

Running Head: Analyzing Nike's 2012 Olympics Ad Campaign

Finding Greatness: Analyzing Nike's 2012 Olympics Ad Campaign

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This paper will focus on Nike's 'Find Your Greatness' campaign that was launched during the London 2012 Olympics. As can be expected for an event the size of the Olympics and a company the size of Nike, the campaign was quite elaborate: there were over 20 different video ads that were disseminated over TV and online, accompanied by various still-image ads on digital and print media. The ads featured everyday people engaging in local athletic endeavors with the premise that greatness could be found in everyone everywhere, not just in star athletes competing at the Olympics.

A brief Nike history

Nike was founded in Oregon in 1964 as 'Blue Ribbon Sports' before being renamed Nike in 1971, after the Greek goddess of victory. In the 50 or so years since then, it has become the world's leading manufacturer of athletic apparel and footwear, bringing in \$36.4 billion in the 2018 fiscal year ("Nike, Inc. Reports Fiscal 2018", 2018).

Adidas has been Nike's historic rival, competing in the same apparel and footwear category. Both companies rely on footwear for about 60% and apparel for about 30% of their revenues (Warner, 2018). Nike and Adidas have been giants of the industry for decades, and while Nike has significantly larger annual revenues, market share tends to fluctuate between the two depending on region and category. Nike's marketing expenses of over \$3 billion each year (Buck, 2016) which are nearly 10% of its annual revenue, are an indicator of the priority advertising has in its marketing strategy. Both Nike and Adidas often have exclusive contracts with various sports

teams and individual athletes to ensure that they do not go to their rivals. It has also become a tradition for both companies to launch elaborate ad campaigns before every major sporting event, featuring top talent and reinforcing the presence of their brand in every sport.

The campaign

Major sporting events such as the FIFA World Cup and the Olympics attract hundreds of millions of TV viewers – cumulative viewing figures can even reach the billions. This makes such events a prime target for Nike and Adidas to roll out their campaigns. Not only is the coverage peppered with commercials from the two brands, they also feature heavily on the apparel and footwear being worn by the athletes, making their presence inescapable.

Nike and Adidas commercials almost always feature elite athletes adorned with the companies' apparel, selling the underlying idea that these products enhance the athletes' performance, and inculcating an aspiration to be like one's sporting heroes. For the 2012 Olympics, however, Nike chose to use ordinary people playing local sports in their 'Find Your Greatness' campaign – a stark contrast to their typically flashy ads featuring elite athletes at the biggest events.

To make sense of Nike's departure from its usual advertising strategies that feature household names, the 'Find Your Greatness' campaign needs some context. Adidas had outbid Nike to secure sponsorship for the London 2012 Olympics. This meant that Adidas had exclusive rights to use Olympic athletes in their marketing, as well as every identifying marker surrounding the event. Nike could not use Olympic athletes, nor could they explicitly refer to the Olympics in any way – they could not even mention the host city, London, in any marketing materials.

It was important for Nike to make its presence felt during an event as iconic as the Olympics, while making sure they were not contravening any rules. To get around this, Nike ran

adverts that cleverly featured other, less glamorous cities around the world called London, such as London, Ohio and Little London, Jamaica. This eventually built up to the main concept of 'Find Your Greatness': greatness could be found in everyday people in everyday cities, not just the superstars in London, England.

The series of 20 adverts (see Exhibit A in Appendix for a compilation video) featured various amateurs competing in Olympic sports, such as a 6-year-old child diving at his local pool, or an overweight teenager running on a country road. By depicting people that one could come across in their own neighborhoods and daily lives, the ads resonated well with the Olympic audience, which tend to be people watching the event on their televisions while having the aspiration but not the motivation to be active themselves.

The campaign was a huge success, driving \$506 million in revenue growth and a 55% increase in Nike+ memberships, while finding a place in the top 10 most shared Olympics ads of all time (Effie Worldwide, 2013).

The consumer journey

It is worthwhile to analyze where potential consumers were before this campaign, and how Nike created a cultural shift to push their message to these consumers.

Most sportswear adverts feature famous athletes who are in peak physical condition and perform at the world stage. Most people grow up watching these players and many kids aspire to be like them, both for the thrill of the sport and the fame and glamor that comes with the money. However, as people grow older, they move towards more established career options, and their interest in sports is relegated to the TV screen. Ads featuring elite sportspeople tend not to resonate as strongly with these people at this point in their lives, as they are beyond the stage of life in

which they can emulate their heroes. Yet, these are the ads that they are bombarded with every time there is a major sporting event being broadcast.

Thus, it is amusing to see how Nike's previous advertising created the very space for this particular campaign to exploit: to connect with the average consumer who is more comfortable running a mile around the block than training for a marathon, and therefore may consider Nike as an accessible brand rather than an elite one. From anecdotal evidence, there seems to be an aura around Nike, in that one may be advised by their peers to "first develop the requisite sporting skills before splurging on Nike for your footwear", implying that Nike is only for people who are serious about athleticism and have reached a point where they need professional gear to excel further. This campaign goes some way in addressing that concern since, after all, it is the millions of average consumers that will drive Nike's revenue, not the handful of professional athletes.

Psychology, sociology, and cognition

Psychologically, the campaign does very well to tie in with Nike's existing marketing. The brand has been marketed by superstars for decades, and thus is very firmly paired with top-level athletes. The halo effect is involved in impression formation of the brand: our overall impression of something can be affected by a few prominent features. For instance, if an athlete is successful, then they may also be perceived as attractive, competent, and kind (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). The positive feelings we associate with our sporting heroes tend to get transferred over to the brands they use as well, and thus Nike benefits from the glories achieved by these athletes. In the 'Find Your Greatness' campaign, Nike uses its historical clout as an elite brand, but now markets it by directly approaching the everyday consumer – thus providing them with the feeling that they, too, can use the same brand as their heroes without having to be a professional.

Many people also look up to these athletes as heroes, and share in their joy and misery by following their favorite players and teams throughout the season. This deeply personal connection with the athletes lays a solid foundation to then also aspire to be like them. The athletes become a standard for peoples' ideal self, which is the type of person they want to be – as opposed to their actual self, which is what they think they are at the moment. But because these standards are extremely high and are rarely met, it creates a discrepancy between the ideal self and the actual self which creates discomfort (Higgins, 1987). While the discrepancy cannot always be addressed by actually becoming a professional player, it can be reduced in smaller ways such as adopting their hairstyles, jerseys, and of course, brand preferences. By using Nike products, people can reduce their self-discrepancy by coming that much closer to their heroes.

From a sociological perspective, the campaign capitalizes on an in-group vs out-group approach. In-groups are people that are considered to be similar to oneself in a particular category or trait, such as belonging to a certain race, country, university, or sports team. Out-groups, by comparison, are those who are excluded from this group, such as a rival university or team (Tajfel, 1982).

For many of the millions watching the Olympics on TV – and, incidentally, also being exposed to the usual Adidas ads – there would have been a palpable feeling that these elite athletes were an out-group: people that got to where they were with natural talent or intense training. Thus, the wares that they were peddling in these ads would not really be applicable to the armchair enthusiast, who would much rather prefer something more affordable for their athletic needs. However, by using everyday people in its campaign, Nike created an in-group everyone could relate to: their neighbor's kid or their local gym trainer. Escalas & Bettman (2005) have found that brands with images consistent with an ingroup enhance self-brand connections. Depicting these

normal, accessible people achieving their smaller, personal milestones provided relatability and hence a stronger connection with the Nike brand.

From a cognitive perspective, most viewers have by now developed a schema of Nike and Adidas ads by repeated exposure over the years. A schema is a mental framework based on existing knowledge that one uses to understand the world around them. These ads tend to be high tempo, glitzy affairs with sports' most recognizable faces adorning them and the brand logos prominently displayed all around.

The Find Your Greatness ads, however, are understated, devoid of music, and feature unrecognizable actors. This is a far cry from typical ads in its category, and thus does a great job of demanding immediate attention because it does not easily fit into the existing schema of Nike ads. The most popular ad, for instance, features nothing but single shot of a long road with a teenage boy jogging towards the camera, with the only sound being that of his footsteps. The voiceovers are motivational and speak directly to the viewer – in a language that they can understand and relate to (See Exhibit B in Appendix for a transcript of the voiceover). With these elements of the ad design, people are immediately drawn towards the screen and end up being a captive audience, which is helpful in retaining the message.

Featuring real people with real stories also makes the viewer want to find out more about their background. The jogging teenager, for instance, generated so much interest that he appeared on various morning shows to update people about his weight loss progress after featuring in the campaign (Stampler, 2013). When the viewers themselves demand information and go looking for it, they are the perfect audience to market to, since they have the motivation, ability, and opportunity to seek this information and be receptive to the marketing message associated with it (MacInnis & Jaworski, 1991).

The clincher, however, is that these stories do not end in fairy tales of street kids being propelled to international stardom; they are still about normal people achieving small personal goals in their daily lives. This immediately makes the story more accessible because it changes the definition of success from 'made it in the Olympic team' to 'ran around the block' and motivates people to achieve their own success – and associate it with Nike.

Demographics

Nike is an all-encompassing brand: its product offerings cater to men and women of all ages, from newborns to octogenarians. Its presence in over 120 countries around the world (and dozens more if knock-off products are taken into consideration) also means that there are no strict racial, ethnic or geographical boundaries. Nike's campaigns have to be able to reach these diverse markets without necessarily having to pick a particular segment; and the global appeal of the Olympics is the perfect event to do so.

The Olympics were broadcast in over 220 territories and had an estimated 3.6 billion unique viewers ("London 2012 Olympic Games", 2012). This made TV an obvious choice for Nike, since it would reach everyone who had even the slightest of interest in athletics, incidental or otherwise. It also gave Nike the double whammy of first having people watching the Olympic athletes wearing Nike gear, and then being exposed to an ad that they could relate to on a more personal level. The campaign was also supported by digital media, with it being widely shared on Facebook, YouTube, and various blogs.

The diversity of Nike's 'target' market is apparent in the 20 ads of the campaign as well. The various spots feature pre-teens, teenagers, adolescents, adults, retirees, black women, Muslim women, Asians, and even the handicapped (see Exhibit C in Appendix for a sample).

Thus, with the choice of media being TV and digital, the choice of event being the Olympics, the choice of actors representing a wide range of ages, ethnicities, genders, and minorities, and being backed by Nike's millions, the campaign was destined to reach – and engage – everyone and their grandmothers. This makes sense both in terms of Nike as a brand – as its product offering is not limited to a certain demographic – and as a campaign, which speaks to the common man.

Implications for fitness-conscious millennials

While the campaign targeted nearly every segment, I think it did particularly well with millennials who were trying to be more health-conscious. These adolescents are aware that they need to be more fit, and make attempts to pursue their fitness goals on and off, but sometimes lack the discipline to be regular. The campaign approached this desire by combination of inspiration and motivation. The inspiration came from seeing their peers doing everyday activities that were easily replicable. The motivation came from making the tasks seem very easy, without requiring any special equipment.

Millennials also tend to be high on openness, part of the Big Five personality traits, as laid out by Digman (1990). This means that they are open to new experiences – and importantly, also tend to be affluent enough to pursue these experiences. A sub-campaign promoting Nike+ ran with the 'Find Your Greatness' campaign, prompting people to become members and earn Nike Fuel points. In order to earn these points, one had to purchase a Nike Fuel band, which is a wearable fitness tracker, which would then award points for exercising. This gamified the experience of working out, and sharing progress with one's friends also made it a social activity.

This segment may struggle with the intrinsic motivation to exercise: motivation that comes from the activity being a reward in itself, as defined by Ryan & Deci (2000). With the Nike Fuel band offering points, awards, and progress sharing, an extrinsically motivated element (one in which the behavior is done for an external reward) was added to the mix, and thus provided a convenient path for this segment to join in. With the campaign seeing a 55% increase in sign-ups for Nike+, it was clear that Nike had managed to elicit immediate buying behavior from these adolescents – who would then also become the early adopters that would drive future sales of the device. These short-term and long-term benefits worked well for both the consumers and the brand.

Implications for Nike

All things considered, Nike did extremely well to get around the sponsorship rules and trump Adidas during the Olympics. The campaign made Nike more relatable and accessible, and embedded the brand in the cognitive schema of those who would be just starting out in their athletic endeavors as the go-to brand for starting small.

Fitness goes a long way in contributing to self-esteem and self-actualization. According to Maslow (1943), these are at the top of human needs after basic physical and social needs have been taken care of. Those looking to improve their self-esteem and achieve self-actualization can do so by aiming to be more fit, and Nike steps in to nudge them to take that first step. This positive association with the brand can last long into the future if people become regular exercisers. The nostalgic value of using Nike since the start can eventually turn into long-term brand loyalty.

Finally, the cheekiness of the campaign with subtle references to London and maneuvering around Olympic athletes while still showing Olympic sports resonated well with the audience. It

maintains Nike's image of being young and hip while also retaining its association with the highest quality and global appeal.

Analysis

I think Nike managed to pull a rabbit out of a hat with this campaign. It was a bold strategy that paid off by becoming the most talked-about campaign of the Olympics, despite Adidas investing significantly more in their campaigns and sponsorships.

As someone who was part of the key audience for the ad, it resonated very strongly with me as well, and swung my brand perception of Nike. Malone & Fiske (2013) categorize brands as being on axes of warm to cold (how good-intentioned brands are) and competent to incompetent (how capable they are of acting on their intentions). I previously considered both Nike and Adidas to be cold and competent, since they were extremely successful companies that used aspirational ads depicting a fitness level I could personally never reach, and yet selling their gear under the premise that it was necessary for success. This ad shifted Nike towards being warmer for me, because they understood that not everyone could reach the high level of performance and discipline as their advertised stars, but that did not mean that everyone was not fighting a personal battle of their own every day. It ended up being a purchase driver for me, since I saw Nike as a realistic choice for my entry-level soccer boots.

More importantly, however, I think it catered to all age groups effectively, since very young children and very old sports enthusiasts do not necessarily know or can recognize contemporary sports stars. Even for regular enthusiasts, Olympic athletes are relatively anonymous compared to their peers in, say, soccer or tennis, because of the infrequency of the event. Using ordinary people was a great way to get around this problem – and a much cheaper way to do so as

well. Additionally, the events that they chose to feature in the ad were those that required little-to-no preparation or equipment to get involved in immediately: running, lifting, and swimming are all easily accessible compared to more specialized Olympic sports like javelin throwing or archery.

Having said that, I do think this campaign was a one-off, and expected to Nike revert to their tried-and-tested strategy at the very next opportunity. Out of curiosity, I looked at their 2016 Olympics campaign, and was pleasantly surprised to find that they had gone for a middle ground approach that year. The ad started off with a narrator talking to the actors which portrayed everyday people competing in local athletic activities, motivating them and predicting their rise to success. It continues in this manner until the athletes start excelling beyond the narrator's expectations, and the latter half of the ad starts featuring the names and faces we all know and love – Serena Williams, Neymar Jr., Mo Farah and so on. This is a smart way to retain the 2012 narrative while still featuring their star athletes. Repeating the 'Find Your Greatness' strategy would likely not work a second or third time, and would dilute the brand image that everyone is used to. Experimenting with these unique approaches keeps Nike relevant and their ads noticeable, in a space that is increasingly being crowded out by converging ideas.

Appendix

Exhibit A – Campaign compilation



Click the image above to access a compilation of the campaign ads, or visit the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WYP9AGtLvRg>

Exhibit B

FIND YOUR GREATNESS.

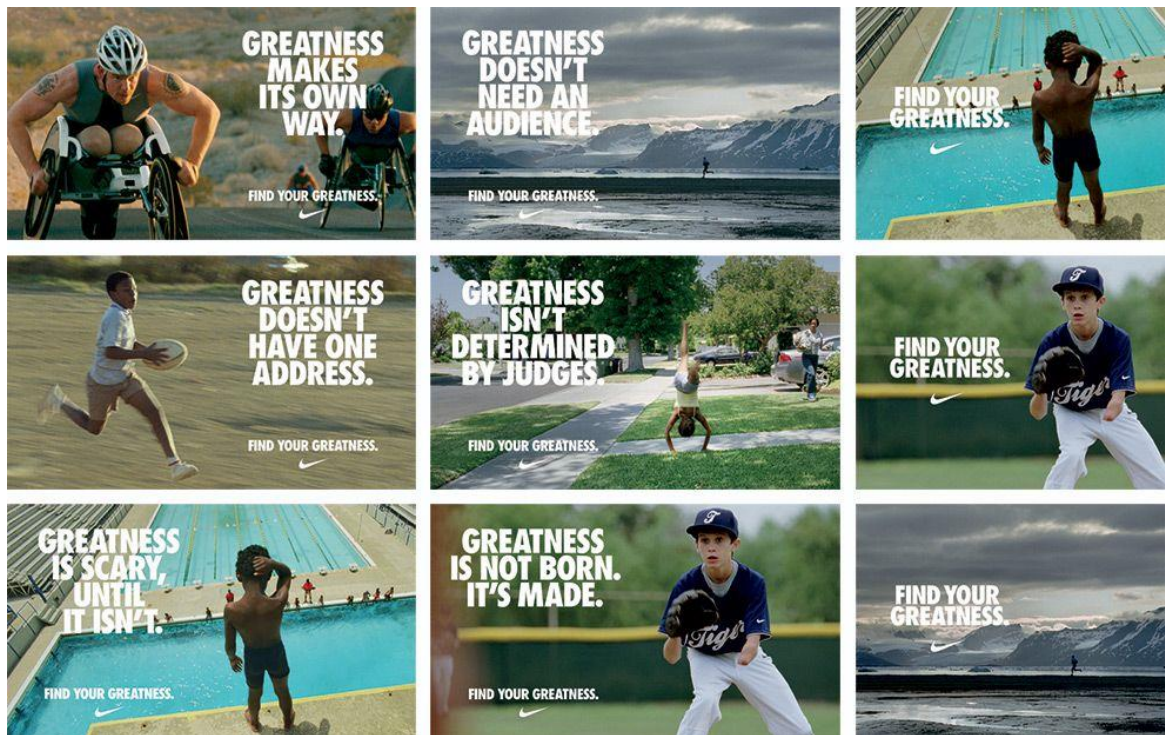
SOMEHOW WE'VE
COME TO BELIEVE THAT
GREATNESS IS ONLY
FOR THE CHOSEN FEW,
FOR THE SUPERSTARS.
THE TRUTH IS, GREATNESS
IS FOR US ALL. THIS IS
NOT ABOUT LOWERING
EXPECTATIONS; IT'S
ABOUT RAISING THEM
FOR EVERY LAST ONE
OF US. GREATNESS IS
NOT IN ONE SPECIAL
PLACE, AND IT'S NOT
IN ONE SPECIAL
PERSON. GREATNESS
IS WHEREVER
SOMEBODY IS TRYING
TO FIND IT.

FIND YOUR GREATNESS.



The script for the voiceover of the main ad was disseminated in written form as well

Exhibit C



Various still images from the campaign spots giving an overview of the range of diversity

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