

**Kneeling for justice:
A study on how the 30th anniversary of the Nike “Just Do It” campaign starring Colin
Kaepernick was portrayed by the media**

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Abstract

In 2018 Nike collaborated with controversial NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick on their 30th anniversary of their “Just Do It” campaign. Released on multiple platforms, the “Dream Crazy” campaign as it was labeled featured Kaepernick as well as other prominent athletes that broke all odds to become some of the biggest athletes in their sport. A prominent figure in the fight against racial injustice, Kaepernick triggered outrage when he started kneeling during the playing of the national anthem of the United States of America. Drawing from theories of Corporate Social Responsibility and Cause-Related Marketing, this thesis analyses media coverage of the “Dream Crazy” marketing campaign to understand why Nike would collaborate with Kaepernick. Employing qualitative thematic analysis, this thesis examined newspaper articles published around the release of the campaign. Research findings show that Nike received positive coverage as well as over forty-three million dollars in free media exposure. While some individuals burned their apparel in protest, Nike saw sales increase as consumers sought to demonstrate their support for Kaepernick and racial justice. Simultaneously, the campaign made the fight for racial justice a front-page topic as well as exposing Kaepernick’s own struggle with being blackballed by the NFL for his public protests.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A ubiquitous symbol of today's ever-expanding global marketplace, the Nike swoosh has become a mainstay in millions of consumers' closets. A multibillion-dollar sportswear brand, Nike has distinguished itself by releasing controversial advertisements on a wide range of provocative topics, such as supporting Muslim rights (Bahrainwala & O'Connor, 2019; CBC News, 2018), stopping AIDS (Baek et al., 2017; Szto, 2013), and increasing physical activity in school children (Baek et al., 2017). On September 3rd, 2018, the company celebrated their 30th anniversary by releasing a new installment of their "Just Do It" campaign which caused dissension among supporters of President Trump (Intravia, Piquero, & Byers, 2019). At the centre of this new controversial advertising campaign was former NFL star Colin Kaepernick. A contentious figure, the former San Francisco 49ers quarterback came into the national spotlight when he started protesting for racial equality and injustice (Serazio, Thorson, & Stanfill, 2020; Schmidt et al., 2018).

Kaepernick drew national headlines on August 26, 2016, when he decided to sit during the playing of the American national anthem at an NFL pre-season game between the Green Bay Packers and the San Francisco 49ers (Intravia, Piquero, & Byers, 2019; Schmidt et al., 2018). Following this first protest, he would subsequently alter his approach from sitting to kneeling after consulting with Nate Boyer a former Green Beret and NFL player as to not be seen as disrespecting the military (Schmidt et al., 2019; Farmer, 2018). However, that didn't stop individuals from attacking Kaepernick, with many of them pushing for his firing. Prominent among these voices was the US President, who asked in a 2017 rally in Alabama: "Wouldn't you love to see one of these NFL owners, when somebody disrespects our flag, to say, 'Get that son

of a bitch off the field right now. Out! He's fired. He's fired!" (Hoffmann et al., 2020; Boykoff & Carrington, 2019). Kaepernick has become a mainstay figure in the fight for racial justice and equality (Yoo, Brown, & Chung, 2018); he has even become one of the focal points behind the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests (Belson, 2020).

Debuting on September 3, 2018, as a tweet posted by Kaepernick which included the slogan "Believe in something, even if it means sacrificing everything," and featuring a black/white picture of himself (Cosentino, 2019; Kwong, 2018). The "Dream Crazy" campaign as it is titled, features a video to accompany the photo of the NFL player/activist accompanied by other prominent figures in the sports world, such as LeBron James, Serena Williams, and wheelchair basketball player Megan Blunk (Hoffmann et al., 2020; Boren, 2018). The video which is narrated by Kaepernick tells the inspirational stories of athletes who fought through obstacles such as being born without legs or being raised in one of the toughest neighborhoods in America to make their dreams a reality and ultimately becoming inspirational household names (Guardian Sport, 2018). Ending with the slogan, "So don't ask if your dreams are crazy, ask if they're crazy enough", the video doesn't blatantly push Nike branding and it is not until the very last shot of the video that the Nike swoosh logo is prominent in any significant manner (Hoffmann et al., 2020).

Receiving backlash over the "Dream Crazy" campaign from protestors burning their garments on social media, the collaboration between Nike and Colin Kaepernick caused issues for certain individuals who didn't support the swoosh partnering with the controversial quarterback (Intravia, Piquero, & Byers, 2019; Gay, 2018; Kwong, 2018). On the other hand, sales of Nike products after the release of the campaign grew through the Labor Day holiday period by 31% compared to the previous year (Martinez, 2018). As Lartey (2017) noted, no

previous athlete's driven Black Lives Matters protest came closer to the impact than the one carried out by Colin Kaepernick.

Founded in 1964 as Blue Ribbon Sports, Nike evolved from a small distributor/importer of Japanese running shoes to one of the biggest sportswear brands in the world (Locke, Qin, & Brause, 2007). As a trademark, the Nike swoosh has become recognizable across the world and turned that name recognition into a multi-billion-dollar company. Additionally, Nike isn't the only brand name in the 30th anniversary campaign. As Swaminathan et al. (2020) noted, individuals and ideas/movements can as well be brands such as Colin Kaepernick, LeBron James, Venus Williams, and even to some extent Black lives Matter. As such, multiple brand names are included in this thesis which are at their heart a combination of aspects such as the company itself, its products/services, its logo, staff, and reputation to name just a few (Doyle, 2016). All these elements combine to create what is titled as the corporation's "brand" and is what ultimately resonates in consumers' minds (Hoeffler & Keller, 2018).

The objective of this thesis is to gain insight into the Nike corporation's reasoning behind the choice of Colin Kaepernick, considering all the controversy surrounding the athlete. Additionally, with the multitude of different dimensions to this campaign -- social, political, and economic -- this partnership that culminated into an advertising campaign is one that could help explore future politically charged commercial movements. Grounded in this context, this study explores how major brand corporations can utilize advertising as a vehicle for engaging in political discourse while advancing their own brand identities in this space.

This study of the "Dream Crazy" campaign utilizes the marketing practices of cause-related marketing (CRM) as this approach partners companies with social causes for mutually beneficial purposes. Thus, this campaign would be categorised as utilising CRM as it is a

mutually beneficial partnership between a corporation (Nike) and a social cause (Colin Kaepernick fight for racial equality). A component of the more expansive marketing approach of corporate social responsibility (CSR), CRM is a marketing strategy in which corporations seek to increase profits while simultaneously benefiting a social cause and thereby enhancing brand reputation (Mullen, 1997; Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). As it touches on the Black Lives Matter movement and other racial inequalities suffered by the black community in its messaging, the 30th anniversary of Nike's "Just Do It" commercial was grounded the use of CSR in its marketing strategy.

In exploring the partnership between Nike and Colin Kaepernick, this thesis focuses on the strategic reasoning behind the controversial collaboration between both parties. Also engaged in this larger project is a concern with exploring the morality supporting the 30th anniversary campaign of "Just Do It," given that advertisements are a form of commercialized communication to sell goods and services. Hence, this thesis set out to address the question, where does the Nike 30th anniversary of "Just Do It" lie in comparison to other marketing campaigns? This is because unlike most marketing campaigns, this one at its forefront was trying to help push a social issue while simultaneously trying to sell sportswear. Moreover, the sheer fact that a sitting US President called for the firing of the player by the NFL and labeled him a "Son of a bitch" speaks volume to how impactful Kaepernick's protest truly was and still is to this day (Belson, 2020, Boykoff & Carrington, 2019). For these reasons, for Nike to partner in a commercial with Kaepernick speaks volumes and provides the rationale for this study.

This thesis sets out to discover the strategies utilised by Nike in the "Dream Crazy" campaign and its implications in Nike's marketing strategy. Thus, this thesis is not looking into either Nike nor this campaigns' impact on the public sphere or political discourse in general. As

this thesis is an exploration of strategic elements of the Kaepernick and Nike “Dream Crazy” campaign, a case study method was chosen. This approach will help give thorough insight that will be able to become more generalizable in a “real-world” dynamic for future research conducted in the same field. In all, this methodological approach will help dissect the “Dream Crazy” campaign.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The “Dream Crazy” campaign rests squarely at the intersection of communication and advertising studies. This section's goal is twofold. First, the primary aim is to define the key actors behind the campaign which are Nike, Colin Kaepernick, and being black in America in terms of giving historical context as well as defining their key aspects. The secondary purpose of this section is to introduce and describe the main theoretical structure around which empirical aspect of this thesis is built.

As noted above, cause-related marketing (CRM) was chosen as an analytic framework given its flexibility for analyzing advertising campaigns while still providing a robust theoretical framework to guide data analysis. While traditional commercial goals might be to sell a pair of shoes to an already defined target market, this campaign with the inclusion of Kaepernick and other politically charged imagery extended beyond simply the selling of branded garments.

Nike Branding

Nike is a brand that has pushed and, on occasion, crossed the line in terms of bold and unique marketing strategies; it has learned to use them in effective ways to build its brand into one that has become a household name throughout the world (Epstein-Reeves, 2010; Klein, 2000). As a brand, Nike has built itself as a company that has aligned with some of the most

prominent athletes in the world, names such as golfing icon Tiger Woods, basketball superstar Kobe Bryant, and cyclist legend Lance Armstrong (Kim, 2020; Park, Park, & Billings, 2020; Carrillat, D'astous, & Lazure, 2013). More importantly, Nike has gained a reputation of sticking with its sport stars even through legal battles and has even on occasion gone on to sign controversial spokespeople.

Nike has transformed over the years into what Klein (2000) has called a “superbrand” by encompassing much more than just the traditional corporation centered around the manufacturing and selling of goods/services; there is now more of a focus on brand image with the manufacturing of the products left to third party suppliers. This makes Nike’s advertising efforts even more crucial as the “Nike brand” is the Nike corporation itself; in other words, Nike is primarily trying to sell consumers the swoosh on a pair of shoes and not the whole garment *per se*.

As Ilicic, Baxter, and Kulczynski (2018) noted, many brands are moving away from hiring celebrities altogether in favour of what are perceived to be more genuine and cost-effective marketing campaigns. However, each year companies are still spending billions on celebrity endorsements (Um & Jang, 2020; Miller & Laczniak, 2011). Yet, the use of celebrities to anchor major campaigns can generate negative publicity if the athlete gets in trouble or is directly linked to deviant behaviour (Ilicic, Baxter, & Kulczynski, 2018). Despite this, Nike has a long track record of holding on to their spokespeople in times when many other companies would have let them go. The likes of Eric Cantona (suspended 8 months for going into the stands to attack a fan), Randy Moss (multiple legal issues), and John McEnroe (famous for his short temper and bombastic on-court outbursts) were all controversial athletes who were at one time or another, under contract with Nike (Williams, 2019; Burton, Farrelly, & Quester, 2000). More

recently, Nike has maintained ties with the likes of Tiger Woods (public meltdown which included crashing his car and marital infidelity) and Kobe Bryant (sexual assault allegations), two athletes who were cut by other companies because of their widely publicized behavior (Park, Park, & Billings, 2020). Thus, the pairing of Kaepernick and Nike isn't as far-fetched as it might seem, for the swoosh has decades of history of both signing and sticking with controversial athletes. Moreover, when looking at Nike's target market, it's mostly the under 35 age group which supports the brand's more liberal stances on social issues (Novy-Williams, 2018).

Nike exemplifies the new type of company in which brand name plays a bigger part in their business model than the manufacturing of their products. With 27% of its production located in China, but with plans to move a significant portion to Vietnam, Nike has employed a tactic which many brands now utilize which is offshoring their manufacturing arm of the business to third party suppliers in low-income countries (Meyer, 2019; Klein N., 2000).

A company associated with several controversial business practices, Nike's most persistent allegation is its use of sweatshops in poor countries for the manufacturing of its products (Donado, 2021; Boje & Khan, 2009; Locke, Qin, & Brause, 2007). While the company began manufacturing products in Japan, it relocated its production to countries with less expensive labor such as Indonesia, Vietnam, and China (Meyer, 2019). In fact, Nijof, Forterre, & Jeurissen (2008), stated that the American athletic footwear market is 95% imported from low-wage countries. For Nike, the practice of using sweatshops in low-wage countries has appeared multiple times in its history with lawsuits and news stories depicting the poor conditions in which Nike garments are manufactured (Donado, 2021; Xu & Leibold, 2020; Locke, Qin, & Brause, 2007; Ki, 2004).

Having a history of sweatshop allegations, Nike has seen multiple scandals regarding their use of poor manufacturing conditions which had diminished the swoosh prestige of its wearers (Donado, 2021; Xu & Leibold, 2020; Wokutch & Singal, 2018). These sweatshop allegations, as well as media coverage depicting companies using child labor in some of their factories, were reported as far back as the early 1980s. Nike has faced child labor and sweatshop allegations throughout their history (Nijhof, Forterre, & Jeurissen, 2008; Locke, Qin, & Brause, 2007). Thus, creating a social issue raised by journalists and academics in the swoosh brand advertising greatness no matter an individual's race or socioeconomic background, while at the same time using the cheapest labour from the poorest countries to make their branded garments.

Poor working conditions at Nike factories were at the center of a 1995 documentary entitled *Children at Work*. This film depicts the poor working conditions children were suffering through to make Nike soccer balls (Boje & Khan, 2009). In response to the documentary and other allegations of poor working conditions, in 1998 Nike founder Phil knight publicly stated the company's intentions to improve how the brand manufactured its products, which helped lessen the public backlash over its poor manufacturing practices. Hence, Nike was going to focus to better itself and become socially responsible (Sellnow & Brand, 2001). Nike has tried to amend these issues by creating their first code of conduct for factory workers in 1992 (Nazario & Roach, 2015). Yet, even in 2020 poor working conditions were discovered in Nike factories in China (Xu & Leibold, 2020).

The Nike swoosh is one of the most recognizable brand images in the world. As Matović, Stanić, and Drinić (2019) detailed, Nike's branding activities center around pushing a winning mentality and competitive spirit in the way that puts winning over everything else. Additionally, Shah (2018), described Nike as a brand that is primarily targeted to the young and urban

consumer. This is compounded by the fact that the target market for the “Dream Crazy” campaign was individuals under the age of 35 as they make up 67% of their consumers (Green, 2018; Novy-Williams, 2018). For this reason, Nike has backed some of the most prolific athletes and in its most recent adverts pushed this mantra to a new level with the message of it doesn’t matter if you’re gay, poor, or black the only thing that matters is you becoming the best. Hence, this and other commercials released by the swoosh brand have pushed some boundaries such as the promotion of both racial equality and social justice (Kim, 2020; CBC, 2018).

In the beginning, Phil Knight, one of the founders of Nike, was reluctant in choosing the swoosh logo that is now synonymous with Nike, yet years later the swoosh has become one of the world's most recognizable logos (Klara, 2019). Nike is also synonymous with its advertising efforts with billions spent on sponsorships and commercials which have made the brand one of the most famous in the world (Klara, 2019). As Kim (2020) highlighted, the change was achieved by taking a non-traditional way in which Nike ads don’t pitch products, but instead set a mood for the brand itself which makes all its offerings cool. Hence, Nike doesn’t release commercials for new shoes or new running shirt innovation, they release ads to remind people of the ethos behind the brand with the reasoning why people should buy and wear the swoosh.

Nike has always garnered publicity for its ads, in fact the swoosh brand has made a name for itself by pushing boundaries to differentiate themselves from their competitors. As the “Dream Crazy” commercial and subsequent 2020 “You Can’t Stop Us” video demonstrated, being different or controversial for Nike isn’t a losing strategy. Thus, Nike has created a name that has gone further than just the athletic market, with its multiple collaborations and mentioned the swoosh brand has made into mainstream culture.

The swoosh logo has become so synonymous with Nike that in 1995 they dropped the word Nike from the logo to just the swoosh and they even trademarked the word swoosh in 1994 (Klara, 2019). As Klein (2000) described them as “Logos, by force of ubiquity, have become the closest thing we have to an international language, recognized and understood in many more places than English” (p.20).

Yet what is branding? It is a combination of both tangible and intangible elements; it is what comes to mind when consumers think of a company as it encompasses aspects such as its logo, products, reputation, and above all its name (Doyle, 2016). Additionally, the American Marketing Association (AMA) adds that for the intangible aspects the end goal should be the creation of “distinctive images and associations in the minds of stakeholders, thereby generating economic benefit/values” (AMA). Moreover, brands help distinguish between the products of each different company simplifying their choices and helping with quality assurance (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Finally, brands communicate an implied quality guarantee based on reputation, thereby reducing risk for consumers as a company’s logo or name can be regarded as a stamp of quality (Keller & Lehmann, 2006).

In an oversaturated market in which consumers are exposed daily to countless advertisements, brands have no choice but to focus their effort on standing out from their competitors in a precise and targeted manner (Ries and Trout, 2000). Positioning is the use of messaging to help push certain perception onto consumers in a hyper connective and competitive market (Lee, Kim, & Won, 2018; Ries & Trout, 2000). Example of positioning can be Mercedes-Benz positioning themselves as the most luxurious and reliable automaker that sophisticated wealthy individuals purchase (Kosteljik & Alsem 2020). Positioning is the act of targeting a specific market to be able to create a specific brand image and ethos about the brand in the mind

of its consumer (Kosteljik & Alsem, 2020; Ries & Trout, 2000). Yet, positioning can also be done on a single product, a service, and even an entire country (Ries and Trout, 2000). As such, positioning takes the role of how advertisers can occupy a specific place (position) that differentiates them from competitors (Lee, Kim, & won, 2018). As Ries & Trout (2000) noted, positioning is retying already made connections in the minds of consumers. In other words, positioning is not product or brand innovation, it is reaffirming and focusing consumers' minds onto a desired identity (Lee, Kim, & Won, 2018).

With the world is becoming ever more connected, consumers now have many international and domestic options at their disposal making for a more competitive global marketplace (Bruning, Alge, & Lin, 2020). Taking a whole new beginning in the 1990s, brands realized the importance of brand name as a form of association with a lifestyle around the brand itself (Doyle, 2016). Thus, currently with branding, individuals do not just buy an item anymore; with one's purchase you now become part of that brand's inner circle putting you into a group of like-minded individuals such as Ford nation or the cult of Apple buyers who line up for days for the latest iPhone. Lastly, an important aspect of branding is the logo. As noted above, the Nike swoosh is one of the most distinguishable logos in the world and is as if not more important than any of Nikes apparel items. In terms of logos, they are the face of the brand and, as such, function as the defining element of the firm's identity (Foroudi, Melewar, & Gupta, 2017).

In brief: branding is essentially a means by which an entity can differentiate itself from others, particularly in a crowded and competitive marketplace. In a competitive market, companies need ways to communicate their competitive advantage and at the same time promote the need of their item. When it comes to Nike branding, innovation and stickiness are the key

aspects of their marketing scheme which in turn has made them one of the most talked about brands in recent years.

Brand Authenticity

In today's marketplace, authenticity has become a form of competitive advantage by which firms are either highlighting or manufacturing to distinguish themselves from their competitors (Portal, Abratt, & Bendixen, 2019; Eggers et al., 2013). Brand authenticity is the perception of how genuine the brand is representing itself and its offering to its consumers (Napoli et al., 2014). According to Fine (2003), authenticity is "linked to an absence of cognitive understanding, creating an unmediated experience - sincere, innocent, original, genuine, and unaffected, distinct from strategic and pragmatic self-presentation" (p.155). When considering authenticity in terms of company aspects such as history (how many years has the firm been in business), origin (where is the company based), method of production (examples of this can be facets such as where it was made and was it handmade or mass-produced), and moral values to name just a few (Morhart et al., 2015). In a particularly useful formulation, Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry (2003) describe authenticity as a cornerstone of contemporary marketing for the creation of a brand's "essence", which is comprised of the core elements that make the brand unique to its consumers.

Recently, many companies have adapted their communication to consumers on social media to more "authentic" content, demonstrating just how important brands in the 21st century strive to be deemed "authentic" by consumers (Yang et al. 2021).

Developing the concept of authenticity, Kestenbaum (2019) explains:

"Authenticity is now important because it is part of the ultimate search in life, the search for the meaning and belonging. What's new here is that the traditional source of meaning

in our culture, close and extended families and established religions, have lost their pull on younger consumers. As a result, consumers are searching for meaning in places that historically had no meaning, including consumers' products" (paras. 1)

As such, authenticity is an important factor when observed in the marketing realm as consumers are more willing to purchase authentic brands (Yang et al., 2021; Morhart et al., 2015; Eggers et al., 2013). Additionally Guèvremont & Grohmann (2018), demonstrated that companies in a crisis situation get more clemency from consumers if they have deemed the brand "authentic". Moreover, research has demonstrated that brands deemed as authentic are also perceived as being more trustworthy (Portal, Abratt, & Bendixen, 2019; Eggers et al., 2013). Thus, brand authenticity is the continuous effort by a company to uphold its image by not undermining or lying to its consumers by falsifying claims to increase sales or gain a competitive edge over its competitors (Fritz, Schoenmueller, & Bruhn, 2017; Grayson & Martinec, 2004).

In terms of brand authenticity, Beverland, Lindgreen, & Vink (2008), argued that it comes in different forms, all of which relate to the level of true authenticity. This is caused by the fact that authenticity has become a marketing tool for companies as consumers associate authenticity as being higher quality (Morhart et al., 2015). This can be explored further in the fact that the authenticity of firms can be separated into 3 sub-categories, namely, *Pure* (genuine company with years of experience and tradition), *Moral* (modern Brand that emulates past firms by following their traditions and customs for the love of the craft), and *Approximate* (mass-market brand that emulates styles and characteristics of the genuine company) (Beverland, Lindgreen, & Vink, 2008). This means that while brands can be deemed authentic, consumers

should do their research to make sure they're not buying a product they believe has decades of history and is truly just a craft reproduction.

Regarding brand authenticity, consumers in general associate this term towards a company's production and origin of products being sold, aspects such as a brand's corporate messaging, keeping its promises, and its credibility (Fritz, Schoenmueller, & Bruhn, 2017). For example, companies can be deemed authentic if they keep to their corporate promises such as retaining low prices (Morhart et al., 2015). One key aspect of this is sincerity which when dissecting the "Dream Crazy" campaign by Nike will be important to see just how sincere the ad truly was. In other words, was this commercial just a ploy to get behind the Kaepernick and the BLM movement to sell more apparel or was it a genuine attempt to promote their messages.

Colin Kaepernick and black activism

As in American society in general, African Americans have suffered persecution and abuse in sports (Cooper, MacAuley, & Rodriguez, 2019; Schmittel & Sanderson, 2015). Among countless others, the likes of Jack Johnson the first African American boxing champion, Jesse Owen who won gold at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, and Jackie Robinson who broke the colour barrier to become the first African American player in MLB -- they all endured racially charged abuse (Martinez, 2012; Fuhrman, 2008). Resisting the challenges and overcoming them, today's sports realm is a kaleidoscope of individuals from different races and backgrounds with many black athletes being the face of franchise to even entire sports leagues.

Colin Kaepernick was a quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers in the National Football League. Yet, as of 2016 he hasn't played a game or even been on a team's roster (Mather, 2019). A public figure that has been compared to other celebrated athletes who took stances on social

issues such as Muhammad Ali, Tommie Smith, and John Carlos, Kaepernick has grown into a major figure in the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests sweeping America (Belson, 2020; Cooper, Macaulay, & Rodriguez, 2019). Categorized by Cooper, Macauley, and Rodriguez (2019) to be in the 4th wave of “black athlete activism”, this wave which began in 2005 is categorized by the financial and technological push black athletes have at their disposal which has helped further the sharing of the hardship suffered by the African American community. While not the only NFL or even black athlete to protest for racial equality in the last decade, Kaepernick has become one of its main symbols (Serazio, Thorson, & Stanfill, 2020; Yoo, Brown, & Chung, 2018).

While previous waves of “black athlete activism” saw the likes of Muhammad Ali and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar fighting for respect for all races, this new movement which began in 2005 features the likes of LeBron James and Kaepernick fighting for racial empowerment via new technological streams such as Twitter (Cooper, Macaulay, & Rodriguez, 2019). In 1966 Muhammed Ali refused to go fight in Vietnam stating “Man, I ain’t got no quarrel with them Vietcong.” (Kaufman, 2008). Gaining national attention, Ali received severe backlash from fans and the government who tried to imprison him, revoke his fighting license, and even fined him \$10,000 (Brown, 2018). As Branch (2017) puts it, Kaepernick is this generation's Muhammed Ali. For Ali it ended well for him as he received his license back and went on to make millions fighting Joe Frazier at Madison Square Garden (Brown, 2018). As of 2022, Colin Kaepernick hasn’t played in an NFL game since 2016.

As athlete protests have increased in numbers and intensified over time, one important fact remains: these individuals, while celebrities and important figures to millions of individuals,

are still just citizens of that country. This notion is explained by Kaufman & Wolff (2010: p. 167):

“When many athletes step outside their role in sports and enter into the role of responsible and active citizen, they are often viewed suspiciously at best and scornfully at worst. But being an athlete should not and does not occur at the expense of other social identities. Although they may spend inordinate amounts of time pursuing excellence in their chosen sport, athletes are also consumers, taxpayers, parents, patients, voters, and above all, citizens. In this regard, athletes, like the rest of us, have an obligation to be aware of what is going in the world so that they may play an active role in shaping current and future policies - policies from which they are in no way immune.”

If Muhammed Ali can be seen as the pioneer, Tommie Smith and John Carlos elevated athlete activism when they did the Black Panther salute at the 1968 Olympic Games to raise awareness to the poverty and mistreatment suffered by African Americans (Schmittel & Sanderson, 2015). In 2012, the Miami Heat players wore black hoodies in response to the Trayvon Martin killing, standing in solidarity with the Martin family (Cooper, Macaulay, & Rodriguez, 2019).

In 2020 Big Ten commissioner Kevin Warren put out a statement that his conference athletes will be allowed to take a knee during the national anthem (Brennan, 2020a). Additionally, more sports have joined the protest with many basketball players and staff taking a knee during the 2020 NBA season (Reynolds, 2020). The NHL and Premier League also experienced players kneeling during the national anthem. (Rosen, 2020; Smith M. D., 2020). Thus, while the national protest might have started with the NFL, fuelled by the current national

unrest caused by George Floyd killing, players from sports across the world decided to follow suit and kneel during the playing of national anthems or before the start of games in solidarity with the treatment of black individuals.

Surrounding these social movements is the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM), which was first introduced when individuals started protesting on black community Facebook boards after the killing of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin and the subsequent acquittal in July 2013 of his killer George Zimmerman (Maqbool, 2020; Anderson, 2016). Rallying around the names of the victims, the BLM movement is most associated with the names of the deceased and not specifically around its key members or activists (Maqbool, 2020). The BLM was originally founded by three African American queer women, but the movement gained even more track in 2014 after a series of other lethal shootings involving police and African American individuals (Updegrave et al., 2020). Black Lives Matter rapidly became a rallying cry by the African American community and Americans in general to protest the killing of black people by the police (McIvor, 2016).

In all, Kaepernick follows in the tradition of athletes using their unique platform to promote racial injustices suffered by the black community. As with his predecessors, Kaepernick has been attacked and punished for taking a political stance. In the end, this caused the loss of his professional football career.

Corporate Social Responsibility and Cause-Related Marketing

Advertisements are a way for corporations to promote their brand and products to consumers, yet as demonstrated with the “Dream Crazy” campaign Nike went beyond the selling of branded t-shirts and running shoes in taking an overt political stance in its imagery and choice

of spokesperson. This form of marketing would be categorized as cause-related marketing which aims to blend the world of business with social good by contributing funds to non-profits and other causes in need of financial support (Chang & Chu, 2020; Brønn & Vrioni, 2001; Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). CRM is strictly a voluntary act taken upon by a corporation to help its stakeholders, employees, community and society (Coombs & Holladay, 2011). A diverse marketing approach, CRM covers a wide range of topics (environment, wellness, social equality, etc.) and target markets (potential customers, current customers, employees, etc.) making it a tool that can be molded to fit the firm's exact desired objectives (Liu, 2013). This is because the use of CRM can elevate corporate stature in the eyes of consumers by conveying social responsibility and help improve corporate image (Christofi et al., 2020; Pharr & Lough, 2012; Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). Hence, the reason why so many corporations have begun implementing this type of strategy is largely explained by the fact that it is mutually beneficial for both firms and society at large (Das et al., 2019; Brønn & Vrioni, 2001).

At its core, the aim of CRM is utilising social causes for the purpose of encouraging consumers to purchase the products with the understanding that their purchase will benefit the cause the brand is promoting (Berglind & Nakata, 2005; Smith & Higgins, 2000). Examples of CRM range from the donation of money for each purchase, to multi-million-dollar partnerships like Nike with their Livestrong initiative for cancer research and McDonalds with their Ronald McDonald house charity which helps sick kids (Das et al., 2019; Chang, 2012).

A practice that has been in use for decades, CRM was first introduced in 1983 by American Express in their redevelopment campaign for the Statue of Liberty (Chang & Chu, 2020; Lafferty, Lueth, & McCafferty, 2016). Rooted in the American philanthropic tradition fostered by some of the biggest industrial titans such as John Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie

who donated to social institutions in the late 1800s' and early 1900s' (Berglind & Nakata, 2005). The basis of the American Express campaign which lasted for three months was that with every purchase made with an American Express card or new card activation a donation was given to the Statue of Liberty restoration fund (Lafferty, Lueth, & McCafferty, 2016). A successful campaign, the company received a 45% increase in new card applications and a 28% increase in transactional activities with \$1.7 million raised (Lafferty, Lueth, & McCafferty, 2016; Chang, 2012). Evolving from 1983, CRM has been used by almost every type of industry and social cause with the likes of Home Depot (Black universities), Coca Cola (Habitat for humanity), Starbucks (HIV treatment), and as previously mentioned McDonalds establishment of the Ronald McDonald House helping sick kids (Das et al., 2019). Hence, CRM which was created to help restore the Statue of Liberty while increasing the amount of new card users for AMEX, has become a viable option for both social causes and corporations to partake in a mutually beneficial partnership for both sides.

Social media has become one of the keyway brands are communicating with consumers in the 21st century. As a form of communication that enables international reach as well as two-way interactions, social media has become a popular mode for CSR marketing (Yang, Chunterawong, & Pugdeethosapol, 2021; Chu, Chen, & Gan, 2020; Cho, Furey, & Mohr, 2017). As Stohl et al. (2017) noted, social media gives brands using CSR better involvement, engagement, and dialogue with its stakeholders. Brands have used social media to push their messaging by giving individuals the ability to share their thoughts with their family and friends in a way to push the brands' CSR messaging in the process (Chu, Chen, & Gan, 2020). As Noland (2020) put forth, this is just like after the ALS ice bucket challenge or the changing of the profile pictures after the Paris terrorist attack in which social media drives slacktivism in the

way individuals can just like or retweet a post. While brands have received negative public opinion in their use of some CSR tactics, the practice is still going strong no matter the allegations of “greenwashing” and being ingenuine (Cho, Furey, & Mohr, 2017; Lyon et al., 2013). Ultimately, social media has given CSR a platform for brands to share their message internationally and given them the ability to have a two-way dialogue with their consumers. As Pardun (2014) noted, the practice of brands enlisting and utilizing public figures as the face of their CRM campaigns is not a new phenomenon. To gain credibility and exposure to their CRM campaign, the use of public figures in CRM campaign is just one of the many ways brands utilise celebrities in their advertising campaigns. Nevertheless, while a brand can help in the social discourse of an issue as well as help raise awareness and finances for this issue, the goal of advertising campaigns is to make money, not “do good” (Pardun, 2014). Thus, while brands utilize public figures and other advertising tactics in the goal to attract consumers to buy their products or their services, Pardun (2014) asked the question “Is it compassion or consumerism?” Regarding brands utilising CRM tactics, it is left to the consumer to determine whether it’s compassion or consumerism.

Berglind and Nakata (2005) explained that while a portion of sales can go towards a selected social cause, it isn’t an explicit rule that for a campaign to be labeled CRM it needs to have financial donations as part of the marketing strategy. Pharr and Lough (2012) added to this by outlining that the purchasing of the service or good of the corporation is just one of the desired outcomes with potential others such as changing customer attitudes towards the brand, increasing loyalty, and/or consumers switching over are companies would choose to implement this marketing practice. This type of CRM would be categorized as “message promotion program” by Berglind and Nakata (2005), who described it as an initiative taken by a corporation

which has the primary aim not of financial gain, but of promoting a social cause using that firms' resources. As part of the bigger Corporate social responsibility category, "business practices" (examples of this would be updating customer relations and modernizing corporate ethical behavior) which Pelozo and Shang (2010) discovered in their analysis of practices that it was the second most used type, just behind "philanthropic" which is the practice most associate with charitable donations through a commercial exchange.

As with many marketing practices that have been in place for decades, multiple names have been associated with the practice of business partaking in partnerships where firms associate themselves with social causes. Berglind and Nakata (2005) highlighted CRM as an evolving business strategy that is still progressing with multiple definitions and labels associated with it, such as "pro-social marketing" and "corporate social marketing" to name a few. Pharr & Lough (2012) highlighted the differences between social marketing and CRM, articulating the latter as more of a business-oriented approach while the former is characterized as more of a social good approach.

An important tool utilised by companies, CRM which is part of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a form of business strategy which can help corporations differentiate themselves from their competition (Christofi et al., 2020; Alcañiz, Cáceres, & Pérez, 2010). Not universally agreed upon as some argue they are two separate entities, for this thesis CRM will be treated as a part of CSR (Sheikh & Beise-Zee, 2011). Part of this strategy is the fact that a business needs to take a socially responsible approach to its business practice, Carrol (1979) outlined that this means the firm needs to fulfill obligations in the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary aspects of its business practices. Thus, CSR is the commitment by companies to better the societal quality of life throughout its business practices (Yang & Hsu, 2017; Sen &

Bhattacharya, 2001). As the world becomes even more connected and firms are battling not only with local business but with international conglomerates, CSR has become a way that corporations can transform themselves (Christofi et al., 2020; Alcañiz, Cáceres, & Pérez, 2010; Brønn & Vrioni, 2001). Additionally, CRM has become the way that companies have communicated their CSR intentions using this marketing practice (Mora & Vila, 2020).

While not an obligation, many organisations have seen positive responses by consumers consequently rewarding firms who take the initiative of CRS with “pro-company behavior” which entails purchasing its products and brand loyalty to name a few (Baskentli et al., 2019; Mohr, Webb, & Harris, 2001). On the other hand, there’s skepticism of firms which utilize CSR for only financial benefits and don’t want companies to use social causes to benefit their bottom lines (Alcañiz, Cáceres, & Pérez, 2010). Reasoning being that the end goal of CSR is still the purchasing of an organization's product or service; accordingly, consumers don’t want to be cheated into a purchase that used a social cause just for the firm's own self-interest (Yang & Hsu, 2017).

Another vital aspect of CSR is the mitigation of negative public opinion after a harmful event that can damage an organizations’ corporate image (Klein & Dawar, 2004). As highlighted in the previous section, Nike has suffered bad publicity in its past regarding its manufacturing of products in third world countries. Hence, optimizing this approach such as Volkswagen, United Airlines, and BP who went through a crisis and had to use some form of positive public relations to salvage their brand identities in their respected crisis (Handley, 2017).

In terms of CSR for Nike, the company has used this business strategy in the past mostly for one of the key benefits CSR provides, which is to help restore corporate image after a scandal (Kim et al., 2020; Epstein-Reeves, 2010; Boje & Khan, 2009). Not a stranger to this approach,

the swoosh brand has used it the past in its Livestrong campaign with professional cyclist Lance Armstrong which supports cancer research as well as releasing pro-hijab commercials with sport Nike hijabs (Bahwainwala & O'Connor, 2019; Berglind & Nakata, 2005). Epstein-Reeve (2010) even called Nike the parent of CSR for its handling of the unfavorable publicity surrounding its use of sweatshops in Asian countries. One example is the backlash Nike suffered in the 1990s' when it came to light that their soccer balls were made with child labour in impoverished countries (Boje & Khan, 2009). In the end, Nike is still a multi-billion-dollar company with year-over-year growth, which means that their efforts paid off successfully with consumers still buying Nike branded garments and soccer balls.

Summary

In this chapter, both former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick and the American sporting manufacturing giant, Nike, were examined in terms of their roles in “Dream Crazy,” which became a controversial advertising campaign released by Nike starring Kaepernick. Furthermore, a brief history of black athletes’ protests against racial injustice, as well as the creation of the Black Lives Matters movement were detailed to help place this study into a broader socio-cultural and historical context. All this information was presented to help the reader better understand the fact that this campaign was released in a politically divided country in which African American individuals have suffered injustice for decades just because of the colour of their skin. Hence, the reasoning behind the outcry and boldness of how one of the biggest American companies would collaborate with a controversial individual even after being publicly attacked by the President of the United States of America.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

In this section of this thesis, the research design and methods chosen for this study are detailed, and the rationale and justification for these choices considering the exploratory nature of this study is also laid out. To help guide this study, the choice of creating a research question was taken to better help guide the thesis into the goal of this research which is to gain better insight into the “Dream Crazy” campaign and its impact on CRM and CSR marketing ethos. More specifically this thesis is looking into.

The main research questions this study addresses was split into two sub-research questions to help focus on the two main research points of this thesis:

RQ: Why would Nike select Colin Kaepernick as their official spokesperson for their 30th anniversary of the “Just Do It” campaign considering the controversy surrounding his protest movement?

SUB-1: How does the Nike campaign utilising the controversial Colin Kaepernick benefit Nike in terms of achieving greater sales and how does the partnership with Kaepernick benefit his desire for awareness to racial equality?

SUB-2: How does the use of prominent racial equality activist Colin Kaepernick and the use of the slogan “believe in something even if it means sacrificing everything” drive cause-related marketing in terms of Nike positioning itself as a supporter of equal rights in the eyes of their target market?

Exploratory Approach

Drawing on the work of Stebbins (2002), the design of this study was strongly informed by exploration. *Exploration* is a distinctive way of conducting social science and is characterized

by an emphasis on flexibility and the biographically specific interests of an investigator. More specifically, exploration is a “broad- ranging, purposive, systematic, prearranged undertaking designed to maximize the discovery of generalizations leading to description and understanding of an area of social or psychological life” (Stebbins, 2001, p. 4). In this manner, “the emergent generalizations are many and varied; they include the descriptive facts, folk concepts, cultural artifacts, structural arrangements, social processes, and beliefs and belief systems normally found there.” Exploratory research is undertaken to create a rich description of a distinct phenomenon and to produce generalizations about the group or process under study (Stebbins, 2001; Lowes & Awde, 2015). As Reiter (2013) explained it, exploratory research “refers to the very domain of what can be detected, described, and explained” (p.11).

In this sense, exploration is undertaken to create a rich description of a distinct phenomenon and to produce generalizations about the group or process under study (Stebbins, 2001; Lowes & Awde, 2015). As Reiter (2013) explained it, exploratory research “refers to the very domain of what can be detected, described, and explained” (p.11). The conceptual approach taken for this study is motivated by an overarching concern to explore the NFL’s crisis communication efforts during the concussion crisis. As little is known about how the League changed its crisis communication strategies since it was recognized to have denied the concussion crisis for decades, a qualitative exploratory case study was chosen for this research endeavour. As Stebbins (2001) explained it, “researchers explore when they have little or no scientific knowledge about the group, process, activity, or situation they want to examine” (p.5).

Case Study Design

A case study is a research design used to generate an in-depth, multi-faceted understanding of a complex issue in its real-life context. It is an established research design that is used extensively in a wide variety of disciplines, particularly in the social sciences. While there are many definitions of a case study, the central tenet is the need to explore an event or phenomenon in depth and in its natural context. It is for this reason sometimes referred to as a "naturalistic" design; this contrasts with an "experimental" design (such as a randomized controlled trial) in which the investigator seeks to exert control over and manipulate the variable(s) of interest.

In their broadest application in the social sciences and humanities, case studies can be used to explain, describe or explore events or phenomena in the everyday contexts in which they occur (Yin, 2009). These can, for example, help to understand and explain causal links and pathways resulting from a new policy initiative or service development. In contrast to experimental designs, which seek to test a specific hypothesis through deliberately manipulating the environment, the case study approach lends itself well to capturing information on more explanatory 'how', 'what' and 'why' questions. This in turn can help develop and refine theory.

A case study is “the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (Stake, 1995). Case studies can thus be used to describe an intervention and the real-life context in which it occurs (Yin, 2009). This method is often used to increase the understanding of a particular event and to provide a detailed description of the situation under study (MacNealy, 1997). Case studies are a method of choice when a researcher has no control over the studied contemporary event (Yin, 2009). Case studies are frequently used in risk and crisis research as they can be used in numerous instances to

contribute to the knowledge of individual, organizational, social, and related phenomena (Yin, 2009). Case studies are used in risk and crisis research to provide insight into the specific courses of action that are taken by an entity during a crisis. They can also be used to evaluate the effectiveness of theoretical frameworks by testing them against real-life crises (Walton & Williams, 2011). Numerous researchers also argue for the use of case studies in organizational communication research as it enables to connect academia and praxis by providing practitioners with more “strategic input into business decisions” (Stacks & Michaelson, 2010).

As empirical focus of this study is on a single advertising campaign, the choice was made to utilise the case study method which, as Yin (2018) put it, will give a thorough and “real-world” insight to be able to answer the how and why of contemporary social events such as the recent Nike campaign. The reason to conduct case study research is to gain understanding in a “real-life” context of a certain real-world situation in a rigorous manner (Thomas G., 2017: Tight, 2017). As such, Simons (2009) defined the case study method as a “process of conducting systematic, critical inquiry into a phenomenon of choice and generating understanding to contribute to cumulative public knowledge of the topic” (p.7). Also, the case study is empirical research to understand a modern phenomenon when boundaries between the phenomenon and context aren’t clearly defined (Simons, 2009). Thus, as the research outcome sought by this thesis is to be able to gain insight into the “Dream crazy” campaign to make it generalizable and to be able to join the body of CSR/CRM literature.

Qualitative Thematic Analysis

Qualitative thematic analysis method was used to analyze Nike’s “Dream Crazy” advertising campaign, featuring Colin Kaepernick as its centerpiece. Thematic analysis is a

qualitative research tool used to conduct data analysis. It is used to uncover themes and patterns of meaning across a set of data, producing a detailed portrait of a particular group of themes within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this manner thematic analysis is a useful qualitative tool to identify, analyze and report themes within data.

Thematic analysis was chosen for this study due to the flexibility of this research tool. Thematic analysis can be used in a flexible way as it is compatible with various research paradigms and theoretical approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As Reiter (2013) argued, “a pure exploration that starts from scratch is impossible” (p.4). Theory allows to “simplify, isolate, and focus on particular aspects of a reality that, taken as a whole, is far too complex and contingent to be captured and explained” (Reiter, 2013). Reiter goes on to suggest that the only option we have as researchers is then to “explicate our theoretical framework and take them into consideration” (Reiter, 2013). In a similar vein, Zhou and Heim (2016) also observed that thematic analysis “allows prior theories and deductive research aims to guide analysis, rather than relying solely on the data collected” (p.584).

Numerous scholars applying their field of research to sports have also used thematic analysis. Amongst other studies, thematic analysis was used to study team resilience in elite sport (Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013), to research how the media portrayed the career of world champion boxers (Bonhomme et al., 2020), to determine the relationship between university sports participation and alcohol consumption (Zhou & Heim, 2016), and to assess FIFA’s attempt at image repair throughout their corruption crisis (Onwumechili & Bedeau, 2017). This study, in its design and execution, follows this approach and tests the core theoretical concepts of situational crisis communication theory and the buffering effect against the case of the National Football League’s concussion crisis.

The flexibility of thematic analysis comes from the absence of a specific, constrained methodology when using this analytical tool. However, in the objective of creating a reliable methodological framework when using thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke (2006) created a six-step process. They noted that qualitative analysis guidelines are not rules, and a researcher must adopt a flexible approach to methodology in order to remain coherent with their study's research questions and data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Researchers using this thematic analysis should therefore (1) familiarize themselves with the data, (2) generate codes, (3) search for themes, (4) review themes, (5) define and name themes and (6) produce a report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This methodology was followed in this study.

In terms of data collection procedure, the choice was made to analyse newspaper articles as they were identified as having the best ability to give this thesis a broader scope of opinions as they give access to opinions from all around the world and from multiple different political/social ideologies. In other words, newspaper texts enabled access to a documentary record of the opinions of conservative and liberal minded media outlets to give differentiating opinions and views towards the "Dream Crazy" campaign. Additionally, newspapers can give international perspectives as this thesis observed publications from not only Canadian sources but American, British, and French publications. Also, by including editorials and columns in the research it did provide some individuals views regarding the campaign itself.

For the approach taken for the collection of newspaper articles, this thesis utilised databases as they gave access to articles from multiple news outlets. As for the search requirements, a selection of key words was identified as helping dwindled down the number of articles from the databases to ones that were more optimal for this thesis. Regarding the databases utilised for this thesis, ProQuest, Factiva and Google news were identified as giving

access to the most articles. Lastly, a subscription to The Boston Globe was done to give access to its articles. These key words were “Nike” and “Colin Kaepernick” to make sure that the articles covered both parties and didn’t just talk about one or the other. Additionally, only articles published from September 1st, 2018, to September 1st, 2019. This timeline was selected as it gave the opportunity to examine articles published prior to the airing of the super bowl commercial when rumours of the partnership were leaked, as well as months after the airing. Lastly, if the same article was distributed by multiple newspapers under the same Media conglomerate such as PostMedia, only one article would be included in the research.

In a pre-test preliminary analysis, fifty articles were analysed to help identify key subject lines, actors, and opinions. This way, when the formal research for this thesis was conducted, these elements helped categorise each article and helped analyse and different articles from one another. In all, seven major categories were identified with names such as “Donald Trump”, “Nike”, and “Colin Kaepernick”. Thus, this helped streamline the research process. In total 130 articles were analysed for this thesis, which includes the preliminary 50 articles. For this thesis, no separation between articles written by journalists or by columnist as they would have both been published by the newspaper and thus could have been read by the newspaper’s readers. Furthermore, as times have evolved, many individuals now read only the digital versions of newspapers. Thus, articles could be print or digital versions to qualify for this thesis. In analysing the articles for this thesis, as previously described, a series of major categories were recognized and filled with important subject lines and trends that were identified in the primary research phase of this thesis. A table was created with the identified seven major categories as well as sub-points for each. When an article mentioned one of the points it was marked down.

Simultaneously, quotes from articles were taken and put into a separate database to be inserted into this thesis as direct quotes to add context.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section of the thesis is separated into sections corresponding to key themes that were identified during the research phase of this thesis. Drawing on both international and domestic newspapers as well as ones in two languages, provide insight into how the controversial ad starring Colin Kaepernick was interpreted by consumers, journalists, and industry experts. These data illustrate how the Nikes “Dream Crazy” campaign was interpreted and more importantly how this can be used in future marketing campaigns using cause-related marketing as a strategy. Thus, giving a case study for future CSR and CRM research in which researchers can draw upon for reference and comparison.

Through analysis of data, several key themes and topics reoccurring were identified; the following section of the thesis will be separated into subsections by theme/topic. Finally, each section will end with an analysis section which will take the information gathered from examining the newspaper articles and will investigate how the Nike “Dream Crazy” commercial was interpreted and how this could affect corporate social responsibility/cause-related marketing.

Colin Kaepernick

A controversial figure that caused uproar from individuals including President Trump who believed this action disrespected the country (Hoffmann et al., 2020; Boykoff & Carrington, 2019). Colin Kaepernick garnered much coverage by the press in their coverage for the Nike commercial “Dream Crazy”, journalists highlighted the outcry both positive and negative from

individuals centered around the inclusion of the controversial athlete. Yet as Nike's Vice-President of brand for North America Gina Fisanotti said in an interview "we believe Colin is one of the most inspirational athletes of this generation, who has leveraged the power of sports to help move the world forward" (Raskin, 2018). Additionally, a report suggested that some Nike executives didn't fully believe in the partnership with Kaepernick with one sentence detailing "The New York Times said on Thursday that it spoke to two Nike insiders with information about a high-level meeting where executives came close to cutting ties with Kaepernick" (Bostock, 2018a). In fact, the *New York Times* report itself goes deeper in stating that "in the summer of 2017, a debate raged in Nike's headquarters in Beaverton, Ore., over whether to cut loose the controversial, unemployed quarterback – the company very nearly did" (Creswell, Draper, & Maheshwari, 2018). Hence, while the campaign was one that on the surface looked unified and an authentic partnership between Kaepernick and Nike. Under the surface, Nike saw the potential of controversy in being associated with Kaepernick. Yet, as a company with shareholders, Nike also saw the potential that partnering with Kaepernick would do for them.

In terms of the reporting on the anthem protest itself, many articles simply identified it as "anthem protest" or a variation of this with articles not taking a deep dive into the social and political aspects *underlying* the protest. This can be seen in sentences like the one by Beaton (2018), who writes "the anthem protest by NFL players have been criticized by President Trump and a hot-button on social media"; and by Green (2018), writing "kneeling during the national anthem which he did in 2016 to protest racial injustice and police brutality." This example from Green depicts a trend that journalists utilised that was categorising the reasoning behind Kaepernick's anthem protest on the lines of fighting against "racial injustice and police brutality". This can be seen the articles by Graham Rapier (2018) when talking about the

backlash Nike received for supporting Kaepernick as “it (Nike) faced backlash for supporting Kaepernick amid his protest against racial injustice and police brutality” and by Wang & Siegel (2018) “NFL quarterback who generated controversy for kneeling during the U.S. national anthem to protest racial injustice and police brutality”.

As demonstrated, this could have been for the simple fact that these articles were writing about the Nike commercial starring Colin Kaepernick and not the anthem protest themselves. Moreover, as mentioned in the methodology section of this thesis, the articles analysed were from 2018 when the commercial was released two years after Kaepernick took a knee for the first time to protest police brutality and social injustice. This indicated that the mindset of the media might have been more focused on the commercial itself. However, this mindset becomes hazy when factoring in those articles did in fact mention the protest in the first place and the fact that Kaepernick was a main subject of the articles when the video includes the likes of LeBron James, Serena Williams, one-handed NFL rookie Shaquem Griffin, and Canadian soccer star Alphonso Davies (Boren, 2018). Thus, as a CRM campaign and one that many articles fixated on Colin Kaepernick, it is shown in the research that newspapers were more drawn to Kaepernick and labeling him a controversial figure. While on the other hand, not particularly outlining why he was controversial apart from a simple generic identifier. Hence, while this CRM campaign did bring racial equality and the BLM movement back onto the front pages of newspapers, a question can be asked if it truly helped these movements or just Nike.

Another reoccurring subject line that about a third of all articles shared, was that after two years of battle with the NFL, Colin Kaepernick was still not playing in the league. Nevertheless, Kaepernick was still determined to play in the NFL but was in active legal dispute with the NFL over allegations the league had blackballed him over his political views. However, as fellow

quarterback Tom Brady stated “he was a damn good quarterback. He’s played at a high level and brought his team to Super Bowls. That’s how I feel about him”, he would also state he had “no idea” why Kaepernick was being blackballed from the NFL (Yang, 2017). In terms of the number of articles that touched on this point, only about 20 articles mentioned him being in a current legal battle with the league over this issue.

As a news item with mass coverage, some articles and journalists took a unique stance to report on the campaign which help to distinguish themselves. This came with the use of their tone and rhetoric that came across as more critical and negative to the campaign. These articles can be categorised as taking a more opinionated or sceptical point of view towards the “Dream Crazy” campaign. Yet, the opposite was also discovered in articles such as “standing for the national anthem before a sporting event is no way part of an athletes’ job. Their job is to kick or throw a silly ball into the end zone or net, while getting paid millions of dollars” (Clark, 2018) or “Kaepernick is out of the NFL because in 2016 and 2017 he peacefully protested institutional racism in America...This made some people mad, and the great American conservative attack machine’s engines are already moaning” (Arthur, 2018). However, the trend in writing about the “Dream Crazy” articles was one with a much softer tone with no clearly defined sentiment regarding the opinion of the person writing the article. Nevertheless, there were articles that were published that did attack and questions the morals of Nike/Kaepernick. In most cases however, these were written by columnist or newspapers that were more right leaning in their political ideologies. While not neutral, articles not written by the columnist mostly stuck to the same narrative of detailing that Nike had just released a new segment of their “Just Do It” campaign starring controversial NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick. As highlighted in the research, this campaign was viewed as an authentic collaboration by both newspapers and consumers. Thus,

regarding CRM, Nike achieved the goal that this marketing tactic sets out in benefiting the brands' image in the eyes of the public.

As these examples demonstrate, articles written by a columnist did dive deeper into the narrative and reasoning behind this campaign in a way to be able to share more properly their true sentiments with their readers. Lastly, another negative trend was discovered in the research, this one in headlines such as "Nike hit by protest after backing NFL Knee' star - Protesters called for a boycott of Nike after it chose Colin Kaepernick" (The Financial Times, 2018). This follows a trend in which the headlines themselves were written in a more eye-catching manner than the articles themselves. To gain readers attention, this type of eye-catching writing style is demonstrated in the following two examples "Nike ads to feature embattled quarterback Kaepernick; Ex-49er led national-anthem protest, will take part in renewed 'Just Do It' campaign" (Beaton, 2018a) and this one as well "Nike ignited a firestorm of fury with its new Colin Kaepernick ad, but it's still a brilliant strategy" (Green, 2018a).

Another element of the "Dream Crazy" campaign that was shared by articles was the slogan which was "Believe in something, even if it means sacrificing everything". The tag line put in Colin Kaepernick's tweet that featured this slogan as well as a black and white photo of him which subsequently became the most retweeted the day it was released (Baranyai, 2018). Discovered in researching for this thesis, nearly half of all the articles analyzed for this thesis shared the slogan which is associated with Kaepernick's real life struggles of being blackballed by the NFL. As a spokesperson said about Kaepernick on why they chose the NFL player for their new "Just Do it" campaign, "nobody represented that quite like Mr. Kaepernick" (Beaton, 2018b). As an article written by Wang & Siegel (2018) noted that the slogan as experts say is a way for Nike to represent its core values to its consumers going on to say, "Nike has claimed the

fight for racial equality as a tenet of its mission”. This worked very well according to Cathal Kelly of *The Globe and Mail* who referred to the tag line as a “moment in time” in the marking ethos (Kelly, 2018).

Kaepernick as well gained support in the form of tweets by prominent athletes and celebrities who shared their support for the quarterback. This includes the likes of LeBron James, Tom Brady, and Kevin Durant (Mahoney, 2018; Taylor, 2018). Yet not every celebrity supported the campaign with the like of Fox news host Sean Hannity who said that not Kaepernick or Nike knew the true meaning of “sacrificing everything” (Rabinovich, 2018). Additionally, Hannity wasn’t the only Fox news celebrity to talk about the campaign in a negative light with Tucker Carlson saying that it is an attack on the US that will destroy American society, while calling Kaepernick a “helpless kid” (Relman, 2018). However, many celebrity endorsements shared by the articles in the research were positive coming from celebrities from all sectors including sports, movies, music, and even politicians.

Regarding CRM, the inclusion of Colin Kaepernick in the 30th anniversary edition of “Just Do It” made for as Smith & Higgins (2000) refer to as a win-win situation as Nike did received publicity for the campaign, while simultaneously Kaepernick went back into the spotlight regarding not only his dismissal from the NFL but his anthem protest with the reason behind it. Also, as Berglund & Nakata (2005) described, CRM does not need to seek financial incentive and can in some cases promoting a social cause using that firms’ resources while helping differentiate the brand from its competitors. Yet as mentioned, articles didn’t give substantial information on either racial equality or the BLM focusing mostly on Kaepernick and Nike.

Ultimately, the partnership with Colin Kaepernick is what makes the 30th anniversary of “Just Do It” a CRM campaign. Additionally, the inclusion of other famous athletes such as LeBron James and Serena Williams just adds to the narrative set out for this campaign of not necessarily selling Nike apparel, but to inspire youth to dream big. Nikes’ primary market are individuals under the age of 35 and their partnership with Kaepernick can be seen as beneficial for the brand in selling more apparel. Thus, this is Nike positioning themselves as a brand that stands for racial equality in the minds of their consumers. As Ries & Trout (2000) note, positioning is a selection project which brands need to select the most memorable material that has the best chance of sticking in the minds of their consumers. The partnership between Nike and Kaepernick is a strong business move by the former. However, it also did benefit Kaepernick in putting himself back on the front page even if it was to talk mostly about him.

People burning their Nike branded apparel in protest

As a public debate began on the use of the controversial Kaepernick in Nike campaign began, individuals who disagreed with the inclusion of the anthem protest organiser took to social media to demonstrate their anger towards Nike. Protesters took to social media to demonstrate their displeasure for Nike’s inclusion of Kaepernick in their latest “Just Do it” campaign by torching their branded apparel on social media. As one article put it, “sneakers, shirts, sweatshirts, hats...all of it stamped with the iconic Nike logo ...up in smoke. Polyester to ashes. Dust to dust. swooshes to cinders” (Dupont, 2018). On this same point, Gay (2018) observes with respect to the anthem protest that “nothing that's happened so far is a surprise: not the social media meltdown starting on Labor Day, not the calls for boycotts; not the mush-mouthed statement from NFL leadership; not the grumpy a.m. tweet from the President of the

United States”. Even if this is the case, it didn’t stop individuals to share their sentiments with lines such as “not only am I burning my favourite pair of Nikes, you’re burning your sales” or “hope you’re happy. Those are all of my Nike shirts that just went up in flames” (Brodeur, 2018).

In analysing the articles that mentioned the burning of Nike apparel, the commonality was the fact that for the most part they highlighted the negative feedback in a paragraph by pairing the individuals burning their Nike apparel with the negative feedback by President Trump. The digital versions of the articles or made for the internet did include pictures and tweets from angered consumers. These angered tweets, which included the hashtag #JustBurnIt, included examples such as tweet with the caption “first the @NFL forces me to choose between my favourite sport and my country. I chose country. Then @Nike forces me to choose between my favourite shoes and my country. Since when did the American Flag and the National Anthem become offensive?” with the tweet accompanied by a video of its author burning their Nike shoes (Bostock, 2018b). In another tweet, an individual posted a video of them burning multiple pairs of Nike shoes with the National Anthem playing in the background with the caption “.@Nike Due to your support of C.K. in your coming ads, I as an American can no longer support your company. #boycottNike #IStandForOurFlag” (Ibid).

One tweet which received a great deal of media attention was the one by John Rich of the country duo “Big and Rich” who tweeted “our soundman just cut the Nike swoosh off his socks. Former marine. Get ready @Nike multiply that by the millions.” This is accompanied by the picture in question of him holding cut Nike socks (Fortin & Haag, 2018; Maaddi, 2018; Mahoney, 2018; Tiwari, 2018). Lastly, while not burning their Nike apparel others past consumers did express their displeasure with quotes like “guess what my son is not getting for

school this year...No more Nike purchases by this Patriotic Mom!” or “just bought a pair of Nikes yesterday not knowing about this, but now will be returning them!” (Taylor, 2018a).

In examining the demographics of the Nike consumer base, a picture can be made into some of the rationale behind the reasoning why Nike would have seen their partnership with Colin Kaepernick viable. As a *Washington Post* poll revealed that 63% of respondents believed it was “never” appropriate to protest by kneeling, while people under the age of 30 who are Nike’s major consumers as 67% of the swoosh brands buyers are under the age of 35, responded the same question with only 38% agreeing with the statement (Barro, 2018; Green, 2018b; Novy-Williams, 2018). Another poll this one conducted by the *Wall Street Journal/NBC News* received 43% approval for the national anthem protests, while isolating individuals under the age of 34 this number jumped to 56% (Beaton & Safdar, 2018b). Thus, while a vocal group of individuals took to social media to voice their opinions which garnered the media’s attention with over half of all the articles analysed mentioning the “shoe burnings”, these individuals take up a smaller percentage of what would be considered as the core Nike buyers.

Nike apparel isn’t the first-time angered consumers took to social media to burn their garments in protest to a brands political statement, as in 2016 individuals burned their New Balance shoes when they learned that the company supported the stance taken by the Trump administration on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (Brodeur, 2018; Mettler, 2016). Indeed, the Nike shoe burnings can be categorised as a 180 degree turn in terms of the individuals who were burning their New Balance shoes, are now on the side mocking the individuals burning Nike apparel. Moreover, journalists asked the question, why are people burning their shoes in the first place? As Michael Andor Brodeur (2018) summed up “so why set your own clothes on fire?... Apologies...I actually have no idea. It makes about as much practical sense as burning your

lunch to fight hunger”. Bruce Arthur (2018) categorised them as “angry conservative dudes who take time out from grilling some burgers to embarrass themselves by burning their Nikes on the lawn”.

Of all the documents analyzed for this study, nearly half of the articles mentioned in some form individuals burning their Nike garments with many articles fully dedicated on the individuals burning their garments with pictures and their negative tweets included in the articles themselves. Moreover, in researching the articles for this thesis it was noted that articles did include the Nike burnings in their titles in order to capture audiences. Additionally, the burning of Nike apparel became an important subject matter that was covered by just over a third of the articles which was covered by multiple News outlets and journalists. Ultimately, this and the backlash brought on by the negative comments brought on by President Trump were the two main negative elements that Nike/Kaepernick suffered through the release of the “Dream Crazy” campaign.

Regarding cause-related marketing, as Pharr & Lough (2012) noted, a key objective of CRM is to change attitude towards the company and create brand loyalty. As demonstrated, the “Dream Crazy” campaign was covered in articles detailing how retailers saw an increase in sells from the press coverage it received (Safdar, 2018). Additionally, articles demonstrated the positive views some individuals had on the inclusion of Kaepernick in the commercial with accounts of consumers going so far as buying Nike items just to demonstrate their support for the brand (Safdar, 2018; Shah, 2018). This goes hand in hand with another of the primary goals of CRM which is to encourage purchase of a company's products over their competitor by differentiating themselves. While protestors were on social media burning their garments for the world to see, as articles did make a point to say these individuals made up a small percentage of

Nike's customer base. This isn't to say that the campaign was a success with the likes of President Trump and as mentioned individuals burning their Nike apparel becoming mainstream news. Yet, journalists highlighted Nikes' controversial past of supporting social and political causes that were not universally accepted by all Americans.

In the end as a cause-related marketing campaign, "Dream Crazy" garnered publicised hatred for its message and support of a controversial figure. However, it also placed the national spotlight back onto Colin Kaepernick and his protest with the campaign making it onto the mainstream news market for a few days at least re-putting Kaepernick's' message into everyone minds for at least a few days' news cycle.

Nike and Authenticity

As Andrew Hill (2018) of *The Financial Times* put it, Nike is just being consistent in their marketing and public relation imaging by collaborating with Kaepernick. This is the brand who had outspoken former NBA star Charles Barkley, state in a Nike commercial "I am not a role model" (Cosentino, 2019; Joseph, 2012; Hill, 2018; Burton, Farrelly, & Quester, 2000). Another example of this mindset is by Bruce Arthur (2018) who said, "it should be remembered that Nike is not your friend, and not your leader. It is trying to protect its flank from the lifestyle-cool-triangulation of rival Adidas, whose market share in North America is vastly outpacing Nike's, even though Nike has triple the sales". Thus, the pairing of the controversial Kaepernick with Nike a brand who has stuck by the likes of Tiger Woods and John McEnroe, isn't all that astonishing (Kim, 2020; Williams, 2019: Burton, Farrelly, & Quester, 2000). In fact, Nike signed Dennis Rodman, a controversial basketball player who was notorious for his antics off and on the court, such as attacking a cameraman (Burton, Farrelly, & Quester, 2000). This from the brand

that in 1988 released their “Just Do It” campaign; inspired by the last words of serial killer Gary Gilmore just before being executed by firing squad (Meyer, 2019; Nazario & Roach, 2015).

Thus, Kaepernick is just one of several controversial athletes and actions committed by Nike.

A reoccurring opinion that columnists shared was that this campaign was calculated with the backlash by both angered consumers and President Trump was expected (Gay, 2018; Hill, 2018). As per Bruce Philp (2018), “they needn't have worried. I suspect this will turn out to be one of those Nike masterstrokes that have kept the brand's street cred burnished for three decades... As brand risks go, this one is quantifiable, lying as it does along a tragically familiar American cultural fault line”. Journalists used other examples as well to demonstrate how the “Dream Crazy” campaign aligned with Nike’s brand image. These include the swoosh brand tweet of “you can take the superhero out of her costume, but you can never take away her superpowers” in response to the French open banning Serena Williams black cat suit (Harrington, 2018).

Nike had many reasons to release this type of marketing campaign with journalists highlighting this in a subdued way in praising Nike in its boldness while simultaneously saying there might be an ulterior motive to why the swoosh brand would partner with Kaepernick. For example, this quote that praised the campaign while still warning consumers it was calculated, “Nike’s decision to make the American football player Colin Kaepernick one of the faces of its 30th anniversary “Just do it” campaign is a bold, overtly political move but also a shrewd – and consistent – commercial calculation” (Hill, 2018). Another example of this offered by Winkler (2018), who demonstrated that while risking a part of its consumer base, it will grow its primary target market “even if the controversy over the ads grows, Nike's risk is limited. The company may lose some of its older, white customers who ruined their sneakers and socks by cutting out

logos, but it is right to bet that younger, more progressive buyers are its future.” As Philp (2018) summed up, “it's virtually certain that the company knows the politics of its customers as intimately as it knows where they live and how they play. And it is a public company, after all; if Nike took a chance such as this, it did after conducting market research and an understanding that it would be a financially sound move that would generate sales.

The notion of a calculated and well researched campaign is compounded by the fact that articles brought up the fact that this is the age of boycotts with the Nike shoe burning just falling into the list of other politically fuelled boycotts by consumers. As per Adam Kirsh (2018), this is just another in what he calls “the latest in a long series of boycotts that have been announced and then just as quickly forgotten.” He then goes on listing examples of recent short-lived boycotts such as In-N-Out Burger, Dicks Sporting Goods, and New Balance. One angle taken by Scott Stinson writing in the *Edmonton Journal* (2018) questions the entire notion of the Nike boycott and boycotts in general (p. B.3). He wrote: “The social media outcry, with the burning of Nike shoes and socks and the dreaded boycott hashtag, was as inevitable... It does make you wonder what would have happened if it was, say, Ford that put the former San Francisco 49ers quarterback in its ads. Would the people burning their Air Jordan’s be taking a sledgehammer to their F-150s?”. Lastly, an article in the *Wall Street Journal* featured a professor of management who studied more than 140 boycotts, explained that “consumers aren't as consistent with their behaviors and beliefs as we think... People who say they've boycotted a product might not be in the market for buying that product anyway” (Safdar, 2018). Taken together, these examples demonstrate that not only did Nike assume a part of their customer base would boycott the brand after the airing of the commercial, but that as history demonstrates most boycotts are temporary knee jerk reactions. As the Washington Post poll highlighted, Nike understood that over 65% of

individuals under the age of 35 agreed with the stance they took (Barro, 2018). As such, it wasn't a surprise to columnists nor Nike that most individuals would have favored the partnership with Kaepernick. In analysing the research conducted for this thesis, while the negative sentiments of the President and others was mentioned by over half of all publications, the positive feedback and media coverage that Nike received outweighed the #Nikeboycott movement that trended on Twitter for a few days.

History cannot be forgotten that Nike almost cut its ties with the controversial Kaepernick, in fact many executives of the company saw issues in supporting an out-of-work quarterback with a controversial background (Creswell, Draper, & Maheshwari, 2018). Along this line of thinking, both columnists and journalists analyzed here questioned the authenticity behind Nike's collaboration with Kaepernick. Thus, the "Dream Crazy" campaign was often portrayed as a stereotypical Nike advertisement which matched their previous bold marketing strategy. Another theme identified in the data shows a skeptical narrative by questioning the morals behind the advertisement. As one columnist puts it, "instead of launching a bland campaign...Nike sized up a controversial issue, chose a side and will seek to cultivate sales there. The move might turn out to be a cynical marketing stunt, but it's still significant" (Campbell, 2018). Another columnist remarked, "to be clear, Nike recruited Kaepernick - and set out to differentiate its brand by taking sides in the culture wars - for one reason: to sell products. But they also did so with a very clear understanding of their customer base" (Burnett, 2018). However, one reporter asked the question, "Has Nike decided to follow the example of Colin Kaepernick, the controversial NFL quarterback, and "believe in something, even if it means sacrificing everything," as he puts it? Or has the company calculated that generating some buzz would help reinvigorate a brand that was at risk of losing its spark?" (Winkler, 2018). In all these

quotes, the messaging is similar: that Nike saw an opportunity to make money by utilising Colin Kaepernick as the figurehead for their next “Just Do it” campaign.

Simultaneously, another issue that emerged from the data analysis concerned Nike being truly authentic. This is caused by the fact that in the past the brand did use cause related marketing as a tool in reducing negative publicity with respect to their allegedly illegal business practices. In fact, as articles pointed out Nike was involved in a crisis in which executives of the company departed on the grounds of inappropriate workplace behavior (Beaton, 2018b; Wells, 2018). Additionally, Nike has had issues in the past with the use of sweatshops and other questionable business practices that came up in articles when referring to some of the motivation behind the “Dream Crazy” campaign. Summed up by Tim Gow (2018) as, “his detractors (Kaepernick) are enraged at his commercial tie-in with a company that has been accused of using sweatshops to make their goods and accounting schemes to avoid tax” or by Michael Andor Brodeur (2018) of *The Boston Globe* speaking on how Nike will fare on the backlash they received “they’ll be fine. (Or at least, better than the people who made less than pennies making the sneakers you’re setting on fire.)”. Thus, while journalists did question the partnership of Nike and Kaepernick in the light of some of Nike's past negative business behaviours, they made up of less than 10 articles of the research base for this thesis.

Analysing the greater picture of the motive behind why Nike would release the “Dream Crazy” campaign, the notion that this was an attempt from the brand to mitigate negative publicity it was receiving. As the research of Guèvremont & Grohmann (2018) demonstrated, this would be a strategic move as they had found brands with a perceived “authentic” persona that got clemency by consumers in times of crisis. Moreover, this has the added benefit of making the brand seem more trustworthy (Portal, Abratt, & Bendixen, 2019; Eggers et al., 2013).

In all, this means that the collaboration between Nike and Kaepernick was one that helped Nikes' reputation as the research demonstrated that the brand received mostly positive feedback with very little mentions of its prior illegal activities. Additionally, the research demonstrated that the release of a CRM campaign such as "Dream Crazy" as Guèvremont & Grohmann (2018) noted, will indeed benefit a brands image in the eyes of consumers.

One comparison made by journalists was the comparison of Nike's "Dream Crazy" campaign to the botched 2017 Pepsi commercial starring Kendal Jenner. Journalists point out that for people to believe in your messaging it needs to be felt as genuine... in other words it needs to feel authentic (Baranyai, 2018; Burnett, 2018; Philp, 2018). As Jo Ellison (2018), Pepsi released a "Woke" Kendall Jenner campaign that was pulled because "it seemed so ingenuous". The comparison is understandable as both commercials featured prominent political ideologies, the difference as journalists point out was that Nike seemed more genuine while the Pepsi one felt as Robin Baranyai calls it "devoid of passion" (Baranyai, 2018; Burnett, 2018; Philp, 2018). For context, the Pepsi commercial in question centered around Kendal Jenner in a non-specified protest who hands a can of Pepsi to a police officer whose part of a barricade which causes the entire crowd to cheer and seemingly solve all the issues they were in the streets protesting (Baranyai, 2018). Hence, while the Pepsi commercial seemed to just hop onto the social bandwagon, Nike for their part made the commercial more genuine even emotional with-it slogan "Believe in something, even if it means sacrificing everything".

In looking at authentic marketing, one can see that "Dream Crazy" for the most part was labeled as an authentic partnership between Nike and Kaepernick. While this is the case, Nike is a company with shareholders who at their forefront are making profits. As the research depicted, individuals are more likely to buy from a brand that they deemed being authentic. This was

demonstrated by the fact that consumers lined up to buy Nike apparel in support of the swoosh's partnership with Kaepernick (Beaton & Safdar, 2018b). This goes hand in hand with what Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry (2003) explained when they said that brands are trying to carve out a brand "essence" made up of the core elements that make the brands unique to its consumers. This can be seen as Nike positioning themselves as a brand that stands for social justice giving the Swoosh the desired brand image of advocates for social change.

As highlighted by journalist, this isn't the first risky advertisement or controversial stance Nike has taken on a hotly debated social issue. This has made the brand in the eyes of consumers as a brand which takes political/social stances on issues its consumers care about. Therefore, Nike has positioned itself as a brand that stands for the values of its consumers even if it means being attacked by individuals for taking a stand for what they believe is right. However, Yang, Chunterawong, & Pugdeethosapol (2021) did demonstrate in their research the power of social media in CSR marketing regarding BLM as brands using black influencers received more positive feedback than posts with non-black influencers. Thus, while brands can support the BLM movement, it is a profitable and buzz-worthy stance to draw consumers.

In a *New York Times* article details how Nike's marketing firm (Wieden & Kennedy) which they have used for decades pushed for the use of Kaepernick with a designer at the firm stating, "Nike agreed to it. We made it. Colin posted it. People lost it" (Creswell, Draper, & Maheshwari, 2018). This from a marketing firm that convince Nikes' skeptic founders on advertising as Phil Knight the brands founder introducing himself to one advertiser as "Hi, I'm Phil Knight, and I hate advertising" (Kim, 2020). A good question to ask would hence be, how much of the "Dream Crazy" campaign was Wieden & Kennedy influenced and how much was Nike influenced. Yet, as mentioned the partnership between Nike and Kaepernick at one point

was in jeopardy coming to a pre-mature end. However, it was saved by Nigel Powell the head of communications for Nike, when he had gotten word that Nike executives were contemplating cutting Kaepernick and argued that Nike would face backlash as people would see Nike siding with the NFL rather than Kaepernick (Creswell, Draper, & Maheshwari, 2018). In the end, Nike has a target market that are under the age of 35 and over 50% of them support kneeling while protesting (Barro, 2018; Green, 2018b; Novy-Williams, 2018). The brand had an understanding before the release of the “Dream Crazy” campaign on how the media and consumers would interpret its release. While Nike did receive backlash for their partnership with Kaepernick, they did so knowingly and benefited in sales and media coverage that outweighed the few days of negative publicity.

Nike

Focusing on the Nike brand itself, the research discovered that the main focal point for many articles was the greater picture of the “Dream Crazy” campaign. This means that issues such as who is Nike, and their past wasn’t top of the agenda. Additionally, less than 10 articles spoke about the controversies of Nike in terms of their poor working conditions and other past public mishaps. In the end, articles focussed on the campaign itself with Colin Kaepernick and the negative response to “Dream Crazy” as the main subjects covered by journalist.

While this thesis did cover newspapers, a big part of this campaign was on social media not forgetting the fact that this campaign all started with tweets by Colin Kaepernick. As Kent & Taylor (2016) note, social media gives brands the opportunity to have real-time two-way feedback with their consumers. Hence, brands using social media regarding CSR advertising, can benefit from not only interacting with their consumers, but lets the consumers share their

thoughts with friends and family which gives brands free advertising. This can be seen with the tweets in solidarity with Nike and Colin Kaepernick. Consumers in solidarity with Kaepernick retweeted and commented on his tweet to show their support. Thus, social media is a tool in CSR marketing as it makes it easy for people to share advertised content which grows the number of people who see the post. Therefore, the release of the “Dream Crazy” campaign on social media as a teaser for the Super Bowl was a good business move on Nike as the research showed that news coverage for the campaign started days before the airing of the Super Bowl. As a global brand, Nike has been written about vigorously in both scholarly and journalistic publications, this comes with the fact that the company was valued at \$157.7 billion in 2020, putting Nike revenues at \$10.18 billion in 2019 (Thomas, 2020). This ranks the swoosh in the top 100 companies in the world in terms of market value and the most valuable apparel brand in the world, almost double its biggest competitor Adidas (Fortune, 2020; Bunns, 2019). As such, its trademark swoosh logo image recognition is so powerful that when highly touted college basketball player Zion Williamson’s Nike shoe disintegrated on national television and pictures were plastered across the internet, Nike stock price dropped by \$1.12 billion (Klara, 2019).

In the context of Nike branding history, the 30th anniversary of “Just Do It” can be regarded as focusing on social progress regarding athletes willing to alienate a sector of the marketplace that doesn’t align with their own values and beliefs. Still, this did not deter people from attacking Nike as one article noted, “it’s one thing for LeBron James – untouchably powerful and already under contract – to make clear his presidential and racial politics. But Nike re-signing a player whose demonstrations against racism ignited a two-year controversy shows political neutrality is no longer a prerequisite to endorsement deals” (Campbell, 2018). Another writer noted there was “nothing like a culture war to get the ol’ protest juices going.” Owners of

Nike paraphernalia, irked over the company on Monday centering its throwback ad campaign around Colin Kaepernick, “immediately took to their backyards and driveways with trash cans and lighter fluid, with clenched fists raised and pointed defiantly towards Beaverton” (Dupont, 2018).

The research conducted for this thesis demonstrates that Nike did not face much scrutiny in terms regarding “Dream Crazy”, while they did receive backlash from the President and a few viral videos of people burning their apparel. Regarding the campaign the inclusion of athletes such as 10-year-old wrestler Isaiah Bird who was born without legs and wheelchair basketball player Megan Blunk is noteworthy on the part of Nike (Hoffmann et al., 2020; Boren, 2018). However, Nike is a multi-billion-dollar corporation with thousands of loyal consumers who the brand had no doubt would support the inclusion of athletes such as Bird and Blunk, but of Kaepernick as well. Therefore, while “Dream Crazy: is a marketing campaign that made headlines for its boldness, it was uncouthly calculated on the part of Nike.

Nike positioned itself as a brand that stands for social change with its previous advertising campaigns. Hence, with the release of “Dream Crazy”, Nike strengthening its position as a brand that stands for prominent social issues. As such, Nike isn’t innovating with the “Dream Crazy” campaign any previous position they already had in the minds of its consumers. In the end, positioning is consumer association with a sense or feeling. As Ries & Trout (2000) described, consumers are exposed to many advertisements, hence the goal is to focus on the perception of the consumer rather than the product itself. Thus, why the “Dream Crazy” campaign isn’t focusing on a new Nike running shoe or Nike workout shorts, but on the Nike being a brand that stands for racial equality. Another aspect of the “Dream Crazy” campaign is the involvement of one of Nike’s biggest partners and simultaneously Kaepernick’s

adversary, the NFL. Financial partners for many years, Nike and the NFL have a contract as the swoosh brand is the official uniform supplier of the NFL (Draper & Belson, 2018; Maaddi, 2018). In an apt characterization, Brennan (2018b) described Nike as “one of the NFL’s most visible and crucial business partners, supplying uniforms and sideline apparel to all 32 teams through at least 2028, you have to say the Kaepernick campaign is the Nike-est Nike thing ever.” As per Beaton & Safdar (2018a), Nike was having talks between both Kaepernick and the NFL in the same months to re-sign Kaepernick as well as complete a new apparel deal with the NFL. As for telling the NFL, Nike gave a “modest heads-up” to the league informing them their plan to utilise the quarterback they were in legal dispute with while at the same time downplaying the significance of his involvement saying he was just going to be one of many famous athletes featured in the new “Just Do it” campaign. Yet, this comes from Nike who not only is one of the NFLs’ biggest partners with their already mentioned newly minted billion-dollar contract, but one that was having a highly publicized legal battle in which he argued he was blackballed from playing in the NFL because of his political views (Beaton & Safdar, 2018a).

To rebut the campaign, some journalists used the Nike stock drop which occurred after the release of the campaign which was caused by the worry on Wall Street on the reaction people would have to the controversial advertisement. One example of this is by Susan Shelby (2018) “Nike appears to be saying he is a hero who has sacrificed everything for what he believed. ---- Will that sell shoes? It didn’t do a very good job in selling stock. Shares of Nike fell 3 percent on Tuesday. Investors may have been unsettled by pictures on Twitter of people setting their swoosh-embossed shoes on fire” or the front page of the September 5, 2018, addition of the *Wall Street Journal* (Beaton & Safdar, 2018a):

Anthem Backlash Strikes Nike, Hurting Share Price

BY ANDREW BEATON
AND KHADEEJA SAFFDAR

Nike Inc. ventured into charged political territory when it put National Football League quarterback-turned activist Colin Kaepernick at the center of its latest advertising campaign, risking backlash to align itself with a cause that has resonated with young consumers.

The Oregon-based shoe giant saw opposition to its decision in the aftermath of the announcement when many shoppers began calling for boycotts of its products. Images of people torching Nike shoes and cutting swooshes out of gear surfaced on Twitter and other social-media sites, countered by expressions of support for Nike and Mr. Kaepernick. Shares of the company fell more than 3% Tuesday, though they are still up about 27% for the year.

The reaction laid bare the perils of Nike's decision to feature Mr. Kaepernick, who emerged as the face of pro-

tests in 2016 when he began kneeling on the field during the national anthem to call attention to racial injustice and social inequality. The player protests Mr. Kaepernick helped kick-start have been a contentious issue for the NFL,

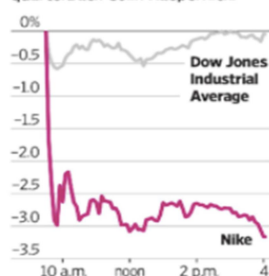
with criticism coming from President Trump and fans who have labeled them unpatriotic.

Now Nike faces questions on two fronts: whether its reinvigorated partnership with one of the most controversial figures in sports will prove fruitful; and how this move will affect its relationship with the NFL. While Nike is one of the NFL's biggest partners with a reported billion-dollar deal that was extended in the spring, the league is engaged in a high-profile legal battle with Mr. Kaepernick, who has filed a grievance alleging that he has been effectively blackballed from signing with a team because of his political views.

"Although the company's stand may go down well on its native West Coast, it will be far less welcome in many other locations," Neil Saunders, managing director of GlobalData Retail, wrote in a research note, adding that the brand "cannot afford to make bad decisions" in a highly

Thrown for a Loss

Nike shares slipped Tuesday after the company unveiled an ad campaign featuring unsigned NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick.



Source: SIX
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Please turn to page A8

As demonstrated by the two examples above, journalists used Nike's stock drop as a concrete example on how the inclusion of Colin Kaepernick was a terrible financial decision for Nike. Yet as Morgan Campbell (2018) described, Adidas saw its share price dip 2.4 per cent Tuesday, while Puma lost nearly two per cent. Neither of those companies signed a stridently pro-Black brand ambassador, a clue something besides Kaepernick's politics drove those share price declines". This was shared by Mahoney (2018), who posted a tweet by Charles Robinson that showed the stock of both Puma and Adidas that demonstrated that both companies were down 2.26% and 2.5% respectively. Simultaneously, another piece of information that was shared with the stock drop was the performance of Nike shared that year, as demonstrated here by Beaton & Saffdar (2018b) "countered by expressions of support for Nike and Mr. Kaepernick. Shares of the company fell more than 3% on Tuesday, though they are still up about 27% for the year". Additionally, an article in the *Boston Globe* by Novy-Williams (2018) showed data that

product orders rose 27% from Sunday to Wednesday after the release of the Kaepernick advertisement which was a big difference from the 2% drop Nike saw the previous year. Lastly, journalists also reported that many consumers who denounced Nike for their inclusion of Colin Kaepernick vowed not only to never purchase a shows product ever again, but to shift allegiances to brands such as New Balance, Adidas, and Converse. Yet as a few articles highlighted, Nike does own Converse. Nevertheless, both Adidas and New balance saw their stock drop as well after the release. Thus, as this example demonstrates, depending on the journalist and/or newspaper in question the isolation of just the stock drop can paint a different picture than the one including the yearly number of a 27% increase in stock price.

The release of the “Dream Crazy” campaign came on the heels of Colin Kaepernick just signing a new contract with Nike that would pay him on par with some of the top football players who are still currently in the league (Beaton, 2018a; Beaton & Safdar, 2018a; Harrington, 2018; Maaddi, 2018). As previously mentioned, it wasn’t that long ago that the company was looking into cutting Kaepernick before a handful of executives rejected the idea as it could have made for bad publicity (Bostock, 2018a; Creswell, Draper, & Maheshwari, 2018). Yet, the new contract not only pays him on par with some of the top athletes in the NFL but would feature him in marketing material on multiple platforms (Beaton, 2018a; Maaddi, 2018; Harrington, 2018). As highlighted by journalists however, Kaepernick was signed with Nike from 2011 but the swoosh brand didn’t use him for the last two years (Rapier, 2018). This speculative train of thought does to in perspective the reason why Nike would bring back the out-of-work former NFL quarterback. Also, brands such as Puma and Adidas were looking into signing Kaepernick (Beaton & Safdar, 2018a). Thus, the brand went from cutting him to making him a center piece

of their marketing strategies with making him the feature athlete of their 30th anniversary of “Just Do It.”

A part of a bigger plan for the aid of black people in American, the “Dream Crazy” campaign was going to be only one part of a multifaceted aid campaign between Nike and Kaepernick. This is because in researching for this thesis it was discovered that one of the plans for Colin Kaepernick by Nike was to start selling branded clothing which was part of his new contract he had just signed with the brand (Beaton & Safdar, 2018b; Draper & Belson, 2018; Green, 2018a; Harrington, 2018). Additionally, proceeds from the sale of the garments Nike would donate money to Kaepernick’s’ charity “Know Your Rights Campaign” which aims to help minorities to elevate the next generation (Draper & Belson, 2018; Harrington, 2018; Know your rights camp). Hence, Nike would have gained not only a recognizable face which they could have plastered as a semi-modern “Che Guevara” t-shirt, but it could have as well benefited from CRM in the fact that proceeds would go towards a charitable cause.

In 1984 Nike would sign on an athlete who would become synonymous with the swoosh and would play a central role in making the company what it is today; that player was basketball legend Michael Jordan (Nazario & Roach, 2015). However, as Jack Todd (2018) explained, this new campaign is a big move from the Nike era of Woods and Jordan who both would have never taken such a political stance as the new crop of Nike athletes of the likes of Kaepernick, Williams, and James. As Michael Jordan explained, “Republicans buy shoes too” when refusing to endorse a black democratic candidate or “racists wear Nikes, too” (Campbell, 2018; Serazio, 2018; Todd, 2018). Yet, this didn’t stop Air Jordan to generated \$2.8 billion in 2018 alone, with Jordan himself making over 100 million in royalties (Meyer, 2019). Additionally, this is also the same company that has played a significant part in the Hip-Hop culture and sneaker culture for

decades (Falchi, 2019; Wong, 2019; Albertini, 2018). The swoosh brand has also been featured in multiple rap songs from the likes of Kanye West, Jay-Z, Nelly, and Travis Scott (Falchi, 2019). Nike has even featured in the 1989 Spike Lee film “Do the Right Thing” which drew heavily on what it was to be a black man in Brooklyn (Albertini, 2018). Another of the celebrities included in the campaign, Serena Williams tweeted a picture of herself playing tennis at a young age with the caption “Especially proud to be part of the Nike family today #Justdoit” referring to her part in the campaign (Mahoney, 2018). As such, while Nike previously stood behind their athletes when they were going through issues, it seems like the Nike of today has evolved into a company that supports their athletes’ social/political views and outreach programs to the point where they can use their reach as a platform to share their views. Summed up by Christine Brennan (2018b) of USA Today regarding the Nike collaboration with Colin Kaepernick “Nike was being Nike, with its edgy history of embracing rebels and pushing limits”. This demonstrates the importance of athletes in Nike’s brand image and especially Black athletes,

In terms of benefits for Nike, the biggest one from doing a controversial campaign such as this one is the reach it gets from people sharing and talking about it as it becomes not just a piece of marketing but becomes mainstream. As data showed, Nike received \$43 million in media exposure as it became the most trending on Twitter and everyone was talking about it (Green, 2018a). Additionally, Nike received a lot of good publicity in days after the release of the “Dream Crazy” campaign with all the major news outlets in America and around the world writing about it.

Donald Trump

While the “Dream Crazy” campaign by Nike starring Kaepernick might have been the focal point of this thesis, a subject line that became an important topic when conducting the research was the remarks made by Donald Trump about the former NFL quarterback and Nike advertisement. The now-former President of the United States, who had previously called Kaepernick a “son of a bitch”, went on twitter to voice his displeasure for the Nike/Kaepernick partnership (Hoffmann et al., 2020; Boykoff & Carrington, 2019; Boren, 2018; Safdar, 2018). As John Fritze (2018) of *USA Today* wrote, Trump tweeted nearly three dozen times the previous year about the anthem protest sharing the President's tweet after the first game of the new 2019 season which he wrote “wow, NFL first game ratings are way down over an already really bad last year comparison...if the players stood proudly for our flag and Anthem, and it is all shown on broadcast, maybe ratings could come back?”. As such, when the release of the Nike “Dream Crazy” campaign, Trump took to Twitter to share his displeasure for the collaboration writing in a tweet “just like the NFL, whose ratings have gone WAY DOWN, Nike is getting absolutely killed with anger and boycotts. I wonder if they had any idea that it would be this way? As far as the NFL is concerned, I just find it hard to watch, and always will, until they stand for the FLAG!” (Boren, 2018). Moreover, the 45th President of the United States also tweeted about the social media burning and vowing to boycott Nike by saying “I think it’s a terrible message and a message that shouldn’t be sent. There’s no reason for it,” (Green, 2018c). Thus, the inclusion of Presidents Trump’s sentiment regarding the campaign was shared by nearly half of all articles researched for this thesis. Additionally, articles did include Trump in their headlines with the Presidents name being featured in titles for articles with the words Trump and some sort of negative sentiment towards Nike/Kaepernick.

When analysing the rhetoric on the reporting of President Trump's sentiment towards Nike, the stereotypical outline was that first articles would explain President Trump's past comments on the matter and his dissatisfaction with Kaepernick and the NFL. Following this, they would feature how unhappy he will be or is depending on the release date on the new Nike ad starring Kaepernick. For added context or information, articles would dive deeper into Donald Trump's past sentiments with quotes he had previously said in the past such as the "son of a bitch". Interestingly, only 6 articles in the research included the phrase "son of a bitch" in their reporting. In all, readers would have read that when it came to the "Dream Crazy" campaign, President Trump was opposed to the new commercial and that by releasing this add, Nike is going against him.

Prior to becoming the President of the United States, Donald Trump was a famous New York City property developer. His flagship property, Trump Tower, included a Nike store. Yet, Nike had recently terminated the lease on their store which was called Niketown (Taylor & Green, 2018). Announced in 2017, the move from Nike left the Trump organisation with a big hole to fill in its flagship property as Nike was the largest site rented by a single tenant (Alexander & Drange, 2017). As then-President Trump put it, "Nike is a tenant of mine. They pay a lot of rent," which while true also came in retrospect after Nike had already terminated their lease agreement with Trump and were in the final months of their contracts (Taylor & Green, 2018).

Regarding CRM and CSR, as Das et al. (2019) pointed out, CRM can not only elevate corporate stature but at the same time help define the brand as one that strives for social responsibility. Additionally, about CSR, it is a key tool utilised by companies to differentiate themselves from their competition (Alcañiz, Cáceres, & Pérez, 2010). Yet, at what point do these

tactics backfire like in the case of Pepsi and Kendall Jenner when the President of the United States himself is tweeting and going on television to talk about your campaign in an unfavourable way. While Nike has demonstrated in the past that they have stuck through harsh times with their athletes and that the swoosh brand as articles highlighted knew that it would have surely received negative feedback from Trump and his political base. Nike received over \$40 million in free publicity because of the “Dream Crazy” campaign with many of that surely coming from the satisfaction of President Trump who not only tweeted about the campaign but talked on television about it.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Colin Kaepernick started his protest as a way to shed light on the hardship and inequality suffered everyday by black individuals on a daily basis. Months following his protest, he became a household name and one of the key activists in the fight for racial justice. Yet, he also became a target for his views and the way (kneeling during the national anthem) he protested these views. Ultimately, this put the NFL quarterback out of work to this day.

In conducting research for this thesis, news coverage of the “Dream Crazy” campaign was analysed. As this thesis was identifying the reasoning behind why would Nike choose the controversial Kaepernick in their 30th anniversary of the “Just Do it” campaign. In referring back to the research question, the designated outcome was to help guide this thesis into one that could be held as a case study for future CSR and CRM research. Though detailed earlier, it is worth restating the research question and sub-questions which structured this study.

RQ: Why would Nike select Colin Kaepernick as their official spokesperson for their 30th anniversary of the “Just Do It” campaign considering the controversy surrounding his protest movement?

SUB-1: How does the Nike campaign utilising the controversial Colin Kaepernick benefit Nike in terms of achieving greater sales and how does the partnership with Kaepernick benefit his desire for awareness to racial equality?

SUB-2: How does the use of prominent racial equality activist Colin Kaepernick and the use of the slogan “believe in something even if it means sacrificing everything” drive cause-related marketing in terms of Nike positioning itself as a supporter of equal rights in the eyes of their target market?

Findings for the first sub-research question (How does the Nike campaign utilising the controversial Colin Kaepernick benefit Nike in terms of achieving greater sales?) found that most articles portrayed the “Dream Crazy” campaign in a positive light, with most articles focusing on Kaepernick and why this partnership was controversial. Additionally, this gave publicity to the campaign which portrayed the swoosh brand as one that supports black individuals for racial injustice. As mentioned, Nike received over \$43 million in free media exposure (Green, 2018a). When it comes to bad publicity, only 4 articles covered the past Nike sweatshop scandals. Additionally, the only negative slight on Nike would be some columnists questioning the rationale behind Nike partnering with Kaepernick with some saying it was just a publicity stunt. While Nike did get public backlash in terms of people burning their Nike apparel and President Trump publicly denouncing the campaign as bad idea.

As the research demonstrated Nike was the clear winner in this campaign since the brand received millions of dollars' worth of free exposure and made the front page of top American newspapers as well as prominent international newspapers. Regarding Kaepernick, he did receive news coverage that bolstered his protest for racial equality. Yet as the research demonstrated, news articles were more concerned about his controversy in general than his protest itself. While Nike received sales and news coverage, Kaepernick did receive multiple days of news coverage but will it truly in years' time have done anything to change the current state of the racial equality in America?

In observing the second sub-research question (How does the use of prominent racial equality activist Colin Kaepernick and the use of the slogan “believe in something even if it means sacrificing everything” drive cause-related marketing in terms of Nike positioning itself as a supporter of equal rights in the eyes of their target market?) the “Dream Crazy” was in essence promoting the Nike mentality of pushing a winning mentality with people who beat tough odds to become household names. As a brand, Nike is positioning itself as being a supporter of social justice with its past marketing campaigns in support of women in sports wearing a hijab, HIV, and now partnering with Colin Kaepernick is distinguishing itself from its competitors on the grounds that buying Nike is to support social justice. Furthermore, with the slogan “believe in something, even if it means sacrificing everything” Nike is pushing its consumers to do more and to become the next Kaepernick. Following the release of “Dream Crazy” Nike saw increase in Sales in response to partnering with Kaepernick. Moreover, athletes as well as consumers posted on social media their support for Nike. Thus, Nike saw articles and tweets cementing its desired brand image in the minds of its consumers. While over half of all news coverage mentioned the negative comments by President Trump, this is a man who in the past called Kaepernick a “son

of a bitch” and who Nike would have known would have disapproved of the campaign. As such, this thesis demonstrates the power of CRM marketing as how a single partnership between Nike and Colin Kaepernick can not only become mainstream news but be financially profitable.

Commercials are now part of daily life, people are exposed to hundreds of ads daily from social media, television, and billboards to name just a few. Thus, the key for brands is to be memorable and more importantly to make people buy the product these businesses are trying to sell. This thesis demonstrates through its research that a commercial can be not only financially profitable but help address a social cause in its communication for the mutual benefit of both parties. Yet, how authentic was Nike in this campaign? As alluded by Bruce Arthur (2018) Nike isn't your friend, they are a corporation with shareholders. This campaign wasn't even Nikes' idea but their marketing firm (Wieden & Kennedy) (Creswell, Draper, & Maheshwari, 2018). Nike received 43 million in free advertising because of “Dream Crazy” (Green, 2018a). Moreover, Nike has had sweatshop allegations in the past. Hence, while undoubtedly “Dream Crazy” benefited Kaepernick's cause, it did so in a calculated fashion guaranteeing Nike would come out of this financially profitable.

As a case study for future CRM and CSR research, this thesis gives an example of a campaign that utilised this marketing approach in a way to give a platform to a social cause while simultaneously receiving millions in free advertising from all the coverage it received. Furthermore, this thesis helps future research in their analysis of public and media response to a campaign. As for the social movement started by Kaepernick, many players still take a knee before games and Kaepernick's name is still mentioned whenever race related protests or negative public event happens in the USA. Thus, not only is this campaign one that can be analysed further by marketing and communications scholars in its use of CRM and CSR

marketing tools. But social scientists can further research the aspect of Colin Kaepernick and how the “Dream Crazy” campaign effected the discourse surrounding race relations in modern day America.

In future considerations for this thesis, focus groups and other qualitative research methods approaches could be utilised to gain a better understanding on individuals’ opinions on the “Dream Crazy” campaign and more broadly politically charged marketing campaigns. Moreover, the comparison with other politically charged marketing campaigns and how they have evolved from the American Express commercial to aid the Statue of Liberty to this Nike campaign of today.

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