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As well as to what extent leadership improves brand image and perception in the minds of Nike members as well as customers. The focus will be on evaluating the leadership of Phil Knight, to see how that directly impacts Nike's brand image. The analysis will be done looking inward on other members within the Nike work culture, as well as outward on customers, media, and members of the community. Through studying Nike using brand image and leadership as the areas of focus, useful insight as to how these two are connected will be made to improve companies' brands.

Key words: branding, leadership, organizational communication, media, buyer behavior

INTRODUCTION Background Phil Knight was one of the expounders of Nike and served as CEO until recently. It was through his leadership and his vision that he was able to build one of the biggest names in sports. The brand itself is worth over ten billion dollars, which makes it the most valuable name in the sporting world today. Not only that, Nike has built an incredible culture both from the inside aspect of a company to a culture wide Nike movement.

Through Phil's strategic leadership in Oregon he was able to build a company that not only was successful but a company that is always on the cutting edge of innovation and advertising. It is obvious that Phil Knight and Bill Bowerman, both expounders of Nike, have had a tremendous impact on leading this company down a successful road. However, the extent to which these leaders impacted brand image inwardly and outwardly is yet to be determined.

This study will be valuable for not only Nike but also for other corporations to see how the leadership of key individuals affects the perception of the brand from both a company and consumer viewpoint. This will play a role in determining what kind of leader is best suited for a company if improved brand image is desired as well as, how communication of the leader within a company such as Nike affects the brand image. DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN HOW NIKE'S BRAND IMAGE IS PERCEIVED INTERNALLY AND EXTERNALLY on alleged factors such as identity, work culture, organizational communication, and if the members understand the brand.

In the book *Just Do It: The Nike Spirit in the Corporate World* by Donald Katz discussion regarding how Nike came about and the past decisions that led Nike to the top of the sports world were explained and studied.

Internally Identity. Katz often mentions in his time spent with Phil Knight, that Knight has a retreat sense of identity, association, and ownership with the brand itself (Katz 1994). Not only that, but also organizational members, workers, and players sponsored by Nike felt a great sense of identity with the brand.

What makes organizational members with Nike unique is that Nike has managed to capture the true essence of athletics and extends the idea of being on a team into that of being a member of the Nike team. It is an innate desire to want to be a part of something grand, something impacting and exciting. For most, the concept of a team is stripped from their vocabulary upon leaving high school or college sports. At Nike, members highly identify with that and desire that sense of belonging; their attitudes gravitate toward it and they buy into the concept and reality of that.

On top of it all, Nikkei is a winning CIW-L Journal of Undergraduate Research XVI (2013) team whose very name is Greek for the word victory. Many of the athletes that are endorsed by Nikkei have a winning reputation and a passion for their sport. It aligns well with Nikkei without reshaping their own value system. One Nikkei executive went on record to say that “ Michael Jordan holds us to our values”, Nikkei desires to enhance people’s lives through sports and fitness (Katz 1994, 25). Knight has been intertwined with the brand of Nikkei. He is only a pair of wedding rings away from a beautiful marriage.

Sacrifice, genuine love, and endless passion towards this brand is displayed in an almost human like form from Knight. One exaggerated comparison was made that some employees within Nikkei do not have platelets in their blood but instead have little Swooshes (Katz 1994, 87). Multiple times it was almost Jokingly stated how integrated organizational members were with Nikkei, the logo, the concept, and the slogans. People become what they think about. The longer someone thinks about something the more likely they are to associate with that object or identity.

Because of the intensity of the importance of brand integration into employees, executives, and athletes lives it becomes a large part of how they associate themselves. Work Culture. The culture within Nikkei is one that embodies the very nature that it supports, competition. “ Employees who want to excel at Nikkei must understand what makes people able to cry and scream with pleasure while watching a game” (Katz 1994, 54). Emotion is infused with everyday work life much like it is within competitive.

Unlike so many other businesses in which sporting metaphors have become part of the everyday managerial vocabulary “quarterbacking” a committee and the like, Nikkei is a gigantic multifaceted sports metaphor. Entire careers are envisaged as extended sports movements. Work weeks and fiscal quarters perpetual big game. And as of the beginning of 1993, everyone inside Nikkei knew that the head coach of the company had been crowned “the most powerful man in (Katz 1994, 54). When things are put in the context of a game or athletics, it makes the work environment seem more like a field or arena.

One Nikkei employee said, “Working at Nikkei is like a factory for fun, like finals night, being in a playground, or coming down the face of a wave” (Katz 1994, 49). It is obvious through the research and investigation that has been done that Nikkei has worked to create a culture that breeds winning through hard work and teamwork. Knight and the rest of the members associated with Nikkei know that their slogan “There Is No Finish Line” resonates deep within the heart of the corporate athlete. The innate and slightly trained idea that true competitors are never content with mediocrity keeps the minds of Nikkei banging on all cylinders.

The moment they take the foot off the gas or eye off the ball is when the opponent will strike. Knight expresses his mentality toward corporate winning when he says “I worry over it like I worry about my kids... ‘can’t break the power of the connection any more than I can stop worry about my two kids, and they’re grown up now. There’s just too much emotion involved. I’ll never quit worrying about Nikkei, and we’ll never stop needing to win” (Katz 1994, 90). Organizational Communication. The organizational members

are the players on the team and the head coach is the Phil Knight, who pioneered Nike from the very beginning.

Knight communicates in a harsh and brash sort of way. He knows what he wants to accomplish and he wants others to be on board with that plan. Much like Nike's slogan, the organization operates in the "Just do it" sort of mentality, where quickness in decision making is valued. Members are aware that the products that make up the brand are superior in quality to that of their competitors and they conduct themselves with a subtle arrogance that is often found in highly competitive athletes (Goldman and Passon 1998). Knight is also a man of few words; he is direct and to the point.

Most would classify him as mysterious. He is not easily understood and has a sense of wonderment about him. Corporate stories are another road that communication travels on. These would be tales of glorious moments within Nike and it is through these legendary tales of Phil Knight and Bill Bowerman that carry that management ideology and reinforce company policy. These stories go from person to person through the grapevine. While they are rarely stories that are shared in a large audience corporate setting, they are passed down from older members within the organization. Do Members Understand?

Organizationally speaking, members of Nike understand the image and identity that surrounds this brand. Corporate Nike employees and executives live and breathe Nike, they are mindful of the full weight that the brand is and the journey it has been on to get where it is today. Phil Knight has instilled in others what he has first instilled in himself. This comes

from a deep seeded belief of winning and being part of something that will leave a legacy. Knight knows just how successful Nike has become because he was the one who created the idea from a college paper that he wrote back in his time spent at the University of Oregon (Katz 1994).

We had a vision at that point and time of what a winning business could look like, however, that vision would take flight and would soar to the top of the sports world. During the 1992 summer Olympics in Barcelona it was taken perhaps too far. Several athletes who were sponsored by Nike, specifically Jordan, Barkley, Robinson, Stockton, Pippin, and Mullin refused to wear the official Olympic jackets during the awards ceremony because the Reebok emblem was visible (Katz 1994, 16). Over the course of the Olympics many phone calls were made to Phil Knight from those athletes exclaiming that they were not going to be unfaithful to Nike.

It was Nike and only Nike that was suitable for them to wear (Katz 1994, 17). This was not something that was forced upon them by Knight or by other athletes or corporate executives this was an emotional connection to the brand and all that it stood for. It shows that Nike is not just a brand but a symbol and all other brands will not be deemed acceptable because of the honor, privilege and prestige that the Nike brand has to offer. When the view shifts to the customer, typically the brand image will differ from the company's brand identity.

There are a variety of factors that can contribute to this. Ultimately, if a company can portray their brand with an image that is perceived to be somewhat close to or moderately ideal for most, then companies are

satisfied in their brand management. Image. The way that Nikkei is perceived by customers and by the people in general is best identified and put into words through the use of the Brand Personality Scale, in which 42 items are being evaluated (Nana and Unique 2009, 9). After, these responses were broken down into five clusters where they were further analyzed.

The five clusters were essentially determined based on the affordability of the brand from severe criticism to highly favorable and everything considered moderate in between. Cluster one, would state the Nikkei is almost an ideal brand. People within this group view Nikkei as up to date, successful, charming and original, a brand that illuminates power and energy. The only downfall for this group is their questioning of the reliability and tenderness of the brand (Nana and Unique 2009, 13). Cluster two mainly views Nikkei as a valuable brand but not the most reliable. Generally speaking,

Nikkei is somewhat up to date, successful and original. There is a sense of glamour and winning associated with it but it struggles to be sincere or reliable in their eyes (Nana and Unique 2009, 13). Cluster three looks at Nikkei and sees a brand with no distinctive attributes, neither reliable nor glamorous. They would have the same general perceptions as cluster two (Nana and Unique 2009, 13). Cluster four would be noted as saying that Nikkei has no attributes at all. They would be the most critical of the brand and the brand is mostly deemed as being down to earth but carries no real excitement with it (Nana and Unique 2009, 13).

Lastly, cluster five regards Nikei as a valuable yet not glamorous brand. This cluster would generally have similar perceptions as clusters two and three seeing them as successful, energetic, and up to though Nikei is perceived by others as not being the most honest brand (Nana and Unique 2009, 16). This could be due to a multitude of factors such as their lack of operations transparency, secret working conditions in third world countries, or a variety of other dishonest moments that have occurred over the decades. These brand personality traits describe Nikei in a way that is fair and honest.

However, there is an image about Nikei that cannot always be put into words; it is more of an emotionally elicited response. People cannot help but be drawn toward Nikei. When the image of Nikei comes to mind, consumers and non-consumers have a thought, emotion, or experience that arises. In an instant they are able to associate the brand with an image, the Nikei name, the Swoosh, and other Nikei emblems are associated with something. It could be a memory, a person, an idea, a concept, or a product. Either way, Nikei has a recognizable, visible image that people are aware of.

Culture. The culture surrounding Nikei has been largely impacted through sponsored athletes. The first name that comes to mind when someone says Nikei athlete is Michael Jordan (Bedbugs and Beneficial 2003). He has become the face of the Nikei world. It seemed as though, once Jordan got noticed wearing Nines and appearing in commercials, the craze for buying Nikei shoes took off. There is something magical, something mystical that is

alluring for the iconic Nike Swoosh. It symbolizes everything an individual hopes to be in any sport, the best.

Winning and Nike are nearly synonyms as individuals from different generations have watched their favorite athletes wearing Nike shoes, apparel and equipment, many of whom have found abounding success. From a young age individuals are deciding if they will be loyal to Nike or not (Asker and Schematically 2000). The phenomenon of brand loyalty and brand recognition from a young age is nothing new, but it does bring into question the reason of why and how. The concept of role models, specifically professional athletes, with children is a tremendous contributor to brand loyalty.

Seeing that they wear Nike and that they perform at a high, almost heroic level, children assimilate themselves with that particular athlete leading them to become faithful to the brand. Interestingly enough, this idea of seeking after a sports idol will transition to making purchases from an emotional standpoint to a familiar standpoint. People progress in why they make purchases; and as maturity and reasoning increase the product or brand may stay the same but the response for why they make the purchase may change.

At the heart of it all lies the fact that emotion is still the source for why the Nike brand is purchased (Katz 1994). It is just masked by attributes of familiarity, performance, price, or availability. Media. Tying into culture, is media. Media has become a part of today's culture and one of the ways that culture adapts so rapidly. It is largely due to the media that acts as a

medium to connect individuals to one another. There are both pros and cons to the media, some are based off of truth and other sources are more it as credible. Advertising plays a large part in how the brand is perceived.

Nikkei has always been known for having captivating commercials and print advertisements that have gripped the minds and eyes of the young and old, the athlete and the non-athlete. Strength, speed, innovation, technology, clutch, and winning are just some of the words used in the advertising of Nikkei (Goldman and Passion 1998, 49). "Nikkei continues to represent itself as a self-reflexive corporation with a thoughtful philosophy. Though Nikkei has become the Goliath of the industry, it still wants to appear like David (Goldman and Passion 1998, 45)".

This shows how Nikkei is perceived as the underdog in a market in which they are the juggernaut. This is because the underdog is typically a desirable position to root for. People can associate well with being the underdog and having a fighting spirit to win. Nikkei commercials were trusted for the most part, and when having a reliable figure like Michael Jordan in the advertisements, people saw their deepest emotions through them. The commercials were encouraging and inspiring and spoke the words to consumer who drank deeply from the advertisement like a thirsty dog.

Nikkei strategically places attributes of amazement and determination along with humanness in the commercials featuring MS. They seek to make him an idol but at the same time they want him to be able to relate with the average Joe. They also work to execute a healthy balance of seriousness and humor (Goldman and Passion 1998, 49). In one advertisement Jordan is speaking

and says “ Challenge me, doubt me, disrespect me, tell me I’m older, tell me I’m slower, tell me I can no longer fly, I want you to (Goldman and Passion 1998, 50)”. The epitome of emotion, reflection, and attitude is offered in this commercial.

This aligns with the central theme of winning, “ Just do it”, and rising above. As much positive that may come out of using media as a medium for communication, only a handful can be controlled by Nikkei. When media that is uncontrollable by Nikkei aches consumers and non-consumers it has an effect on the overall image. Sponsored Nikkei athletes can have unglamorous and unpredictable or even disrespectful moments on and off the field. They can become injured, get ensnared in various scandals, perform at a mediocre level, and get caught up in financial or immoral trouble (Goldman and Passion 1998).

Since these athletes represent the Nikkei brand then Nikkei represents these athletes and that can come back to bite them and eventually hurt their desired image. Nikkei can manage these incidents by trying to rebuke the athlete or to remedy the situation but it is more of a maintenance role than a prevention role. Succinctness of Consumer Values. In a study conducted on branding and buying behavior one respondent said “ I know Nikkei is using sweatshops... But I will still buy it, when I like the shoes. It is shallow, but it is so far away from your own situation.

It is not your mother who gets exploited, you know’ (Salter-Morning and Stranded 2007, 416). Ultimately, it comes down to consumers being aware that there are shortcomings with Nikkei. Consumers know that the brand

does not live up to its idealistic standards. Individuals can have a negative attitude toward the brand, yet the intentioned use of the brand and purchasing of the brand will persist. Their overall connection with the morality concerning the brand and the product they buy seems to be severed when in the act of purchasing (Salter-Morning and Stranded 2007, for the brand image of Nike).

Because of this, Nike has the freedom to act as they want knowing that at the end of the day consumers will still remain loyal and will still desire the product but above that they will crave the brand. NINE'S LEADERSHIP AND BRAND IMAGE Leadership at Nike “ Companies that have taken leadership positions in their industries in the last decade such as Nike have done so by narrowing their business focus, not broadening it. They have focused on delivering superior customer value in line with one of three value disciplines: operational excellence, customer intimacy, or product leadership (Treaty and Wireman 1993). Product leadership is exactly what Nike has found the secret to. When it comes to innovation and being the best at what you do, Nike does it best with shoes. Scott Bedbugs describes how Nike was far ahead of its time as far as industry leading brand building practices (Bedbugs and Beneficial 2003). Even though Nike was still considered the number three athletic footwear brand back in 1987 they were working as if they were on top. They implemented new ideas, game changing innovations, and infused profitable creative assets into their business.

With the development of the “ Just Do It” campaign, the brand expansion via the creation of new products and top of the line communication programs, Nike was making moves. They began integrating women's print advertising

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and beefing up television commercials and even worked to open a few retail concept stores such as Nikkei Town. Between Phil Knight and Bill Borrower, leadership at Nike has been constant. These two talented and driven individuals, both athletes themselves, partnered to lead a company to greatness.

Borrower was older than Knight at the time and had more of a coach's perspective as he spent most of his adult life coaching sports. He became so renowned and innovative in his thinking that he went on to coach during the summer Olympic Games in Mexico and Munich in the late 1960s and early 1970s. His pioneering mind came into play when he introduced the concept of jogging into society (Katz 1994). It became a huge success for both athletes and fitness fanatics alike. Nike has been set on a leadership course from day one.

Now that Borrower is deceased and Knight is no longer CEO but has taken the chairman role, the platform and standard for leadership continues on through their legacy and through Knight's guiding hand on the business. Company leaders such as current CEO Mark Parker and brand president Charles Denton have continued carrying the baton (Bedbugs and Beneficial 2002). These leaders have been homegrown, meaning raised in the Nike system under the leadership of Knight. They have been molded and purged with the Nike culture in a way that has helped them to understand the vision of Nike and for Nike.

These leaders do not need to reinvent Nike but rather continue to make sure that the brand stays on course and that it Phil Knight's Impact Nike

has acted much like the potter would with his clay. He has molded something out of nothing, and something has become a beautiful, valuable work of art. “ Nike’s ability to innovate products for customers becomes sustained through employees’ commitment to find innovative ways to do their work. When the external brand consumers prefer reflects the internal culture experienced by employees, brand comes a major source of competitive advantage (Lurch, Smallwood, et al 2000)”.

Brand Identity. For Nike, they are a company built on innovation and being the best (Asker and Schematically 2000). Nike has set the tone for what that looks like and in turn the corporate leaders within the company follow suit. They are competitors that work hard and understand the standard that Nike has set; that idea is ingrained into the company DNA. Because the business platform is so intricately established and rooted in meeting the needs of the athlete, it has the capability to bridge the gap and connect the customer with a valuable product.

On a deeper level it comes down the power of the brand and how that can be used. “ Thinking about a firm’s brand as its culture and set of management practices, however, does not fully explain the power of the brand. The brand should also be embedded in each leader throughout the firm; then they communicate that brand to employees who then sustain it with customers (Lurch, Smallwood, et al 2000)”. Leadership of the brand lies at the core of Nike and has become one with their identity.

Over the course of time the organization creates leaders who are in a sense branded, they are different than their competing leaders in their industry

(Lurch, Smallwood, et al 2000). Brand Image. Globally, Nike maintains the same image in all the markets that it is targeted toward. For fitness and performance the functionality of Nike's marketing mix and product concepts work to be dynamic throughout the world. Local athletes and more regionally popular sports are emphasized using a combination of pricing strategies, communication methods, and distribution outlets.

That is why the Nike brand image is noticeably visible on other continents and in other markets outside the US traditional sports market (Roth 1995, 56). Even though the marketing mix may vary in that the athletes and sports may change based off of geographic location, the basic principle is that each advertisement and strand of the overall marketing plan points back the same fitness and performance image. Nike calls this strategy pattern standardization, which reinforces these key fundamentals within the company (Roth 1995, 57).

Nike has the foresight to see that different regions of the world have different focuses but they can all be achieved through Nike's overarching theme that transcends cultural and geographical barriers. As Nike's product leadership and verbal company leadership continues to strive toward functional innovation in a way that is connected with others around the world the brand image will continue to prosper as it has done for the past 25 years. Great leadership does not always translate into a high regard for brand image or even a positive view of a particular brand.

Where the correlation lies between leadership and brand image is in the advertising and promotional aspect of what Nike is all about. Findings. In all

of the studies that have been examined, no article or study has been forthright in declaring a 100% correlation between Nike's leadership and brand image. However, much is to be said regarding leadership in shaping brand identity. Brand identity is the root of brand image, meaning that from the original identity of a particular brand an image of some degree of accuracy is formed. Creating the brand identity involves remarkable strategic leadership.

Elements such as capabilities, personality, purpose, culture, values, community, and image all go into the melting pot of shaping one's brand identity. These characteristics are not stumbled upon, they are dreamt about, envisioned, planned for, and adaptable to achieve the higher end goal. The success of the brand is for its ambiguity for what it will become. During the creation period of the brand identity if characteristics are not synced up with one another conflict and confusion arises. Nike has eclipsed achievement because they have found a synchronous recipe that accompanies their brand.

As mentioned before, research concerning brand image perceived by people was studied (Nana and Unique 2009). After analyzing, the findings depict that because of the indirect aspect of leadership at Nike which allowed the brand identity to be established, certain personalities were evoked and recalled by participants in the study. Personalities such as successful, charming, and exciting that are associated with the brand were strategically created by Nike's leadership, which showcases Phil Knight (Nana and Unique 2009).

The marketing that was affective with the various participants was able to shine through; while those that associated the brand less than desirable personalities fell short of Nike's expectations. What Nike heard was likely less directly impacted by Nike's branding techniques or leadership a more of a result of unrealistic or uninformed individuals. Why? Brand identity and brand image are two different topics. One is a company's ideal perception and another is a consumer or outside individuals thought of a company. A correlation can be made because although brand image and brand identity are different there are similar elements to both.

Both require leadership. With brand identity it is more hands on, direct and controlled; whereas with the brand image, leadership is more of a result of good or bad leadership in the stages of brand identity. Nike has had great leadership and has truly had one leader since its birth. Studying its brand trend using leadership as an active component, helps to utter understand where the image has been and where it is going. More research needs to be done due to the lack of current research on leadership at Nike and brand image.

Branding is a relatively new subject that is being studied in great detail and therefore specifics to Nike are limited. Affect on Future Business. When and if Nike becomes aware of what they can control and what they cannot control they will be able to refocus their leadership and marketing efforts, which will make them more efficient and likely more affective. If leadership significantly affects brand identity, as it has been identified in this study award aligning the proper leadership with the ideal brand identity in hopes

that a strategic alignment between identity and image will be built over time.

Brand image can be influenced but it cannot be controlled. Therefore, time spent orchestrating a masterful brand identity that has the capacity to be transparent and transportable is better time spent than chasing after things that are changing and intangible, such as brand image. For Nikkei, they seek transparency and so do their consumers (Nana and Unique 2009). By striving after transparent brand identity in a world where most are aware of Nike's existence, the Nikkei image will slowly be more transformed by the translucency of Nike's leadership in dealing with their true identity.