

Nike 'Dream Crazy' Campaign Series

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Part 1: Synopsis

Brand Background

"Nike" has transformed from its original Greek methodology definition of the winged goddess into a modern household name. Nike, Inc. is an American sportswear company founded in 1964 by Phil Knight and Bill Bowerman, his former track-and-field coach at the University of Oregon (Britannica, 2023). The multinational company has evolved to become a global leader in the athletic wear industry.

After going public in 1980, Nike struggled against its largest competitor, Adidas. One of the company's executives encouraged Knight to sign an endorsement deal with UNC Tarheel star and National Basketball Association (NBA) rookie Michael Jordan. A lucrative contract was finalized in 1984, and it revolutionized sports marketing. Nike was transformed into an international powerhouse. The company's line of Air Jordan sneakers became a phenomenon (Britannica, 2023).

In 1988, the company debuted its iconic slogan, "Just Do It." By the early 21st century, Nike had retail outlets and distributors operating in more than 170 countries. Its logo — a curved checked mark, was recognized throughout the world.

Today, the company designs, develops, markets, and sells athletic footwear, apparel, accessories, equipment, and services. Nike has been an innovation leader in product development and consumer experience. Due to a dedication to continuous learning and adaptation, Nike has a powerful arsenal of technology, quality products, and dynamic advertising. Headquartered in Beaverton, Oregon, Nike, Inc. is currently a team comprising the Nike, Jordan and Converse brands (About Nike, n.d.).

Dream Crazy Campaign

Before the start of the 2016 National Football League (NFL) games, former San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick decided to kneel during the national anthem to protest against racial injustices in the United States. The stance sparked outrage and solidarity. Despite being an unsigned free agent and not playing in the NFL since 2016, Nike still chose Kaepernick as one of the faces for their upcoming campaign.

In the fall of 2018, Nike celebrated the 30th anniversary of its "Just Do It" campaign. For 30 years, the "Just Do It" mantra has been a motivational call for athletes nationwide, across all sports and all levels of play (Portland, n.d.). On September 5, 2018, Nike released its first advertisement titled *Dream Crazy* to begin its commemoration. The commercial was released the day before the 2018 NFL season and was narrated by Kaepernick. For Nike, Dream Crazy is a collection of stories that represent athletes who are household names and those who should be. The strategic timing of the release of Dream Crazy rhetorically reminded viewers of Kaepernick's national anthem protest. It also served as a call to action to reflect upon and acknowledge the multiple instances of racial injustices and police brutality.

Within 24 hours of airing, the commercial generated over \$43 million of media exposure (Novy-Williams, 2018). However, with any great advertisement comes polarization. There were cries for boycotts of the company and even videos of people burning their Nike shoes. Some critics are using the hashtags #JustBurnIt. Audiences perceived Nike's endorsement of Kaepernick as anti-American. Donald Trump was among those who attacked the advert at the

time of its release. "As far as sending a message, I think it's a terrible message and a message that shouldn't be sent," said Trump (Sangha, 2019).

Conversely, activists commended Nike's marketing team for providing Kaepernick with a platform. As well as using its "Just Do It" campaign to address a divisive social issue. This is the sort of vigorous response that Nike capitalizes on to remain in the news far longer than its two-minute commercials.

Despite the blowback from some consumers, the campaign was deemed a success. Nike's stock surged in the days after the campaign debuted, increasing the company's value by more than \$6 billion two weeks later (Creswell & Draper, 2019).

Dream Crazy Campaign

In February 2019, Nike released its second advertisement in commemoration titled Dream Crazy. The commercial, which Serena Williams narrates, "shines a spotlight on female athletes who have broken barriers." The all-female cast includes gymnast Simone Biles, fencer Ibtihaj Muhammad (the first Muslim woman to wear a hijab while competing for the U.S. Olympic team), snowboarder Chloe Kim, and U.S. Women's National Soccer Team members (Portland, 2019).

Nike's 90 seconds Dream Crazy advertisement was released during the 2019 Academy Awards, ahead of the FIFA Women's World Cup, and a perfect pairing with the nomination for Best Documentary for RBG, which tells the story of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and her fight for women's rights, even in the face of adversity. The commercial kicks off a celebration of women in sport leading up to the FIFA Women's World Cup in Paris (Binlot, 2019).

Nike's strategy was to deploy the campaign simultaneously on multiple platforms to boost reach and engagement. The ad placement on Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and Facebook helped maximize that effect and created synergy with the T.V. ad placement (Worsham, 2020). After just one day, the commercial garnered over 6 million views on YouTube and more than 28 million on Twitter. The number of brand mentions also increased significantly (Anusic, 2019).

The yearlong celebration of "Just Do It" has been a mechanism for athletic narratives to serve as a foundational platform for social and political change. The Dream Crazy ad continues to build upon Nike's historical stance for addressing controversial issues, such as the stereotypes and framing of female athletes in the media.

Nike's Objective

In launching the Dream Crazy campaign series, Nike pursued multifaceted objectives to foster a more profound societal impact. The primary goal was to raise widespread awareness of racial injustices and police brutality. By strategically choosing Colin Kaepernick, a controversial figure, as the face of the campaign, Nike sought to spark conversations and prompt reflections on these critical issues. Concurrently, the campaign aimed to challenge societal norms and stereotypes by presenting a diverse group of athletes, encouraging viewers to question preconceived notions surrounding activism in sports. This strengthens Nike's brand image as a socially responsible company.

Although a side effect, Nike's objective was not to raise sales in this case but to tap into their audiences' aspirations, values, and emotions. The campaign sought to differentiate Nike from its competitors and reinforce its image as a brand that stands for individuality and social justice.

In the subsequent Dream Crazy ad, Nike urged a cultural shift in perceptions. By showcasing accomplished women, the campaign aimed to empower female athletes and inspire a narrative that celebrates their achievements while breaking down stereotypes. The campaign strategically synchronizes with the FIFA Women's World Cup to maximize campaign reach.

Overall, Nike drove consumer engagement beyond advertisement, extending the historical legacy of the "Just Do It" mantra and solidifying its position as a top leader who contributes to positive change.

Key Stakeholders/Publics:

Athletes and Endorsed Personalities-

- Athletes and endorsed personalities are key stakeholders for Nike due to their influence, association, and impact on the brand's image and marketability. These individuals, often high-profile athletes, have significant reach and a dedicated fan base.
- Athletes bring authenticity and credibility to Nike's campaigns. When high-profile athletes endorse a cause or message, it adds realism, as these individuals are perceived as credible authorities in their respective sports.
- In this case, Nike should continue selecting diverse and authentic athlete representatives in the future to maintain its brand value. Diverse representation and critical figures that align with Nike's mission will appeal to a broader audience.

Existing Consumers-

- Existing customers already have a relationship with the Nike brand. Their loyalty is invaluable, and their continued support contributes significantly to Nike's revenue. The success of the campaigns depends on maintaining this loyalty, as a shift in customer sentiment can impact sales and overall brand viability.
- The divisive nature of the campaigns, as evidenced by instances of people burning Nike shoes online, highlights customer backlash. Existing customers who feel strongly about specific issues may express their dissent through public demonstrations.
- Nike needs to manage this backlash effectively to prevent the loss of customers and mitigate negative impacts on the brand. Initiating open and transparent communication with existing customers can help clearly articulate Nike's goals behind the Dream Crazy campaigns. Nike should proactively address concerns but stand firmly in its commitment to social issues.

Media Platforms-

- Social media is a powerful platform for amplifying Nike's message to a global audience. The campaigns generated significant media exposure, and social media platforms played a central role in disseminating the content.
- In this case, Nike can track real-time conversations, reactions, and sentiments related to the campaign. They can encourage user-generated content and address controversies head-on. Nike should continue the strategic placement of its ads to maximize audience reach. This was exemplified in the Dream Crazy campaign.

Part 2: Analysis

***Main Point #1 – Strategic Placement**

Well-thought-out placement of campaigns is paramount for achieving audience reach and maximizing impact. Carefully selecting the right platforms and channels to display your content plays a crucial role in the success of a campaign and timing. The choice of mediums, such as television, social media, or major events, shapes a brand's visibility and engagement levels. Moreover, timing is equally significant; aligning advertisements with key cultural moments, events, or social discussions enhances relevance and amplifies the campaign's impact.

1a. Decide which media platform is best for displaying your content

In Nike's Dream Crazy campaign, there is a notable departure from the brand's typical media distribution, with a significant emphasis on YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram, while Facebook receives minimal attention. By strategically leveraging these social media platforms and actively encouraging user participation, Nike successfully expands the campaign's reach, nurturing a sense of community and generating additional content that reinforces the campaign's core message.

A parallel example showcasing strategic platform utilization is evident in Rihanna's promotion of Fenty Beauty during the 2022 Super Bowl halftime show. Rihanna's marketing team orchestrated a stunt during her performance, featuring her applying Fenty Beauty Invsimatte Instant Setting Powder. This move resulted in \$44 million earned media value for the Fenty Beauty brand. Despite not receiving payment for the performance, Rihanna's decision to use her halftime performance as a platform to showcase the product proved to be a highly successful marketing strategy, surpassing the impact of traditional advertising channels.

The common thread between these two cases is carefully considering the most suitable channels (if any) for their respective campaigns. Both Nike and Fenty Beauty evaluated their surroundings and strategically chose platforms that resonated with their target audiences. This deliberate approach underscores the importance of aligning marketing efforts with the appropriate social networks to maximize impact and generate meaningful conversation. In the future, Nike should continue evaluating media platforms when launching a campaign. By understanding their target audience first and monitoring the media, Nike will be able to maximize their reach with future campaigns.

1b. Decide when is the right time to launch your campaign

Nike strategically launched its Dream Crazy campaign during the 2019 Academy Awards, leveraging the timing of the Oscars to amplify its message. It was purposely released ahead of the FIFA Women's World Cup and with the nomination of Best Documentary for RBG. The campaign was part of a yearlong initiative to honor women's achievements in sports. By strategically choosing the Oscars, one of the most-watched T.V. events, Nike was able to reach a wider audience base on cable. This emphasizes the critical role of timing in maximizing exposure and impact.

Similarly, Rihanna orchestrated a marketing effort with timing during the 2022 Super Bowl halftime performance to promote Fenty Beauty. After a hiatus from the music industry, Rihanna returned for the halftime performance, a high-profile event with immense viewership. This allowed her to effectively spotlight Fenty Beauty to a broad and diverse audience, capitalizing on the unique moment and underscoring the role of strategic timing.

Both instances highlight the effect of synchronizing major events with brand initiatives, emphasizing how well-timed marketing can significantly elevate a campaign's reach. Nike should continue to utilize timing and don't be afraid to be agile. This means preparing a campaign but also doing enough market research to know the right time to release it. Consider pop culture, what people are getting excited about, what is being repeatedly discussed, and how their work aligns with it.

Main Point #2 – Celebrity Endorsements

Celebrities and iconic people have become indispensable assets for brands seeking to enhance their visibility and credibility. The symbiotic relationship between these people and brands has proven beneficial in shaping public perception, fostering consumer engagement, and driving brand success.

2a. Understand the benefits of picking the right partner

Nike is associated with great athletes; there is no argument that Colin Kaepernick is just that. Kaepernick led the San Francisco 49ers to a Super Bowl appearance in 2013 and took a stance against social injustice in 2016.

Kaepernick's protest against inequality remains a controversial headline throughout the 2016 and 2017 seasons. He was never signed to an NFL team again. Despite this, Nike saw Kaepernick as someone with conviction despite the consequences. It was a calculated risk. However, the selection was strategic and impactful, underscoring the partnership of sports giants and celebrities who embody social activism. By deliberately picking the correct figure for its marketing efforts, Nike showcased its commitment to taking a stance on social matters, aligning the brand with Kaepernick's advocacy.

Tony's Chocolonely collaboration with Oxfam and Glastonbury Festival is an excellent example of the positive impact of choosing the right partner for a campaign. Tony's Chocolonely, a Dutch ethical chocolate brand, teamed up with Oxfam and Glastonbury Music Festival to create a Wonka-esque activation. They released limited edition chocolate bars, five of which had tickets to the 2023 Glastonbury Music Festival. Furthermore, the candy bars are only sold in Oxfam stores. This well-thought-out partnership created a positive image for the company among U.K. consumers and helped it reach a wider audience by connecting with a popular event.

When selecting a partner for collaboration, the company must consider how the public will perceive it and how well the partners align with the brand's values. Nike should continue capitalizing on the success of strategic endorsements that reflect its core values. The selection of endorsers who resonate with Nike's commitment to social justice has proven to be a powerful way to connect with audiences and drive meaningful conversation.

2b. Benefits of leveraging celebrity association

Serena Williams, widely considered the greatest athlete of all time, headlined Nike's Dream Crazy ad. The commercial paid tribute to female athletes everywhere and highlighted icons such as gymnast Simone Biles and fencer Ibtihaj Muhammad. The ad aims at dismissive descriptions of female athletes, particularly the word "crazy."

Williams, who has been the subject of racist and gendered criticism, is perhaps the perfect narrator for this all-female-focused ad. In the past, Williams was punished for snapping at an umpire during a match, even though male tennis players have gotten away with similar behaviors. More recently, the French Tennis Federation banned Williams's medically-required catsuit (Darby, 2018), implying she was "disrespecting the game." By casting Serena Williams,

who has always outwardly spoken about women's rights, Nike leveraged authentic celebrity associations, strengthening its campaign message with purpose.

Similarly, the National Football League (NFL) has been leveraging Travis Kelce's association with Taylor Swift to solidify its position among female viewers. Swift's relationship with Kelce, a tight end for the Kansas City Chiefs, has unlocked many opportunities for the NFL. Swift's attendance at the Chief's football games has boosted viewership for the organization — the Chiefs vs. the Chicago Bears game was the most watched telecast on any network with 24.3 million viewers (Ehalt, 2023). Swift's publicization with Kelce has resulted in associations with the NFL. The league's TikTok bio says "Taylor was here" with the date she attended the game, and the X bio displays "NFL (Taylor's Version)." As a result, fans with no previous interest in football have been tuning in to catch glimpses of their favorite artist in the audience.

Both cases leverage celebrity associations to advance their message. The league's association with Taylor Swift has allowed them to attract a broader women and Gen-Z audience, one that the NFL doesn't usually garner. Likewise, Nike's celebrity association with Serena William reinforced the company's identity and ensured that the endorsements had a meaningful impact.

Main Point #3 – Social Trends

In the ever-evolving landscape of consumer expectations and societal values, brands must recognize and respond to emerging social trends and issues with agility. Failing to acknowledge what is heavily talked about at the time can lead to a disconnection with the target audience; this can result in diminished brand loyalty and relevance. On the contrary, swift responses to relevant social issues and trends demonstrate a brand's awareness and empathy. This will help establish a meaningful connection with consumers who increasingly seek companies that have the same shared values.

3a. Stay updated on what is currently accepted and rejected

Today's world is dominated by rapid information dissemination and heightened social consciousness, so companies must remain current on what is circulating in the media. Colin Kaepernick's impactful gesture of kneeling during the national anthem to protest police brutality and social injustice transcended the football field, sparking nationwide protest, particularly after the death of George Floyd. For a long period, the Black Lives Movement and social injustice became a heated topic of debate.

Nike boldly positioned itself as a brand that comprehends the prevailing social issues and is willing to take a stand on the right side of a divided issue. By featuring Kaepernick in its campaign, Nike demonstrated a keen awareness of the ongoing controversy and showcased a readiness to engage with its audience. This strategic move affirmed Nike's commitment to social awareness and solidified its reputation as a brand unafraid to make a statement. As a result, consumers applauded Nike for its message, raising the company's sales.

On the contrary, Levi Strauss and Co. faced backlash for their partnership with Lalaland.ai to create custom AI-generated models. Levi aimed to create digital models that encapsulate all body types and physical features. However, the campaign was a misfire. Instead of using computer-generated models to increase diversity, the company should have hired real people to embody inclusivity. Although Levi issued an apology, they continued with the partnership.

Brands must be socially responsible and current on what is accepted and rejected. Levi should have conducted extensive research before releasing its campaign. There is heavy

discourse surrounding A.I., as well as sensitive conversations about body positivity and diversity. In this case, Nike has done an incredible job of keeping up to date with the current conversation, allowing them to release real-time campaigns to stay relevant.

3b. Using hashtags to create a trend

Nike strategically harnesses the influence of social media and its iconic #JustDoIt hashtag to orchestrate a compelling and engaging trend during the launch of its Dream Crazy campaign. The trend started with a tweet from Colin Kaepernick, the campaign's central figure. It said, "Believe in something even if it means sacrificing everything. #JustDoIt." This tweet catalyzes a more significant movement, encouraging anyone who went through adversity to share their story. The hashtag #DreamCrazy started trending later on. For Nike's 30th anniversary of its "Just Do It" campaign, the company hopes to reintroduce its philosophy to a new generation. In doing so, Nike navigated backlash, which is evident in the counter hashtags such as #BoycottNike. By combining a powerful message with a hashtag, Nike created a trend that captured the media's attention and encouraged user-generated content.

Similarly, in 2022, Duolingo launched the #TattooDuoOver campaign on National Tattoo Day (March 2021). The company encourages individuals with a tattoo in another language to tweet a picture of their tattoo with #TattooDuoOver. Select people with the worst translation mistakes were invited to go to Paris to have their tattoos covered up. The campaign allowed Duolingo to interact with its audience while highlighting its app functions.

Using hashtags is a simple way to interact with users online. By setting a trend, consumers are getting involved, increasing a brand's awareness. In doing so, Nike established a well-known online presence during this campaign, and people often associate #JustDoIt with overcoming obstacles.

Main Point #4 – Brand Activism

Brand activism describes how companies broadcast ethical values and beliefs as a part of corporate social responsibility. Highly competitive markets, such as retail, have been utilizing brand activism to be successful. However, brand activism marketing must have authenticity and commitment to an issue. Brands have been increasingly attaching themselves to social causes that align their point of view with their target consumer demographic. As a result, they showcase powerful narratives to create deeper emotional connections.

4a. The importance of corporate social responsibility

Nike's Dream Crazy and Dream Crazier commercials are part of a CSR marketing campaign. The commercials aimed to empower athletes and women's rights. This campaign comes at a time when the country was heavily split, and Nike took a stance on what is morally right. In its advertising video, Nike featured athletes with its classical tagline 'Just Do It' to encourage audiences to reach their highest athletic achievements. The campaign was an apparent success. In just 24 hours, it went viral on Twitter and YouTube. Nike took a step towards progressive change, raising people's awareness of societal issues such as police brutality and gender equality.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Ikea demonstrated CSR by encouraging people to stay home and prioritizing their well-being during the difficult time. Their Stay Home campaign didn't showcase any product but highlighted the company's genuine care for its consumers. The pandemic lockdown made people's home feel suffocating and imprisoning instead of a warm shelter. Through this ad, Ikea wants to establish that home is a place filled with memories,

providing a comforting message. Leveraging CSR and creativity, Ikea successfully connected with its audience during a period of uncertainty.

CSR needs to be embedded into companies, including policies and culture. If a company can genuinely fulfill the appealing messages made in its CSR strategy, it will generate positive results. Speaking out on divisive issues is crucial in showing that, as a brand, you care about your consumers. Nike has successfully showcased CSR. In the future, the company should continue educating its internal employees on social responsibilities (whether through on-the-job training or online courses) and updating its key stockholders/investors on its core values. Having your internal ducks in a row will ensure an aligned image to the public, benefitting the company in the long run.

4b. Authenticity boosts brand loyalty

When Kaepernick said, "Believe in something even if it means sacrificing everything," it shows authenticity. It is evident in Colin Kaepernick losing his career in the NFL and consumers setting Nike products on fire. Nike risks brand loyalists and revenue by taking a side on a politically relevant topic. By backing Kaepernick, Nike proved to the public they were willing to risk it all in fighting for what they believed was right. Nike has been consistent with its brand image, building the company's foundation on diversity, integrity, and self-expression. This only pushed Nike forward as an agent of social change.

In the same line of societal change, Pepsi suffered a marketing meltdown in its infamous commercial featuring Kendall Jenner. Originally posted on YouTube, the ad shows young people holding protest signs with nonspecific pleas like "join the conversation." In the ad's climatic scene, a police officer accepts a can of Pepsi from model Kendall Jenner, which ultimately defused the tensions. Moreover, the protesters are seen smiling, laughing, hugging, and high-fiving (Victor, 2017). It is an understatement that consumers did not see this as a revolutionary statement. Instead, it was a self-serving message that did not have any real effort in addressing genuine social issues. Pepsi ended up issuing an apology.

When brands take a chance on social issues, it is easy to see shallow attempts. Getting behind a cause means more than just putting out a commercial. It means risking something that goes beyond the negative comments on social media. Nike has unwaveringly clung to its core values, pushing athletes and the world forward.

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