Nike Sports Apparel Advertising:

Cognitive responses and Positioning

Table of Contents

Abstract and Purpose….2
Introduction.............3
Elaboration Likelihood Model.........................3
Positioning Model........4, 5
Product Symbolism.......5
Advertising Appeal........5, 6
Conclusion................7
Bibliography.............7

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the different aspects of advertising consumers to understand the persuasive techniques being used. By knowing the strategies and tactics used in marketing campaigns, individuals can become responsible consumers in the media flooded culture that we see today. Each product or service that is available has a specific angle in which marketing campaigns progress towards. The way we understand advertisements can be either through peripheral or central processing routes, or better known as the Elaboration Likelihood Model. Nike has positioned itself to be the most dominant product line for the last few decades. It is vital to understand the different ways in which we are able to obtain information, as well as be aware of the strategies and tactics that are used throughout each advertisement.
Introduction

Advertisements are constantly in our peripherals. Companies are consistently trying to find a way to become a part of our daily lives. Advertisers use numerous strategies and tactics through subliminal messages through each advertisement. For an advertisement to be successful, the observer needs to be able to understand what is being portrayed, as well as advertisers need to identify with the consumer and appear to be beneficial for the consumer to use their product. This can happen in many different routes. In order for us to be responsible consumers, we need to be able to identify the different tactics and strategies that these companies are sending us through their advertisements. For sporting goods and clothing, performance is implied in every single advertisement, regardless which brand you consider. This paper will evaluate individual advertisement campaigns of arguably the leading sports apparel brand, Nike.

Elaboration Likelihood Model

The Elaboration Likelihood Model has two factors that greatly influence which of the two routes one may take while processing information. The receiver of the information needs to be motivated to be persuaded and have the ability to process information effectively. Any persuasion technique is processed within an individual’s conscience centrally or peripherally. First is the central route. This route is responsible for critical thinking. Any sort of information regarding a product’s feature such as how durable or effective Nike or Adidas clothing is, the price of an item, and many others that could be named. This cognitive ability or behavior is highly elaborated and consists of active information processing. If an individual is not motivated enough or there is an information overload, the peripheral route will then take control. The peripheral route is unconscious and you would have no idea that persuasion is actually taking place. This could be whether or not you enjoyed an advertisement due to its visual imagery, or mainly because of brand awareness. Nike has done a great job recently through their recent campaign where their “swoosh” is the center of attention, not necessarily the actual product they are promoting.
Positioning Model

Is Nike apparel the best items your money can buy? The use of superior celebrity endorsements throughout each sporting event has been one of Nike’s more prevalent marketing tactics. There are five ways in which a brand can position itself within the marketplace, they are to be the first, best, least expensive, most expensive, or by positioning by age and gender. With arguably the greatest athletes of their time supporting their brand such as Michael Jordan, Tiger Woods, and Herschel Walker, Nike was able to position themselves as “being the best” within their product category. Individuals are usually willing to pay a reasonable price for items that are perceived as the best. Any of these types of positioning niches are done through the use of an individual's peripheral thought processing route. The steps that need to be followed in order to successfully position a brand within a marketplace require six steps. Identify your competitors, assess consumer’s perceptions of your competitors, determine competitors positioning niche, analyze consumer’s preferences, make your positioning decision, and finally, monitor your decision.
Here in the picture above shows Tiger Woods lining up and assessing his putt. Nike implies that using Nike Clothing can turn you into a winner. Typeface is very important while viewing this advertisement. Notice that World #1 is in bright red along with Nike’s logo with the word “Victory”. The brand logo is associated with the word victory, symbolizing that one could achieve greatness by affiliating themselves with Nike’s brand. These simple cues can help consumers identify what these businesses such as Nike are trying to portray to active consumers in forms of symbolic messaging. To follow up on the question in the beginning, is Nike the best you can buy? Personal preferences vary, some because of product symbolism, but Nike’s marketing campaign has effectively niched their selves in a market where being the best, performance-wise, is the main concern to most athletes.

**Product Symbolism**

Product symbolism refers to what a product or brand means to consumers and what they experience in purchasing and using it. Image for young adults is a very important aspect to most whether it’s the car they drive or the clothes they wear. Purchasing clothing like Ralph Lauren, Gucci, Versace, have an image of wealth and luxury. The same goes for athletic clothing. Nike has created such strong brand awareness in recent years that they have been able to associate their products with superstar athletes, and with that have created a subliminal thought in the majority of the average consumers that their product is the reason for the superstar athlete’s success.

**Advertising Appeals**

The advertising appeal is an approach to which a product or service attracts the attention, in other words, something that moves you or speaks to a consumer’s needs. There are two ways in which an advertisement normally can be broken down to in order to creatively execute these messages, usually through informational / rational, or emotional appeals. Rational motives could include convenience, comfort, health, and sensory benefits such as smell, touch, and taste. Some purchase criteria commonly used include quality, efficacy, and performance. William Weibacher identified several types of appeals within advertising including,
competitive advantage, favorable price, product/service popularity appeals, news, or feature. Emotional appeals relate to social and/or psychological needs for purchasing a product or service. For most individuals, purchase decisions are emotional, and their feelings about a brand can more important than knowledge of its features or attributes. The advertisement below displays an emotional appeal towards a large amount of consumers.

In the ad, “find your greatness” is the center of attention. By showing a heavier individual, promotes a favorable image stating that anyone who uses Nike can create success by purchasing their products. Emotional integration is used in the ad to support Nike’s specific advertising aim. Emotional integration is where a person in the specific advertisement is experiencing the emotion while using the product being promoted. This specific advertisement shows a young adult pushing himself towards “greatness”. The scenery behind the heavy individual is crucial for this ad. Surrounding the individual is running in the middle of a road that is in a rural area. By displaying the heavy individual attempting to conquer “greatness” by training through the sunset, displays a motivated “average Joe” in which consumers can identify with emotionally. The majority of Nike advertisements throughout the last few decades majorly attempt to identify with consumers emotionally.
Conclusion

Nike has arguably been the number one sporting gear since the early 80’s. This has been accomplished through an elaborative marketing campaign promoting hundreds of different items. While examining Nike advertisements throughout the years, you can see the progression of sales increase because of effective positioning within the extremely competitive market of sports apparel and equipment. The Elaboration Likelihood Model is a great starting point for consumers to consciously understand how an individual can be persuaded daily. Information in advertisements is easily accessed through symbolic messages when you are able to identify what sort of strategy is present. Nike appeals to nearly every fitness activity an individual can participate in. As a consumer, by identifying the numerous strategies and tactics, you can train yourself to become a conscious and effective consumer in today’s media saturated environment.

References
