

Culture jamming

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Since the 1980s, large corporations released their success lies in generating brands, rather than manufacturing products. Large corporations use global markets to move manufacturing from rich countries to poor countries, where labour is low and there are no regulations. Large corporations use globalization to build their own brands, but failed to release that globalisation can be used to harm the brand. A brand is away of life, an attitude, set of values, and ideas. Corporations use branding as marketing strategy to sell products and services.

The Nike brand is one of the most successful brands in the world, and it depicts the power of large corporations. Some of the practices done by Nike encouraged people to launch anti-Nike campaign: working condition, using child labour, and moving manufacturing to low wage countries.

Culture jamming is the practice of using the media to alter the meaning of one message into another. The aim of culture jamming is to uncover the deeper truth behind the techniques that are used by corporations to dominate people's way of life.

Many jammers believe that corporations' dominance of the media has devalued the right to free speech. Rodriguse de Gerada argues that the ability of corporations to dominate the media has allowed corporations to occupy all public spaces and spread their messages. De Gerada argues that culture jamming is the only way people can use to counter these messages. Culture jamming techniques and practices can be understood within three aspects: semiotic terrorism; branding; and recuperation. Semiotic terrorism refers to individual culture jamming such as pictures on billboards.

Branding refers to the ability to attack a brand in order to undermine corporations' influence in the public sphere. Recuperation is the ability of corporations to utilize culture jamming practices for their benefits. From the mid 1980s, a war “ brand war” emerged between large corporations and culture jammers. Large corporations see brands as key to their success; in contrast, culture jammers see brands as a symbol of subjection. Naomi Klein described the brand war as a war about the loss of public space, corporate censorship, and unethical labour practices.

One of the best examples that depicts the brand war is the anti Nike campaign, that has been running since the 1990s. Activists campaigned against different issues such as using child labour, work conditions in overseas factories, investment in inner cities, and low wages. At the beginning of the campaign, activists started to demonstrate outside shops that sell Nike's products in the USA. The campaign succeeded in persuading local and international media to send correspondents to investigate the issues raised.

In 1997, some activists released that the only way to undermine Nike's influence is by attacking the source of Nike's brand power. They found that Nike's image is made in inner cities and intertwined with black American heroes such as Michael Jordan, Michael Jackson, and Tiger Woods. The activists decided to engage black American and Latino; who live in inner cities, and made connection between what happens in overseas factories and conditions at home. Also, activists started to convince kids that Nike's products are not worth buying, and Nike causes poverty in inner cities.

As a result of the campaign, in 1998 Nike was forced to withdraw its offer to build swoosh gymnasium in Ottawa city: after the issues of child labour was raised. In the same year, Nike accepted to improve working conditions in Indonesian factories, allow independent monitors to visit overseas factories, and not to hire children. In September 1998, the San Francisco human right group global demanded Nike to increase the wages of Indonesian workers. After three weeks, Nike increased the wages by twenty five percent. However, some argue that the increase is due to the devalue of local currency.

In addition to that, the campaign succeeded in forcing Nike to allow health and safety monitors to inspect working condition in Vietnamese factories. However, there is a limit to what culture hammers can achieve. In 2000, a series of billboard advertisement appeared in Australia for a new football boot made by Nike. What Nike did is to cut the work of culture hammers by jamming its own advert through the use of slogans that read “ I am not/A target market/ I am an athlete”. In the same year, Nike launched anti Nike web site.

Kate Coyer argues that the jamming of adverts by Nike shows there is no anti commercial gesture which cannot be commercialized. Also, Coyer argues that advertising agencies see anti corporate activities no more than a street trend, and there always be an ad that will persuade even sincere consumers. According to Tim Jordan, protesting against working conditions and the use of child labour in overseas factories have limited effect on corporations: corporations like Nike have the ability to utilise culture jamming techniques, which undermine the work of culture jammers.

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There is no arena of life that corporations do not touch, therefore, culture jamming should be abandoned. Corporations may be the real author of culture jamming work. Therefore, Jordan argues activists should protest against bombarding people with imageries, instead of raising emotional feelings. Despite the limitation of culture jamming, the anti Nike campaign has shown that activists can force corporations to re-consider some of their practices. For example, the anti Nike campaign has succeeded in highlighting some issues and forced Nike to consider its practices.

First issue, the use of child labour has damaged the reputation of Nike. As a result, some schools in the USA refused to accept donations from Nike. Second issue, the working conditions and low wages in overseas factories. The persistent campaign has forced Nike to improve working condition, increase wages, allow independent monitors, and appoint vice president for corporate responsibilities. The campaign has generated bad publicity for Nike; as a result, Nike lost some of its supporters in inner cities. In addition to that, Nike's competitors like Reebok used the scandal to gain some of Nike's market share.

The success of the anti Nike campaign in highlighting some issues; clearly, cannot be used to study the impact of the brand war on Nike's power. Naomi Klein argues that culture jamming will not change people's behavior: public space is safe for commercial advertising and commercial messages are unable to awake us. In addition to that, most of the literature did not address how many people are willing to adopt culture jamming argument, if they are offered alternative. In brief, culture jamming techniques do have an impact

upon corporations such as reputation, but it is difficult to measure the impact on other areas.