

# Screening Response to various aspects of advertising and consumer culture

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The screening presents Nike advertising through interviews, athlete testimony, brand imagery, and an apparently documentary style. My original response described the criticism in the screening as constructive because the questions invite people to discuss how the company and its products perform. That description remains partly correct, but the screening also demonstrates why advertising should be analyzed as a carefully produced message rather than a neutral collection of opinions. The athletes who appear on screen may speak sincerely, yet the advertiser controls selection, editing, sequence, music, visual framing, and the final claims presented to the audience. Positive testimony can therefore feel spontaneous while serving a commercial strategy. The screening is valuable because it reveals the relationship among celebrity authority, consumer identity, emotional storytelling, product meaning, and corporate reputation. My response is not that all advertising is dishonest or that consumers are helpless. It is that persuasive communication works by shaping what viewers notice, how they interpret a product, and which alternatives remain outside the frame (Williamson, 1978).

## The Form of Critique Presented in the Screening

The screening appears to invite evaluation by asking athletes and other participants about their experiences with Nike products. This resembles constructive criticism because respondents may identify strengths and areas for improvement. However, a company-produced or company-associated advertisement is unlikely to include the full range of criticism that an independent investigation would present. The final message depends on whose interviews are included, which statements are shortened, and whether negative comments are shown at all. A neutral-sounding question does not guarantee an objective result. The setting, relationship with the brand, knowledge of filming, and expectation of publication can influence answers. The screening therefore offers controlled critique: enough evaluation to create credibility, but not necessarily enough to threaten the brand's central promise.

## Persuasion Is Not the Same as Manipulation

My original response used the word "manipulation" to describe advertising that convinces people to buy something they did not plan to purchase. Persuasion and manipulation overlap, but they should be distinguished. Persuasion presents reasons, images, emotions, or testimony with the aim of influencing choice. Manipulation interferes with informed and autonomous judgment through

deception, concealment, exploitation of vulnerability, or pressure. An advertisement can legitimately inform viewers about product design or associate the product with an appealing lifestyle. It becomes ethically problematic when it makes unsupported performance claims, hides a paid relationship, creates a false sense of urgency, or uses an endorser in a way likely to mislead consumers. The screening should therefore be evaluated by truthfulness, transparency, evidence, and respect for audience agency rather than by assuming that all influence is automatically improper.

## Celebrity Endorsement and Borrowed Credibility

Athletes are especially powerful endorsers for sportswear because their professional achievement appears relevant to performance. Consumers may infer that a successful runner, basketball player, or footballer has expertise in shoes and equipment. The brand borrows the athlete's credibility, discipline, confidence, and cultural status. The relationship also works in the other direction: sponsorship provides athletes with money, visibility, and a platform. Yet the audience must distinguish the athlete's actual experience from the commercial arrangement. A celebrity's excellence does not prove that one product caused the achievement or that an ordinary consumer will obtain comparable results. The Federal Trade Commission's Endorsement Guides require endorsements to be truthful and advise that material connections between endorsers and marketers should be disclosed clearly when consumers would not reasonably expect them (McCracken, 1989; Federal Trade Commission, 2026).

## Athletic Success as Brand Meaning

The screening links Nike products with successful athletes, allowing the product to symbolize performance rather than merely footwear or clothing. The consumer is not purchasing only fabric, foam, rubber, or design. The advertisement invites the buyer to purchase an association with determination, victory, resilience, speed, and recognition. This symbolic meaning is central to consumer culture. Products help people express aspirations and social identity. A person may choose a brand because it communicates membership in a sporting community or commitment to self-improvement. Such choices are not necessarily irrational; symbolic value is a real part of consumption. The ethical issue is whether the advertisement allows viewers to separate symbolic appeal from measurable product performance (Goldman & Papson, 1998).

## The Testimonial Form and the Appearance of Authenticity

Interview footage can appear more authentic than a conventional scripted commercial. The speaker may pause, laugh, use informal language, or describe personal memories. These qualities reduce the visible distance between advertisement and ordinary conversation. However, authenticity in media is

constructed. Lighting, camera angle, location, editing, sound, and question selection produce a particular impression. Even a completely sincere statement can be placed into a sequence that gives it a broader meaning the speaker did not intend. A critical viewer asks who commissioned the screening, what the participants received, whether dissenting accounts were available, and which claims are independently verifiable. This does not require cynicism toward every speaker. It requires media literacy about production.

## Consumer Culture and the Production of Desire

Consumer culture organizes social life partly through commodities, brands, advertising, shopping, and the repeated promise that identity can be improved through acquisition. The screening illustrates this process by turning athletic equipment into a pathway toward the admired qualities of celebrities. Advertising rarely creates desire from nothing. It connects existing desires—for health, success, belonging, attractiveness, confidence, or recognition—to a specific product. The consumer may genuinely need shoes, but the advertisement encourages a particular interpretation of what the “right” shoes mean. It can make an ordinary alternative appear insufficient because the branded product carries social prestige. My original observation that consumers sometimes buy what they are shown as “best” remains useful, provided it does not deny their capacity to compare information and resist messages.

## How Target Audiences Are Constructed

The obvious target audience includes athletes and people interested in sport, but the market is broader. Nike advertising often appeals to recreational exercisers, young consumers, fashion audiences, and people who admire sports without participating competitively. The screening’s use of elite athletes may create several imagined audiences: the aspiring athlete who wants professional credibility, the fan who wants symbolic closeness to a hero, and the lifestyle consumer who treats sportswear as everyday identity. Advertising constructs the audience by suggesting who the viewer could become. This strategy is effective because identity-based appeals can remain meaningful even when the technical differences among products are small.

## The Difference Between Product Evidence and Image

A strong advertisement should not rely entirely on celebrity image when making objective claims. Statements about injury prevention, speed, durability, comfort, or superior performance require evidence appropriate to the claim. A professional athlete’s testimonial may describe personal experience, but it does not substitute for testing. Individual outcomes depend on anatomy, training, surface, fit, technique, and other factors. Viewers should distinguish subjective claims such as “I like

the feel” from objective claims such as “this reduces injuries.” The screening would be more informative if it explained product design, identified the limits of its evidence, and allowed comparison rather than treating celebrity success as proof.

## Selection Bias in the Interviews

My original response noted that most interviewees praised the products and that the questions limited objectivity. This can be explained as selection bias. If the advertiser interviews only sponsored athletes or includes only favorable answers, the final sample does not represent the entire customer population. The apparent agreement may be an effect of production rather than widespread satisfaction. A more credible screening could include nonprofessional consumers, independent sports specialists, people with different body types, and users who experienced problems. It could also state whether athletes were paid or contractually connected to the company. Balanced evidence would not require equal time for unsupported criticism; it would require relevant perspectives and transparent criteria.

## Open Questions and Meaningful Criticism

Open-ended questions can produce richer answers, but they do not automatically remove bias. Interviewers can still steer participants through follow-up questions, tone, and editing. A useful evaluation would ask what participants liked, what they would change, what alternatives they had used, and whether their experience was typical. It would distinguish product feedback from emotional loyalty to the brand. The screening could also address cost, accessibility, durability, labor conditions, sustainability, and the difference between elite and ordinary use. These questions expand critique beyond whether a shoe helps one athlete feel confident.

## Advertising Ethics and Disclosure

The legal and ethical context has become more important as endorsements move across television, streaming, podcasts, and social media. The FTC revised its Endorsement Guides in 2023 to address digital practices, material connections, virtual influencers, reviews, and disclosure. A viewer should be able to recognize when a message is an advertisement and when an athlete has a financial or employment relationship with the brand. Disclosure does not make the endorsement false; it provides information needed to evaluate credibility. A small or hidden label is less useful than a clear statement placed where viewers will notice it. Ethical advertising also requires that the endorser actually use the product when describing personal experience and that the company possess support for objective claims (Federal Trade Commission, 2023).

# Representation, Inclusion, and the Politics of the Athletic Body

Sports advertising influences beliefs about whose body counts as strong, attractive, disciplined, or successful. A screening dominated by elite, able-bodied, conventionally attractive celebrities can motivate viewers but also create narrow standards. Inclusive representation should not become tokenism in which diversity is displayed without changing the story. Brands can include athletes of different genders, races, disabilities, ages, body types, and levels of participation while avoiding the claim that purchasing a product solves structural barriers in sport. Viewers should also ask whether the company's treatment of sponsored athletes, workers, and communities is consistent with the values communicated in the advertisement.

## Consumption, Price, and Social Status

Branded sports products can operate as status goods. A high price may be interpreted as evidence of quality even when production cost and performance do not justify the entire difference. Limited releases and celebrity collaborations can create scarcity, resale markets, and social pressure. Younger consumers may feel that belonging requires a particular shoe. Advertising contributes to that pressure by making the brand visible within admired groups. The solution is not to shame people for enjoying fashion or collecting products. It is to recognize how price, identity, and marketing interact so that consumers can decide whether the symbolic benefit is worth the cost.

## The Consumer Is Active but Not Invulnerable

My earlier response treated consumers as people who buy what advertisements tell them is best. That is too passive. Consumers compare prices, read reviews, discuss products, reject campaigns, remix brand meanings, and choose alternatives. At the same time, advertising operates repeatedly across environments and uses detailed research about attention, emotion, data, and social influence. Individual awareness does not make a person immune. Media literacy should therefore combine personal skepticism with consumer-protection rules. The burden should not rest entirely on viewers to detect every misleading practice.

## My Overall Reaction to the Screening

The screening is effective because it transforms commercial claims into personal stories and places admired athletes between the company and the audience. The interview strategy creates trust, while the brand's association with achievement makes the products emotionally desirable. I remain persuaded that the production works well as advertising. I am less convinced that it functions as

objective product evaluation. The strongest improvement would be greater transparency about sponsorship, wider participant selection, clearer separation of personal opinion from evidence, and inclusion of limitations. These changes would not eliminate persuasion; they would make the persuasion more honest.

## Conclusion

The screening reveals that advertising and consumer culture operate through more than direct statements about a product. Celebrity testimony, visual design, selective criticism, emotional narrative, and identity all contribute to the message. Nike's use of successful athletes allows the brand to borrow credibility and connect products with aspiration. The strategy can inform and inspire, but it can also exaggerate, conceal commercial relationships, and substitute image for evidence. Constructive critique therefore requires attention to both effectiveness and ethics. A successful advertisement is not automatically a fair one, and a commercial connection does not automatically make every endorsement dishonest. The key questions are whether claims are supported, relationships are disclosed, participants are represented fairly, and consumers receive enough information to exercise meaningful choice.

## Works Cited

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