of a performance are often seen as peak moments that forge a strong emotional connection among attendees. Participants note that at the start, there is a shared excitement as artists take the stage, sparking a mutual sense of anticipation. Similarly, the end of the performance is marked by collective effervescence, as everyone reflects on their shared experiences and the joy of the event, creating a profound sense of unity. Moreover, the impact of these moments extends beyond the actual event. Respondents also emphasized the significance of pre-event anticipation and post-event reflections, suggesting that the live event and its collective atmosphere transcend the physical and temporal boundaries of the live events themselves. The pre- and post-event experiences further contribute to building an interaction ritual chain, becoming an integral part of the formation of collective effervescence and establishing a successful ritual (Berkers & Michael, 2017).

The event experience starts well before the actual event itself, encompassing anticipation and planning phases. According to respondents, this often involves purchasing tickets, planning and preparing for the trip and event. Such anticipation is heightened by event marketing efforts, including lineup announcements and social media engagement from event officials. These interactions make the live events a symbolic totem for fans, holding emotional significance. The rituals such as trip planning and sharing artist announcements further foster collective excitement, building a shared sense of anticipation for the individuals. While the conclusion of events varies for different respondents. For some, it ends when they leave the venue or go to sleep, still buzzing with excitement. Others find closure through post-event activities, such as attending after-parties, sharing media, or reflecting on performances with fellow participants. These activities can extend the totemic significance of the live event, allowing people to relive its emotional highs and indicating a successful ritual where collective effervescence is formed and further extended, creating a sense of solidarity among fans (Berkers & Michael, 2017). By prolonging audience interaction through after-parties, media reviews, or conversations with friends, the collective effervescences continue beyond the event itself, blurring the line where the event truly ends.

Moreover, interviewees also noted differences in the sense of continuity between live event settings. According to them, festivals are generally considered more immersive and extensive than concerts experience, providing a broader and more continuous experience due to the variety of artists and stages. This variety caters to a wider range of musical tastes and encourages more diverse social interactions. In contrast, concerts tend to have more definitive endings and less sustained collective excitement. Music festivals thus, with their multiple artists and stages, present a broader array of totemic symbols that support more inclusive ritual practices among participants. This diversity of totems and rituals extends the sense of collective excitement, further highlighting the close connection between totemic rituals and collective effervescence.

4.4. Totem and Sense of Community

The section of Totem and Sense of Community delves deeper into totemic items and symbolic totems found in live event settings, exploring how these symbols,

shared interests, and mutual experiences shape the fan community. It also investigates how individuals perceive the role of this community in shaping their broader social identity, fostering affiliation and a sense of belonging within the hip-hop community. This section seeks to answer the third sub-question: how do young adult hip-hop fans recount shared experiences at live performances and their interplay with personal identity and community bonds? Under this overarching section, three sub-themes will be explored in detail: Symbolic Totems, Community Building in Hip Hop, and Community and Social Identity. The latter two sub-themes are combined due to their close connection, as social identity and community are central concepts for this entire article, which also closely ties to the final conclusion of the research question, and thus are not explored in excessive detail in this section.

4.4.1. Symbolic totems

Symbolic totems include both physical totem objects and non-physical totems that hold significant meaning for fans. The latter are closely associated with rituals performed during live events. In these settings, totems are often linked to fashion and style, such as streetwear, artist merchandise, or event-specific gear. Items like flags, straps, ski masks, and similar accessories allow mosh pit participants to identify and connect with their group in a crowd. At live events, fans also intentionally choose their outfits to align with the event's hip-hop aesthetic. As Linping noted:

I don't usually dress very hip-hop ... But I try to wear hip-hop outfits when I attend a hip-hop festival. On a daily basis, I don't really dress that way because I enjoy other styles as well. Being recognized outside of the festival isn't important to me.

In this context, fashion items at live events act as totems, creating a distinctive visual language that promotes group cohesion and helps fans easily identify each other in a crowd, serving as symbolic objects within subculture as Hebdige (2013) argued. While Linping's observations illustrate how fans purposefully adapt their appearance to align with the event's fashion style, underscoring their group membership in the live event setting. Respondents noted that these totems hold less significance in everyday life, but at live events, adopting these symbols works as 'signifiers' helps participants feel connected to others who share their interests, thus

creating a solidarity and a sense of belonging among the subcultural groups (Hebdige, 2013). This also highlights the temporary and fluid nature of social identity, expressed through totemic items in the specific cultural context.

Another aspect involves both physical and digital souvenirs, such as event merchandise, photos, and videos that participants either personalize at the venue or capture themselves to commemorate special moments during live performances. These souvenirs help fans relive and reinforce their emotional connections with the events. Meanwhile, digital media plays a crucial role in this process, closely linked to what fans describe as collective effervescence. Typically, these media capture clips of collective rituals in which participants engage, aiding fans in sustaining a sense of shared emotions even after the festival concludes.

The other type of totem mentioned by the interviewees is more abstract and less tangible. These totems often represent shared experiences, like the sense of togetherness among fans with similar interests or collective rituals, both are seen as holding a totemic significance that fosters a sense of community. This indicates that rituals and totems presented at live events act as cultural signifiers, carrying collective meanings. Through recognizing these cultural symbols, fans further build a sense of belonging and connection within the fan community, solidifying their group affiliation and identity (Marshall, 2002).

Here, Sam gave an example of how a specific group of friends made him “feel at home” at a live event. He mentioned that an online community, 175tv, was created by a group of hip-hop fans passionate about live music and mosh pits. Despite being from different regions, they connect online, book events together, and meet up at festival venues to participate in mosh pits rituals, record videos, and capture live scenes. In this case, the symbolic totems are closely linked to the fans’ shared interests, ritual performance, and community-building. As individuals embrace and participate in these symbolic totems, their group identity is reinforced, and this bond transcends regional boundaries, strengthening each time they meet in person and engage in their shared rituals.

4.4.2. Community Building in Hip Hop, Belonging and Social Identity

When asked about friendship formation in the live performance scene and their personal engagement with the hip-hop community, respondents revealed that

their interactions with other fans varied in duration. Some highlighted lasting interactions with their friend groups, while others emphasized the brief, fleeting connections made with other fans at live events. The formation of community surrounding hip-hop live performances thus encompasses two dynamics: temporary and long-term. Temporary communities, according to the respondents, are built around live events, where fans engage with each other through social media and online forums, sharing their excitement before the event and their reflections afterward, fostering virtual bonds based on mutual interests and experiences. In live settings, rituals like mosh pits allow fans to briefly interact, sharing a collective effervescence and opening opportunities for forming temporary, event-based friendships with strangers.

Long-term communities, on the other hand, are rooted in the shared interests and values of fans. Here, hip hop allows fans to engage with the same narratives underpinned by its strong cultural roots and diverse expressions. This long-term community is also evident in the creative scene; for example, as artist Marco mentioned in his interview, hip hop's collaborative spirit encourages fans to participate in music creation and joint content creation, helping to build a creative community based on the music scene. Interestingly, while live-event-based community formation is often linked to temporary engagement, social media and online platforms also enable fans to build a long-term, event-based sense of family. Platforms like 175tv mentioned above allow fans to engage deeply within the festival scene, sharing a passion for mosh pit rituals and live experiences. This creates a sense of family among attendees who frequently participate, transcending geographical differences and fostering enduring connections.

Both short-term and long-term fan community engagements help fans develop their group affiliation, fostering a sense of belonging to a specific fan group. This connection allows fans to cultivate their social identity through shared music tastes, participation in live events, and expressions of specific fashion or art styles. This identity is further reinforced by mutual recognition; respondents reported feeling assured and accepted when recognized culturally or physically. Such recognition encourages fans to more fully embrace their hip-hop identity by attending live events and interacting more with the fan community, which exemplifies social identity theory's notion that a stronger identity within a group not only enhances self-perception but also solidifies the in-group as a source of pride and self-esteem,

motivating continued and more profound engagement with the group's activities and values.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

This study seeks to explore how fans perceive the role of live hip-hop music in the construction of their social identity. Underpinned by the central research question, the study employed a qualitative framework, utilizing thirteen semi-structured, in-depth interviews and conducting thematic analysis through a hybrid approach that combines both deductive and inductive methods. Specifically, the research aims to investigate the intersection between hip-hop fandom, young adult fans' experiences at live events, and how these experiences contribute to their broader social identity construction in the Netherlands.

Addressing the research question, "How do fans perceive the role of live hip-hop music in the construction of their social identity?", the findings reveal that fans view live hip-hop music as essential in shaping their social identity, they engage with the culture not only in live settings but also in their daily lives, including music, language, and behaviors, which enhance their sense of belonging and empowerment. Particularly, live events serve as spaces for collective rituals surrounded by the culture and mutual emotional energy transfer, shaping fans' group identity and community bonds through shared experiences and symbolic rituals. The research further highlights hip hop as a medium for self-expression and social belonging for fans, emphasizing the fluid and fragmented nature of identity formation within this subculture.

The study addressed the following sub-research questions, which separately examine fans' subcultural engagement within hip-hop culture, the rituals and symbols adapted in live performances, and the collective effervescence formed through cultural participation at live events, highlighting fans' perception of their social identity formation in relation to their hip-hop cultural engagement, particularly in live settings:

1. How do young adult hip-hop fans construct their social identity in relation to hip hop?
2. How do young adult hip-hop fans perceive symbols and rituals encountered at hip-hop events in relation to their social identity?

3. How do young adult hip-hop fans recount shared experiences at live performances and their interplay with personal identity and community bonds?

According to respondents, hip hop is not only a form of musical entertainment they frequently engage with but also a powerful tool for expressing personal identity and a sense of community. Participants in the Netherlands perceive hip-hop subculture differently due to socio-economic disparities from its American roots, and the limited presence of major international hip-hop artists and significant music festivals, which are seasonal, underscores the exclusivity of fans' engagement with hip hop in the Dutch scene. This showcases the trans-local appeal of hip-hop culture (Bennett, 2004), which transforms fans' ways of engagement and perception when it is relocalized in a different cultural context. Accordingly, fans embrace this "niche" taste, further linking their sense of identity to the culture. Fandom here is characterized not merely by attendance at live events but by a daily, deeper engagement with hip-hop through music, language, behaviors, and other artistic expressions. This engagement forms an overarching lifestyle, using hip hop as a medium of self-expression and empowerment, connecting individuals to broader community and social issues, especially those pertinent to minorities, which underscores the role of traditional subcultures as a form of cultural resistance tied to social class (Williams & Hannerz, 2014). However, fans also display a pattern of critically assessing the culture's artistic expressions. While they recognize the empowering aspects of the culture in seeking cultural belonging in relation to their cultural backgrounds, they also adopt a critical stance towards "negative" messages within the music scene, which further reflects a post-subcultural approach among young adults towards cultural consumption, showcasing a more flexible and fragmented manner of integrating it into their identities (Bennett, 2011).

This phenomenon of group categorization is particularly evident in the way fans perceive those within their community versus outsiders. In the realm of hip hop, fans treasure the genre for its inclusivity, which spans various sub-genres and artistic styles catering to diverse preferences. This inclusiveness cultivates a profound sense of belonging and self-esteem among fans. Especially in live settings, fans experience a community feeling that seems to dissolve socio-economic barriers, replaced by a shared passion for the music and its culture. Nonetheless, despite its inclusive nature, there exists an inherent exclusivity within the hip hop community. This exclusivity is

defined by fans' deep engagement with the music and its culture. The concept of a "true" fan thus often revolves around a deeper appreciation of the genre's history, lyrics, and artists' backstories. This distinction separates dedicated fans from more casual listeners and underscores the role of cultural capital in this intra-group differentiation, where fans use specific knowledge about hip hop to further categorize themselves and reinforce group membership distinctions, integrating Bourdieu's (2018) concept of cultural capital with social identity theory.

Moreover, group classification is reinforced through intergroup comparisons, where fans further differentiate themselves by emphasizing unique elements in hip hop and experiences at live events, such as participation in rituals, from outsiders. However, some fans exhibit a fluid identity within hip hop, engaging with multiple music scenes, which enables them to enjoy a variety of cultural forms, sometimes blurring boundaries between different music genres and resulting in a more inclusive approach to hip-hop culture (Warde et al., 2007). This consumption pattern allows fans to forge connections across various musical communities, enhancing their social identity through a blend of affiliations, further aligns with the theory of cultural omnivorism under the framework of social identity. Thus, these observations answer the first sub-question by indicating how young adult hip-hop fans construct their social identities through deep, critical engagement with hip-hop culture, utilizing it as a means of self-expression and seeking social belonging, differentiating themselves from outsiders, negotiating their depth of affiliation with other fans, and navigating various musical preferences within hip-hop scene.

In the realm of live performances, the social identity of fans is deeply intertwined with the rituals observed within the event environment, as well as the collective effervescence experienced through shared performances. This collective emotional experience extends beyond the performance itself to include pre- and post-event interactions. Artists play a pivotal role in shaping these collective rituals; their performance styles critically decide the nature of rituals fans engage in, from mosh pits to serene, lyrical interactions. In this context, artists act as modern totems, centralizing and guiding the communal focus in these ritualistic interactions (Collins, 2004); Interaction within these performance rituals, such as mosh pits, is vital for the successful transfer of emotional energy (EE) between artists and audiences. This interaction aligns with Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital in ritual participation, where knowing how to behave is crucial. Those who embrace these unwritten rules

and actively participate help forge a sense of belonging within the fan community (Bourdieu, 2018). Conversely, when these rituals fail—due to a lack of connection from the artist or poor audience engagement—feelings of alienation and disappointment can emerge, indicating a dip in emotional energy.

The finding also highlights the dynamics of emotional energy transfer, which can occur directly between artists and fans or indirectly through individual fans energizing the crowd. However, standout individual performances in rituals like mosh pits can sometimes disrupt the collective nature of the event, leading to alienation. Additionally, the adaptability of rituals within these settings underscores that successful collective effervescence requires participants to share an understanding and willingness to engage appropriately. For example, some individuals can also find a sense of connection in less intense rituals, like singing along or waving, which suggests a diverse range of emotional energy expressions in live performances.

Additionally, the diversity of emotional energy (EE) across different live settings is noted. Concert environments often provide a calmer EE, centered around the artist and varying audience positions, whereas festivals typically generate a more intense EE due to larger crowds and more extensive participation in rituals. The scale of co-presence significantly impacts the formation of collective effervescence. The significance of beginning and ending moments is underscored, as they mark shared emotional peaks, but the formation of such moments also occurs before and after the events, enhancing the collective atmosphere and extending the emotional highs beyond the live performance itself. Responding to the second sub-question, the study highlights how fans embrace totems and symbolic rituals in the hip-hop live setting. While the live events provide a space for co-presence, where specific norms and behaviors act as barriers to outsiders who do not participate in the rituals. The artists' performances serve as a mutual focus and attention point, enabling fans to share their emotions through the ritual performances and further build their group identity and bonds through these totemic rituals. This aligns with the theory of symbolic ritual chains (Collins, 2004), suggesting that these ritual interactions sequentially build upon each other, together enhancing the collective bond and emotional energy across the group.

In the realm of live events, symbolic totems encompass both tangible and intangible elements. The former includes physical items such as fashion accessories or merchandise, and media clips. The latter, on the other hand, comprises intangible

elements like ritual practices or small fan communities that emerge around these events. Both types of totems hold symbolic significance for fans, aiding in identification and fostering connections within the crowd, thus enhancing group cohesion. However, physical totems primarily assert their importance at live events, serving as a visual language that bolsters group identity but are less pertinent in everyday contexts. This underscores the transient and situational nature of social identities within these cultural settings, reflecting the fluidity of self-perception in negotiating personal and social identities (Onorato & Turner, 2004).

Community formation, meanwhile, is rooted both in these live events and a mutual interest in hip hop, supporting both temporary and long-term bonds among fans. Temporary communities often arise around specific events, bolstered by social media and online interactions that occur before and after these gatherings, creating a virtual space for shared excitement and reflection. Long-term communities, in contrast, are grounded in the shared narratives and cultural values of hip hop. Engagement in these communities offers fans opportunities to further connect within the hip hop culture, allowing them to build their social identities through shared experiences at live events and broader interactions with other fans, which fosters mutual recognition and acceptance, enhancing fans' self-perception and solidifying their affiliation with the group. This addresses the third sub-question by indicating that young adult fans view shared experiences at live performances as a means of self-expression. The immersive environment at these events allows for expressive self-representation and active participation in the music and culture. Through this, fans are able to develop either temporary or long-term bonds with the community, fueled by the collective effervescence, shared narratives, and mutual recognition within the hip hop scene.

The study explored the comprehensive engagement of young adult hip-hop fans in the Netherlands with the culture and music scene. It investigated their interactions within fan groups and with outsiders, delved into their participation in live music events, and examined the rituals, collective effervescence, and community dynamics surrounding these events. As each sub-question of the research addresses different aspects of how fans integrate their social identities within this vibrant subculture, the findings confirmed arguments in existing studies, highlighting that live music events are more than just venues for cultural participation; they are spaces where fans use the culture to express themselves. Furthermore, the study added that

live music serves as a dynamic interaction that reaffirms their social identities through collective participation in rituals and shared emotional experiences. These mutual experiences allow fans to construct, negotiate, and display their identities while balancing individual expression with group affiliation. Together, these insights provided a framework for understanding how young adults utilize their cultural participation within the hip-hop community to facilitate social identity formation. Using an interdisciplinary approach, the research enhanced the theoretical discourse on music consumption, cultural participation, and identity formation. It also provides insights into how young adults perceive the global music scene, like hip hop, as localized and integrated into different social and cultural contexts in the Netherlands. Hip hop is perceived as a relatively niche cultural expression rooted in black communities compared to the scene in the U.S. Particularly in the context of live performance, the limited access to live experiences when the scene is transferred to the Dutch context makes live participation a form of exclusive cultural participation, further enhancing the subcultural appeal of hip-hop and creating a dedicated sense of fandom among those who attend live performances.

Furthermore, the research provided valuable insights for future event management, marketing, and policymaking. It advocates for the promotion of inclusive cultural experiences by understanding and embracing the diverse narratives within subculture communities. For event management and marketing, the study suggests encouraging fan community interaction by providing infrastructure that supports ritual practices while ensuring safety considerations during high-energy rituals. Additionally, it recommends fostering artist-audience engagement, recognizing targeted market components, and acknowledging the subcultural aspect of hip-hop in the Netherlands, enhancing audience loyalty and create an inclusive atmosphere at events; For policymakers, the research underscores the importance of promoting inclusivity in cultural events to ensure that diverse groups feel welcome and represented. This includes initiatives to educate the public and event organizers about the cultural significance of different music subcultures, thereby fostering a more inclusive cultural environment that adapts to the contemporary cultural scene in a globalized world.

5.1. Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

Despite the insights, the study has some notable limitations that need consideration. Firstly, the sample consists exclusively of individuals who self-identify as hip-hop fans. This selection criterion may introduce bias, particularly concerning the sub-question of how young adult hip-hop fans construct their social identity in relation to hip-hop. Such a focus might limit the study to those already active within the hip-hop culture, potentially overlooking a broader spectrum of experiences. Secondly, the existing sample includes four female participants and nine male participants, resulting in a relatively male-dominated dataset. This imbalance might cause the study to overlook the narratives of female or other gender groups concerning the complex interplay between gender and cultural engagement in the formation of fans' social identity. Thirdly, the research emphasizes 'live hip-hop music' but does not clearly differentiate between various live settings. This lack of distinction means that the findings related to diverse live environments are somewhat limited and underdeveloped. Lastly, during the interviews, certain subcultural groups known for engaging in specific rituals, such as the mosh pit community, were identified. Platforms such as 175tv or moshpitsdaily enable fans to embrace these ritual practices under the hip-hop lens and, more importantly, build interactions with other fans who are also into hip-hop mosh pit rituals across different geographies. This facilitates both short-term and long-term community bonds within and outside of the live performance scene, reinforcing their social identity surrounding hip-hop fandom and subcultural ritual practices. However, due to time constraints and interview scheduling, a deeper investigation into these groups was not conducted, leading to only a relatively superficial understanding of their role in live hip-hop events.

The limitations outlined above suggest that further research should broaden the participant pool beyond self-identified fans to include individuals less familiar with or outside the hip-hop scene to avoid potential bias. Additionally, a more detailed examination of different live settings, such as concerts, music festivals, and clubs, is necessary in the future studies. As interviewees noted that festivals provide richer elements, such as diverse artists and activities that fans can engage with, whereas concerts are seen as relatively surface-level cultural participation. The short duration of concerts makes it relatively harder to form qualitative social engagements with

other fans. This suggests the need for separate studies focusing on each distinctive live setting to fully capture their unique contributions to social identity formation. Moreover, in relation to live events and collective ritual participation, an in-depth study on specific subcultural groups within the hip-hop community is recommended. Detailed examinations of these groups' behaviors, rituals, and meaning-making processes will further elucidate the complex interplay of social dynamics and identity formation within the broader hip-hop scene. This focus on more subcultural and emerging groups with limited existing research will enhance the understanding of ritual practices within the scene as well. Lastly, future research could also explore cultural omnivorism among fan groups, a recurring theme in the study. With fans often exhibit mixed cultural consumption patterns across genres, suggesting a more fluid aspect of identity formation among young adults. This indicates that fans do not limit their self-expression to a single convention or culture, highlighting the need to investigate how fans perceive such diverse cultural engagements in relation to their social identity.

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Appendix A

Interview guide

Dear interviewee,

Thank you for agreeing to share your experiences with me. Your insights as a hip-hop fan are incredibly valuable for my research, particularly in understanding the intersection of live music events, like festivals and concerts, with social experiences and their role in shaping your identity.

During our interview, we'll cover topics related to your personal experiences, the live music events you've attended, and how these gatherings connect you to the wider hip-hop community. Your individual insights will greatly enhance my understanding of how these events foster community bonds and individual identity within the hip-hop culture.

Please feel free to let me know if you ever feel uneasy, wish to pause, take a break, or require any other accommodations during our conversation. There are no wrong answers or questions, and I want to make sure you feel comfortable speaking with us.

I plan to record our discussion for transcription purposes. If, for any reason, you would prefer not to have the interview recorded, please let me know. The interview will take about 45 to 60 minutes.

Once again, thank you for participation.

Demographics

1. Can you tell me something about yourself?
 - What's your name?
 - How do you identify in terms of gender?
 - How old are you?
 - Can you tell us your nationality and city of origin?
 - How long have you been living in the Netherlands?

* Thank you for sharing about yourself. Now, let's shift to your interests. I'd like to know about your personal story with hip hop and how it resonates with you.

Hip-Hop Subculture

1. When did you first get interested in hip hop?
 - What specific activities / parts of the culture do you engage with?
 - What makes you stay involved in it?
2. What does hip hop mean to you? *How would you define hip hop?
3. For you, what does be a part of the hip hop community mean for you? * What does be a hip-hop fan mean to you?

Ex. attending live performances / engaging with the community / expressing yourself through fashion, dance / creating hip hop music.

4. How do you incorporate it into your daily routine or experiences/ daily life?
5. When did you first start going to live hip-hop events?
 - What inspired you to do so?
 - Would you describe yourself as someone who often attends live hip-hop events, or are you relatively new to this experience?

* After discussing your personal connection with hip-hop, let's move on to your experiences at live events.

Totemic Rituals

1. In your opinion, how is seeing hip-hop live different from listening at home?
 - Which do you prefer? Why?
2. Can you tell me about your most memorable experiences participating in a hip-hop live performance (concerts/festivals)?
3. What group activities do you often see / join in at hip-hop events?

- Do you consider activities are important in experiencing the live setting?
Why?
- 4. Can you recall a specific moment during a live event when you felt a strong connection to the artist performing?
- 5. Has there ever been a time at a hip-hop event when you felt out of place or disconnected?
 - What happened?
- 6. What makes you feel at home at hip-hop live events? (*ask for totems/ symbols)
 - How can you recognize other hip-hop fans? (*ask for totems/ symbols)

*Let's talk about the collective atmosphere. I'd like to explore the energy and connections you feel with others during live hip hop events in this section.

Collective Effervescence

1. How does the crowd's energy at a live event influence your experience / affect your relationship with other fans?
2. What are your thoughts on the different experiences offered by different live music settings, like festivals compared to concerts?
3. Can you recall a moment at a hip-hop event where you felt a strong sense of connection with other fans?
 - Have you ever made a lasting friendship at a hip-hop event?
 - Can you tell me about it?
4. At what point do you feel the festival/concert experience actually begins and ends?
 - Ex. does it start when planning the trip, attending the online community group chat, or planning what to wear?

* Now, let's delve into the social aspects. I'd like to understand how hip hop shapes your interactions and sense of self within both the fan community and broader society.

Social Identity

1. How does hip hop connect with your personal background, culture, or identity?
2. In what ways has hip hop played a role in your friendships and social circles?
3. In your view, what distinguishes a 'real' hip hop fan from others?

- And do you think going to live shows is part of what makes someone a true fan?"
4. In what ways do you feel different from people who are not part of the hip-hop scene?
 - Have you ever felt judged or stereotyped for being a hip-hop fan?
 5. Can you tell me how does being a fan of hip hop impact your self-confidence or self-image?

Appendix B

List of Respondents

Respondent	Name	Gender	Nationality	Age
R1	Domonique	Male	Dutch	23
R2	Elizabeth	Female	Chinese	26
R3	Hoyin	Male	Dutch	23
R4	Jasmine	Female	Chinese	26
R5	Joy	Female	Dutch	20
R6	Linping	Female	Chinese	23
R7	Marco	Male	Italian	20
R8	Mike	Male	Dutch	24
R9	Musa	Male	Dutch	22
R10	Pedro	Male	Portuguese	24
R11	Philipp	Male	German	23
R12	Sam	Male	American	23
R13	Solly	Male	South African	22