

Screening Response to various aspects of advertising and consumer culture

Posted on September 20, 2018

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Introduction

The screening presents Nike advertising through interviews, athlete testimony, brand imagery, and a documentary-like style that appears to invite open evaluation. Its persuasive strength comes from making commercial communication feel conversational and authentic rather than obviously scripted. Athletes may describe genuine experiences, but the final advertisement remains a constructed message because the advertiser controls who is interviewed, which answers are selected, how scenes are edited, what music accompanies them, and which claims receive emphasis. This distinction matters when evaluating criticism within branded media. A campaign can include limited criticism to create credibility while still protecting the brand's central promise. The screening therefore provides a useful case for studying persuasion, celebrity endorsement, consumer identity, selective evidence, and corporate reputation. Advertising is not automatically dishonest, and audiences are not passive recipients, but influence works partly by directing attention and attaching symbolic meaning to products. A critical response should evaluate how the message is produced, what evidence supports its claims, and which perspectives remain outside the frame (Williamson, 1978; Goldman & Papson, 1998).

Constructed Authenticity and Controlled Critique

The interview format gives the screening an appearance of authenticity because athletes speak in personal language rather than through an obvious sales script. Yet authenticity in advertising is partly produced through camera placement, editing, location, sound, pacing, and question selection. Open-ended questions can generate rich answers, but they do not remove selection bias if the advertiser chooses only sponsored participants or favorable remarks. Constructive criticism becomes meaningful only when viewers can distinguish genuine product feedback from strategically curated agreement. A stronger screening would identify the relationship between interviewees and the company, include relevant limitations, and separate personal experience from objective claims about performance. This does not require equal space for every criticism regardless of evidence. It requires transparent criteria for whose testimony appears and why. The key analytical question is whether the format invites viewers to believe they are seeing an independent evaluation when they are actually watching brand communication. Media literacy begins by recognizing that sincere speakers can still participate in a

message whose overall meaning is shaped by commercial production decisions.

Celebrity Endorsement, Disclosure, and Evidence

Celebrity endorsement is especially powerful in sportswear because athletic achievement appears relevant to shoes, clothing, and equipment. The brand borrows qualities associated with the athlete—discipline, excellence, confidence, resilience, and cultural status—while sponsorship can provide the athlete with money, visibility, and professional support. The commercial relationship does not make an endorsement false, but it changes how viewers should evaluate credibility. Current Federal Trade Commission guidance requires endorsements to be truthful and not misleading and states that material connections capable of affecting the weight consumers give an endorsement should be disclosed clearly. The FTC’s Endorsement Guides were revised in 2023 to address contemporary practices including social media, reviews, virtual influencers, and disclosure standards (Federal Trade Commission, 2023; 2026). An athlete’s success also does not prove that one product caused that success or that ordinary users will experience the same results. Subjective statements about comfort differ from objective claims about injury prevention, speed, or durability, which require appropriate substantiation beyond celebrity testimony.

Consumer Desire and the Ethics of Persuasion

The screening also illustrates how advertising transforms a functional product into a symbolic resource for identity. Consumers may buy shoes because they need footwear, but the campaign connects that purchase with aspiration, belonging, sporting discipline, fashion, and proximity to admired athletes. Consumer culture works through these associations because products can communicate social membership and personal goals as well as practical utility (McCracken, 1989). This symbolic value is real, but it can make ordinary alternatives appear inadequate when status becomes attached to a logo, limited release, or celebrity collaboration. Younger consumers may feel additional pressure when peer belonging and online visibility depend on possessing recognizable products. Persuasion should therefore be distinguished from manipulation. Persuasion offers reasons, images, emotion, or testimony intended to influence choice; manipulation undermines informed judgment through deception, concealment, exploitation of vulnerability, or unfair pressure. Ethical advertising respects audience agency by supporting claims, disclosing commercial relationships, and avoiding the substitution of celebrity image for evidence about measurable product performance.

Target Audiences, Representation, and Brand Meaning

Target audiences are constructed through the identities that advertising makes available. Nike campaigns can speak simultaneously to competitive athletes, recreational exercisers, fans, fashion

consumers, and young people who admire sporting culture without participating professionally. The viewer is invited not only to ask whether the product works but to imagine who they might become by wearing it. Representation therefore deserves attention alongside sales effectiveness. Advertising that relies almost entirely on elite, conventionally attractive, able-bodied celebrities can narrow public ideas about strength and athletic legitimacy, while more inclusive casting can expand those ideas if it avoids tokenism. Race, gender, disability, body type, age, and level of participation all influence who recognizes themselves in a campaign. At the same time, inclusive imagery should not become a substitute for examining labor conditions, sponsorship practices, environmental claims, or product accessibility. A brand's visual values are most credible when they correspond with organizational conduct. The screening is thus valuable not only as product promotion but as evidence of how commercial media organizes cultural meanings around bodies, achievement, and belonging.

Reflective Evaluation of the Screening

My overall response to the screening is that it works effectively as advertising because it converts commercial claims into personal stories and places admired athletes between the brand and the audience. I am less persuaded that the same format should be treated as objective product evaluation. A stronger version would disclose material relationships clearly, include a wider range of users where relevant, distinguish subjective experience from testable claims, and explain the limits of the evidence presented. Viewers also have an active role: they can compare prices, read independent reviews, reject campaigns, reinterpret brand meanings, and choose alternatives. Consumer agency, however, does not remove the need for truthful-advertising rules because repeated exposure, data-driven targeting, and social influence can affect even skeptical audiences. The most useful media-literacy response is therefore neither cynicism nor unquestioning trust. It is a disciplined evaluation of production, evidence, disclosure, representation, and omitted alternatives. Advertising becomes more ethically defensible when persuasion remains visible enough for consumers to understand who is speaking, why, and on what basis.

Conclusion

The screening demonstrates that advertising and consumer culture operate through far more than direct product descriptions. Testimony, editing, music, athlete prestige, visual identity, and selective criticism work together to create an emotional and social meaning for the brand. Nike's association with successful athletes can legitimately communicate sporting identity and inspire consumers, but celebrity authority cannot replace substantiation for objective performance claims. The distinction between persuasion and manipulation depends on truthfulness, transparency, evidence, and respect for the audience's capacity to choose. Current FTC guidance reinforces this principle by requiring honest endorsements and clear disclosure of material connections that may affect credibility (Federal Trade Commission, 2023; 2026). Consumer culture also requires broader questions about representation, status pressure, price, and the identities that branded products make desirable. A

critical screening response should therefore evaluate both communication effectiveness and ethical quality. The central issue is not whether advertising influences people—it is designed to do so—but whether that influence leaves viewers with enough accurate information and context to exercise meaningful judgment.

Works Cited

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