

**How the Nature of Sportswear Advertising Affects Consumer Values and  
Brand Perceptions**

**by**

**Anna S. Lear**

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**Thesis Committee:**

**Assistant Professor Ariel Hasell (Principal Thesis Advisor)**

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## **Abstract**

This study researched how certain common values when purchasing sportswear (athletic potential, lifestyle appeal, and political/ethical aspects) are enhanced through advertising. It used a survey experiment to assess what consumers wanted out of sportswear brands before and after seeing a Nike advertisement related to one of four conditions based on the aforementioned common values and a control condition. I predicted that each Nike advertisement would increase the importance participants place in the values presented by each advertisement as well as increase general positive feelings about Nike. Results indicated that the only condition that drove up its respective value is the political/ethical condition, which also incited the most positive feelings about the brand.

## **Introduction**

Without marketing and advertising, it is extremely difficult for many businesses to thrive. When it comes to competing brands with similar products, brand differentiation is especially important in marketing plans. Brands need to discover what consumers value and want out of their products, and then find ways to emphasize those values in their brand image. For example, in the casual sportswear market, consumers make purchase decisions by predominantly assessing reputation, materials used, price value and quality value (Chi & Kilduff, 2011). The benefits people seek when choosing which sportswear to purchase fall under the categories of being utilitarian (wearability, material), symbolic (brand meaning, expressiveness), and hedonic (design, color) (Lim, Kim, & Cheong, 2016). The concept of brand love centers around people's perception of what the brands can do for the consumer(s), eliciting passionate desire to use their products, willingness to invest resources, evoking aspired and current self-identity, frequent thoughts, emotional attachment, positive affect, long term relationship, and anticipated separation distress (Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012). Whether it regards moral value, material value, or brand love, several factors go into consumption decisions every day. Therefore, this thesis aims to answer how and in what capacity sportswear brand Nike generates and enhances consumer priorities and values to drive positivity toward their brand. Nike has multiple characteristics as part of its brand values, and the aim of this research is to assess what brand personalities, consumer perceptions, and consumer preferences result from Nike's advertising strategies.

This goal will be accomplished with an experiment that shows how values Nike emphasizes in their various advertising methods enhance these same values in their potential

consumers. This research will not only apply to the brand directly; by understanding how consumers intertwine their own values with perceptions of sportswear advertising, other sportswear brands will gain knowledge on how their advertising techniques reach specific types of consumers.

### **Review of Literature**

There are many factors that go into consumers' purchasing decisions. They consider, whether consciously or subconsciously, what they seek from the product, how it makes them feel, and their values when purchasing products of that type. Beyond considerations of the individual products, they also must think about the brand as a whole. Consumers may consider love or commitment to the brand, along with characteristics or values of the brand that may mirror those of their own. I will dive into existing research regarding all of these elements in order to provide guidelines on what values sportswear companies should emphasize in their advertising to increase the importance of those values to consumers.

### **Brand Personality**

Advertising and marketing focuses on increasing the likelihood to purchase a product, whether that means appealing to consumers' moral values, deepest desires, or surface-level needs. Through every campaign and advertisement, brands develop characteristics that are human in nature, allowing consumers to express themselves, or ideal versions of themselves, through purchasing the brand (Aaker, 1997). Additionally, these personalities/characteristics allow similar brands to differentiate themselves (Aaker, 1997). For example, Dr. Pepper tends to be associated with being nonconforming, unique, and fun, while Coca-Cola is cooler, all American, and real (Aaker, 1997). Differentiations in brands that may be similar in product give

brands opportunities to channel unique values that may mirror those of their target customers. By giving consumers the opportunity to associate the brand with something bigger than its product, it allows the consumers to believe that the brand fulfills a greater need than the mere product it sells, which may give the brand an edge against competitors.

Aaker conducted extensive research into the overarching categories of brand personalities in 1997 and found five dimensions: Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, and Ruggedness (Aaker, 1997). While these dimensions are credible, the changing dynamic of digital advertising begs the question of their current, durable relevance. In markets that have shifted dramatically towards reliance on technology, it is useful to periodically assess how brands' realization of their values have shifted with new advertising landscapes and generational changes.

Aaker's research has been expanded more recently to sportswear brands; Tong and Su (2014) used her framework to identify the overarching dimensions associated with sportswear brands. In their research, they found seven different dimensions applicable to athletic brands: Competence, Attractiveness, Sincerity, Innovation, Activity, Excitement, and Ruggedness (Su & Tong, 2014). Competence, Sincerity, Excitement, and Ruggedness overlap with Aaker's original findings, but Attractiveness, Innovation, and Activity are unique findings to this study. I will keep Su & Tong's dimensions in mind to help guide this analysis of brand personality perceptions of Nike; while they draw on Aaker's framework, the enhanced recency and applicability of their findings make them more directly relevant to this research.

Not only do the dimensions reflect capabilities of the physical products, but they also touch on emotional values that the brand may represent. For example, sincerity reflects the

brand's ability to seem candid in their mission, and attractiveness reflects consumer's desire to look attractive and respectable while using the product. Therefore, in this research, participants' views on sportswear brands' sincerity when presenting ethical values was assessed, as well as their desire to be respected and look attractive while wearing the product in daily life.

### **Brand Love and Commitment**

Brand personalities give consumers particular associations with brands that may not only lead to purchasing, but also feelings of love and commitment towards brands. In 2012, Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi explored the concept of brand love and how it compares to and interacts with interpersonal love. Through several in-depth interviews, they found that almost all participants claimed to love or "sort-of-love" a brand (Batra et al., 2012). In terms of characteristics of brand love, it largely centers around what the brand can do for the person, in contrast to interpersonal love, which is characterized by more reciprocal behavior (Batra et al., 2012). The elements involved in brand love are passionate desire to use, willingness to invest resources, past actions by the brand, desired self-identity, current self-identity, life meaning, frequent thoughts, intuitive fit, emotional attachment, positive affect, long term relationship, anticipated separation distress, overall attitude valence, and certainty/confidence (Batra et al., 2012). However, while one might expect that these elements may translate to undying commitment to the brand, the research indicates that this is not the case. The aspect of the "long term relationship" with the brand does translate to a general sense of commitment; however, if someone who loves a brand perceives that a better alternative has emerged, and if the poor performance of the loved brand became undeniable, they are likely to pursue that alternative (Batra et al., 2012). Since brand love centers



around how the brand can benefit the consumer, if a loved brand begins to perform poorly and loses those benefits, commitment will wane, and the consumer's purchase behavior will wander.

Assessing brand love towards sportswear brands in this study will be useful, since it will help illuminate potential reasoning for participants' purchase decisions. This research will assess how brand love or positivity may emerge from various advertising methods, since it is important for brands to understand what advertising strategies are most holistically beneficial to them.

Though they are similar in nature, studies show that brand commitment is a different phenomenon than brand love. Even though commitment may waver when brands underperform, it is a moderator when evaluating marketing for competing brands (Raju et al., 2013). This study by Raju, Unnava, and Montgomery researched how brand commitment moderates the evaluation of its competing brands. Those with high levels of commitment to a brand are likely to produce more counterarguments to an advertisement by a competing brand, compared to those with low brand commitment, but this difference was only present when the advertisement had weak arguments (Raju et al, 2013). When there were strong arguments for the competing brand, brand commitment did not significantly vary the number of counterarguments. (Raju et al., 2013). This research also suggests that less counterarguing is incited when there are a higher number of arguments in the competing advertisements. In combining the strength of arguments with the number of arguments, high commitment participants rate a competing brand unfavorably when there are few arguments, regardless of the strength, but gain more favorable attitudes towards that brand if there are many strong arguments for it (Raju et al., 2013). These results emphasize the importance of strategic advertising; by using the "hard sell" technique of several strong

arguments, brands elicit fewer counterarguments and are more likely to coax consumers away from their competitors.

The combination of these studies show that feelings associated with interpersonal relationships tend to also be applied to brands. Different dimensions of brand personalities may allow consumers to express their own values through purchasing that brand, and the regularity and liking of doing so could lead to brand love, leading to commitment to a brand under the conditions of consistent performance and weak arguments for a competitive brand. In relation to the current study, this research suggests that if consumers begin to associate Nike with their own values, it may lead to more love and commitment for the brand.

### **Perceptions of and Values Associated with Sportswear**

In a study analyzing consumers' willingness to pay for luxury versus casual sportswear brands, researchers found that important values associated with sportswear for the participants fit under these categories: utilitarian, hedonic, and symbolic (Lim et al., 2016). This categorization is useful for the current study because it is specific to sportswear and synthesizes aforementioned personality dimensions into specific emotional and physical uses for the consumer. The current study mirrors these values because they illuminate those that consumers consider when making decisions to purchase sportswear.

To go more in depth about this, I explored another study regarding consumer perceived value (CPV) of casual sportswear. The study used a "consumer perceived value model" consisting of four constructs: price value, emotional value, social value, and quality value (Chi & Kilduff, 2011). Through an online questionnaire, participants indicated that company and brand reputations were considered important when attracting and retaining customers, as well as

positive attitudes toward cotton usage (Chi & Kilduff, 2011). Additionally, price value and quality value were shown as being more important to consumers than emotional and social (Chi & Kilduff, 2011). This shows that athletic brands with nearly equal levels of price and quality must focus on enhancing their emotional and social value to properly compete with one another. Doing so allows consumers to connect to brands in ways beyond what their products do for them, but also how the products make them feel, allowing consumers to have pride in their purchases for reasons beyond usage. To make these reasons unique creates a sincere image that gives brands a competitive advantage. In connection to this finding, the current research explores the ways that Nike connects emotional and social value to its brand, and how that translates to consumer preferences.

When it comes to how specific brands currently reflect some of these values, a study in France indicated that Adidas was most connected with fashionable products and sports marketing (55.8%) but so was Nike (48.9%), Reebok (66.4%), and Puma (45.6%) (Lebrun et al., 2013). While this study is comprehensive in the number of brands and associations it generated, the sheer multitude of them makes it difficult to draw direct conclusions about specific brands in comparison to each other. For example, it reflects French consumers' associations with the brands, but it does not inquire what they actually value and whether these associations lead to purchase or commitment.

It is not only important to assess how sportswear brands reflect certain values, but also what types of values most effectively reach consumers. When comparing the effects of emotional versus informational appeals on brand attitude and recall of sportswear brands, emotional appeals led to greater change in brand attitude in comparison to informational appeals (Lee et al,

2014). This finding provides a contradiction between earlier findings that price and quality values were perceived as more important than emotional and social values when deciding which athletic brands to purchase. To help ease this contradiction, the current research aims to show how these values are realized and amplified through Nike's advertising methods.

### **Consumer Responses to Nike's Cause Related Marketing (CRM)**

In this review, cause-related marketing (CRM) is defined as a brand aligning itself with a socially-beneficial or political cause in efforts to connect with their consumers' values and create social value for the brand ("Cause Marketing", n.d.). Cause-related marketing may bring consumers to practice political consumerism, where they evaluate their own economic, environmental, social, ethical, or political values in making purchase decisions (Micheletti & Boström, 2014). It is important for any brand to fully evaluate the implications of engaging in CRM, as the decision to do so may cause the loss of customers who do not agree with their advertised cause. If a brand's advertising supports a controversial platform, they may only be positively reaching a small sector of their consumer base and may lose the rest of their customers due to disagreement. Therefore, it is informative to understand the effects of CRM and potential political consumerism for brands who have chosen to participate, like Nike.

Within Nike's advertising framework, they include a great deal of CRM tending to either relate to women's empowerment or their endorsement of Colin Kaepernick in the wake of his controversy with the National Football League (NFL). The controversy involved the athlete kneeling during the National Anthem as a method of protesting racial injustice in the United States. While some of the population thought his protest was warranted, some found it extremely inappropriate. In the wake of the high profile disputes and negotiations that then ensued between

Kaepernick and the NFL because of the protest, Nike chose to stand by Kaepernick and publicly endorse him.

In a study examining the population's perceptions of Nike's endorsement of Kaepernick, it was found to be deeply divided between Black and non-Black participants (Intravia et al., 2019). Black participants were almost twice as likely to agree that Nike should be using Kaepernick in their advertising, that social issues should be addressed in their advertisements, and that they should be involved in his charity (Intravia et al., 2019). This is important information for Nike because they should know what types of consumers are inclined to agree with their controversial advertising, and what types may begin to denounce the brand.

In research regarding consumers' general perceptions of CRM, it was found that those exposed to an ad with a CRM message thought of the company much more favorably than those who saw one in a regular condition, regardless of whether the cause was high or low fit to the brand. In other words, consumers generally respond positively to CRM (Nan & Heo, 2007). CRM gives brand images depth and the ability to fulfill consumer's emotional desires, instead of only physical ones. The fact that consumers feel positively about that shows that, when making purchase decisions, they seek that emotional fulfillment in some sense. It is essential to take cause-related marketing into account when analyzing perceptions of Nike, due to the way they integrate it into their business model, which is why the current research has a specific condition dedicated to Nike's cause-related marketing.

To summarize, the outlined studies have shown various important findings regarding brand values. The utilitarian, hedonic, and symbolic benefits consumers seek when purchasing sportswear serve as a useful framework to help understand the ways that consumers view brands,

and the research regarding brand love and commitment shows that they factor in as moderators for consumer purchases. It is important to fill the gap in the research that not only discusses values associated with athletic products and brands, but also how these values are enhanced by advertising. Not only do sportswear brands need to understand what consumers seek when purchasing their products, but also how these values and behaviors interact with the brands' advertising and marketing efforts.

### **Hypotheses**

H1: Participants assigned to the athletic condition will have increased athletically/quality-oriented preferences after watching the ad compared to before watching.

H2: Participants assigned to the lifestyle condition will have increased lifestyle-oriented preferences after watching the ad compared to before watching.

H3: Participants assigned to the political condition will have increased value-oriented preferences after watching the ad compared to before watching.

H4: Participants in every condition will have more generally positive feelings towards Nike after watching a Nike advertisement.

### **Method**

#### **Overview**

This survey experiment will focus on three values consumers may find important: quality (athletic potential), lifestyle (a social utility factor), and ethical (brand aligning with moral/political values). The consumers being researched were college students, due to the convenience of the sampling of this group and the fact that they represent the most prominent

demographic that consumes sportswear (Tong & Su, 2014). The aim of this experiment was to assess how values communicated through advertising affect consumer perceptions of Nike as well as consumers' own values when purchasing sportswear.

## **Sample**

The survey was created in Qualtrics and people participated on a volunteer basis. All participants solicited were students at the University of Michigan. They were selected by reaching out to dance groups and the general athletic community, as well as those affiliated with the Ross School of Business, along with students from the research participant pool of the COMM 102 course who received credit for participating. Participants were solicited this way because I wanted to ensure that those involved in athletics were represented, since they are more likely to be purchasing sportswear frequently, but also did not want to neglect the university population that is not necessarily athletic and may purchase sportswear for reasons beyond athletic performance.

All participants that were under the age of 18 and those who completed the survey multiple times due to technological error were deleted to produce a final number of 189 participants. 19.6% were men, 70.9% were women, .5% opted out of identifying with a gender, and 9% did not respond to the gender identity question. 40.7% of respondents were in their freshman year of school, 32.8% were sophomores, 7.4% were juniors, 9% were seniors, 1.1% were past their senior year, and 9% declined to respond to the school year question. 24.9% of the sample was age 18, 27.5% was age 19, 23.3% was age 20, 6.9% was age 21, 3.2% was age 22, 1.1% was age 23, .5% was age 31, and 12.7% did not respond to the age question. In terms of the family's yearly income, 3.2% made <\$25k, 6.9% made \$25k-\$50k, 7.9% made \$50k-\$75k, 7.4%

made \$75k-\$100k, 16.4% made \$100k-\$200k, 30.2% made \$200k+, and 28% declined to respond to the income question. In terms of racial identification, 13.2% identified as African American, 13.8% identified as Asian, 64.6% identified as White, 4.2% were of Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish origin, and 3.7% preferred not to identify with any race.

On average, the sample as a whole exercises between a few times a month to several times a week ( $m=3.72$ ,  $sd=.819$ ), suggesting that the purchasing of sportswear is somewhat relevant to the lifestyle of the sample. This was calculated as participants answered on this scale: never (1), a few times a year (2), a few times a month (3), several times a week (4), and daily (5).

## **Procedure**

Participants were first asked a series of questions regarding demographics, exercise habits, pre-existing perspectives and purchase intentions of sportswear brands, and values that the consumer considers when making these purchases. Participants were told that the purpose of the experiment was to assess consumer behavior and perceptions.

In order to assess how values regarding athletic quality, social and lifestyle quality, and political and ethical alignment changed after watching the advertisements, I conducted a univariate analysis of variance test for each condition. It assessed either athletic, political, or lifestyle values communicated after watching the advertisement on a scale from 1-5 (where 3 is neutral). See Appendix A for all survey questions asked.



## **Measures**

### **Independent Variable**

**Ad condition.** After the first set of questions assessing pre-existing general values and habits, participants were randomly assigned into one of these 4 conditions: political Nike ad, lifestyle Nike ad, athletic Nike ad, and a control condition with an advertisement that has nothing to do with sportswear or apparel. The political condition was a feminist advertisement titled “Dream Crazier”. The lifestyle condition featured popular comedian Ilana Glazer enjoying Nike shoes. The athletic condition featured several talented athletes wearing athletic gear and playing football in the snow. The control condition was an American Express credit card commercial featuring Tina Fey. After viewing the advertisement, they were asked questions regarding views about Nike that centered around athletic quality, lifestyle quality, or political and ethical concerns.

### **Dependent Variables**

The questions assessing the values in the experiment gave these answer options: strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, neutral, somewhat agree, and strongly agree. Each of these answers were coded from numbers 1-5, respectively. They were then averaged out throughout the entire sample as well as within each condition to demonstrate the degree to which the participants agreed that specific values were important to them. These averages and their differences were visualized through frequency and descriptive statistics as well as ANOVA and Post-Hoc Multiple Comparisons tests using SPSS software. All dependent variables listed below were tested this way.

**Difference in athletic values.** Questions assessing athletic values before the advertisement were phrased as follows: “How often do you exercise?”, “The quality of the material is very important to me”, and “The durability of the product is very important to me”. Questions assessing athletic values after the advertisement were phrased as follows: “Nike prioritizes athletic performance in its products”, “Nike’s sportswear is high quality”, “When I want quality athletic gear, it is very likely that I buy it from Nike”, and “I prefer to buy sportswear from brands endorsed by athletes”. To assess how the values changed, those averages exhibited before watching the advertisement were subtracted from the averages after watching the advertisement ( $m = -1.0982$ ,  $sd = .71148$ ).

**Difference in lifestyle values.** Questions assessing lifestyle values before the advertisement were phrased as follows: “I want to be able to wear it daily, even if I’m not necessarily exercising”, and “It is important to me that people I admire and/or respect wear this brand’s products”. Questions assessing lifestyle values after the advertisement were phrased as follows: “I respect people who wear Nike”, “The people I hang out with tend to wear Nike”, “I prefer to buy sportswear from brands that are popular”, and “When I get new items from Nike, I am excited to show them off”. To assess how the values changed, those averages exhibited before watching the advertisement were subtracted from the averages after watching the advertisement ( $m = .1282$ ,  $sd = .81892$ ).

**Difference in political/ethical values.** Questions assessing political/ethical values before the advertisement were phrased as follows: “It is important to me that the brand's ethical values are consistent with my own (ex: sustainability, treatment of workers, fair pay)”, “It is important to me that the brand's political values are consistent with my own (ex: political beliefs of those

who run the company, political beliefs exhibited in their advertising)”, and “I really don't like it when brands attempt to associate themselves with political values”. Questions assessing political/ethical values after the advertisement were phrased as follows: “Nike has values that align with my own”, “Nike associates itself with values in a sincere way”, “Nike’s values make me respect the brand more”, and “I prefer to buy sportswear from brands with values that align with my own”. To assess how the values changed, those averages exhibited before watching the advertisement were subtracted from the averages after watching the advertisement ( $m = .6627$ ,  $sd = .90970$ ).

**Positive feelings about Nike.** Positivity about Nike after watching the ad was assessed with this phrasing: “This advertisement gave me more positive feelings about Nike” and “This advertisement gave me more negative feelings about Nike”. These were also coded as numbers 1-5 ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”, and were averaged across the sample for positivity ( $m = 3.41$ ,  $sd = 1.052$ ) as well as negativity ( $m = 2.05$ ,  $sd = .964$ ) through frequency and descriptive statistics. ANOVA and post-hoc comparison tests in SPSS were used to test positivity for the athletic ( $m = 3.32$ ,  $sd = 1.056$ ), lifestyle ( $m = 3.51$ ,  $sd = .756$ ), political ( $m = 4.00$ ,  $sd = .911$ ), and control ( $m = 2.71$ ,  $sd = 1.063$ ) conditions, as well as negativity for the athletic ( $m = 2.11$ ,  $sd = .786$ ), lifestyle ( $m = 2.03$ ,  $sd = .986$ ), political ( $m = 1.88$ ,  $sd = 1.131$ ), and control ( $m = 2.24$ ,  $sd = .852$ ) conditions.

## Results

### *Hypothesis 1: Athletic Condition*

To analyze the first hypothesis, I conducted an ANOVA with post-hoc comparisons, using the experimental condition as the independent variable and difference in athletic values

before and after athletic advertisement as the dependent variable. In the athletic condition, there was no significant difference in athletic values after watching the advertisement between each condition ( $p = .676$ ). Participants concern about the athlete values of the brand actually decreased after seeing the video for participants in the athletic condition, which is the opposite of what H1 predicted ( $m=-1.0982$ ,  $sd=.71148$ ,  $F=2.254$ ,  $p=.085$ ), suggesting that viewing the athletic advertisement lead people to be less likely to heavily consider athletic qualities when purchasing sportswear. However, this difference was not statistically significant, and Hypothesis 1 was not supported.

#### *Hypothesis 2: Lifestyle Condition*

For the second hypothesis, I also conducted an ANOVA with post-hoc comparisons, using the experimental condition as the independent variable and difference in lifestyle values before and after lifestyle advertisement as the dependent variable. In the lifestyle condition, there was also no significant difference in lifestyle values after watching the advertisement between each condition ( $p=.701$ ). Participants' concern about lifestyle values did increase after watching the video for those in the lifestyle condition, but this difference was not significant ( $m=.1282$ ,  $sd=.81892$ ,  $F=1.885$ ,  $p=.135$ ). Although these results support Hypothesis 2, they do not do so significantly.

#### *Hypothesis 3: Political Condition*

Similarly for the third hypothesis, I conducted an ANOVA with post-hoc comparisons, using the experimental condition as the independent variable and difference in political/ethical values before and after political/ethical advertisement as the dependent variable. The participants

in the political condition reported the highest political/ethical priorities after watching the advertisement to a statistically significant degree overall ( $m = 3.7024$ ,  $sd = .62771$ ,  $F = 3.145$ ,  $p = .027$ ). Participants' concern about political values significantly increased after watching the political advertisement compared to the other conditions ( $m = .6627$ ,  $sd = .90970$ ,  $F = 4.186$ ,  $p = .007$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was supported by this experiment. See the table below for these results.

Table 1  
ANOVA (test of between-subjects effects) for change in participants' political/ethical values from before watching the advertisements to after watching for those in all conditions.

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	8.742 <sup>a</sup>	3	2.914	4.186	.007
Intercept	20.913	1	20.913	30.042	.000
Condition	8.742	3	2.914	4.186	.007
Error	99.543	143	.696		
Total	132.979	147			
Corrected Total	108.285	146			

a. R Squared = .081 (Adjusted R Squared = .061)

#### *Hypothesis 4: Positivity about Nike*

Values of positivity were compared between conditions by assessing responses to the statement “This advertisement gave me more positive feelings about Nike”. Anything above a 3.0 was considered positive, since the answer for that was “neutral” and anything above that meant that the participant agreed that the advertisement made them feel more positive about Nike. After watching every type of advertisement except for the control video, the participants felt more positive about Nike ( $F = 12.636$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Participants felt the most positive about it

after watching the political advertisement ( $m=4.00$ ,  $sd=.911$ ) then the lifestyle condition ( $m=3.51$ ,  $sd=.756$ ), then the athletic condition ( $m=3.32$ ,  $sd=1.056$ ). In the control condition, participants disagreed that the advertisement made them feel more positive about Nike, understandably ( $m=2.71$ ,  $sd=1.063$ ). This result was mirrored in the question regarding negativity ( $F=.946$ ,  $p=.420$ ), where the political condition produced the least negativity ( $m=1.88$ ,  $sd=1.131$ ), then lifestyle produced the second least ( $m=2.03$ ,  $sd=.986$ ), athletic produced the second most ( $m=2.11$ ,  $sd=.786$ ), and the control condition produced the most negativity ( $m=2.24$ ,  $sd=.852$ ). Although the results regarding the negativity differences were not statistically significant, since those regarding the positivity differences were significant, these results support Hypothesis 4. See the tables below for these results.

Table 2  
ANOVA (test of between-subjects effects) for overall feelings of positivity about Nike after watching the advertisement in all conditions.

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	33.844 <sup>a</sup>	3	11.281	12.636	.000
Intercept	1645.676	1	1645.676	1843.331	.000
Condition	33.844	3	11.281	12.636	.000
Error	127.667	143	.893		
Total	1869.000	147			
Corrected Total	161.510	146			

a. R Squared = .210 (Adjusted R Squared = .193)

Overall, while hypotheses 1 and 2 were not supported by the results, hypotheses 3 and 4 were supported.

## Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that if sportswear brands advertise their ethical and political values, consumers watching will not only feel more positive about the brand but will place political and ethical brand values at higher importance when deciding where and how to purchase sportswear. However, this is likely only true when it comes to values that consumers agree with. So while it would be wise for brands to showcase their ethical values in their advertising, in order to reach the widest consumer base, it should remain as uncontroversial as possible.

It would be reasonable to assume that the high number of women who took the study influenced these results. Since 70.9% of the sample identified as women, it makes sense why the sample felt so positively about the advertisement regarding women's empowerment. In future studies, I would suggest that the researcher use a Colin Kaepernick example for a Nike political ad, since it is much more controversial and can shed light on how overt political statements affect brand perception within different demographics.

Both the athletic and lifestyle conditions produced insignificant results. This is potentially true because the advertisements in those conditions did not express anything about Nike that the participants did not already know. Nike is a very popular brand with unquestionable quality and has already socially permeated the population. Therefore, it is potentially due to the lack of a novel element in these conditions that consumers' values were not enhanced. It is not uncommon that popular, successful sportswear brands produce quality gear that is also good for everyday life. Therefore, when consumers go to buy new sportswear, these values are often at the forefront. However, it is less likely that a given popular sportswear brand stands for certain

causes. To see a cause-related advertisement by Nike may inspire consumers to consider political/ethical values when buying sportswear in ways that they did not previously consider. This is in contrast to athletic or lifestyle quality, which the consumers already were considering.

These results serve to emphasize the importance of brand differentiation in the sportswear industry. Consumers already consider athletic and lifestyle quality when purchasing sportswear, which means that it is vital that these brands make efforts to differentiate themselves in other ways. Nike is on the right track with its cause-related marketing in that it gives consumers more reason to like their brand besides the physical qualities of their products.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

There were several limitations associated with this study. The sample mostly consisted of women and also students of families that made at least \$100k per year (46.6%). These numbers, along with the fact only college students were sampled, show that the general sportswear-buying population was not properly represented in this sample.

Another limitation was lack of assessment of attention during the study. It is likely that several survey respondents clicked answers randomly in order to get the survey done as quickly as possible. This is especially probable in the sample of students from the COMM 102 course. Since they received course credit for simply completing the survey, they had little incentive to answer the questions truthfully.

Additionally, due to COVID-19, an entire facet of this study was derailed. Originally, there was going to be a focus group along with the survey experiment in order to assess opinions about perceptions of brand personality differences between Nike and Adidas. These two brands were chosen because they are often compared and tend to generate brand loyalty. However,



because of the global pandemic, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) banned all nonessential human research, therefore the focus group could not be conducted. Luckily, the survey results were already collected before this ordinance.

Other limitations include the lack of reliability of self-reported responses and lack of causality. Not only may people be clicking answers mindlessly, but they may also not be in touch with their true values, may not be answering truthfully, and may be influenced by how they feel in the specific moment of taking the survey. And since the study was purely correlational, one cannot apply causality to the advertisements invoking certain values or positive feelings.

Future research should focus more closely on one of the conditions as opposed to applying several. For example, if this study only regarded the political condition, more clear analyses could have been done regarding participant's pre-existing values and backgrounds. They could potentially be grouped based on income group, gender identity, and geographic location in order to compare what types of consumers most appreciate certain political advertisements and which reject them. It would also be useful to do direct brand comparisons to assess how various types of advertising cause the realization of brand commitment and perceptions.

## **Conclusion**

Those in the business of advertising sportswear would find this research useful as it points out how various techniques can enhance the brand's image and make consumers care more about certain values. Specifically, engaging in cause-related marketing that caters to the target consumer's ethical values can help with brand differentiation and positivity. It is imperative for the sportswear industry to understand how their advertising can potentially reject,

mirror, or change the priorities of their target audiences in order to maximize the success and reputation of their products. Not only do sportswear brands cater to what consumers want, but they also need to create those desires.

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## Appendix A

- ❖ *How often do you exercise?*
- ❖ *How often do you wear clothing by sportswear brands?*
- ❖ *How often do you buy new clothing by sportswear brands?*
- ❖ *Do you prefer any specific athletic brand(s) over others? Please list them here.*
- ❖ *Do you avoid any specific athletic brand(s) over others? Please list them here.*
- ❖ *How often do you see your peers wearing the preferred sportswear brand(s) you listed?*
- ❖ *How often do you see your peers wearing the avoided sportswear brand(s) you listed?*
- ❖ *How often do you see sportswear brands advertised?*
- ❖ *Do you follow any sportswear brands on social media? If so, please list the brands and the media on which you follow them.*
- ❖ *Please rank how much you agree/disagree with these statements when it comes to reasons why you purchase clothing from a sportswear brand.*
  - *The quality of the material is very important to me.*
  - *The durability of the product is very important to me.*
  - *I want to be able to wear it daily, even if I'm not necessarily exercising*
  - *It is important to me that the brand's ethical values are consistent with my own (ex: sustainability, treatment of workers, fair pay)*
  - *It is important to me that the brand's political values are consistent with my own (ex: political beliefs of those who run the company, political beliefs exhibited in their advertising)*
  - *I really don't like it when brand's attempt to associate themselves with political values.*
  - *It is important to me that people I admire and/or respect wear this brand's products.*
- ❖ *Do you ever wear different sportswear brands at the same time?*

**\*\*watch advertisement\*\***

- ❖ *Have you seen this advertisement before?*
  - *Yes*
  - *No*
  - *I don't remember*
- ❖ *Please rank the degree to which you agree or disagree with these statements.*
  - *I enjoyed watching this ad*
  - *I found this ad to be informative*
  - *I would be willing to watch another ad by this company*
  - *I thought the ad had a generally positive message*
- ❖ *What do you believe is the intention of this advertisement? (Choose the answer you best see fit).*
  - *They were trying to showcase their values as a company*
  - *They were trying to showcase the athletic capabilities of their products*
  - *They were trying to show that it is cool to use their products*

- *Other:*
- ❖ *Please rank these values in order of importance when it comes to deciding what sportswear brand to purchase. Do this by dragging each option to its desired position.*
  - *Design*
  - *Material*
  - *Brand reputation*
  - *Brand values*
  - *Brand worn by people you admire/respect*
  - *Price*
- ❖ *Please rank the degree to which you agree with these statements (options: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree).*
  - *I respect people who wear Nike*
  - *Nike has values that align with my own*
  - *Nike's prioritizes athletic performance in its products*
  - *Nike associates itself with values in a sincere way*
  - *Nike's sportswear is high quality*
  - *The people I hang out with tend to wear Nike*
  - *Nike's values make me respect the brand more*
  - *When I get new items from Nike, I am excited to show them off*
  - *When I want quality athletic gear, it is very likely that I buy it from Nike*
  - *I prefer to buy sportswear from brands with values that align with my own*
  - *I prefer to buy sportswear from brands that are popular*
  - *I prefer to buy sportswear from brands endorsed by athletes*
  - *This advertisement gave me more positive feelings about Nike*
  - *This advertisement gave me more negative feelings about Nike*