

Corporate Social Marketing: An Analysis of Consumer Response to Nike's Campaign Featuring Colin Kaepernick

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Abstract

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is ubiquitous within the sport industry and a common business strategy to enhance brand image. This research focused on corporate social marketing (CSM) and how consumers processed and responded to Nike's social injustice campaign featuring Colin Kaepernick. A thematic analysis of New York Times readers' comments was conducted and comments were placed into predetermined categories. Together, attribution theory and the Inoue and Kent (2014) CSM framework were used to create five code categories: (1) corporate attributes, (2) corporate reputation, (3) CSM attributes, (4) cause attributes, (5) consumer behavior. Results demonstrated the campaign had an overall positive influence, particularly with consumer purchase intention. Additionally, the results showed a lesser emphasis on corporate attributions and corporate reputation when consumers process CSM campaigns.

Introduction

Currently, we are experiencing what sport sociologist Harry Edwards called the Fourth Wave of athlete activism (Viet, 2017). Athletes are using their global platforms to highlight social inequalities and fight for the betterment of their communities and society at large. Sport fans are resistant to athletes' engagement in social movements and have historically responded negatively towards such actions (Ryan, 2016). Fans' negative responses are likely the cause of athletes' silence on social issues through the 1980's and 1990's. This resurgence of athlete activism has presented sport companies and organizations with particular challenges (Armstrong, Butryn, Andrews, & Masucci, 2018). Specifically, companies must decide how to manage these activist athletes and whether to continue with their sponsorship, to terminate their sponsorship, or to remain neutral.

Some companies, such as Air Academy Federal Credit Union and CenturyLink opted to cut ties with a former Denver Broncos linebacker for his activism (Nittle, 2018). Nike took a different approach and decided to use the opportunity for corporate social responsibility (CSR). "CSR can be broadly understood as the responsibility of organizations to be ethical and accountable to the needs of their society as well as their stakeholders" (Bradish & Cronin, 2009, p. 692). CSR has become ubiquitous within the sport industry and is an increasingly important part of an organization's business strategy. CSR programs are wide-ranging and can be both internal and external initiatives. Such programs include cause-related marketing (CRM) and corporate social marketing (CSM) (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001).

In September 2018, Nike launched a “Just Do It” CSM campaign featuring multiple athletes known for their activism. These athletes included Colin Kaepernick, Serena Williams, LeBron James, Odell Beckham Jr., Lacey Baker and Saquem Griffin (Mejia, 2018). The first part of this campaign featured a picture of Colin Kaepernick and the saying “Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything” (Carrington & Boykoff, 2018, para. 1). Kaepernick tweeted the advertisement, which was quickly picked up by media outlets and spurred national discussion questioning Nike’s involvement with Kaepernick’s fight against social injustice.

Nike’s choice to support Kaepernick is an example of a CSR initiative aimed at social change. There are several studies in sport management that focus on CSR (Babiak & Wolfe, 2006, 2009; Braddish & Cronin, 2009; Sheth & Babuak, 2010; Smith & Westerbeek, 2007; Trendafilova, Babiak, & Heinze, 2013; Walker & Kent, 2009), but recently, with the increase of athlete activism, the sport industry has taken an interest in CSM campaigns (Chelladurai, 2016). The primary aim of a CSM campaign is to influence a positive behavioral change for the betterment of society. However, CSM campaigns have been proven to be beneficial for both society and organizations’ profit margins (Blakely & Bell, 2010; Pharr & Lough, 2012). This makes CSM campaigns a potentially fruitful corporate strategy for companies aspiring to improve society at large and achieve a business objective.

To further analyze the possible dual benefit of CSM campaigns, this study utilized attribution theory and the empirical findings of Inoue and Kent (2014) to explore the narrative surrounding Nike’s sponsorship of Colin Kaepernick. Particularly, this research examined what cues consumers used to process and evaluate the CSM campaign. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to investigate the impact of Nike’s sponsorship of Kaepernick on consumers’ perceptions of Nike’s brand, as well as the campaigns influence on consumers’ purchase intentions.

Relevant Literature

The concept of CSM was originally generated by sociologist G.D. Wiebe and then further refined into the marketing field by Kotler and Zaltman (Andreasen, 2003). Organizations have integrated CSM initiatives in areas such as health, education, community involvement, and intercultural understanding (Inoue & Kent, 2014). The effects of CSM are increased when the social issue being highlighted by the campaign requires individuals to change their behavior, and at least in part, aligns with the organization’s goals and objectives (Kotler & Lee, 2011). Specifically, organizations want to avoid the perception of inauthenticity to circumvent a cynical response by consumers and ultimately a failed campaign (Kotler & Lee, 2011). Research has shown that CSR authenticity has a mediating influence on consumer perceptions and outcomes of a campaign (Alhouti, Johnson, & Holloway, 2016).

The majority of research on CSM has been conducted in the public health discipline (Grier & Bryant, 2005; Ling, Franklin, Lindsteadt, & Gearson 1992; Stead, Gordon, Angus, & McDermott, 2007; Walsh, Rudd, Moeykens, & Moloney, 1993), but over the last decade CSM has gained some attention in the sport management field (Inoue & Kent, 2012; Pharr & Lough, 2012; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006). For instance, Lough & Pharr (2010) extended a multi-tiered marketing framework from Storey, Saffitz, & Rimon (2008) to examine two Nike campaigns, Livestrong and Nike Gamechangers. The extended model applied Storey and colleagues (2008) five original variables, (1) locus of benefit, (2) objective/outcomes, (3) target market, (4) voluntary exchange and (5) market perspective, to three marketing strategies: (1) commercial marketing, (2) CSM and (3) CRM. The purpose of the analysis was to demonstrate how the

marketing strategies differed in deepening the connection between consumer and brand in a specific campaign. The results showed that the social marketing objective of the Gamechanger campaign helped satisfy consumers' higher order needs for self-actualization (Lough & Pharr, 2010). In other words, consumers felt that their efforts were contributing to improving society at large by purchasing the brand's products. Further, Blakey and Bell (2010) conducted interviews and observed participants during the football Euro 2005 season to determine the effectiveness of a CSM campaign intended to encourage women participation in sport. The campaign was conducted in five stages: (1) precontemplation—creating awareness, (2) contemplation—persuading and motivating, (3) preparation—creating action and commitment, (4) Action – enabling action, and (5) confirmation/maintenance—maintaining change. The researchers found the program to be successful in influencing both individual and societal changes because the program created awareness, motivated individuals, facilitated support and provided opportunities to maintain behavioral change through involvement with the league. In other words, more women became involved and stayed involved in sport because the campaign created a culture for it.

The lack of research on CSM could be, in part, due to researchers' mislabeling CSM as CRM. Pharr and Lough (2012) noted that previous studies have inaccurately used CRM to describe initiatives that fall under CSM campaigns. For example, prior research has mislabeled the *NFL Play 60* campaign as CRM (Pharr & Lough, 2012). CRM and CSM are two distinct marketing strategies employed to achieve CSR. CRM has been defined as "the process of marketing activities that link a firm's contributions to a charitable cause to a revenue-producing transaction with the firm that satisfies both business and individual objectives" (Kim, Kwak, & Kim, 2010, p. 516). It is critical for organizations to accurately differentiate the types of initiatives, whether raising awareness or behavioral change, to fully reap the benefits of either CRM or CSM (Kotler & Lee, 2011). Professional sport leagues and teams have embraced CRM as a business strategy to align themselves with social causes that resonate with their target audience (Roy & Graeff, 2003), such as the Dallas Cowboys' long-standing partnership with the Salvation Army, where the Cowboys use their national platform during their annual Thanksgiving Day game to kick-off the Salvation Army's Red Kettle Campaign ("The Army and the Star," 2018). The visibility generated from the association with the Cowboys Thanksgiving Day game has resulted in millions of dollars of donations. The aim of such campaigns, in addition to advancing social responsibility goals, are to build consumer relationships and enhance corporate image (Kim et al., 2010).

Conversely, the goal of CSM is to change individuals' behavior to improve society at large (Pharr & Lough, 2012). CSM is unique in that it utilizes commercial marketing technologies and techniques to plan and implement programs designed to influence behavior of a target audience with the objective of improving personal and societal welfare (Lough & Pharr, 2010). Prior research demonstrates that CSM is persuasive and can significantly affect consumers' behaviors and attitudes towards an organization and their products, both positively and negatively (Hoeffler & Keller, 2002; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001).

Menon and Kahn (2003) measured the effects of corporate sponsorship of philanthropic activities on perceptions of the sponsor brand. Specifically, the researchers examined the difference among perceptions of consumers on sponsorships of two different types of philanthropic activities: cause promotion (CRM) and advocacy advertising (CSM). The results showed that CRM yielded higher ratings than CSM. This is because consumers elaborate and think more about the brands persuasion tactics for CSM, resulting in a less favorable evaluation

(Menon & Kahn, 2003). These results align with prior findings that consumers' perceptions of organizations motives for CSM influence the campaigns outcomes (Hoeffler & Keller, 2002).

Kelley's (1972) discounting principle elucidates that individuals will disregard an organization's CSM action when alternative causes become salient. Therefore, if self-serving causes are evident, such as the desire to increase sales, then consumers will likely conclude that the CSM campaign was motivated from self-interest and thus have negative reactions to the organization's sponsorship. This effect has been well-documented and it's likely explained by the fact that consumers want purely public-serving motives for any CSM campaign. Further, Rifon and colleagues (2004) found that strong company-cause fit generates consumers' attributions of altruistic motives and enhances credibility and attitude towards the sponsor.

Haley (1996) found that consumers process CSM campaigns through perceptions of source and corporate credibility. Specifically, perceptions of source credibility affect message evaluation, attitude change and behavioral intentions, but the effects of source credibility are situational. Prior research is split on whether an organization's vested interest in a social issue influences corporate credibility. Some scholars have found that when the organization has a vested interest in the cause, the advertising is more credible than an unrelated social issue (Haley & Wilkinson, 1994). Also, perceived fit can impact consumers' perceptions of authenticity, which has been proven to influence consumer behavior (Alhouthi et al., 2016). Consumers associate intent of the CSM campaign with an organization's trustworthiness and if the organization is invested and involved with the advocated issue beyond mere advertisement, perceived trustworthiness and credibility are increased (Haley, 1996). Other scholars have found that if the focus is on a social issue with no connection to the organization, credibility of the source is enhanced (Menon & Kahn, 2003).

CSR initiatives, specifically CSM campaigns, may elicit negative feelings from consumers if consumers attribute the organization's motives as self-serving or if the campaign does not align with the organization's values and goals (Forehand & Grier, 2003; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006). Attribution theory posits "consumers cognitively infer a motive for the sponsorship behavior; an altruistic, or socially responsible, motive attribution could provide the foundation for sponsor credibility and subsequent positive attitude toward the sponsor" (Rifon et al., 2004, pp. 29). Ideally, corporations want consumers to focus on intrinsic motives, such as raising awareness for the cause, to avoid negative responses due to perceived corporate exploitation (Kotler & Lee, 2011).

Theoretical Framework

Based on the previous literature, attribution theory served as the most appropriate theoretical foundation for understanding consumers' perceptions of CSM campaigns (Kim & Choi, 2018). Attribution theory is a collection of theories based on the assumption that consumers are social perceivers who evaluate the motives of others to explain and understand the world (Heider, 1958; Jones and Davis, 1965; Kelley, 1967; Kelley, 1973). Further, attribution theory addresses the process through which consumers evaluate motives and how those perceived motives influence subsequent behaviors and attitudes (Forehand & Grier, 2003). There are two primary types of motives associated with firm behavior: (1) intrinsic or altruistic motives or (2) extrinsic or ulterior motive of self-interest (Rifon et al., 2004).

Inoue and Kent (2014) developed a conceptual framework to explain how companies can influence consumer behavior to achieve both social and business benefits through CSM

campaigns. The framework was grounded in source credibility research, theorizing CSM effectiveness is contingent on the credibility of the organization supporting the cause (Inoue & Kent, 2014). Based on this theory, Inoue and Kent's (2014) framework identified 10 antecedents of CSM credibility, divided into three categories: (1) corporate attributes, (2) CSM campaign attributes, and (3) cause attributes. Corporate attributes included CSR associations, which refer to the organization's ability to meet societal obligations through social initiatives. (Inoue & Kent, 2014). CSM campaign attributes include company-cause fit, amount of effort set forth by the organization, personal investment by the organization, value-driven motives for CSM campaign, and demonstrated impact of CSM campaign. Lastly, cause attributes consider consumer personal importance of the cause, cause proximity and cause familiarity.

For this research, Inoue and Kent's (2014) three main categories of attributes (1) corporate attributes, CSM campaign attributes and (3) cause attributes were applied. Additionally, since prior literature has clarified a distinction between corporate credibility and corporate reputation, corporate reputation served as the fourth category of attributes utilized. These four categories, in addition to consumers' purchase intention, were used to analyze the comments of a New York Times article with the Nike and Colin Kaepernick advertisement. Based on the prior literature and attribution theory, the following research questions were developed:

- RQ1: How do corporate attributes affect consumers' evaluation of a CSM campaign
- RQ2: How do corporate reputation affect consumers' evaluation of a CSM campaign
- RQ3: How do CSM attributes affect consumers' evaluation of a CSM campaign?
- RQ4: How do cause attributes affect consumers' evaluation of a CSM campaign?
- RQ5: What specific attributes have the greatest impact on consumers' purchase intention?

Methodology

A qualitative data analysis was conducted to investigate what attributes consumers used to evaluate Nike's CSM campaign featuring Colin Kaepernick. Case study-based analyses are chosen to investigate, in detail, situations where researchers have little control, but aim to develop or extend new theoretical concepts (Yin, 2003). This research sought to extend Inoue and Kent (2014) framework to consider CSM campaigns paired with athlete activism.

Case Study: Nike and Colin Kaepernick

Nike is known for its groundbreaking sport innovations and high-profile athlete endorsers. However, Nike has taken on a new initiative - to drive global conversation and effect social and political change. Specifically, Nike launched a CSM campaign that featured an advertisement with Colin Kaepernick, the former San Francisco 49ers quarterback and leader of the #takeaknee movement in the NFL. The advertisement was simple: a picture of Colin Kaepernick's face and the saying "[b]elieve in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything" (Bain, 2018). Kaepernick tweeted the advertisement, which was quickly picked up by national media outlets, including the New York Times.

Nike's decision to use Kaepernick in a marketing campaign resulted in mixed reactions. Some individuals called for a boycott of Nike products, others saw the strategy as a shrewd business move trying to commercialize Kaepernick's message, and some applauded Nike for their bravery in furthering the fight for social justice and equality (Bain, 2018). These varied responses created an intriguing opportunity to evaluate the interaction between corporations

and athlete activism by analyzing what attributes consumers used to evaluate the Nike and Colin Kaepernick advertisement. Such analysis is critical to understanding why consumers are responding in a certain way to the Nike and Kaepernick partnership. This information can help future campaigns by providing strategies to enhance specific cues to manage consumers' responses to advertisements.

Sample

Comments from a New York Times (NYT) article were analyzed for this study. The article was written by Draper and Belson (2018) and published shortly after Colin Kaepernick tweeted out the advertisement. The authors chose this publication due to its credibility as a news source and being one of the first major outlets to publish the advertisement (Shortt, 2018). Additionally, while the NYT is considered left-center biased, it is considered one of the most reliable sources for news information (Shortt, 2018).

Data Collection

The preliminary stage of this study consisted of collecting 377 readers' comments that were posted on the Draper and Belson (2018) NYT article "*Colin Kaepernick's Nike Campaign Keeps N.F.L. Anthem Kneeling in Spotlight.*" This article was selected because of its timeliness in publishing the advertisement tweeted by Colin Kaepernick earlier in the day. The article was published online where readers were able to post comments about the article or to other readers' comments. The NYT has approximately 5 million online subscribers (Tracy, 2019), but this article also was available online to the general public. Since the comments could originate from subscribers as well as the general public, the NYT would allow researchers to analyze readers' comments and reactions to the Nike and Kaepernick advertisement.

Data Analysis

A thematic analysis of the readers' 377 comments was conducted employing the framework method (Gale et al., 2013). The Inoue and Kent (2014) framework of antecedents of CSM credibility categories (i.e. corporate attributes and corporate reputation, CSM campaign attributes, and cause attributes) and consumer behavior literature were used as the thematic structure for the present analysis. This framework was used to further examine whether Inoue and Kent's (2014) framework extended to Nike's CSM efforts. However, while coding the comments the researcher allowed for themes to emerge outside of the predetermined categories. Thus, readers' comments were not forced to fit into a specific category, but rather were organized naturally into either the preexisting themes or newly emergent categories. As a result, this research utilized both a prior and emergent design to allow for the greatest flexibility in unearthing the findings of this study. Creswell (2013) noted that use of a prior codes "does serve to limit the analysis to the 'prefigured' codes rather than opening up the codes to reflect the view of participants in a traditional qualitative way. If a 'prefigured' coding scheme is used in analysis, [he] typically encourage[s] researchers to be open to additional codes emerging during analysis" (p. 185). Since this was a small, single research project, the researcher was able to follow the method outlined in Creswell (2013).

Each comment was manually coded by a single coder. For comments that fit into multiple themes, they were placed in the category that represented the dominant theme of the comment. Dominant themes were extracted by the researcher by analyzing what was said, paying particularly close attention to the purpose of the comment. During the coding process the

primary researcher was mindful in the evaluation of the comments to ensure that comments were categorized in a manner that reflected readers' opinions and perceptions. Specifically, the coder was cognizant not to include their own biases and judgements in the interpretation and categorization of the comments. Further, each predetermined category had a clear definition to aid in coding the comments. Having these operational definitions are indispensable and create reliability within the study (Miles et al., 2014). Additionally, each comment was coded for overall tone: positive, neutral, or negative. The tone was evaluated based on the entire context of the comment with a focus on perception of the CSM campaign. A comment was coded as positive when it had a positive emotional appeal (e.g. admiration or respect). For example, the comment "Wow...what corner office at Nike made this decision--From a civil rights perspective I applaud the decision, from a corporate perspective, not sure this was wise..." was coded as positive because overall it shows support for the campaign while suggesting the campaign may have negative business consequences. A comment was coded as negative when it had negative emotional appeal (i.e., inappropriate or capitalistic). For instance, a comment stating: "Well Nike you lost a lifetime consumer of your product over this self-serving bias pandering move," was coded as negative because it referred to the campaign as self-serving.

Results

As shown in Table 1, a majority (74%) of the comments analyzed fit into the predetermined thematic categories. The most prominent themes were CSM attributes (105 comments), consumer behavior (95 comments) and cause attributes (61 comments). Comments categorized within these three groups accounted for 69% of the comments reviewed. The predetermined thematic categories are explained in detail in addition to other themes that emerged in the readers' comments.

CSM Attributes.

The literature explains that CSM programs are typically more successful when the supported cause fits with the organization's operations and products (Bloom et al., 1997). For example, studies have shown that company-cause fit has a significant effect on consumer perceptions of companies (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Rifon et al., 2004). Additionally, Inoue and Kent (2014) also found that effort set forth by the organization, altruistic motives and the demonstrated impact of the CSM campaign influence consumers' perceptions of the campaign. A total of 105 comments were in this category, including 69 positive, 14 neutral and 22 negative comments.

In general, positive comments included followers showing support for the cause and applauded Nike's efforts for providing the platform to highlight Kaepernick's message. For example, one commenter wrote: "As a Nike shareholder I am proud of the company for offering CK this contract. I am sure they thought long and hard before coming to this decision. It shows a sense of social responsibility within the firm that for me is encouraging." Another reader said, "good news for both Nike and a deserving player who has been treated so shabbily by the ridiculous NFL. A win-win for both and an inspired choice...kids buying Nike products may take notice. I love it. Protest is as American as apple pie." Despite a majority of comments in this section being positive, there were still negative perceptions of the campaign.

Overall, negative comments were readers disagreeing with Nike's involvement in Kaepernick's cause or the quote used in the advertisement. For instance, one reader stated, "we've seen this before -- 68 Olympics -- old hat --same root cause -- never resolved -- alienates -- enlivens racism not a very good idea to politicize retail sales" Neutral comments were general

commentary on the CSM campaign and do not take an affirmative or negative tone. For example, one individual stated, “Nike, brand above all, has nothing to lose in this no-risk move. I would suggest, however, that Mr. Kaepernick consider going back to school, for an MBA in marketing communications or a JD in entertainment, sport management, and law.”

Table 1: New York Times Reader’s Comments Themes

Attribution Theory Themes	Tone						Total Count	% of Total
	Positive	% Total	Neutral	% Total	Negative	% Total		
Corporate Attributes and Corporate Reputation	6	1.5%	2	.5%	14	4%	24	6%
CSM Attributes	69	18%	14	4%	22	6%	105	28%
Cause Attributes	25	7%	25	7%	11	3%	61	17%
Consumer Behavior	67	18%	0	0%	25	7%	92	24%
							282	75%
Additional Emergent Themes								
Misc.	1	.2%	9	2%	1	.2%	11	3%
Political	11	3%	26	7%	2	.5%	39	10%
Patriotism/Military	2	.5%	10	3%	2	.5%	14	4%
Extrinsic Motives	3	.8%	3	.8%	8	2%	14	4%
NFL and Kaepernick Lawsuit	2	.5%	10	3%	4	1%	17	4%
							95	25%
Total	186	49%	100	27%	91	24%	377	

Consumer Behavior.

Consumer behavior (i.e. consumer purchase intention) was the second largest category with 92 comments. Comments in this category included reader statements about whether they were encouraged to purchase or boycott Nike apparel as a result of the CSM campaign. The purpose of this campaign was to gain support and raise awareness for Kaepernick's fight against social injustice (Dator, 2018). Kaepernick's cause, specifically his method of kneeling during the National Anthem was very controversial and created a divide among NFL consumers (Graham, 2018). While the intention of CSM campaigns is to primarily generate awareness for a cause, it is helpful for organizations to understand the potential positive and negative business consequences of the campaign, particularly in regards to profit margins. Out of the 92 comments, 71% were positive and 29% were negative. Additionally, attribution theory was found to explain consumers' purchase intentions. The comments indicated that positive purchase intention was associated with consumer perception of altruism and boycotting was associated with consumer perception of Nike being self-serving. For example, one commenter wrote:

Not a Nike fan, I consider them a local bully here in Beaverton and an arrogant one at that. My sports gear bears more of their competitors' logos, but I am in need of new running shoes as the bad weather approaches and I'll gladly support Kaepernick and his integrity with a swoosh, for a change.

Not only does the above comment indicate that the consumer plans on purchasing Nike apparel, but that this campaign attracted a new consumer to Nike. Despite the majority of comments in this category indicating positive purchase intention, almost a third of the comments in this category called for a boycott. For instance, one reader wrote, "Well Nike you lost a lifetime consumer of your product over this self-serving biased pandering move."

Cause Attributes.

Research has demonstrated that the personal importance or the degree to which individuals support the cause, has a significant effect on perceptions of the company (Inoue & Kent, 2014). Thus, analyzing consumers' perceptions of the cause will aid in the understanding of the effects of cause attributes on the CSM campaign. The cause highlighted in this study is divisive as some consumers find Kaepernick's method of protest (kneeling during the National Anthem) offensive, while others believe that it is a peaceful protest. Additionally, some consumers may feel personal importance or have familiarity with the cause that influences their evaluation. There were a total of 61 comments in this category. Comments included in this category had dominant themes discussing the specific cause. For instance, one reader postulated:

To those who say Colin Kaepernick is disrespecting the flag and the military, please consider the following. His taking of a knee is not about the flag. It's not about the military. It's not about patriotism. So, what is it about? In the military, taking a knee is done to allow time to consider a situation, to reflect and understand what's going on around you. On football teams, taking a knee is done to show support for a fallen player. I suggest that Colin Kaepernick is doing both by taking a knee during the National Anthem. He is assessing and considering the situation between the police and the African-American community; and he is demonstrating support for those who have fallen as a result of that situation. What's wrong with that? Isn't that his responsibility, as a

member of our society? Isn't that also our responsibility, as members of that same society?

This comment provides the reader's point of view on Kaepernick's cause and demonstrates support for Kaepernick's action. While other readers found the protest shameful. For example, one comment stated:

Unfortunately, Mr. Kaepernick is confusing disrespect to his flag and country with activism against racism and social injustice. People are racist and commit acts of social injustice. Our country does not and in fact, the constitution of this country specifically does not support racism. So why then insult the flag and country? Speak out instead against the men/ women who offend. Hold your protest on the White House lawn and aim your vitriol at the appropriate target. Not your flag. I believe that what Mr. Kaepernick has done is an unpatriotic act, not activism. I am saddened that an institution such as the NFL would allow for any of its players to act in an unpatriotic way. I am also confounded that an American corporation like Nike would further laud Mr. Kaepernick's act of disrespect to our country. Shame on both of you and the people who run your organizations. I suggest that if Mr. Kaepernick can't get his facts straight and show some respect, he consider living in another country. I suggest that the NFL and Nike rise above and set an example instead of furthering this ignorance and disrespect.

Here, the reader finds Kaepernick's actions to be disrespectful and offensive and, therefore, does not support the cause because of the method of activism. Neutral comments discussed the cause, but do not take a side on whether they agree or disagree.

Corporate Attributes and Corporate Reputation.

Inoue and Kent (2014) define corporate attributes as consumers' perception of how well the company meets its societal obligations through social initiatives and the company's ability to produce quality services and products. Specifically, these comments captured consumers' opinions about Nike, such as, "Nike has a stronger back bone than our elected leaders" and "So rare that a big corporation is brave enough to take a stand that could adversely affect their bottom line. You just did it, Nike! Proud of you and proud to wear the Nike swoosh."

Corporate reputation encompassed comments that mentioned Nike's history of social misconduct, including unfair labor wages in Asia and gender discrimination at its U.S. headquarters. The majority of comments about Nike's reputation were negative. For example, one reader expressed:

There are consequences for all actions. Certainly Nike has done significant research and determined that their target demographic supports Kaepernick's position and has chosen to make him their campaign poster boy because it makes economic sense for them to do so. I fail to believe this campaign exhibits a sense of altruism or desire to fight injustice on the part of Nike, a company well known for its inhumane treatment of employees around the world.

This comment shows that the reader is using Nike's history to evaluate Nike's intent in supporting Kaepernick's cause. There were a total of 22 comments in this category.

Additional Emergent Themes.

In addition to the predetermined categorical themes, seven other themes emerged from the comments, (1) political, (2) patriotism/military, (3) extrinsic motives, (4) journalism, (5) Colin Kaepernick's collusion lawsuit, (6) NFL and (7) miscellaneous (see Table 1). In total, these additional themes made up 26% of the comments reviewed, with political, patriotism/military and extrinsic motives being the three recurring themes. Political commentary (39 comments) included comments that discussed the government, political parties, or freedom of speech. For instance, one reader stated:

Individuals tearing the Nike logo off their socks and burning their runners don't have even the slightest idea of the root or meaning of Kaepernick's protest. Feel like you have to choose between your country and something else and want to choose your country in a meaningful act? Vote Democrat in November.

Patriotism/military comments (14 comments) discussed the right to protest and the applicability of the protest to the military (both positive and negative views). One commenter asserted:

I remain allergic to the visuals of field size colors being jiggled by pro or amateur marketing operations (NFL, NCAA, MLB, NBA...). I remain allergic to visuals of the colors wrapped around individuals marketing themselves literally and figuratively (Olympians, politicians...). But I will happily sneeze and move on to say that I will die to defend their right to do so while also being willing to die to defend others kneeling in honor to fellow countrymen dying in disproportionate likelihoods wrapped in the color of their skin. The Americans I respect and honor behave with respect and honor toward each other. The colors they wave or wear are trivial in the utmost.

Lastly, extrinsic motives (14 comments) included comments that felt Nike's reason for engaging in the CSM campaign was for financial gain. For example, an individual argued:

Nike is a for-profit corporation, and they knew exactly what they were doing. Any PR is good PR in fashion. They also know that the tastemakers in this country aren't the blood-and-soil Trump voters who are burning their Nikes today--they are the young people of color who will love them for this move. Nike has been fighting a battle against cultural irrelevance thanks to upstart competitors like UA, and this move gets them into the conversation, immediately, in a huge way. It'll also help them out hugely in international markets--the only place the athletic apparel market is really growing.

Discussion and Implications

The aim of CSM campaigns is to raise awareness for a specific cause and help improve society at large. Attribution theory and the literature on CSM campaigns provide that consumers use specific cues to evaluate a social marketing campaign. This research sought to investigate consumers' evaluations of Nike's social marketing campaign featuring Colin Kaepernick to determine whether polarizing causes lead to different evaluation cues. The findings in this study revealed that consumers use the same cues to interpret a potentially polarizing cause as they do any other social cause. Specifically, the study found support for Inoue and Kent's (2014) framework in predicting the effects of CSM campaign. To date, little academic research has been dedicated to understanding the impact of CSM campaigns and such information is crucial as companies start to become more socially active.

The findings indicated that most of the readers were not relying on Nike's reputation or company attributes as means to evaluate the CSM campaign (RQ1). Prior research suggests that consumers evaluate CSM sponsorships through their perceptions of source and corporate credibility, which is evidenced through corporate reputation and perceived company attributes (Haley, 1996; Inoue & Kent, 2014). Yet, only 24 comments or 6% of the comments analyzed mentioned corporate attributes, including corporate reputation. Thus, corporate reputation and attributes did not play a significant role in influencing consumers' perceptions of the campaign as originally expected. These findings contradict prior literature which suggests that corporate credibility plays a vital role in the effectiveness of corporate communication (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953).

In response to research question two, comments within the corporate reputation category were examined. Despite Nike launching multiple CSM campaigns, consumers were still skeptical of Nike's motives given their history of unfair labor practices and gender discrimination. This is established in the following two comments:

So is Nike attempting to redeem themselves for their long, long history of abuse of women and children (and men) in sweatshops around the world? "Sorry, Nike, but there are too many other excellent manufacturers of outdoor sporting attire for me to ever darken one of your retail portals again...!" I consider Nike to be one of the seamier manufactures out there. They're a good "show" I don't trust 'em...

So everything is forgiven? The gender discrimination and the hostile working environment for women? Gone. The sweatshops in Asia where kids are paid less than one dollar per hour? Gone. Sneakers produced for less than \$5 but sold \$200, in order to offer multi-millions contracts to few athletes? Gone. Did Nike really change its entire business model, or is it another cynical move?

These comments demonstrated that some consumers utilize Nike's corporate reputation as a cue for interpreting the campaign. Although corporate reputation comments were only a small percentage of the total comment, most of the comments were negative, suggesting that an organization's negative reputation can have a more significant impact.

To address research question three, comments in the CSM attribute category were reviewed. CSM attributes were defined as company-cause fit, company effort toward the cause, personal investment by the consumer, value-driven motives of the campaign, and the impact of the campaign. Results showed that some readers felt there was a lack of company-cause fit. This theme was evident in the following two comments, "I support Colin Kaepernick. Now if Nike can continue to correct how they've been treating women equally in the workplace, they will get my business" and

Good for Kap. Don't go giving Nike any props though. They are still the number one corp responsible for making international slavery back into a global source of profit. It's how they made themselves so big so fast along with profiteering level pricing for the slave made products and propaganda to divert attention from the facts.

Readers may have felt differently if Nike's efforts were focused on remedying its own social failures, such as violating labor laws in Asia and creating hostile work environments for women at its U.S. headquarters (Haley, 1996; Speed & Thompson, 2000). Conversely, some readers

were impressed with Nike's stance and willingness to stand with Colin Kaepernick. One consumer commented:

Kudos to Nike for its signing of Kap. Yes, Nike seeks to capitalize off of Kap's popularity with many of the young and, in my own case, old fans of football and/or simply undaunted courage. But Nike also surely knows it will be risking a significant consumer boycott by Trump's racist supporters and other conservatives who are seemingly incapable of understanding what Kap is doing. I just hope that any such boycott fails miserably. So I intend to do my small part to support Kap and Nike by going to the Nike store today to purchase a new pair of sneakers for these tired old feet of mine, and to urge friends and family to do likewise.

Other comments included: "Nike is all about its athletes taking extreme risks to succeed so why wouldn't they take a risk too? Very proud they took a stand," "Both a brilliant marketing move and a powerful moral move by Nike. I support" and "I am so impressed by NIKE for having the vision to see the potent symbol and icon that he is, and his potential to help save democracy, frankly." Based on the comments analyzed, consumers' perceptions of company-cause fit is impacted by their perceptions of the cause. This supports the literature, which has identified that the degree to which consumers personally support the cause has a significant effect on their perceptions of the organization's sponsorship of the cause (Inoue & Kent, 2014). Consumers who stated positive purchase intentions wanted to show support because they felt it was a worthy cause. Some readers wrote, "I'll let my debit card do my talking. I'll be buying Nike gear as long as they continue to support free speech and the right to stand up and be counted" and

Based on these responses, I feel Nike is on the correct track. I have never paid the outrageous amounts Nike charges for their jerseys, but if purchasing one of CK's jersey will help show Nike made a good decision, I'm going to buy one today. If NFL games are not being watched as much as before, it could be likely, fans are no longer sure they are watching the best players available. They are watching players who fit a mold and won't get uppy.

Eighteen percent of all comments reviewed had a positive purchase intention theme. This shows that some consumers not only appreciated the advertisement but were also motivated to go out and support both Nike and Kaepernick by purchasing Nike apparel. Thus, to answer research question five, consumers' personal identification with the cause and appreciation for Nike creating the social platform had the most significant effect on consumers' purchase intentions.

In this study, the selected cause played a critical role in consumers' perception of the advertisement. Consumers are unwilling to simply accept that an organization is doing good by highlighting a cause, rather a consumer's personal identification and support or nonsupport of the cause has a much greater impact on the consumer's overall perceptions of a CSM campaign. This finding differs slightly from previous research that found sponsorship fit as a critical aspect (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006), but agrees with Inoue and Kent (2014) which emphasizes the importance of consumer identification with a cause. As a result, marketers should carefully select a cause that their target audience can personally identify with and want to support even if the cause does not fit perfectly with the organizations goals and values. Therefore, in response to research question four, cause attributes had the strongest influence on consumers' evaluations of this CSM campaign.

Theoretically, this study supported the use of attribution theory to explain the findings in the readers' comments. Previous research has demonstrated that consumers draw inferences about an organization's motives and that the consumer attributions of the motives will impact subsequent evaluations and behavior (Forehand & Grier, 2003). This research also found that consumers considered Nike's motives for launching the campaign, specifically Nike's extrinsic motives, when assessing the campaign. One reader wrote:

Nice to know that once again, the hucksters can turn anything into a profit center while at the same time remaining self-congratulatory! I am a believer in capitalism but Ambrose Bierce would stand proud in defining the cynic as one who sees things are they are as opposed to how he would like them to be.

Consumers who attribute self-serving motives had an overall negative view of the campaign, while reader's who felt Nike's actions were altruistic had a positive view. However, this research went beyond examining consumers' attributions towards Nike's motives; it also analyzed consumers' attributions to the campaign and cause. In fact, many of the comments contained themes about the CSM campaign and cause attributes. Therefore, consumers not only look at an organization's motives for engaging in the CSM campaign, but also the attributes of the campaign and cause itself. Previously, attribution theory has only focused on an organization's motives, whether altruistic or self-serving (Forehand & Grier, 2003). This research extends attribution theory to also consider attributions of the campaign and cause. The results of this study showed that consumers' personal identification with the cause greatly impacted their overall perception of the CSM campaign and their behavioral intentions.

Limitations and Future Research

The results of this study contribute to the CSM literature and attribution theory in multiple ways. The results provided an empirical understanding of consumers' responses and subsequent behaviors to Nike and Kaepernick's CSM campaign, demonstrating that CSM campaigns can influence consumers' purchase intention, which is enhanced when the target consumers personally identify with the sponsored cause. Particularly, this study focused on a case study with a highly publicized and divisive cause to specifically analyze consumer response to corporate involvement with such causes. This study revealed some interesting findings, such as including corporate attributes and corporate reputation were only a minor factor in consumers' evaluations of the CSM campaign.

There were several limitations with this study. For example, only one CSM campaign was investigated, and therefore, the results may not apply to other campaigns and brands. However, the results of this study may be useful for corporations looking to support Colin Kaepernick's movement. In particular, individual's attitudes toward the cause may shift overtime resulting in different responses, and this study determines that consumers are relying on attributes to process the campaign. Such findings may be applicable to other corporate CSM campaigns. Additional potential limitations include typical concerns such as, research subjectivity and external validity. The primary researcher was the only coder involved in this research, which may have resulted in some researcher bias. Although, the researcher was careful to manage biases during the coding process to ensure credibility and dependability of the study. Another possible limitation is the selection of sample comments; this research only investigated the first 377 comments of the news article, not all commentary. Although, the results provide a foundation to further explore the influence of CSM campaigns in both a domestic and international context.

Given the limitations within this study, additional empirical studies exploring other CSM campaigns supporting various causes is needed to further these findings. By investigating various CSM campaigns, researchers can discover potential paradigms within consumers' responses that may help organizations improve their tactics to execute a successful CSM campaign. Further, CSM effectiveness can be measured through a quantitative research design where participants review different CSM campaigns and provide feedback based on their evaluation of the campaign.

Obtaining an understanding of effectively executing a CSM campaign is invaluable to marketers because it provides an opportunity for an organization to not only better society, but also further various business goals. Additionally, CSM offers a different avenue for organizations to garner new customers and reinforce its current consumer base. The literature states that consumers consider an organization's involvement in social change when making purchase decisions, proving the importance of CSM campaigns and the potential financial impact it can have on an organization's brand (Lough & Pharr, 2010).

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